

**Between the ethnic and the national: A discourse analysis of how Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello constructed sub-national identities in Nigeria between the years 1945 to 1967**

**By:**

R.A. Adekoya

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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**Chapter 1 Introducing the Issue**

**1.1 Abstract**

This study investigates the discursive construction and politicization of ethnic and other sub-national identities in Nigeria, starting from the post-WWII era up until the outbreak of Nigeria’s civil war in 1967. Adopting social constructivist assumptions about ethnicity and applying a selection of Critical Discourse Analysis tools, I will conduct an analysis of written and spoken discourse by the three foremost Nigerian political leaders during the period under study: Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello, commonly referred to in Nigeria as the ‘Founding Fathers’.

Each of them was the most prominent political leader of one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria: the Yorubas, the Igbos and the Hausa-Fulanis. It is generally accepted all three engaged in ‘ethnic politics’ at various points in history with varying degrees of intensification. What has not been investigated in systematic manner is *how* they *discursively* constructed and politicized sub-national identities. This study aims to fill that gap by identifying and describing the various discursive strategies and narratives they employed in this endeavour.

As my investigation will be covering a significant length of time during which Nigeria’s socio-political circumstances underwent major shifts on numerous occasions, which, according to the theoretical assumptions of this study, could be expected to have influenced and altered narratives of identity, the focus will be on tracking the evolution of the three leaders’ grand narratives on sub-national

identities over the 22-year period. By this I mean the *fundamental ideas* they attempted to convey regarding these identities.

I will also investigate potential antagonisms between ethnic and national identity in the discourses of the Founding Fathers who all, on the one hand, needed to maintain leadership of their ethno-constituencies while at the same time often requiring support outside those constituencies to succeed at national level politics. The study aims to contribute to the research on political leadership and ethnicity in Nigeria from a previously unexplored angle as well as enrich the broad scholarly repertoire on ethnic and ethno-regional identity construction in multi-ethnic societies.

**1.2 Background and rationale for study**

Nigeria, with a population of over 190 million people constituting roughly 250 ethnic groups speaking over 500 distinct languages, is arguably one of the most ethnically-diverse countries in the world, thus presenting an interesting and challengingly complex case-study for scholars exploring issues of ethnicity and identity. Moreover, the subject of ethnicity continues to crop up in contemporary Nigerian politics, for instance, in the taken-for-granted assumption that a presidential ticket must be ‘ethnically-balanced’ to have any hopes of national success.

It is considered politically unfeasible for a party serious about winning the Nigerian presidency to propose a presidential and vice-presidential candidate from the same ethnic group or even region of the country. If the presidential candidate is from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group concentrated in the Northern parts of Nigeria, then the vice-presidential candidate *must* be from one of the groups concentrated in the Southern regions. If the presidential candidate is from one of the Southern regions, then his or her vice-candidate must be from the North. Otherwise, the ticket would not be considered ‘balanced.’

It is even more inconceivable today that an Igbo could be considered a serious gubernatorial candidate in one of the Yoruba-majority states in the south-west of the country or a Yoruba in one of the Igbo-majority states in the south-east, even if the person had lived in that state all their lives, knew its problems and spoke the local language fluently. Ethnicity thus deserves the attention it has received as a dominant theme in studies of Nigerian political history.

The phenomenon of ethnicity has been investigated from varying perspectives in the Nigerian context. Jinadu rightly pointed out that analyses of ethnicity in Nigeria have passed through several phases reflecting changes in the country’s political status as well as changes in social science research trends.[[1]](#footnote-1) Ethnicity elsewhere and in Nigeria has been associated with primordial attachments by Geertz,[[2]](#footnote-2) with functioning as a mask for class privilege by Sklar[[3]](#footnote-3) and with rapid modernization by Melson and Wolpe.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It has been examined from a rational choice perspective by Dudley[[5]](#footnote-5) and portrayed as the virtually inevitable outcome of an exploitative and divisive colonial economy by Nnoli.[[6]](#footnote-6) Van den Berghe’s sociobiological perspective explained ethnicity as an extended form of biological nepotism, the human propensity to favour kin over non-kin[[7]](#footnote-7) while Horowitz asserted ethnic group formation was largely a socio-psychological reaction to colonialism, during which territorial horizons became larger and an ‘enormous amount of subgroup amalgamation took place’ in countries like Nigeria.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Scholars like Chandra, meanwhile, have argued that ‘ethnic identities are not singular, nor are they fixed’, highlighting as examples changes in ethnic identifications over the years in a variety of countries, ranging from the former Yugoslavia and the United Kingdom to Brazil and Sri Lanka where people switched identifications in response to socio-political and contextual developments.[[9]](#footnote-9)

However, while shedding valuable insights on particular aspects of the ethnic phenomenon in Nigeria and elsewhere, these approaches have not devoted much attention to *how* ethnic identities are constructed and/or politicized by members of ethnic groups themselves, and most especially, as is the main interest of this study, on how they were constructed *discursively* by political leaders in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

Analysing this discursive construction process is important because as Lynch points out in her illuminating work on the mid-20th century construction of the Kalenjin ethnic identity in Kenya: ‘Ethnic identities are socially constructed historic and moral communities that are subject to ongoing processes of negotiation and contestation.’[[10]](#footnote-10) Political and cultural elites help shape these negotiations by responding to, articulating, and/or focussing popular sentiments of justice and injustice, morality and immorality, and inclusion and exclusion around the axis of identity.[[11]](#footnote-11)

As a result, ‘shared and interpreted histories - for example, of achievement, marginalization, injustice, past land use, and/or divine will - provide a discursive framework that leaders can use to mobilize support but that ordinary people can also use to assert rights to the ownership and control of space and/or the redistribution of resources.’[[12]](#footnote-12) In other words, apart from constructing and entrenching group identities, popularized ethnic narratives help provide the justificatory premises for what a group will subsequently claim as its fair share of land, political representation, development projects and a host of other material resources within the state, thus linking ethnicity to everyday social and political life.

Approaches steeped in rational choice theory, such as Posner’s work on ethnicity in Zambia, which posited that after taking into account institutional constraints and the ‘option set’[[13]](#footnote-13) of potential identities from which they can choose, individuals will emphasize the identity that ‘serve(s) them best’[[14]](#footnote-14) in terms of gaining resources, have provided useful insights into the instrumental value of ethnicity.

However, this study agrees with Lynch that such explanations are incomplete without the acknowledgement that aside institutions and resources, ‘one must also include interpreted pasts and associated notions of threat, justice, and entitlement, which influence both the option set and their political salience and allow for the possibility that rational calculations of loss and gain may be intertwined, reinforced, and/or come into conflict with more economically irrational feelings of affection, resentment, anger, and hatred.’[[15]](#footnote-15)

Meanwhile, with regards to the involvement of political elites in this crucial process of *interpretations* of the past and present, Gadjanova has pointed out that without analysing elites’ political discourses, their role in emphasizing or de-emphasizing ethnicity as a politically salient issue relevant to wider socio-political and socioeconomic issues ‘cannot be examined satisfactorily.’[[16]](#footnote-16) Furthermore, analysing the logic of ethnic appeals, namely the justificatory arguments they are premised on, ‘is important because it provides key information for the political actors’ motivations, intentions and willingness to compromise in the future. The latter are in turn central to models of ethnic outbidding, reconciliation or violence.’[[17]](#footnote-17) The messages of ethnic discourses thus have wider political implications outside the immediate sphere of individual and/or group social identity.

While this study views Brass’s summary of the complex and multidimensional phenomena of ethnic group formation as ‘a process created in the dynamics of elite competition’,[[18]](#footnote-18) as an overly reductionist attribution of the phenomenon to savvy leaders who simply invent ethnicity for the purpose of furthering their personal interests, the fact this study chose to focus on political leaders is a clear acknowledgement of the critical role they play in the overall formation process.

The constructivist view adopted by this study posits that ethnic identity is being perpetually socially constructed by a combination of internal forces (via negotiation, redefinition and reconstruction of ethnic boundaries) and external forces such as social, economic and political processes. By placing the interactions between circumstances (structure) and agency at the heart of the construction process, this approach ‘rescues ethnicity from the prison of circumstances’ and acknowledges its creative component.[[19]](#footnote-19) This creative process involves members of ethnic groups across all strata of society, and not just elites. In the Nigerian context, for instance, the village sculptor of traditional masks associated with a specific ethnic group likewise plays a role in constructing and entrenching an identity as do the faceless men acting out the roles of traditional masquerades identified with specific ethnic or village cultures.

However, this study maintains that political elites *do* enjoy a very privileged position in this creative process. This stems from the esteem accorded them by their ethnic communities and the subsequent influence their opinions thus gain, the resources they have at hand to disseminate their views (for instance, party-friendly media), the general apparatus of power and/or government at their disposal, their connections with and influence over traditional rulers with whom they often cooperate in exercising leadership and their (usually) above-average intellectual abilities and knowledge of the quirks, beliefs and prejudices prevalent in the ethnic or sub-national group.

Political leaders, especially highly-successful ones who achieve larger-than-life status in their lifetime as did the subjects of my study, thus have a disproportionate amount of influence in shaping the dominating narratives within an ethnic group regarding its character, history, boundaries, common interests and appropriate future goals. This, along with other issues which shall be discussed in the methodology chapter, informed my decision to focus on ethnic discourses by political elites. Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello have been chosen as the subjects of this study because they were the dominant political actors during a crucial era in Nigeria’s formative history. They all played key roles in Nigeria’s independence struggle and in the drawing up of its first sovereign constitution, hence the popular references to them as the ‘Founding Fathers’ of independent Nigeria.

Each of these three leaders was at the forefront of what became an ethnocentric political landscape that eventually led to the catastrophe of a civil war which claimed between 1 to 2 million lives. They all successfully mobilized mass support from their ethnic groups in numerous elections over the 20-year period this study will be focused on, demonstrating the effectiveness of their political strategies. They all remain important authority figures within their ethnic groups today with their views on ethnicity continuing to carry significant weight in present-day Nigerian political discourse, which remains significantly ethnocentric.

**1.3 Literature gap**

As suggested earlier, while scholars such as Bates[[20]](#footnote-20) and Brass[[21]](#footnote-21) provided insights into the societal conditions that enable elites to operate politically using ethnicity as a rallying tool (such as the emergence of a centralizing modern state), they provide much less in the way of analysis on the techniques employed by these elites to construct ethnic identities, offering few details on the discursive ‘*hows*’ of maintaining cohesion in groups sometimes running into millions of people who usually never meet each other face-to-face.

Ethnic and ethno-regional groups, like nations, are, to borrow Anderson’s phrase, ‘imagined communities’,[[22]](#footnote-22) sometimes running into the tens of millions, most of who never meet face-to-face. Imbibing a sense of solidarity and common destiny in such vast numbers of people with varying individual interests is thus a complex achievement the mechanisms of which are worthy of closer study. Investigating how ethnic identities are imagined and articulated is important to analysis of ethnicity for it sheds light on how ethnic groups come into existence in the minds of their members and how they are sustained even in significantly changing socio-economic and political contexts as has been the case in Nigeria.

Brass provided valuable insights towards understanding how ethnic identities are constructed via the choice of official national languages and formal modes of education.[[23]](#footnote-23) However, he does not engage with how language is deployed discursively in the creation of that identity. Posner focussed on the institutional constraints and incentives shaping ethnic identity construction in Zambia.[[24]](#footnote-24) Lynch, on the other hand, did engage with how language - in the form of historical narratives - were used to construct and entrench the idea of an ethnic community – the Kalenjin – but this was in a specific Kenyan context.[[25]](#footnote-25) Meanwhile, Gadjanova focussed on broader conceptualizations of ethnic appeals in political rhetoric across a wide range of societies rather than on closer analysis of a single case-study.[[26]](#footnote-26)

As for discursive identity constructions in the Nigerian context specifically, Adebanwi has provided significant insights into the discourses of the Nigerian media in search of a ‘grand narrative’ of *national identity*.[[27]](#footnote-27) However, my investigations into the literature on ethnicity and sub-national identities in Nigeria have yet to locate a single scholarly work amounting to a systematic analysis of how ethnic and sub-national identities were discursively constructed and eventually politicized by Nigeria’s most important political leaders in the colonial and immediate post-colonial era, namely the ‘Founding Fathers.’ This is the gap this study aims to fill.

**1.4 Research Questions**

The main research question to be answered is: *How did Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello discursively construct and politicize ethnic and ethno-regional identities in Nigeria?*

To answer the main research question, the following sub-questions will be addressed:

1) How are the discursive strategies and techniques employed by Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello used to construct ethnic and/or sub-national identity?

2) What are the potential observable antagonisms between discursive attempts by Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello to construct ethnic and/or sub-national identities and ongoing attempts to construct a national identity?

3) How did Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello's discourses on ethnicity evolve over the period 1945 to 1967?

4) How did Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello's discursive approaches to ethnicity and identity differ if indeed they so did?

**1.5 Surveying the existing literature on ethnicity**

**1.5.1 Introduction**

This section will review some of the major theoretical approaches available to a study of ethnicity in order to map out the subject terrain, shed light on scholarly advances in understanding the phenomenon and highlight some of the paradoxes in the existing literature. This study is concerned specifically with the construction and politicization of ethnic identities in Nigeria and so this survey of existing literature will serve to illustrate some of the various theoretical approaches on offer which have attempted to shed light on both these aspects of ethnicity in order to emphasize literature gaps. This section will also expand on the ontological and epistemological approach of this study to ethnicity leading to the theoretical approach it has proposed to answer the research questions.

The section will be divided into three sub-sections: The first mentions some of the conceptualizations associated with ethnicity and ethnic groups including the definitions this research will adopt. This will give an indication of the ontological approach to ethnicity favoured by this study. The second section will elaborate on four different theoretical approaches to ethnicity: primordialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and the approach which focuses on modernization/structuralist arguments to explain ethnicity.

These were selected because most of the major works on ethnicity fall under one of these approaches (especially the first three) although, naturally, each school of thought has its own internal factions which additionally emphasize or de-emphasize one or the other aspects of ethnicity. A separate section has also been devoted to theories linking ethnicity to modernization specifically due to the fact that the particular historical period this study is concerned with (1945-1967) happened to be an era of exceptionally rapid and massive societal change in Nigeria brought about via classic modernization processes. Finally, the last section will deal with post-review conclusions and will reiterate clearly the theoretical position adopted for this research.

**1.5.2 Defining ethnicity and ethnic groups**

The term ‘ethnicity’ itself stems from the ancient Greek word *ethnos* which referred to a range of situations in which a collectivity of humans lived and acted together.[[28]](#footnote-28) Today, *ethnos* is usually translated as ‘people’ or ‘nation’.[[29]](#footnote-29) Ruane and Todd thus stated that ethnicity refers to the issue of ‘peoplehood.’[[30]](#footnote-30) Max Weber was one of the first scholars to tackle the issue of ethnic groups describing them as ‘those human groups (other than kinship groups) which cherish a belief in their common descent of such a kind that it provides a basis for the creation of a community. This belief may be based on similarities of external custom or practise or both, or on memories of colonization or migration. The question whether they are to be called an ‘ethnic’ group is independent of the question whether they are objectively of common stock.’[[31]](#footnote-31)

Importantly thus, Weber was one of the first scholars to rightly emphasize the *subjective* nature of the notions enabling the formation of ethnic groups. What people *believe* is what matters in the process, not what really is. As it is rather difficult to imagine a significant number of individuals arriving at the same subjective belief in isolated thought, it would follow that in order for such a belief to take root within a group of people, there must be an actor or actors who in a more or less coordinated manner, help devise, propagate and institutionalize this subjective belief until it graduates to the status of accepted conventional wisdom within that collective.

Weber suggested as much when he stated ‘it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity’.[[32]](#footnote-32) This suggests the belief in common ethnicity is likely to be a consequence of political action, an assertion significant for this study which is focused on political leaders and the discourse they employ to imbibe in a group a sense of solidarity, common purpose and shared values based on a perceived common ethnicity.

While Weber highlighted the notion of ‘common descent’ as the unifying belief required for the formation of ethnic groups, others such as Jenkins have emphasized shared culture as the glue that holds such groups together.[[33]](#footnote-33) Meanwhile, Farley described an ethnic group as ‘a group of people who are generally recognized by themselves and/or by others as a distinct group, with such recognition based on social or cultural characteristics’.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Jenkins rightly warned against the reification of both ethnicity and culture, stating that ‘neither ethnicity nor culture is “something” that people “have”, or indeed to which they “belong.” They are rather complex repertoires which people experience, use, learn, and do in their everyday lives, within which they construct an on-going sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows.’[[35]](#footnote-35) Anthony Smith offered a definition of an ethnic group as ‘a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of a common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity’.[[36]](#footnote-36)

However, in the final analysis, the Nigerian scholar Okwudiba Nnoli appears to have offered the most succinct and apt definition for the term, especially as applies to the Nigerian context this study is focussed on. He described ethnicity simply as ‘a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups’.[[37]](#footnote-37) Meanwhile, he characterized ‘ethnic groups’ as ‘social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture, or both. In Africa, language has clearly been the most crucial variable.’[[38]](#footnote-38) However, Nnoli importantly noted that ethnic groups are not necessarily homogenous entities even linguistically and culturally and ‘minor linguistic and cultural differences often exist within the group.’[[39]](#footnote-39) In this study, when the concept of ‘ethnic group’ is deployed, it is to be understood as defined by Nnoli.

Another important concept that will be used in this study is that of ‘ethno-regionalism’ and ‘ethno-regional’ groups. During the period under study, Nigeria was divided into three regions, East, West and North, each of which contained a variety of distinct ethnic groups and communities. As mentioned earlier, all three leaders strove to extend their political influence beyond their immediate ethnic groups and thus this study expects to discover attempts at constructing larger-scale, yet still ultimately sub-national identities which could be referred to as ‘ethno-regional’ identities.

In the Nigerian context, the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethno-regional’ or ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethno-regionalism’ are often used interchangeably to describe, for instance, the dominant political parties and ideology of the period under study. However, an appeal to ethnicity does not necessarily have to be an appeal to regionalism nor does an appeal to regionalism automatically have to entail an appeal to ethnic sentiments. However, as Urwin argued persuasively, ethno-regionalism clearly involves a situation where *both* these dimensions become inter-related, signalling not just the ethnic communal boundaries of culture and language identified by Nnoli, but the combination of a community/membership space (based on some common socio-cultural characteristics) and geographical space (occupation of a territory and identification with it).[[40]](#footnote-40) Dandoy stated that ‘the first main characteristic of an ethno-regionalist political movement can be related to the sub-national territorial border and the identification with *some* pieces of [the national] territory.’[[41]](#footnote-41)

As the territorial aspect is clearly of crucial importance, regionalist parties do not *have to* be built along ethnic lines; they could be built along purely geographical lines. Also, in the Nigerian context where there were a multitude of ethnic groups in each region, a regional identity could include multiple ethnic groups. However, it would seem reasonable to suggest that if an ostensible appeal to a regional identity explicitly or implicitly *includes* or *excludes* members of certain ethnic groups within the country from belonging to that ‘regional family’ even if they have lived in the regional territory for decades, then this should be understood as an appeal not just to regionalism, but to ‘ethno-regionalism.’

If, for instance, it is implicitly or explicitly suggested that Igbos who might have lived in Northern Nigeria for decades, cannot be considered ‘Northerners’, then it is clear there is an ethnic element to Northern regional identity, rather than it being simply a matter of territoriality.

Thus, besides the territorial aspects, ethno-regionalism also ‘requires an exclusive group identity… a consciousness of group membership identity and belonging.’[[42]](#footnote-42) This ‘ethnic aspect – is also important because it indicates […] “belonging” to a group with shared experiences and history.’[[43]](#footnote-43) The political expression of cultural, ethnic or linguistic differences is thus considered a decisive and structuring force of a party system at the regional level and such orientations will be found in the ideologies of ethno-regionalist parties.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Meanwhile, ‘political regionalism’, another concept which inevitably crops up when discussing Nigerian politics during the period under study, should be understood to refer primarily to the project of a territorial-political organization carried out by a party[[45]](#footnote-45) while a regional party can be defined as an ‘autonomous party formation of regional obedience, whose ideological, program and organizational identity (…) are of regional nature.’[[46]](#footnote-46)

**1.5.3 Surveying** **the ethnic terrain**

**1.5.3.1 Primordialism**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, scholars began pondering why nation building seemed to be facing significant contention from ethnic groups in so many newly-independent Asian and African states. Clifford Geertz suggested ‘primordial attachments’ were more powerful than the civic ties the new states were attempting to encourage. By a ‘primordial attachment’ Geertz meant ‘one that stems from the “givens” – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed “givens” – of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language … and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves’.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Geertz added that in the new states ‘one is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbour, one’s fellow believer, *ipso facto*; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself.’[[48]](#footnote-48) Geertz was not the first to put forward the primordialist argument. He was building on the work of Edward Shils who had suggested earlier that the new states were abnormally susceptible to serious disaffection based on ‘primordial attachments’.[[49]](#footnote-49) Shils had argued that primordial attachments derived their strength from ‘a certain ineffable significance … attributed to the tie of blood.’[[50]](#footnote-50)

Hale, meanwhile, likened the primordialist conception of ethnic groups to that of various stones constituting the ‘wall’ that is society.[[51]](#footnote-51) As between such stones, there are clear-cut and enduring boundaries between groups with each group possessing its own particular stable and enduring features in the realms of culture, tradition, history, language and so on.

In a rebuke of primordialism, Eller and Coughlan argued Geertz’s talk of primordial attachments having an ‘ineffable overpowering coerciveness’ and existing ‘ipso facto’ presented ‘a picture of underived and socially-unconstructed emotions that are unanalysable, overpowering and coercive, yet varying. A more unintelligible and unsociological concept would be hard to imagine.’[[52]](#footnote-52)

It is true that when Geertz spoke of the ‘unaccountable absolute import’ of ethnicity, he appeared to attribute to it an almost mystical quality, quite incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it. Geertz seemed to view ethnicity, or at least thus he came across, as some sort of phenomenon experienced and felt only by the Other.

As he and, indeed, most anthropologists of his time were invariably from the Western world, the non-Westerner was inevitably cast in the role of the Other. And for the Other to attract the interest of anthropology’s predominantly Western audience, it was helpful if he/she was somewhat original and exotic (from a Western point of view), not necessarily a worse kind of human (it would be unfair to accuse Western anthropology of blanket racism) but certainly a somewhat *different* kind of human. It would seem Geertz and Shils before him, consciously or subconsciously, took the path of portraying ethnicity as an exotic phenomenon foreign to the Western world.

Jenkins addressed such attitudes explicitly when he talked about the tendency of anthropologists and the (white) Western world in general to treat ethnicity as ‘typically – or even only – an attribute of the Other. Ethnicity thus becomes a phenomenon that characterizes other people, rather than ourselves. We need to remind ourselves all the time that each of us participates in an ethnicity – perhaps more than one – just like them, just like the Other, just like the “minorities.”’ Jenkins argued that this recognition would be the first step towards understanding the ‘ubiquity” of ethnic identification.’[[53]](#footnote-53)

One possible reason for the lack of understanding about the ubiquity of ethnicity is because the Western world tends to use the term ‘ethnic group’ only in relation to non-Westerners. The 3 million-strong Welsh are a ‘nation’ while 40 million Yorubas are an ‘ethnic group.’ Consequently, a Western audience is able to identify with nationalism as a phenomenon commonplace in the West, but not necessarily ethnicity except that which has to do with non-white ‘ethnic minorities’ living in the West. Geertz and Shils definitely failed to notice the ubiquity of ethnicity in their writings.

What’s less often mentioned though is that while Geertz clearly saw ethnic identity as something with the inherent power to shape human behaviour, what he argued for was, in some sense, a sort of ‘constructed primordialism’.[[54]](#footnote-54) Geertz had spoken, after all, of ‘assumed givens’[[55]](#footnote-55) being responsible for primordial attachments, which de facto echoes Weber’s view of the power of people’s beliefs and assumptions in the sphere of ethnicity. To sum up, what can be ascertained from Geertz’s writings is that he believed people have single ethnic identities, which were created at some point in the past, were capable of inspiring strong passions and that once these identities are created, they become fixed and stable.

Pierre Van den Berghe, meanwhile, is associated with the sociobiological perspective in primordialism. According to this view, ethnic sentiments are an extension of kinship sentiments. Ethnocentrism is thus an extended form of nepotism – the propensity to favour kin over non-kin. Van den Berghe argued that ‘there exists a general behavioural predisposition in the human species, as well as in others, to react favourably toward other organisms to the extent that these organisms are biologically related to the actor. The closer the relationship is, the stronger the preferential behaviour.’[[56]](#footnote-56)

Ethnic ties thus stem from membership in a nuclear family, then an extended family, and finally the ethnic group. Identification with one’s ethnic group results from the common ancestral bonds of group members or the perceived existence of such bonds. Ethnicity will always exist because kinship will always exist, according to this line of thinking.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The problem with this perspective is that if, as Van den Berghe himself admits, common descent within an ethnic group is usually entirely fictive, that would seem to invalidate the sociobiological basis of ethnicity stemming from the need to pass on one’s genes. Also, going by the sociobiological line of thinking, it would be ‘normal’ for adopted children to be treated much less preferentially by their foster parents than even the most distant cousins of these parents, who are, after all, closer to the foster parents genetically than the adopted child. But there does not seem to be much evidence supporting such a reality. Also, Van den Berghe neglected to explain why ethnicity seemed to inspire stronger ‘biological’ loyalties and more heated conflicts in some regions of the world and weaker ones in others.

To sum up, primordialism, as to be understood from the writings of Shils, Geertz and Van den Berghe, posits that ethnic identity is acquired through birth and once acquired, becomes more or less stable and immutable and is easily susceptible to strongly-felt often irrational passions. Ethnicity is more or less exogenous to human social processes. Furthermore, primordialism implies that ethnic identity drives an almost automatic wedge between members of one group and another.

Primordialist approaches are largely unsuitable for this thesis for several reasons; firstly, because this study disagrees with its premises regarding the fundamentally immutable, irrational and exogenous nature of ethnicity in relation to human social processes. Secondly, primordialism offers no explanation for why ethnic identities change, wane or disappear nor why new identities emerge as they did in 19th and 20th century Nigeria in the case of the Igbos, Yorubas and Hausa-Fulanis.

The primordialist approach also tends to overlook the historical and structural conditions under which ethnic identities emerge. Additionally, and importantly, from the point of view of this study, primordialism deemphasizes the political processes associated with ethnic identity formation and politicization. This study is focused on political leaders and will thus naturally gravitate towards theories of ethnicity, which offer insights and analytical concepts around which ethnic political leadership can be factored in relatively smoothly.

Primordialism does however provide some valuable insights by rightly emphasizing the emotional pull of ethnicity and the sometimes exceptionally tenacious nature of ethnic solidarity. While social scientists may have disproved many of the primordialist myths surrounding ethnicity, ignoring the primordialist notions everyday people often associate with their ethnic group such as ‘kinship’ or ‘common descent’ is to ignore what is most powerful and distinctive about the ethnic phenomenon.

People can experience ethnicity very primordially in the same emotional and often irrational way people experience nationalism, which if anything, appears to be enjoying a resurgence in many parts of the Western world. These ‘primordial’ feelings have the power to propel to sometimes very politically impactful action. This study will thus be paying attention to primordial metaphors in the discourse of our subjects such as those referring to the shared origins or kinship of the group. This study assumes that ethnic leaders will tend to make use of primordial metaphors in communication with their groups especially when they want to mobilize the group for collective action, for instance, during election time.

**1.5.3.2 Ethnicity as strategy – the instrumentalist approach**

The instrumentalist approach emphasizes the role of ethnicity as a strategic tool employed to further individual or collective interests, usually political or economic, in a rational reaction to social circumstances. According to this perspective, ethnicity exists and thrives due to its practical utility, not because of the ‘unaccountable absolute import’ of ‘primordial attachments’ Geertz talked about. Balcha asserted that ‘ethnicity is constructed by particular elites or groups driven by competition for political power, economic benefits, social status or other objectives and motives.’[[58]](#footnote-58)

Benefits from ethnicity can range from ‘the moral and material support provided by ethnic networks to political gains made through ethnic bloc voting,’ according to Portes and Bach.[[59]](#footnote-59) Indeed, the success of the ethnic-based political parties led by the subjects of this study evidences the organizational potential of groups whose members believe they share a common ethnic identity. A school of influential scholars associated with instrumentalism ascribed a decisive role in ethnic identity formation and conflict to political leaders who manipulate ethnicity to achieve political power or gain resources from the state.[[60]](#footnote-60)

According to this view, elites, often in competition and/or conflict with each other, mobilize ethnicity because it is useful in the achievement of a favourable outcome for themselves in these rivalries. That this study chose to focus on political leaders demonstrates an acknowledgement of the critical role played by [political] elites in ethnic identity formation and politicization in 1950s and 1960s Nigeria.

But when this theoretical approach sums up the complex and multidimensional phenomena of ethnic group formation as ‘a process created in the dynamics of elite competition’ as Brass did,[[61]](#footnote-61) it is, in overly reductionist fashion, limiting the phenomenon to an elite invention used by savvy leaders to further their narrow personal interests via demagoguery and mystification. Additionally, the assumption that millions of people who have coalesced around ethnic leaders over the years are mindless victims of manipulation, duped into accepting fictitious identities while blindly serving as mere tools in the realization of elite ambitions, smacks of far-reaching paternalism.

While political elites have doubtless played significant roles in ethnic identity formation and politicization the question radical elite-focused instrumentalists have been unable to answer is why others follow. Instrumentalists have so far been unable to provide a plausible explanation for this, apart from largely discredited Marxist theories about a ‘false consciousness’ among the masses.[[62]](#footnote-62) There is more to ethnicity than simply the ambition of a handful of leaders.

Also, while elite-based approaches have provided insights into the societal conditions that enable elites operate politically using ethnicity as a rallying tool, they provide less detailed analysis on the techniques employed by these elites to create, maintain, strengthen and politicize ethnic identities. They tend to stop at generalized assertions that ethnic leaders strengthen and politicize ethnic identities but offer few details on the practical ‘hows’ of maintaining cohesion in groups sometimes running into the millions of people who usually never meet each other face-to-face.

This is the gap in the literature this study intends to fill by shedding some analytical light on the ‘hows’ of ethnic group construction and politicization, specifically by focusing on how political leaders discursively construct and politicize ethnic identities. What are the discursive strategies deployed in this endeavour and what discursive techniques are used to realize these strategies?

Another influential faction in the instrumentalist school views the creation of ethnic groups as a rational reaction to social circumstances with the ultimate aim being for the individual member to achieve his (usually material) goals with the help of the collective. Bell argued for ethnicity to be understood as ‘a strategic choice by individuals who, in other circumstances, would choose other group memberships as a means of obtaining some power and privilege.’[[63]](#footnote-63)

Rational choice approaches stem from the hugely influential Anglo-Saxon economic ideology that has its roots in utilitarian paradigms popularized by Jeremy Bentham. According to this world view, human beings are essentially rational economic entities while societies are the consequence of the economic exchanges between these entities. And so while the writings of primordialist authors like Geertz seemed to imply that the significant role ethnicity played in non-western societies demonstrated how people in those societies were somehow fundamentally different from Westerners, rational choice theorists were essentially asserting that human nature is very much the same everywhere and Asians and Africans simply adopted ethnicity as a tool to achieve exactly the same results Europeans or Americans were pursuing (more money and power) because it was the best suited and most effective approach for the particular social, economic and historical realities in which they lived.

It is quite easy to see the considerable psychological and ideological appeal of such an approach not only to those Western scholars wishing to refute racist stereotypes in their societies regarding the ‘primitive’, unpredictable, irrational and generally inferior nature of non-Western (read: non-white) people, but also to non-Western scholars trying to do the same. The rational choice approach to ethnicity in the non-Western world cast the phenomenon in a logical light, thus rendering it more understandable and palatable to the Western mind which tends to place a premium on ‘rationality’ and is very wary of behavioural patterns that don’t fit its expectations of how a human being is supposed to act.

The approach provided valuable insights into the background of the phenomenon, describing, for instance, how colonialism helped create an arena for competition between ethnic groups by bringing together diverse peoples into new urban centres while distributing resources from a new political centre; how the rapid urbanization and internal migration colonialism brought with it created tensions between ‘locals’ and migrants which fostered ethnic antipathies and how ambitious politicians realized ethnicity offered ready-made and low-cost resources for massive political mobilization.

But rational choice approaches offer little insight into why people stubbornly hold on to their ethnic identity even in the midst of changing socio-economic realities including when it is contrary to their interests.[[64]](#footnote-64) As Laitin observed, ‘people do not quit their ethnic groups as they do their jobs; nor do they change their ethnic identities the way they change their brand of beer.’[[65]](#footnote-65)

Going by the rational choice logic, one would expect that people living under a dictatorship which frowned on ethnicity, people would quickly shed their strategically-assumed ethnic identities for keeping them would be inimical to their self-interest. However, despite numerous dictatorships in Asia and Africa which, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, articulated their preference for national patriotism over ethnic identities, ethnicity still survived. Also, if ethnicity is only useful as long as it serves one’s self-interest, why should anyone take part in any ethnic action that might lead to violence being perpetrated on his or her person by members of other ethnic groups or to punitive action by the state?

Furthermore, in rational choice models, individuals are usually assigned a stable preference structure with the assumption that their actions can be predicted by acquainting oneself with the constraints and incentives in their environment. However, from the point of view of our study, on what basis can you realistically assume a stability of preferences, especially in fast changing socio-economic and political environments like pre-independence Nigeria? As Peterson argued persuasively, rational choice theory provides its most useful insights under stable institutional environments.[[66]](#footnote-66) This hardly describes the situation in Nigeria which had to absorb several constitutions and a whole mass of socio-economic and political change in the two decades before its independence in 1960.

It also smacks of the implausible that most people consciously calculate the costs and benefits of belonging to their ethnic groups when conventional wisdom still portrays ethnicity as a largely pre-determined affair. If both of X’s parents are Igbo and society tells X this means he/she is Igbo, full stop, is it plausible to assume that X will continuously weigh the costs and benefits of being Igbo with the assumption that he may one day decide to shed his Igbo identity in favour of something else? And if this cost-benefit analysis is not being constantly made, how then can we speak of a rational choice approach to ethnicity in the case of X?

The instrumentalist approach in its rational-choice form has been criticized on the one hand for its cynical approach to human motivation and for underrating the emotions and passions ethnic ties are capable of inspiring. McKay argued that human beings struggle over ideals and values as well as economic and political interests and one could not reduce all ethnic disputes to economic issues and issues of political power or advantage.[[67]](#footnote-67) Divorcing emotions from human action, especially in the realm of politics or economics, where interests are bound to clash and where the stakes can be very high, is to ignore a significant aspect of the reality of everyday human experience.

On the other hand, acknowledging and even emphasizing the role of emotions in ethnicity does not have to be tantamount to endorsing an essentialist notion of primordiality as inherently irrational or abandoning the notion of ethnicity being socially constructed. As Bell elegantly put it, ethnicity is salient because it ‘can combine an interest with an affective tie.’[[68]](#footnote-68) It is this combination that makes it the formidable and widespread phenomenon it is.

To summarize, while the instrumentalist approach is useful for explaining economic and political struggles between ethnic groups and how ethnicity can be used strategically, it has little to offer on the psychology of ethnicity. While this study does not agree with those instrumentalist views which tend to concentrate all agency in the ethnic group formation process to elites, it does however, take the position that political leaders can and often do have a privileged role in the ethnic identity formation process. This view will be elaborated upon in the section discussing the constructivist approach to ethnicity which this study is adopting.

**1.5.3.3 Modernist/structuralist approaches to ethnicity**

In 1914, the previously separate Northern and Southern provinces of Nigeria were amalgamated by the British colonial administration bringing together groups with vastly differing histories, cultures and traditional norms and values into a singular political unit. The subsequent decades ushered in massive social changes in society brought about by the processes of unification, modernization, increasing urbanization and general colonial transformation of Nigeria.

By the time of the historical era this study is concerned with (1945-67), the generational effects of these transformational processes were already well visible. It is therefore well worth our while to take a look at some of the theories directly linking modernity and the modernization process to the phenomenon of ethnicity. Although most of the scholars who made this linkage did this on the basis of their observations of the industrialization and modernization process in Western societies, some of their general insights are worth reviewing to ascertain if they could prove useful in analysing the Nigerian experience as well.

While scholars like the social anthropologist Ernest Gellner and historian Benedict Anderson focused on the identity phenomenon of nationalism and not ethnicity, their insights nevertheless helped sharpen analytical and conceptual approaches to ethnicity as well. As Saul pointed out, ‘the dividing line between ethnic unit and nation is a very blurred one.’[[69]](#footnote-69) Gellner was one of the first to categorically assert ‘there is nothing natural or universal about possessing a “nationality” … the theoretical problem is to separate the quite spurious “national” and “natural” justifications and explanations of nationalism, from the genuine, time- and context-bound roots of it’.[[70]](#footnote-70) His and Anderson’s depictions of the national collective as being far from ‘natural’ were useful eye-openers for those studying ethnic groups as well.

When both scholars[[71]](#footnote-71) described how modernity, largely via industrialization, print capitalism, mass education and the development of transport as well as communications networks, helped bring about an unprecedented widespread disruption of the traditional balance of societies in Western Europe and fostered new notions of common communities and shared interests, one could not help but draw parallels to colonialism and the similarly disruptive effects the processes it brought with it had on 19th and 20th century Nigerian society.

The insights of the likes of Gellner and Anderson were applied to Africa by scholars like Davidson who drew parallels between the formation of ethnic groups in Africa and the creation of nationalities in Europe.[[72]](#footnote-72) Groups such as the Igbos, Yorubas and Hausa-Fulanis became demonstrably more self-conscious during the colonial era.[[73]](#footnote-73) Processes identified as directly responsible for the increasing self-consciousness of ethnic identities included increased competition for resources and jobs and the new phenomenon whereby Africans who worked in the colonial bureaucracy were suddenly handed the kind of power over their fellow Africans that only important traditional rulers had possessed in the pre-colonial era.[[74]](#footnote-74)

All of a sudden, it was an advantage or disadvantage to be Yoruba or Igbo depending on which part of the country you resided in or which ethnic group the clerk dealing with your issue in the colonial office was from. Meanwhile, consciousness of difference was being sharpened bereft of the representative institutions of 19th-century Europe within which ethnic differences might have been negotiated.[[75]](#footnote-75) Ethnic groups thus evolved into ‘political tribes’ and had the Igbos or Yorubas been Europeans they would have been called ‘nationalities’ argued Lonsdale.[[76]](#footnote-76)

These insights into the effects of the social change going in Nigeria at the time are crucial in helping to establish the contextual background for our study. They help explain how the stage was set for the emergence of political leaders who could articulate to a wider audience (including the colonial authorities) the prevalent sentiments about the realities of colonial Nigeria within their ethnic groups. This eventually led to leaders like the subjects of our study playing a role in constructions of ethnicity in their discourses, our main object of interest.

Nationalist and ethnic politics are fuelled by grievances and insecurities. Thus, understanding the socio-economic context on the ground is important to understanding the politicization of ethnicity. In the chapter dealing specifically with the Nigerian background to ethnic identity politics, the study will elaborate on the institutional environment created by the colonial administration which contributed to the process of leaders building voting blocs based largely on the mass support of particular ethnic groups. In this sense, modernization approaches outlining the macro-situation are helpful in establishing the micro-context for individuals, a factor often neglected in political science research on ethnicity which tends to focus on inter-group relations and conflicts without always paying much attention to the motivations of the individual members of those groups.

An earlier school of thought identified with modernization theory predicted ethnicity’s demise. Modernization theory holds that the process of modernization is a transition, or rather a series of transitions from primitive, subsistence economies to technology-intensive, industrialized economies; from subject to participant political cultures; from closed, ascriptive status systems to open, achievement-oriented systems; from extended to nuclear kinship units and from religious to secular ideologies.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Modernization theory assumed ethnic tensions in developing societies at the time resulted from the fact that the peoples who constituted these societies originated from varied cultures that had engaged in conflicts before the advent of colonialism. Summing up the obstacles nation-building was facing in West Africa, W. Arthur Lewis asserted that ‘some of these groups live side by side in a long tradition of mutual hostility, restrained only in the past by an imperial power’.[[78]](#footnote-78)

The solution was the spread of Western-style education, increased urbanization and economic development, the creation of national institutions, promotion of nationalist ideals by political leaders; in short, a replication of the processes that had helped promote nationalist consciousness in Europe and the United States with its proverbial ‘melting pot.’ All this would lead to an inevitable weakening of pre-modern era loyalties and Africans would aspire to larger national ambitions.

The idea of using the incomparably more economically-advanced and politically stable societies of the West as models and yardsticks for analysing and predicting future social patterns in new states just emerging from centuries of colonial domination is remarkably Eurocentric as well as naive. This school of thought seemed to view colonialism as little more than a ‘modernizing’ phase without appreciating the negative disruptive effects it unleashed on the social fabric of these societies and the future consequences of those. It forgoes establishing linkages between colonialism and the dependent and politically fragile nature of the new states as well as their underdeveloped conditions.[[79]](#footnote-79)

It seems clear though that some aspects of modernization likely exacerbated ethnic antipathies. For one, modernization produced (Western) educated elites like the subjects of our study who did eventually capitalize on ethnic sentiments to further their political interests. But it has not been demonstrated persuasively that modernization inherently generates conflict or ethnic tensions. If it were so, then the most-modernized diverse societies should have much higher levels of conflict and ethnic tensions than the least modernized ones. That does not seem to be the case. To sum up, studies linking modernization to ethnicity need to problematize the specific contexts in which modernization can affect ethnicity or relations between ethnic groups.

As Doornbos rightly argued, ‘discussion of ethnicity *per se* does not make too much sense as there is no way of establishing what orientation or underlying motive any ethnic consciousness raising may have without first understanding the context of the social forces and the issues concerned… ethnicity should always be considered in its dynamic relation to and interaction with other social dynamics.’[[80]](#footnote-80)

However, with regards to my study, historical accounts and analysis focussed on the modernization process in colonial-era Nigeria will prove useful in providing vital contextual information to be considered when interpreting political discourses.

**1.5.3.4 Ethnicity constructed – constructivist approach**

The central claim of constructivism is that ethnic identities are social constructs endogenous to a set of social, economic and political processes.[[81]](#footnote-81) In this view of ethnicity as ‘socially constructed’, there is general agreement between those described as ‘instrumentalists’ and those associated with ‘constructivism.’ The differences are more to be found in the spheres of analytical emphasis and factors attributed as dominant in the ethnic formation process.

With regards to analytical emphasis, instrumentalists tend to focus more narrowly on how ethnicity is exploited for (usually material) gains while constructivists tend to pay closer attention to the variety of factors shaping how ethnic ties were constructed in the first place and how they are maintained. Scholars like Wimmer,[[82]](#footnote-82) Horowitz[[83]](#footnote-83) and Laitin[[84]](#footnote-84) persuasively demonstrated the role of institutions and historical factors such as colonialism in ethnic group formation in Asia and Africa. They showed how some ethnic groups Geertz would likely have described as ‘primordial’ had in fact been largely constructed less than a century before he espoused his theory and how during the colonial era, an ‘enormous amount of subgroup amalgamation took place’ with new groups appearing such as the Malays in Malaysia, the Kikuyu in Kenya, the Bangala in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) or the Moro in the Philippines.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Fredrik Barth is credited with pioneering what later became a very influential line of constructivist thought; namely that ethnicity is the product of a social process rather than a cultural given and that groups play a very active creative role in negotiating its boundaries. Barth proposed focusing not on the ‘cultural contents’ of an ethnic group, as had been the dominating practice among ethnicity scholars, but on the boundaries that ‘contain’ the group. Categorizing ethnic groups as ‘a form of social organization’, Barth argued it is the sustenance of the boundary between groups, the ‘continuing dichotomisation of members and outsiders’ that allows the survival of ethnic groups and that ‘socially relevant factors alone become diagnostic for membership, not the overt, “objective” differences.’[[86]](#footnote-86)

Barth was saying that the fundamental dividing line(s) between ethnic Group A and ethnic Group B is/are drawn based upon the difference(s) between them that group members intersubjectively decide are socially relevant. So if, for instance, both groups have differing religions, languages, modes of dressing and dietary habits, Group A members could decide that religion and language are the socially relevant distinguishing markers for their group and that if a member of Group B were to learn their language and adopt their religion, he/she could be accepted as a Group A member despite still dressing and eating the way they do in Group B.

In this way, he aimed to shift the analytical focus from the study of the cultural characteristics of an ethnic group towards the social process of relationships between groups and their members. This emphasis on the boundaries between ethnic groups represented a significant shift of interest towards the salience rather than the cultural content of ethnicity in inter-group relations.[[87]](#footnote-87) Barth significantly influenced subsequent investigations of ethnicity either directly or indirectly and the theoretical framework offered by ethnicity scholars Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann which I will be adopting for this study has its intellectual foundations in his innovations.

Cornell and Hartmann label their approach to ethnicity ‘social constructionism’. However, the labels ‘constructivism’ and ‘constructionism’ are often used interchangeably in ethnicity studies and asides a preference for the latter term among sociology scholars (as are Cornell and Hartmann), there is no discernible ontological or epistemological difference in approach to ethnicity distinguishing both labels. At the most, constructionism can be described as an offshoot of the constructivist school which tends to devote a lot of its analytical focus to the constant ‘negotiation’ of ethnic identity and on the never-ending social interaction which shapes ethnicity. Cornell and Hartmann posit that ethnic identity is perpetually being socially constructed and reconstructed by a combination of internal forces (via negotiation, redefinition and reconstruction of ethnic boundaries within ethnic groups) as well as external forces such as social, economic and political processes.[[88]](#footnote-88) According to this view, the negotiations within groups do not take place unrestrained by external forces but rather at the crossroads of the claims groups make about themselves and the claims others make about them.

The extent to which assignment (outsider’s wishes and opinions) or assertion (insider’s wishes and opinions) prevails in identity construction generally depends on the ability of the group to promote or resist, both among its members and in the larger society, its own conception of boundary and meaning.[[89]](#footnote-89) The approach takes into consideration the always specific and often vastly differing power dynamics between groups in different societies.

There will be a different power dynamic in a society where one ethnic group commands a clear numerical majority like in Zimbabwe where the Shona make up roughly 82% of the population and in one where no one group forms such a majority such as Nigeria where the Hausa-Fulani make up roughly 32% of the population, the Yorubas 21% and the Igbos 18%. Groups can also vary vastly in their socio-economic potential and/or access to political power, which all have an influence on the power dynamics between groups, knowledge of which is essential in establishing the proper social context of ethnicity in a particular society.

This approach to ethnicity emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between agency and structure in the ethnic identity construction process while instrumentalist theories tend to portray ethnicity as predominantly a reaction to external forces and circumstances which decide the ethnic identities individuals will consider beneficial pursuing.

Instrumentalism’s assertions on the importance of circumstance are not negated but a creative element is added to the ethnic identity formation and maintenance process, namely the contribution group members make to it. Cornell and Hartmann argue that ethnicity involves not only circumstance but also active responses to circumstance by individuals and groups guided by their own preconceptions, dispositions, and agendas. Ethnic identities are not simply thrust upon people as they can ‘accept, resist, choose, specify, invent, redefine, reject, or actively defend’ them as the case may be.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Historical accounts provide us evidence of several ways in which ethnic groups can actively participate in their own construction process. Examples of this in the Nigerian context include the establishment of organizations such as the Pan-Yoruba cultural association *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* (Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa), the Pan-Igbo socio-cultural association, the Ibo Federal Union or the Pan-Northern *Jam’iyyar Mutanen Arewa*, all prominent ethnic-based associations in colonial Nigeria. These organizations helped promote research into the history and culture of their groups, reshaping historical narratives and myths in manners that redefined and (inevitably) glorified the past of these groups, boosting the value of group membership and pride in the collective. This creative process in which groups actively shape their own ethnic identities is where the subjects of our study come in.

Building on Barth’s original insights, Cornell and Hartmann argue that distinctions between groups *per se* are not influential in ethnic identity construction—what is important is the *social relevance* or *meaning* that is attached to those differences. The assertion of meaning is thus a key part of the ethnic formation process. And it is in this key process of asserting meaning that political elites have the power to play a very significant role.

The recognized right and authority of a leader to assign meaning to ‘we’ as well as to ‘they’ is one of the most powerful tools at his/her disposal in the construction and potential politicization of ethnic identity. This authority gives leaders the opportunity for the ideologization of ethnicity which involves assigning a unique history and future to a particular ethnic group and generating a set of symbols that serve to mobilize and unite group members on the group’s behalf.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The ideologization of ethnicity lays the groundwork for eventual politicization, which is one of the aspects this study will focus on and which is why particular attention will be paid to how Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello discursively assigned a unique history to their groups, how they discursively constructed symbols that serve to mobilize and unite group members on the group’s behalf and how, importantly from the political point of view, they constructed a unique collective future for their group, portraying the future lot of its individual members as inextricably linked to the fortunes of the group as a whole.

As Muntigl argued, politicization via discourse involves presenting certain opportunities for action and for constructing social reality while at the same time limiting alternative paths to constructing social reality.[[92]](#footnote-92)

The approach I am adopting thus views communication and discourse as processes which are instrumental in the creation of our social world, rather than simply activities we conduct within it. It ‘emphasizes the dynamic aspects of interaction and the constantly changing and developing nature of ethnic identities, categories and boundaries – a process in which talk clearly plays an essential part’.[[93]](#footnote-93) Language is ‘not just a carrier of cultural values and norms … it plays a constitutive role in sustaining and changing cultural practices.’[[94]](#footnote-94)

In what ways did our three leaders communicate to their groups that their ethnic identities were central to a proper understanding of the political, economic and social realities in Nigeria at the time? In what ways did they imbue their discourse with cultural codes, meanings and significance? How did they reinforce the sense among group members that they had shared interests and shared something special together, that their history, belief-systems, cultural practices and general way of life was not only worth keeping but worth being proud of as well? How did they eventually politicize ethnicity via their discourse?

Leadership discourse is constrained by the parameters of broad societal norms and ‘inherited structures of belief, power, opportunity etc’[[95]](#footnote-95) and thus the construction of ethnic identities in discourse by leaders also occurs within the constraints of ‘culturally available, sense-making frameworks or discourses’.[[96]](#footnote-96) Appeals to historical experiences, traditions, well-established identity markers and conventional wisdom have the power to be effective because they are embedded in a knowledge system group members are already familiar with. Such discourse can be made more persuasive thanks to the convincing illusion that its tenets are somehow *natural* since they correspond with the pre-existing ‘knowledge’ group members have come to consider conventional wisdom. Ethnic leaders will thus likely base their discourse on existing knowledge systems within the group, meaning that a discourse analysis also gives us insight into key aspects of the system of knowledge of a particular group.

The advantage of constructivist approaches in general is that they provide us with a contextualized viewpoint by elaborating the specific historical and social circumstances in which ethnic groups are created. By emphasizing the constructive character of ethnicity, this approach also helps explain why ethnic ties and/or antipathies can differ significantly in intensity over time. What we usually don’t get from constructivist approaches are insights into how ethnic affiliations are and can be utilized as an instrument towards collective political or economic action. Constructivism tends to help explain how ethnic groups came about but is less focused on the consequences of ethnicity.

**1.6 Concluding remarks**

Ethnicity is a social construct and its characteristics and consequences are contingent onsocial convention. The selection of the factors which allow one to be accepted (or not) asthe member of an ethnic group – namely, the ‘boundary markers’ of the group – are anissue of convention and not of whether those factors consist of ‘natural’ or ‘objective’distinguishing features. Furthermore, it is the way people in a particular social environmentlearn to think about themselves and others that will shape their attitude towards ethnicityand thus its consequences. In the final analysis, what really counts in the practical sphere of ethnicidentity is what people *believe* about it.

The only way to ascertain the significance and/or potential of ethnicity in any society is by learning what people in that particular society believe about it - if they believe it (should) divide(s) them from their fellow citizens who are members of other ethnic groups, then it will; if they believe it should not, it won’t; if they believe their ethnicity is a fundamental aspect of their integral identity, then it will be, if not, it won’t; if they believe their ethnic group is superior/inferior to other groups, then they will treat members of other groups in a manner reflective of that belief and so on and so forth.

Establishing objective social circumstances alone will never be enough to predict the actions of ethnic groups or their leaders because human action depends on the *interpretation* of circumstances. One collective, or leader of a collective, can react very differently from another faced with identical circumstances. The interpretation and consequent decision-making process as to the best reaction to specific circumstances thus play a significant role in the shaping of ethnic identities.

Political leaders, due to their position of authority in the group, have a very influential role to play in the interpretation of circumstances and subsequent meaning attached to them as well as in the decision-making process regarding the optimal reaction of the group to that particular situation. Leaders will usually make these judgments and decisions taking into consideration the beliefs, prejudices, value and knowledge systems, expectations, fears and potential of the group. This is why analysing the discourse of the political leader of an ethnic group apart from giving us insights into ethnic discourse and ethnic leadership, also gives us valuable glimpses into the group’s beliefs, the rationale for those beliefs and the plausible expectations for future action those beliefs could lead to.

While this study adopts a social constructivist approach to ethnicity with all the fluidity and flexibility of the phenomenon such a position assumes, I also posit that in real life, ethnic boundaries, once formed and sanctioned by dominant social convention, tend to be relatively stable in most cases even though they can undergo changes from time to time, with these changes sometimes being very significant. Ethnicity is nevertheless not as malleable as some have suggested. I concur with Laitin that ‘people do not quit their ethnic groups as they do their jobs; nor do they change their ethnic identities the way they change their brand of beer.’[[97]](#footnote-97)

Also, the majority of people do not get to choose their ethnicity but are born into it, according to the prevalent rules in their particular society at a particular time in history. There are constraints, sometimes significant, on the ethnic identity one can plausibly make claims to with practical effect for wider society. These constraints are also a matter of social convention and are socially constructed, but they exist nevertheless and have a real influence on people’s lives. Of course, ethnic categorization rules will vary from society to society and various factors can influence ethnic identity.

Political leaders, such as those this study will be focusing on, can promote ethnic awareness while structural conditions can serve as catalysts for ethnic consciousness. Ethnic competition can sharpen ethnic boundaries and make membership significantly more restrictive, especially in countries like Nigeria where resources are scarce relative to population size. Critical Discourse Analysis, from whose tools I will be borrowing, offers fresh ways to investigate the relationship between social structures and political agency, the role of interests and identities in explaining social action, the interweaving of meanings and practices, and the character of social and historical change.[[98]](#footnote-98)

**Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework**

**2.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the theoretical framework within which this study is conducted. As mentioned in chapter one, my investigation operates within the intertwined realms of social constructivism and discourse analysis. The objective is to identify some of the various macro-strategies and grand narratives employed in the construction of ethnic and/or sub-national identities in Nigeria and describe them utilizing discourse analysis framework tools.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section shall discuss the social constructivist underpinning of this study with relation to its approach to ethnicity and justify my focus on political leaders. The second section shall provide some background on the scope and objectives of discourse analysis as a broad research paradigm. In the final section, I shall introduce the specific Critical Discourse Analysis paradigm from which I will be drawing on most heavily in this study, namely the Discourse-Historical Approach, also known as DHA.

**2.2 Social constructivist framework**

As indicated in the preceding chapter surveying the literature on ethnicity, the primary theoretical foundation of this study with regards to the aforementioned subject is to be broadly located in the constructivist approach to ethnic identities and specifically, in the work of Cornell and Hartmann on ethnicity and the construction of group identities. Cornell and Hartmann posited that the process of ethnic group construction was ‘interactive.’[[99]](#footnote-99) By this, they meant that ethnic identities ‘are made, but by an interaction between circumstantial or human assignment on one hand and assertion on the other.’[[100]](#footnote-100)

This construction process involves ‘both the passive experience of being “made” by external forces, including not only material circumstances but the claims that other persons or groups make about the group in question, and the active process by which the group “makes” itself…this interaction is continuous and it involves all those processes through which identities are made and remade, from the initial formation of a collective identity through its maintenance, reproduction, transformation, and even repudiation over time.’[[101]](#footnote-101)

The emphasis on this ‘creative role’ of ethnic group members in constructing their collective identity thus allows for significant agency in the process while at the same time recognizing the constraints and opportunities imposed by circumstances and structural factors. As they pointed out, ethnic identities, once constructed, ‘vary significantly in the degree to which they organize social life and collective action.’[[102]](#footnote-102)

Ethnic identities can become ‘thick’, meaning they ‘organize a great deal of social life and both individual and collective action,’ essentially constituting the key organizing principle of socio-political life in a society. [[103]](#footnote-103) Such became the case, for instance, in 20th century Rwanda. While the Hutu and Tutsi identities had relatively little influence on people’s everyday lives in the mid-19th century, following processes of political centralization, rigidification of ethnic boundaries under German and Belgian colonialism, and subsequent episodes of ethnic conflict, these identities had become very thick by the late 20th century, assuming a defining role in Rwandan political and social life.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Another prominent example of the thickening of ethnicity over a time period is that of the former Yugoslavia. The country went from a relatively well-integrated multi-ethnic state where people shared ‘a largely common language and a great deal of culture,’[[105]](#footnote-105) observed non-rigid ethnic boundaries, often inter-married and paid heed to an ideology of Slavic unity, to one which experienced a radical thickening of ethnic boundaries in the late 1980s, egged on by ethno-nationalist leaders and eventually culminating in Europe’s bloodiest post-WWII conflict to date.[[106]](#footnote-106)

In contrast, the Italian-American ethnic identity, which was quite thick in early 20th century America, playing a comprehensive role in the everyday social life of Italian-Americans, gradually grew ‘thinner’ in the late 20th century, becoming a much less significant shaper of their social life as other identity categories such as race, class, gender, occupation and religion came to play more prominent roles.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Similar was the case with German-Americans, who for much of the 19th-century, united by a broadly common language and cultural similarities, often actively strove to preserve their Germanness as a social identity. By 1894, there were nearly 800 German-language publications in the United States, including 97 daily newspapers providing news about the community.[[108]](#footnote-108) However, two world wars involving Germany in the first half of the 20th century quickly rendered Germanness a less than desirable identity to be associated with in America, and most German-Americans decided it was better to simply become full-fledged ‘Americans’ rather than have their loyalties questioned by an anxious public.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Political, social and economic processes as well as group-internal constructions can thus work towards thickening ethnic identities or thinning them. This study will pay close attention to whether and how the narratives of Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello served to thicken or thin ethnic and/or ethno-regional identities and whether ethnicity was presented as a/the key organizing principle of Nigerian socio-political life. For instance, calling for Nigeria to be structured along ethnic lines can clearly be interpreted as an appeal serving to thicken ethnic identities while, for instance, an effort to downplay differences between ethnic groups and emphasize their commonalities and shared interests, can be interpreted as working towards the thinning of such identities.

Cornell and Hartmann’s framework also provides the assumptions this study will be adopting regarding the most powerful forces likely to strengthen the construction of ethnic identities and difference: interests, meaning, happenstance and inertia. With regards to interests, emphasis on ethnic differentiations are usually strengthened by ‘situations of competition over scarce resources: jobs, housing, school access, prestige, political power and so on.’[[110]](#footnote-110)

When it comes to the issue of meaning, Cornell and Hartmann observe that ‘the blessings of modernity are many, but the preservation of intimate, meaningful communities has not been one of them. Ethnicity with its sense of historical continuity and its claims to deep and meaningful – even primordial – interpersonal ties, holds out the prospect of communion and connection.’[[111]](#footnote-111)

It serves as a ‘mediating community between the individual and the large, impersonal institutions that dominate the modern world.’[[112]](#footnote-112) Indeed, colonialism forced Africans into the world of ‘large impersonal institutions’, and in light of this, ethnicity makes sense as a response to this new situation. Then there is the issue of happenstance, in other words, external circumstances affecting daily living that promote ethnic identification, however inadvertently. For instance, the shared experience of being discriminated against in a certain setting can unite people who might otherwise not have considered themselves having that much in common. Finally, inertia refers to the fact that ‘people are carriers of collective identities all the time’ as a result of a socialization process that leads individuals to see themselves as ‘connected to other categories of people’, as ‘part of some larger body of persons.’[[113]](#footnote-113)

These identity categories can later be sustained by institutions or emphasized by political leaders as particularly important and relevant to social life. This study will thus be working on the assumption that identity constructions embedded in a combination of these four forces would likely be the most powerful and emotionally resonant.

Petersen highlighted the role of emotions in ethnic relations and some of his insights will be useful in interpreting how the leaders’ ethnic discourses appealed to certain emotions. For instance, he highlighted how the emotion of resentment can stem from the perception that one’s group is located in an unwarranted subordinate position on a status hierarchy and the feeling of being politically dominated by a group that has no right to be in a superior position.[[114]](#footnote-114) Constructions of external threats to the in-group and general appeals to fear can also be expected to often be effective in rallying an ethnic or ethno-regional group around an identity.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Rothschild’s theoretical work on the politicization of ethnicity will also be drawn on in this study, especially with regards to his insights on the dynamics of interethnic relations, engagements and confrontations. Rothschild describes the politicization of ethnicity as a ‘dialectical process that preserves ethnic groups by emphasizing their singularity and yet also engineers and lubricates their modernization by transforming them into political conflict groups for the modern political arena, where they must deploy cosmopolitan modern skills and resources.’[[116]](#footnote-116)

Cornell and Hartmann observed that while ‘identity construction may occur in any part of a society and as an aspect of virtually any set of social relations’,[[117]](#footnote-117) labour markets, residential space, social institutions, culture, daily experience and, most importantly from the point of view of this study, the field of *politics* often serve as ‘critical construction sites’ in which identity formation occurs.[[118]](#footnote-118)

As Ricento suggests, since it is practically unfeasible to study all the discourses produced by a society that could potentially influence group identity constructions, ‘one must consider those sites which intersect with and inﬂuence the greatest number of people.’[[119]](#footnote-119) As ‘obvious candidates’, he pointed to texts of major social institutions such as the media, institutions of education, the business world as well as the world of government and politics. Ricento argued that the prominence and far-reaching inﬂuence of these institutions ‘is maintained, in part, by the selective way in which access to them is controlled’[[120]](#footnote-120) as not anyone can get published in widely-distributed newspapers or be able air their views in a national parliament.

Van Dijk, meanwhile, has pointed out that ‘social power is based on privileged access to socially valued resources, such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education or knowledge’ and that those who possess greater social power possess greater access to the tools of persuasion such as the media through which they can deploy strategies to ‘change the mind of others in one’s own interests’.[[121]](#footnote-121)

This combination of ‘disproportionate access to the fora of social persuasion’ as well as knowledge of rhetorical and, more generally, discursive techniques ‘to advance the self-interests of individuals and groups with social power’ are key factors in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic discourses, understood as the dominant ways of interpreting the world.[[122]](#footnote-122) Their extraordinary access to the tools of social persuasion is a major reason I chose to focus on political elite constructions of ethnic and sub-national identities in Nigeria.

As political operatives, it is to be expected for politics to have had a greater or lesser influence on Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello’s choice of discursive strategies at a given period or instance. This study shares Wodak and others’ assumption that there is a connection between the political position of a speaker at the time they are delivering a speech or statement discussing the issue of identity and their constructions of identity.[[123]](#footnote-123)

For instance, a politician holding an important national office (as Azikiwe did from 1960 to 1966, first as the country’s Governor-General and later as its first president), can be expected to address issues deemed important to the state such as national unity, in a ‘solemn, dignified manner’[[124]](#footnote-124), particularly on important occasions, and to ‘act as an integrative authority to promote harmony and diffuse potential conflicts.’[[125]](#footnote-125)

Thus, the expectation would be that most of Azikiwe’s speeches in the post-independence era under study would generally tend to de-emphasize intra-national differences and appeal to common national interests and threats. Likewise, with the three leaders all being regional premiers for most of the 1950s, the assumption would be that during this period they would generally tend to downplay intra-regional inter-ethnic differences, instead emphasizing regional unity and common regional interests as the nature of their office demanded.

On the other hand, the study assumed that when not in power, the politicians would deploy different strategies,[[126]](#footnote-126) presenting interpretations of the present and future meant to compete with the views on identity propagated by the colonial authorities in 1940s Nigeria and by the government of post-independence Nigeria. This would mostly apply to Awolowo prior to his ascendance to regional political office in 1951-52 and following his resignation from the office in 1959, and to Azikiwe prior to his ascendance to regional power in the 1950s. As for Bello, even before he officially joined politics, he was a member of the traditional ruling Northern elite and can thus be expected to have presented views on identity generally in harmony with what Northern ruling elites were espousing throughout this study.

During these periods when not part of government, the expectation would be that Awolowo and Azikiwe would articulate narratives propagating alternative visions of sub-Nigerian identities, shaped by their individual historical, political and ideological perspectives. They would generally deploy discursive strategies corresponding to these perspectives while simultaneously questioning or discrediting official/government positions on identity.

Aside from their personal positions and individual historical, political and ideological perspectives, other factors expected to shape the chosen discursive strategies of the leaders in their identity narratives would include ongoing political developments, the raw materials of history, pressures from below (voters, constituents, opinion-makers etc), readings of contextual dynamics and overall party strategy. Aside the influence of pressures from below, which this study has no way of credibly gauging, the other assumptions will be tested on the empirical evidence gathered.

There are drawbacks to the elite-focussed approach this study has adopted. Perhaps the most significant is that it does not enable an assessment or understanding of the *impact* of political elite discourses of identity on their intended audiences; how the narratives of Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello may have been received and recontextualized in the everyday conversations of regular Nigerians living at the time. Moreover, considering the period I am covering was one in which a very limited number of Nigerians had access to mass-media and most were illiterate, it is possible that socialization discourses within the family and early peer groups had a bigger influence on providing the interpretive frameworks that defined their approach to identity rather than elite discourses.

Conducting interviews and assembling focus groups for this study would no doubt have enriched my findings significantly as I would have been able to test contemporary interpretations and understandings of the identity narratives proposed by the three leaders as well as their scope of influence. However, considering the period of history my study covers goes back seven decades, this was not practically feasible as the intended audiences of these discourses have either passed away or are unlikely to be able clearly and authentically reconstruct how they might have interpreted specific narrative themes *at the time*.

Van Dijk has observed that when it comes to narratives on ethnicity, ‘political discourse both reflects and influences’ popular as well as elite opinions and concerns.[[127]](#footnote-127) On the one hand, during their everyday political activities, politicians are acquainted with popular feelings and opinions on ethnicity and identity via their constituents, party activists, supporters and other members of the public they may come into contact with as well as by opinion-shaping actors such as journalists, academics, government bureaucrats and various other professional experts. Taking all these views into consideration, they will then shape their identity narratives to achieve maximum political benefit.

On the other hand, ‘political definitions of ethnic events and issues may in turn influence public debate and opinion formation’ which then subsequently ‘influence and legitimate policies and legislation, thereby closing the full circle of mutual influence.’[[128]](#footnote-128) This leads to group identity narratives ultimately being shaped by both bottoms-up and top-down processes. Van Dijk nevertheless argued that although the communicative mechanisms in these processes are extremely complex and dialectical, ‘in ethnic affairs, it is primarily the [government] administration and the politicians who define the ethnic situation and set the terms and boundaries of public debate and opinion formation.’[[129]](#footnote-129) I shall likewise be adopting this assumption in my study.

Ultimately, taking into consideration the fact that the period under study was an era in which popular mobilisation was competitive, critical and intense, it is reasonable to assume that successful political leaders like Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello were well-tuned to the popular sentiments of the day on a variety of issues relevant to public life, including those revolving around ethnicity and identity. Considering this study’s acknowledgement of the two-way flow of ethnicity narratives (bottoms-up and tops-down), analysing their discourses on this issue should also thus provide us with some insight into prevailing popular opinions on identity in Nigeria at the time.

While I cannot categorically lay claim to a measurable extent to which one can attribute popular ideas about identity in Nigeria to the country’s Founding Fathers, I argue it is justified to suggest their views, by virtue of their personal authority, prestige and privileged access to fora in which to disseminate their narratives, including media outlets and party propaganda machines, are likely to have commanded significant attention in the day.

Importantly, their views on identity are still regularly cited in contemporary academic, media and political discourses in Nigeria by various actors hoping to buttress their own arguments with the moral, political and intellectual authority of the Founding Fathers, evidencing their continued influence and relevance. It is for these reasons that I have decided to focus on the discourses of these three particular members of Nigeria’s political elite for my study.

**2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis**

As I will be utilizing elements of a discourse analytical framework, it would be worthwhile providing a brief overview of this research paradigm before proceeding further. Since the 1970s, the term ‘discourse’ has gained increasing popularity in a variety of research covering the fields of humanities and social science.[[130]](#footnote-130) There is general scholarly agreement that what is broadly referred to today as ‘discourse analysis’ has become a vast field of study covering broad aspects of research cross-cutting with numerous academic disciplines.

Van Dijk has gone as far as asserting there are ‘few disciplines that offer such a broad, multidisciplinary, multicultural and socially relevant approach to human language, cognition, communication and interaction as discourse analysis.’[[131]](#footnote-131) Relevant to my study, discourse analysis has become one of the most widely used methodological approaches within social constructivism,[[132]](#footnote-132) the theoretical school on ethnicity this study is steeped in.

As Jorgensen and Phillips rightly point out, ‘discourse analysis’ does not define one single approach but rather ‘a series of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies.’[[133]](#footnote-133) In fact there is no clear consensus on what exactly discourses are or how to go about analysing and drawing empirically or theoretically-valuable conclusions and knowledge from them. Instead, various schools of thought offer their own suggestions and approaches, to some extent, competing ‘to appropriate the terms “discourse” and “discourse analysis” for their own definitions’.[[134]](#footnote-134) Thus, far from being a single systematically cohesive method, discourse analysis is a very broad theoretical and methodological approach to analysis, as is the sub-sphere of this research school commonly referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Nevertheless, what all discourse analytical approaches take as their starting point is ‘the claim of structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic philosophy, that our access to reality is always through language’ and that via language ‘we create representations of reality that are never mere reflections of a pre-existing reality but [also] contribute to constructing reality.’[[135]](#footnote-135) To pre-empt potential caricaturist characterisations of the approach, it is important to stress here that this is by no means a claim that ‘there is no such thing as “reality” or that physical objects do not really exist’, it is simply a claim that these objects and realities only achieve *meaning* to humans via discourses.[[136]](#footnote-136)

For the purposes of this study, I will be adopting Jorgensen and Louise Phillips’ baseline definition of discourses as ‘a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world).’[[137]](#footnote-137) Going by this definition, ‘ethnic discourses’ were and are a particular way of talking about and interpreting the social realities of Nigeria, especially with regards to social identities and their consequences.

Located within the research school of discourse analysis is CriticalDiscourse Analysis, also known as CDA, which is distinguished from other forms of text, discourse or conversational analysis in that it ‘does not pretend to be able assume an objective, socially neutral analytical stance.’[[138]](#footnote-138) Instead, it is committed to a ‘socially critical approach’ which aims to ‘unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory, inclusion and exclusion in language use.’[[139]](#footnote-139) I subscribe to this commitment and in this study, I aim to uncover what Wodak referred to as ‘manipulative manoeuvres in politics… which aim at linguistic homogenisation or discriminatory exclusion of human beings’, and to ‘heighten the awareness of the rhetorical strategies which are used to impose certain political beliefs, values, and goals.’[[140]](#footnote-140)

My objective is to shed light on the largely contingent and imaginary character of ethnic, ethno-regional and/or sub-national identities in a bid to sharpen awareness of dogmatic, essentialist and naturalising conceptions of ethnicity and identity, which according to Habermas, threaten or make impossible what he described as ‘difference-sensitive inclusion’, namely, an equal pluralistic coexistence of various ethnic, racial, language and religious groups as well as other communities.[[141]](#footnote-141)

CDA, and in this case myself by extension, thus have an explicit political agenda of raising awareness about the various ideological frameworks that not only inform language choice, but also the way discourses construct, represent and position social actors. In this case, I will be focussing on how Nigeria’s prominent and powerful Founding Fathers constructed, positioned and represented social actors within their discourses revolving around identity as an aspect of their overall strategies for winning and/or maintaining political power and hegemony.

It is because of CDA’s particular focus on deconstructing ideological frameworks, on manipulative techniques in discourses, and on context, that I opted to utilize this approach to discourse analysis in my study rather than, for instance, content analysis or frame analysis which are also used to investigate discourses. In the case of content analysis, which is usually quantitative, a major drawback to the approach is that it investigates discursive utterances abstracted from their contexts and from the intentions of the producers of those utterances.[[142]](#footnote-142) This is clearly not a suitable approach with which to attempt deconstruct ideological frameworks and manipulative discursive strategies deployed at a very specific contextual period in Nigeria’s history.

In the case of frame analysis, while this approach too is interested in ideologies, it is focussed more on how existing ideologies and ideas are ‘framed by different actors, bending their meaning in certain directions’[[143]](#footnote-143) rather than on how those ideologies came to be constructed in the first place, which is the focus of my study. Frame analysis is less interested than CDA in uncovering the process of constructions of ideologies, but more focussed on explaining the influence and effects of those constructed ideologies on their audiences when deployed.[[144]](#footnote-144) As mentioned earlier, this study is focussed not on the impact of the Founding Fathers’ identity narratives, but on how those narratives were constructed and articulated, making CDA a more suitable approach than frame analysis.

Wodak distinguished between CDA approaches associated with Gunther Kress, Norman Fairclough and Theo Van Leeuwen who draw heavily on Foucault’s work on discourses and on linguistic structures; the cognitive-oriented approach which investigates how personal and social cognition mediate between social structures and discourse structures as represented by Teun van Dijk, and the Discourse-Historical Approach associated primarily with the likes of Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl, which places emphasis on the historical and contextual factors in which discursive ‘events’ are embedded.[[145]](#footnote-145)

Broadly speaking, CDA provides a general framework to problem-oriented social research, allowing the integration of different dimensions of interdisciplinarity and multiple perspectives on the empirical object of analysis which are approached as multidimensional and embedded in a textual as well as historical and socio-political context.[[146]](#footnote-146) My research draws on the CDA assumption that language deployed in discourses reshape and reframe social processes and practices, and that ‘discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned. It is constitutive in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the status quo and, in the sense, that it may contribute to transforming it.’[[147]](#footnote-147) Through discourses, ‘social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups and those who interact with them.’[[148]](#footnote-148)

Hence, discourse may serve to construct and perpetuate categories such as ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’ or ‘nation’, or alternatively, may dismantle or destroy them.’[[149]](#footnote-149) A major assumption of this research paradigm is that discourses function as prescriptions for and descriptions of social practice which social actors inculcate to a greater or lesser extent.

**2.3.1 The Discourse-Historical Approach**

As highlighted earlier, CDA, as with other discourse analysis approaches, is a research framework lacking the unified analytical and conceptual coherence usually prevalent in other research methods. It thus allows for a mix-and-match selection of study-specific research tools most suited towards achieving the objectives of a particular empirical analysis. In this section, I shall justify why I consider the so-called Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) framework that which provides the most useful analytical tools and concepts for the purposes of my study.

DHA was originally developed by the Vienna School of CDA to investigate stereotypical anti-Semitic images and rhetoric which emerged in Austrian public discourse during the country’s 1986 presidential campaign of former UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim who, for a long time, had kept secret his Nationalist-Socialist past.[[150]](#footnote-150) From the onset, it was thus designed with a view to investigating issues revolving around social identities and their ideological discourses. Martin Reisigl, a co-creator of DHA, listed ‘racism, ethnicism, nationalism, xenophobia, islamophobia and sexism,’[[151]](#footnote-151) as major topics of interest for its proponents.

Following its ongoing development, DHA has since been applied in various investigations into group identity formation, including Wodak and others’ study of the discursive construction of Austrian national identity,[[152]](#footnote-152) Ricento’s analysis of constructions of American identity[[153]](#footnote-153) and Hernández’s investigation into how Gibraltarian identity has been discursively narrated.

While DHA has so far mostly been applied to investigations of national identity, some of its conceptual and analytical tools were also deployed in Baykal’s study on discursive constructions of the ethnic identity of the Romani group inhabiting the Sulukule region of Istanbul in Turkey.[[154]](#footnote-154) I decided to adopt some of the analytical and conceptual tools of DHA for my study because of its focus on social identities and because it has developed useful analytical and descriptive methods applicable to my investigation of discursive constructions of sub-national identities in Nigeria.

While sharing many similarities with other discourse analysis models, DHA’s main distinguishing feature is the emphasis it places on highlighting the *historical* context of discourses. It ‘always attempts to integrate as much available information as possible on the historical background and the original historical sources in which discursive “events” are embedded.’[[155]](#footnote-155)

This is important as the phenomena of ethnicity and identity are too complex and multidimensional to be analysed solely via linguistic tools and concepts. As Koselleck aptly observed: ‘All language is historically conditioned, and all history is linguistically conditioned.’[[156]](#footnote-156) One cannot understand, much less hope to *critically analyse* the language and logic of ethnicity without first understanding the historical conditions in which that language was deployed. This applies to both researcher and reader of this study. In the case of the latter, Kramsch has pointed out that when it comes to interpreting texts, ‘one of the greatest difficulties for foreign readers is less the internal coherence of the text than the cultural coherence of the discourse.’[[157]](#footnote-157)

A discourse analytical tool that emphasizes the integration of historical and contextual information into the interpretive analyses of texts as DHA does is thus a prerequisite for a rigorous understanding and analysis of this study’s subject matter for both researcher and reader.

Another usefulness of DHA’s historical orientation is its concept of ‘recontextualisation’, which involves examining intertextual relationships ‘between utterances, texts, genres and discourses’.[[158]](#footnote-158) The understanding behind this is that texts are linked to other texts, either in the past or the present. These links are manifested in explicit references or allusions to a previous text, speaker or set of events. For instance, a politician might, in a speech, refer directly or indirectly to an utterance by another politician given in an earlier speech or newspaper interview.

This process of transferring previous discursive elements to a new context is understood as recontextualization, a process which leads to the recontextualised element acquiring, at least partially, a new meaning ‘since meanings are formed in use.’[[159]](#footnote-159) Paying attention to recontextualisations can thus help this study answer one of its sub-questions regarding how identity narratives and concepts evolved during the period under study in line with socio-political and historical developments. As Koselleck stated, ‘investigating concepts and their linguistic history is as much a part of the minimal condition for recognizing history as is the definition of history as having to do with human society’.[[160]](#footnote-160)

This realization of the need for a comprehensive historical understanding of the period in which the narratives and concepts I will be analysing were embedded in is why I have devoted a chapter of this study to providing an overview of the major socio-political happenings of that era. Furthermore, in the thematic chapters, before analysing a text, I shall strive to provide as much additional historical background to the discursive instance as possible.

However, linguistic tools and history alone are not enough to analyse a phenomenon as complex and multi-dimensional as ethnicity and group identities. DHA is a useful choice in this respect as well due to its encouragement of a multi-disciplinary approach[[161]](#footnote-161) in which alongside linguistic and historical perspectives, insights from other social sciences such as sociology and political science are also factored into analytical interpretations of discursive instances. My research thus draws on perspectives from the sociological and political science literature on ethnicity in order to inform and enrich my critical interpretations of discourses.

Finally, DHA pays particular attention to analysing argumentation schemes in political speeches. As Reisigl observed, DHA ‘is more concerned with the analysis of the content of argumentation schemes’ than other CDA approaches.[[162]](#footnote-162) This clearly predisposes it to be particularly useful for the purposes of my study, which is focussed on political discourses that, virtually by definition, strive to persuade via argument. These are the reasons for which I decided to deploy DHA tools and concepts in my investigation.

**Chapter 3 Methodology**

**3.1 Introduction**

Following the description of the overall theoretical framework of this study, this chapter deals with the actual methodological model that has been utilized for its purposes. The chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section shall highlight the specific methodological steps I undertook in my research in order to satisfy the requirements of academic rigour and ensure findings and interpretations are as robust as possible. The second section shall address some of the most oft-recurring critiques aimed at results derived from discourse analysis frameworks. The final section shall provide some summarizing remarks.

While the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) adopted allows for research practice to vary from study to study depending on practical factors such as resources of time, money and available empirical material, I followed a series of 8 steps recommended by Reisigl[[163]](#footnote-163) for analysts deploying DHA tools. I shall now highlight these steps, explaining in greater detail the parts which constituted the bulk of my analytical work.

**3.2** **DHA research steps undertaken in study**

**Step 1: Activation and consultation of preceding theoretical knowledge.**

This involved the study of previous research on the broad theme of ethnicity as well as on ethnic politics in Nigeria during the period under study specifically.

**Step 2: Systematic collection of empirical evidence and context information.**

This involved physically gathering and/or digitally accessing evidence of *all* utterances directly attributable to Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello during the period under study from books, newspapers and archival sources both in the UK and Nigeria. The corpus gathered in this manner amounted to thousands of pages of discourse material. UK sources included the British Library in London, the British National Archives in Richmond, Greater London and the digital archives of British media such as *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian* (known as ‘*Manchester Guardian*’ during most of the period under study) and *West Africa Report* as well as the digital archives of Sheffield, Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

The digital archives of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* also yielded source materials for my study as well as YouTube, the internet audio-visual channel. Nigerian archival sources visited and accessed included the National Archives of Nigeria branches in Kaduna and Ibadan as well as the Ibadan head office of *Nigerian Tribune*, the newspaper established by Obafemi Awolowo. I was also granted access to Awolowo’s personal archives located at his former home in Ogun state, Nigeria. I likewise visited and was granted access to the archives at Arewa House in Kaduna, the research centre built in the former official residence of Ahmadu Bello.

**Step 3: Selection and preparation of evidence for the specific analyses.**

In preparing the final corpus for analysis, I downsized the empirical evidence according to criteria of salience and relevance to the broad theme of identity, most especially that of sub-national identity. This involved selecting discursive instances in which Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello addressed the issue of identity, especially sub-national identities, more or less explicitly as well as selecting all the contextual information available on those instances.

The main challenge at this stage involved making the distinction between utterances that involved sub-national identity constructions from those which did not. This process was complicated by two major factors. First of all, as Gadjanova has pointed out, ‘what constitutes an identity appeal varies from context to context according to the elements making it recognizable and meaningful locally.’[[164]](#footnote-164) Also, while explicit constructions of ethnicity are relatively straightforward to locate (e.g. ‘we Igbos are dynamic people’), implicit appeals are less straightforward to identify and complicate the process of making the distinction between an ethnic-related and non-ethnic related utterance.[[165]](#footnote-165)

With regards to the first obstacle, the initial research step involving extensive research on the broad theme of ethnicity and ethnic appeals, on Nigeria’s socio-political developments during the period under study and on ethnic politics in Nigeria specifically, was very helpful in assisting me identify the elements making an ethnic appeal ‘recognizable’ in the Nigerian context. With regards to implicit appeals, scholars such as Mendelberg,[[166]](#footnote-166) and Huber and Lapinski[[167]](#footnote-167) have helpfully shed light on certain frames and narratives widely recognized as alluding to race or ethnicity without explicitly mentioning these themes, thus providing some guidance on this issue.

However, my selection process was most heavily informed by the theoretical assumptions derived from Cornell and Hartmann’s work on ethnicity which highlighted three primary themes in the process of group identity construction[[168]](#footnote-168):

1. The boundary that separates group members from non-members;
2. The meaning attached to the identity.
3. The perceived position of the group within the wider society;

According to this theoretical perspective, the issue of ‘boundary’ specifically involves the establishment of criteria for distinguishing between group members and outsiders. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any intra-human group construction process without some form of boundary construction serving to distinguish between ‘us’ and ‘them’. I thus searched for utterances related to the construction of identity **boundaries** in the discourses of the three leaders.

Meanwhile, the issue of asserting ‘meaning’ to identity involves self-presentations of the group (e.g. ‘we are the most hard-working people in this country’).[[169]](#footnote-169) Again, it is difficult to imagine any form of group identity construction without the formulation of implicit or explicit answers to questions such as: Who are we? What defines us? I thus selected utterances from the leaders that served the purposes of offering answers to these questions, or in other words, of the **self-presentation of** a sub-national group.

Finally, with regards to the ‘perceived position of the group within society’, Cornell and Hartmann asserted identities emerge in the midst of social relations, thus ‘part of identity construction involves situating the group in the context of those relations, specifying its position in a set of relationships and statuses.’[[170]](#footnote-170) Hence, I searched for utterances by the leaders which situated their group in relation to other groups within Nigeria, focussing specifically on the theme of **domination**, which, as will be evidenced in the introduction to the thematic chapter, has long been emphasized by academic scholars and Nigerian political actors as a major factor shaping inter-ethnic fears and hostilities in Nigeria during the period under study.

Focussing on the themes above, the final corpus of empirical evidence selected for analysis included political speeches, newspaper articles, press statements, book passages, lectures, party manifestos, letters, a journal article, semi-private correspondence and one instance of audio-visual material which was transcribed at this stage. I recognize this is a very eclectic mix of discourse materials and genres addressed to multiple audiences for various purposes. However, my qualitative approach does not aim at quantitative proof. My study was focussed on *what* political leaders said on the subject of ethnicity and identity in the available empirical evidence, and on *how* they did so, not on how often.

DHA investigations into constructions of national identities operate on the social constructivist assumption that there is no such thing as *one* national identity in an essentialist sense. Rather, different variations of national identities are discursively constructed by speakers taking into consideration audience, setting, topic and content.[[171]](#footnote-171) I shall likewise be operating on the constructivist assumption that there is no such thing as *one* ethnic or ethno-regional identity in an essentialist sense; instead, different variations of such identities will be constructed also shaped by audience, setting, topic and content. Like with national identities, discursive constructions of ethnic and ethno-regional identities will therefore likewise be ‘malleable’ and ‘frequently ambivalent and diffuse.’[[172]](#footnote-172)

When analysing the empirical evidence, I shall thus take into consideration factors such as audience and setting where information about such is available or can be plausibly inferred. One important assumption I will be operating under regarding audience is that since most of the period covered in this study falls under the colonial era, much of the discourses analysed would have been uttered not just solely for the benefit of their immediate Nigerian audiences, but also for the benefit of a crucial deciding actor at the time: the British colonial government and, by extension, its overlords in Britain. As the most prominent political leaders and thinkers in colonial-era Nigeria, one thing Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello could have been sure of was that the British were paying attention to what they were saying and writing in public.

Ultimately however, while factors such as setting, and audience will be taken into consideration in the analysis, my study is predominantly focussed on highlighting the *fundamental* ideas, narratives, arguments and the overall discursive strategies relating to identity and ethnicity in the discourses of the Founding Fathers rather than on deciphering the varying linguistic nuances deployed in accordance with setting, audience or discourse genre.

From the point of view of audience reception, it seems safe to assume that in what was at the time a largely illiterate country, only the core ideas espoused by the Founding Fathers would have filtered down to the majority citizenry. From this perspective, the fundamental ideas and arguments communicated were arguably more relevant and worthier of analysis than the specific setting or discourse style they were uttered in.

In DHA, ‘there is no iron rule by which cases are selected or data gathered.’[[173]](#footnote-173) The recommendation is for the use of ‘various methods of data collection and the analysis of different sets of data’[[174]](#footnote-174) to provide a more comprehensive picture of identity construction in ‘settings exhibiting various degrees of formality.’[[175]](#footnote-175) It thus encourages the collation of empirical evidence ‘across all relevant discourses, texts and genres’[[176]](#footnote-176) and I strove to gather as much empirical evidence of utterances on my subject matter as available.

All the selected corpus materials I gathered were subsequently analysed as texts which always serve as ‘the base unit of analysis and the point of departure for the analyst’[[177]](#footnote-177) in DHA. The approach understands ‘texts’ as the ‘materially durable products of linguistic actions’[[178]](#footnote-178) which ‘bridge two dilated speech situations, i.e. the situation of speech production and the situation of speech reception.’[[179]](#footnote-179) Hence, while as much available background information as possible is provided on discourse settings and audiences, utterances contained in a speech, a book or a newspaper interview are all analysed as texts using standardized conceptual and analytical tools of DHA I shall highlight in step 5 of this research framework. In the case of studies like mine investigating constructions of identity by political leaders, recommended empirical evidence for analysis by DHA include political speeches, newspaper articles, posters and brochures and, where possible, interviews and focus groups.[[180]](#footnote-180)

In my case, due to the fact I was investigating discursive events conducted in the years 1945-1967, interviews and focus groups were not a feasible option as explained earlier, thus I focussed on the gathered evidence highlighted earlier with political speeches representing the bulk of the corpus material. Jonathan Charteris-Black defined a political speech as ‘a coherent stream of spoken language that is usually prepared for delivery by a speaker to an audience for a purpose on a political occasion.’[[181]](#footnote-181)

As my study is concerned with the discussion of identity by three political leaders whenever and wherever they took place, there is no emphasis on specific historical events per se. The texts that constitute my sample were selected on the basis of their focus on issues of identity rather than on specific events. Nevertheless, certain events which prompted particularly heated and significant debates on identity will somewhat naturally figure prominently in the analysis such as the 1953 inter-regional controversy over the optimal timing for Nigerian independence.

Importantly, while the availability of empirical material uncovered for our study varied in quantity over the 22-year time-period with regards to the three leaders under study, my use of multiple sources of discourse material, ranging from books to newspaper articles ensured I was able to analyse a fairly large amount of discursive utterances from each of the three leaders.

**Step 4: Formulation of initial assumptions.**

This step involved the formulation of initial assumptions on the basis of the literature review and a first skimming of the gathered selected corpus.

**Step 5: Qualitative analysis**

This stage involved utilizing DHA analytical tools in a linguistic as well as a context analysis carried out on individual discursive instances. First of all, I identified the main discourse topics of each text, extrapolating them from the themes listed in step 3. This was followed by identification of the main discursive strategies to be found in the texts.

In DHA, ‘discursive strategies’, are understood as ‘plans of actions with varying degrees of elaborateness, the realization of which can range from automatic to conscious, and which are located at different levels of mental organization.’[[182]](#footnote-182) In interpreting ‘strategies’, I followed DHA recommendation of taking into account not just the historical, social and material conditions surrounding the utterances, but also the fact that social actors, including of course political leaders, ‘have been conditioned through the socialisation of individual acting.’[[183]](#footnote-183)

However, this did not translate to efforts to absolve Awolowo, Azikiwe or Bello of responsibility for their discursive actions by attributing these simply to the socialization process as that would be incompatible with the position of CDA and render any *critical* analysis of discourse redundant.

Relevant to this study, DHA posits that ‘the degree of conscious intention’, or in other words, purposeful strategy, is usually greatest in discursive instances such as political speeches, newspaper articles and campaign messages,[[184]](#footnote-184) thus I worked under the assumption that Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello deployed some form of more or less conscious strategies in much of the empirical evidence analysed for their discourses on identity and ethnicity.

In order to identify linguistic strategies, I utilized analytical tools recommended by DHA as particularly useful in the analysis of discourses about social identities. **This involved systematically going through five core questions analytically answered via qualitative research on each relevant text**. The questions, their strategy categorization and its objectives are presented as below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Questions applied to discursive instances** | **Discursive strategy** | **Purpose** |
| How are persons, phenomena and actions named and referred to linguistically in this text? | Nomination | Discursive construction of social actors and phenomena; discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups. |
| What characteristics, traits and qualities are attributed to the social actors and phenomena mentioned in this text? | Predication | Discursive characterization of phenomena, social actors and their actions (e.g. groups portrayed positively or negatively) |
| What arguments are employed in this text? | Argumentation | Persuading addressees of the validity of specific claims of truth and normative rightness |
| From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, arguments expressed in this text? | Perspectivisation | Positioning the speaker’s or writer’s point of view and expressing involvement or distance |
| Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated in this text? | Mitigation and intensification | Modifying the illocutionary force of utterances in respect to their epistemic or deontic status |

Table 2.1: Discursive strategies

Of these strategies, the most important for my study were the analysis of **Referential Predicational** and **Argumentation** strategies. Referential strategies reveal how social groups were linguistically named and thus socially-constructed (e.g., ‘the Yorubas’, ‘Northerners’). Predicational strategies reveal how these constructed social groups were portrayed (e.g. ‘the Igbos are industrious’, ‘Northerners are fanatically religious’).

Argumentation strategies reveal how the three leaders justified their truth claims on ethnicity and identity (e.g. ‘history shows countries as diverse as Nigeria require a federalist system’, ‘examples of other diverse countries that have achieved a sense of common nationality shows it is possible in Nigeria too’). Meanwhile, Perspectivation strategies reveal how the three leaders positioned themselves in the discourses, in terms of involvement or distance (e.g. ‘the Yorubas are a people who…’, ‘We in the North…’) or in terms of position signalling (‘me and my party believe in one Nigeria unlike X party who are tribalistic’).

Such categorizations, argumentations and portrayals play a role in shaping societal perceptions of these socially-constructed groups by members and non-members alike. Furthermore, investigating these strategies also helped shed light on the discursive balancing act between constructions of national and sub-national in-groups the three leaders often had to walk (e.g. constructing notions of ‘We-Nigerians’ vs constructing notions of ‘We-Igbos’).

In labelling the subsequent discursive strategies I uncovered in my study, I drew on DHA categorizations, adopting its terminology where applicable. Of

various strategies, those which I uncovered at the macro-discourse level in my study included the following:

***Constructive strategies***

According to Wodak, these are the ‘most comprehensive discursive strategies.’[[185]](#footnote-185) They attempt to construct and to establish a certain group identity by ‘promoting uniﬁcation, identiﬁcation and solidarity, as well as differentiation.’[[186]](#footnote-186) As with constructions of national identity uncovered in the study of Wodak and others, constructions of large-scale ethnic and ethno-regional identities in Nigeria likewise involved ‘promoting unification, identification and solidarity’ among groups running, like most nations, into millions of people. Serving this macro-strategy were various sub-strategies. Those identified included:

1. the strategies of emphasis or presupposition of sameness, also known as **strategies of assimilation**. Strategies of assimilation aim linguistically to create a temporal, interpersonal or spatial (territorial) similarity and homogeneity in reference to the various thematic dimensions we have discussed above. Some of those discovered in this study include presupposition and/or emphasis on intra-group sameness or similarity (e.g. ‘we in the North believe…’, ‘the Igbos are hard-working people’), strategy of ‘we are all in the same boat’ and presupposition of and/or emphasis on ethnic (ethno-regional) group continuity (e.g. ‘before the British came, we…’)
2. strategy of **singularisation**, which included presupposition of and emphasis on group uniqueness (e.g. ‘the Igbos were created by the God of Africa to ….’).
3. strategy of **autonomisation**, which involved an emphasis on group autonomy (‘we demand self-determination for the Igbo people’, ‘we in the North demand strong regional autonomy’).
4. strategies of **unification and cohevisation,** which included emphasis on unifying common features and shared sorrows or worries (e.g. sufferings under colonialism or worries about the group’s future in an independent Nigeria), emphasis on the will of group members to unify and co-operate with each other, to feel and show solidarity towards one another as well as warning about external threats to group autonomy and uniqueness
5. strategies of **avoidance**, which included suppression and/or backgrounding of intra-group differences, suppression and/or backgrounding of inter-ethnic similarities, suppression and/or backgrounding of history calling into question claimed group cohesiveness.
6. strategies of **vitalisation**, which included personifications and anthropomorphisms (e.g. ‘the Ibo giant’).

***Destructive strategies***

These serve to de-mythologize or demolish an existing identity construct. In the context of my study, I worked on the assumption that discursive strategies aimed at dismantling, destroying or depreciating the idea of a national identity in Nigeria, ultimately served to create the mental space for, and strengthen, sub-national identities. A major sub-strategy here was the:

1. Strategy of emphasis on or presupposition of difference, also known as strategies of **dissimilation** which create a temporal, interpersonal or territorial difference and heterogeneity among peoples or groups of peoples (e.g. ‘they in the North’).

To realize the above-mentioned macro-strategies, various lexical units and syntactic devices, or as DHA describes them ‘**linguistic means and forms of realisation**’, were deployed to construct unification, unity, sameness, difference, uniqueness, origin, continuity, autonomy, heteronomy’ and so on. The most important and oft-recurring of these were:

1. Personal reference: anthroponymic generic terms (e.g. the ‘Yorubas’, the ‘Igbos’), personal pronouns (e.g. ‘we’, ‘us’) and quantifiers (e.g. ‘many Igbos’, ‘most Northerners’).
2. Spatial reference: toponyms/geonyms (e.g. ‘Northernisation’), phrases with adverbs of place (e.g., ‘here in the North’, ‘there in the East’,), spatial reference by means of prepositional phrases such as ‘for us’, ‘for them’;
3. Temporal reference: temporal prepositions (e.g. ‘since’, ‘during’), adverbs of time (e.g., ‘always’, ‘never’), temporal conjunctions (e.g., ‘*before* the British came’).

Finally, I identified some of the main argumentative schemes used to justify the main claims of the three leaders on the issue of sub-national identities. In DHA, argumentation schemes used to realize discursive strategies and sub-strategies are referred to as ‘topoi.’ Wodak and others defined these as ‘highly conventionalised parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory elements of argumentation and take the form either of explicit or inferable premises. They ‘connect an argument or arguments with a conclusion, a claim. As such, they justify the transition from an argument or arguments to the conclusion…. if topoi infringe rules of rational argumentation, they become fallacies.[[187]](#footnote-187)

**Step 6: Detailed study of whole range of empirical evidence.**

This involved identifying inter-textual and interdiscursive relationships as well as instances of recontextualization across discourse practises and genres. It included interpreting the different results within the social, historical and political contexts of the discourses and identifying patterns of continuity and/or discontinuity to arrive at an overall interpretation.

This overall interpretation was arrived at after considering questions of whether and/or how the three leaders’ narratives of identity evolved over the years, what seemed to be the driving factors behind any eventual changes, whether specific audiences and immediate context appeared to have a significant influence on how sub-national identities were constructed and how the leaders differed from each other in their identity narratives. Close attention was paid to the most prominently recurring themes in the discourses and interpretations offered as to why those gained such salience at the time.

**Step 7: Formulation of critique**

This involved the formulation of critique on the basis of the interpretation of the findings taking into consideration the relevant context knowledge. There are three forms of critique proposed in the DHA approach:

1. *Text or discourse immanent critique* is primarily knowledge-related. It aims at discovering inconsistencies, contradictions and paradoxes in discursive instances, for instance with respect to cohesion, presuppositions and argumentation. This form of critique relies mostly on rhetorical and argumentation theoretical norms or criteria. For instance, with respect to argumentation norms, DHA draws on rules for constructive arguing such as the obligation to give reasons, accurate reference to a previous utterance cited, correct reference to implicit premises, acceptance of shared starting points, plausible schemes of argumentation, logical validity, clarity of expression and correct interpretation.
2. *Socio-diagnostic critique* is concerned with demystifying the manifest or latent manipulative character of discursive practises and suggesting potentially ethically problematic aspects where observed. Here I made use of social, historical and political background knowledge and drew on social theories found in the secondary literature on ethnic politics in Nigeria to support my interpretations of discursive events. This aspect of critique includes the critique of ideology, in this case, of the ideology of ethnicity.

In DHA, ideology is defined as ‘an (often) one-sided perspective or worldview composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group’[[188]](#footnote-188) and serve as an important means of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations through discourse: for example, by establishing hegemonic identity narratives.

Power relations are legitimized or delegitimized in discourses with texts often serving as sites of social struggle in that they manifest traces of ideological battles for dominance and hegemony. Thus, in the in-depth analysis of texts, the DHA focuses on the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power, which is discursively exerted by reproducing ideology in various societal situations.[[189]](#footnote-189) The is to ‘demystify the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that establish, perpetuate or fight dominance.’[[190]](#footnote-190)

1. *Prospective critique* aims to contribute to the practical improvement of constructive communication, for example, by offering suggestive guidelines against discriminatory language behaviour. In DHA, the philosophical model of deliberative democracy often serves as a normative point of reference for this form of critique.[[191]](#footnote-191) Key normative concepts are those of a public sphere in which free and equal participation in debate, critique, and decision making are guaranteed by the rule of law. Language is assumed here as the central medium of democratic organisation and free exchange of interests, wishes, viewpoints, opinions and arguments crucial for a pluralistic democracy in a modern diverse society. In the thematic chapters, my emphasis will be on the first two forms of critique as these address specific language and discursive choices in specific texts while in the concluding chapter, there will be some focus on the third prospective aspect which tends to address the more general overall picture of how certain discursive constructs are created and maintained and is thus best realized in the summarizing and concluding remarks of such studies.

**Step 8:** This final step involved pointing to the application of analytical findings where possible and is contained wholly in the concluding chapter

**3.3 Critiques of CDA approaches**

In this final section, I shall mention some of the most prominent criticisms levelled at CDA and aim to address them with respect to my study. Like all research approaches, CDA is not without its critics who have raised issues regarding interpretation and context, analyst bias, research tactics and methodological shortcomings.[[192]](#footnote-192) Perhaps most prominently, in the 1990s, Henry Widdowson, an authority in the field of applied linguistics, criticized CDA in a series of articles. Focussing on the work of Norman Fairclough, one of the foremost CDA theorists, he accused it of blurring distinctions between concepts, disciplines and methodologies, pointed to what he saw as the vagueness of many concepts and analytical models used and criticized it for text selection bias as well as providing ideologically-driven interpretations of discourses under the guise of ‘critical analysis’.[[193]](#footnote-193)

Widdowson argued that critical discourse analysis was a ‘contradiction in terms’ as it is simply ‘an exercise in interpretation’ and therefore ‘invalid as analysis.’[[194]](#footnote-194) He asserted scholars who deployed CDA inevitably failed to suggest to readers the possibility that ‘alternative interpretations’ to the ones they were offering were also viable. Instead ‘there is usually the implication that the single interpretation offered is uniquely validated by the textual facts.’[[195]](#footnote-195)

In his rebuttal, Fairclough demonstrated that while CDA made no effort to mask its political commitment to focussing on explanatory connections between texts and social relations of power, and therefore to questions of ideology, CDA scholars acknowledged texts *could* be open to different interpretations depending on the context and interpreter and that discourse meanings could not be simply be read off texts without considering other social patterns and circumstances. He emphasized that diversity of text interpretations was in fact a central assumption in the theoretical and analytical framework of CDA,[[196]](#footnote-196) which makes no claim to an absolute or near-absolute truth.

Meanwhile, with regards to Widdowson’s claims that CDA does not qualify as ‘analysis’, Haig rightly pointed out that Widdowson significantly skewed the argument in his favour from start by defining ‘analysis’ in extremely narrow terms so as to be able discount CDA as qualifying under this definition.[[197]](#footnote-197) With regards to ideological motivations being a discrediting factor in research this can be easily countered for as Haig observed ‘even non-critical, dyed-in-the wool orthodox applied linguists such as Widdowson have ideological commitments such as the commitment to keeping politics and science apart.’[[198]](#footnote-198) Drawing on Blackledge, ultimately there is no value-free CDA as there is no value-free science.[[199]](#footnote-199)

It would be difficult to point to a research study, qualitative or quantitative, that is *not* subject (of course, to varying degrees) to the influences of the researcher’s personal values and beliefs even with regards to which subjects are worth closer investigation and which are not, which questions are worth asking and which are not. Importantly, CDA researchers explicitly own up to their agenda from the onset as I have done, and readers of my findings can consequently evaluate the persuasiveness of such with this in mind.

With regards to text selection bias, a relevant accusation oft-levelled at CDA, selecting specific texts which reveal how certain discursive strategies are deployed to further particular aims should not pre-empt an automatic assumption that the knowledge gained through such a process is inherently invalid or useless. Martin has observed that CDA can be useful in revealing how discursive practices can be used to counter dominant ideologies and thought-patterns.[[200]](#footnote-200) This is especially relevant if we are dealing with socially-negative ideologies such as racial, ethnic or gender discrimination.

Criticizing CDA, Widdowson also suggested its analysts needed to subject their analyses and interpretations of texts to some form of falsification by examining alternative possible readings and then seeking evidence to support or refute them. Haig pointed out however, that neglecting application of the Popperian rule was applicable to the great majority of orthodox applied linguists and thus could not be portrayed as peculiar to CDA researchers and thereby obviously attributable to ideological biases and agendas.[[201]](#footnote-201) Nevertheless, the criticism of CDA being too ideological and focussed on a political agenda, thus leaving other theoretical and methodological aspects of the analysis insufficiently developed is one that has also been levelled by Scheuer and is worth keeping in mind as one conducts analysis using this research paradigm.[[202]](#footnote-202)

From another perspective, CDA has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the human mind and its language cognitive processes. Most prominently, Chilton argued that since CDA accepted that use of language in everyday social situations means engaging in social structures and social practices, ‘how do they think this is possible unless, individuals, part of collectivities, to be sure, carry around in their memories understandings - changeable, variable but intersubjectively coordinated and interacting knowledge frames, that is cognitive frames that are representations of social structures and practices?’[[203]](#footnote-203) He asserted that a wealth of research on ‘neural imaging, mental modules and empirically grounded work in cognitive grammar, cognitive semantics and cognitive pragmatics’ now existed but was often neglected by CDA analysts.[[204]](#footnote-204) This is a relevant observation. However, importantly, Chilton did acknowledge that some CDA theorists, such as Van Dijk and Wodak (who is the most prominent creator of the DHA approach I will be using) have started to incorporate cognitive knowledge into their approaches.

Finally, Blommaert offered further elements of critique. First, he pointed to a ‘linguistic bias in CDA’ by which he meant an emphasis on linguistic-textual analysis which restricts the space of analysis to textually organised and (explicitly) linguistically encoded discourse, not to where it comes from and goes to.’[[205]](#footnote-205) He also talked of CDA’s ‘closure to a particular time-frame’, by which he meant a neglect of history, an argument easily refutable by the DHA approach this study will be drawing from, which places special emphasis on socio-historical context.

However, the third major critique Blommaert levelled is particularly relevant for this study, namely his accusations surrounding CDA’s ‘closure to particular kinds of societies’.[[206]](#footnote-206) Blommaert started out by criticizing CDA for restricting its analysis to ‘highly integrated, late modern, and post-industrial, densely semiotised First-World societies.’[[207]](#footnote-207)

Indeed, I am very much in agreement with him on this and one of my major motivations for this study was to highlight the role of discourses in the politics of societies other than those in the Western world, using Nigeria as a case-study. While there is, of course, more emphasis on the everyday struggle for survival and resources in poorer undeveloped countries than in rich developed ones, ideas and narratives *matter* there too. They shape beliefs and beliefs shape actions, including the actions undertaken in the pursuit of survival and scarce resources. However, Blommaert’s subsequent critique is one I particularly need to address. He argues against assuming that descriptions of discourses in well-developed Western societies can efficiently serve as a model for understanding discourses in other societies:

‘…for the world is far bigger than Europe and the USA, and substantial differences occur between different societies... The self-evident way in which features of the First World are projected onto the globe and attributed to all mankind is perplexing. Any general approach to discourse, especially one that aspires to address discourse in an era of globalisation needs to take that into account…. CDA takes far too much sharedness for granted when it comes to discourse in contemporary societies across the world.[[208]](#footnote-208)

Indeed, by borrowing from a tool that was developed with group identities in the Western context in mind, I run the risk of ‘taking too much sharedness for granted’ when it comes to discourses of identity in 1950s and 1960s Nigeria and the contemporary Western world. Clearly there are huge differences in the different times and environments, socio-economic, cultural and historical.

However, what drew me to DHA in the first place was the fact that preliminary analysis of the empirical evidence I had gathered, somewhat to my surprise, suggested several significantly-similar discursive strategies in certain aspects of sub-national identity construction in Nigeria to those discovered by Wodak and others in their studies on national identity as highlighted above. These strategic similarities suggest that while Blommaert’s reservations need to be taken very seriously, he might have, in turn, underestimated the amount of ‘sharedness’ involved in constructing large-scale group identities in the Western world and in a non-Western society like Nigeria.

My final argument countering both Blommaert’s critique of CDA as too linguistic-dependent and Western-centric would be that all I am claiming to propose here are potential building blocks towards a greater overall understanding of the issues of ethnicity and identity construction in Nigeria. CDA can be useful in providing such building blocks. Hopefully, future studies would be able to build on this by developing more systematic and locally-suitable discourse analytical tools for investigating constructions of national, ethnic and sub-national identities in Nigeria both in the past and present.

It is crucial to emphasize again that CDA does not claim to hold *the* answer to the social issues it investigates. What it can accomplish is reveal instances of discursive strategies deployed in articulating social issues from a qualitative perspective. Its findings are therefore only comprehensively useful when considered in conjunction with the wider body of knowledge on an issue, including those provided by other scholarly approaches to both discourse and general social analysis.

**3.4 Summary**

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological model applied in my study. I presented a list of the specific research steps I took utilizing tools from the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). I mentioned the analytical questions I posed when examining each of the discursive instances analysed. These analytical tools and concepts found within the general theoretical framework of DHA will

help in discovering the discursive strategies involved in constructing ethnic and other sub-national identities by Nigeria’s Founding Fathers, which is the subject of this investigation.

**Chapter 4 Sociopolitical Context**

**4.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out an account of some of the major socio-political developments in Nigeria through the period under study: 1945-1967. As explained in chapter 2, the Discourse-Historical Approach analytical model I shall be drawing on always attempts to integrate as much available information as possible on the historical background in which discursive instances to be investigated were ‘embedded.’[[209]](#footnote-209)

The chapter thus benefits the study by providing it a historical contextual framework with which to help interpret selected discursive events. It also provides readers a contextual template against which the plausibility of analytical propositions stemming from my discourse analysis can be ascertained. Furthermore, the chronologically-sequenced historical account provides a frame of reference with which to trace diachronic changes in the discourses on identity during the period under study.

As Koselleck observed, ‘when they are applied to history, even seemingly general patterns of explanation inevitably refer to chronological succession, without which every history would be not only meaningless but impossible. Chronology borrowed from natural time is thus indispensable for a historical reality that is to be

redeemed empirically… natural time with its recurrence and time limits is a permanent premise both of history and of its interpretation.’[[210]](#footnote-210)

With this in mind, the historical narrative of the present chapter shall be divided into four distinct chronologically-sequenced constitutional eras during the period under study. The reason for singling out *constitutional eras* as distinct period markers relevant to my study is because the ongoing constitutional debates and developments in Nigeria at the time reflected attempts to negotiate a political structure capable of effectively managing Nigeria’s identity diversity while simultaneously fostering a sense of common nationhood.

Constitutional debates thus became discussions on identity by proxy, reflecting participants’ views on what it meant or did not mean to be a ‘Nigerian’ and their general perceptions of collective identities at the time. In turn, these views on identity needed to evolve and adapt to the sometimes significantly varying politico-structural frameworks and circumstances each major constitutional era ushered in.

As Wodak noted, the ‘concept of ”identity”… never signiﬁes anything static, unchanging, or substantial, but rather always an element situated in the ﬂow of time, ever changing, something involved in a process.’[[211]](#footnote-211) Likewise, ‘identity’ in the Nigerian context was involved in the historical process of constitutional and political changes in the country during the period under study.

The central role a country’s constitution plays in organizing the structures of state and by extension the political playing field combined with the fierce identity-driven debates triggered by constitutional negotiations, have thus led me to divide this chapter into four distinct constitutional eras during the period under study, each of which ushered in significantly different politico-structural dynamics.

Finally, Nigeria’s constitutional debates during this crucial era in its history are part of the wider global discussion regarding the most suitable political structures and forms of government for multi-ethnic multi-lingual societies, particularly those brought together involuntarily via external imposition. Tracing my socio-historical narrative via the constitutional pathway should thus help provide some enriching material for this global discussion as well. I shall however, start with a few remarks about some key pre-WWII political developments, knowledge of which is crucial to understanding the post-WWII political dynamics I will be focussing on in my study. After that, I shall present the four constitutional eras in chronological sequence as stated earlier.

**4.2 Nationalist beginnings**

While organized political associations advocating nationalist ideals, such as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), were active from as far back as the 1920s, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), established in 1936, was the first organization to successfully recruit nationalist and politically-conscious elements from various sections of Nigeria.[[212]](#footnote-212) NYM aimed for ‘the development of a united nation out of the conglomerate of peoples who inhabit Nigeria’ by establishing ‘a sense of common nationalism among the differing elements in the country’.[[213]](#footnote-213) Obafemi Awolowo was one of the first members of the party while Nnamdi Azikiwe joined in 1937, the latter helping broaden NYM’s appeal by popularizing it amongst Igbos with the help of his newly-established nationalist newspaper, the *West African Pilot*.[[214]](#footnote-214)

However, while many historical accounts emphasize the ‘national’ outlook of NYM, it was in fact a predominantly Southern Nigerian organization whose nationalist message never made much headway in the Northern parts of the country. A number of reasons have been offered for this, ranging from low education levels in the North to the combined hostility of the region’s powerful emirs and British authorities to NYM.[[215]](#footnote-215) Ultimately, referring to NYM as the ‘first truly national party’[[216]](#footnote-216) in Nigeria, is somewhat of an exaggeration. However, the movement did offer promising beginnings for a potentially nation-wide nationalist political organization, especially as the commencement of WWII provided ‘immense stimulus to nationalist activity’ in Nigeria.[[217]](#footnote-217)

Pre-WWII, regular Nigerians were largely isolated from the outside world. Only a small elite student community had experienced life in the West. Regular Nigerians, whose contacts with the British was usually with colonial officials, considered all white people powerful beings. This changed during the war as Nigerians recruited into the Allied Forces came into contact with regular European soldiers who were farmers, tradesmen or even servants back in their countries. Nigerians at home also observed Allied soldiers passing through their country, bereft of special privileges. Additionally, Nigeria became an important link in the Allied supply chain. These experiences helped demystify white people as self-sufficient and all-powerful, rendering to regular Nigerians more plausible the nationalists’ claims that independence could be wrested from the British.[[218]](#footnote-218)

But while NYM energetically agitated for increased political and economic rights for Nigerians, personal rivalries intensified within the organization, perhaps most consequentially between Azikiweand Ernest Ikoli, another top NYM figure, who in 1938 founded the *Daily Service,* a nationalist newspaper that became direct competition for Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot*, a fact the latter is said to have strongly resented, especially considering the ‘small reading public’ at the time.[[219]](#footnote-219)

The in-fighting eventually led to Azikiwe’s departure from NYM in 1941. In what was a sign of things to come, the NYM rift was fraught with accusations of ethnic chauvinism levelled by Azikiwe against his rivals and vice versa. Igbo NYM members stood solidly behind Azikiwe and when he left, they went with him. Thus, despite efforts by Awolowo and others to keep NYM alive and ethnically broad-based, after 1941 it essentially became a Yoruba-dominated movement that fizzled out slowly but surely.[[220]](#footnote-220)

Considering this study’s theoretical approach to identities as being socially-constructed rather than self-evident and timeless, I should note here that I am deploying the identity labels of ‘Yoruba’ and ‘Ibo’ (later changed to ‘Igbo’) when describing 1940s-era events because these were already quite well-established and popularly-used identity categorizations[[221]](#footnote-221) in Nigerian public discourse at this point in the country’s history.

In 1944, Azikiwe co-founded a new political organization conglomerating numerous ethnic and social unions into a political party called the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) which aimed to achieve ‘self-government for Nigeria’.[[222]](#footnote-222) The NYM saga left a lasting impression on Yorubas in the movement, including Awolowo who later suggested the loyalty Igbo NYM members had shown Azikiwe in his rivalry with Ikoli (who was from a minority ethnic group) arose not from ideological, but ethnic, affiliations.[[223]](#footnote-223)

Awolowo would later use the NYM experience to justify his consistently-espoused view Nigeria should not be structured under a unitary constitution, but under a federalist system, as would eventually be the case. He argued this was necessary in part to avoid the country being ‘dominated’[[224]](#footnote-224) by one ethnic group under a unitary system, ‘domination’ being a key discursive theme uncovered in my preliminary analysis to be subjected to closer investigation in a separate chapter.

Livingston argued convincingly that ‘the essential nature of federalism is to be sought for, not in the shadings of legal and constitutional terminology, but in the forces – economic, social, political, cultural – that have made the outward forms of federalism necessary’.[[225]](#footnote-225) Switzerland and Canada are often cited as examples of countries where federalism emerged to a significant extent in response to ethnic diversities prompting desires to create governmental structures that would mediate between the needs for autonomy and union.[[226]](#footnote-226) I shall now proceed to providing a chronological account of major socio-political events during the post-WWII era.

**4.3 Richards’ Constitution-era (1947-51)**

In the aftermath of WWII, events were to occur that would reshape Nigeria’s socio-political landscape, establish the constitutional framework under which political leaders would operate for the next years and set Nigeria firmly on the road to regionalism and the solidification of ethnic and sub-national identities during the next two decades. In the post-war era, colonial authorities faced an upsurge in organized resistance from Nigerian political movements and workers unhappy with the sharp rise in living costs the wartime economy had brought.

This led to a coordinated 37-day General Strike in 1945 by seventeen labour unions demanding wage increases to offset cost of living hikes, a strike which effectively shut down the economy and entire colonial administration. The strike was called-off only after the government agreed to address workers’ demands. The event shook the British authorities, while propelling to national-hero status Azikiwe, whose newspapers and nationalist political party, NCNC, had very actively supported the strike.[[227]](#footnote-227)

One can easily imagine the significant psychological boost this successful collective action provided not only the striking unionists, but in general those Nigerians agitating for a greater say in the affairs of their country. Nigerians had self-organized, stared down their British overlords and emerged triumphant. Faced with this increasingly coordinated and assertive nationalist movement and fearing a rise in militant Soviet-inspired communist ideology within the unions, the colonial government decided on a far-reaching program of economic, social and constitutional development to attempt assuage some of the grievances being raised by these groups before they further radicalized.[[228]](#footnote-228) Against this background emerged the Richards’ Constitution, which came into effect on January 1, 1947.

There is general consensus among scholars that the Richards’ Constitution (so-named after then Governor-General of Nigeria, Arthur Richards) was a landmark political development, ushering in a new era in Nigerian history and triggering a chain of events ultimately ending in the triumph of regionalist and ethnic politics in the young nation.[[229]](#footnote-229)

Coleman asserted the ‘concept of regionalism was the most distinguishing innovation in the new constitution.[[230]](#footnote-230) By this he meant the fact it established semi-legislative bodies in each of the three governmental regions, the North, East and West, based on elections from local native administrations. These regional legislatures were empowered to choose from among their members’ representatives to a central legislative council which would include Northern members for the first time.[[231]](#footnote-231) The colonial government argued the constitution was rooted in indigenous institutions and gave expression to the ‘real’ interests of historic African communities and their natural rulers who were more representative of mass opinion than an urban, unrepresentative and generally self-serving nationalistic minority.[[232]](#footnote-232)

The Richards’ Constitution was roundly criticized by Southern Nigerian politicians, though often from contradictory viewpoints. However, two aspects of the constitution annoyed all the dominant Nigerian political figures of the time: First, Governor Richards had not sought their opinion in the crafting process, thus the constitution was viewed as a wholly-foreign imposition arrogantly thrust upon the Nigerian people. Second, the regional assemblies created were toothless, mere ‘advisory’ bodies with no real legislative powers, giving Nigerians no more of an influence in the administration of the country than had previously been the case. Azikiwe and his NCNC party additionally subjected the constitution to harsh criticism for the concept of regionalism, which they argued was a ‘divide-and-rule’ strategy, an intentional obstacle erected on the path to achieving Nigerian nationhood.[[233]](#footnote-233)

However, Olusanya persuasively pointed to a lack of evidence to justify this suggested divide-and-rule conspiracy. For starters, the three regions had in fact existed since 1939 when the former Southern Nigeria protectorate was split into the Eastern and Western provinces. The new constitution merely formalized the 1939 arrangement. Furthermore, it could be argued the constitution actually promoted the unity of Nigeria because for the first time, North and South were brought together in a central Legislative Council.[[234]](#footnote-234)

Whatever the intentions of the constitution’s authors, the result was a rejuvenation of agitations for self-government fuelled by the intensification of anti-colonialist grievance, particularly in the South of the country. While Azikiwe criticized the constitution for seeking to regionalize (read: ethnicize) Nigerian politics, Awolowo criticized it for not going far enough in acknowledging Nigeria’s ethnic diversity.[[235]](#footnote-235)

Awolowo criticized the tri-partite division not for being a divide-and-rule tactic, but for being ‘constituted without regard to ethnological factors’[[236]](#footnote-236) stating ‘under a true federal constitution’ each group ‘no matter how small must be given the opportunity to evolve its own peculiar political institutions and must be autonomous with regard to its own internal affairs.’[[237]](#footnote-237) In his opinion, rather than just three ‘even as many as 30 to 40 regional Houses of Assembly would not be too many in the future United States of Nigeria.’[[238]](#footnote-238)

Interestingly, Awolowo’s vision is today’s reality: Nigeria is currently divided into 36 federating units, each with its own House of Assembly. Awolowo and Azikiwe thus presented different stances on the Richards’ Constitution, while both being critical towards it. Interestingly, Azikiwe, who criticized the new constitution for trying to divide Nigerians, had in 1943, himself advocated the division of the country into eight protectorates reflecting the ethnic diversity of the country.[[239]](#footnote-239)

While Ahmadu Bello had not yet emerged as the dominant voice in Northern Nigerian politics at the time the Richards’ Constitution was introduced, Northern leaders generally supported regionalization with the fallout from the new arrangements only strengthening this tendency.[[240]](#footnote-240) As stated earlier, the constitution incorporated the Northern Region into the central legislature for the first time. Northern elites hence came face-to-face with the reality their region’s future was linked to the South. Yet the North was evidently lagging behind the South in socio-economic and educational development as the latter had generally enthusiastically embraced Western education in contrast to the predominantly Muslim North.

The Richards’ Constitution was a stark reminder of this reality when it emerged there were not enough qualified Northerners to properly represent the region in the planned central legislature just as there were not enough qualified Northerners to fill positions in the Northern Region’s civil service, staffed mostly by Southerners. Believing a centralized unitary state would seal Southern domination of their region, Northern elites favoured the allocation of as much power as possible to regions and as little as possible to a central authority.[[241]](#footnote-241)

At a meeting of the Nigerian Legislative Council in March 1948, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who later became deputy leader of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and Nigeria’s first prime minister, expressed Northern sentiments at the time in no uncertain terms:

Many [Nigerians] deceive themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one… particularly some of the press people…this is wrong. I am sorry to say that this presence of unity is artificial, and it ends outside this chamber…the Southern tribes who are now pouring into the North in ever increasing numbers and are more or less domiciled here do not mix with the Northern people…and we in the North look upon them as invaders.[[242]](#footnote-242)

Ethnic and regional identities had begun to solidify and become politically meaningful by the 1940s along with the expansion of various ethnic unions and organizations.[[243]](#footnote-243) In 1945, while a student in London, Obafemi Awolowo co-founded the *Egbe Omo Odùduwà,* a pan-Yoruba organization meant to foster unity and a sense of one-ness among the Yoruba-speaking peoples.[[244]](#footnote-244)

But it was not until 1948 that the *Egbe* really took off, with several branches established throughout the Yoruba-majority areas of the Western Region. Meanwhile, the Ibo Federal Union had been established in 1944, also with a view to engendering pan-Ibo unity and improving education levels among Ibo-speaking peoples. In the North, the Bauchi General Improvement Union was established in 1943. This later morphed into what became known as the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) in 1949. NPC aimed to ‘promote Northern unity in the fight to maintain regional autonomy for the North in the face of impending Southern domination. NPC was conservative and did not wish to challenge the authority of existing [colonial] structures as other nationalist groups did’.[[245]](#footnote-245) For the majority of Northern leaders, the main enemy was the better-educated condescending Southern Nigerian, not the British colonialist.

For all these ethnic and/or regionally-based organizations, the regionalism of the Richards’ Constitution was a positive development as the regional houses of created by it reinforced the attitudes and methods of [ethnic] organizations by giving them something specific and tangible to fight for on a regional level.[[246]](#footnote-246)

Meanwhile, Richards’ successor as Nigeria’s Governor-General, John Macpherson, took up office in April 1948. As Lynn recounts, Macpherson arrived at a critical moment. Two months earlier, serious rioting had broken out in Accra. This led to the Watson Commission’s report recommending changing the Gold Coast’s constitution to give citizens of that country a greater role in administering their nation. A subsequent 1949 report suggested introducing ministerial government with African-run government departments; by February 1951 Kwame Nkrumah was leader of government business in the Gold Coast and the colony was heading towards independence. These developments made it ‘difficult, if not impossible to delay change in Nigeria. It was too easy for Nigerian leaders to point to developments in their near neighbour and argue for the application to Nigeria of similar measures.’[[247]](#footnote-247)

Add to that earlier-mentioned fears of communist (Soviet) infiltration within the ranks of labour and of a more radical brand of nationalism and we see how the stage was set for further constitutional and political development in Nigeria. However, unlike his predecessor, Macpherson embarked on a process of nation-wide consultation over the shape of a new Nigerian constitution.

**4.3.1 The ‘Lagos Press War’ and its aftermath**

Meanwhile, with regards to ethnic relations between Igbos and Yorubas, a significant event deserving special attention during the Richards’ Constitution-era was the so-called ‘Lagos Press War’ of 1948 between Azikiwe’s newspapers, in particular the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Service*, which had by now become the mouthpiece of the Yoruba *Egbe Omo Odùduwà*. From the inception of the *Egbe* in Nigeria(with Awolowo as Secretary-General) it faced accusations from Azikiwe and his media of ethnicizing politics. Azikiwe’s media conveniently ignored the fact that an Ibo Federal Union with very similar objectives for the Igbos, already existed at the time.

For most of 1948, the rival papers were involved in a bitter war of words involving personal attacks often tainted with ethnic undertones. For instance, in response to Azikiwe’s support for the establishment of a rival Yoruba socio-cultural organization, the Yoruba Federal Union, in June 1948,[[248]](#footnote-248) an editorial in *Daily Service* was published titled: ‘Nnamdi Azikiwe is warned not to strain the patience of Yoruba people.’ In it, the (Yoruba) author stated:

The picture that leaves me bewildered, however, is that of Zik, an out-and-out Ibo inaugurating a Yoruba Federal Union! ... It may be said in mitigation that he had but the poorest materials out of which to erect the Yoruba Federal Union, having only managed to scrape together the waifs and strays of the Yoruba race…he had no Yoruba unions to ‘federate’ for no Yoruba Union would submit to the degradation of being federated by Zik. Nevertheless, the daring of the man is staggering…by attempting so openly to create divisions among the Yorubas, he is approaching the zero hour of his chequered political career. He is playing with the trigger of a loaded gun, the muzzle of which is pointed ominously toward his own forehead. Can anyone imagine a Yoruba man in Onitsha or Nnewi organizing an Ibo Federal Union?[[249]](#footnote-249)

By September of 1948, Yoruba-Igbo hostilities had escalated to such an extent, colonial authorities including Governor Macpherson feared there was real danger of actual physical violence between Igbos and Yorubas. These fears were intensified by news radicals from both sides had started buying up all the available cutlasses in Lagos in readiness for clashes and police presence was increased on the streets of the city. In response to alarms raised about mass cutlass purchases by Igbos, Azikiwe declared the ‘brandishing of cutlasses and machetes were only for propaganda purposes’[[250]](#footnote-250), a rather unconvincing explanation.

By September 8, the hostilities had reached a fever pitch, with the *Pilot* arguing in an editorial that:

Henceforth the cry must be one of battle against the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, its leaders, at home and abroad, uphill, and down dale, in the streets of Nigeria and in the residence of its advocates. The *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* is the enemy of Nigeria; it must be crushed to the earth…There is no going back, until the Fascist organization of Sir Adeyemo Alakija [leader of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*] has been dismembered.[[251]](#footnote-251)

Meanwhile, at a mass meeting of Igbos in Lagos, it was declared personal attacks on Azikiwe would be considered attacks on the ‘Igbo nation’.[[252]](#footnote-252) Awolowo’s response to that declaration, contained in a telegram to *Daily Service* editors which I uncovered in his private home library, will be analysed closely in a separate chapter.

The situation calmed down towards the end of 1948 and Coleman asserted:

The most significant outcome of the press war was the politicization of the pan-Ibo Ibo Federal Union and the pan-Yoruba *Egbe* nationality federations. In December 1948 at a pan-Igbo conference, the Igbo Federal Union morphed into the Ibo State Union to organize the ‘Igbo linguistic group into a political unit in accordance with the NCNC freedom charter’…. Azikiwe was elected Igbo State Union president.[[253]](#footnote-253)

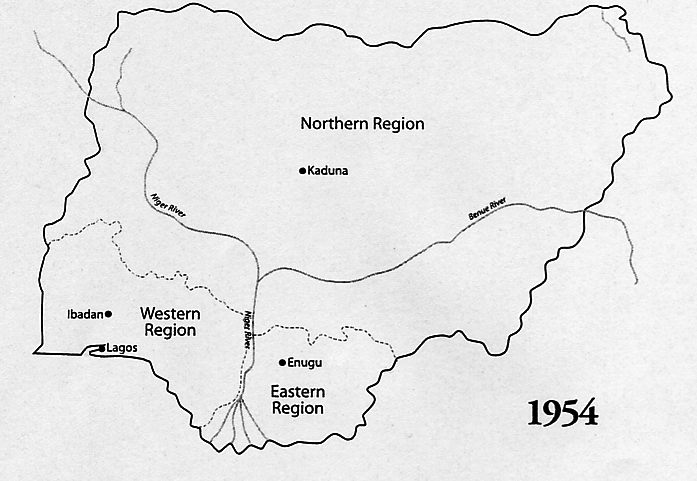
This naturally opened Azikiwe up to accusations from his detractors, including Awolowo, that he was in fact, first and foremost, an Igbo leader and not the Pan-nationalist he was claiming to be and that his NCNC party was essentially an Igbo-dominated outfit.

Attempting to shed light on the psychological factors driving Igbo-Yoruba rivalry at the time, Coleman pointed to Yoruba elite resentment against the rising status of Igbos in the 1940s. Due to the early educational advantages of the Yorubas, up until the mid-1930s, a disproportionate amount of the higher positions in the civil service and business were held by Yorubas. Additionally, until Azikiwe and his NCNC emerged, Yorubas had dominated political activity in Lagos. But by the late 1940s, the Igbos were fast eliminating the educational gap and becoming increasingly assertive in business and [Lagos] politics. This vexed many Yoruba elites, fuelling intense inter-ethnic competition.[[254]](#footnote-254)

As for North-South tensions, we have mentioned the fear Northern elites had because of the educational and socio-economic gap between their region and the South. The Northern People’s Congress (NPC) leadership believed the North could only be saved by Northerners. Common opposition to the more advanced Southerners, perceived as arrogant and aggressive, created a Northern unity that transcended social class. It is against this background of North-South and Yoruba-Igbo tension that we must view the ‘post-1948 shift to regional separatism’.[[255]](#footnote-255)

It would seem pertinent to mention here that while the East-West rivalry in Southern Nigeria at the time could be described as a clash of equals, the North-South cleavage was a different scenario altogether. The Northern Region incorporated three-quarters of Nigeria’s area, making it larger than the Eastern and Western Regions’ combined. Furthermore, while the 1952-53 census had the Eastern and Western Regions with similar population sizes (7.2 million and 6.4 million respectively), the North was home to 16.8 million, or 55.4%, of Nigeria’s population.[[256]](#footnote-256)

The tri-regional relationship was thus an asymmetrical one in terms of population size and area mass. The South was better educated and more developed, but the North was far larger and had many more people. For illustration, below is a 1954 map[[257]](#footnote-257) of Nigeria displaying the size of the three regions through the period under study up until 1963 when a Mid-West Region was carved out of the Western Region:



The North’s numerical superiority became particularly significant as future political arrangements would lead to political power at the centre (in the federal House of Representatives) becoming, in a practical sense, increasingly dependent on regional population numbers, leading to the contestation and politicization of census results and a sharpening of ‘us’ vs ‘them’ ethnic and/or regional divides, a subject which will be investigated more closely in future chapters.

Meanwhile, with Governor Macpherson wanting to avoid his predecessor’s mistake of not consulting new constitutional proposals with Nigerian opinion leaders, starting from 1948 and through 1949, conferences on proposed constitutional reform were organized at village, provincial, and regional levels culminating in a General Conference held in Ibadan in 1950 where representatives from all sections of Nigeria gathered to reconcile regional recommendations. Importantly, a majority of the delegates voted to retain the three existing regions (West, East and North) as distinct political units, thus entrenching the tri-regional politico-structuring of the country.[[258]](#footnote-258)

By 1950 the basic outline of the new constitution scheduled for introduction in 1951 was clear. It would not only preserve the three regions and their separate assemblies, but significantly increase their powers, upping the stakes significantly. The Macpherson Constitution was historic in providing for the first general election in Nigerian history, scheduled for 1951. Anti-Azikiwe Yoruba elites now faced the very realistic scenario of him leading his NCNC party to capture not just his home Eastern Region assembly but also the Western Region assembly that would both be invested with tangible powers.

At that time Awolowo called a secret meeting of several of his Yoruba supporters and some individuals from non-Yoruba groups in the Western Region. In March 1951, the Action Group (AG), a new political party led by Awolowo, was officially established. Its original core support came from some of the old Yoruba families, Yoruba professionals, middle-class Yoruba traders, Yoruba intellectuals opposed to Azikiwe, chiefs who were patrons of the *Egbe* as well as from some leaders of minority groups in the Western Region.[[259]](#footnote-259)

AG had a clear and regionally-restricted objective: the capture of power in the Western Region under the electoral system of the in-coming constitution. Accordingly, a main theme in the group’s electoral campaign was opposition to Azikiwe and the threat of Ibo domination. Meanwhile, NCNC also employed ethnicity as an argument while trying to win support from non-Yoruba groups in the Western Region by portraying AG as having an agenda for Yoruba domination in the region. In the years 1948-51, tribalism and regional nationalism thus gained political legitimacy, becoming the most effective means for ambitious political leaders to achieve power.[[260]](#footnote-260)

**4.4 Macpherson Constitution-era (1951-1954)**

The Macpherson Constitution contained some federalist features but was essentially a unitary solution. It posited regional Houses of Assembly would each elect a number of members to a central House of Representatives and nominate (for the first time) Nigerian ministers to a central Council of Ministers presided over by the British Governor-General. On the one hand, the new constitution provided broad scope for regional legislative initiative, investing regional assemblies with real powers unlike the advisory role they were relegated to under the Richards’ Constitution. On the other, it granted unlimited legislative authority to the central legislature and stipulated regional laws could not be enacted without the approval of the central Council of Ministers.[[261]](#footnote-261)

Like its predecessor, the Macpherson Constitution was attacked from various angles by Southern politicians. Azikiwe’s NCNC criticized its regionalist elements, arguing that since ministers would be nominated by regional Houses of Assembly, rather than by the central legislature, ‘regional bias will be the guiding principle since acceptability to the region determines the selection of any particular Central Minister’.[[262]](#footnote-262) Meanwhile, Awolowo, who favoured a strongly-federalist solution, described the new constitution as a ‘wretched compromise between federalism and Unitarianism’.[[263]](#footnote-263)

Southern leaders were also very displeased the North was allocated 50% of the seats in the federal House of Representatives (after threatening secession otherwise) on grounds their region contained over half of Nigeria’s population. They feared this veto power could hand Northern political elites’ perpetual control of the centre but accepted the arrangement to avoid the North blocking constitutional advances for Nigeria as a whole.[[264]](#footnote-264)

British officials, who sought to maintain Nigeria’s territorial unity, believed providing the North safeguards it felt it needed to avoid Southern domination was a necessary requirement towards that end. Moreover, the North, in no hurry for self-government, provided a welcome counter-weight to growing Southern agitation on the issue. In his report to London, Macpherson thus described the outcome of the constitutional negotiations as ‘extremely satisfactory’.[[265]](#footnote-265) We see here the crucial role regional population figures played in shaping Nigeria’s political centre at the time and why they became such a hotly-contested political issue with some Southern voices accusing British authorities of colluding with the North to artificially boost its population figures, so the region could be used to checkmate the more independent-minded South.

Sklar’s description of the Macpherson Constitution as ‘the kind that invites trouble and is virtually made to collapse’ providing for ‘semi-responsible government at the centre [Nigerian ministers were not given charge of their departments] and in the regions,’ appears most apt in hindsight.[[266]](#footnote-266) The constitution indeed proved short-lived. However, in its immediate aftermath, political leaders focused on upcoming elections to regional assemblies.

As Falola and Heaton observed, the 1951 election campaign ‘galvanized regional and ethnic identifications as cultural associations organized as proper political parties to campaign for control of the various regional assemblies’.[[267]](#footnote-267) In the Eastern Region, there was the Ibo State Union with Azikiwe doubling as its president and NCNC head. In the West, the *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* Awolowo had co-founded provided the foundational basis for AG while the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) had morphed from a cultural organization to a political party.

During the campaign, Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot* portrayed Awolowo’s AG as a party of ‘tribal regionalism’ and ethnic chauvinism in contrast to NCNC, which was the only ‘truly nationalist’ party fighting for a ‘unified’ Nigeria.[[268]](#footnote-268) It accused Awolowo’s party of trying to orchestrate ‘Yoruba attacks on Dr Azikiwe’[[269]](#footnote-269) and of spreading false rumours about plans for ‘Ibo domination’ among Yoruba voters.[[270]](#footnote-270) Moreover, AG had de-facto ‘husbanded itself to perfidious imperialism’ by deploying divide and rule tactics in a bid to ‘Balkanize’ Nigeria.[[271]](#footnote-271) An NCNC campaign message proclaimed:

Nigeria is one and must remain one. We will have no Pakistan here or hereafter. Vote for NCNC. The true nationalist party.[[272]](#footnote-272)

The danger of ‘Pakistanization’, a metaphor for the potential violent break-up of Nigeria along ethnic and religious lines similar to the 1947 India-case, was a recurring threat-scenario in the discourse of Azikiwe’s political party and media outlets, which often accused Awolowo and his party of working towards a ‘Pakistanized’ Nigeria rather than genuinely attempting to foster a common nationality.

AG, meanwhile, did openly appeal to ethno-regional sentiments as evidenced in their campaign message urging people in the Western Region to:

Vote for the Action Group because it stands for Western solidarity……vote only for the AG if you are a true born Yoruba, a true born Benin, a true born Itsekiri, Urhobo, Western Ijaw, Western Ibo and Yes A true born Nigerian.[[273]](#footnote-273)

Revealingly, when campaigning in the Yoruba heartland, NCNC politicians felt the need to emphasize their party ‘was founded in Yorubaland by the Yorubas’ and ‘its first president was a Yoruba, the late Herbert Macaulay.’ Moreover, there were ‘more Yorubas than Igbos in the NCNC cabinet’. *Pilot* reported these campaign statements by NCNC politicians in an editorial titled ‘Myth of Ibos dominating the Yorubas is exploded’.[[274]](#footnote-274) This suggests NCNC leaders de-facto feared AG’s message of Western (read: Yoruba) solidarity was resonating in the region and were wary of being perceived as an Igbo-dominated party.

The 1951 election results revealed a country divided into regional party enclaves: The Eastern Region dominated by NCNC, the Northern Region by NPC and the Western Region by AG. The Western Region elections were however, a close battle between NCNC and AG and both claimed victory after voting-day. Most candidates stood without party labels, resulting in a brief period of confusion regarding which party some elected members would represent. When it emerged AG had the majority, NCNC cried foul, claiming some members who pledged allegiance to it before the elections were lured by AG after the vote via corrupt methods. AG denied this, going on to form a regional government.[[275]](#footnote-275)

Additionally, AG embarked on a complicated political manoeuvre (clearly masterminded by Awolowo as a letter I uncovered in his personal library revealed),[[276]](#footnote-276) to ensure Azikiwe wasn’t elected to the central House of Representatives from the Western Region’s House of Assembly where he had chosen to contest a seat (in Lagos) rather than in his native Eastern Region. This successful manoeuvring included turning some elected NCNC members against Azikiwe, forcing their party boss to remain in the Western Region’s assembly as opposition leader, rather than going to the federal legislature to coordinate NCNC’s activities from there as hitherto planned.

The highly-contested nature of the 1951 Western Region elections and the subsequent scheming to ‘sink Azikiwe in the Western House’ as Awolowo described it,[[277]](#footnote-277) was bitterly remembered for years to come in NCNC and wider Igbo circles. Some point to this as the moment ethnic politics arrived Nigeria for good with the message for Azikiwe essentially being that he return to his Eastern homeland and leave the West to be run by Westerners.

The next year was relatively calm politically as leaders adjusted to new roles under the Macpherson Constitution. However, 1953 brought dramatic and ultimately tragic events that would have a long-lasting impact on Nigerian politics and inter-ethnic relations. At a meeting of the federal House of Representatives in March 1953, Anthony Enahoro of AG listed a motion requesting the house endorse as a primary objective the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956. NCNC was in support, but Northern house members vehemently opposed such a specific timetable. Instead, Bello suggested replacing ‘in 1956’ with the phrase ‘as soon as practicable’.[[278]](#footnote-278)

Knowing the North had the numbers (50% of House Members) to block the motion, AG and NCNC members staged a walkout in a demonstration of Southern solidarity on this issue, heralding the beginning of a short-lived AG-NCNC alliance In subsequent proceedings, Southern politicians accused Northern leaders of colluding with the British to perpetuate colonial rule.[[279]](#footnote-279) After the tumultuous self-government proceedings, Northern members were booed and ridiculed by Lagos crowds on leaving the House of Representatives’ building. They were jeered and insulted throughout their trip back to the North, as angry demonstrators awaited them at each train stop. Recalling the events of that day in his memoirs, Bello later wrote:

This journey just about finished it for us. We were all not only angry at our treatment, but indignant that people who were so full of fine phrases about the unity of Nigeria should have set their people against the chosen representatives of another Region while passing through their territory and even in our own.[[280]](#footnote-280)

After this experience, many Northern leaders sought immediate secession and were restrained only by practical considerations. The North was landlocked and depended on Southern coastal cities for transportation routes for its imports and exports. Northern leaders worried an ‘unfriendly South’ might block passage of goods across their lands.[[281]](#footnote-281) Indeed, Awolowo suggested as much, stating some weeks later to the press that if the British let the North secede ‘we [the Western Region] shall declare our independence immediately and we will not allow the North to transport their groundnuts through our territory’.[[282]](#footnote-282)Groundnuts were a key export for the North at the time.

Northern leaders thus opted to aim for a ‘structure which would reduce the powers of the Centre to the absolute minimum and yet retain sufficient national unity for practical and international purposes.’[[283]](#footnote-283) They put forward an 8-point program entailing de-facto secession from Nigeria but were eventually dissuaded by the British. Colonial officials feared a domino effect if the North seceded. At the time, Governor-General Macpherson wrote to Thomas Lloyd, Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, stating: ‘if Nigeria splits, it will not be into two or three parts, but into many fragments.’[[284]](#footnote-284)

Meanwhile, *Pilot* suggested the North’s actions were part of a British conspiracy to further its rule in Nigeria. They were egging the North on to create a crisis at the centre so as to give Macpherson an excuse to dissolve the central government and create a ‘Pakistanized’ Nigeria where regions competed against each other, rather than ‘unite strongly against the real enemy’.[[285]](#footnote-285)

Southern newspapers continued to lambast and ridicule Northern leaders for their stance on self-government, inflaming passions even further. In this atmosphere, AG leaders decided on a particularly ill-timed ‘educational tour’ of the North to defend their self-government motion, visiting Kano, a city with a significant population of Southerners while remaining a predominantly Northern Muslim area. Inter-ethnic violence eventually erupted in Kano, leading to 277 casualties, including 36 deaths - 15 Northerners and 21 Southerners.[[286]](#footnote-286)

Coleman argued the crisis provoked by the self-government motion was ‘the surface manifestation of deep and unresolved tension in two interrelated areas- Northern fear of Southern domination in a self-governing Nigeria and Southern dissatisfaction with the 1951 constitution and in particular, its frustration over slow movement towards self-government’.[[287]](#footnote-287) Bello’s account confirms Northern leaders wished to delay self-government for fear if it happened before they were ready, they would face Southern domination. They had more faith in the British than in Southern Nigerians.[[288]](#footnote-288)

After the Kano riots, Oliver Lyttleton, Secretary of State for the Colonies, informed the House of Commons it had become clear Nigeria’s regions could not work together effectively in a tightly-knit federation and Britain would invite Nigerian leaders to discuss a new constitution providing greater regional autonomy. Constitutional conferences, presided over by Lyttleton, were held between July 1953 and February 1954. A memo to Cabinet by Lyttleton in the midst of heated debate over the future status of the commercial hub of Lagos, gives us interesting insight into the thinking on Nigeria of Britain’s highest-ranking colonial official at the time. Lyttleton described the three major Nigerian groups as:

The Hausa and Fulani of the North, Muslims and warriors, with the dignity, courtly manners, high bearing and conservative outlook which democracy and the Daily Mirror have not yet debased; and the Yoruba West and Ibo East, pagan or Christian, with higher education and lower manners and inferior fighting value, somewhat intoxicated with nationalism, though loyal to the British connection at least so long as it suits them… The North with their deep but already somewhat shaken trust in the British and distrust of their ‘brothers’ in the West and East fear that greater autonomy now suggested for regions will lead to the West seceding when it suits them, especially as the West incorporates Lagos, at once the commercial and political capital and only effective outlet to the sea for the trade and commerce of the North… The North now insist on Lagos being a federal area under separate administration to safeguard it from becoming a Yoruba preserve and to make sure their access to the sea remains open… We cannot let the North down. They are more than half the population, more attached to the British and more trustful of the colonial service than the other two…if my colleagues agree, I shall state that we have decided to excise Lagos from the West... to act otherwise would be to alienate our friends, probably drive them into secession, to cast aside our responsibilities and to leave a dismembered Nigeria to settle its own differences perhaps with the spear.’[[289]](#footnote-289)

Lyttleton’s words provide evidence supporting Southern politicians’ oft-repeated claims that the North was systematically favoured by colonial authorities in all colonial-era constitutional negotiations, to the detriment of the South, a perception helping fuel grievances against the North and the British among Southern Nigerian ethnic groups.

The 1953/54 conferences produced the Lyttleton Constitution, which established the firmly federal system under which Nigeria gained independence in 1960. In the new constitution, the central House of Representatives would have jurisdiction over issues on exclusive legislative lists while jurisdiction over legislation on all issues not on those lists devolved to regional assemblies, except in cases of conflict whereby federal law would prevail. The majority leader in each regional House of Assembly would be Premier of that region, with his own cabinet of ministers. The North kept its 50 percent quota in the central legislature. Each region was given the option of full internal self-government by 1956, unless it preferred otherwise.[[290]](#footnote-290)

The period 1951 to 1954 thus proved to be particularly eventful years in the realm of Nigerian politics, characterized by the manifestation of Northern fears of Southern domination in a post-British Nigeria, Southern frustrations at the North slowing the country’s march to self-rule, a further solidification of ethnic and regional identities visible in the development of more or less coherent ethnic groups with identifiable leaderships, debates over the appropriate political structuring of the country reflecting the viewpoints of these leaderships on national and sub-national identities and the realization by British colonial authorities that a decidedly federalist structure seemed the only realistic solution for the multi-ethnic diverse country they had created.

Mwakikagile rightly observed that the constitutional ‘formulas devised [by Awolowo, Azikiwe et al] were a tacit admission that tribalism, more than nationalism, was the paramount factor in Nigerian politics.’[[291]](#footnote-291) Crowder was probably accurate in describing the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution as the moment which ‘marked the end of the nationalist struggle with Britain. For the next six years, leaders were preoccupied not so much with wrestling power from the colonial government as dealing with day-to-day administration and development of the country and settling the basis on which they would cooperate with each other’.[[292]](#footnote-292)

**4.5 Lyttleton Constitution-era (1954-1960)**

For most of 1955 and 1956, Nigerian leaders focused on their new powers and responsibilities and in preparation for the next constitutional conference scheduled for May-June 1957. Ethnic animosities were never far below the surface though. In a 1955 memo to Alan Lennox-Boyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Bryan Sharwood-Smith, Governor-General of Northern Nigeria, stated:

It is appropriate to record the increasing tendency of many ministers, and particularly the Premier [Bello] to indulge in anti-Southern diatribes on the one hand and to evidence a narrowing and more militant Islamic outlook on the other. This despite repeated reminders that a Southern exodus would result in total collapse and that one sure way of ensuring this is rabid racialism, particularly when this is combined with acute religious intolerance.[[293]](#footnote-293)

Later that same year, reporting on sentiments among NPC party-members towards Southerners, Sharwood-Smith wrote: ‘while there is deep dislike and suspicion for the Action Group and all its works, the Yoruba, as a race, are not unpopular. On the other hand, the Northerner’s feeling for the Ibo borders on detestation….it is a situation which must always contain the seeds of violence’.[[294]](#footnote-294)

In a 1955 memo to the Colonial Secretary, James Robertson, Governor-General of Nigeria, also noted Northern anti-Igbo sentiments:

My brief tour of the Northern Region left me in little doubt that Northerners are bitterly opposed to the Ibo in general and the NCNC in particular. Every Northern minister with whom I discussed the North versus South issue has emphasized his fear of Ibo infiltration. They have much less fear of the West and seem to think that they can easily come to terms with the Action group and the Yoruba. Possibly this feeling is based partly upon the fact that many Yorubas are Moslems.[[295]](#footnote-295)

We see here the suggestion Yorubas in general were viewed more favourably in the North at the time. Antipathies were reserved for AG as a party, not the Yorubas as a people whereas Igbos were disliked ‘in general’ as Roberson suggested. However, while Yorubas as a whole were not viewed as negatively as Igbos, Northern elite resentment towards AG would soon increase even further as Awolowo and other party leaders agitated for Northern areas inhabited mainly by Yorubas to be incorporated into the Western Region, in a bid to reduce the North’s numerical and territorial advantage.

A 1956 *The Times* editorialnoted Awolowo touring the Ilorin province ‘advocating its secession from the North to join its “kith and kin” in the West’…Awolowo who spoke in the Yoruba language, was enthusiastically applauded… [he] has gained considerable personal ascendancy through addressing the masses, who understand only Yoruba, whereas the normal language of the NPC leaders is Hausa’.[[296]](#footnote-296)

Awolowo and his party devoted significant resources towards persuading Yorubas in the Ilorin province as well as other minorities in the lower North to agitate for secession from the region, vexing Northern elites and making AG their main political enemy, a situation that would have its consequences after independence. It was not that the NCNC wasn’t making its own efforts to encourage the break-up of the Northern Region or trying to peel away support from NPC by allying with parties trying to rival it in the North, but its efforts were less well-financed and organized than AG’s, making them a lesser threat and thus the lesser enemy, so to speak. As independence approached, Legum asserted Nigeria’s regional governments were ‘hopelessly at odds with each other’ and ‘treat each other with a mutual aloofness reminiscent of Russia and the United States at the height of the cold war’… Bello makes no bones about the contempt he feels for both his adversaries in the South’.[[297]](#footnote-297)

Despite this ‘cold war’, regional leaders, refereed by the British, reached agreements on key issues at the constitutional conference of 1957, during which both the Eastern and Western Region were granted self-government, with the North opting to wait till 1959. Again, population strength played the deciding role in structuring the political centre. It was agreed seats to the federal House of Representatives would be allocated per capita, approximately 1 representative per 100,000 people. This meant the North would eventually be entitled to 174 of 312 seats in the federal House of Representatives. A central government was established with Abubakar Balewa, Bello’s deputy in the NPC, taking over as Nigeria’s first Prime Minister. All three major parties, AG, NCNC and NPC, agreed to join his government.[[298]](#footnote-298)

However, as independence approached, regional minority groups stepped up separatist agitations. As Sklar observed: ‘in every region, there was a dual ethno-geographical make-up--a regional nucleus inhabited by the cultural majority and a peripheral zone of ethnic minorities’.[[299]](#footnote-299) In the eyes of minorities, the major parties were all controlled by the numerically dominant groups in their region, thus they feared independence from colonial rule might amount to the replacement of British overlords with Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani overlords. The growth of ethnic nationalism within these major groups, visible in organizations like the *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* and the Igbo State Union, hardly served to reassure worried minorities.

In the North, separatist tendencies were notable among the non-Hausa often Christian or pagan peoples of the region’s southernmost provinces. In the Western Region, non-Yoruba minorities agitated for autonomy as did non-Igbos in the Eastern Region. Bello and NPC were categorical on the issue of separatism in their region: they would not part with ‘an inch’ of Northern territory.[[300]](#footnote-300)

Southern politicians were more ambiguous. On the one hand, Southern nationalists generally supported the reorganization of Nigeria into a larger number of states based on criteria of cultural and linguistic affinities. On the other hand, once their parties captured control of their regions, NCNC and AG leaders were reluctant for new states to emerge from territory under their control. Instead, they actively supported separatist tendencies in their rivals’ regions.[[301]](#footnote-301)

In response to minority agitations, a Minorities Commission was established in 1957 to address the issue of minority fears regarding their fate in an independent Nigeria and their demands for new state creation. After touring Nigeria and weighing the arguments and counter-arguments of various representatives and community leaders, the commission recommended against the creation of new states, arguing this could foster nationwide fragmentation along ethnic lines, asserting it was unclear whether majority opinion favoured creating new states in the areas involved and questioning the viability of new states.

Instead, it recommended constitutional safe-guards guaranteeing minority rights and a strongly federal system of government where no single ethnic nationality could dominate. Bello’s NPC welcomed the decision, again a favourable one for them. It left the North intact, larger than the other two regions combined. Awolowo’s AG, which had wanted the roughly 500,000 Yorubas living in the Northern Region to join their ‘kith and kin’ in the West, was predictably critical of the outcome. Azikiwe’s NCNC, also unwilling to see the East lose any territory, said independence was the overriding goal and state creation could be deferred for the moment.[[302]](#footnote-302)

Bello’s NPC now had every chance of capturing power at the centre after independence as the North held on to its allocation of 174 of 312 seats in the federal House of Representatives. Theoretically, if NPC could capture 157 of the 174 available seats in its Northern stronghold, Bello, who was very frank about where his primary loyalties lay, could end up controlling a majority in the national assembly without having to win a single constituency in the South! In an August 1958 letter to the Colonial Secretary, Governor Robertson wrote:

Perhaps the single biggest drawback to a strong Nigeria is the fact that the Sardauna [Bello] is the undisputed head of the NPC…. and because of this is probably the most powerful political figure in Nigeria. But his interest very much lies where his own office lies- in the Northern Region- and he tends to think of the federal government, in so far as he thinks of it at all, as a rather distasteful agency in Lagos which fortunately is run by a Northerner, but which must be kept in its place for the benefit of the North.[[303]](#footnote-303)

The focus now turned to the all-important general election of 1959, which would determine who controlled the centre after independence. Electioneering kicked off in earnest with AG leaders crisscrossing the country in helicopters, campaigning particularly hard in the seat-rich North as well as in the East, where they hoped to make enough in-roads with regional minorities to be able win a majority. However, as Sklar and Whitaker observed, the 1959 election demonstrated once again ‘the decisive supremacy of each regional government party in the section of each region inhabited by the majority ethnic group…

NCNC won all 50 seats in the Igbo constituencies of the Eastern Region, NPC won 104 of the 110 seats in the upper-North dominated by Hausa-Fulanis and the AG won 32 of the 47 available seats in the Yoruba sector of the Western Region…AG also won 14 seats of a total of 23 in the minority sector of the East, and, in alliance with the United Middle Belt Congress, 25 of 74 seats in the lower North. Similarly, the NCNC won 14 of 15 seats in the [non-Yoruba areas of the West]. All told, NPC commanded a total of 142 of the 312 seats in Nigeria’s federal House of Representatives, NCNC and its Northern coalition partner, NEPU, controlled 89 seats while AG had 73 seats.[[304]](#footnote-304)

NPC went into coalition with NCNC and Balewa remained as Prime Minister, this time, of an independent Nigeria while Azikiwe was appointed Governor-General, by now, a largely symbolic position. Awolowo’s AG went into opposition.

**4.6 Independence to civil war (1960-1967)**

Falola and Heaton pertinently describe Nigeria as a ‘state without a nation’ at the time of independence:

The underlying cause of all the problems Nigeria experienced in the 1960s and has experienced since then is the ‘national question.’ What is Nigeria? Who are Nigerians? How does a country go about developing a meaningful national identity?......the people within the borders of Nigeria were known to the world as ‘Nigerians’ but in reality, this designation meant little to most people whose lives continued to be primarily centred on local communities that had existed for hundreds and thousands of years. The regional and federal emphasis of the constitutions of the 1950s further undermined the development of a unified national consciousness by determining that access to power at the national level was to be derived from holding power at the regional level.[[305]](#footnote-305)

Furthermore, political domination by Yorubas, Igbos and Hausa-Fulanis in their respective regions left minorities feeling alienated from the political process, nurturing further subdivisions of identity and rendering even more uphill the task of building an overarching national identity. Thus, while many cultural elites made spirited attempts to construct a national identity in the 1960s, these failed largely due to the political trend of consolidating power at the regional level at all costs. The politics of the immediate post-independence years were characterized by corruption, election rigging, ethnic baiting and violence.[[306]](#footnote-306)

Walter Schwarz aptly summed up 1960s Nigerian politics thus:

On paper, the system seemed fair and reasonable; it gave the opposition the chance in future federal elections to capture enough seats in its opponents’ home territory to swing the balance.… in practice the system did not work that way…. with federal power went a large bloc of patronage; jobs in federal corporations, the siting of industries, the granting of scholarships, the allocation of revenues for amenities. The Yoruba felt they were ‘left out’… that their people were not getting their fair share… The other obstacle was that the chances of winning seats in other regions were largely illusory. The powers of a regional government in manipulating elections- by intimidating opposition and rewarding supporters- were considerable and grew with every election as party managers gained experience.[[307]](#footnote-307)

By 1962, even Azikiwe’s NCNC was feeling marginalized by the dominant NPC despite being in coalition with it. The same year ushered in a crisis in AG. A faction of the party believed AG, and Yorubas in general, were losing too much as a result of being in opposition at the federal level and should reach out to Bello’s NPC for access to power and resources. This group included Samuel Akintola, who succeeded Awolowo as Western Region Premier when the latter resigned the post to lead the party in the 1959 elections.

Awolowo disagreed, arguing the West should focus on economic self-sufficiency, reducing its dependence on the federal government and thus rendering NPC irrelevant to the region’s future. Subsequently, Awolowo tried to remove Akintola as regional Premier by having him expelled from AG, the ruling party in the region. The latter refused to give up his premiership and violence erupted in the ensuing power struggle. PM Balewa, happy to weaken the AG, declared a state of emergency in the West, suspending the AG-controlled regional government for six months, after which Akintola was reinstated as Premier, this time under the auspices of a new political outfit, United Peoples’ Party (UPP), which formed a majority coalition with NCNC in the Western Region assembly. AG thus became an opposition party in its former stronghold.[[308]](#footnote-308) Awolowo was then accused of plotting to overthrow the government by violent means and charged with treasonable felony, eventually being sentenced to ten years imprisonment in 1962. AG was further weakened when a new Mid-West region was carved out of the West during this period.

Meanwhile, ethnic tensions were growing at the federal level as Southerners became increasingly resentful of NPC policies. For instance, in 1961, it was decided 50% of all military officers would be Northerners regardless of their qualifications vis-à-vis their Southern compatriots. Southerners became increasingly frustrated with a federal system that prioritized ethnicity over merit. Also, the bulk of development funds went to projects in the North as did those for health and education. Northern leaders justified this by arguing their region needed to catch up with the South after its underdevelopment during the colonial era.[[309]](#footnote-309)

By 1962, many Southern leaders believed the only way to reduce NPC’s power was via a census planned that year. The number of seats allocated to regions in the federal legislature was based on population figures from 1953. Southern governments decided to manipulate the census results, so their regions could gain seats and reverse the Northern advantage. When the figures were released, they showed an improbable 70 percent increase in the South’s population since 1953, compared to a 30 percent increase in the North. NPC rejected the figures, calling for a new census.

Predictably, the 1963 result now showed significant population gains for the North. This was in turn decried as fraudulent by the South. However, NPC was in power and had the authority to make the 1963 figures official. Akintola, now allied with NPC, accepted them on behalf of the Western Region. Dennis Osadebey, Premier of the newly-created Mid-West region, also accepted the results ‘for the sake of national unity.’ The new figures had Nigeria’s population at 55.6 million, of which a clear majority (29.7m) lived in the North. Federal representation thus continued to favour the North with all its implications.[[310]](#footnote-310) Again, we see here the crucial role of population count in Nigerian politics at the time and the ethnic tensions the jostling over population numbers fostered. We will be investigating some of the discourse surrounding the highly-contested 1963-63 census results in later chapters.

Southern leaders needed a new strategy, especially with new federal elections upcoming in 1964. NCNC thus allied with AG to form an electoral coalition called the United Progressives Grand Alliance (UPGA). The main goal was to wrest control of the centre from NPC, rendering the stakes high for Bello’s party, which faced potential national-level marginalization if UPGA triumphed. Bello joined forces with Akintola’s new political outfit, the NNDP, and a few other small Southern parties to form the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA).

NNA’s objective was to maintain the status quo. Intimidation tactics were employed against UPGA politicians who were sometimes physically prevented from entering the North to campaign or even from being able to register their candidacy at all. The 1964 campaign was largely fought along ethnic lines. As a December 1964 editorial in *The* *Times* noted:

Party manifestos have long since been forgotten in the heat of the battle. The overwhelming emphasis laid by all campaigners on tribal and regional disputes and prejudices indicate the real points at issue. The Northerners are concentrating their fire on fears of everyone else of ‘Ibo domination’... wooing Yorubas of Western Region by playing on their dislike of the Ibos and arguing that victory for Akintola’s N.N.D.P would ensconce Yoruba influence in the government whereas votes for the Action Group merely tie the divided Yoruba people to the chariot wheels of Ibo aggrandizement, or more likely to their impotence and unpopularity in defeat.[[311]](#footnote-311)

Here we see how, due to the fall-out between the former coalition partners, NCNC and NPC, Igbos once again resumed their role as enemy number one of the North.

Meanwhile, *Guardian’s* Nigeria correspondent commented the 1964 election campaign in the Western Region where Awolowo’s AG party had lost power to Bello’s new ally, Akintola and his NNDP party, thus:

An unpopular government regarded by many people as stooges of the North must try to cajole or to threaten the population to vote for it...[AG and NNDP] adopted long before the elections the system of creating private armies of thugs under the name of ‘party stalwarts.’ They are on the payroll of the party; they are mobilized…and they are armed with knives and guns. Their job is to break up rival party meetings, to intimidate the population in general… thugs beat up opposition leaders or members methodically…it is already public knowledge how the elections are to be rigged…voters are instructed not to put their [ballot] papers in the ballot box but to hide them… They are told to hand the paper to the head of their compound. He in turn is expected to deliver all the ballot papers of his compound to a party official who will then put several hundred papers into the Government box.[[312]](#footnote-312)

In the end, 88 of 174 seats were declared ‘unopposed’ in the North after local officials hindered the registration of UPGA candidates. Meanwhile, NNDP declared 30 percent of seats in the Western Region unopposed using similar tactics. Frustrated, UPGA leaders called for a late boycott of the election. However, voting still went ahead in many places and NNA declared victory. PM Balewa called on Azikiwe (Nigeria’s ceremonial president since it became a constitutional republic in 1963) to invite the creation of a government. Azikiwe refused at first due to the events surrounding the election, and many Southern leaders refused to accept the results. In the end though, Azikiwe relented and the Bello-led NNA claimed 198 of 312 seats in the federal assembly, going on to form a national government.[[313]](#footnote-313)

The Western Region elections of 1965 followed a similar pattern. Akintola’s NNDP deployed blatantly ethnic rhetoric, stating on the cover of its election manifesto that if elected, it would make sure ‘Yorubas shall never be slaves’, implying the opposite might be the case if its rival, UPGA, which had a lot of Igbo politicians, won the regional election.[[314]](#footnote-314) NNDP intimidated UPGA candidates, doing everything to hinder their registration process. Both sides declared victory after the vote. UPGA leaders were arrested for disregarding the official results. Subsequently, the Western Region became a battle zone with widespread riots and clashes with police. By now, many Nigerians were fed up with the existing system. Such attitudes led to the January 1966 coup, led by mainly Igbo officers, who assassinated those they held primarily responsible for the 1964 and 1965 election debacles: Ahmadu Bello, Prime Minister Tafewa Balewa and Samuel Akintola, Premier of the Western Region, among others. But the coup was not entirely successful as the plotters failed to seize Lagos. In effect, the highest-ranking military officer at the time, Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi (an Igbo) took over as Head of State.[[315]](#footnote-315)

To many Southerners, the coup was a welcome end to Northern domination. To many Northerners, it seemed a prelude to the Igbo domination they had feared for decades. Four of the five majors who led the coup were Igbo. No top Igbo politician was killed in the coup; President Azikiwe conveniently happened to be out of the country at the time, for ‘medical reasons.’ Meanwhile, the North’s two most important leaders, Ahmadu Bello and Prime Minister Tafewa Balewa, had been killed. Further aggravating Northerners was the fact that though the coup plotters were in detention, Ironsi seemed in no hurry to try them.[[316]](#footnote-316)

Ironsi then made some political blunders which would provoke catastrophic consequences. By June 1966, Schwarz was warning about how Ironsi’s reliance on mostly Igbo advisers was ‘leading Nigeria back to tribal strife’ as he had come to increasingly rely on ‘friends he could trust’ for political advice. Considering these friends were predominantly Igbo, ‘this soon began to look like a clique to outsiders. In this atmosphere came unitary decree of May 24 abolishing the federation, the result was anti-Southern riots in North.’[[317]](#footnote-317)

Ironsi’s announcement of Decree 34, officially abolishing the federal structure and replacing it with a unitary system, was for many Northerners, a clear sign Igbos wanted a return to the days when they dominated the North’s bureaucracy. The reaction revealed just what kind of passions the issue of political structuring could trigger in polarized multi-ethnic Nigeria. In response to Ironsi’s decision, Igbo lives and property were attacked on a massive scale in the final days of May 1966.

It began with a demonstration in the Northern city of Zaria by students of the Institute of Administration and the Ahmadu Bello University against the unification decree which they feared would adversely affect their competition for jobs by throwing open the relatively closed job market of the North to Southerners. This was followed in July with massacres of Igbo soldiers by their fellow soldiers in the Nigerian army. Northern soldiers were determined to end what they saw as Igbo domination in Nigeria’s military and current power structures. On 29 July 1966, ‘they descended with ethnic vengeance on the Igbo officers and men, eliminating them in large numbers.[[318]](#footnote-318)

In July 1966, Northern officers organized a counter-coup, killing Ironsi and appointing Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon as military head of state. Gowon was from the North, but he was neither Hausa-Fulani nor Muslim. He was a Christian from one of the minority groups and thus presented as a unifier in this period of heightened sectarian tension. He immediately repealed Decree 34, reverting Nigeria back to a federal structure and released Awolowo from prison in a goodwill gesture to the Yorubas who welcomed the AG leader back as a hero. At a 1966 gathering of Yoruba political, intellectual and traditional elites, Awolowo was declared ‘*Asiwaju*’ (leader) of the Yoruba people and mandated to represent Yoruba interests in the new political reality. Gowon eventually appointed Awolowo Federal Commissioner for Finance and deputy vice-president of the ruling Federal Executive Council.[[319]](#footnote-319)

However, Emeka Ojukwu, appointed military governor of the Eastern Region after the January coup, never accepted Gowon’s leadership, insisting there were higher-ranking officers who should have been first in line. Meanwhile, between May 1966 when Ironsi abolished the federal system and September 1966, consistent violence had been aimed at Igbos in the North. Massacres, conducted mainly by Northern soldiers, killed between 80,000-100,000 Igbos during this period. Revenge killings of Northerners followed in the East. The safety of Igbos outside the East became a big issue and Ojukwu questioned the ability or willingness of the military government to protect them.[[320]](#footnote-320)

The atmosphere of fear and mistrust between the ethnic groups at the time was perhaps best summed up in a candid memorandum submitted by the Northern delegation to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference that met in Lagos in September 1966 in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to resolve the ongoing inter-ethnic crisis:

We have pretended for too long that there are no differences between the peoples of Nigeria. The hard fact which we must honestly accept as of paramount importance is the Nigerian experiment especially for the future is that we are different peoples brought together by recent accidents of history. To pretend otherwise will be folly. We all have our fears of one another. Some fear that opportunities in their own areas are limited and they would therefore wish to expand, and venture unhampered in other parts. Some fear the sheer weight of numbers of other parts which they feel could be used to the detriment of their own interest. Some fear the sheer weight of skills and the aggressive drive of other groups which they feel has to be regulated if they are not to be left if they are not to the left as the economic, social and possibly political underdogs in their own areas of origin in the very near future. These fears may be real or imagined; they may be reasonable or petty. Whether they are genuine or not, they have to be taken account of because they influence to a considerable degree the actions of the groups towards one another, and more important perhaps, the daily actions of the individual in each group towards individuals from other groups.[[321]](#footnote-321)

The key theme from this passage is ‘fear’: among the Igbos of not being able live and work safely outside the Eastern Region, amongst Yorubas they would be dominated by the numerically superior North and amongst Northerners, that they might be left behind in a free-market open competition-style scenario with members of the other ethnic groups. Fear is a recurrent discursive theme in the data gathered and will also be subjected to closer analysis in future chapters.

Gowon’s decision in May of 1967, to do away with the tri-regional structure and divide Nigeria into 12 states, was likely a crucial moment in the lead-up to the war. As Kirk-Greene observed, whether Gowon’s decree ‘was designed to forestall secession (would-be Biafra was now to consist of three states instead of the Eastern Region, two of them mischievously emphasizing the East’s long contained minorities problem of Ibibio/Efik discontent and Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers separatism and the third, a landlocked oil–less overpopulated Igbo enclave’ or whether it pushed Ojukwu into the final act of defiance declaring a secessionist republic remains a matter of argument. What is clear is the ‘unequalled point of no return Gowon’s decision constituted.[[322]](#footnote-322) After last-ditch negotiations between Ojukwu and Gowon failed, the former declared the secession of Biafra, thus triggering the Nigerian civil war.

In the end, one cannot credibly point to any single isolated event that triggered Nigeria’s civil war, the causes of which are to be found in the combined effects of Nigeria’s political developments and happenings in the years this chapter has covered. Starting from the late 1940s, Nigeria slowly but steadily progressed on the path of ethnic nationalism and regionalism developing along the way more or less coherent ethnic and/or sub-national with their own identifiable leaderships.

Once federalism had been entrenched as the prevailing constitutional arrangement, leaders like Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello focused on ensuring their particular region stayed under the political control of the parties they led. Other considerations became secondary. This consolidation of power at the regional level and pursuit of maximum-possible regional autonomy, often at the practical cost of weakening the Nigerian centre, served not only to weaken the Nigerian state as a whole, but also to strengthen ethnic and regional identifications at the cost of identification with the Nigerian state.

Kirk-Greene summed it up brilliantly when he asserted ‘federal Nigeria was the antithesis of the saying that the whole is as strong as the sum of its component parts. She was as weak as the strength of those parts could ensure.’[[323]](#footnote-323) The fact Bello, leader of NPC, the majority party in parliament, chose to remain premier of the Northern Region while delegating his deputy, Balewa, to become PM of Nigeria, says a lot about where he believed real power resided and/or should reside.

The political debates during this 20-year period over state creation, the congruence of territorial divisions with ethnic groupings, appropriate federal arrangements and political structuring, census figures and the appropriate timing for independence all reflected views about identity, bringing to the fore certain recurring discursive themes such as fear, domination, imaginations of boundaries and essentialism. These themes and others emergent will be investigated more closely in later chapters with a view to analysing their implications for identity construction in Nigeria at the time.

**Chapter 5 Constructing Boundaries**

**5.1 Introduction**

This chapter investigates narratives centred around *boundaries*, highlighted by Cornell and Hartmann as a crucial feature of ethnic group identity construction.[[324]](#footnote-324) Indeed, it is difficult to envisage the construction of any group identity without some form of boundary drawing signifying the dividing line(s) between an Us and a Them.

Benhabib has argued that as ‘every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not, identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference.’[[325]](#footnote-325)Meanwhile, theDHA toolkit I shall be drawing from in this chapter has highlighted *strategies of dissimilation*, aimed at creating ‘a temporal, interpersonal or territorial difference and heterogeneity among peoples or groups of peoples,’[[326]](#footnote-326) as useful discursive tools for boundary construction.

In this chapter, I shall thus be paying close attention to instances where intra-Nigerian differences were constructed and emphasized. Particularly interesting about boundary-construction in Nigeria during the period under study is the fact political and historical circumstance required all three leaders to address issues of identity in both the sub-national and national context. After all, despite various

expressed misgivings about the colonial project, Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello all endorsed the idea of keeping ‘Nigeria’ together after the British left. This endorsement was a prerequisite to negotiating independence considering Britain was determined its national construct remain intact. It was therefore politic to debate boundaries in a manner not seen as detrimental to the wider nation-building project. This chapter shall attempt to reveal some of the tensions and contradictions emergent in this discursive balancing act.

Where intra-Nigerian differences were emphasized, I shall strive to highlight what *kind* of differences were emphasized most consistently. This should help signal potential themes around which sub-national identities were constructed, that is, ‘the set of criteria established for distinguishing between group members and non-members’.[[327]](#footnote-327)

The analysis focusses on content; texts are not analysed word for word as this would significantly extend the scope of the study. Furthermore, not everything in a text is equally relevant to my investigation, so the analysis is largely thematic, investigating utterances associated with boundary construction.

The chapter starts with some preliminary remarks followed by four separate sections. The first covers the post-WWII period up to 1954 during which Nigeria was governed under two similar regionalist quasi-federalist constitutions; this section contains a further sub-section which deals with the controversial self-government debate of 1953 that brought to the fore discussions of boundaries and identity. The second section covers the period 1954-60 during which federalism was firmly adopted and Nigerian politicians began preparations for independence. The third section investigates the years 1960-67, which started with the achievement of independence and ended with the outbreak of civil war. This will be followed by some concluding remarks.

**5.2 Preliminary remarks**

Generally speaking, none of the three leaders attempted to construct notions of Nigerian sameness in the spheres of culture, political traditions, historical experiences, social attitudes and norms, language or religion. On the contrary, they all, to varying degrees, emphasized intra-Nigeriandifferences in these spheres, signalling them as boundary markers differentiating the numerous communities inhabiting the country.

While group categorizations were employed ambiguously, with the same collective sometimes referred to as an ‘ethnic group’, ‘linguistic group’ and/or ‘nation’ in one discursive instance, for the most part, Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello implicitly and explicitly portrayed ‘Nigeria’ as a country constituted by various distinct ethno-national collectives.

However, their narratives diverged significantly with regards to the *degree of emphasis* placed on intra-Nigerian differences, *how* these differences were portrayed (for instance, positively, as an enriching factor, or negatively, as an obstacle to harmonious co-existence) and the *intensity of belief* expressed in the (eventual) materialisation of an overarching national identity subsuming these differences. Here, Awolowo and Bello’s narratives remained rather consistent throughout the period under study while Azikiwe’s underwent various evolutions and were generally more context and audience-dependent.

**5.3 Constructing boundaries: Post-WWII to 1954**

Perhaps I shall start with Obafemi Awolowo’s first and arguably most influential book, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, published in 1947. A political blueprint for Nigerian

independence, it was aimed at literate politically-conscious Nigerians, including the growing group of intellectual and political leaders; British decision-makers and influencers as well as general British readers interested in their country’s colonies.

The British audience was crucial in this case as Awolowo’s primary objective was to persuade the British government to revise aspects of its governance approach to Nigeria, which he argued ‘has the knack of so clumsily going about things as to invite the most violent opposition, where if a little imagination had been used, the readiest support could have been gained.’[[328]](#footnote-328)

Favourably-reviewed and widely-cited in both the Nigerian and British press[[329]](#footnote-329), the book attained cult-status among Awolowo’s future (mostly Yoruba) political supporters and became a general reference point for identity debates in Nigeria. Azikiwe often made inter-textual allusions to Awolowo’s arguments in *Path to Nigerian Freedom* and I uncovered one instance of him reading aloud from it at a political rally in 1951.[[330]](#footnote-330) In the relevant chapter, Awolowo criticized the 1947 Richards’ Constitution, asserting Britain wanted a Unitary Nigeria, which he declared ‘patently impossible’. He offered the following justificatory arguments for his position:

If rapid political progress is to be made in Nigeria it is high time we were realistic in tackling its constitutional problems. Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no ‘Nigerians’ in the same sense as there are ‘English’, ‘Welsh’, or ‘French’. The word ‘Nigerian’ is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. There are various national or ethnical groups in the country… It is a mistake to designate them ‘tribes.’ Each of them is a nation by itself, with many tribes and clans. There is as much difference between them as there is between Germans, English, Russians and Turks for instance. The fact they have a common overlord does not destroy this fundamental difference. The languages differ…their cultural backgrounds and social outlooks differ widely; and their indigenous political institutions have little in common. Their present stages of development vary.[[331]](#footnote-331)

Awolowo deployed destructive strategies which served to dismantle any notions of an existing national we-group. The major social actors referred to in his nomination strategy are ‘Nigerians’, ‘national or ethnical groups’, ‘Germans’, ‘English’, ‘Russians’, ‘Turks’, ‘Welsh’, ‘French’ , the British ‘overlord’ and ‘Nigeria’. His predication strategy involved characterizing ‘Nigeria’ as a multinational state constituted of institutionally-complete nations each sharing a distinct language, culture, value-system, political institutions and level of socio-economic development.

He faulted Britain’s designation of Nigeria’s major groups as ‘tribes’, an inter-textual reference to the labelling in the most recent 1931 colonial census. Cornell and Hartmann have emphasized the agency social actors have to ‘resist’ identity labels others wish to assign them.[[332]](#footnote-332) Awolowo here was resisting the labelling of the likes of his Yoruba group as ‘tribes’, asserting instead that they were ‘nations’. From a psychological viewpoint, group prestige was at stake here. ‘Nations’ are generally perceived as more advanced political communities than ‘tribes’, a label connoting primitive levels of development. In this light, Awolowo’s preference for Yorubas et al being perceived as ‘nations’ is hardly surprising.

From a pragmatic standpoint, it is also quite likely Awolowo calculated demanding the self-determination he was about to demand, for ‘nations’, offered more prospects of success than demanding it for mere ‘tribes.’ Awolowo further employed his characterization of Nigeria as multi-national to buttress his claim intra-Nigerian differences were as far-reaching as inter-national differences, such as those ‘between Germans, English, Russians and Turks’. For this *topos of comparison*, he selected nations he could safely assume his audience, especially the British, *would* likely consider significantly different from each other in terms of language, culture, history and politico-institutional systems. Meanwhile, Awolowo’s predication strategy in the cited chapter involved attributing differing abilities to Nigeria’s ‘nations’:

There are also vital differences in the potential abilities of the various national groups. In embracing Western culture, the Yorubas take the lead and have benefitted immensely as a result. The Efiks, the Ijaws, the Ibibios and the Ibos come next…. The Hausas and Fulanis on the other hand are extremely conservative and take very reluctantly to Western civilization. Their eyes are turned to the East, from whence light and inspiration had come to them in ages past; and they seem to spurn to look westward. And if the race is to the swift, in spite of their lower cultural background, the Ibos or Ibibios would certainly qualify for self-government, long before the Hausas.[[333]](#footnote-333)

Hausa-Fulanis, who metonymically represent Northern Nigeria, are portrayed as ultra-conservative, unambitiously sluggish, anti-Western and oriented towards Middle-Eastern/Islamic civilization in contrast to Southern Nigerians who were Western-oriented, sharp and progressive.

Asides emphasizing intra-Nigerian differences to his general audience, Awolowo’s utterances likely also served to emphasize Hausa-Fulani difference *from* his British readers specifically while implying Southern Nigerian similarity to them. In a persuasive strategy, his British audience is invited to feel an affinity and common ground with Southern Nigerians, especially Awolowo’s Yoruba group, who are very similarly-oriented to them, and a hostility towards Northern Nigerians who ‘spurn’ their way of life.

In further analogies, Awolowo deployed arguments from factand *topos of history as teacher* to justify essentialist claims steeped in the fallacy of certainty that heterogenous populations are inherently unsuited to Unitarianism. He cited agitations for ‘home rule’ by the Welsh, Scottish and Irish as well as inter-ethnic tensions in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Belgium as irrefutable empirical evidence proving those who consider themselves distinct peoples inhabiting a country withOthers, invariably desire federal systems guaranteeing their groups strong autonomy:

Experts can propound learned theories as to why people having different languages and cultural backgrounds are unable to live together under a democratic unitary Constitution. But the empirical facts of history are enough to guide us. It has been shown beyond all doubt that the best constitution for such diverse peoples is a federal constitution. This is exemplified by the constitution of Switzerland, which is acclaimed to be the best and the most democratic in the world since it gives complete autonomy to every racial group within the framework.[[334]](#footnote-334)

Using an argumentum ad populum, Awolowo asserted the Swiss-style political structuring he advocated for Nigeria was ‘acclaimed’ as ‘the most democratic in the world’ while neglecting to provide the source of this alleged acclaim. Continuing his argument for a Swiss-style structure, Awolowo asserted ‘each [national] group must be autonomous in regard to its internal affairs’ with ‘its own regional House of Assembly’:

Strictly speaking, the political structure of any particular national group is primarily their own domestic concern. The others may criticize it in the same way as French and Russians may criticize the British constitution. But they have no right to try to interfere effectively in the shaping of such a constitution. But this is exactly what is happening in Nigeria now. The Ibos, for example, unused to having chieftains, cannot understand why the Obas [Yoruba traditional rulers] in Yorubaland or the Emirs in the North should be entitled to the positions they occupy. On the other hand, the autocracy of the Emirs cuts the Yorubas who think it is their business to work to bring about a drastic change in these [Northern] constitutions. This is certainly not the correct attitude. But as long as every person in Nigeria is made to feel that he is a Nigerian first and a Yoruba or Ibo or Hausa next, each will…poke his nose into the domestic issues of the others. The only thing of common interest to all Nigerians as such … is the constitution of the central or federal republic of Nigeria. The constitution of each national group is the sole concern of the members of that group.[[335]](#footnote-335)

Awolowo’s nomination and predication strategies here portrayed key social actors (‘Yorubas’, ‘Ibos’ and ‘Hausas’) as distinct ‘national groups’ whose rightful autonomy was being encroached upon by non-members as a result of Britain’s Nigerianization project.

Kmylicka has described how ‘external protections’ are often claimed on behalf of ethnic or national groups in multi-ethnic or multi-national states. These involve the group’s rights vis-a-vis the rest of society and are intended to protect it from the impact of external pressures, such as the political decisions of larger society.[[336]](#footnote-336) Awolowo demanded external protections for groups like the Yorubas, guaranteeing them the right to determine their own politico-institutional structures without having to consider any input from wider society. He thus sought formal political acknowledgement of ethno-national group boundaries within the Nigerian project; it needed to be made clear non-members had no right to a say in another group’s internal affairs.

In *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, Awolowo thus constructed and reinforced intra-Nigerian boundaries in language, culture, social values, political institutions and civilizational orientation, portraying divergencies in these spheres as more or less immutable. Simultaneously, he naturalized sub-Nigerian identities, imbibing them with essentialist-like characteristics while downplaying differences within sub-Nigerian collectives, though he did acknowledge they all had ‘various tribes and clans.’

Ethnonyms like ‘Yoruba’ and ‘Igbo’, which only gained currency during the colonial era, are presupposed to have deeper meaning for those so described, while ‘Nigerian’ is portrayed as a functional label commanding no emotional attachment. Thick civilizational boundaries are constructed between North and South and presented as practically irreconcilable. While Awolowo does mention intra-Southern differences, these are portrayed in less essentialist and categorical fashion than those between Southern and Northern Nigeria, which is constructed as the archetypical Other to the former.

His solution to accommodating these boundaries he constructed can be described as ‘ethnic federalism’ which is ‘a regime that grants a degree of autonomy and self-government to ethnic groups within a broader constitutional framework’ and involves ‘the diversification of parliamentary government through novel forms of bicameralism or multicameralism allowing representation of different constituencies’.[[337]](#footnote-337)

Awolowo’s core argument was that ‘Nigerians’ were *so* different from each other, only ethno-federalism with essentially self-governing political units each respecting each other’s firm boundaries, guaranteed satisfactory co-existence. Based on selective analogies, he thus presupposed ethno-linguistic homogeneity and autonomy within a delineated politico-territorial unit as a prerequisite for social harmony while an argumentum ad consequentiam is offered to the effect (forced) multicultural co-habitation begs conflict and dissatisfaction.

This latter argument was further reflected in his characterization of the British-imposed tri-regional structure as done ‘without regards to ethnological factors’ with ‘minority groups … at a considerable disadvantage’ as ‘they are forced to be in the midst of other people who differ from them in language, culture and historical background.’ Awolowo’s *Path to Nigerian Freedom* can be described as the first systematic discursive construction of intra-Nigerian boundaries by a prominent Nigerian public figure and set the narrative tone for future identity debates. From then on, national identity discourses mostly struggled to answer the question of whether indeed Nigeria was just a ‘mere geographical expression’ or something more.

In 1949, Awolowo reiterated his ethno-federalist vision in a written foreword to the official constitutional recommendations of the *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* during consultations preceding the 1950 Ibadan Constitutional Conference. Formally addressed to colonial authorities, the document was made available to the various representatives taking part in the consultations and reflected the position of Awolowo and the Yoruba elites who led the *Egbe*. Like *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, this text was thus addressed both to a domestic and foreign (British) audience. The key excerpt stated:

We advocate the grouping of Nigeria into various autonomous states or regions, purely on ethnical basis. Experience of other countries shows that this basis is more natural, and invariably more satisfactory than any other basis. For this reason, we urge that the Yoruba-speaking people in the Northern region, and the Ibo-speaking people in the Western region, should be grouped respectively with the Western and Eastern regions.[[338]](#footnote-338)

This time there is not only an *autonomisation* strategy emphasizing group independence, but also the demand for redrawn and strictly-applied *ethno-territorial* boundaries. Awolowo argued Yorubas currently grouped within the Northern region should be incorporated into the Yoruba-majority Western region while Igbo-speaking areas currently grouped with the West become part of the Igbo-majority Eastern Region.

Keeping the vastly different historical contexts in perspective, Awolowo’s advocated position here was not fundamentally different from that of contemporary right-wing Western anti-multiculturalists who explicitly or implicitly suggest *like living with like* is the best guarantor of social harmony. The only major difference is that the social actors in Western populist discourses are perceived in racial, rather than ethnic, categories. At heart though, it is the same argument.

It is worth mentioning this text was written in the aftermath of the bitter 1948 Lagos Press War discussed in chapter 2, which had led to the ‘politicization’[[339]](#footnote-339) of ethnic associations like the Ibo State Union and *Egbe Omo Odùduwà*. It is thus possible the prevailing bitter atmosphere prompted Awolowo towards an even more ethno-separatist stance than he had presented in his book two years earlier. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the ethno-separatist nature of his text.

Awolowo’s assertion that organizing Nigeria ‘purely on an ethnical basis’ was ‘more *natural*’ than ‘any other basis’ for politico-administrative sub-divisions served to naturalize ethnic identities in essentialist manner as well as impose a hegemony of ethnic-oriented discourses in the political sphere, a scenario beneficial to Awolowo himself, who as an established Yoruba leader stood to gain as a community gate-keeper in such a dynamic. In general, from the late-1940s up till 1951, he consistently constructed thick intra-Nigerian boundaries in the spheres of language, culture and political institutions, presenting these boundaries as the common-sensical basis for the political structuring of Nigeria. The construction of ‘thick’ ethnic boundaries is a call for ethnicity to be a comprehensive organizing principle of political, economic and social life in a society and serves to strengthen and naturalize ethnic identities.[[340]](#footnote-340)

During this period, Azikiwe’s boundary constructions were more audience and context-dependent, though not fundamentally different from Awolowo’s. When addressing Igbo audiences, he deployed nomination and predication strategies fulfilling the discursive function of constructing an Igbo in-group portrayed as marginalized, persecuted and generally treated unjustly by out-groups, British and non-Igbo Nigerians alike.

On June 25th, 1949, he delivered perhaps the most famous speech of his political career at the ‘Ibo State Assembly’[[341]](#footnote-341) (the correct spelling of the group is now considered to be ‘Igbo’, but it used to be spelt ‘Ibo’), a pan-Igbo gathering organized by the Ibo State Union, an ethnic association of which Azikiwe was president at the time, evidencing his leadership role within the group.

Two weeks later, the speech was reproduced in Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot* under the headline‘Self-Determination for the Ibo People of Nigeria’, reflecting the importance Azikiwe and/or his supporters attached to his utterances that day. His demand for ‘self-determination’ for Igbos represented an *autonomisation* sub-strategyserving a larger macro-constructive strategyaimed at‘promoting uniﬁcation, identiﬁcation and solidarity’[[342]](#footnote-342) among Igbos while differentiating them from others. It should be noted this speech too occurred in the months following the 1948 ‘Lagos Press War’ which escalated Igbo-Yoruba tensions significantly, potentially radicalizing Azikiwe’s position along with Awolowo’s.

Azikiwe demanded ‘self-determination’ for Igbos ‘within the framework of a federated Commonwealth of Nigeria and the Cameroons’,[[343]](#footnote-343) via the creation of a unified ‘Ibo state’ located in ‘Ibo-land’. He listed the major cities and towns he considered part of ‘Ibo-land’,[[344]](#footnote-344) representing an autochthonic territorial claim over specific areas of Nigeria and evoking the notion of an Igbo homeland, a named area belonging to the group and to which its identity was linked.

Territoriality has been characterized as ‘the attempt by an individual or group to influence, affect or control objects, people and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. This area is the territory.’[[345]](#footnote-345) The concept has been linked to the material power of space, necessary for the everyday functioning of individuals and communities as well as to the latent emotional power of space. According to this view, when the features of the material power of space are filtered through the human experience of time and process, they contain within them the power to invoke or provoke emotional responses.[[346]](#footnote-346)

The logic of territoriality clearly involves constructing boundaries, uniting and dividing space into ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, fostering autochthonous notions of ‘us’ the ‘real indigenes of the land’ and ‘them’ the outsiders. Such exclusionary utterances signalled to non-Igbo Nigerian citizens living in the territories Azikiwe claimed as ‘Ibo-land’ that they were but mere guests in these areas which ‘belonged’ to Igbos.

Azikiwe’s nomination strategy involved repeatedly labelling Igbos, who had no pre-colonial history of larger-scale centralized authority,[[347]](#footnote-347) as a ‘nation’, presupposing intra-Igbo cohesiveness and uniqueness while differentiating them from Nigeria’s other inhabitants. By depicting Igbos as a ‘nation’, Azikiwe, like Awolowo at the time, portrayed Nigeria as multi-national, thus implying thick intra-Nigerian boundaries. Aspects of this speech containing Azikiwe’s self-presentation of the ‘Ibo nation’ will be analysed in the subsequent chapter.

Importantly for this chapter, Azikiwe constructed boundaries between Igbos and non-Igbo Nigerians by emphasizing their marginalization, exploitation and persecution. His argumentation schemes justifying these claims employed *topos of victim* and *topos of comparison* by means of lexical choices, adjectives and intensifiers:

We have been taxed without representation and our contributions in taxes have been used to develop other areas out of proportion to the incidence of taxation in those areas. It would seem that the Ibo nation is becoming a victim of economic annihilation through a gradual but studied process….it will be found that outside the Government College at Umuahia, there is no other secondary school run by the British government in Nigeria in the Ibo nation. And there is not one secondary school for girls run by the British government in the Ibo nation. In the Northern and Western provinces, the contrary is the case. If a survey of the hospital facilities in the Ibo nation is made, embarrassing results might show some sort of discrimination. Look at the roads of the Ibo nation: how many of them are surfaced with bitumen compared, for example with the roads in the Western provinces and the [Lagos] colony?[[348]](#footnote-348)

His use of the first-person plurals ‘we’ and ‘our’ served to build an in-group identity while constructing out-groups who inhabited ‘other areas’. Azikiwe suggested the British favoured these Others in the ‘Northern and Western provinces’, developing those regions with Igbo funds while planning the ‘economic annihilation’ of Igbos. The systematic and purposeful nature Azikiwe ascribes to this alleged conspiracy served to elevate the existential threat level to Igbos specifically, distinguishing them from others in the country. In this way, regional administrative borders drawn up by colonial officials were transformed into identity boundaries dividing ‘us’ the persecuted here in the ‘Ibo nation’ and ‘them’ the favoured in the ‘Northern and Western provinces.’

Azikiwe cited several other similar grievances to buttress his claim Igbos were being short-changed socio-economically while other Nigerians progressed at their expense. He also deployed the fallacy of illustrative example, presenting emotionalising portrayals of individual instances of alleged discrimination against Igbos as reflecting a pattern of behaviour, claiming ‘what seems to be a calculated attempt to give preference to non-Ibo civil servants’ in Nigeria’s bureaucracy and narrating the instance of an ‘African [magistrate] of non-Ibo nationality’[[349]](#footnote-349) who had allegedly handed unfairly harsh sentences to two Igbo women simply because they were *Igbo*. This clearly emphasized boundaries between Igbos and ‘non-Ibos.’

Azikiwe’s claims Igbo tax-money subsidized other regions proved very divisive. In an example of intertextuality, two years later, Awolowo’s *Nigerian Tribune* cited the speech as proof Azikiwe was a ‘notorious liar’, arguing that contrary to his claims Igbo taxes were developing other regions: ‘the East has been living quite luxuriously on the resources of other regions.’[[350]](#footnote-350) This demonstrates how Azikiwe’s utterances not only served to reinforce intra-Nigerian boundaries, but also provoked emotional and hostile counterclaims which of course only further sharpened boundaries and cleavages.

As suggested earlier, Azikiwe’s boundary-drawing narratives were strongly addressee-dependent. Two major exemplifications in 1950 shed light on how he tailored message to audience. On July 4th, 1950, a National Day of Mourning was held in memory of 21 striking miners killed the previous year in the Igbo-majority city of Enugu on British orders, provoking considerable anger in Nigeria. In a press statement geared towards a national audience, Azikiwe constructed a Nigerian ‘we-group’ united in shared colonial bondage:

Our kith and kin have been slain in the cause of Nigeria. It is for us, the living, to show that their blood shall not have been shed in vain; rather it shall hallow the ground on which it fell. Even the blood of the two innocent children who were shot at Onitsha shall fertilize the barren soil of Nigerian nationalism, and there shall arise a breed of Nigerians with love of freedom in their sinews, and they shall not take a backward step once they are on the march for freedom.[[351]](#footnote-351)

The powerful familial ‘kith and kin’ metaphor referred to Nigerians generally as Azikiwe mentioned no other collective before that phrase and emphasized the miners were ‘slain in the cause of Nigeria.’ His ‘barren soil’ metaphor for Nigerian nationalism was a powerful and relatable unifying appeal in a mostly agrarian society: We need national unity to achieve freedom and to *survive*.

Azikiwe concluded by describing the miners’ deaths as part of a ‘struggle for national survival’,[[352]](#footnote-352) unifying via *topos of threat* from a common external enemy: colonialist Britain. This speech was typical of Azikiwe’s utterances to multi-ethnic audiences where he usually constructed a Nigerian we-group, united via shared oppression by the British. He suppressed intra-Nigerian differences, positioning himself as a Nigerian ‘nationalist’ concerned about all the inhabitants of the country.

In contrast, speaking about the same tragedy to an Igbo audience at the Ibo State Assembly on December 15th, 1950,[[353]](#footnote-353) Azikiwe emphasized the slain miners’ ethnicity, which he had avoided in his July national statement:

Gathered here in the capital of the Eastern province, where the blood of twenty-one Ibo men was shed in order to pay the price of political slavery, we owe it to our conscience as a people not to allow their sacrifice to be in vain. By laying down their lives in what is definitely a part of the common struggle for freedom in Nigeria, the twenty-one miners have bequeathed to us a legacy and it is for us to prove worthy or unworthy of the same. As a true Ibo son, I feel very bitter that twenty-one of my kith and kin should lose their lives under such tragic circumstances. Will you be good enough to stand for a few seconds in memory of these slain Ibo miners.[[354]](#footnote-354)

Here, Azikiwe’s nomination strategy involved emphasizing the miners’ Igbo-ness (thrice within four sentences) while his perspectivation strategy involved presenting himself as an authentic Igbo leader (‘a true Ibo son’). This time ‘kith and kin’ referred to Igbos, rather than Nigerians. While Azikiwe still placed the deaths in a national context (‘part of the common struggle for freedom in Nigeria’), stressing the miners’ ethnicity meant emphasizing *Igbo* sacrifices in the struggle, thus glorifying and reinforcing that particular identity. Azikiwe could have described the slain miners as ‘Nigerians’ throughout the speech but decided not to do so.

Furthermore, he maintained his categorization of Igbos as a unique ‘nation’ being ‘singled out for punitive visitations’ and ‘marked down for wholesale victimization’ by the British.[[355]](#footnote-355) This continued a predication strategy portraying Igbos as the chief victims of colonialism, distinguished from Nigeria’s other inhabitants by their unique suffering. Azikiwe further reinforced intra-Nigerian boundaries while commenting the decision to award 50% of the seats in the central legislature to the North. In the context of upcoming regional assembly elections, Azikiwe stated:

In the North, the feudal aristocrats and their minions have spared no time in making it easier for non-English speaking ciphers and dummies to flood the Northern House of Assembly. With due deference, may I say that these marionettes are entitled to about fifty percent of the seats in the central legislature.[[356]](#footnote-356)

Azikiwe’s nomination and predication strategies involved constructing Northern Others who are characterized very negatively. Northern elites are ‘feudal aristocrats’ while the other Northern social actors referenced are portrayed as mindless and uneducated.

Meanwhile, just two years after his *West African Pilot* described Awolowo’s *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* as an ‘enemy of Nigeria’ that needed to be ‘crushed to the earth’[[357]](#footnote-357), Azikiwe now praised the Yoruba group for being ‘very active in seeing to it that only nationalists and patriots who are pro-nationalist should enter the Western House of Assembly.’ He exhorted his Igbo audience to likewise ‘make it impossible for genuflecting Uncle Toms, shameless stooges, servile stool pigeons, mercenary traitors, unemployed spivs, and professional sycophants’ like those in the North from getting elected into the Eastern Assembly.[[358]](#footnote-358)

Adebanwi described how Azikiwe and Awolowo’s newspaper mouthpieces were ‘historically vociferous against imperialism and British colonialism’[[359]](#footnote-359) in contrast to the main Northern newspaper (*Nigerian* *Citizen*) which avoided anti-colonialist rhetoric and often portrayed the Southern position as immoderate. Consequently, Southern media often portrayed the North as a stumbling block to Nigerian independence, an anchor weighing down the more aspirational South. ‘This condescension to the Northern region seems so natural or conventional, it is hardly treated with caution or caveat’,[[360]](#footnote-360) observed Adebanwi.

Azikiwe’s comments on Northerners in his speech exemplified such condescending attitudes publicized without ‘caution or caveat’, constructing a mental boundary between Northerners portrayed either as autocratic feudal elites or unintelligent colonialist lackeys and Southerners portrayed as egalitarian, aspirational and patriotic ‘nationalists.’ The speech illustrated Azikiwe’s simultaneous construction of boundaries between North and South and differentiation of Igbos from all the rest via their constructed status as the *most victimized* group in Nigeria.

This situational and multi-dimensional nature of his boundary constructions arguably served to strengthen his leadership role among Igbos while simultaneously seeking to expand his political appeal outside this core constituency. However, such was the generally highly-fluid and situational nature of identity discourses in Nigeria that even Azikiwe’s utterances before multi-ethnic audiences sometimes emphasized intra-Nigerian boundaries, for instance, his proposals for political structuring.

In a formal setting addressing members of the Nigerian Legislative Council on April 3, 1950,[[361]](#footnote-361) he criticized the Ibadan Constitutional Conference’s decision to maintain Nigeria’s tri-regionalism on the grounds:

[The tri-regional system] is an artificial system and must inevitably lead towards Balkanization and the existence of chronic minority problems. I suggest instead the division of the country along the main ethnic and/or linguistic groups in order to enable each group to exercise local and cultural autonomy within its territorial jurisdiction.[[362]](#footnote-362)

Like Awolowo, Azikiwe presupposed inter-ethnic tensions within a tri-regional system, essentializing ethno-linguistic identities as inherently and immutably divisive. Unlike Awolowo, however, in this instance, Azikiwe did not even bother to provide any empirical evidence supporting why this *had* to be so. Instead, the audience is expected to believe him based on his personal authority. His solution, mirroring Awolowo’s, was to sub-divide Nigeria into more *natural* ethno-linguisticunits, replacing the tri-regional system which grouped together numerous ethnic collectives in a single region.

Azikiwe emphasis on ethno-group autonomy served to emphasize and naturalize ethnic boundaries and ethnic discourses, potentially beneficial to him as well as Awolowo thanks to their personal leadership positions within their core groups. In this speech, he deployed two far-reaching arguments: first, that there were too many distinct collectives in Nigeria to divide it into just three regions and second, that when such ethno-linguistic collectives are grouped within the same political unit, conflict between them is *inevitable* unless each group is generally in control of their own affairs. Both arguments strongly emphasized intra-Nigerian boundaries.

This ethno-federalist stance reflected Azikiwe’s general position on Nigeria’s structuring from 1943 till 1951 when he switched to supporting a Unitary system. Nnoli persuasively argued this turnaround resulted from political calculations Unitarianism offered his party greater chances of capturing power nationally. This because Azikiwe realized NCNC would likely *not* win the electoral support of most Yorubas and Hausa-Fulanis, the majority groups in Western and Northern Nigeria, thus restricting his party to domination in the Eastern region only if Nigeria remained in a tri-regional structure.[[363]](#footnote-363)

Returning to Awolowo’s narratives, the regionalism entrenched by the 1951 Macpherson Constitution, prompted a discursive shift from emphasizing ethnic boundaries to regional ones. During the 1951 Western assembly elections, his party openly appealed to regional solidarity in campaign messages, urging the region’s inhabitants to:

Vote for the Action Group because it stands for Western solidarity……vote only for the AG if you are a true born Yoruba, a true born Benin, a true born Itsekiri, Urhobo, Western Ijaw, Western Ibo and Yes A true born Nigerian.[[364]](#footnote-364)

While emphasizing Yoruba primacy by mentioning the group first, AG appealed to other groups in the region too, including the ‘Western Ibo[s]’ who Awolowo had recommended be regrouped in the Eastern region just two years earlier. However, since this request had not been heeded by British authorities, and every vote counts after all, his AG party now invited ‘Western Ibos’ to identity as part of a regional ‘we-group’ subsuming smaller-scale ethnic identities. This reflected a strongly-situational and opportunistic boundary narrative driven by immediate political interests.

In Awolowo’s first major speech as party leader during AG’s public inauguration on April 28, 1951, he addressed an audience made up mostly of Yoruba supporters, but also including some non-Yoruba backers in the region. In an attempt to construct a regional ‘we-group’, he asserted that ‘broadly speaking, we [in the West] originated from common stock’ and ‘in any event our political and cultural associations have been of such long standing as to make us look upon one another as close relations.’[[365]](#footnote-365)

Evoking the powerful family/kinship metaphor, Awolowo could plausibly for his audience claim common origins with one major non-Yoruba regional group, the Edos, whose king, the Oba of Benin, custodian of the famous Benin Empire, is believed by some (though this is contested by others) to be descended directly from the mythical Yoruba progenitor Odùduwà. However, other groups in the region shared no such common origin myths with the Yorubas.

For their benefit, Awolowo thus highlighted political and cultural inter-group ties making them view each other as ‘close relations’. This played on distinctions in the extended family system between ‘close relations’ (grandparents, aunts/uncles) and ‘distant relations’ (second/third cousins removed) who usually did not enjoy as privileged a relationship as the former. Awolowo strove to evoke the closest possible familial ties outside the core family between Yorubas and other groups in the region.

However, Awolowo himself characterized his efforts to construct a Western identity as unsuccessful in his 1960 autobiography, stating the ‘non-Yoruba’ inhabitants of the Western region were ‘rabidly anti-Action Group because they were anti-Yoruba’ and considered his party a ‘Yoruba organization.’[[366]](#footnote-366) These antipathies were reflected in AG’s consistent under-performance in the non-Yoruba areas from which the ‘Midwest region’ was later carved out: it lost all ten Midwest seats in the 1954 federal elections, sixteen of twenty in the 1956 regional elections and fourteen of fifteen in the 1959 federal elections.[[367]](#footnote-367) Most of those seats went to Azikiwe’s NCNC, viewed, among other things, as a counterbalance to the forces of Yoruba hegemony in the region.[[368]](#footnote-368)

Despite efforts, Azikiwe too failed to construct a popular ‘Eastern’ identity and non-Igbo inhabitants of the region perceived his party as a primarily Igbo political movement. These failed attempts at constructing regional we-groups suggest significant constraints on group identity construction stemming in part from pre-colonial historical experiences and memories. This view is arguably supported by the fact that while Awolowo and Azikiwe failed to generate popular identification with regional identities in their multi-ethnic regions, Ahmadu Bello did this successfully in Northern Nigeria, which had the pre-colonial historical experience of linguistically and culturally diverse large-scale centralized political units such as the Sokoto Caliphate and Bornu Empire. It also had hundreds of years of the uniting influence of Islam.

**5.3.1 Self-government controversy and aftermath**

Perhaps no single event brought to the fore Bello’s views on boundaries as clearly as the 1953 self-government controversy which almost triggered the break-up of Nigeria. In March that year, Awolowo’s Action Group proposed a motion in the House of Representatives demanding Nigerian self-government by 1956. Azikiwe’s NCNC was in support while Northern members opposed the demand, setting up a North-South divide on the issue of optimal timing for national independence.

During the March 31, 1953 debate in the House, Bello proposed a dilatory motion replacing ‘1956’ with the phrase ‘as soon as practicable.’[[369]](#footnote-369) Addressing members of the House, he stated:

It is true that we politicians always delight in talking loosely about the unity of Nigeria. Sixty years ago, there was no country called Nigeria. What is now Nigeria consisted of a number of large and small communities all of which were different in their outlooks and beliefs. The advent of the British and that of Western education has not materially altered the situation and the many and varied communities have not knit themselves into a composite unit.[[370]](#footnote-370)

In a destructive strategy, Bello dismissed political declarations of an existing national we-group as empty rhetoric. His temporal reference (‘sixty years go’) emphasized Nigeria was a (relatively) recent foreign creation lacking long-lasting political continuity. He emphasized intra-Nigerian boundaries in beliefs and values, implying only people with similar worldviews could constitute a unified community, suggesting Nigeria’s inhabitants were no more a national community in 1953 than during the pre-colonial era.

His nomination strategy in the speech involved employing deictic possessives like ‘our people’ in reference to ‘Northerners’ and ‘their people’ in reference to ‘Southern’ Nigerians in differentiating and distancing fashion and he described Nigeria as an ‘un-unified’ country. Simultaneously, Bello constructed a regional we-group with a strong emphasis on its autonomy (‘we want to make it abundantly clear that the destiny of the North is in the hands of the people of the North’). He also presupposed group consensus on a shared future (‘It is our resolute intention to build our [Northern] development on sound and lasting foundations so that they would be lasting’).

Later during the debate, Bello uttered what he later described as ‘the shortest speech that I have ever made and possibly one of the most important’[[371]](#footnote-371), stating simply that:

The mistake of 1914 has come to light and I should like to go no further.[[372]](#footnote-372)

In a clear allusion to Britain’s 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, Bello described it as a ‘mistake’, thereby negating the very *sense* of the Nigerian project and emphatically constructing a thick North-South boundary. Notably, in his autobiography published a decade later, Bello cited the one-sentence speech as one of his ‘most important’ but did *not* take the opportunity to suggest he had since revised that view, implying by omission he still considered the amalgamation of Nigeria a historical ‘mistake’, albeit one he was forced to live with.

Of the three leaders, Bello’s boundary constructions were the most consistent. Irrespective of audience, setting and context, he portrayed Northern Nigeria as a *distinct* political entity, complete with its own value system, historical experiences and unique identity differentiating it from the rest of the country. His boundary-construction focus was well-reflected in the name of the political party he led from 1954 till his death in 1966: the ‘**Northern** People’s Congress’.

Northern Nigeria constituted three-quarters of the country’s area, held over half its population, and was entitled to 50% of the seats in the House of Representatives (later increased to 55%). As long as its political elites united behind Bello to vote *en bloc* in the national House of Representatives, he did not need the goodwill of Southern Nigerians to realize his political objectives. He thus generally ignored Southern opinions, focussing on the construction of a large-scale 17 million-strong regional *pan-ethnic* we-group he labelled ‘Northerners’, an identity meant to subsume their smaller-scale ethnic and communal identities. Admirers and detractors alike have acknowledged Bello’s significant success[[373]](#footnote-373) in this endeavour and his self-presentation strategies for ‘Northern’ identity will be examined in the next chapter.

In contrast to Bello’s utterances during the 1953 self-government debate, Awolowo’s speech represented an exemplification of his occasional efforts to construct a national we-group where occasion deemed it politic to do so. For instance, addressing the House of Representatives on March 31, he strove to justify his party’s demand for independence by 1956:

The mere fact…. that we Nigerians stand up here today to debate this question [of self-government] is evidence at once of our national humiliation and degradation… We were put into this ludicrous and humiliating position by the British people.…Every time we talk about self-government for this country, the British people turn round and say if we depart from your country, there will be civil strife, there will be war, there will be all sorts of things….It is a matter of historical fact that the most ruthless tribal wars which were fought in this country, were fought under the brutal instigation of the British people and their colleagues the French… They came to buy slaves, and they supplied gun-powder, ammunitions, and other things to our people and said to them- ‘go into the interior and bring slaves.’ They thereby stimulated inter-tribal wars which were designed toward taking people to the shores, selling them to the white traders, who took them to the West Indies, the Americas and other places as slaves…. Now today they are claiming that they brought peace to this country.[[374]](#footnote-374)

Similar to Azikiwe, Awolowo constructed a national we-group united by shared sorrows at the hands of European imperialism. Deploying a *topos of historical fact,* he countered British claims of incessant pre-colonial inter-tribal conflicts with a scapegoating strategy: it was the fault of British and French slave-traders that inhabitants of pre-colonial Nigeria fought their most ‘ruthless’ wars against each other. The inhabitants of what was now known as Nigeria who physically delivered slaves to European slave-traders are passivized, Awolowo’s fallacious implication being they had *no choice* but to supply slaves. In a collective whitewashing strategy, he emphasized a shared [national] innocence and victimhood. Pre-colonial inter-group conflicts are heteronomised; portrayed as externally-inspired, a common trope in African anti-colonialist argumentation schemes.

However, towards the end of his speech, intra-Nigerian divisions resurfaced as Awolowo announced his party would stage a walk-out since they were powerless against Northern leaders’ ability to truncate the self-government motion via their 50% veto-power, stating: ‘we will allow the North alone to run the show by themselves.’ Thus, while attempting national unification, his distancing spatial reference to ‘the North’ ultimately emphasized intra-Nigerian regional boundaries. This reflected the in-built discursive contradictions in trying to construct a Nigerian we-group in a structural reality of three distinct politico-administrative regions inhabited by groups with varying cultures and histories as well as often conflicting interests.

Awolowo and his party colleagues subsequently exited the chambers, joined by NCNC members, demonstrating Southern solidarity on the self-government issue. After the controversial debate, Northern leaders considered secession from Nigeria while Awolowo and Azikiwe floated the idea of declaring an independent Southern Nigeria.[[375]](#footnote-375) Both reactions further reinforced North-South boundaries as did

Awolowo’s press statement accusing Bello of being influenced by ‘white officials whom he adores and worships’,[[376]](#footnote-376) metonymically portraying Northerners as imperialist stooges brainwashed by the British.

During the subsequent constitutional conference convened in London to discuss a way forward, Azikiwe again reversed his position on structuring, re-embracing federalism as the best option. This was a symbolic moment in Nigeria’s identity debates: its three most important leaders now unanimously endorsed the idea intra-Nigerian differences were *so strong* the only route to peaceful co-habitation was via a loose political structure guaranteeing strong autonomy to its component units. Those who had argued for a Unitarian Nigeria with loose internal boundaries had lost the argument.

However, where Azikiwe differed from Awolowo and Bello by now was in his chosen strategy of acknowledging intra-Nigerian differences but downplaying them as *no obstacle* to forging a national we-group. Following his return from the London conference, on August 29th, 1953, he addressed a town hall meeting in cosmopolitan Lagos, recalling his party’s position during the London talks:

We [NCNC delegates]…refused to subscribe to the curious thesis that we were not a nation, or that we could not become a nation, because of our ethnic and linguistic differences. We opposed the idea that because we differed in language, culture, tradition, and outlook, therefore we could not achieve national unity, even at the constitutional level. We remembered the opinion expressed by a group of British parliamentarians, whose views we value highly: ‘Experience shows that, given plenty of time and favourable circumstances, differences of races, language, religion and culture need not prevent the growing of a feeling of national unity.’[[377]](#footnote-377)

Azikiwe justified his belief in a diverse nation-by-volition by citing examples of successful similarly diverse nation-states such as ‘Switzerland and Canada’. Thus, while Awolowo usually deployed comparisons with other multi-ethnic nations to support his arguments for ethno-federalism, Azikiwe deployed them to buttress his arguments a national identity was achievable despite Nigeria’s diversity. Bello generally avoided analogies to other countries altogether.

**5.4 Final stretch to independence (1954-1960)**

The 1954 Lyttleton Constitution ‘marked the end of the nationalist struggle with Britain’ firmly entrenching federalism in Nigeria.[[378]](#footnote-378) Increasingly clear independence would be granted in a few years, the focus turned to preparing for the post-colonial era. In 1954, Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello all became regional premiers, requiring them to officially mediate between various regional groups while simultaneously nurturing the emotional attachment millions of their ethnic kinsmen had developed for them over the years.

While still emphasizing Igbo uniqueness when addressing Igbo audiences,[[379]](#footnote-379) Azikiwe began asserting the emergence of a sense of national identity when addressing multi-ethnic audiences, encapsulated by his oft-characterization of Nigeria as a ‘nation in emergence’.[[380]](#footnote-380) This metaphorical turn of phrase enabled him acknowledge those not convinced a national identity had yet been forged while still positioning him as the harbinger of hope and aspiration for all those eager to believe the nation-building project was succeeding. This was in line with Azikiwe’s general discursive strategy of presenting himself as all things to all people.

For instance, during the 1956 campaign for the Western regional elections, he addressed a rally in Lagos on May 25th, stating:

The issues at stake in this election are both national and regional. We are determined to convince our people that Nigeria is no longer a mere geographical expression but also a historical fact. In the contest that we are now embroiled in, we shall urge our people to reject the Action Group view that Nigeria cannot become a nation because of cultural and linguistic differences. Our stand is that Nigeria is a nation in the emergence and that this political union which has been forged on the anvil of British rule is indissoluble and perpetual.[[381]](#footnote-381)

Alluding to Awolowo’s by-now decade-old famous assertion from *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, Azikiwe argued Nigeria was ‘no longer a mere geographical expression but also a historical fact’, presenting the Nigerian project as firmly-established and irreversible. However, despite emphasizing an emerging national identity, Azikiwe stating his party wanted to ‘convince’ Nigerians their country was ‘no longer a mere geographical expression’, implied they *needed* *some* *persuading* to this viewpoint, a revealing insight into the popular sentiments of the day.

He invited his audience to reject views he imputed Awolowo’s party to the effect intra-Nigerian cultural and linguistic were too thick for nationhood to be possible. While I did not uncover evidence of Awolowo explicitly negating the possibility of Nigeria *ever* becoming a nation, he and his party members were clearly more restrained than Azikiwe in expressing hopes such a development was anywhere near imminent.

Another example of Azikiwe attempting to construct a national we-group was his March 4, 1958 speech to the Legislative Council in the Northern city of Kaduna. Again, seeking to invalidate Awolowo’s ‘geographical expression’ characterization of Nigeria, he advocated de-emphasizing intra-Nigerian boundaries:

This country, Nigeria, can no longer be regarded as a mere geographical expression. It is also an historical expression. The various communities or nationalities inhabiting this country have great traditions and a rich heritage of culture which, if pooled together, can make Nigeria great and enable her to take her rightful place among the family of nations…. It is essential that ill-will be not created in order to encourage a Pakistan in this country. The North and South are one, whether we wish it or not. The forces of history have made it so. We have a common destiny; so, too, have the East and the West. Any attempt from any source to create dissension and make the North feel that it is different from the South and the West from the East, or to make any particular nationality or tribe in Nigeria feel it is different from others, should be deprecated.[[382]](#footnote-382)

Azikiwe emphasized a shared national destiny and sub-national qualities, which, properly harnessed, offered a path to greatness for the national we-group. His predication strategy involved presenting Nigeria’s diversity as a competitive advantage. The prospect of participation in shared greatness remains the most popular nationally-unifying strategy employed by Nigerian politicians till date: the idea a unified Nigeria has the potential for greatness while its various component units on their own lack such potential.

However, in further example of the inherent tensions involved in constructing a national we-group in the midst of intensive and often conflictive sub-national group constructions, Azikiwe weakened his main message by acknowledging there were some who wished Northern and Southern Nigeria had *not* been amalgamated (likely an allusion to Bello). Characterizing Nigeria as a product of the ‘forces of history’ (read: colonialism), he also heteronomised national identity, weakening attempts at asserting a united national we-group. In Nigeria’s identity discourses, the smaller ‘we’ almost inevitably seemed to clash with the bigger ‘We’ even when the *intention* of the speaker appeared to be promoting identification with the bigger ‘We.’

In contrast to Azikiwe, Awolowo’s boundary narratives in the years leading up to independence were generally similar to his utterances the late 1940s. He emphasized the need for ‘true federalism’, which he described as the ‘widest possible application of self-determination’ for the country’s ethnic groups. In a 1956 lecture delivered to students and later distributed in pamphlets across the country, he again likened the Igbos and Yorubas to the Scots and Welsh, emphasizing that despite ‘a process of rigorous assimilation [within Great Britain]…many a Scot and a large number of Welsh still talk of Home Rule.’[[383]](#footnote-383)

While by now Awolowo had switched from describing Nigeria as constituted by ‘national groups’ to constituted by ‘ethnic groups’ or simply ‘diverse peoples’, he continued deploying *topos of fact* and *topos of history as teacher* argumentative schemes to portray the desire for strong autonomy as an inherent-like characteristic of collectives perceiving themselves distinct from others within a political unit, even after centuries of co-existence. Immediately before and during the 1958 London conference deciding Nigeria’s independence date, Awolowo pushed very strongly for new state creation to accommodate intra-Nigerian differences.

Addressing a press conference in the Western regional capital of Ibadan on September 15, 1958, he asserted Nigeria’s ‘ethnic groups have been lumped together by our British overlords without the knowledge or consent of the people concerned, and with little or no regard to their cultural, linguistic and ethnological differences’ repeating his 1940s-era arguments of imposed association and stating:

Instances from other parts of the world, like India, Ceylon, Cyprus, and Britain (before the separation of Eire), have abundantly demonstrated that wherever these [diversity] factors have been ignored, there have invariably been communal strifes and bloodshed. Conversely, wherever these factors have been scrupulously observed, as in Switzerland and Canada, there have always been peace, concord, progress and prosperity among the diverse peoples concerned.[[384]](#footnote-384)

Awolowo deployed a *topos of threat* to buttress his arguments for new state creation reflecting ethnic boundarieswith strongly-decentralized Switzerland and Canada again serving as role model states.In London, on September 22, 1958, he addressed Nigerian and international press in a statement later published in a booklet distributed locally by the Western regional government. Pushing for new state creation, he argued:

Before the advent of the British into Nigeria, the relationship between the different groups was far from cordial; within the ethnic groups there had always been a lot of inter-tribal wars…. it was Britain who brought all the diverse elements in the country together. When we talk of the diverse elements in Nigeria, there is always the danger of regarding them as diverse, in the sense that the Yorkshire man is different or diverse from a Londoner. That is not the true position. In a recent discussion a highly-placed official in Nigeria said, in agreeing with me on this point, that there is more in common between a Sicilian or a Greek villager and an English or British villager, than there is between a Sokoto villager and a Western Ijaw villager. The Greeks and the British have a culture which is derived more or less from the same source and they also belong to the same religious faith, the Christian religion, and this has gone on for centuries…But when you come to consider the relationship between the Sokoto man and the Western Ijaw man, where is the connection? There is none at all, either in language or in culture; they do not derive their culture from the same source, and there was no local interchange of ideas before the advent of the British.[[385]](#footnote-385)

Independence now imminent, gone was the nationally-unifying rhetoric of pro-independence speeches blaming pre-colonial inter-group conflict on European slave-traders. Instead, Awolowo now characterized pre-colonial inter-group relations as ‘far from cordial,’ reflecting the instrumental nature of his identity discourses geared towards achieving political objectives rather than accurately reflecting historical realities.

He repeated his claims Northerners, represented metonymically by the ‘Sokoto man’, didn’t just differ from Southern Nigerians (personified by the ‘Western Ijaw man’) culturally and religiously, they belonged to *different civilizations* sharing *nothing* in common with each other, even after 44 years of amalgamation. He thus returned to constructing very thick boundaries between Northerners and Southerners, portraying their differences as essentially immutable and irreconcilable.

In an article published in *The* *Times* that same day, and thus aimed mainly at its British readership, Awolowo significantly intensified his *topos of threat*, stating:

Before the British pacification of Nigeria, our people were divided into tribal groups which were virtually armed camps. No man was able to move about free from fear- fear of man, of beast, or of the forces of darkness. It has been only in recent years that our citizens have come to feel that they can move in safety from place to place. It has been freely predicted that, when the British leave, tribal rivalries and suspicions will revive. Such has happened in other new nations. It is my belief that this can be avoided through the creation of three new states or regions.[[386]](#footnote-386)

It is important to recall Awolowo desired new state creation in the hopes breaking up the Northern region would deprive it of its majority in the central legislature, thus political considerations likely shaped his rhetoric on this issue. However, irrespective of motive, such utterances constructing highly-hostile past and present inter-ethnic relations clearly served to reinforce intra-Nigerian boundaries and would have been noted by political observers and participants back home.

Like Awolowo, Bello too continued reinforcing intra-Nigerian boundaries in the years leading up to independence while simultaneously constructing a Northern we-group. In his speech addressing NPC’s party convention in May 1954, he demanded strong autonomy for his region. Considering NPC only admitted Northerners as members, Bello would have been addressing a virtually all-Northern audience:

One of our great principles is strong regional autonomy; that is control over our own regional affairs without interference from outside. We ask for strong regional autonomy so that we shall be able to direct our own affairs in the best interest of our people, to protect our people and to help to promote their happiness and prosperity without fear or favour. We asked that each region should have its separate public service.[[387]](#footnote-387)

Apart from consistently deploying the first-person plurals ‘we’ and ‘our’ as well as the deictic phrase ‘our people’ to construct a regional we-group, Bello, like Awolowo, demanded external protections for his group from the decisions and influence of wider Nigerian society.

Like Awolowo, Bello was wont to emphasize thick boundaries dividing North and South. One of the most explicit exemplifications of this came during a 1956 interview with *Manchester Guardian* in which he stated: ‘They [Southern Nigerians] get their civilisation from over the sea; we get ours from over the desert’.[[388]](#footnote-388)

Bello thus evoked a thick civilizational boundary between the Northern and Southern regions of Nigeria, arguing Northerners were shaped by Islamic/Middle Eastern influences while those in the South were Western-oriented. On this issue, he and Awolowo thus concurred, and while *Manchester Guardian* catered to a primarily British and Western audience, as with other major British newspapers, it was also read by Nigeria’s political and intellectual classes who are likely to have taken note of Bello’s boundary-drawing declaration.

This is not to say Bello never made any attempts to de-emphasize inter-regional differences on certain occasions or present them as an enriching factor. An exemplification of such (albeit rare) attempts was his speech addressing a Northern crowd on March 15th, 1959 celebrating the region’s attainment of self-government:

We shall need now more than ever before to draw on our patience and respect for ways of life different from our own…As we march from strength to strength so must we further our intercourse with men of other tribes and other faiths… I know we have our differences, but such differences should not be the occasion for disagreements, but merely a variation which adds more colour to a picture. We must ensure that if we differ it is only in the means we follow in pursuing a single purpose of making this nation great. We can then benefit by the greater variety of ideas that can result from differing viewpoints.[[389]](#footnote-389)

Bello thus presented intra-Nigerian diversity as a plus on the national level, referring to the nation-building project in very positive terms though he warned a few sentences later in the speech that no region would be allowed to ‘dominate’ any of the other regions, implying there were some (non-Northerners presumably) who had such inclinations, ultimately weakening his rare nationally-unifying message.

**5.5 A state without a nation: Independence to civil war**

Nigeria gained independence on October 1, 1960. The British who had mediated between the country’s diverse groups for the previous century were now out of the picture and it was up to leaders like Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello, now popularly known as the ‘Founding Fathers’, to negotiate identity and co-habitation in what Falola and Heaton aptly characterized a ‘state without a nation’ at independence.[[390]](#footnote-390)

Following his party’s coalition agreement with Bello’s NPC, Azikiwe was appointed Nigeria’s first indigenous Governor-General, a ceremonial, though powerfully-symbolic role at the time. While Nigeria remained a constitutional monarchy until 1963 with Queen Elizabeth II officially Head-of-State, Azikiwe de-facto performed this role domestically. In 1963, when Nigeria became a constitutional republic, he was officially appointed its first president, also a symbolic position with real power formally residing in the hands of the NPC-appointed prime minister, Abubakar Balewa, and informally in the hands of Bello, leader of the senior ruling party.

From 1960 till 1966, Azikiwe’s official roles required he promote national unity. Nevertheless, an evolution is clearly discernible in his utterances, from optimistic emphasis on intra-Nigerian commonalities in the months after independence to resigned acknowledgement of seemingly overwhelming differences by the mid-1960s. This shift reflected the rapid upsurge in inter-ethnic tensions in post-independence Nigeria. It all, however, started very optimistically.

On November 16th, 1960, Azikiwe delivered his inaugural address as Governor-General to a Lagos audience made up of the crème de la crème of Nigerian society; political leaders, intellectuals, traditional rulers, business elites and other VIPs as well as foreign guests from other African countries, Britain and America. Six weeks after becoming officially independent, it was a momentous event in Nigeria’s history and Azikiwe presented his vision for Nigerian-ness, emphasizing the constitution guaranteeing equal rights to citizens of all ethnicities needed to be more than just a written document, but ‘a way of life’.[[391]](#footnote-391)

He advocated a civic nationalism and the construction of a *willesnation*: a national ‘we’ based not on notions of cultural, biological or linguistic sameness, but on a collective willingness to adhere to a set of constitutionally-established liberal democratic rules intended to ensure harmonious co-existence and further mutual trust, solidarity and national cohesiveness. In a shift from his 1950s assertions of a ‘nation in emergence’, Azikiwe now presupposed the existence of a Nigerian nation, which was anthropomorphized and imbibed with a ‘personality’, stating that Nigerians’ ‘primary duty’ was ‘to assert the evolution of a single nation- and to project the personality of that nation.’[[392]](#footnote-392)

Common dangers and common enemies alert us on the need for common security. The British came here in 1851 and found us hopelessly divided in tribal compartments. When Britain transferred power to us on 1st October 1960, we were no longer an expression of geography but a reality of history. During all our years of political vassalage we became socially and economically integrated. We have also developed an identity of interest and we have crystallised common nationality.[[393]](#footnote-393)

Referring to ‘common dangers’ and ‘enemies’ Azikiwe strove to unify nationally via a *topos of threat* emphasizing intra-Nigerian unity was needed to preserve independence. Again, striving to invalidate Awolowo’s ‘geographical expression’ characterization, Azikiwe pointed to the colonial-era 1851-1960 as the period during which a sense of Nigerian we-ness had supposedly developed.

Constructing affective ties between people and country (‘love of our country should outweigh the love of our petty selves’), he combined this with an emphasis on shared interests. Azikiwe’s speech thus targeted both the sentimental and the pragmatic: for the more former, there was the pride of being part of an independent ‘African power’ and for the latter, the ‘identity of interest’ that had been developed, all good reasons to accept the ‘historical reality’ of Nigeria and try make it work.

However, after a brief post-independence honeymoon, the struggle for power returned to the fore of public discourse. Awolowo, now opposition leader in the national House of Representatives, quickly adopted a critical stance towards the government, asserting Nigeria was not *really* independent, but still controlled by the West. In a lecture delivered to Nigerian students in London on September 3rd, 1961, he argued[[394]](#footnote-394):

Before independence, our economy was dominated by Britain and her fellow-members of the N.A.T.O. Since independence, we have made no effort to relax this imperialist stranglehold on our economy. On the contrary, we now throw the doors of our country wide open to indiscriminate foreign exploitation. Every conceivable inducement is being given to foreign investors of the Western Bloc to come to Nigeria to exploit our natural resources in whatever way they choose.

Awolowo’s nomination and predication strategies here involved constructing a national we-group experiencing shared exploitation by greedy outsiders (Westerners), returning to the combative anti-imperialist rhetoric deployed during the anti-colonial struggle to rally mass opinion against the British. Needing support from outside his core Yoruba constituency to have a shot at national power, it was clearly in Awolowo’s interest to attempt rally around his person all manner of Nigerians impatient and dissatisfied with the current government.

However, as had happened in other cases where he attempted this, at a point in his lecture, intra-Nigerian differences returned to the fore with his *topos of threat* regarding Bello’s alleged Islamist policies:

We [Nigeria] proclaim neutrality and yet the Sardauna of Sokoto [Bello], with the express consent of Balewa is moving heaven and earth to drag Nigeria into a Commonwealth of Moslem states… As if the Northern Region is not just an integral part of the federation of Nigeria, and as if he is entitled under the constitution to pursue a separate foreign policy for the North, he has, with the open acquiescence of Sir Abubakar, committed the Northern Region to the Arab side in the Arab-Israeli dispute.[[395]](#footnote-395)

Most of the students Awolowo addressed that day would have been Southern Christians who greatly outnumbered Northern Muslim students abroad. They were likely to be alarmed by Awolowo’s claims Bello wished to ally Nigeria with the Muslim world. AG had deployed similar allegations against Bello in 1958, accusing him of an agreement with President Nasser and his United Arab Republic under which a ‘huge sum of money’ was to be paid to NPC to ensure its success in the 1959 federal elections, an allegation Bello vehemently denied, ascribing it to AG’s ‘hatred of Islam and Muslims’.[[396]](#footnote-396)

Awolowo’s suggestions, however inadvertently, ultimately emphasized intra-Nigerian boundaries, in this case religious. However, he generally maintained his attempts at national unification and developing a sense of national sameness via anti-Western rhetoric in the first year following independence. In 1962, he faced an internal party crisis that ultimately led to his imprisonment in 1963 and political inactivity until 1966.

As for Bello, now the most powerful politician in Nigeria as leader of NPC and premier of the largest federating unit, his emphasis remained squarely on constructing a Northern we-group,[[397]](#footnote-397) stating before the Northern House of Assembly in March 1961 that his ‘cherished ideal’ was his party’s motto of ‘”One North, One People and One Destiny”. It is this ideal which holds together the different peoples of this great region, irrespective of tribe or religion.’[[398]](#footnote-398) He also continued emphasizing intra-Nigerian boundaries. In his 1962 autobiography, he asserted Nigerians were so different *no leader* could claim the authority to speak on behalf of the whole country:

Nigeria is so large and the people are so varied that no person of any real intellectual integrity would be so foolish as to pretend he speaks for the country as a whole, and yet there are plenty of people who have no hesitation in making sweeping statements of a general nature (pretending that it has general agreement) which could represent the opinions of only a very small section of the community in a particular area…I want to make this clear, since the position here is quite different from that in smaller and more homogenous countries and great caution must be exercised in accepting general statements.[[399]](#footnote-399)

The implication is that a Yoruba man from Lagos, irrespective of his political or government position, had no authority to speak on behalf of a Hausa-Fulani from Kano, and vice-versa. Bello also further emphasized North-South civilizational boundaries, recalling how Northern members of the House of Representatives had felt about Southern members during the 1950s:

The Northerners, being people of the same outlook for the most part, clung together, and virtually formed a party, usually called ‘Northern Bloc.’ [We] did not care for our stays in [the Southern city] Lagos. The whole place was alien to our ideas of life and we found that the Members for the other regions might well belong to another world so far as we were concerned.[[400]](#footnote-400)

Bello thus suggested a virtually unbridgeable mental gulf between Northern and Southern Nigerians. In the years 1962/63, the most contentious issue in Nigeria, once again pitting North against South, regarded census figures. Since political representation at the centre depended on population numbers, some Southern leaders attempted to alter the calculus by inflating their regions’ figures in the 1962 census, registering an improbable 70 percent population increase in the South as a whole (compared to 1952/53), in contrast to the more plausible 30 percent increase recorded by the North.[[401]](#footnote-401) The initial 1962 results thus had the North with less than 50 percent of the population, giving the Southern regions a combined majority.

The North requested a verification exercise which eventually revised the numbers, returning its numerical advantage.[[402]](#footnote-402) Azikiwe’s NCNC rejected the reassessed figures and a repeat census was conducted in 1963. This merely reaffirmed the status quo arrived at after the verified figures of 1962, ergo giving the North a majority (53.4 percent) of the population. As the ruling party, Bello’s NPC was able to sanction the 1963 figures, maintaining the status quo. Following subsequent inter-ethnic tensions, President Azikiwe addressed the issue of identity in his 1964 New Year’s address to the nation, striking a markedly different tone from his initial post-independence optimism:

We must be honest in making up our minds to remain citizens of one country and not aliens and strangers to one another in a strange country. Our Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Balewa was reported to have said some time ago: ‘I sincerely hope there will come a time when we shall have to talk no more in terms of North, East or West, but Nigeria.’ To this noble and patriotic sentiment, I can only add that we should no longer speak of ‘One South’ or ‘One North’ but we should always emphasize ‘One Nigeria’. We must no longer identify ourselves specifically as ‘Southerners’ or ‘Northerners’ but as Nigerians. I realize that the task before us is not an easy one; but the building of a modern nation cannot be so simple.[[403]](#footnote-403)

Azikiwe acknowledged a sense of national we-ness had not yet materialized. His critical reference to the phrase ‘One North’ alluded to NPC’s motto of ‘One North, One People’, which focussed on constructing a regional we-group. Azikiwe now returned to his 1950s stance of expressing *hope* a national identity would emerge in Nigeria in contrast to his post-independence assertions it *already had*. Acknowledging many citizens identified primarily with their sub-national identities rather than with a Nigerian-ness, a pessimistic note is detectible in Azikiwe’s usually upbeat narratives on identity.

The census row set the stage for the showdown in the December 1964 federal elections, widely perceived as a North vs South battle between Bello’s NPC on the one hand (assisted by his new anti-Awolowo Yoruba allies) and a Southern alliance between Azikiwe’s NCNC and Awolowo’s AG, united under the acronym UPGA (United Progressives Grand Alliance).[[404]](#footnote-404) The elections were marred by rigging, violence and a campaign heavily entrenched in ethnically-polarizing rhetoric.

By April 1965, Azikiwe admitted ethnic boundaries had proven insurmountable and efforts to build a sense of national we-ness had failed. In an article for *Foreign Affairs* geared towards global intellectuals, policy makers and Nigeria’s political class, he advocated new state creation to resolve inter-group tensions, now reverting to his 1940s-era position:

One formidable barrier to be hurdled by this young Republic is the question of creating more states…in 1943, I had suggested that Nigeria should become a federation of eight protectorates, but in 1946 Nigeria was officially divided into three virtually separate regions...when I proposed that Nigeria should become a federation of eight regions, I was being political, and not sociological, in my approach. I did not necessarily overlook the tribal factor, but in my innocence, I deliberately minimized it. Within five years, tribalism had reared its horrid head and Nigerian politics was saturated with its obnoxious ramifications. Since then tribalism has displaced patriotism as the center of political gravity and Nigerian leaders have been manoeuvred to dissipate their energies and turn against themselves.[[405]](#footnote-405)

Azikiwe stating that ‘tribalism’ had driven Nigerian politics since the late 1940s was a remarkable assertion from someone who had consistently argued since the 1950s that Nigeria was close to becoming, or in fact already was, a nation. Whether Azikiwe ever *really* believed his declarations is a matter outside the scope of this study. Of relevance however was his assertion that due to ‘tribalism’ Nigeria’s leaders had ‘been manoeuvred to dissipate their energies and turn against themselves.’

Passivizing Nigerian politicians as ‘manoeuvred’ by ‘tribalism’, Azikiwe accorded destructive controlling agency to the social phenomenon of ethnicity itself which he personified (‘reared its horrid head’), implying ethnic sentiments amongst the wider population were so strong, Nigerian politicians had simply been forced to accommodate them. This essentially absolves political elites like himself of any blame in exacerbating inter-ethnic conflicts. Clearly by now, Azikiwe had forgotten his portrayal of Northerners as ‘illiterate dummies’ and his claims Igbos were subsidizing the rest of Nigeria.

His political solution was to divide Nigeria ‘according to the main nationalities or linguistic groups (not ethnic groups) which form the bulk of the population’. He insisted groups like Yorubas and Igbos not be described as ‘ethnic groups’ but as ‘nations *or* linguistic groups’, portraying Nigeria as a multinational state as he had done in the 1940s.

I prefer to use the more correct anthropological terminology because there has been loose talk about ‘tribes’, ‘ethnic groups’, ‘races’ etc by some ill-informed but well-meaning Nigerians and by many ‘experts’ from abroad. Professor Ashley Montagu correctly said that without language human culture would be impossible; thus, it is ‘the great stimulator and binder’. Those who speak the same language generally come under the influence of the environment into which they are born.[[406]](#footnote-406)

Azikiwe thus effectively equated linguistic groups with nations, portraying language as the chief boundary marker and shaper of social attitudes, using an *argumentum ad verecundiam* to justify this assertion. He did not, however, explain if he considered every group which had developed a distinct language to be a ‘nation’, for if this were the case, it would make Nigeria a country of hundreds of nations since hundreds of languages are spoken on its territory!

The January 15, 1966 coup ended Azikiwe’s political career via his removal as president and Bello’s via his assassination. As for Awolowo, it was not until his release from prison in 1966 that he returned to active public discourse. In a series of articles published in his *Nigerian Tribune* in 1967, he proffered his vision for negotiating boundaries.

By now, thousands of Igbos had been massacred in the North, an Igbo exodus back to the Eastern region was underway and talk of impending civil war was commonplace.[[407]](#footnote-407) Awolowo’s articles were addressed to *Tribune* readers, (mainly Yorubas), but also the general Nigerian public. By now he had been ‘elected’ *Asiwaju* (Leader) of the Yorubas via popular acclaim at a 1966 gathering of Yoruba political, cultural and traditional elites who desired a spokesperson in what was shaping out to be a defining period in Nigerian history.

In a May editorial, Awolowo returned to his assertions of twenty years earlier in *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, namely that Nigeria was a multi-national state and no such thing as a Nigerian identity existed:

The so-called common ‘Nigerian nationality’- which is a complete misnomer as there is no such thing as a Nigerian nation anyway- is a veneer or façade consciously or unconsciously put up by some Nigerians to cover up what many of their fellow men see quite plainly as rabid nationalism. There have, it must be admitted, been some measure of cultural diffusions among many of the national groups. The Yoruba style of dress which is itself a synthesis of Hausa/Fulani styles, is now prevalent in most parts of the country. The Onitsha Ibos and their Edo neighbours have a lot in common in the matter of chieftaincy paraphernalia. But all these together with some British cultures which we pretend to have adopted, are superficial and do not in any case affect the hardest core of all cultural divergencies- language.[[408]](#footnote-408)

Allowing for some little-relevant intra-Nigerian similarities, Awolowo concluded these were ‘superficial’ and did not affect the core boundary marker, which he identified as *language* as Azikiwe had done in his 1965 *Foreign Affairs* article. His characterization of those expressing belief in a Nigerian nationhood as disingenuous was reminiscent of Bello’s 1953 self-government speech criticizing ‘loose talk’ of national unity. Explicitly asserting Nigeria constituted ‘51 nations’, Awolowo stated:

All the fifty-one Nigerian nations differ as widely in their culture as do any group of nations in any part of the world. For instance, their political institutions, customary usages, basic religious beliefs, and even food habits are so divergent that neither British rule nor Christian and Islamic civilizations have brought about any permanent assimilation.[[409]](#footnote-409)

This reflected a full-fledged return to his 1940s position, with the added assertion that Nigeria’s groups differed so profoundly in culture, political institutions, customs and religious beliefs neither *colonialism*, *Christianity* or *Islam* had proven strong enough to subsume these boundaries. Intra-Nigerian boundaries are thus constructed in essentialist terms, as more or less immutable. Again, Awolowo called for an ethno-federalist structuring with language prioritized as the boundary marker.

In a follow-up May 1967 article in *Nigerian* *Tribune*, Awolowo stated he and other pro-independence leaders had feigned attachment to the idea of Nigerian nationhood during the anti-colonial struggle in the 1950s for tactical purposes of presenting a ‘united front’[[410]](#footnote-410) against the colonial overlord. Since this strategic pretence was no longer sustainable post-independence, ‘hope of economic advantage’ remained the sole (!) motivation for keeping Nigeria together.[[411]](#footnote-411) He emphasized intra-Nigerian boundaries while downplaying intra-ethnic differences, asserting a ‘solidarity within each of the national groups in the country’.[[412]](#footnote-412) Awolowo’s boundary narratives thus come full circle during the period under study.

**5.6 Concluding remarks**

While, with varying degrees of emphasis and intensity, Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello all constructed and reinforced intra-Nigerian boundaries in culture, language, religion, pre-colonial history, social attitudes and political institutions, they made contradictory counter-claims as well, evidencing the generally ambiguous nature of identity narratives in Nigeria at the time. However, most of this ambiguity was to be found in Azikiwe’s discourses, which were strongly audience and context-dependent and shifted over the years from emphasis to de-emphasis on intra-Nigerian boundaries.

Up until the early-1950s, when addressing Igbo audiences, Azikiwe strongly emphasized intra-Igbo sameness in the spheres of language, history, political institutions and behavioural patterns while differentiating them from other Nigerians by portraying them as the most persecuted, marginalized and disenfranchised group in Nigeria. However, his nationally-targeted discourses, though not always consistently, usually strove to downplay intra-Nigerian boundaries and construct a Nigerian we-group united by shared sorrows under colonialism and a common destiny.

During the mid-1950s, with his ascension to power, he started asserting the emergence of a Nigerian nationhood, actively striving to invalidate Awolowo’s 1947 description of Nigeria as a ‘mere geographical expression’, a phrase which came to symbolize the ultimate discursive negation of an existent Nigerian ‘we’. While acknowledging Nigeria’s diversity, Azikiwe often deployed a *topos of historical fact* to portray the thinning of intra-Nigerian boundaries as an ongoing, inevitable and irreversible historical process.

In the early 1960s, as Nigeria’s symbolic number-one citizen, he actively strove to thin intra-Nigerian boundaries, asserting a sense of national ‘we’ already existed in the minds of the country’s inhabitants. However, by 1964, undeniable inter-ethnic conflicts prompted him to shift course and admit this was not yet the case. In 1965, he admitted there was no sense of national we-ness, asserting ‘tribalism’ had triumphed. His proffered solutions for accommodating Nigeria’s diversity shifted from ethno-federalism (1943-1951), to Unitarianism (1951-1953) and back to federalism from 1953 onwards. Azikiwe’s boundary narratives can be characterized as an ambiguous combination of political opportunism and wishful-thinking.

Awolowo rather consistently constructed and emphasized thick and divisive intra-Nigerian boundaries in the spheres of culture, language, political institutions and behavioural patterns, focussing especially on inter-regional North/South differences. While on occasions he strove to construct notions of a national ‘we’ united by the shared humiliation of foreign domination and a common destiny, these attempts were overshadowed by his regular Othering of the North which was portrayed as the antithesis of the progressive South and by his destructive strategies occasionally explicitly negating the existence of a national identity.

His proffered solution to accommodating intra-Nigerian differences, which he portrayed in essentialist and immutable fashion, was ethno-federalism, though he characterized it simply as ‘federalism’. He categorized Nigeria’s identity groups variously over the years depending on what was politically acceptable at the time (‘nations’, ‘ethnic groups’, ‘linguistic groups), but always presented them as collectives very distinct from each other. To support his ethno-federalist case, he often deployed *topos of history as teacher*, *topos of reality* and *topos of fact* presenting his arguments as common-sensical, objective and supported by empirical evidence from other multi-ethnic/multi-national states. While entertaining the possibility a sense of national sameness could potentially emerge, he was restrained in expressing such hopes. Awolowo could be described as an agnostic on Nigerian nationhood.

Bello consistently constructed and reinforced thick intra-Nigerian boundaries in the sphere of cultural attitudes and values, most especially between North and South. While political opposites on many issues, he and Awolowo articulated very similar views on intra-Nigerian boundaries and differences, both emphasizing the need for significant group autonomy. He did not express belief a Nigerian sameness could emerge, at most a mutually-beneficial inter-regional cooperation. He portrayed intra-Nigerian differences as problematic, while portraying intra-Northern multi-ethnic and multicultural diversity as an enriching factor. Bello could be described as an extreme sceptic regarding the eventual emergence of a genuine sense of we-ness among the inhabitants of Nigeria though this was never stated explicitly.

In this chapter, I have thus shown how boundaries were discursively constructed, reinforced and sometimes de-emphasized by Nigeria’s founding fathers in their identity narratives, helping shape societal perceptions on intra-Nigerian similarities and differences during the period under study.

**Chapter 6 Narratives of Self-Presentation**

**6.1 Introduction**

This study has adopted a social constructivist framework assuming ‘ethnicity and race are not simply labels forced upon people; they are also identities that people accept, resist, choose, specify, invent, redefine, reject, actively defend, and so forth. They involve an active “we” as well as a “they”. They involve not only circumstances, but active responses to circumstances by individuals and groups guided by their own perceptions, dispositions and agendas’.[[413]](#footnote-413) As mentioned earlier, Cornell and Hartmann highlighted three issues dominating group construction: the *boundary* that separates group members from non-members, the *meaning* attached to the identity and the *perceived position* of the group within society.[[414]](#footnote-414)

The previous chapter investigated boundary constructions by Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello. This chapter will investigate the *meaning* assigned to sub-national identities. While all three aspects of the construction process involve asserting meaning to identity, I will narrow my analytical focus in this chapter to constructive strategies deployed in the *self-presentations* of sub-national identities.

Since leaders employ the ‘raw materials of history, cultural practise, and pre-existing identities’[[415]](#footnote-415) in identity constructions, I will occasionally compare these self-

presentations with scholarly characterizations of pre-colonial societal patterns dominant within the collectives presented. This should help shed light on how the leaders’ narratives drew upon pre-existing identities and historical experiences, thus constituting part of an on-going construction process which *intensified* during the period under study. None of the three leaders constructed an identity ‘from scratch’, so to say.

Preliminary analysis suggests their self-presentations can be grouped under three thematic spheres: *constructions of a shared past*; *constructions of a shared present and future*, and *narrative presentations of a prototypical group member*. Attention will be drawn to similarities and dissimilarities in constructive strategies within these thematic spheres. This should help shed light on whether we can infer any generalized patterns of identity construction or whether the leaders deployed very different strategies, rendering each case study unique and circumstantial. The chapter will start with some preliminary remarks, followed by an analysis of each of the main themes in a separate section and some concluding remarks at the end of the chapter.

**6.2 Preliminary remarks**

A striking recurrence in the texts analysed was Awolowo and Azikiwe’s use of multiple conceptual categories such as ‘nation’, ‘ethnic group’, ‘linguistic group’ or ‘tribe’ to describe Nigeria’s major sub-national groups, including their own core group. Operating politically in an English-language discourse-world dominated by Western conceptualizations of identity categories, the leaders needed to characterize their groups in terms understandable to this discourse-world *and* potentially advantageous to them personally as well as the collective.

For instance, there were historical phases it appeared beneficial to define Yorubas and Igbos as ‘nations’, like in the late 1940s when Awolowo and Azikiwe demanded significant autonomy for their groups on the premise they constituted distinct nations with their own language, history, political institutions and cultural traditions. However, in the 1950s both leaders became regional political office-holders, requiring them to be seen as representing the interests of their (multi-ethnic) regions, rather than that of a single ethno-group. Both accordingly shifted from claims-making on behalf of the Yoruba and Igbo ‘nations’ to regional-specific categorizations (‘the people of Western Nigeria want…’, ‘Easterners are demanding…’ etc).

Furthermore, both men nursed ambitions of national leadership in an independent Nigeria, which by the mid-1950s, appeared increasingly imminent. It thus became more politic for them to categorize Yorubas and Igbos as ‘ethnic groups’ or ‘linguistic groups’ to avoid accusations of obstructing *Nigerian nation-building* by claiming nation-status for their groups.

With both leaders wanting to present themselves as Nigerian nationalists who transcended ethnic particularisms, explicit constructions of Yoruba-ness and Igbo-ness were largely forgone in the 1950s, resurfacing in Awolowo’s narratives after his party lost the all-important 1959 federal elections determining Nigeria’s first post-independence government.

By 1967, when ethnic tensions had laid bare the fragility and shallowness of Nigerian nationalism, Awolowo had reverted to categorizing Yorubas (and other major groups in Nigeria) as ‘nations,’[[416]](#footnote-416) likely reflecting his heartfelt stance throughout the period under study, political correctness aside. As for Azikiwe who held national positions in post-independence Nigeria, as Governor-General (1960-63) and constitutional president (1963-66), he generally refrained from explicit constructions of Igbo-ness from the 1950s till the end date of this study.

Though Bello did not explicitly categorize Northern Nigeria a ‘nation’, he de-facto conducted a Northern nation-building project within the Nigerian nation-building project, conveying the *idea* of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nation by volition, a Northern *Willesnation*, affirming Paden’s description of him as a ‘strong proponent of Northern nationalism’[[417]](#footnote-417) who considered Northern Nigeria a ‘federation within a federation’.[[418]](#footnote-418) As mentioned in previous chapters, political control of the North virtually guaranteed control of the centre. Bello never strove to burnish his Nigerian credentials like Awolowo and Azikiwe; he was the only of the three who knew he could become Nigeria’s most important political actor without being seen as a *Nigerian* statesman. All he needed was to be seen as a Northern statesman.

However, strategic considerations aside, there were also instances of Azikiwe characterizing Nigeria’s collectives as ‘linguistic groups’, ‘ethnic groups’, ‘nationalities’ and ‘tribes’ in one speech without specifying who qualified as what and according to which criteria.[[419]](#footnote-419) Meanwhile, in a major article for *Foreign Affairs* in 1965, he equated ‘linguistic groups’ with nations[[420]](#footnote-420) without explaining whether he considered every group that shared a distinct language a ‘nation’ which would render Nigeria a country of hundreds of nations.

Similarly, Awolowo declared the existence of ‘various national or ethnical groups in the country’[[421]](#footnote-421) as if the two categorizations were interchangeable while Bello occasionally referred to Northern Nigeria as a ‘country’ and ‘region’ in the same speech.[[422]](#footnote-422) While some of these conflicting terminologies served the perpetuation of immediate political and power interests as shall be highlighted in this chapter, some examples suggest a genuine conceptual ambivalence on how to adequately categorize Nigeria’s groups rather than purposeful discursive strategies, reflecting the instability and in-built contradictory natureof identity discourses in Nigeria. This in turn reflected the whirlwind of change the country underwent during the period under study.

Between 1945 and 1967, Nigeria experienced numerous major constitutional changes, separate regional evolutions to self-government, a near break-up of the country following disagreements over the timing for independence, independence, transformation to a constitutional republic, hotly-disputed census and election results, and two military coups which led to the start of a Civil War.

In such a dynamic national environment over which Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello ultimately exercised limited control -- either due to British officials being the ultimate decision-makers during the colonial era or due to virtually autonomous regional governments in the post-independence period -- they needed to articulate discourses potentially beneficial to them, their political parties and their sub-national groups while simultaneously keeping the Nigerian project alive. It is hardly surprising the constant discursive juggling-act often led to ad hoc, incohesive and ambivalent identity narratives.

**6.3 Constructing a shared past**

This section shall start by investigating how the leaders, starting with Azikiwe, narrated a shared past. Identity narratives ‘portray concepts of history which, through certain linguistic means, identify and designate particular historical events and facts which are deemed relevant for a large number of human beings and establish chronological and causal relations.’[[423]](#footnote-423)

One component usually found in narratives constructing nations[[424]](#footnote-424) and ethnic groups -- a foundational myth -- was generally absent in Azikiwe’s presentations of Igbo-ness. This was likely due to a pre-colonial history of highly-decentralized Igbo-speaking communities usually ‘organised into separate and autonomous political societies coterminous with the village’,[[425]](#footnote-425) many with varying foundational myths of their own. Singling out the version of one sub-group as *the* Igbo founding myth risked alienating others and fostering divisions, so Azikiwe usually deployed what DHA refers to as a *strategy of avoidance* on this issue.

More so the case in the 1950s when he attempted to construct an ‘Eastern’ identity in a region constituting diverse ethno-linguistic groups, each with their own preferred accounts of the pre-colonial era. However, in one instance, Azikiwe did refer vaguely to the ‘creation’ of the ‘Ibo nation’ by the ‘God of Africa’,[[426]](#footnote-426) deploying a metaphysical creation metaphor without mentioning any specific year or even century this beginning moment supposedly happened.

In contrast to Azikiwe, Awolowo’s presentations of Yoruba-ness, traceable to his 1945 founding of the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group *Egbe Omo Odùduwà*, drew strongly on an already existing and popular foundational myth. Here too, history played a major role. While even at the height of the once-powerful Oyo Empire, pre-colonial Yoruba-speakers never constituted a unified socio-political unit, forging instead autonomous city-states each fostering their own distinct identities, a myth of common ancestry from a progenitor, *Odùduwà*, had been popularized by their traditional rulers before colonization.[[427]](#footnote-427)

All Yoruba-speaking peoples thus agreed descent from *Odùduwà*, though some were still reluctant to self-describe as ‘Yorubas’ during the 1940s,[[428]](#footnote-428) explaining Awolowo’s unificatory strategy naming the group he established *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* (Official translation: Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa) and not, for instance, *Egbe Omo Yoruba*. By reinventing *Odùduwà* as the central symbol of Yoruba-ness, Awolowo narratively linked past to present with a foundational myth that also provided a geographical point of origin for the group, the city of Ile-Ife, from where *Odùduwà*’s children purportedly spread out to establish the various Yoruba-speaking kingdoms.

The discursive choice deployed a powerful familial metaphor. While the official English-language translation of *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* was ‘Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa’, which emphasized common descent by translating the Yoruba word ‘*omo*’ as ‘descendants’, in everyday Yoruba parlance, ‘*omo*’ usually refers to ‘child’ or ‘children’. ‘*Omo* Adekoya’ literally means Adekoya’s child or children depending on whether the reference is to a particular child of Adekoya’s or two or more of his children. Rather than the more formalistic-sounding translation, it is thus likely the *meaning* associated with the term ‘*Egbe Omo Odùduwà*’ by Yoruba-speakers, especially those who spoke mainly or only Yoruba, would be more akin to ‘Society of the Children of Oduduwa’, a family/kinship metaphor significantly more powerful than the official translation allows for.

Chilton suggested ‘metaphor works by mapping well-understood source domains of experience onto more schematic ones’[[429]](#footnote-429) asserting ‘some social concepts are themselves basic and provide source domains. The linguistic evidence suggests that this would be true for “family”, which is mapped onto social entities that are not in the basic sense families.’[[430]](#footnote-430)

It appears the social concept of ‘family’, certainly a focal point in the lives of Yoruba-speakers, was indeed mapped onto the social entity of ‘Yoruba’ Awolowo constructed, with all the mutual obligations and familiarity that entailed. In this construction of a ‘Yoruba family’, *Odùduwà* served as the paternal father-figure. Adebanwi narrated how Awolowo later came to be viewed by Yorubas as the ‘modern *Odùduwà*’[[431]](#footnote-431) and his re-popularization of the foundational myth is considered crucial to his successful construction of a popular pan-Yoruba identity.[[432]](#footnote-432)

As for Bello, his consistent focus on constructing a regional pan-ethnic political community steered him towards narratives of origin highlighting the socio-historical circumstances surrounding the emergence of ‘Northern Nigeria’ rather than any implausible claims to a single foundational myth in a region comprising three major culture zones, over 200 ethno-linguistic groups, varying religious beliefs, and conflicting historical legacies.[[433]](#footnote-433) Bello thus effectively portrayed Northern Nigeria as a *social-construct*. His stance, before both Northern and foreign audiences, is exemplified in his welcome speech to Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to the region in 1956:

Your Majesty will be aware that your loyal subjects in this Region number eighteen million spread over 280,000 square miles. We are a Region of many peoples. Northern Nigeria, as it is today, came into being through the accident of history, the courage of our distinguished ancestors, and the foresight of your public servants whom your forebears sent to this country.[[434]](#footnote-434)

Bello presented the ‘North’ as a product of pre-colonial historical events, colonialism and local agency. He credited British administrators with helping further a historical process that involved ‘accident’ but had also been purposefully engineered by Northerners (‘our distinguished ancestors’), emphasizing *local agency* in the construction process. Bello avoided presenting Northern Nigeria as the externally-imposed colonial construct it actually was, choosing to portray it as a community that had already been evolving towards unification before the advent of colonialism. Thus, with regards to group beginnings, Azikiwe and Awolowo evoked metaphysical origins, the former via vague references to a divine creator he personally constructed (‘the God of Africa’) while the latter exploited and reinforced an already-existing creation myth involving a divine progenitor (*Odùduwà*). Bello, meanwhile, narrated a socially-constructed identity.

Moving from group origins to general constructions of a shared past, while Azikiwe referred rarely and vaguely to the former, his narratives on the latter were richer in content. An exemplification was his June 25th, 1949 ‘presidential’ address to the first Ibo State Assembly in which he deployed the creation metaphor mentioned earlier. In a constructive strategy deploying *singularisation*, Azikiwe presented Igbos as a nation whose glorious past evidenced their exceptionalism, a key trope that shall be investigated more closely in a later section:

It would appear that the God of Africa has specially created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages. Otherwise is it not fortuitous that the Ibo nation is one of the few remnants of indigenous African nations who are still not spoilated by the artificial niceties of Western materialism? Is it not historically significant that throughout the glorious history of Africa, the Ibo is one of the select few to have escaped the humiliation of a conqueror’s sword or to be a victim of a Carthaginian treaty? Search through the records of African history and you will fail to observe where in any pitched battle any African nation had either marched across Ibo territory or subjected the Ibo nation to a humiliating conquest. Instead there is evidence to show that the martial prowess of the Igbo nation at all stages of human history had enabled them not only to conquer others but also to adapt themselves to the role of preserver of all that is best and noble in African culture and tradition.[[435]](#footnote-435)

Using rhetorical strategies of metaphor and vagueness, Azikiwe asserted the divine creation of an ‘Ibo nation’ sometime in an unspecified past, portraying Igbo-ness in timeless fashion which avoided the pitfalls of mentioning a specific date that could be questioned while simultaneously naturalizing the identity in an aura of permanence.

He asserted a valorous past without referencing any specific battles collectively fought by Igbos against a mutual enemy (historically, they had never fought any major battles together).[[436]](#footnote-436) However, deploying an *argumentum ad verecundiam* Azikiwe rested his claims on the authority of ‘records of African history’ without specifying the source of these ‘records’. In further rhetorical vagueness, he provided no specific examples as to which aspects of the multiplicity of African cultural traditions Igbos had helped ‘preserve’ as he asserted. Addressing the pan-Igbo gathering the following day at the Assembly, Azikiwe reiterated his claims of a glorious history while consistently keeping his temporal references as vague as possible, simply asserting Igbos were a ‘nation with a glorious tradition and historic past’.[[437]](#footnote-437)

Another argumentative scheme he deployed to construct a shared past was the *topos of history as teacher*, present in his speech addressing the Ibo State Assembly on December 15, 1950. Azikiwe asserted that ‘if the lessons of history mean anything, it must be conceded that the Igbo people, though numerous, are friendly in their disposition, charitable in their relations with others and artistic in their temperament’.[[438]](#footnote-438) Here, he simultaneously constructed a shared past as well as an Igbo prototype (presentations of the latter shall be analysed in a subsequent section).

In the 1950s, Azikiwe’s constructions of a shared Igbo past became rare, one notable instance being a December 1954 speech to the Ibo State Assembly in which he asserted Igbo ‘social institutions’ had played a key role ‘in the cultural development of the African peoples’ and referred to the survival of Igbo ‘artefacts, mores and conventions, in spite of the ruthlessness of classic slavery and the clash of cultures which followed the path of European imperialism in Africa’.[[439]](#footnote-439) Azikiwe hence implied long-lasting shared Igbo cultural traditions stretching back 400 years to the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

As for Awolowo, the best exemplifications of his construction of a shared Yoruba past were to be found in two books; his 1947 *Path to Nigerian Freedom* and a 1960 autobiography written while he was still very active in Nigerian politics. In the former, he narrated a shared political past, asserting Yorubas ‘had a highly developed system of government long before the white man came’, and that:

‘…the constitution of the Yorubas is analogous to what is known as constitutional monarchy. The dictatorial powers which some Yoruba chiefs are wielding today are the making of the British government, who at the beginning misconceived the true nature of the Yoruba monarchy.’[[440]](#footnote-440)

Linguistically, Awolowo constructed a shared past via recurring use of singular forms (‘*the* constitution of the Yorubas’, ‘*the* Yoruba monarchy’) to imply the pre-colonial existence of a single, homogenized and centralized Yoruba state. As previously mentioned, no such centralized and unified state had existed in pre-colonial times. Similar to Azikiwe, his vague temporal reference to Yoruba political institutions existing ‘long before the white man came’ served to imply a long-standing shared political past without pointing to any specific time-frame.

Like Azikiwe, Awolowo generally ceased constructions of Yoruba-ness in the 1950s in favour of an emphasis on regional identities. However, in his 1960 autobiography, he returned to constructing a Yoruba past, though somewhat critically:

‘…in all their long history they [the Yorubas] had waged wars against one another. When the Portuguese and the British had visited their coasts in the course of their slave trade, the Yorubas had shown no qualm of conscience in conducting violent and merciless slave raids on one another. These inter-tribal wars and slave raids had come to an end under the so-called Pax Britannica. But the mutual hatred and acerbity which were attendant on them lingered.’[[441]](#footnote-441)

Awolowo thus narrated a long-lasting but problematic shared history. Nigerian independence assured along with his position as the most prominent Yoruba political leader, Awolowo allowed himself a frank assessment of pre-colonial Yorubaland in contrast to the 1950s when negative colonial portrayals of Africans were countered by pro-independence leaders with categorically positive and uncritical self-presentations to further their strategic aims of justifying and attaining self-government. Awolowo, who used to lay sole blame for the slave trade on Europeans, now admitted Yorubas had been ‘enthusiastic’ participants, no longer backgrounding them as passive victims.

He acknowledged intra-Yoruba wars had been halted by British colonialism, an assertion that would have been deemed heretic if uttered during the peak of the independence struggle in the 1950s, revealing the instrumental approach to historical and identity discourses during this period. However, it is also worth noting that Awolowo presented this shared but conflict-ridden Yoruba past as a phenomenon since overcome by his unificatory efforts starting with the establishment of *Egbe Omo Odùduwà*  in the mid-1940s. Constructing this negative past thus served Awolowo’s self-presentation as the great unifier, the ‘Otto Bismarck of the Yoruba nation’[[442]](#footnote-442) as Abegunrin characterized him.

As for Bello, he constructed a shared Northern past by highlighting the region’s pre-colonial achievements, its well-developed political systems which had spawned vast centralized empires like the Sokoto Caliphate, cities like Kano dating back 1000 years and the rich traditions and cultures this long history of social interaction had produced over the centuries.[[443]](#footnote-443) As he told Northern House of Assembly members in July 1951:

When the British came… they found that we had our chiefs, schools, judges and all that was necessary for civilization.[[444]](#footnote-444)

Asides instilling pride in Northerner-ness, such utterances served to inculcate a sense of shared history predating the colonial-era, a foundation for Bello to rest his presentation of a cohesive political community known as ‘the North.’ In another constructive strategy using a *topos of comparison* to instil a sense of history and regional pride, Bello contrasted the complexities of pre-colonial Northern political institutions to those of the Igbos in the East, asserting in a July 1952 speech to the Northern House of Assembly that:

Fifty years ago, in the East the unit of local administration rarely extended beyond the village, whereas in the North our units covered much the same large areas as they do today.[[445]](#footnote-445)

However, the people of Northern Nigeria shared conflicting historical legacies. Even in the pre-dominantly Muslim areas where Islam was a strong uniting factor, historic rivalries between the Sokoto Caliphate and the Bornu Empire still created intra-Northern tensions.[[446]](#footnote-446) Meanwhile, the Christian and animist communities in the southernmost parts of the region had their own historical legacies, often including pre-colonial conflicts with the Fulanis who ran the Sokoto Caliphate Bello’s ancestor founded.[[447]](#footnote-447)

Thus, while Bello occasionally reminded Northern audiences of these empires as evidence Northerners were capable of building large-scale functioning state systems, his constructive narratives focussed mostly on *shared values* as that which truly defined Northern-ness and united the region’s inhabitants above their ethnic, religious and historical differences. This theme shall be investigated in a subsequent section.

Overall, the three leaders generally avoided detailed narratives about the colonial conquest of their ‘homelands’, cushioning their groups from confrontation with the humiliation of their (relatively easy) subjugation by the British. Of the three, Bello discussed this issue in the most detail, though mostly in his 1962 autobiography published *after* the attainment of independence.[[448]](#footnote-448) The three men clearly had different modes of interpreting the past which corresponded to their intellectual, psychological and political predispositions as well as the raw materials of history available to them. Azikiwe’s narratives tended to be the most fantastical and ahistorical while Awolowo and Bello’s were more rooted in actual historical realities.

**6.4 Constructing a shared present and future. Situating the smaller ‘we’ within the wider Nigerian project**

Evaluations of the present political and economic situation of the sub-national groups depended more on political and personal circumstances than immediate audience. The more responsible for government Awolowo and Azikiwe were, the more positive their picture of the present and future of their groups. However, when not in power, they tended to portray their group’s situation in negative terms and their demands for the future were significantly more radical.

Due to his elite background, Bello never had to criticize government to get into government, occupying various positions of authority from the young age of 24.[[449]](#footnote-449) In an uninterrupted position of power from 1952 to 1966, while often highlighting Northern disadvantages vis-à-vis the South, especially in the sphere of education, he presented the situation as reversible, generally narrating a positive future for Northerners. As he stated during the 1953 self-government debate in the House of Representatives: ‘Although we were late in assimilating Western education, yet within a short time we will catch up with the other regions and share their lot.’[[450]](#footnote-450)

In this section, perhaps I shall start with Awolowo’s constructions of a shared present and future for the Yorubas in Nigeria.These can be traced to the founding declaration he co-wrote for the *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* in 1945, a document later distributed to Yoruba traditional rulers, elites and other influential persons. It stated the objectives of the *Egbe* in ‘Yorubaland’ were:

To study fully its political problems, combat the disintegrating forces of tribalism, stamp out discrimination within the group and against minorities, and generally infuse the idea of a single nationality throughout the region; To study its economic resources, ascertain its potentialities, and advise as to the wisest utilization of its wealth, so as to ensure abundance and prosperity for its people; To plan for the improvement of educational facilities both in content and extent, to explore the means of introducing mass education promptly and efficiently and to foster the study of Yoruba language, culture and history. To promote the social welfare of Yorubaland, combat the cankerworm of superstition and ignorance, spread the knowledge of medical relief and stimulate the provision of hospitals, maternity homes and suchlike amenities.[[451]](#footnote-451)

As mentioned with regards to Azikiwe in the previous chapter, Awolowo presupposed the existence of an ethnic homeland (‘Yorubaland’), an autochthonous territorial claim linking space to identity. This served as a unificatory strategy fostering notions of a pan-Yoruba identity in communities whose social identities had historically been defined by their city or town of origin, rather than their *Yoruba-ness*.[[452]](#footnote-452) The homeland concept held strong unificatory potential in the present due to the *Odùduwà* foundational myth locating the geographical origins of Yoruba-speakers in Ile-Ife, thus providing a ready-made contemporary spiritual capital for the group. It is no coincidence that when *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* was launched in Nigeria, the inauguration ceremony took place in Ile-Ife.[[453]](#footnote-453)

However, while evoking a Yoruba ‘we’ who shared a common present and future in an identifiable living territory, Awolowo acknowledged historical intra-Yoruba antipathies which were to be overcome via unificatory discourses designed to ‘infuse the idea of a single nationality’, or in other words, evoke an ‘imagined community’[[454]](#footnote-454) of people identifying with a ‘Yoruba’ identity subsuming their smaller-scale communal affiliations.

The manifesto’s emphasis on propagating [Western] education, combating ‘superstition’, discouraging intra-Yoruba discrimination and parochialism, improving access to modern (i.e. Western) medical facilities and bettering the general socioeconomic condition of Yoruba-speaking people placed Awolowo’s nation-building manifesto squarely within the ideational realms of *ilosiwaju* (‘progress’), *idagbasoke* (‘development’) and *olaju* (‘enlightenment’), all broadly subsumable under the auspices of enlightenment ideals popularized among Yoruba-speaking people following their 19th-century encounter with colonial Christianity.[[455]](#footnote-455)

Awolowo’s planned Yoruba identity was one that would cherish its own unique culture, history and language, but would also be strongly oriented towards Western-style socio-economic development, generally accepting contemporary Western egalitarian ideals regarding what constituted societal progress and modernity. This identity construct reflected his personal beliefs as well as his conviction this was a self-concept Yoruba-speakers could readily identify with. In the previous chapter, I cited Awolowo’s assertions that within Nigeria, ‘in embracing Western culture, the Yorubas take the lead.’[[456]](#footnote-456)

In 1945, Awolowo thus presented Yoruba-speaking peoples as a *prospective nation* within Nigeria. While possessing all the ingredients necessary for nationhood – a shared language, culture and history-- elite guidance was required to overcome internal divisions and propagate a sense of one-ness via discourses emphasizing these shared elements.

However, just two years later, in his book *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, Awolowo characterized Yorubas (and other major Nigerian ethno-linguistic groups) as already-established ‘nations.’ Rather than a widespread transformation in the popular consciousness of Yoruba-speakers during that short time-span, as I suggested in the previous chapter, Awolowo’s nationhood claim can perhaps best be attributed to political calculations that claiming nation-status presented the best justificatory premise for the strong autonomy he was demanding for Yorubas. The previous chapter discussed his *autonomisation* strategies demanding self-determination for Nigeria’s ‘national groups.’

At the height of their ethnic group construction efforts, that is, in the late 1940s, both Awolowo and Azikiwe expressed fears the Nigerian nation-building project, as currently conducted, threatened their group’s identity in certain ways. In *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, Awolowo argued the British policy of pursuing a synchronized nation-wide tempo of political and socio-economic advancement represented a threat to the development potential of the Yorubas, evoking much internal disaffection. His nomination and predication strategies involved constructing distinct ethno-national groups with ‘incompatibilities’, which ‘militate against unification’[[457]](#footnote-457):

For one thing, they [incompatibilities] are bound to slow down progress in certain sections, and on the other hand, they tend to engender unfriendly feelings among the diverse elements thus forced together. The more alert and ambitious groups, like the Yorubas, Igbos and Ibibio are impatient and want an increase in the pace of political, educational and economic advancement while the Hausas are indifferent. The Yorubas, in particular, have suffered feelings of frustration for years. Under a system which aims at getting all the peoples in the country to the goal of autonomy at the same hour and minute, the Yorubas have been compelled to mark time on their higher level while the other sections hasten to catch up with them. Because of this, it is wrongly believed [by Yorubas] that the Yorubas are deteriorating.[[458]](#footnote-458)

Awolowo portrayed Britain’s ongoing national integrative efforts as unrealistic and counterproductive. Homogenizing and anthropomorphising Yorubas, he presupposed an existing consensus among 3.2 million[[459]](#footnote-459) Yoruba-speakers regarding the shared frustrations he positioned himself as expressing on their behalf. He portrayed Yorubas as aspirational, intelligent and strongly desirous of political, economic and intellectual *progress*, to be understood, as suggested earlier, according to Western paradigms of ‘progress’ with their metaphorical emphasis on constant forward movement. This was reflected in Awolowo’s assertion Yorubas had taken ‘the lead’ in ‘embracing Western culture’ but were now being kept at a standstill while other groups ‘hasten to catch up’.

His *topos of comparison* presented Yorubas as participants in a nationwide race towards destination development. However, they were being slowed down by the Hausas (metonymically representing Northern Nigeria), who are singled out as particular dead-weights. This reflected Awolowo’s consistent positioning of Northerners at the opposite end of the identity spectrum from Yorubas, as seen in the previous chapter.

In line with his strategy of presenting himself as an objective commentator, Awolowo pointed to other groups asides Yorubas—Igbos and Ibibios specifically—as also being ‘alert and ambitious.’ However, he used the conjunctive adverb ‘in particular’ as a transitional linguistic device of emphasis to suggest Yorubas were *the* most advanced collective, by implying no other group was *as frustrated* as they were with the slow pace of overall development in Nigeria. Awolowo likely felt such assertions justified because, on aggregate, Yorubas were socio-economically and educationally ‘far ahead’ of other Nigerian groups during the first half of the 20th century,[[460]](#footnote-460) though the gap between them and the Igbos had ‘virtually closed’ by the mid-1950s.[[461]](#footnote-461) Awolowo’s solution to the problem he articulated was significant self-determination for the Yorubas, a theme discussed in the previous chapter which he continued to emphasize through the late 1940s, along with appeals for pan-Yoruba solidarity, internal cohesion and increasing education levels among the Yorubas.[[462]](#footnote-462)

As mentioned earlier, during this period, Azikiwe too evoked threats to Igbo identity from Britain’s Nigeria project as currently constituted. An exemplification was his June 25, 1949 address to the Ibo State Assembly demanding ‘self-determination’ for the Igbos.[[463]](#footnote-463) At the beginning of his speech, Azikiwe deployed a journey metaphor, a linguistic device often deployed in discourse constituting a call to political action,[[464]](#footnote-464) evidencing his politicization of Igbo identity during that era:

The Ibo people have reached a cross-road and it is for us to decide which is the right course to follow. We are confronted with routes leading to diverse goals, but as I see it, there is only one road that I can safely recommend for us to tread, and it is the road to self-determination for the Ibo within the framework of a federated commonwealth of Nigeria and the Cameroons, leading to a United States of Africa. Other roads in, my opinion, are calculated to lead us stray from the path of national self-realization.[[465]](#footnote-465)

Like Awolowo, Azikiwe presupposed consensus among 3.2 million[[466]](#footnote-466) Igbo-speakers regarding their readiness to embark on a collective political journey of ‘national self-realization’. A shared political present and future was conveyed linguistically via the deictic ‘we’ and the group pronoun ‘us’ understood to include speaker + listeners + other Igbos not present in the audience. Azikiwe painted a very negative picture of their shared present, emphasizing numerous injustices Igbos were allegedly suffering in a constructive strategy serving to unite via shared sorrows.

In his portrayal of Igbos as the most persecuted and marginalized group in Nigeria (as discussed in the previous chapter) he asserted ‘unnecessary acts of discrimination against, and persecution of, our beloved [Ibo] nation’. Without providing any evidence in the form of particular citations, Azikiwe told his audience this anti-Igbo conspiracy was visible in an anti-Igbo media campaign conducted both in the British press (‘In this unholy crusade the *Daily Mirror*, *London Times*, *The Economist*, *News Review*, and the *Daily Mail*, have been in the forefront’)[[467]](#footnote-467) as well as ‘sections of the Nigerian press’ in ‘Lagos, Zaria and Calabar’,[[468]](#footnote-468) all cities with non-Igbo majorities Azikiwe thus indirectly accused of anti-Igbo bias.

He asserted that ‘both in England and in West Africa, the expression “Ibo” has become a target of opprobrium’,[[469]](#footnote-469) arguing Igbos had been politically ‘disenfranchised by the British for decades’ as if Igbos were the only politically disenfranchised indigenous group in 1949 Nigeria.[[470]](#footnote-470) These anti-Igbo actions left Igbos with only one choice: to demand the establishment of an ‘Ibo state’ on the territory of ‘Iboland’, which Azikiwe divided into ‘twenty main dialectal regions’ that could be ‘conveniently departmentalized as provinces of an Ibo state.’[[471]](#footnote-471) He presented the constructed Igbo homeland as a potential *locus amoenus* -- an idealized place of safety, comfort and natural wealth:

Our agricultural resources include economic and food crops which are the bases of modern civilization, not to mention fruits and vegetables which flourish in the tropics! Our mineral resources include coal, lignite, lead, antimony, iron, diatomite, clay, oil, tin! Our forest products include timber of economic value, including iroko and mahogany! Our fauna and flora are marvels of the world! Our land is blessed by waterways of world renown, including the River Niger, Imo River, Cross River![[472]](#footnote-472)

Azikiwe’s repeated use of the group-constructing possessive pronoun ‘our’ was the main linguistic device constructing notions of territoriality, naturalizing the idea whatever resources lay within that territory ‘belonged’ to Igbos. Constructing shared sorrows and injustices, Azikiwe asserted colonialism was not allowing Igbos enjoy their natural wealth. In his self-presentation narratives, a shared language as indicative of nationhood went a long way towards compensating for the lack of a popular unifying foundational myth or geographical point of origin, hence his presentation of the 20 ‘main dialectal [Ibo-speaking] regions’ as the constituent units of the Igbo ‘nation’.

Addressing the Ibo State Assembly on December 15, 1950, he reiterated his claims of Igbo victimisation by British authorities, referencing 21 Igbo miners shot dead in the Eastern city of Enugu the previous year during a strike action:

The Enugu tragedy is now history, but the homes of the twenty-one miners are now desolate. What do the Ibo people propose to do in order to prevent repetition of this challenge to our manhood? In 1929, Ibo women suffered like fate in Aba and Opobo areas. In 1947, Ibo men, among others, were shot at Burutu. And in 1949, Ibo men, women, and children were shot at different places. In spite of these shootings, some of which have ended in death, and some in permanent injuries, what have the Ibo people done to show that they have been humiliated? That we have been singled out for the punitive visitations mentioned above is clearly a reflection on Ibo leadership and followership.[[473]](#footnote-473)

Azikiwe not only asserted Igbo suffering, he challenged Igbos to take assertive action against the British, provoking the males to prove their ‘manhood’ in response to British humiliations, a powerful argument in a male-centric society. The subsequent section will provide another example of Azikiwe constructing Igbo-ness in gendered fashion. Apart from the discursive use of *Odùduwà* as the paternal progenitor of the Yorubas, I did not find instances of Awolowo or Bello explicitly deploying gendered constructions of identity.

Azikiwe’s utterances in the cited speech represented a mobilizational call to Igbos for decisive political action against the colonial authorities. While by now he had dropped his agitations for an ‘Ibo state’ after negative reactions to this demand from colonial authorities, non-Igbo Nigerians and concerned Igbo leaders who felt he was being too divisive,[[474]](#footnote-474) Azikiwe still defined Igbos as a ‘nation’, asserting:

‘…the Ibo of Africa must rise to the occasion and not allow the British press or any other institution or people to discourage them from their progressive march in concert with the other great nations of this country towards a free and independent commonwealth of Nigeria.’[[475]](#footnote-475)

Following his change in status from opposition politician to politician in [regional] power during the 1950s, Azikiwe’s explicit constructions of Igbo-ness generally ceased as did his negative presentations of their shared present. By the time he addressed the Ibo State Assembly in December 1954, he was Premier of the Eastern region and presented a radically different picture of Igbos’ situation in Nigeria. While still claiming anti-Igbo propaganda was rife ‘in certain sections of the British and Nigerian press’[[476]](#footnote-476) his overall message was infinitely more optimistic:

The British government, in partnership with us, is conducting a great experiment in parliamentary democracy in this country. We are completely immersed in it and are in the vanguard. The new constitution is a visible manifestation of this acid political test of the black man’s capacity for self-government. Your outlook, your attitude, and your reactions will supply the answers to those who doubt your political maturity…you can make this experiment successful by being more solicitous for the welfare of your comrades than that of yourselves, and by being less ambitious to feather your own nest at the expense of your neighbour. We can make a greater success of the present government of the Eastern region by being more cooperative and by levelling fair and constructive criticism than by being conscious of our pound of flesh and by denouncing imagined grievances without restraint.[[477]](#footnote-477)

Azikiwe now spoke positively of the British who were partners in a ‘great’ democratic experiment. He introduced a new theme relative to his earlier narratives, namely the need for Igbos to *prove* Africans were ready for self-government. This discursive shift to placing the onus of responsibility on Igbos to prove their readiness for independence was a common trope in Azikiwe’s 1950s discourses. Azikiwe, who had shown scant restraint stoking Igbo grievances when not in power, now urged them to be less self-absorbed and cease from ‘denouncing imagined grievances without restraint.’

This exemplified his instrumental and situational approach to identity narratives, stoking grievances to achieve power, then subsequently shifting to downplaying expectations from government and even disparaging Igbo demands as ‘*imagined* grievances’. To paraphrase a future President Kennedy, Azikiwe now urged Igbos to ‘ask not what the Eastern Region government can do for you, ask what you can do for the Eastern Region.’ The *Manchester Guardian* approvingly, if somewhat ironically, noted Azikiwe’s radical shift in the mid-1950s, stating ‘Dr. Azikiwe, the champion of Nigeria against the “British oppressor” has recently become a strong supporter of Colonial Office policy.’[[478]](#footnote-478)

Azikiwe urged further Igbo involvement in ‘the nationalist movement…we must cooperate energetically with other linguistic groups to make our country free and united.’[[479]](#footnote-479) Having dropped his claims to nation-status for the Igbos, Azikiwe redefined them as a ‘linguistic group’, a less assertive group-identity claim and one more compatible with the Nigerian project. After all, it is easier to imagine a multi-lingual nation than a multi-national nation. Group labels were thus adjusted in line with political circumstances and interests, furthering conceptual confusion and ambivalence.

During the 1950s, Azikiwe continued emphasizing Igbos needed to prove themselves ready for efficient and humane self-government, though by now, he usually deployed the regionalist categorization of ‘Easterners’ even when addressing pre-dominantly Igbo audiences.[[480]](#footnote-480) During the 1950s, Awolowo, in regional power as well, generally ceased self-presentations of Yoruba-ness, switching to the regional self-categorization of ‘the West.’

With regards to Bello, when constructing a shared political present and future for the North’s inhabitants within the wider Nigerian project, he consistently emphasized the region’s distinctness and uniqueness in a *singularising* strategy. For instance, speaking to the Northern House of Assembly in his capacity as regional Minister of Works in July 1952, he addressed voices within the North demanding it emulate the fast-moving Southern regions. Using a *topos of comparison*, arguments emphasizing political continuity as well as arguments from ends and means, Bello asserted that the North, unlike the East, had strong pre-colonial institutional ‘foundations upon which to build’:[[481]](#footnote-481)

We have of recent years witnessed the sweeping changes in the local administration in the Eastern provinces and proposals for almost as drastic changes in the West. The North has nothing to match against these spectacular moves and it is perhaps because of this that it has become the fashion in other regions to regard the North as backward and hidebound by tradition. Indeed, there are some people in the North who hold this view and who think that we should follow the example set by the other regions…The object to be achieved by a reform of local administration at this time is to enable the people take a much fuller part in their own administration…We can set about attaining this object in one of two ways. Firstly, we can copy the example of the East [-ern region], wipe the slate clean, overthrow the present structure…and start afresh. Secondly, we can retain the present time-tested structure to which we are all accustomed and modify it to suit our new requirements…Above all, the present structure is known to the common man, who is to be called upon at all levels to help make it work. From experience we know that it does work; it is something we have inherited from the past and to which we have added from time to time. It is our own. Would we be wise to do away with what we have ourselves built up in favour of a system of administration designed by people with different customs to suit different circumstances, or in favour of some other system not yet designed and quite untried? I do not think so, Sir...’[[482]](#footnote-482)

Bello consistently emphasized the North’s future development strategies should and would be rooted in its social traditions and existing indigenous institutions. Addressing the issue of self-government to party members and supporters during his party’s May 1954 convention, he stated:

This vital question [of self-government] is ever present in our minds. Our main intention is to lead the people forward as quickly as possible but in a way that will not cause unrest or disrupt their way of life.[[483]](#footnote-483)

This reflected a key theme in Bello’s constructive strategies: social harmony and stability as a defining feature of his political project. Western-style political and economic development would be encouraged, but only as rapidly as the existing social order could absorb without large-scale disruptions. Nevertheless, while Bello emphasized the role of tradition in the North’s modernization process, the narratives of all three leaders, to a lesser or greater extent, reflected the internalization of Western capitalist thought-paradigms, presenting their ethnic groups and regions as runners in a metaphorical race towards ‘development’, a competitive attitude fostering group envy and resentment. This was reflected in Bello’s regular references to the need for the North to ‘catch up’ with the South in terms of education. An exemplification was his January 1955 speech at the Nigerian Union of Teachers’ Conference where he stated:

As you all know, the Northern Region is still backward in Western education…But I can tell you this, we do not intend to remain backward, and I can promise you that we are going to catch up, while still retaining the essential elements of our Moslem civilization.[[484]](#footnote-484)

While Bello did not define the ‘essential elements’ of the North’s ‘Moslem civilization’ in that particular speech addressed to a national union, he shed some light on this issue in his well-publicized February 5, 1958 address before the British Minorities Commission responsible for assessing ethnic minority agitations for new state creation before independence.

As discussed in chapter two, each region contained minority groups demanding their own autonomous political units. In the North, agitations were loudest for a ‘Middle-Belt’ state to be carved out of the southernmost non-Muslim parts of the region. Bello’s political strategy depended on keeping the North intact so his party could benefit from the politico-structural advantages it enjoyed based on population numbers. This was thus a crucial speech for Bello. Describing the North as ‘diverse, but united’,[[485]](#footnote-485) he presented a picture of idyllic social harmony where tradition, personified by ‘chiefs’ and modernity, by his regional government, cooperated with mutual respect:

Here in the North we have evolved a system of government in which our chiefs are brought closely and intimately into contact with the conduct of the government’s day to day affairs. We believe that the chiefs have an unsurpassed knowledge of the wishes of their people. There is a Hausa proverb which implies that the chief is the symbol of the people. The regional government sets great store by the close ties of friendship and interest which exists between ministers and chiefs. Were we to lose the confidence of those chiefs, I know that our position would be very difficult.[[486]](#footnote-486)

Bello emphasized it was traditional authorities who linked contemporary political institutions to everyday Northerners. His emphasis on the positive and crucial role played by chiefs, and traditional rulers in general, was symptomatic of his conservative approach to modernizing the North, a vision in which pre-colonial political institutions and power relations would be fully incorporated into contemporary political processes and systems of governance.

Chiefs and elders, as keepers of tradition, experience and wisdom, were to provide the link between past and present, ensuring stability and continuity and as little disruptiveness as possible in a time of rapid social change. In his constructive strategies, Bello also deployed economic arguments, asserting the North represented ‘an integrated viable [economic] unit.’

Addressing complaints of religious discrimination against non-Muslims in the North, he emphasized religious tolerance while simultaneously highlighting Islam as *the* main regional religion:

‘…here let me say one word about Islam. Islam is not merely a religion but, for those who follow it, a way of life. A good Muslim must always feel that he walks with God. Nonetheless, let the commission ponder the high place which Christians have always had in the respect and regard of the followers of Islam. This has been so since the time of the Prophet himself and though on occasion political consideration and, let us be frank, misguided fanaticism on both sides have tended to blur and obscure this fact, nonetheless it remains a fact. We Muslims have no quarrels with Christians or animists. We believe that the existence of the two world religions side by side in peace and friendship is not merely possible of achievement but is well within our powers to achieve. Similarly, I must point out that the acceptance of Islam by the majority of persons in the Northern Region also entails an acceptance by them of Islamic Law.[[487]](#footnote-487)

Emphasizing the prevalent role of Islam, Bello used an *argumentum ad populum* to legitimize the presence of Islamic courts. Since Islam was more than ‘merely a religion’, but a ‘way of life’ for its adherents, and the majority of Northerners were Muslims, it stood to follow that Islam was fundamental to the everyday performance of Northern-ness. However, Bello downplayed religious-based conflicts in the region as rare, vaguely attributing them to unnamed fanatics on ‘both sides. (i.e. Muslims and Christians).

By apportioning blame for religious conflicts equivalently between Muslims and Christians, Bello downplayed suggestions majority Muslims bullied minority Christians and animists. In this way, he absolved the numerically-dominant and clearly more powerful Muslim communities from any particular responsibility in ensuring religious harmony within the region. Simultaneously, Bello clearly identified himself, and all the prestige his political and traditional authority carried, with Islam, via his references to ‘we Muslims’.

However, likely reflecting his frustration at the intensity of separatist demands in the region, during the speech, Bello contradicted his own self-presentation of a harmonious North which was rare indeed:

One thing, however, is certain: the more Northerly provinces have made substantial contributions to the development of the so-called Middle-Belt, [the situation] it now finds itself would be very different indeed had it not been for this support. I must, in fact, here point out that I and my ministers are being subjected to increasing criticism from some areas in the ‘Far North’ for spending such a higher percentage of the funds available to the region in developing the ‘Middle-Belt’. Those of us who come from the far North are continually being accused of neglecting our own areas, whose contribution to the [region’s] revenue is so much greater than is that of the Middle-Belt.[[488]](#footnote-488)

These utterances reflected the tensions and contradictions involved in constructing a shared present and future for a region comprising hundreds of diverse groups with varying levels of development and interests. The ‘Far North’ was dominated by Bello’s Hausa-Fulanis, who he presented as essentially subsidizing ‘Middle-Belt’ development, revealing intra-Northern conflicts Bello usually studiously avoided talking about.

Such tensions were further revealed when he discussed the Yoruba-speaking city of Ilorin which Awolowo was demanding be ‘returned’ to the Western region so the Yorubas there could join their ‘kith and kin’.[[489]](#footnote-489) Bello stated: ‘it has been said in some circles here in the North that it would be a good riddance if Ilorin went to the West’[[490]](#footnote-490) but ‘it is not our intention to shirk our responsibilities purely because an area presents a difficult administrative problem, and Ilorin did so even before the advent of Europeans.’[[491]](#footnote-491)

Rather than out of a sense of ‘responsibility’ for Ilorin, it seems more likely Bello strove to keep the ‘difficult’ Yoruba-speaking area in the North for the political advantages mentioned earlier, to thwart those whose arguments he characterized as ‘aimed solely at wrecking the position which the Northern region has attained in the federation’,[[492]](#footnote-492) a unificatory strategy evoking pride in the region’s (strong) position within the country.

In a speech delivered on November 20, 1958 to the Northern Christian Missionary Society, Bello discussed the upcoming attainment of regional self-government, re-emphasizing his government’s commitment to religious tolerance in the North,[[493]](#footnote-493) further testament Christian communities harboured doubts on this issue. At the same time, he warned his audience that:

…we do not wish our young men to lose their respect for authority, whether that authority be their fathers, their village or district head or their chief. I know that there can be difficulties in areas where the rulers are Muslims and the bulk of their people are not; and I know that it is in these places that the young men may lose their respect for their elders. We do not want them to lose this respect; and here you have an important part to play by teaching your young men that differences in religion must not mean that they can do what they like and ignore those who are set in authority over them. Throughout my travel in this region, I always emphasize this point to school-children. My view is: mere book-learning without good manners is of little worth. My motto for the new-born North is ‘Work and Worship’. I ask for your cooperation over this.[[494]](#footnote-494)

Bello suggested young Northern Christians were prone to disrespecting the authority of their Muslim rulers, thus violating one of his cardinal rules of Northern-ness: respect for authority. The young Christians needed to conform to Bello’s conservative Islamo-centric vision of Northern-ness. An education meant nothing without ‘good manners’; good manners naturally involved a subordinate attitude towards traditional and political authority. This served not only to construct Northern-ness, but also to naturalize the hegemony of contemporary ruling authorities like himself.

Bello’s discursive choice of *Work and Worship* as the organizing motto for a self-governing Northern region, signalled his emphasis on maintaining religious values while fulfilling the requirements of capitalism. Acknowledging hard work was crucial to Northern progress, he emphasized religion, especially Islam, would continue play a crucial role in Northern-ness. As he stated in a speech addressing Northern crowds celebrating the attainment of regional self-government on March 15, 1959, he chose *Work and Worship* as the region’s motto because ’it embodies the sense of individual effort and faith without which nothing of value in this world can be accomplished.’[[495]](#footnote-495) Material success was important, but only combined with religious faith could it become *meaningful* to a Northerner.

From 1960 onwards, Bello revealed further cracks in his picture of regional religious harmony, steadily radicalizing his stance on Islam. In a February 12, 1960 interview with *New York Times*, he warned Christian missionaries in the North to ‘keep out of politics’, complaining that during the just-concluded 1959 federal elections, ‘they asked people to vote for Christians.’[[496]](#footnote-496) In June 1961, he visited Pakistan to discuss ‘the possibility of promoting a Pan-Islamic commonwealth or confederation.’[[497]](#footnote-497) As mentioned in the previous chapter, Awolowo criticized Bello for ‘moving heaven and earth to drag Nigeria into a Commonwealth of Muslim states.[[498]](#footnote-498)

In 1963, Bello embarked on an Islamization mission across the Northern region. In a 1964 speech addressing the Muslim World League in Mecca, he emphasized having ‘personally’ converted ‘80,000’ non-Muslim Northerners to Islam ‘within a period of five months… from November 1963 to March 1964’[[499]](#footnote-499) and ensuring Islam was taught in ‘all government schools’[[500]](#footnote-500):

It is also fitting at this juncture for me to mention the numerous attempts being made by the Jews to enter under-developed countries to their side. Barely two years ago, they offered a sizable amount of loan to the federation of Nigeria. The offer was accepted by all the [regional] governments of the federation except we in the North who rejected it outright. I made it vividly clear at the time that Northern Nigeria would prefer to go without development rather than receiving an Israeli loan or aid…I have earlier spoken of conversions of non-Muslims to Islam. I would like to say that this is only the beginning as there are other areas we have not yet tapped. I hope when we clean Nigeria we will go further afield in Africa.[[501]](#footnote-501)

Bello’s statements reveal the extent of his more radicalized vision of Northern Nigerian Islam at this juncture in history. Now confident in his party’s dominance of national politics, he no longer masked his Islamist vision of Northern-ness. It is doubtful the non-Muslim inhabitants of the Northern region would have been thrilled to hear their regional government had rejected financial development assistance because it had been offered by Jews and that they needed ‘cleaning’ by Islam, a purification metaphor suggesting non-Muslims were unclean.

In summary, both Awolowo and Azikiwe constructed notions of a shared ethnic homeland, language, culture and political institutions that served to unite their groups in the late 1940s. Bello, in line with his consistently regionalist focus, constructed notions of a shared regional homeland but did not suggest linguistic or cultural sameness in the North.

In the case of Azikiwe, evaluations of the present political and socio-economic situation of his sub-national group depended more on personal political circumstances than immediate audience or setting. The more responsible for government he was, the more positive was his picture of the present and future of the group. However, when not in power in the late 1940s, he portrayed the group’s situation in negative terms and his demands for the future were significantly more radical as he sought to mobilize Igbos behind his leadership by emphasizing a ‘victim’ thesis alleging intentional injustices committed against the group. These differing stances reflected the instrumental and situational nature of his presentations.

In the case of Awolowo, he too portrayed the group’s situation negatively when not in power in the late 1940s. However, he did not attribute this to a systematic attempt to persecute Yorubas, as Azikiwe did in the case of Igbos, but rather to misguided constitutional engineering by the British. As long as the Yorubas were allowed to more or less determine their own fate, they had a bright future ahead of them. When in power in the 1950s, Awolowo (discursively in the context of the Western region as a whole) painted a positive and improving picture for the group. This would again change when he was out of power in the 1960s, during which he would emphasize the threat of domination, a theme that will be explored in the subsequent chapter.

As for Bello, due to his elite background, he never had to criticize government to get into government, occupying various positions of authority from the young age of 24.[[502]](#footnote-502) In an uninterrupted position of power from 1952 to 1966, while often highlighting Northern disadvantages vis-à-vis the South, especially in the sphere of education, he presented the situation as reversible, generally narrating a positive future for Northerners.

**6.5 Narrating group characteristics**

This section shall start with Azikiwe’s *singularising* strategy of emphasizing Igbo exceptionalism in the 1940s, exemplified by his 1949 speech during the Ibo State Assembly claiming that the ‘God of Africa has specially created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages’,[[503]](#footnote-503) thus ‘placed in this high-estate by the God of Africa, the Ibo nation cannot shirk its responsibility from its manifest destiny’.[[504]](#footnote-504)

This para-religious construction of Igbo-ness, reminiscent of the ‘chosen people’ biblical construction of Jewish identity, complete with its African equivalent of the ‘God of Israel’, was likely to resonate with a people under strong Christian influence. Of the three major groups, Igbos embraced Christianity in the largest numbers -- the Hausa-Fulani were overwhelmingly Muslim while Yorubas were split roughly fifty-fifty between Moslems and Christians. Azikiwe was well-aware of Christian influences among Igbos, hence his choice of religious metaphors was unlikely coincidental.

Self-presenting Igbos as a divinely-favoured group with a ‘manifest destiny’ served to strengthen their desire to identify with Igbo-ness as association with greatness is an attractive prospect for many. Igbo males were especially likely to be receptive to Azikiwe’s anthropomorphising attribution of manly ‘martial prowess’[[505]](#footnote-505) to Igbos and his assertions they had never been conquered (by other Africans).

Conveying Igbo exceptionalism in another 1949 speech to an Igbo audience, Azikiwe anthropomorphised the Igbo collective as a ‘giant…waking from his stupor’[[506]](#footnote-506) though he neglected to mention the causal factor inducing this break from greatness. The likely answer was colonialism, but it didn’t serve Azikiwe’s constructive strategies to remind Igbos that despite the ‘martial prowess’ he attributed to them, they had been subjugated by the British, so he avoided explaining what caused the Igbo giant’s ‘stupor.’ He presented Igbos as ‘free people’, ‘ethical and logical objects of creation,’ the latter characteristics countering colonialist claims of African immorality and irrationality.

Addressing the Ibo State Assembly on December 15, 1950, he used the *topos of history as teacher of lessons* to anthropomorphise Igbos:

‘If the lessons of history mean anything, it must be conceded that the Igbo people…are friendly in their disposition, charitable in their relations with others and artistic in their temperament. But they are pugnacious when aroused, and they resent injustice no matter from what quarter. They are industrious and enterprising and have powers of adaptability due to their colonizing instinct, which has led them to migrate to almost every part of West Africa… Like the Jews of the world, the Igbo of Africa must rise to the occasion and not allow the British press, or any other institution or people discourage them from their progressive march in concert with the other great nations of this country towards a free and independent commonwealth of Nigeria.[[507]](#footnote-507)

In a rhetorical strategy of vagueness, without specifying historical examples to justify his claims, he presented Igbos in flattering essentialist fashion as ‘industrious’ and ‘enterprising’, reiterating his ‘chosen people’ construction by likening them to ‘the Jews’. These self-stereotypes served to emphasize Igbos’ financial savvy, entrepreneurial skills, resilience to persecution and uniqueness. Interestingly, Awolowo often likewise described Igbos as go-getters (‘keen’[[508]](#footnote-508), ‘alert’[[509]](#footnote-509), ‘ambitious’[[510]](#footnote-510), ‘fast-moving’[[511]](#footnote-511) and ‘progressive’[[512]](#footnote-512)), suggesting Azikiwe’s self-presentation reflected popular opinions about Igbos among non-Igbos as well.

Azikiwe’s narratives emphasized not only Igbo economic potential, important encouragement for a poor population preoccupied with bread-and-butter issues, but also their relational predispositions towards others (‘…charitable in their relations with others’) at a period when Nigerian leaders were attempting to fashion out a mutually-beneficial harmonious co-existence between the diverse groups brought together by colonialism. He presented Igbos as good economic partners *and* friendly neighbours.

However, to potential aggressors, Azikiwe asserted Igbos were ‘pugnacious when aroused’, reflecting Nnoli’s characterizations of pre-colonial Igbo societies, where a ‘certain boisterousness and aggressiveness was expected in social relations.’[[513]](#footnote-513) This perceived aggressiveness would play a role in the ‘Ibo-domination’ narrative to be investigated in the next chapter.

Azikiwe portrayed Igbos as a positively-disposed but assertive people who would not be pushed around interminably by colonial authorities or anyone else for that matter. While his claims Igbos had ‘powers of adaptability’ logically reflected his overall presentation of Igbos as go-getters, his assertion of a ‘colonizing instinct’ was quite startling, considering the historical context of the time and fears of ‘Igbo domination’ which could only be fuelled by such statements. It is difficult to fathom what exactly Azikiwe hoped to achieve by deploying that phrase. Perhaps, again, to emphasize Igbos’ assertiveness and imbibe his audience with an empowering feeling of strength and superiority.

The Igbo was thus characterized by courage, a love of freedom, industriousness, dynamism, adventurousness and a rational assertiveness. In a *singularising* strategy emphasizing group uniqueness, Azikiwe presented Igbos as inherently egalitarian, or as he put it in his 1949 speech to the Ibo State Assembly, ‘essentially democratic – in fact, more democratic than any other nation in all Africa.’[[514]](#footnote-514)

Azikiwe presupposed this in-born egalitarianism based on what he characterized as Igbos’ ‘ancestral legacy of pure democracy,’[[515]](#footnote-515) alluding to the decentralized pattern of pre-colonial Igbo societies, usually dispersed into compact autonomous political units and described by scholars as ‘republican in character’[[516]](#footnote-516) with no ultimate monarch and little stratification of individuals by blood or occupation, barring distinctions between freemen and slaves.[[517]](#footnote-517)

Azikiwe drew from this pre-colonial history to imply, in essentialist fashion, egalitarian and naturally democratic behavioural tendencies in Igbos. Finally, in line with parallels to biblical constructions of Jewishness, he portrayed Igbos as long-suffering victims of persecution at the hands of the British as well as other Nigerians. In the 1950s, he switched to (generally failed) attempts at constructing Eastern-ness rather than Igbo-ness. However, the contents of ‘Eastern’ self-presentations were virtually synonymous with his earlier presentations of Igbo-ness.

For instance, as Premier of the Eastern Region, in a radio broadcast on September 10, 1954, Azikiwe emphasized Easterners were ‘a freedom-loving people and very democratic in our way of life’[[518]](#footnote-518), the same characteristics he had attributed to Igbos in previous years. Earlier, in May 1953, during tensions following the self-government controversy when fears emerged of possible civil war between the Northern and Southern regions, in a newspaper interview, Azikiwe warned Northerners that Easterners had ‘never been subjugated by any indigenous African invader’[[519]](#footnote-519), the exact same claim he had earlier made regarding Igbos. It thus appears valid to suggest Azikiwe was still asserting meaning to Igbo-ness, but more covertly due to his official regional position. He was still speaking primarily to Igbos, only this time using the code word ‘Easterners.’

As for Awolowo, his construction of a homo-Yorubacus was generally limited to his writings in *Path to Nigerian Freedom* and his 1960 autobiography. In the former he characterized Yorubas as politically well-organized and sophisticated, ‘alert and ambitious’,[[520]](#footnote-520) and instinctively drawn to Western civilization with its ideals of enlightenment and social progress. Based on the early socio-economic advantages Yorubas gained in the early colonial era, Awolowo presented a generalized claim of sophistication and enlightenment relative to other Nigerian groups, ascribing to Yorubas inherent-like predispositions towards civilizational ‘progress’, understood according to the dominant Western paradigms of the day.

Like Azikiwe, Awolowo’s 1950s self-presentation of regional, in this case ‘Western’, identity was strikingly similar to his earlier constructions of Yoruba-ness. An exemplification was his June 4, 1959 press conference presenting his party’s political program during which he asserted:

It is common knowledge that of all the present three regions of Nigeria, the most advanced in all sphere of human endeavours and governmental achievements is the Western Region. The next is the East, and the last the North.[[521]](#footnote-521)

Premised on a ‘common knowledge’ argumentation scheme, Awolowo essentially transposed the Yoruba civilizational superiority over other groups he had asserted in the late 1940s unto the Western region as a whole. Assertions the West was the most developed region ‘in all sphere of human endeavours’ represented a categorical claim to regional superiority.

Awolowo’s supremacist regional hierarchy was strikingly similar to the ethnic hierarchy he had constructed in *The* *Path to Nigerian Freedom* over a decade earlier; however, this time the ‘West’ replaced the Yorubas at the top, while the ‘North’ replaced the Hausas at the bottom. Constructions of a superior Yoruba-ness were now subsumed under the politically-correct category of ‘Westerner.’ However, after his party’s election loss in the 1959 federal elections, in his 1960 autobiography, Awolowo returned to self-presentations of Yorubas, describing them as ‘highly progressive’:

[Yorubas are] a fastidious, critical and discerning people. They will not do anything in politics merely to oblige a fellow Yoruba. If the Yorubaman is satisfied that your policy is good and will serve his self-interest, he will support you no matter from which ethnic group you hail.[[522]](#footnote-522)

Yorubas were characterized by self-interested rationalism, intellectual sophistication and meritocratic ideals. Despite his occasional stoking of anti-colonialist sentiments, it is quite clear Awolowo (and Azikiwe) admired the ideals that had shaped contemporary Britain such as rationality and meritocracy. Likely in a bid to promote such ideals among Yorubas, Awolowo presupposed them, creating the impression these already were *the* dominant ideals within the group to which all members needed to conform. True Yoruba-ness meant being ‘fastidious’, ‘critical’, ‘discerning’ and ‘highly-progressive’. To act otherwise was thus not to act like a *true Yoruba*.

Bello, on the other hand, openly admired the British but claimed Northerners got their civilization from the Middle-Eastern/Islamic world,[[523]](#footnote-523) presenting them as naturally conservative and unwilling to discard their traditional values in favour of Western ideals. He emphasized *shared values* as the primary factor uniting Northerners above their ethnic, religious and historical differences. Northerners were *spiritual* and *traditional*. While Islam was assigned a fundamental role in Northern-ness, Bello generally asserted a Northern preoccupation with matters of the spirit and soul in a broader sense than that just encompassing religion, hence my use of the broader term ‘spirituality.’

Meanwhile, Bello’s emphasis on ‘traditionalism’ should not be understood as stressing a particular tradition as *the* best way of doing things (as he acknowledged varying cultural traditions in the North), but as a shared reverence for the value of tradition *per se*. The Hausa-Fulanis might have different cultural traditions from the Kanuris and Tivs, but what they all shared was a mutual respect for each other’s particularistic traditional practices as they all placed a premium on the role of tradition in everyday social life. As he stated in his welcome speech to Queen Elizabeth II when she visited Northern Nigeria in 1956:

We have, in this Region, a tradition of loyalty to our Chiefs and Elders. We respect the pattern of our past. I can therefore assure your Majesty that the demonstrations of loyalty which you have witnessed are both sincere and heartfelt.[[524]](#footnote-524)

‘Chiefs and elders’ personified tradition in general, thus commanding the instinctive loyalty of Northerners. As mentioned earlier, Bello’s emphasis on tradition naturally served to legitimize the existing power structures from whence he himself claimed a significant part of his authority as ‘royalty’, being a descendant of Othman dan Fodio, founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. To legitimize and maintain the existing order as well as construct notions of Northern-ness, Bello consistently presupposed Northerners as tolerant people living in social harmony.

An exemplification of this emphasis can be found in his March 15, 1959 speech to Northern crowds celebrating the attainment of regional self-government:

Here, in the Northern Region, from whatever part of it we may come, we have always prided ourselves that we conduct our affairs with dignity, toleration and understanding. This emphasis stems largely from the great emphasis which we place on spiritual values and in our belief in tried institutions which have stood the test of time.[[525]](#footnote-525)

Finally, in response to Southern portrays of Northerners as hostile to new ideas, Bello asserted Northerners recognized the value of modernity, but purposefully took their time to adopt innovations in a manner not conflicting with the core values and traditions which defined their essence. This attitude had helped them maintain social cohesion in the fast-changing colonial era. As Bello stated in a speech to crowds in the Northern city Sokoto on March 15, 1959:

The people of this region- with tenacity of purpose and with characteristic caution in accepting innovations- have, slowly, but none the less firmly, received and adapted to their advantage to many parts of the free world by the modernising influence of Pax Britannica…when we survey all the phenomenal changes that have occurred in our recent history we are gratified with one important factor in our way of life, that quality of the Northern people- an ability to absorb, adapt, or renovate new ideas without completely discarding their social inheritance, even despite the attractions of glittering alien systems. In so doing we are proud to follow the old Hausa saying: ‘It is better to repair than to build afresh’.[[526]](#footnote-526)

Mutual tolerance was a prerequisite for any hopes of constructing a united political community out of such a diverse collective; to inculcate such attitudes, Bello thus presupposed tolerance as an inherent characteristic of Northern-ness, applying moral pressure on individuals to conform their behaviour to this defining characteristic; failure to do so would imply one was perhaps not a *true* *Northerner*.

He regularly presented Northerners as tolerant,[[527]](#footnote-527) respectful,[[528]](#footnote-528)stable[[529]](#footnote-529) and well-mannered.[[530]](#footnote-530) The traits Bello emphasized as central to Northern-ness differed significantly from the ‘progressive’ traits Southern politicians like Awolowo and Azikiwe assigned their groups (impatient ambition, intellectual sophistication and a drive towards enlightenment) in the case of Awolowo and (exceptionalism, egalitarianism and dynamic entrepreneurism) in the case of Azikiwe. Bello sometimes appeared to construct Northern-ness in conscious opposition to Southern-ness in order to widen the mental distance between Northerners and the rest of Nigeria.

**6.6 Concluding remarks**

Like discourses surrounding boundaries, narratives of self-presentation were closely linked to the socio-political context in which they were embedded. The context of possibilities for imagining and articulating the ethnic and/or ethno-regional group was shaped by a set of conditions reflecting the historical trajectory of Nigeria as well as that of the three regions the leaders emerged from.

These conditions included material circumstances such as pre-colonial history, the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria fostering an increasing Nigerianization of politics and other key socio-economic spheres, increasing contact between previously separated communities and groups, constitutional changes and developments, an ongoing socio-economic process intended to transform the country into a modern capitalist economy, a political process aimed at leading the country to eventual self-government and the achievement of independence itself.

Asides material circumstances, contextual conditions also involved non-material discursive possibilities, most importantly the emergence and evolution of new subject positions of group identification (‘Igbos’, ‘Nigerians’, ‘Northerners’ etc), increasing discursive incorporations of the ideals of democracy, anti-colonialist ideals and historical discourses of Yoruba-ness, Igbo-ness and Northern-ness.

In this chapter, I strove to identify major themes and strategies involved in the self-presentations of these emerging sub-national group identifications by the founding fathers. The themes and strategies investigated were discursive manifestations and reproductions of the broader social processes mentioned and of different forms of group-identity construction: for instance, Awolowo’s construction of a Yoruba ethnicity vs Bello’s construction of a multi-ethnic Northern identity.

While the self-presentation strategies of all three leaders were linked to thematic clusters of a shared past, present and future, a shared territory, and the idea of a typical way of behaviour for group members, they differed quite significantly in some relevant respects. In the years leading up to the regionalist 1951 Macpherson Constitution, Awolowo and Azikiwe focussed on presenting Yorubas and Igbos as distinct ethno-national groups, utilizing motifs from both civic and cultural models of nationhood: emphasis on a shared language, homeland, history, culture (mostly presupposed rather than actively constructed), common political institutions, prototypical behavioural patterns, and a shared future in an emergent state.

Of the two, Awolowo was dealt the stronger hand with the raw materials of history and existing identity discourses: he could draw on extensive shared pre-colonial experiences of Yoruba-speakers and a popular foundational myth. Even historical intra-Yoruba conflicts ultimately served to remind of an extensive, albeit often bitter, shared history.

Azikiwe was dealt a weaker hand in this regard and had to be more imaginative in dealing with the past. With no popular foundational myth or extensive pre-colonial interaction to draw on, he resorted to rhetorical strategies conjuring imaged of a glorious Igbo history via metaphors and allusions. However, both men’s articulations of ethno-national identity were responses to a rapidly changing present, meant to open up a new future in which a cohesive unified group would have a strong political and socio-economic voice in the emergent (and eventually post-British) Nigerian state under the leadership of both leaders naturally. Both identities were exclusionary and inherited, not chosen.

Their exclusive nature was highlighted via differentiating strategies setting the group’s members apart from other Nigerians. In the case of Awolowo, his identity discourses often seemed at least partly constituted on the basis of resistive reaction to pressures from ‘above’ via the British Nigerianization effort to de-emphasize sub-national identifications and boundaries in favour of a new national identification he viewed as at least temporarily unworkable and even threatening to Yoruba-ness.

Prior to their ascendance to power, the present generally tended to be evaluated in negative terms by both Awolowo and Azikiwe, with the former emphasizing problems of forced cohabitation of diverse groups and ill-advised colonial politico-administrative boundaries ignoring ethnic identities and sensibilities while Azikiwe emphasized Igbo persecution and marginalization, portraying Igbos in a struggle for survival though ultimately destined for greatness. At the time, both constructed identities that could only properly thrive in a loose federal-style arrangement guaranteeing significant group autonomy. Both presented their groups as aspirational and progressive in a Western materialist sense, reflecting the desired direction in which they believed the groups should evolve even though Azikiwe was often critical of Western civilization itself.

When in power in the 1950s, thus interested in maintaining the status quo, both constructed the present more positively with their groups portrayed as capable of thriving harmoniously with other groups although Awolowo returned emphatically to the issue of ethnic boundaries in the immediate period before independence, raising fears over post-independence scenarios. Awolowo strove to evoke pride in Yoruba-ness by emphasizing their socio-political, educational and economic achievements relative to other groups in the country. He portrayed Yorubas, and later, the Yoruba-majority Western region, as superior in these spheres. Azikiwe strove to evoke pride via the dynamism, courage, entrepreneurial spirit and egalitarian instincts and exceptionalism he attributed to Igbos.

In Northern Nigeria, the context of possibility for successfully imagining a large-scale collective was defined by a set of conditions reflecting a different historical trajectory than that of the Southern regions. The different material circumstances included the existence of large-scale multi-ethnic pre-colonial centralized states, the Sokoto caliphate and the Bornu Empire as well as centuries of the unifying influence of Islam in most of the region’s areas.

Another material circumstance was the relative ‘backwardness’ of the entire region vis-à-vis the South in terms of Western education and socio-economic development. The discursive condition present was that of the existence of a political unit called ‘Northern Nigeria’ from 1900. These combined provided the necessary ingredients for Bello to successfully construct a regional identity steeped in shared values, a shared respect for tradition, a (mostly) shared religion, a shared history, a difficult present which needed to be overcome via significant efforts in spreading Western education and development and a promising future provided the unit remained united and retained strong autonomy within Nigeria. To evoke pride, he emphasized the past successes of building vast empires and, towards the end of the 1950s, the region’s strong political position in contemporary Nigeria. In contrast to Awolowo and Azikiwe, Bello presented Northern-nes in a more spiritual and conservative Eastern sense, linking it strongly to Islam.

However, he tried to counter negative ascriptions attached to Northerners such as religious bigotry with counter-claims they were tolerant and peaceful. He presented Northerners as respectful (especially towards authority), comfortable in their conservative skins and not in a hurry to prove to the world how ‘progressive’ they were like Southerners. They were not hostile to new ideas, but cautious in adopting them. Their core values of spirituality and traditionalism was key to their identity.

The three leaders’ discursive constructions seemed aimed at engaging with change and fostering a sense of larger-scale, yet familiar community mobilized to actively politically participate (under the Founding Fathers’ leadership) in a rapidly-changing present and uncertain future in the emergent Nigerian state. Hence, the identity constructs were mostly focussed on the present and the future. The prospective position was articulated to formulate and justify competing visions for the most optimal political structuring of the Nigerian state, legitimize ethnic discourses (especially in the cases of Awolowo and Bello) and generally prepare the group for life in the emergent capitalist Nigerian state in co-existence and competition with other groups.

**Chapter 7 Narratives of Domination**

**7.1 Introduction**

Previous chapters investigated the boundary-drawing and self-presentation aspects of identity construction. In this chapter, I shall investigate narratives of domination, a theme related to the third key aspect of group construction highlighted by Cornell and Hartmann: the perceived position of the group within society.[[531]](#footnote-531)

Historical accounts, political (auto)-biographies and colonial reports from Nigeria covering the period under study consistently emphasize Northern fears of Igbo and/or Southern domination, Yoruba concerns over Igbo domination, and Southern worries regarding Northern political domination. Perceptions of domination and/or fears of plans for domination by out-groups played a crucial role in the politicization of identity and numerous political crises that ultimately led to the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in 1967.[[532]](#footnote-532)

It is therefore important to understand and explain *how* influential leaders like Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello constructed and legitimized fears of domination by the Other. I shall also highlight how such narratives served to politicize identity by drawing on Rothschild’s conceptual framework which asserts ethnicity is politicized when actors frame ‘social, cultural and economic interests, grievances, and aspirations’ in ethnic terms and ‘bring these claims into the political arena’.[[533]](#footnote-533) If, for

instance, a political leader argues for the need to increase or decrease the number of people from a specific ethnic group or region in a bureaucracy based on their identity ascription, this will be interpreted as framing economic interests in ethnic terms, thus politicizing ethnicity.

Preliminary analysis suggests the leaders’ narratives on domination could be subsumed under two thematic clusters: those emphasizing *Group traits predisposing towards domination* and those emphasizing *Structural factors combined with group traits predisposing towards domination*. I shall start with a few preliminary remarks after which each of these two themes will be investigated in separate sections, followed by concluding remarks.

**7.2 Preliminary remarks**

The structural factors fostering fears of domination during the period under study have been well-documented. The North enjoyed a significant politico-structural advantage over the two Southern regions ever since its leaders negotiated 50% representation in the central House of Representatives for their region during the 1950 Ibadan General Conference. In 1958, their allocation was increased to 55% based on population numbers, giving the North 174 of 312 available seats in the federal legislature.

In the agenda he prepared for the 1950 *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* convention as General-Secretary of the association, Awolowo characterized the Ibadan decision as granting a ‘veto power’ guaranteeing Northern dominance in Nigeria’s political centre.[[534]](#footnote-534) Azikiwe likewise criticized the decision during his 1950 presidential address to the Ibo State Assembly, asserting Nigeria would have ‘a legislature where the North, the East and the West are disproportionately represented in the ratio of 68:34:34 [representatives each]’.[[535]](#footnote-535)

Conversely, both Southern regions enjoyed significant socio-economic advantages over the North, especially with regards to education. As late as 1966, with more than half the country’s population, Northern Nigeria accounted for just 9 percent of its university students; it also had 11 percent of its eligible age cohort registered in primary school (compared to 58 percent for the rest of the country), and 1 percent in secondary school, compared to 6 percent in the East and 10 percent in the West.[[536]](#footnote-536) In 1955, Bello told the Nigerian Teachers Union ‘the Northern region is still backward in Western education.’[[537]](#footnote-537)

While these regional imbalances were self-evident and straightforward to articulate, what requires more analysis are the justifications behind presuppositions structural advantages were being or would *inevitably* *be* exploited for the purposes of domination. Structural factors alone cannot fully explain or justify fears of domination. If the mere fact of one ethnic or sub-national group enjoying structural advantages (in education levels or population numbers) over other groups within a country were enough to automatically evoke fears that group would exploit this to dominate others, then most countries in the world should have populations living in constant fear of domination by one group or the other. This, however, appears to be far from an iron rule.

There is no obvious logical imperative to presuppose that if Group A has a structural advantage over Group B, they are *certain* to exploit this to try and dominate Group B. Unless, of course, one presupposes an essentialist will to domination in *all* people(s) as an inherent aspect of ‘human nature.’ Only such a stance would render it ‘obvious’ why Awolowo would harbour and evoke fears of Northern domination or Bello of Southern domination.

However, if we assume, as this study does, that identity as well as the attitudes and worldviews it shapes are socially constructed, then it remains important to explain *how* this fear of domination was justified asides the articulation of obvious structural factors. Moreover, the Igbo-domination scare is difficult to explain via any structural advantages held by Igbos, especially in relation to Yorubas. Yet such fears persisted over the years.

In the material analysed, of the three leaders, it was Awolowo who most emphatically constructed fears of domination, especially at the hands of Northerners and in two instances uncovered, at the hands of Igbos. He justified fears of Northern domination by emphasizing the North’s politico-structural advantages combined with certain group traits he ascribed its inhabitants, most especially their elites. In the case of Igbos, he emphasized ascribed group traits and the ambitions of their most prominent leader, Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Bello’s usually implicit suggestions of the potential for Southern domination were much rarer, more indirect and justified by an emphasis on structural advantages held by Southerners combined with ascribed ‘Southern’ traits and the personal ambitions of Southern politicians. I however uncovered one revealing instance where Bello justified fears of Igbo-domination by focussing specifically on ascribed group traits, as shall be evidenced.

Azikiwe very rarely evoked the spectre of domination, and when he did, it was mainly in two contexts: first, in the general context of regional ethnic majorities potentially dominating ethnic minorities in Nigeria’s tri-regional system and, during the 1951 Western regional parliamentary campaign, he subtly alluded to the potential for Yoruba domination of the West should Awolowo’s Action Group win political control of the region.

While he called for Nigeria to be divided ‘in such a way as to prevent any one region or any combination of regions being in position to dominate the others’[[538]](#footnote-538) and argued ‘each region should enjoy complete equality of representation in the federal legislatures, irrespective of size and population’[[539]](#footnote-539), he generally avoided articulating fears of [Northern] domination, leaving it to Awolowo to make such assertions on behalf of the South, and pay the subsequent political price. This was likely due to calculations antagonizing Northern leaders, who were virtually guaranteed control of the central legislature, would be detrimental to his political career. I shall now proceed to investigating fears of domination justified by emphases on structural factors combined with group traits.

**7.3 Structural factors combined with group traits predisposing towards domination**

During the period under study, it was only during the run-up to the 1951 Western Assembly elections that Azikiwe evoked the spectre of ethnic domination in Nigeria. For instance, in a newspaper interview on July 20, 1951, he argued the country’s tri-regional structure was ‘based on the false concept that Nigeria consists of only three tribes, mainly Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa.’[[540]](#footnote-540) Emphasizing the existence of several ‘tribes’ in each region, he argued ‘regionalization based on the concept of three tribes is therefore an attempt to encourage the tyranny of majorities over minority groups which have as much right to exist as the larger units.’[[541]](#footnote-541)

His solution was a ‘federation on the basis of legal equality’[[542]](#footnote-542) which essentially meant dividing Nigeria into a greater number of political units so that each of the ‘main ethnic and/or linguistic groups’[[543]](#footnote-543) could ‘exercise local and cultural autonomy’[[544]](#footnote-544) within its territorial auspices. Azikiwe offered no justificatory arguments for his presupposition of ‘tyranny’ by the largest ethnic groups in a tri-regional structure. Rather, his audience was invited to believe his assertions based on his personal authority.

Nevertheless, an unspoken presupposition arguably inferable from Azikiwe’s *topos of threat* is that numerically-superior ethnic groups will, as *a matter of course*, seek to dominate smaller groups if given an opportunity to do so, and tri-regionalism presented such an opportunity since the three major ethnic groups had the numbers to decide who wielded power in their respective regions.

This would suggest a rather cynical view of human nature (or perhaps of Nigerians specifically), which would run contrary to Azikiwe’s usually upbeat narratives about the national project. Arguably therefore, his assertions of potential ethnic majority domination in the tri-regional system are perhaps best interpreted in the context of his attempts to link AG’s support for tri-regionalism to their intentions for Yoruba domination in the West via numerical advantage, a scenario he evoked in a speech that will be analysed in the subsequent section.

Criticism of tri-regionalism also served Azikiwe’s support for Unitarianism at the time, a stance he later abandoned in favour of federalism. Suffice to say, the study did not uncover him emphasizing the issue again after the 1951 elections. For the rest of the period under study, Azikiwe generally ceased evoking fears of domination until his 1965 article in *Foreign Affairs* when he raised the issue of new state creation to redress the imbalances in Nigeria’s federal set-up.

As for Awolowo and Bello, when it came to evoking fears of Northern and Southern domination respectively, both usually deployed arguments combining structural factors with ascribed behavioural tendencies. For instance, after Bello and other Northern House of Representatives’ members used their ‘veto-power’ to truncate his party’s 1953 motion for self-government by 1956, Awolowo upped his criticism of the 50% arrangement, accusing Bello of ‘aspiring to dictatorship of the country by means of his Northern majority’ in a press statement on April 7, 1953.[[545]](#footnote-545)

Awolowo’s nomination strategy of referring to Bello’s ‘*Northern* majority’ rather than simply his ‘majority’, served to delegitimise the 50% arrangement among non-Northerners, constructing an Us vs Them cleavage along a North/South dividing line. It was somewhat inaccurate to employ the term ‘majority’ as the North had negotiated a parity of seats with the two Southern regions combined. What this meant in practise at the time was that no motion could pass the House if *all* Northern members opposed it. Awolowo thus presupposed the existence of a monolithic Northern political elite willing to permanently support Bello’s ‘dictatorship’ project.

In Awolowo’s narrative, Bello served as the metonymic personification of Northern Nigeria’s political elites who he had earlier, in essentialist fashion, described in his book *Path to Nigerian Freedom* as ‘autocrats, pure and simple.’[[546]](#footnote-546) In the press statement cited above, he employed the term ‘dictatorship’ as *a topos of threat* to evoke fears Southern Nigerians faced domination by a united and autocratic Northern elite led by Bello. It was thus a combination of the politico-structural advantages the North enjoyed and the presupposed unity of its political elite that Awolowo used to justify fears of Northern domination in Nigeria.

To redress the North’s politico-structural advantage, he advocated breaking up the region during his party’s annual conference on December 16, 1953. Awolowo told party members and supporters that to avoid ‘Northern domination’ in a future independent Nigeria, there should be a ‘redivision of the country into nine states with the Northern Region partitioned into four parts, the West into two, and the East into three, with an Upper House at the centre in legal recognition of the equality of status of each state.’[[547]](#footnote-547)

However, his suggestion did not receive much active support during the mid-1950s even within his own party where senior members, while in principle supportive of breaking up the North, were in practise ‘anxious not to offend the NPC which was deadly opposed to the creation of any state, and in particular, the Middle-Belt state.’[[548]](#footnote-548) It would not be until 1958 that Awolowo and his party would really force the issue of breaking up the Northern region. While presenting his party’s manifesto for the upcoming 1959 federal elections at a press conference in June that year, Awolowo described Bello as a ‘feudal overlord’[[549]](#footnote-549) who nursed the dream of ‘absentee autocratic control’[[550]](#footnote-550) of the Nigerian state once the British left as planned the following year.

As for Bello, in the 1950s, he emphasized Southern educational advantages combined with usually subtle and implicit ascriptions of domineering and unfair behavioural tendencies among Southerners (and especially their leaders) as justified reasons to fear domination if Nigeria gained independence before the North was strong enough to resist any such efforts. In his March 31, 1953 speech to the House of Representatives opposing AG’s demand for self-government by 1956, he presented the motion as an example of such overbearing behaviour, stating:

The Northern region does not intend to accept the invitation to commit suicide… any country which accepts self-government must do so with its eyes wide open and the problem, therefore, of one section of the country imposing its will on the others does not arise.[[551]](#footnote-551)

Bello suggested ‘one section of the country’ (a euphemism he often used to refer to Southern Nigerian ethnic groups) sought to impose its will on the North and lead it into committing ‘suicide’ (a metaphor evoking Northern subjugation to the better-educated Southerners). Just because Southerners wanted quick self-government, they sought to force it down the throats of Northerners who were unready for it.

Bello explained Northern unreadiness for self-government by emphasizing Northerners had been ‘late in assimilating Western education’ and were still in the process of ‘catching up’ to the South in this sphere. He added: ‘We have embarked upon so many plans of reform and development that we must have time to see how these work out in practise.’

In his April 4, 1953 radio broadcast briefing Northerners on events following the controversial self-government debate, all the Southern social actors Bello references are portrayed as domineering, aggressive and generally untrustworthy:

A most unpleasant feature of our last three days in Lagos was the bands of hooligans who were organized by unscrupulous politicians to abuse anyone seen to be wearing Northern dress who appeared to be a member of the House of Representatives. The abusive language they used and their behaviour disgusted us and left us in no doubt as to the type of undemocratic tactics that were being used to attempt to frighten us Northerners. It was a great disappointment to us Northern members to find that in Lagos other members put politics before the welfare of the country. We found no willingness to compromise or cooperate. We have, therefore, determined to carry on as rapidly as possible with our own reforms and development in the North. If other regions are willing to cooperate with us let them do so; if not we will concentrate on our own problems…When the people of the North consider themselves ready for self-government, we will ask for it and obtain it. We will never however agree to be dominated by a few ambitious politicians from the other regions.[[552]](#footnote-552)

Bello deployed a range of strategies to justify the North’s position and impute intentions of domination to Southern politicians though he avoided ethnic categorizations. He offered negative moral evaluations of Southern social actors (‘bands of hooligans’, ‘unscrupulous politicians’) who sought to intimidate Northern leaders due to their opposition to the self-government motion.

Southern politicians are portrayed as domineering (‘no willingness to compromise or cooperate’) and opportunistic (‘put politics before the welfare of the country’). Faced with such immoral actors, the only rational response for Northerners was to leave the door open to cooperation, but generally focus inwards and resist efforts at domination by the overbearing Southern politicians. Bello thus presupposed the existence of Southern politicians who sought to dominate Northerners. However, he did not ascribe this desire to any organized doctrine of ethnic supremacy, attributing it rather to aggressive personal ambition.

Nevertheless, the likely impact of this speech and the Lagos events on Northern perceptions of Southerners cannot be over-emphasized. In the Hausa-Fulani culture that dominated most of Northern Nigeria, personal humiliation through public abuse is considered a worse offence than physical assault.[[553]](#footnote-553) As Kirk-Greene observed, ‘if 1953 was to become the Biafran point of no return because of the slaughter of Ibos in Kano, it had never been anything less in the NPC demonology of the South because of their treatment by politicians and proletariat alike in Lagos.’[[554]](#footnote-554)

Their leaders subjected to such public abuse would likely have been interpreted by many Northerners as a humiliating act of aggression, which is why Bello made sure to highlight these events to rally them round his message of resistance to early self-government. In his autobiography published a decade later, Bello returned to the issue of how Northern leaders had been treated in Lagos, stating the 1953 events ‘just about finished it for us [Northerners] …what kind of trouble had we let ourselves in for by associating with such people?’[[555]](#footnote-555)

On May 22, 1953, Bello addressed Northern House of Assembly members, stating that before requesting self-government, his government’s priority for the North was advanced implementation of ‘the Northernisation of the Civil Service and of Local Government Services,’ a policy aimed at replacing the Southerners in the region’s bureaucracy with Northerners:

The Regional Government is fully aware of the need for the Northernisation of all grades of the Civil Service of the region. As far as the Senior Service is concerned it is the policy of the Regional Government to appoint a Northerner wherever he can be found. As proof of this I am pleased to be able to tell the House that within the last two months we have had fifteen Northerners appointed to the Senior Service compared with twenty-nine over the past five years.[[556]](#footnote-556)

Presenting Northernisation as an indisputable ‘need’ (read: to avoid Southern domination), Bello deployed *a topos of responsibility* suggesting it was his government’s duty to implement the policy. Juxtaposing recent appointments of Northerners to senior civil service positions (fifteen ‘within the last two months’), to the pre-Northernisation record (‘twenty-nine over the past five years’), he deployed a *topos of numbers* to imply that prior to the policy, Southerners had been allowed to dominate the region’s senior bureaucracy.

Via employment opportunities, Bello’s Northernisation policy thus linked Northerners’ identity category to their socioeconomic interests. This was a case of discourse combining with policy to politicize identity through the articulation and ‘formation of ethnically based governmental policy’ such as passage of laws that favour one ethnic group over another or discriminate against specific ethnic groups.[[557]](#footnote-557) Northernisation clearly favoured the various ethnic groups indigenous to the North while discriminating against members of Southern ethnic groups (Igbos, Yorubas etc) and can thus be described as the articulation and implementation of ‘ethnically’ or ‘ethno-regionally based’ policies.

Northernisation represented what Rothschild described as a ‘demand for the redistribution of society’s assets’ among ethno-groups as ‘corporate entities’, not just ‘access for individuals…. or reward for performance within certain accepted structural perimeters, [but] the power to set the perimeters.’[[558]](#footnote-558) Groups ‘that fear being overwhelmed by the forces of modernization and by dominant groups… politicize themselves to resist, dialectically, the feared fate by harnessing the very forces that portend it.’[[559]](#footnote-559)

Bello consistently linked his Northernisation policy to notions of emancipation from control by the Southern Other. In his May 1954 speech at NPC’s party convention, he stated:

We hope to have our own Northern men and women in all branches of the Public Service in the region…. Once we allow all the key positions in both the Junior and Senior Service to be in the hands of other people, self -government will not be real but a shame...[[560]](#footnote-560)

The ‘other people’ Bello referred to euphemistically were clearly Southerners who at the time dominated the North’s bureaucracy. Evaluating a scenario of continued dependence on them after independence as a ‘shame’ that would render self-government illusory, Bello appealed to Northerners’ sense of pride, honour and fears of domination. In his 1962 book, Bello provided more detailed justificatory arguments for why Northern leaders had rejected early self-government in the mid-1950s:

…we were very conscious indeed that the Northern region was far behind the others educationally. We knew that individually the educated Northerners could hold their own against the educated Southerners, but we simply had not got the numbers they had…for years the British Administration had clung to the principle that no one could enter the Administrative Service, the rulers of the world- our world, of course -.without a degree…as things were at that time, if the gates to the departments were to be opened, the Southern regions had a huge pool from which they could find suitable people, while we had hardly anyone. In the resulting scramble it would, we were convinced, be inevitable that the Southern applicants would get almost all the posts available. Once you get a government post you are indeed hard to shift and providing there is no misconduct the line of promotion to higher posts must as far as possible follow seniority. The answer was clearly that in these circumstances the Northerner’s chance of getting anywhere in the government service would be exactly nil…such a situation might, taken from a broad angle and in other conditions have appeared to be quibbling and possibly rather childish. As things were here, it was a matter of life and death to us. For we were not only educationally backward, but we stood at the time far behind the others in material development...if the British administration had failed to give us the even development that we deserved and for which we craved so much- and they were on the whole a very fair administration- what had we to hope from an African administration…. The answer to our minds was quite simply just nothing beyond a little window dressing.[[561]](#footnote-561)

This excerpt suggests, in line with Rothschild’s observations, that the major engine of conflict in North-South relations was not ‘this or that primordial cultural commitment per se’[[562]](#footnote-562) (e.g. was Islam or Christianity the ‘true’ faith?), but ‘the perceived ethnic inequalities and inequities in access to, and possession of, economic, educational, political, administrative, and social resources.’[[563]](#footnote-563) Bello generally presented the ‘Southern threat’ in largely non-ethnic language – as primarily the result of *regional* structural imbalances.

However, he did emphatically distinguish between two categories of Nigerian social actors – ‘Northerners’ and ‘Southerners’ – in line with his strategy of drawing boundary lines along this axis. Moreover, while his arguments rested on structural factors (lower Northern education levels) they also included implicit but clearly-discernible negative moral evaluations of Southerners who he portrayed as lacking a sense of fair-play, using a *topos of comparison* to Brits who despite being in a very dominant position vis-a-vis Northerners during colonialism were ‘on the whole a very fair administration.’

Bello’s positive moral evaluation of British group characteristics thus led him to perceive Brits in charge of the North’s bureaucracy very differently from Southerners being in charge, which is hardly surprising considering the open contempt Southern leaders regularly expressed towards the North.

According to Bello, if self-government came before the North had enough educated personnel to compete for bureaucratic jobs, Southerners would grab everything available, entrench themselves in the region’s civil service and use their positions to divert resources to South, prolonging the North’s economic backwardness which would subsequently leave it in an even weaker position vis-à-vis the South.

To sum up, Southerners could simply not be trusted to do the fair thing when in a position of advantage. This is why the situation represented ‘a matter of life and death for us’, as Bello asserted dramatically. Northerners needed to undertake every possible pre-emptive action to ensure Southerners never held the upper hand over them in an independent Nigeria. It is difficult to imagine the building of a successful nation in such an atmosphere of mistrust and fear.

However, while he consistently implied the danger of Southern domination through most of the 1950s, by March 1958, with Northernisation well-advanced, his party in firm control of the North and looking likely to dominate post-independence national politics as well, Bello’s narrative shifted markedly towards now declaring before the Northern House of Chiefs that the aim of Northernization was to have ‘Northerners gain control of everything in the country.’[[564]](#footnote-564)

Such utterances, combined with Bello’s increasingly-aggressive Northernisation efforts, fuelled fears of impending Northern domination. Following the wholesale dismissal of 600 Southern workers from the North’s regional service in 1958, Awolowo wrote a public letter to Bello, stating the ‘summary and rather ruthless manner’[[565]](#footnote-565) in which the Southerners had been fired had ‘sent shivers down many a spine throughout the country’[[566]](#footnote-566) prompting fears of what things would look like in an independent Nigeria. In his reply letter, Bello stated the incident was a ‘purely domestic issue’[[567]](#footnote-567) and that ‘no one invited’[[568]](#footnote-568) the dismissed Southerners to come to the North in the first place.

Thus, in 1958, Awolowo and his party started loudly demanding further regional sub-divisions, including the establishment of a Middle-Belt state to be carved out of the Northern region, arguing this was needed to assuage the fears of regional minorities wary of being dominated by Bello and his ‘Fulani clique’ in a post-British Nigeria.[[569]](#footnote-569) After the Minorities Commission established to look into these demands that year decided not to recommend changes to the status quo, Awolowo released a press statement, asserting:

The fundamental cause of minority fears which the commission had missed was the dictatorial and totalitarian tendencies inherent in the characteristics of certain majority ethnic groups in the country.[[570]](#footnote-570)

While neglecting to specify which ‘majority ethnic groups’ he was referring to, it seems safe to assume he did not mean his Yoruba group and was alluding to the Hausa-Fulanis of the North, perhaps also to the Igbos of the East, though the phrase ‘totalitarian’ suggests he was primarily referring to the former, considering his regular characterizations of Northern Nigeria as ‘feudal’ and ‘autocratic.’ Thus, in essentialist fashion, Awolowo ascribed an ethnic group (or groups) inherent ‘dictatorial tendencies’ as justification for fears of domination by that group. It is important to emphasize here that considerable care was usually taken by all leaders to ensure political discourses about regional inequalities and potential for domination were largely non-ethnic in content, although they often implied ethnic references as evident in Awolowo’s press statement cited above.

For his part, Bello’s rhetoric grew increasingly assertive in the immediate pre-independence era. On March 15, 1959, while addressing Northern crowds celebrating the attainment of regional self-government, he highlighted the North’s politico-structural advantage over the Southern regions going into independence, stating:

We have not, always in the past, received the same constitutional privileges and benefits as those enjoyed by other regions. Today however, we emerge as equals with them; and, having the greatest number of people in the federation, I can say that we emerge as first among equals. Let no one think that we shall withdraw from or underrate this position.[[571]](#footnote-571)

Bello used the *topos of numbers* (thanks to which the North enjoyed greater political representation than the Southern regions combined) to justify his claims Northern Nigeria was entering the independence era as the pre-eminent region, a status he signalled he intended to take advantage of and *maintain*.

After his party’s victory in the 1959 federal elections, Bello went even further, asserting his impending personal domination of the country. In a speech in the Northern city of Kaduna on December 18, 1959 addressing supporters, he announced plans to hand over power to younger Northern leaders at the national level. Suggesting his withdrawal would take place in similar fashion to that of his great-grandfather Usman dan Fodio, founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, who, on completion of his successful Jihad ‘exactly 151 years ago’, divided the empire, conquered territory and all, between his brother and his eldest son for them to administer, Bello declared:

When the current political battle is over, I too will divide this country between my two trustworthy lieutenants.[[572]](#footnote-572)

The historical analogy was one of Bello’s most categorical articulations of a post-independence Nigeria viewed as the historical continuation of the Sokoto Caliphate with himself in the role of contemporary Usman dan Fodio. This declaration naturally fuelled domination fears further, drawing a sharp official response from Awolowo’s party, who in a January 1960 press statement, asserted they had:

…taken cognisance of the statement made by the leader of the NPC, Sir Ahmadu Bello… to the effect that he intended to divide Nigeria into North and South and then rule the two parts: from Sokoto through his lieutenants, in much the same way as his great-grandfather ruled the Fulani Empire… all nationalists in Nigeria must find this threat not only disturbing and it was against this background that the new composition of Council of Ministers should be viewed, consisting as it did of 10 lieutenants of Sir Ahmadu Bello, all from the North, and 7 others drawn from the East, COR area, the West, the Mid-West and Lagos. It was decided [at the AG meeting] to immediately embark on a program of action, both in the House of Representatives, and outside it…to champion the struggle of the masses against oppression, tyranny, tribal domination and victimisation which are the common political weapons of the Northern People’s Congress…[[573]](#footnote-573)

In an example of inter-textuality, AG drew a link between Bello’s statement and the decision of the NPC-led coalition to appoint 10 *Northern* ministers in the 17-member Council of Ministers. The combined events are presented as proof of a conspiracy to dominate Nigeria and further ‘tribal domination’ by the majority Hausa-Fulani group of the Northern region.

In his 1960 autobiography published just before independence, Awolowo combined structural arguments with negative moral evaluations to warn of impending Northern domination of Nigeria. Using an *argumentum ad verecundiam*, he stated the North’s size violated the rules of federalism laid down by Kenneth C. Wheare who asserted:

The capacity of states to work a federal union is also greatly influenced by their size. It is undesirable that one or two units should be so powerful that they can overrule the others and bend the will of the federal government to themselves.[[574]](#footnote-574)

Apart from the North’s size violating this federalist principle, Awolowo argued its elites had every *intention* of dominating Nigeria:

The slogan of the NPC … is ‘One North, One People’’; and significantly enough this party has so far refused to change its name and constitution to enable Nigerians other than those who are indigenous to the Northern Region to become its members. Nevertheless, this political party which is exclusive to Northerners not only insists on maintaining the feudal aristocracy of the North but also seeks to dominate the government of the Federation. There is no doubt that the Northern Region as at present constituted is determined to bend the will of the Federal Government to its own end and, if it can, to make the other regions live in permanent subordination to it.[[575]](#footnote-575)

Bello’s NPC is a major social actor referenced, portrayed as ethnically exclusivist, since it barred non-Northerners from its ranks. Awolowo asserted a Northern potential and intention to dominate Nigeria’s government and *permanently*.subjugate the southern regions. Awolowo moved from referencing a specific political party, NPC, to deploying a generalizing synecdoche (‘the Northern region’) to evoke a concerted regional conspiracy for domination.

Awolowo’s presuppositions of impending Northern domination were further reflected in his party’s ‘manifesto for an independent Nigeria’[[576]](#footnote-576) issued to the press on September 23, 1960, again advocating ‘the division of the country into states based on linguistic or ethnic lines’ because ‘any system of political grouping which allows the domination of one ethnic unit by another strikes a blow at the unity of the country.’[[577]](#footnote-577)

In the post-colonial era, Awolowo went from warning of impending Northern domination to asserting its rapacious existence. When addressing Southern Nigerians, he strove to stoke outrage at this supposed state of events, usually deploying the *topos of cause*, the *topos of threat* and the *topos of reality* (which involves asserting something *presently exists)*, as argumentative schemes. An exemplification was Awolowo’s November 7, 1960 address to his party’s Eastern Regional Conference. Addressing a pre-dominantly Igbo audience, Awolowo asserted:

All of us Nigerians have opted for a federal constitution. But there can be no true federation when one of the regions or states in our federation is so large and populous that it can override the wishes of all the others put together and bend their will to its own. This principle is violated by the existence of Northern Nigeria as a monolithic unit. Not only that, by virtue of its population, it has in practise and to the knowledge of all of us, succeeded and continues to succeed in bending to its own device the will of all the other regions put together. Let us face fact, it is no longer the people of the COR [Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers areas], Mid-West and Middle-Belt areas that are minorities in Nigeria, the Ibo and Yoruba have also been reduced to the status of minorities under the over-bearing and over-awing majority of Northern Nigeria. I am not a prophet, but I want to make a shrewd prediction. If we do not all unite now to split the North into more states, the North as at present constituted will either break Nigeria or enslave all of us under a new form of imperialism.[[578]](#footnote-578)

Awolowo portrayed ‘Northern Nigeria’ as a homogenized political unit dominating the country due to its structural advantages. Using an *argumentum ad populum*, he claimed ‘all of us’ (himself + his audience) agreed this was the case. On the one hand, by consistently referring to ‘the North’, ‘Northern Nigeria’ or using the impersonal pronoun ‘it’, rather than, for instance, ‘Northerners’, Awolowo strove to depersonalize his arguments: It is not Northerners who are the problem, but the fact a political unit the size of Northern Nigeria exists within a federal arrangement.

On the other hand, he deployed emotional arguments appealing to Igbo and Yoruba pride by asserting they had suffered a downgrade in post-independence Nigeria (‘reduced to the status of minorities’). Furthermore, they faced increased subjugation in the future if they did not unite to force the break-up of the North.

Rothschild asserted it is ‘more vexing’ for an ethnic group to be dominated by those it considers its economic and cultural inferiors than those it considers its equals or superiors.[[579]](#footnote-579) This observation appears applicable to Awolowo’s narratives which reflected a ‘politics of aggressive resentment, fuelled by the experience and emotion of relative deprivation’ among leaders of formerly dominant groups currently experiencing a ‘condition in which capacities (political, economic, social or cultural) fail to match expectations.’[[580]](#footnote-580) Awolowo used intensifying phrases such as ‘overbearing and over-awing’ to portray the North as a domineering bully, striving to unite non-Northerners, in particular, Igbos and Yorubas, against the powerful region.

In the post-independence era, Awolowo consistently called for a restructuring of Nigeria’s federation which was ‘monstrously abnormal in structure’ as the political antidote to northern domination. Addressing Nigerian students in London on September 3, 1961, he asserted:

The Northern region bestrides the rest of the country like a colossus. As long as this region remains a unit, the party in power there, even in a free and fair election, will always have an electoral advantage over other political parties…Today, the NPC rules both the North and the federation; and yet its leaders refuse to change the name of the organisation to permit the admission of Southerners into its membership. But, of course, the Sardauna [Bello] has declared, in his characteristically pompous manner, that ‘NPC is Nigeria and Nigeria is NPC’…. he has never made any bones about the fact that the federation is being run by his loyal lieutenants who must look to him, from time to time, for direction on major issues. In actual fact, therefore, the centre of gravity of the federation is Kaduna, not Lagos; and this degrading state of affairs will continue so long as the present unbalanced and unusual structure of our federation persists.[[581]](#footnote-581)

Again, Awolowo drew attention to the ethnically-exclusivist nature of NPC, highlighting Northern domination by pointing to Kaduna (from where Bello ran the Northern regional government) as Nigeria’s de-facto political capital rather than the Yoruba-majority city of Lagos which was Nigeria’s official capital. Awolowo described this as ‘degrading’, presumably to the Yoruba students in his audience who had to endure the humiliation of knowing ‘their’ city was no longer the *real* capital of Nigeria where important decisions were made. Throughout 1962, Awolowo continued to argue for the break-up of the Northern Region.[[582]](#footnote-582)

However, as discussed in Chapter 2, due to in-fighting in AG, Awolowo eventually lost power in the West and was found guilty of treasonable felony in 1963. In a statement before The High Court, he implied he was being persecuted because of his struggle ‘to preclude the permanent subservience of the people of Nigeria to the autocratic ruling caste in the North.’[[583]](#footnote-583)After his release from prison (and the death of Bello), Awolowo continued to make the argument that the North needed to be broken up to reduce its advantage vis-à-vis the two Southern regions. Thus, right from the 1950s, Awolowo asserted first a potential, and then an actual, scenario of ‘Northern domination’ justifying this claim by highlighting the politico-structural advantages of the region while simultaneously offering negative moral evaluations of Northerners, especially Northern elites, ascribing to them an inherent *will* to dominate. As for Bello, for most of the 1950s, he evoked fears of domination by pointing to structural advantages and portraying Southerners as aggressive and lacking a sense of fair-play. As mentioned earlier, after 1951, Azikiwe generally ceased evoking fears of domination.

**7.4 Groups traits predisposing towards domination**

A July 1948 Colonial Office political report described the establishment of the Yoruba socio-cultural group *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* as a ‘closing of the Yoruba ranks against what they perceive to be the ‘threat’ of economic and political domination by the Igbos’.[[584]](#footnote-584) As mentioned in previous chapters, after the Yorubas gained a significant head start in the spheres of Western education and socio-economic development during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, by the late 1940s, the Igbos had all but caught up and significant sections of Yoruba elites were feeling threatened by the increasingly commanding position of Azikiwe and his Igbo-dominated NCNC party in Southern Nigerian politics.[[585]](#footnote-585) This was the immediate context in which the 1948 ‘Lagos Press War’ (discussed in chapter two) between Azikiwe’s *Pilot* and the *Egbe Omo Odùduwà’s* mouthpiece, the *Daily Service*, took place. The conflict was a manifestation of on-going rivalries between sections of Yoruba and Igbo elites in Lagos, which due to its centrality as the political and economic capital of the country represented a particularly important and symbolic battleground in the ethnic hegemonic politics of colonial Nigeria.[[586]](#footnote-586)

However, while the socio-economic ‘catching up’ of the Igbos to the Yorubas was clearly a structural factor fostering contemporary Igbo-domination fears, in the instances Awolowo touched on the issue, he focussed on *negative moral evaluations* of Igbos predestining towards domination rather structural factors, presenting Igbos as ethnocentric, untrustworthy and domineering.

An exemplification can be found in a telegram I uncovered in Awolowo’s personal archives at his family home, likely sent sometime in the second-half of 1948 to the editors of the *Daily Service* in response to a declaration issued at a mass meeting of Igbos in Lagos stating media attacks on Azikiwe would be considered an attack on the ‘Ibo nation’.[[587]](#footnote-587) At the time, Awolowo was General Secretary of the *Egbe Omo Odùduwà* and his telegram suggested how *Daily Service* should react to this development. The text could thus be described as aimed at the formation of opinion and will within the ranks of the *Egbe,* its Yoruba leadership and the mostly Yoruba readers of the *Daily Service* newspaper. Awolowo’s telegram deployed a *topos of threat* suggesting Azikiwe and his Igbo supporters were bent on intimidating Yorubas:

So the Lagos Igbos regard attack on Azikiwe as attack on them Stop Even so the attack must go on with unabated fury for to do otherwise would be to dethrone reason and put suicidal madness in its place Stop Fight on redoubtable Service Stop Now that the Igbos have placed themselves on the side of the evil that is Azikiwe the issue is clear Stop Lagos Igbos lied ignominiously when they said that Egbe diplomatically turned down offer for settlement before present press war started the fact is offer was made after war started and was not turned down Stop They also lied when they said Egbe’s express aim is to put Igbos at their right place Stop It is incredible and it is an outrageous affront on Yoruba manhood and womanhood that whilst Igbos resented reprisals on Azikiwe they approved of his unprovoked attacks on respected and respectable Yoruba leaders Stop We had thought that it was an issue between individuals but now that Igbos make Azikiwes cause theirs we too make Alakijas Majas and Davies cause ours we accept the challenge without flinching we must not attack first but every aggressive onslaught must be repulsed with stronger force we must so fight that our opponents would soon discover that there is more courage and more brains and resourcefulness on this side than there Stop Lagos is a Yoruba town and four million Igbos cannot terrorize its Yoruba inhabitants into submissive silence Stop Surely Azikiwe’s time is up it is only a matter of weeks Stop Am writing series on recent events for publication from next week Stop meantime please show our Igbo friends that the Yorubas though gentle in manners are formidable in action Stop.[[588]](#footnote-588)

Awolowo’s assertion ‘Lagos is a Yoruba town and four million Igbos cannot terrorize its Yoruba inhabitants into submissive silence’, conveyed on the one hand an ethno-territorial claim to ownership of Lagos as well as the idea the on-going conflict was part of an Igbo effort to subjugate Yorubas in their own homeland. At the time, ‘four million’ represented the *total* maximum estimated number of Igbos throughout Nigeria, thus by referencing this figure and not the number of Igbos who actually lived in Lagos (roughly 30,000 at the time),[[589]](#footnote-589) Awolowo significantly magnified the threat presented, implying Igbos in their homogenized totality had launched an assault on Lagos Yorubas.

His insistence media attacks on Azikiwe had to continue ‘for to do otherwise would be to dethrone reason and put suicidal madness in its place’ metaphorically presupposed extreme danger from Azikiwe and his Igbo supporters. The telegram is generally littered with militaristic terms (‘onslaught’, ‘attack’, ‘repulsed’, ‘stronger force’), portraying the conflict as an inter-ethnic battle. The scenario presented can be summed up thus: If we [Yorubas] back down now, we will simply be accepting domination by Azikiwe and his Igbo supporters in Lagos.

Awolowo’s strategies of nomination emphasized to his immediate audience the existence of an ‘us’ (Yorubas) and a ‘them’ (Igbos) co-existing in an antagonistic relationship. His telegram suggests a highly-personalized elite-based approach to inter-ethnic relations both on his part and on the part of the Igbos actors referenced.

An elite conflict between individual Igbo actors, personified by the central figure of Azikiwe, and prominent Yoruba leaders mentioned in the telegram, was transposed onto their ethnic groups, escalating into a conflict in which an attack on Azikiwe was considered an attack on the ‘Igbo nation’ and backing down was portrayed as tantamount to submission by the Yoruba collective itself – ‘suicidal madness’ – as Awolowo asserted dramatically.

This idea defeat and/or dishonour for individual elite actor(s) de-facto translated to defeat and/or dishonour for the whole group represented a strong personalization of ethnic discourse in which elite honour is equated with group honour, elite rivalries escalate into group rivalries and overall ethnic interests are portrayed as congruent with group interests.

This discursive fusion of Yoruba elite and non-elite interests is achieved in part through the ethnicization of discourse reflected in Awolowo’s referential categorizations. The social class of the individuals involved in the conflict is portrayed as of secondary importance to their ethnic identities. Although Awolowo spoke of ‘respected and respectable Yoruba leaders’, thus signalling their elite status, clearly it was not their eliteness that warranted intervention on their behalf but the fact they were *Yoruba* elites who had been attacked by Azikiwe, an Igbo, with the support of other Igbos. Awolowo’s battle-cry urged ethnic solidarity with the Yoruba leaders, applying moral pressure on the addressees to ‘defend’ their kinsmen under attack from the aggressive Other.

His strategy of predication served as the basis for his main legitimising strategy: that of moral evaluation. He sought to establish moral authority and common moral ground with his Yoruba addressees by attributing negative evaluative traits to Igbos and positive ones to Yorubas, implying [Lagos] Igbos were dishonest (accusing them of lying twice in the telegram), aggressive and engaged in moral hypocrisy: while they condemned Yoruba media attacks against Azikiwe, they ‘approved of’ his attacks on Yoruba leaders.

Finally, Awolowo accused Igbos of ethnicizing what Yoruba leaders ‘had thought … was an issue between individuals’, by making ‘Azikiwes cause theirs’. This was an exemplification of the ‘they started it’ argument: *they* introduced ethnicity into the equation, we are just responding in kind. Due to the moral consensus ‘tribalism’ as it was popularly referred to, was undesirable, no individual or group wanted to be associated with it, thus actors like Awolowo constantly shifted responsibility for the phenomenon onto other groups.

This was not the only occasion on which Awolowo would portray Igbos as displaying a tendency for primordial-like ethnic affinity. It is in fact one of the main justificatory arguments he would bring up to justify fears of Igbo domination in his autobiography over a decade later. In his 1948 telegram, Awolowo clearly sought to stimulate emotions Chilton argued can be regarded as more or less basic - anger, sense of security, protectiveness, loyalty[[590]](#footnote-590) in his addressees.

Meanwhile, in the run-up to the Western assembly elections of 1951, while Awolowo himself avoided public accusations of plans for Igbo domination, editorials in his newspaper, *Nigerian* *Tribune*, asserted Azikiwe’s ‘political and social activities have had this Ibo-domination inclination.’[[591]](#footnote-591) *Tribune* also urged Azikiwe, who was contesting a seat in the Yoruba-majority city of Lagos, to stay out of Western politics since he did not belong to the region ‘by birth’.[[592]](#footnote-592) These were exemplifications of ethnicity being introduced into the political arena; a major theme in AG’s 1951 campaign was opposition to Azikiwe and ‘Igbo domination’ of the Western region.[[593]](#footnote-593)

Azikiwe’s *Pilot* responded by accusing AG of propagating ‘the myth of Ibo-domination’ to win votes in the Western region,[[594]](#footnote-594) particularly among the majority Yoruba voters.[[595]](#footnote-595) Denying such intentions, Azikiwe and his NCNC party adopted two major discursive strategies to counter this trope. When campaigning in the Yoruba heartland, NCNC politicians insisted talk of Igbo-domination was absurd because their party ‘was founded in Yorubaland by the Yorubas’,[[596]](#footnote-596) that ‘its first president was a Yoruba,’[[597]](#footnote-597) and that NCNC candidates standing in Yoruba constituencies were Yorubas.[[598]](#footnote-598) These primordialist appeals suggest NCNC was concerned about the effects of ‘Igbo-domination’ narratives amongst Yoruba voters. In effect, their response helped legitimise and entrench the hegemony of ethnic discourses in political debate. Ethnic discourses thus fed off themselves.

Furthermore, Azikiwe implied Awolowo’s party sought Yoruba-domination of the Western region at the cost of non-Yoruba groups. However, he was very careful with such claims. With his media regularly accusing AG of scare-mongering about ‘Igbo-domination’, Azikiwe personally suggesting plans for ‘Yoruba-domination’ would invite easy accusations of hypocrisy. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, he was contesting a seat in a Yoruba-majority city, and thus needed Yoruba votes, requiring tact with such accusations. He therefore adopted a rhetorical strategy of insinuation based on carefully-laid discursive groundwork.

In the years 1950-51 (and not only), Azikiwe consistently imputed ‘tribalism’ to AG, stating during a campaign rally in the run-up to the 1951 elections that ‘the difference between us and our political opponents is that whereas we believe in, and work for one Nigeria, irrespective of language, class, clan, religion, tribe or region, the Action Group believes in tribalism and regionalisation.[[599]](#footnote-599) Imputing ‘tribalism’ to AG laid the foundation for insinuations Awolowo’s party harboured intentions for Yoruba-domination of the West, which in turn explained their support for tri-regionalism since they knew Yorubas made up the majority in the region and thus could easily dominate it on that basis.

For instance, in a campaign speech addressing a mass rally in the ethnically-diverse city of Lagos on November 17, 1951, Azikiwe’s strategies of nomination and predication were to portray AG as a ‘tribalist’ party guilty of ‘inciting tribe against tribe with all the artifices of the notorious Jew baiters of Nazi Germany’. He stated that ‘in spite of lip service towards Nigerian unity, the Action Group do not believe in one Nigeria but prefer in its stead a tri-sected Pakistanized country.’[[600]](#footnote-600)

Azikiwe thus equated AG’s support for tri-regionalism with ethnic sectarianism, symbolized via the metaphor of ‘Pakistanism.’ In the years following the bloody 1947 partitioning of India, the experience served as a *topos of threat* in Nigerian political discourse to convey the consequences of ethno-centric bigotry in a diverse country. To be accused of ‘Pakistanism’ was to be accused of being an ethnic chauvinist whose actions could lead to the violent break-up of Nigeria.

Azikiwe’s comparisons of Awolowo’s party to the Nazis was as much for the benefit of the British colonial government, who he argued seemed ‘unable or unwilling’ to do anything about AG’s ‘tribalist’ politics, as for his Nigerian audience. With WWII still fresh in mind, it is very likely that to the British official, the worst thing a party could be was *like the Nazis* who represented the worst manifestation of racial and ethnic bigotry hence Azikiwe’s attempts to delegitimize AG in their eyes in the hope of some negative consequence for his rivals.

Azikiwe always focussed his attacks on AG and Awolowo personally to avoid the impression he was criticizing Yorubas as a whole. The study did not uncover a single instance in which he evaluated ‘Yorubas’ negatively and explicit assertions AG had an agenda for Yoruba domination were left to the columnists in *Pilot*[[601]](#footnote-601) while Azikiwe himself relied merely on allusions to this effect. After having laid the groundwork by portraying AG as a fascistic tribalist party in his Lagos speech, he asserted rhetorically:

In the West region, we have the following linguistic groups: Yoruba, Edo, Ibo, Ijaw, Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri. Certainly, the evangelists of the Action Group cannot tell us that the Western region belongs exclusively to one particular linguistic or ethnic group, and they cannot claim that because any group is numerically superior to the others, therefore it can dominate the rest.[[602]](#footnote-602)

Without directly accusing AG of plans for Yoruba domination in the West, Azikiwe insinuated as such by drawing the attention of his audience to the *prospect* of domination by the numerically-superior Yorubas, thus placing the onus of proof on the ‘tribalist’ AG to demonstrate that their support for political regionalism did *not* equate to intentions for Yoruba domination in the region.

This was an exemplification of ethnicity being introduced into the political arena via subterfuge: A political actor (Azikiwe) suggested other political actors (AG members) viewed politics in ethnic terms (they were fascistic ‘tribalists’) and thus their policies (support for tri-regionalism) needed to be interpreted in terms of what they hoped to gain for their ethnic group (Yorubas) by supporting those policies. Ethnicity thus ends up being politicized via claims *others* view politics in ethnic terms.

The domination trope was likely deployed during the 1951 Western election campaign because the actors considered it an effective strategy for mobilizing voters, suggesting fears of domination either already existed amongst significant sections of the Western electorate or could be relatively easily stoked up. Nnoli offered a persuasive account of the material roots of such fears, including fierce socio-economic competition and uncertainty.[[603]](#footnote-603)

In the end, Awolowo led the Yoruba-dominated AG to victory in the elections, effectively seeing off the threat of the Igbo Azikiwe winning political control of the Yoruba-majority region. The rest of the 1950s ushered in the decisive phase of the independence struggle which brought with it new political dynamics such as the North-South dispute over the optimal timing for Nigerian independence. Due to these independence-struggle dynamics, the fact he was in power and likely out of a desire to present himself as a national patriot to further his ambitions of becoming independent Nigeria’s first prime minister, during the years 1952-1959, Awolowo refrained from evoking fears of Igbo-domination, only to return to the issue emphatically after his party lost the all-important 1959 federal elections.

In his 1960 autobiography, geared towards Nigerian as well as foreign readers following Nigerian politics, Awolowo offered justifications for his political actions up to date. With his ambition of becoming Nigeria’s prime minister truncated for the moment, he abandoned political correctness to offer essentialist and negative moral evaluations of Igbos.

His interpretation of the 1941 Ikoli-Akinsanya dispute (discussed in chapter 2), which effectively split the nationalist Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), is particularly interesting for some Nigeria-scholars point to this incident as the beginning of the ethnicization of politics in Nigeria.[[604]](#footnote-604) As in the 1948 telegram analysed at the beginning of the chapter, Awolowo’s nomination and predication strategies involved portraying Igbos as a homogenized collective lacking in principles or moral values, and driven by ethnocentric sentiments:

The implicit and unshaken loyalty which the Ibos had shown to Dr Azikiwe during the [1941] Ikoli-Akisanya crisis did not arise in my view from ideological faith but rather from linguistic affinity and ethnic self-assertion. This, I warned, was an ominous pointer to the future. Nigeria under a unitary constitution might be dominated by those, whatever their number, who owed greater allegiance to ethnic affinity than to principles and ideals.[[605]](#footnote-605)

Awolowo’s argument can be summed up thus: At a crucial moment in history when we were trying to build Nigerian nationalism, ‘the Ibos’ demonstrated their ethnocentrism by backing Azikiwe in a major dispute simply because he was *Igbo*. In a centralized unitary system there was a good chance Igbos would have attained positions of power. Since they are ethnocentric, they would likely have used such power to impose Igbo-domination over the rest of Nigeria. This was one of the reasons I opposed a Unitary system in Nigeria.

This argument paradoxically reflected both Awolowo’s negative essentializing moral evaluation of Igbos as well as his positive assessment of their abilities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he generally portrayed Igbos as resourceful, dynamic and ambitious. What’s more they demonstrated ethnic solidarity as he suggested; it is the combination of these attributes – ability, aggressive ethnocentrism and group unity -- that Awolowo portrayed as justifying fears of Igbo domination. In a later passage, he provided further arguments in this light with his interpretation and recontextualization of Azikiwe’s 1943 proposal to split Nigeria into eight protectorates:

Two things struck me as significant in Dr. Azikiwe’s formula. First, all the Ibos in Benin and Warri Provinces of the Western Protectorate or Region were to be merged with their kith and kin in Onitsha and Owerri under Azikiwe’s proposed ‘Southern Protectorate’, though similar consideration was not extended to the Yorubas of Ilorin and Kabba Provinces. Secondly, the Ibos were cleverly split into two Protectorates – Southern and South-eastern- where because of their numbers they would be in permanent dominance, having regard to their unique ethnic loyalty and solidarity, which had been demonstrated during the Ikoli-Akisanya crisis, and which has been demonstrated several times since.[[606]](#footnote-606)

Awolowo again justified his assertions of Igbo ethnocentrism and group unity (‘unique ethnic loyalty and solidarity’) using the argument from example of the 1941 Ikoli-Akisanya crisis. It is worth recalling Northern unity was also a major factor cited in Awolowo’s narratives about potential northern domination. Why did Awolowo appear so wary of unity in other groups? Some of his writings suggest it was because he felt Yorubas, and most especially their elites, remained significantly disunited[[607]](#footnote-607) and disloyal to the greater group cause in comparison to Igbo and Hausa-Fulani elites,[[608]](#footnote-608) a situation he likely viewed as an inherent weakness in the competition with their major rivals. Thus, weaknesses he perceived within his own group appear to have been a significant source of Awolowo’s fear of domination by the Other.

Simultaneously deploying *the topos of history as teacher*, he asserted Igbo ethnocentrism had been demonstrated ‘several times since’, without providing any further examples. He portrayed Azikiwe’s 1943 structural proposal as *designed* to ensure Igbo domination in two of the proposed eight protectorates by ensuring Igbos formed the numerical majority in both protectorates.

The stated belief that in a specific territorial setting, the numerically-dominant ethnic group will exploit its status to its advantage to subjugate minorities, was also reflected in Azikiwe’s arguments against tri-regionalism, as shown in the subsequent section. Determining whether both leaders really believed Nigerian ethno-majorities would dominate minorities as a matter of course if given the opportunity or whether they simply exploited such fears to position their parties as protectors of minority groups is beyond the scope of this study. However, the fact they both suggested such domination was probable or even virtually inevitable in such a setting, clearly served to intensify fears of domination in ethnic minorities. Such discourses politicized ethnicity by linking the ethno-political structuring of the country to the prospect or avoidance of domination by specific groups.

In his 1960 autobiography, Awolowo also attributed Igbo-domination ambitions to Azikiwe specifically who he labelled an ‘unabashed Ibo jingoist’. In an inter-textual reference, he recalled Azikiwe’s 1949 speech to the Igbo State Union (referenced in the previous chapters) asserting ‘it would appear the God of Africa has specially created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages’:

It was clear from these statements and from the general political and journalistic manoeuvres of Dr Azikiwe over the years that his great objective was to set himself up as a dictator over Nigeria and to make the Ibo nation the master race. It would appear according to his reckoning that the only obstacle in the path to his ambition was the Yoruba intelligentsia, and these must be removed at all cost. A situation in which one ethnic group would dominate the others does not accord with my conception of a united and happy Nigeria. I am implacably opposed to dictatorship as well as the doctrine of Herrenvolk whether it was Hitler’s or Dr Azikiwe’s.[[609]](#footnote-609)

As in the 1948 telegram, Awolowo portrayed Azikiwe as the personification of domineering ethno-chauvinist evil. Importantly, nowhere in the book did he suggest Azikiwe may have given up his imputed ‘doctrine of Herrenvolk’. It is thus left to the reader’s imagination to determine what could be expected of the man in the future. Such utterances in an autobiography likely edited and re-edited several times speak to a calculated strategy by Awolowo to implicitly evoke the continued threat of Igbo-domination on the eve of Nigerian independence.

Finally, he recalled a statement by an Igbo member of the Nigerian Legislative Council who asserted in 1948 that ‘the domination of Nigeria by the Igbos is a question of time.’[[610]](#footnote-610) All this Awolowo pointed to as evidence Azikiwe and other Igbo leaders had sought, and perhaps continued to seek, Igbo domination in Nigeria, demonstrating how irresponsible statements by political leaders could be evoked over a decade later to justify accusations of intentions for domination.

As for Bello, the study uncovered one instance where he explicitly justified Northern fears of Igbo domination with strongly negative moral evaluations of Igbo group traits. The statements were made in a TV interview conducted by a British journalist, most likely for the BBC, and most likely sometime in the early 1960s. The relevant excerpt presents as follows:

Journalist: One thing I’ve noticed Premier while I’ve been here is that Northerners seem to have…(inaudible)…an obsession about the Igbos. Could you perhaps explain that to me?

Bello: Well, the Igbos are more or less the type of people whose desire is mainly to dominate everybody. If they go to a village, to a town, they want to monopolize everything in that area. If you put them in a labour camp as a labourer [for] more than a year, they will try to emerge as headman of that camp, and so on. Well, in the past our people were not alive to their responsibilities because you can see from our Northernization policy that in 1952 when I came here, there weren’t ten Northerners in our civil service here, and I tried to have it Northernized, and now all important posts are being held by Northerners.[[611]](#footnote-611)

Bello’s nomination and predication strategies consisted of portraying Igbos as an aggressive and domineering homogenized collective. His utterances offer fascinating insights into tensions fostered not only by socio-economic competition, but also by cultural differences between Igbos, often (self) characterized as very driven in the individual pursuit of material success and societal advancement and an ascriptive and hierarchical Northern society, which emphasized obedience to authority and those above one on the social ladder.

In Bello’s narrative, the Igbo ‘labourer’ served as a metonymy for the lowest-of-the-low in society. In contrast to Northerners who knew and accepted their ascribed place in society, even the lowest of the low among Igbos strove to compete with their superiors and achieve a dominant position (‘headman of that [labour] camp’), an attitude the aristocratic and conservative Bello clearly found intolerable and considered a threat to the Northern identity and social order.

In his portrayal, Igbos, who represented a significant migrant group in the North, were overly-ambitious, domineering and by implication probably scheming as well. We see thus how characterizations, which in some cultures are viewed as indisputably positive, such as ‘ambition’ and desire to climb the social ladder, can be viewed as negative and even threatening in another cultural zone, in this case the North, as personified by Bello. Asides socio-economic competition, such contradictions and incompatibilities in value systems, present in both elite and mass perceptions, played a significant role in the ethnic conflicts leading to Nigeria’s civil war and continue to be an obstacle to Nigerian nation-building today.

Bello’s essentializing utterances and negative moral evaluation served to evoke and legitimise a fear of Igbos, portrayed as overly ambitious and domineering. They thus needed to be curtailed within the Northern region. Deploying the *topos of responsibility*, Bello castigated Northerners (particularly Northern leaders) for not having been ‘alive to their responsibilities’ before he, Bello, came along.

To justify this criticism, he deployed the *topos of numbers*, pointing out that in 1952 -- the year he became Minister of Works in the regional government – ‘there weren’t ten Northerners in our civil service here’. In other words, the region’s civil service had been dominated by southerners, presumably Igbos since they were the main social actors Bello referred throughout this excerpt. His policy of Northernisation had however, redressed the situation and ‘now all important posts are being held by Northerners.’

On the level of personal self-representation, Bello deployed the *topos of saviour*, strongly noticeable in populist discourse[[612]](#footnote-612): the charismatic leader who oscillated between the roles of Robin Hood (making sure Northerners got jobs), ‘strict father’ (castigating Northerners for not living up to their responsibilities) as well as liberator of the North from Southern domination.

In the first four years of independence, Bello’s NPC ruled Nigeria in coalition with the Igbo-dominated NCNC as a junior partner. During this period, he had no plausible or political grounds to suggest southern or Igbo domination. However, by the latter half of 1964, the NPC-NCNC coalition had unravelled and in July that year, Bello announced his party would have no further dealings with NCNC because ‘the Ibos have never been true friends of the North and never will be’.[[613]](#footnote-613)

Asserting Igbos would never be ‘*true* friends’ of the North, Bello, in essentialist terms, implied Igbo untrustworthiness and opportunism, conveying the message they had most likely been pretending to be friends of the North over the past few years in order to be in power at the centre while secretly harbouring malicious intent towards Northerners. He also portrayed NCNC as an *Igbo* party. On October 31, 1964, Bello held a stadium rally to announce the formation of a new political entity: New Nigeria Alliance (NNA), an electoral coalition mainly between his NPC party and NNDP, a breakaway party formed by former Action Groupers who had fallen out with Awolowo.

In the upcoming federal elections that year, NNA’s main rival was another new electoral coalition called the United Progressives’ Grand Alliance (UPGA), made up mostly of NCNC members and what was left of Awolowo’s Action Group. Bello now portrayed his former coalition partner NCNC as a party interested solely in Igbo interests, stating in his speech that:

[N.C.N.C] …has shown that in all things it will be sectional and will satisfy only sectional interests…. I can recall the persistent effort by the N.C.N.C to ridicule and ruin Western Nigeria, the suppression of minority tribes in eastern Nigeria and the campaign of malice and hatred against the people and institutions of Northern Nigeria, all of them engineered by the N.C.N.C to impose on us a new form of imperialism…The N.C.N.C knows it is only the N.P.C and its allies which prevent it from imposing a cruel dictatorship of a section on the rest of Nigeria.[[614]](#footnote-614)

Furthermore, referring to the few Northern politicians who were part of the UPGA alliance, Bello stated: ‘We know they are being used as tools to accomplish their master’s ambition for a section to dominate the rest of Nigeria.’[[615]](#footnote-615) Bello thus portrayed the UPGA alliance as an Igbo-led political vehicle aiming to assert Igbo domination over Nigeria via his euphemistic reference to a ‘a section’ of the country. His narrative suggested Igbos were bent on essentially continuing colonial-style rule, replacing the British as overlords of Nigeria, an argument Awolowo also used in relation to Northerners as we shall see in the subsequent section. The theme of one ethnic or ethno-regional group essentially wanting to impose its own form of internal colonialism thus deployed by both Bello and Awolowo and would have been easily relatable to everyday Nigerians who still had the colonial experience fresh in their minds. The virulent ethnic rhetoric of the 1964 election and its mutual accusations of intention for ethnic domination, especially between Igbos and Northerners was discussed in chapter 2.

**7.5 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have shown that during the period under study, as with boundary constructions and self-presentations, the discursive reproduction of fears of domination shifted in tandem with socio-political dynamics and the changing institutional frameworks of governance centred around the Nigerian state. Domination narratives interacted with political and economic discourses, as well as with broader popular beliefs and stereotypes. While much of the discourses cited were primarily intended for internal audiences, due to the prominence of the leaders, they would also have been heard and read by outgroup members, providing further justifications for the intensification of domination fears.

The frequent matter-of-fact usage of homogenized ethnic or ethno-regional referential categories (‘the Igbos’, ‘Northerners’) in political narratives of domination served on the one hand to legitimize and naturalize ethno corporate groups as common-sense dominators of political practice within Nigeria, thus politicizing ethnicity, while on the other hand often presenting the dangers of domination as stemming from the ethno groups as collectives or at the very least stemming from political parties *controlled* by specific ethno groups.

All three leaders legitimised ethnic discourses (Azikiwe the least), which in turn served as legitimation tools for other practices, such as political claims-making (e.g. Bello’s claim of the ‘need’ to implement a *Northernisation* policy to give indigenes of a specific region job opportunities at the expense of indigenes of another region within the same country). Without the naturalization and legitimization of ethnic discourses, such clearly discriminatory policies would have been imaginably far more difficult to justify.

Summarizing the salient characteristics of the rhetoric surrounding the issue of domination specifically, it is important to distinguish two levels: on the one hand, specific discursive contents; on the other, specific discursive strategies that realized these contents. The discourses varied significantly in the sphere of topical content, depending on the sphere(s) each leader identified as the source of actual or potential domination. However, the general discursive strategies were often similar.

With regards to Northern domination, Awolowo identified the problem at both the structural and attitudinal level. The threat stemmed from the region’s size and population, which in turn led to in-built politico-structural advantages such as its allocation of seats in the federal House of Representatives. Northern domination was thus mainly a political problem requiring a political solution (a sub-division of the region).

However, Awolowo also articulated negative moral evaluations of Northerners and their leadership culture as further justificatory arguments legitimizing fears of domination. It was not enough to merely point out that the Northern region enjoyed politico-structural advantages, Awolowo needed to emphasize that its leaders had every intention of exploiting this aggressively to dominate the rest of the country. After independence, he asserted this was already happening, portraying Igbos and Yorubas as having been relegated to the status of ‘minorities.’

He portrayed Northern leaders, personified metonymically by the figure of Bello, as inherently autocratic tyrants who felt entitled to rule and dominate Nigeria. Moreover, these united elites could count on the support of what he portrayed as a monolithic and subservient Northern collective. It was the combination of these factors -- politico-structural advantage, group and elite unity as well as autocratic mindsets -- that Awolowo used to justify fears of Northern domination.

With regards to the potential for Igbo domination, Awolowo identified the source of the problem at the attitudinal level: Igbos were united, aggressively ethnocentric, and generally lacked moral principles. Azikiwe, with his aggressive personal style and imputed ethnic chauvinism, served as a metonymic symbol for this Igbo aggressiveness and ethnocentrism in Awolowo’s narratives just as Bello did in his narratives about Northern domination. Igbo resourcefulness and dynamism only magnified the threat they presented. Awolowo equated Unitarianism with the potential for Igbo domination due to the presupposition their abilities would likely lead them to positions of power under such a centralized system.

Bello identified the potential for Southern domination at both the structural (especially during the 1950s) and attitudinal level. He focussed on the socio-economic disadvantages of the North in comparison to the southern regions and on negative moral evaluations of southerners as a whole. Structurally, Southerners dominated the bureaucracy, which Bello portrayed as the most important element of governance affecting Northerners’ everyday lives. Their educational achievements gave them an advantage, which they would mercilessly and unfairly exploit if given the chance. Free competition thus had to be limited to prevent this.

If Northerners did not control all levers of governance in the North, southerners would increase the inter-regional socio-economic gap and weaken them further, thus raising the prospect of permanent domination in an independent Nigeria. They were so exploitative and untrustworthy that a non-Nigerian was preferable to a Southern Nigerian in the North’s bureaucracy. As in the case of Awolowo, without these negative moral evaluations, pointing to Southern educational advantages alone might not have fuelled fears of domination as much. Bello strove to evoke fears of Southern and/or Igbo domination among Northerners through the period under study, apart from the years 1959-early 1964 when his NPC party was clearly (politically) dominant and in an alliance with Azikiwe’s NCNC in which case Bello implied Northern dominance of Nigeria, or more often, his personal dominance of Nigeria.

The possibility of Igbo domination seemed particularly abhorrent and dangerous to Bello due to cultural differences: The North’s ascriptive and hierarchical way of life ensured stability, order and predictability. The Igbos, with their boundless aspirations and pursuit of material success lacked respect for Northern values and authority. Even the lowest of the lowest among the Igbos didn’t seem to know their place in society. An independent Nigeria ruled by Igbos would thus be an aggressive threat to Northern identity, culture and values.

Of the three leaders, Azikiwe expended by far the least effort in fostering fears of ethnic domination apart from his 1951 insinuations of AG plans for Yoruba-domination and assertions ethnic majority groups could dominate ethnic minority groups in the tri-regional system. However, once it was clear the tri-regional system was there to stay, Azikiwe generally abandoned evoking such fears of domination. Unlike Awolowo, Azikiwe never suggested Yorubas in general were predisposed towards ethnic chauvinism or domination but focussed such negative moral evaluations on AG which he portrayed as authoritarian and tribalistic. Azikiwe’s negative moral evaluations can thus not be described as ethnic in this case, but political.

The major discursive strategies employed to realize the above-listed contents in the constructions of fear of domination, were often quite similar and included discourses strongly implying Manichean divisions of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, simplistic dichotomies reinforced by positive self- and negative other- presentation. Related to such a dichotomist worldview was the construction of Southern and Igbo scapegoats by Bello, especially in relation to his discourses on Northernisation. Awolowo and Azikiwe especially employed very aggressive rhetoric using extensive *ad hominem* arguments, demonization of the Other as presenting an extreme danger well as other fallacies, such as the hasty generalization fallacy.

The arguments were often framed as a reactive response to the perceived imposition or plans for imposition of dominance by other sub-national groups within the Nigerian framework. Argumentation schemes aimed at signalling resistance to such moves often incorporated general egalitarian norms and values such as *topos of justice, topos of equality*. Arguments asserting domination or plans thereof were often backed up with argumentative fallacies such as shifting of responsibility (‘they started it’), attacking the character of leaders of other groups (*argumentum ad hominem*), or imputing malicious intentions to leaders of other groups.

**Chapter 8 Conclusion**

**8.1 Introduction**

The fundamental problem is that Nigeria is not and can never be a nation. It is a country of many nations. These nations had long existed thousands of years before the British came and amalgamated them together to form a country. The only hope for the country to live harmoniously is for us to recognise and respect each nation.[[616]](#footnote-616)

This 2017 statement by Stephen Adebanji Akintoye, a historical scholar and former Nigerian senator, reveals how the very existence and even future possibility of a Nigerian national identity continues to be questioned while sub-Nigerian identities continue to be naturalized and entrenched via discourse. The cited utterances echo Awolowo’s views first presented in *Path to Nigerian Freedom* and it is worth noting their author was a prominent ally of the late Yoruba leader.

Seven decades later, Awolowo’s identity narratives continue to remain popular among Yoruba intellectuals and leaders and the cited statement rightly draws attention to the continued relevance of sub-Nigerian identities, still considered by some to be ‘national’, rather than *merely* ‘ethnic’. It is this continued relevance of sub-Nigerian identities in the country’s political discourse that prompted my investigation into how they were constructed by Nigeria’s founding fathers in that formative historical era.

It is also noteworthy that narratives around sub-Nigerian identities continue to serve as justificatory arguments for particular visions of the optimal politico-structuring of Nigeria, evidencing their continued relevance to *political* studies of the country. Contemporary Nigerian political discourse is rife with identity narratives reminiscent of those analysed in this study. One does not have to search long to locate self-presentations of Igbos as the most persecuted and marginalized group in Nigeria, for instance by supporters of IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra), the secessionist group demanding the establishment of a sovereign Igbo state called ‘Biafra’. In an effort to prove Igbo marginalization and persecution has been a long-standing problem in Nigeria, IPOB’s website directly references Azikiwe’s famous 1949 address to the Ibo State Union calling for an autonomous Igbo state due to Igbo persecution and marginalization, demonstrating continuity in aspects of Igbo identity discourses in Nigeria.[[617]](#footnote-617)

Meanwhile, half a century after his death, Ahmadu Bello continues to serve as a symbol of ‘Northern domination’ in contemporary Nigerian discourse like in this excerpt from a 2015 article penned in a national newspaper by Femi Fani-Kayode, a former minister and current opposition politician:

In 1957, Sir Ahmadu Bello… said the following: ‘We the people of the North will continue our stated intention to conquer the South and to dip the Koran in the Atlantic Ocean after the British leave our shores’. The quest for Northern domination in the affairs of our country is as old as the hills. It led to a brutal civil war… It led to the annulment of [Yoruba] Chief MKO Abiola’s presidential election of June 12, 1993…. It led to the brutal suppression of the South by [Northern dictator] General Sani Abacha…It led to stiff opposition to the government of [Yoruba] President Olusegun Obasanjo in the North... And finally, it led to its most barbaric… expression in the relentless opposition to the regime of [Southern Ijaw] President Goodluck Jonathan which came in the form of Boko Haram…with Buhari now in power it appears that those who have been lusting for total Northern domination for the last 55 years have finally had their way.[[618]](#footnote-618)

As in the 1960s, the theme of ‘Northern domination’ continues to serve as a causal explanation for some of the biggest political crises that have rocked post-colonial Nigeria, including the emergence of the terrorist group Boko Haram, which draws its membership from Muslim populations in the Northern parts of the country. Meanwhile, the election of president Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, was presented as part of the grand conspiracy for a ‘Northern domination’ of Nigeria. Half-a-century after Bello’s death, such narratives serve to reinforce the idea of a ‘Northern’ identity existing in the first place while simultaneously imbibing that identity with negative domineering intentions.

Importantly, I was unable to locate the quote attributed to Bello above in any credible source and the author neglected to cite a source in his article. Yet, the quote has been widely-circulated on the internet and in Nigerian media. Clearly, some of Bello’s controversial statements, including some of those this study has cited, help render such unevidenced or recontextualised quotes *plausible* to contemporary audiences.

Indeed, in today’s internet age, past ethnic narratives are not only recontextualized for present purposes based on genuinely-attributable utterances, they can also be reinforced by citing entirely fictitious quotes. All that matters for them to be effective is that they are *plausible enough* to a large enough segment of their target audience. The identity narratives of colonial-era Nigerian politics and of Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello specifically, thus continue to serve as discursive resources in contemporary Nigerian discourse.

This study’s research questions, introduced in chapter one, have been aimed at offering answers as to how Nigeria’s Founding Fathers discursively constructed ethnic and ethno-regional identities. The main research question was: *How did Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello discursively construct and politicize ethnic and ethno-regional identities in Nigeria?* The following sub-questions were also formulated:

1) How are the discursive strategies and techniques employed by Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello used to construct ethnic and/or ethno-regional identity?

2) What are the potential observable antagonisms between discursive attempts by Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello to construct ethnic and /or ethno-regional identities and ongoing attempts to construct a national identity?

3) How did Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello's discourses on ethnicity evolve over the period 1945 to 1967?

4) How did their discursive approaches to ethnicity and identity differ?

The analysis has shown which discursive strategies and narratives were used by the three leaders to construct, legitimize and consequently entrench sub-national identities. In order to survey the broadest possible range of identity constructs and their interrelations, as well as identify the recontextualisation of important concepts and arguments, I investigated various genres of discourse along three analytical dimensions: 1) content, 2) strategies applied in the discursive construction of ethnic and ethno-regional identities, and 3) the forms of linguistic realisation. After a preliminary analysis to tease out the most significant themes revolving around identity, these three dimensions were explored in the context of identity construction in Nigeria.

**8.2 Recap of thesis chapters**

Chapter 1 introduced the research problem and literature gap. It offered a survey of the existing literature on ethnicity and ‘ethnic politics,’ summarizing the contributions of the major schools of thought on the issue, including those particularly relevant to this study. It highlighted some of the insights that have been offered on ethnicity in the Nigerian context.

The survey evidenced the lack of attention devoted to the *discursive* aspects of ethnic identity construction by scholars, despite the unique and interesting case study Nigeria and its Founding Fathers present in this sphere. The chapter also signalled that this study would be located within the traditions of social constructionism and discourse analysis, the latter focussed on highlighting inter-connections between language and the social realities in which language is used.

In chapter 2, I described the social constructivist theoretical framework within which my research was conceived. I also introduced the broad-based research paradigm known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which provided the overall analytical framework and tools from which I drew to carry out my investigation. As an analytical tool, CDA incorporates interpretation and critique of discourse, which has allowed me, through the present analysis, to render the process of sub-national identity construction in Nigeria more transparent. Finally, I introduced the specific CDA approach I utilized elements from, the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). DHA was particularly useful for this study because it emphasizes the analysis of lexical units larger than the sentence and focusses on understanding the socio-political and contextual aspects in which discourses are embedded.

In chapter 3, I described the specific methodological research steps I undertook using the elements of DHA I adopted for this study. DHA provided the set of referential, predicational and macro-discursive strategies I used to help identify the narratives prominent in each of the three discursive themes analysed, thus proving crucial to explaining the core ideas behind the discursive constructions of ethnic and sub-national identities in Nigeria. In this chapter, I also addressed some of the critiques levelled at CDA approaches.

In chapter 4, I presented a picture of the fluid and fast-changing socio-political context in which the discourses to be investigated were embedded. This was done in order to provide informative background knowledge of the situation on the ground during the period under study. Familiarity with this context has been crucial for plausible explanations and interpretations of the discourses analysed. The chapter revealed Nigeria as the product of its colonial-inspired and British-managed evolution into a single large-scale territorial unit aspiring to nationhood.

Simultaneously, efforts were being made to construct lower-scale sub-national identities during the political processes accompanying this guided evolution towards Nigerian nationhood. It showed how ethnic tensions, conflict and regional rivalry were never far below the surface in Nigeria and how notions of group identity played a role in shaping *political positions* on issues like constitution-drafting and the right timing for national independence. While hundreds of languages are spoken in Nigeria, ever since the colonial era, English has been the language of high-level politics, government and education. Big-stage political communication was conducted in English. For this reason, it was the language I found in political discourse and focussed on.

Chapter 5 was the first chapter focussed on the analysis of a specific discursive theme: boundary construction. This analysis allowed me to highlight the tensions and contradictions between virtually simultaneous constructions of ethnic and ethno-regional identities and the broader larger-scale project of trying to establish a national identity. It showed how the three leaders tried to navigate these tricky waters, how fundamental concepts like ‘nation’, ‘ethnic group’ or ‘linguistic group’ were often contested and deployed ambivalently and confusingly in Nigerian political discourse as they still are today! It revealed how attempts at constructing and strengthening sub-national identities sometimes involved purposefully destroying notions of a national identity while at other times holding multiple identities was presented as unproblematic.

The analysis of narratives of self-presentation in chapter 6 enabled us to show the three leaders presented the sub-national groups they most closely identified with to the world, the self-image they portrayed. Though virtually all aspects of group identity formation involve what Cornell and Hartmann described as the ‘assertion of meaning’[[619]](#footnote-619) to identity, narratives of self-presentation focus specifically on this process. Investigating this aspect of the three leaders’ discourses thus allowed us to see how they imagined and articulated their group’s history, current condition, desired future and behavioural traits.

In chapter 7, an analysis of referential and predicational strategies showed how the leaders, especially Awolowo and Bello, constructed and justified fears of domination, a theme that is persistent in many political and historical analyses of inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria during the period under study. Investigating the justificatory arguments for fear of domination thus allowed us to attempt establish the possible root causes of such fears.

**8.3 Main conclusions drawn from study:**

Conceived narrowly, this study is about how Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello, popularly referred to as Nigeria’s ‘Founding Fathers’, constructed and entrenched sub-national identities in their discourses. More broadly, it is also a study about how political leaders construct and politicize social identities in the colonial and post-colonial context of diverse and often divided societies originally forced together into a nation-building project by a colonizing power.

One of the common paradoxes of colonial nation-building projects was that they ushered in a series of social processes which ultimately fostered an enabling environment for the construction of large-scale *sub-national* identities often at odds with the new national identity the colonial project was striving to promote. Setting out to create ‘Nigerians’, ‘Kenyans’ and ‘Malaysians’, colonialism ended up more successful helping create ‘Igbos’, ‘Kikuyus’ and ‘Malays’.[[620]](#footnote-620) Thus, while each sub-national construction process enjoyed its own specifics and contextual dynamics, Horowitz’s comparative study on ethnicity revealed there were also significant similarities in the colonial-era group identity construction processes observable across much of Africa and Asia.[[621]](#footnote-621)

The social processes which enabled this include the imposition of more or less integrated capitalist economies and - in the end phases of colonialism - of democratic politics. Inhabitants of previously separated communities were required to take part in these political and economic national unificatory projects, entailing a crash-course in multiculturalism. Most pronouncedly in major commercial cities, people suddenly found themselves living side by side with others who communicated in a different language and often exhibited significantly different cultural norms from them. This created fertile ground for the construction and entrenchment of new group identities. As Nnoli pointed out in his study of the history of ethnic identities in Nigeria, the colonial urban setting became ‘the cradle of contemporary ethnicity.’[[622]](#footnote-622)

For those interested in the social phenomenon of ethnicity, this study’s findings support the view of ethnic and ethno-regional groups as socially-constructed ‘imagined communities’[[623]](#footnote-623) given direction by political leaders in response to socio-political and socioeconomic developments. This case study also supports Lynch’s arguments asserting ‘leaders play a key role in processes of ethnic construction and negotiation but cannot invent or conjure them, since histories, popular perceptions, and institutions also matter’[[624]](#footnote-624) and that ‘ethnic groups are not created as ﬁxed and unchanging, and thus their perpetuation, content, allies, and foes (as well as their initial construction) must always be explained.’[[625]](#footnote-625)

Considering the many similarities of the colonial experience in Africa and elsewhere in terms of the social processes it ushered in, this case study supports a number of general conclusions that call for comparative application and testing. These are related to [ethnic] identity narratives and statecraft, the use of ethnicity as a flexible and indeterminate resource in political rhetoric, the consequences of competing and ambiguous identity narratives, the tensions between the principles of self-determination and national unity in the political discourse of a multi-ethnic state and the discursive strategies for constructing and naturalizing ethnic and sub-national identities.

I will start by discussing some of the broader political themes and conclusions emergent from the Founding Fathers’ identity narratives in the first two sub-sections before presenting the discursive strategies and techniques they used to naturalize ethnic and sub-national identities in the third sub-section.

**8.3.1 Ethnicity and statecraft**

As Adebanwi has pointed out, ‘narratives make meaningful totality out of a myriad of events. Therefore, they play a very important role in the struggle for control and full participation in whatever is constituted as a “totality”— particularly a political totality expressive in ethnic or ethno-national boundaries.’[[626]](#footnote-626) Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello all attempted to impose their own, often divergent, meaning-making narratives out of the ‘myriad of events’ triggered by Britain’s colonial nation-building project dubbed ‘Nigeria.’ Their competing attempts to articulate this ‘meaningful totality’ explaining ‘Nigeria’ led to conflicting narratives around key issues, including the issue of identity.

As in other African and Asian colonies, the contextual conditions of mid-20th century Nigeria ushered in novel discursive possibilities, including the articulation of new subject positions of group identification (‘the Igbos’, ‘the Yorubas’, ‘Northerners’ etc) while simultaneously necessitating the adoption of a stance towards the imposed colonial identity categorization, in this case that of ‘Nigerian’.

Awolowo’s 1947 characterization of Nigeria as a ‘mere geographical expression’ represented a rejection of this externally-imposed identity category as meaningful, opening up a political debate on which group identity categories *could* and *should* be considered meaningful in the colonial state. It also opened up a broader discussion on the general role of *identity* in statecraft. This mostly revolved around the question of how strongly the political structuring of a state should be linked to sub-national group identities and their perceived compatibilities or lack thereof. Awolowo and Bello both took the position Nigeria’s political structuring should be *strongly* linked to group identities while Azikiwe adopted various positions though for the most part arguing the two should not be so strongly linked.

Gadjanova suggested it is possible ‘to trace political arguments about identity back from their pragmatic policy conclusions to their premises and see that support for multiculturalism or decentralization follows claims about how well groups can coexist, or that affirmative action is premised on grievance and a need for compensation.’[[627]](#footnote-627) By this measure, Awolowo’s support for ethnic federalism followed logically from his claims the country’s constituent groups were so *different* from each other as to be largely incompatible, and thus unsuited for a centralized Unitary political system.

The same presumption of the existence of incompatible North-South differences preceded Bello’s strong preference for regionalism and decentralization while his compensatory affirmative action policy of ‘Northernisation’ was premised on Northern grievances over the preponderance of Southern civil servants in their bureaucracy. As for Azikiwe, his political structuring proposals often shifted along with his actual stance on identity. When he supported ethno-federalist proposals, he likewise emphasized the country’s multiculturalism, but when he advocated a centralized Unitary structure, he downplayed intra-Nigerian differences.

Some of the Founding Fathers’ most consequential *political positions* were thus premised on ideas and claims about group identities and their status, evidencing the crucial role identity played in the history of Nigerian statecraft, as in many other colonies. It would not seem unreasonable to assume a general expectation that political leaders who emphasize inter-group differences and incompatibilities in multi-ethnic societies will tend to look favourably on decentralized political systems ensuring strong group autonomy while those who emphasize inter-group similarities and downplay differences are likely to be open to more centralized close-knit structures.

This case-study provided affirmatory evidence for some of Gadjanova’s theoretical expectations regarding ethnic appeals in political discourse. These included the expectation of mentions of elements of a community’s past and present attributes in highly positive terms accompanied by policies intended to recognize and safeguard these attributes, the articulation of grievances related to the community’s past or present accompanied by policies intended to remedy the perceived injustice and attitudes towards other communities shaped by the perceived threat the latter pose with policies proposed varying accordingly.[[628]](#footnote-628)

However, Gadjanova’s theoretical assumption that when articulations of grievance are accompanied by portrayals of other groups as inferior, policies advocating the regaining of control through centralization or expansion would be put forward, was not confirmed in this case, as Awolowo, who tended to portray the Yorubas as superior to other groups, strongly favoured decentralization over centralization.

This was likely because, despite his portrayal of Yorubas as the most advanced group in Nigeria, he did not believe it a realistic possibility for them to win control of the country’s institutions of power under a centralized system. Rather, he feared the dynamic and more united Igbos would emerge on top and dominant in such an arrangement, a scenario he explicitly conjured in his 1960 autobiography.[[629]](#footnote-629) This shows the emphatically relational nature of ethnicity. Leaders will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own ethnic in-group against that of other groups within the state, and on the basis of that evaluation, propose whichever policies they think will be most beneficial, or least risky, for their group.

Despite these linkages between ethnicity, identity and statecraft, contrary to what I had expected going into the study, in the overall picture, there was a relative rareness of utterances by the Founding Fathers directly or indirectly dealing with ethnicity and identity in the evidence located. It was far more commonplace to locate discourses dealing with issues of everyday governance; budgets, infrastructure needs, levels of school enrolment, economic plans and other socio-economic concerns featured far more prominently in their speeches and various utterances than narratives constructing ethnic or other sub-national identities implicitly or explicitly.

Nevertheless, the issue of ethnicity and identity rose to a prominent fore when constitutions were being negotiated, during major ethno-regional disputes, election campaigns, times of pronounced uncertainties and generally during periods of intensified inter-ethnic conflicts and/or rivalries. In line with Cornell and Hartmann’s assumptions, ethnicity’s powerful mobilizational and unificatory potential was often ‘called into play in situations of competition over scare resources’[[630]](#footnote-630) such as jobs (e.g. Bello’s ‘Northernisation’ narrative justifying discriminatory employment policies) or prestige (e.g. Awolowo’s characterization of Yorubas and Igbos as ‘reduced to the status of minorities’ in post-independence Nigeria) or political power (e.g. Azikiwe’s complaints of Igbo political disenfranchisement when he was not in power).

Despite its perceived pervasiveness, ethnicity was by no means an *inevitable* theme in Nigerian political discourse at the time, rather one that required certain conditions to make it onto the agenda. One general conclusion would therefore be that when there are no ongoing national debates about political structuring, no perceived threats to ethnic or ethno-regional interests specifically, no tangible political gains to be derived, no period of intensified uncertainty regarding the group’s future and little or insignificant bottom-up pressures, top political leaders may well prefer to focus their utterances on everyday bread-and-butter issues (especially in poor societies like Nigeria) and even on encouraging national unity and solidarity rather than on emphasizing ethnic or sub-national identifications.

Moreover, even when ethnicity was on the public agenda, unless there was a strong motivation to *personally* address it, the Founding Fathers appeared to prefer leaving such a divisive topic to lower-level politicians and their media supporters while themselves cultivating the image of broad-minded ‘de-tribalized’ statesmen, a beneficial image to hold from the point of view of national-level ambitions and one promising broader-based societal prestige.

While ethnicity is thus a useful political resource that can be deployed strategically by leaders when deemed advantageous or necessary for them or the ethno-constituency that is their main source of power, there exists a clear awareness that ethnocentric narratives do not come without a political cost in a multi-ethnic polity. Most importantly, potentially alienating significant sections of a national electorate.

This resource was thus drawn upon rather sparingly, rather carefully and very flexibly from an unstable and diverse cultural, historical and situational repertoire depending on the issue, audience and current contextual dynamics on the ground. The insertion of ethnic themes into discourse, especially into the discourses of politicians at the leadership apex, is thus contingent on a range of circumstantial factors. Further, it is imaginable that if some of the conditions exacerbating ethnic narratives in countries like Nigeria (acute scarcity of resources, instability, uncertainty) were to cease or diminish significantly, ethnicity could become a much less present, salient and volatile issue in political discourses.

In other words, if Nigeria or any other African country were to attain anything similar to the level of prosperity, security and stability of a Switzerland or Canada, while ethnic discourses would not disappear altogether, as they haven’t in those countries, they might become rarer, less volatile, and lose a significant amount of their mobilizational capacity as ethnicity would become a less potent political resource.

Certainly, it is more difficult to imagine people being mobilized to commit violence in the name of ethnicity in an environment where they generally feel safe, secure and financially comfortable than in one where the opposite is the case. Ethnic discourses, especially of the defensive-aggressive kind, thrive on scarcity, instability and uncertainty, an observation supported by Lynch’s work on ethnic violence in Kenya.[[631]](#footnote-631)

With regards to the context of possibilities for imagining and articulating large-scale sub-Nigerian identities with resonating potential, and thus useful as a political resource*,* this was both shaped and constrained by the pre-colonial histories pervading the three regions the leaders emerged from. For instance, the pre-colonial unifying presence of Islam as well as the existence of two major empires spanning much of what would later become ‘Northern Nigeria’ provided Bello a solid foundation on which to construct a popularly-acceptable ‘Northern’ identity while Awolowo and Azikiwe lacked such pre-colonial historical foundations on which to successfully construct and popularize ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ identities, which would have been very useful to them and their parties as political resources.

History can thus be a good friend or powerful enemy in the construction of larger-scale sub-national identities, influencing their realistic viability. Leaders cannot simply will ethnic or ethno-regional identities into existence without some form of existing unifying element such as a shared language, culture or history. As Lynch has rightly suggested, ethnic identity constructions are constrained by ‘available historical transcripts.’[[632]](#footnote-632)

Nevertheless, while the Founding Father’s constructions and popularizations of sub-national identities were embedded in real cultural and historical experiences, they were instrumental and opportunistic in practise. Following his investigation into media discourses on Nigerian national identity, Adebanwi asserted socio-historical circumstances determined ‘the meaning, parameters, and salience of the concept of “nation” (ethnic group) and “grand nation” (nation-state)’[[633]](#footnote-633) in Nigerian press narratives because this concept was ‘mobilized for the strategic interest of whatever power the various newspapers and newsmagazines serve.’[[634]](#footnote-634) Meaning was thus ‘deployed in the service or disservice of power.’[[635]](#footnote-635)

Similarly, my study revealed that asides pre-colonial history, contemporary socio-political circumstances and interests, including power interests, played a significant role in shaping the ‘meaning, parameters and salience’ ascribed to sub-national identities by Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello. When I speak of ‘interests’, these are not to be understood in solely personal terms, but more broadly in the context of party interests as well as real or perceived ethnic and/or ethno-regional interests.

Thanks to the fluidity and situationality of the leaders’ narratives, Northern-ness could at times be portrayed as a vulnerable identity requiring defending from domineering Southerners or as a strong assertive identity in a position to dominate the rest of Nigeria. The Yorubas could be a ‘nation’, then an ‘ethnic group’ and then go back to becoming a ‘nation’ again depending on the socio-political situation. Igbo-ness could be undergoing a terrible shared present when Azikiwe was not in power and a much more positive one when he was despite the fact little may have changed in objective material circumstances between these two periods.

Ethnic identity could be portrayed as ‘thick’[[636]](#footnote-636), i.e. a comprehensive aspect of social life that organizes (and should organize) the political, the social and the economic as it was in the late 1940s by Awolowo and Azikiwe or on the contrary discursive efforts could be made to ‘thin’[[637]](#footnote-637) the role of ethnic and sub-national identities, downplaying their organizational and ideological importance in favour of an overarching national identity as was often the case during the peak of the independence struggle. Ethnic and ethno-regional identities, once accepted as ‘obviously’ existing, are virtually endlessly malleable.

Ultimately however, these fluid, situational and often contradictory narratives of the Founding Fathers helped foster a far-reaching ambivalence and *conceptual indeterminacy* surrounding identity in Nigeria. This conceptual indeterminacy persists till today as there remains no elite or societal consensus on whether groups like the Yorubas and Igbos are ‘nations’, ‘ethno-nations’, ‘ethnic groups’ or ‘linguistic groups.’ Some Yoruba leaders even refer to a ‘Yoruba race.’ Likewise, the category of ‘Northerner’ still functions in contemporary political discourse but is equally amorphous asides its clearly regional connotation. Nor is there any widespread consensus as to how thick or thin these sub-national identities are or should be in the Nigerian context.

In practical terms, the continued competing and often contradictory narratives on the true nature of Nigeria’s constituent elements make any meaningful consensus on the nature of Nigeria itself all the more distant. In effect, ‘Nigeria’ remains an essentially-contested concept with the jury still out on whether it is a multi-ethnic nation, a multi-national state or perhaps something else. As in many other African states, the identity confusion ushered in by colonialism has yet to be discursively resolved in Nigeria, a negative phenomenon contributing to weak and ambivalent citizen identification with post-colonial African states.

Asides the clear role of colonialism in all this, the open-ended contestation of the adequate categorization and characterization of Nigeria’s constituent elements can be traced at least partially to the forceful, often rhetorically-persuasive and contradictory identity narratives of the symbols of Nigerian independence, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello. These narratives helped produce a complex, confusing and often contradictory terrain of ethnicity and identity which elites today can draw on opportunistically as a flexible political resource, but which ultimately serves to perpetuate identity ambivalence in Nigeria. These men are thus as much Nigeria’s Founding Fathers as its *Confounding Fathers.*

**8.3.2 Self-determination vs national unity**

Ultimately, the three leaders, in the struggle to impose their own categorizations and characterizations of the constituent elements of the Nigerian state, to varying degrees, all proffered narratives which helped discredit any notions of a ‘naturalness and inevitability’[[638]](#footnote-638) to Nigeria by drawing people’s attention to the fact it was ‘assembled contingently and heterogeneously’[[639]](#footnote-639) by a foreign power. Simultaneously, they consistently reinforced sub-national identifications by naturalizing and essentializing ethnic and ethno-regional groups as if they had existed from time immemorial despite the fact that just like nations, these too were imagined communities.

However, while Awolowo and Bello more than occasionally came across as Nigeria-sceptics, for most of the period under study, the narratives of all three leaders suggest their objective was to build ethnic and/or ethno-regional nations while keeping alive the *idea* of a future all-subsuming Nigerian nation. The tensions involved in this stance were reflected in the recurring contradictions between two major principles manifest in their narratives: that of self-determination and national unity.

During the independence struggle, these principles were often articulated simultaneously as the leaders agitated for self-determination for their sub-national groups via autonomisation strategies as well as for colonial Nigeria as a whole. Like in other colonies, despite the differences and antipathies between the country’s various constituent groups and their leaders, there was general consensus the country needed to free itself from foreign rule in the nearest possible future.

However, once national independence had been achieved, hopes and expectations for increased ethnic and sub-national autonomy, once drowned out by the nationally-unifying rhetoric of anti-colonialism, returned to the discursive agenda with redoubled force. In some post-colonial states, including Nigeria, exacerbated by drastic and violent circumstances on the ground, such sentiments even led to secessionist attempts such as that by the Igbos in 1967. In other places, less violent demands for autonomy were articulated by various groups.[[640]](#footnote-640)

These tendencies thrived on an ideology which, in the Nigerian case, Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello all helped popularize at one point or the other, namely, the ideology of ethnic self-determination. This ideology essentially posits that the path to the good life for an ethnic and even sub-ethnic community lies in it being in charge of its own affairs as far as possible.

In this worldview, ethnic and/or ethno-regional group members wielding control of the group’s economic resources and political destiny is considered an *inherently better* and more beneficial solution for the group as a whole than non-group members exercising such control, even if the latter are co-citizens of a political state. Why exactly this should be considered a golden rule is almost never justified empirically by ethnic leaders propagating the ideology; instead, it is usually presupposed, asserted in a matter-of-fact fashion or justified via analogies suggesting *all groups* share this view thus making it somehow *natural*, as was Awolowo’s preferred strategy.

Koselleck highlighted how, during moments of rapid societal change, new concepts and ideas are created, or existing ones emphasized and popularized for the purpose of ‘reorganizing the masses’[[641]](#footnote-641) emergent from a previous system, in this case the pre-colonial social order, ‘under the banner of new slogans.’[[642]](#footnote-642) These concepts and ideas can then become instrumental in the ideological formation of new political parties and movements.

Clearly, ethnic self-determination was a key ideological organizing principle propagated by Awolowo and the Action Group political party he created. In Bello’s case, the principle of self-determination was strongly articulated in ethno-regional terms by himself and his Northern People’s Congress party. As for Azikiwe, he too glorified the concept of ethnic self-determination in the early years covered by this study, before largely forgoing this stance in favour of a focus on national unity during the 1950s and first few years of independence.

In practise, what the triumph of the ideology of ethnic self-determination leads to is ethnic or ethno-regional political, business and traditional elites gaining and keeping control of the group’s political affairs and collective economic resources. It is an ideology which thus conveniently serves to automatically benefit ethnic elites while any eventual benefits for the rest of the ethnic collective are contingent on how well these elites manage the group resources and political institutions they are handed control over.

Nigeria’s subsequent sub-divisions; first from three to four regions in 1963, then into twelve states in 1967, nineteen states in 1976, twenty-one states in 1987, thirty states in 1991 and thirty-six states in 1996 have all been political responses to the ideology of ethnic and sub-ethnic self-determination. The British have often been accused of employing ‘divide-and-rule’ tactics in colonial territories like Nigeria.

However, while one can certainly point to specific examples of such tactics being deployed at times, as mentioned earlier, the colonial project in Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa, involved more of a forced amalgamation of previously disparate communities than a strategic effort to divide a hitherto united one. It was this forced amalgamation Bello would refer to as a ‘mistake’ in 1953 and Awolowo would criticize for ignoring what he saw as real and sometimes even insurmountable differences between Nigeria’s various communities.

In a multi-ethnic state, it is the ideology of ethnic self-determination that amounts to the ultimate divide-and-rule strategy. While there were periods when the issue of ethnic or sub-national self-determination was downplayed or backgrounded in the discourses of the leaders, it never became a truly non-existent issue and re-emerged strongly after independence.

While Emerson’s observation that ‘where there is original unity, nationalism serves further to unite; where there is a felt ethnic diversity, nationalism is no cure’,[[643]](#footnote-643) is relevant and hard to dispute, it must be said that the Founding Fathers’, through their discourses, actively contributed to the ‘felt ethnic diversity’ among Nigeria’s inhabitants, helping foster the ossification of a sense of ethnic difference and rivalry.

As Adebanwi has argued, ‘ideology can function both as social cement that binds people together and as a tool for dividing people into separate communities of shared values and norms.’[[644]](#footnote-644) Clearly, the ideology of ethnic self-determination served, and continues to serve, to divide people into separate communities of shared values and norms at the cost of national unity. Moreover, its strong affective power has the ability to blind people to certain glaring social realities.

Due to the corruption and gross mismanagement present in all Nigeria’s current 36 states, it is difficult today to point to any significant socio-economic benefits accruing to everyday members of Nigeria’s ethnic communities thanks to the fact they now have their ‘own’ states or constitute the majority in a state. Yet the supposed glory of ethnic and sub-ethnic self-determination is used to justify the existence of such states. The idea a particular Yoruba-majority state might be better governed by an Igbo Governor, or vice-versa, is a proposition the triumph of the ideology of ethnic self-determination has reduced to the level of heresy for the everyday Yoruba and Igbo. This limits the viable options for potential political leadership of many of the country’s federating states only to those individuals who can claim membership of the state’s ethnic majority group. Similar patterns can be observed in other African states.

Concluding on this point, to a greater or lesser extent, tensions between sub-national and national identity were manifested in contradictions between the principles of self-determination and national unity which in turn often reflected tensions between elite interests as well as wider ethnic or regional interests. Today, the tensions between the principles of ethnic self-determination and national unity continue in contemporary Nigeria are manifested in demands for a ‘restructuring’ of Nigeria and the adoption of ‘true federalism’, both essentially demands for states, in practise ethnic and sub-ethnic elites, to have more control over their resources and destiny. Ultimately, the ideology of ethnic self-determination has come to represent an obstacle to the strengthening of national bonds and a sense of national we-ness, making national governance harder, more complicated and a process often seen as abstract, distant and even alien from the point of view of the ordinary citizen.

**8.3.3 Naturalizing ethnic and sub-national identities in political discourse**

While usually striving to display commitment to the national project (Bello most rarely and least enthusiastically), the leaders’ attitudes towards ‘Nigeria’ were all highly ambivalent with regards to the optimal structuring of the country, which in turn reflected views about the strength and compatibility of Nigeria’s constituent sub-national identities: the greater the emphasis on the strength and more *natural* nature of ethnic or sub-national identities, the greater the distance towards notions of national compatibility.

On the part of Awolowo and Azikiwe, from the late 1940s up till 1951, there was significant emphasis on constructing ethno-national identities using various strategies of intra-group unification and inter-group differentiation. Awolowo set the tone for this with his famous 1947 characterization of the country as a ’mere geographical expression’ constituted by incompatible ethno-national identities. He constructed a hierarchy of foreignness with Hausa-Fulanis at the opposite end of the spectrum from his Yoruba group while placing the Igbos somewhere in between the two identities.

Bello generally concurred with Awolowo’s narratives in the sense that he also placed ‘Southerners’ at the opposite end of the identity spectrum from Northerners. As mentioned in the study, he strove to construct the idea of a distinct Northern nation by fostering a perception of socioeconomic marginalization and regional territoriality. Tellingly, unlike Azikiwe who, via intertextual references, actively strove to refute Awolowo’s ‘mere geographical expression’ characterization, Bello never attempted to negate it, even going further than the Yoruba leader by referring to the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria as a ‘mistake’.

Awolowo and Bello both clearly presented intra-Nigerian cultural differences as a problem. In their narratives, these differences existed, were significant, and could not be wished away with rhetoric about Nigerian unity or the existence of a Nigerian identity, which they occasionally categorically negated. They both politicized ethnic and ethno-regional identities by emphasizing dangers of ethnic/ethno-regional domination, attributing negative behavioural characteristics to out-groups in order to justify this fear. They both actively encouraged inter-group mistrust or wariness at the very least.

In identity narratives, it is hardly possible to foster fear of other groups without attributing negative behavioural characteristics – like dishonesty, aggressiveness or desire for domination – to them. Afterall, if there is nothing *inherently* disturbing or wrong in the general behaviour of Group X members, then there is no justificatory foundation on which to build political appeals to fear or mistrust such groups.

While the leaders’ identity narratives can by no means be described as static and fixed, but rather dynamic and ambivalent, there were certain core ideas around which they built sub-national identities. The thematic content of discourses constructing ethnic and sub-national identities all included articulating visions of a shared past, present and future; a shared homeland, shared values, political traditions and sociocultural traits. In the case of ethnic identities (Igbo and Yoruba), they also included strong emphasis on a shared language, confirming Nnoli’s singling out of language as a crucial boundary marker for ethnic groups in the African context.[[645]](#footnote-645)

The most common macro-constructive linguistic strategies deployed by the leaders were constructive and destructive. While all the leaders, on various occasions, deployed constructive strategies with regards to *both* sub-national and national identities evidencing simultaneous constructions of identity on various levels, what stood out was that none of them deployed destructive strategies with regards to *sub-national* identities while they sometimes did so with regards to national identity. This ultimately served to strengthen ethnic and sub-national identities while leaving open and unresolved the question of whether Nigeria was indeed more than just a ‘mere geographical expression’.

The discursive constructs of ethnic and ethno-regional identities emphasized group uniqueness and intra-group uniformity while tending to ignore or downplay intra-group differences. Attempts were made to construct intra-group sameness/similarity and/or differences with other groups depending on the political demands of the moment. This strategy can be subsumed under discourses of sameness, replicating narratives of sameness present in constructions of national identities, thus suggesting similar macro-strategies in both processes in this aspect. Referential and predicational strategies thus mostly served as constructive with regards to sub-national identities since they aimed at discursively building and defending such identities. Group construction also often involved autonomisation strategies emphasizing the right to self-determination as discussed in the previous section.

Meanwhile, linguistic devices aimed at dismantling Nigerian identity did so mostly via emphasis on intra-Nigerian differences, sometimes presented as incompatibilities, on the involuntary and forced nature of the Nigerian union and on supposed intentions for, or already existent, domination of Nigeria by certain ethnic or ethno-regional groups.

Dissimilation from other groups was thus constructed through discourses of difference, especially intensive in case of those sub-national groups that indeed seem to exhibit the most striking socio-cultural differences. The fundamental identity fault line was constructed between ethnic communities living in Northern Nigeria and those indigenous to the Southern regions of the country.

In addition, there were constant references to ethnic or sub-national interests, collective wills and wishes (Yoruba/Igbo in late 1940s and Western, Eastern and Northern in 1950s and early 1960s). These had the effect of creating intra-Nigerian distance and strengthening sub-national perceptions of difference and distinct identities.

The existence of *real* and *natural* group identities at the sub-national level was thus consistently reaffirmed in the narratives of the three leaders. Moreover, these identities were often presented as the logical basis for actions, reactions and the structuring of the Nigerian state, establishing ground rules for mutual co-habitation and collective relations.

Bello constructed an identity whose agency was limited due to its lower educational levels than the South for much of the 1950s. However, by the end of the 1950s, he started constructing an identity whose agency had been greatly enhanced and strengthened thanks to its increasing political clout within the federation. From a defensive identity, Bello thus shifted to an assertive identity.

Awolowo constructed an identity whose fast progress towards advancement and further civilizational development and sophistication was being hampered by less ambitious and able groups in the late 1940s, but then went on to make great strides in the 1950s once generally in charge of its own affairs within the auspices of the Western region only to face marginalization and domination in a post-independent Nigeria dominated by Northern ‘feudal aristocrats.’

Thus, it went from an identity restrained by external actors (the British and slower Nigerian groups, especially Northerners) from achieving potential, to one generally allowed to blossom under Awolowo’s leadership in the 1950s, only to once again face external restraints in the form of Northern domination in post-independence Nigeria when Awolowo no longer ran things in Yorubaland.

In the early years of my study, when Azikiwe was actively building Igbo identity, his discursive representation of the community was of one with virtually unlimited socio-economic and cultural potential but limited in its agency by an oppressive British regime and under attack from British as well as Nigerian quarters seemingly determined to see them fail and be marginalized. It was an identity clearly under threat, existing in an environment very hostile to it. While ethnicity clearly served Nigeria’s Founding Fathers as a political resource and means of advancing personal, party and general elite interests, discourses revolving around ethnicity and identity also seem to have reflected their sincerely-held sometimes clearly-prejudicial views on the issue, especially in the cases of Awolowo and Bello. Awolowo was so consistent in his emphasis on virtually incompatible intra-Nigerian differences, more or less irrespective of changing political conditions on the ground, that it is unlikely this was merely a matter of political strategy and interests for him. He not only constructed Yoruba-ness, but clearly experienced it as well, viewing it as a superior identity relative to others in Nigeria.

Bello likewise was very consistent in his portrayals of Northerners as distinct from Southern Nigerians and the latter as untrustworthy, pushy and scheming (especially Igbos), that this likely reflected his genuine views. These observations are important because elite-based approaches to ethnicity oft portray elite motivations in a purely rational interest-based fashion as if they more-or-less simulate ethnic sentiments and antipathies for personal gain. This view is not helpful (and in the Nigerian case likely untrue), because it desensitizes researchers of the need to examine closely how the personal sometimes authentically ethnocentric and prejudiced views of highly-influential ethnic leaders can affect their constructions of identity.

For instance, a more ethnocentric leader will likely strongly emphasize differences between their group and others and portray the world through an ethnic lens more often than not, thus helping render the group’s identity orientation that much more inward-focussed. Meanwhile, a less ethnocentric leader is likely to help construct a more outward-looking and open identity. The point is that attempting to decode influential leaders’ personal views on ethnicity can be very helpful in *predicting* what kinds of identity constructs they might opt for much of the time in the future. So far, insufficient attention has been given to how these elite perceptions shape their attendant discourses on postcolonial political dynamics.

As Lynch has suggested, such perceptual frameworks should be regarded as ‘inherently intertwined’ with elite behaviour and their favoured institutional arrangements and policies in multi-ethnic states.[[646]](#footnote-646) They inform how the readings of others’ behaviours develop over time and shape the growth of narratives providing interpretations of political events.[[647]](#footnote-647) This study has revealed how the Founding Fathers’ moral evaluations of other groups and their leaderships informed perceptions of threat and proposals for the best way forward for the in-group.

These conclusions are not intended to be the final word on the ethnicity and identity issue in Nigeria for, as Wodak stated ‘interpretations are never finished and authoritative, they are dynamic and open, open to new contexts and information.’[[648]](#footnote-648) The emergence of new information, contextual or other, may always impel towards a reconsideration and re-evaluation of the analysis I have presented in this study.

**8.4 Contribution of study, suggestions for future research and final remarks**

A central contribution of my research has been its illumination of discursive aspects of sub-national identity construction that had previously been neglected in earlier studies. It also revealed the linkages between group identity constructions and statecraft proposals, contradictions between major principles emergent during the colonial era such as self-determination and national unity and the discursive use of ethnicity and identity as flexible and indeterminate political resources. It has offered a new piece of research that attests to the usefulness of applying the theoretical insights of social constructivism combined with the methodological tools of CDA in the analysis of discursive constructions of ethnic and other sub-national identities.

Ethnicity in the Nigerian context has been approached in a comprehensive way from a completely new perspective, namely that of discourse analysis. As Koselleck observed, ‘there is no history without societal formations and the concepts by which they define and seek to meet their challenges, whether reflexively or self-reflexively; without them, it is impossible to experience and to interpret history, to represent or to recount it. In this sense, society and language belong to the metahistorical premises without which Geschichte (story) and history are unthinkable.’[[649]](#footnote-649) Building on this, I argue that investigating the concepts by which the societal formations known as ‘ethnic groups’ define not just their challenges, but *themselves* and *others*, is imperative towards enriching our historical and contemporary knowledge of ethnic politics and the ethnic phenomenon in general.

My study thus complements previous scholarly research on ethnicity, providing new insights from a discursive perspective. It investigated how political leaders imagine and articulate such identities, thus helping shape societal perceptions about them. As we see from recent political developments in the Western democracies and not only, popular perceptions on identity can and often do have a significant impact on political outcomes, including that most important of all: election results. Investigating all significant sources of popular perceptions is thus clearly a worthwhile exercise for contemporary researchers of politics.

The value of such research is practical as well as epistemological; it is only by discovering *how* perceptions leading to negative social phenomena such as ethnic or racial discrimination and prejudice are created in the first place that they can be effectively contested, deconstructed and potentially eradicated or minimized. If we don’t know how people from group X came to believe people from group Y are inherently untrustworthy, how can we ever devise an effective strategy to persuade them otherwise?

With regards to ethnic narratives in Nigeria, while critical of the identity confusion the Founding Fathers helped perpetuate, I concur with Adebanwi that ‘in a country in which there are very few institutionalized, accountable, and transparent processes of conflict resolution and representation of diversity, political narratives constitute perhaps the most open and most unrestrained avenues for the ventilation of group grievances and the articulation of group interests.’[[650]](#footnote-650)

Building on this, I suggest that since political narratives constitute the best available avenue for the articulation of group interests -- and group identities -- in present-day Nigeria, the point is not for the country’s political leaders to cease constructing ethnic identities and pretend they are not an important factor in many people’s lives, but to strive not to repeat the divisive Othering and discriminatory rhetoric of past leaders including Nigeria’s Founding Fathers. The potential consequences of such divisive and inflammatory rhetoric are not merely aesthetic or discursive; Nigeria has already experienced one brutal civil war in which millions of lives were lost and which was at least partly instigated by divisive, anxiety-inspiring and antagonistic ethnic narratives.

The leaders of today, especially those who are influential authority figures within their groups, need to adopt more positive discursive representations of other groups which would hopefully lead to the rest of society, or at least an overwhelming majority, potentially following their lead to adopt more positive views of ethnic out-groups. As Koselleck observed, ‘individual events in history depend on linguistic facilitation…no social activity, no political deal, and no economic trade is possible without accounting, without planning discussions, without public debates… without commands – and obedience- without the consensus of those involved and the articulated dissent of conflicting parties…everyday history in its daily course is dependent on language in action.’[[651]](#footnote-651)

If a more positive and trusting attitude towards other groups is thus encouraged through the everyday language of political leaders, co-habitation and cooperation could become that much more peaceful and mutually beneficial between Nigeria’s hundreds of ethno-linguistic collectives. Otherwise, mutual group mistrust and suspicion will continue to plague the Nigerian polity and hamper the progress of the country as a whole.

My study has helped shed light on how the narratives and discourses analysed are ideologically, socially and politically significant. What my study could not show was the impact the Founding Father’s discourses had on their intended audiences and thus any quantifiable degree to which they were internalised by their recipients at the time.

This research will hopefully open discussion in the field and encourage other scholars to take a look at the ethnicity issue in other African or multi-ethnic societies from a discursive angle. Possibilities for future studies include applying a similar (or different) method of discursive analysis to other contexts and historical moments in Nigeria. There are many questions to answer. Why does the mental construct of ‘Northerner’ still persist in contemporary discourse even though the territory covering what used to be ‘Northern Nigeria’ has since been divided into 20 distinct politico-administrative units (19 federating states and a federal capital territory)?

Have the recently-evolved six geopolitical zones -- North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East, South-South -- each containing a mixture of ethnic communities, evolved their own distinct regionally-unifying identities? If so, are those identities being constructed by emphasizing differences between particular regions? If yes, which ones and why? What about Nigeria’s so-called minority groups, namely all the other ethnic groups outside the big three (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa-Fulani), how are their political leaders constructing their group identities?

Additionally, a study could be carried out on the impact of the political discourses analysed by investigating their reception and recontextualization by the media and other Nigerian intellectual, political and cultural leaders. What did they make of Awolowo, Azikiwe and Bello’s narratives? It could also be very interesting and fruitful to analyse contemporary discursive constructions of ethnic and other sub-national identities in the Nigerian press and/or by Nigerian political leaders.

Discourses are not just static receptacles, but also sites of action. They reflect beliefs based on the interpretation of events and, in turn, help shape future events. They are windows into the mental schemes of a leader, a culture and a society at a given time.

Language, as understood by the CDA approach I used, both (re)produces and reﬂects social relations and practices. The way in which ethnic and/or ethno-regional groups come to have identities is as complex process as that of national identity acquisition. Discourses can be fruitfully studied as sites in which the work of such sub-national identity construction is revealed.

The imagined nature of ethnic identities and their accompanying narratives do not undermine their mobilizational capacity to influence the behaviour or actions of significant groups of people. Nor does it prevent them from providing an interpretive lens through which people can view and absorb political events and processes. This is why it is worthwhile analysing and explaining historically-situated ethno identity constructions. I emphasize the term ‘historically-situated’ because ethnic and ethno-regional group construction refers ‘not to a one-time event but to an ongoing project’,[[652]](#footnote-652) a project that is ‘never finished,’[[653]](#footnote-653) thus it is a process that requires ongoing investigations and re-evaluations in line with changing socio-political and historical contexts.

Appendix

List of speeches examined for study in full-text or extended excerpts. In chronological order.

11.05.46 Azikiwe’s funeral Oration for Herbert Macaulay, first president of

NCNC and founder of Nigerian National Democratic Party at Ikoyi Cemetery.

25.06.46 Azikiwe’s address in Native Court Hall, Opobo in connection with nationwide campaign of NCNC against the Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs Ordinance and other issues.

13.07.46 Azikiwe’s speech delivered in African School at Calabar during a mass meeting convened during visit of NCNC delegation.

16.11.46 Azikiwe’s speech at Ikare during nationwide tour of NCNC.

\_\_.\_\_.47 Awolowo’s speech to Assyrian Union of Teachers delivered in Ibadan.

04.03.47 Azikiwe’s speech on racial prejudice in colonial Nigeria at mass meeting in Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos.

11.06.47 Azikiwe addressing welcoming committee including Deputy Mayor of New York at New York City Hall.

27.06.47 Azikiwe addressing Lincoln University Alumni Association and African Academy in Hotel Pennsylvania, New York.

27.06.47 Azikiwe’s speech on colonialism at Hotel Pennsylvania.

31.07.47 Azikiwe’s speech celebrating centenary of the Republic of Liberia in Friends House, London under auspices of Pan-African Federation.

15.08.47 Azikiwe’s speech at Oxford University on Nigeria-Britain relations.

03.03.48 Azikiwe addressing Legislative Council at Kaduna while supporting motion to adopt a memorandum on education policy in Nigeria.

05.03.48 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council in Kaduna supporting introduction of ordinance to prohibit discrimination against any person on account of race in any public place in Nigeria.

05.03.48 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council at Kaduna on salaries for Nigerian legislators.

09.03.48 Azikiwe’s speech delivered during debate on Appropriation Bill in the legislative Council at Kaduna.

10.03.48 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council in Kaduna discussing Appropriation Bill.

05.04.48 Azikiwe’s presidential address to annual convention of NCNC at Rex Cinema, Kaduna.

21.08.48 Azikiwe’s speech delivered at Legislative Council in Lagos supporting motion for increased political responsibility for Nigeria.

01.09.48 Azikiwe’s speech at inauguration of African Continental Bank in Yaba, Lagos.

10.03.49 Azikiwe’s speech given during debate on press law in Nigeria.

16.03.49 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council at Ibadan during Second Reading of Appropriation Bill.

30.03.49 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council in Ibadan during introduction of motion concerning films which are humiliating to the Negro race.

31.03.49 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council at Ibadan on the democratization of local government.

04.04.49 Azikiwe’s speech to annual convention of NCNC held at Tom Jones Memorial Hall, Lagos.

25.06.49 Azikiwe’s presidential address to the Ibo State Assembly in Aba.

26.06.49 Azikiwe’s farewell speech to Ibo State Assembly in Aba.

09.09.49 Azikiwe’s speech to Second Annual Conference of Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism on ‘Colonies and War’ at the Civic theatre, London.

23.10.49 Azikiwe’s address during Plenary Session of British Peace Congress at Lime Grove baths, Hammersmith, London.

04.12.49 Azikiwe’s speech to rally at Trafalgar Square, London, under auspices of West African Students Union of Great Britain and Ireland and associated organizations.

12.02.50 Azikiwe’s speech delivered at caucus of National Emergency Committee (formed of the National Youth Movement and the NCNC) in Dr Randle’s resort, Victoria Beach, Lagos.

09.03.50 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council at Enugu on youth attitudes to colonialism.

03.04.50 Azikiwe’s speech to legislative Council in Enugu advocating regionalization of Nigeria on ethnic and linguistic grounds, contrary to the recommendations of the Ibadan General Conference for the revision of the constitution.

14.06.50 Awolowo’s lecture to the West Nigerian branch of the Nigerian Union of Journalists.

04.07.50 Azikiwe’s statement on national day of Mourning in memory of 21 miners killed at Enugu on order of British police officer.

15.12.50 Azikiwe’s presidential address to Third Ibo State Assembly at Enugu.

25.01.51 Azikiwe’s speech to rally of Nigerian National Democratic Party in Glover memorial Hall, Lagos.

07.03.51 Azikiwe’s speech delivered to Legislative Council on Macpherson Constitution.

12.04.51 Azikiwe’s speech in Glover Memorial Hall following NCNC’s call to positive action against colonialism.

28.04.51 Awolowo’s first speech as leader of Action Group addressing party members and supporters at Owo.

30.08.51 Azikiwe’s presidential address to Third Annual Convention of NCNC in Kano.

17.11.51 Azikiwe’s campaign speech to rally at Obalende square, Lagos, during elections to the Western House of Assembly.

03.01.52 Azikiwe’s speech to NCNC members of Eastern House of Assembly and executive officers of NCNC at Owerri Hall, Enugu.

15.03.52 Awolowo’s speech on the Appropriation Ordinance to the House of Representatives.

13.07.52 Azikiwe’s speech during reception for Nigerian students in London.

16.07.52 Awolowo’s speech to Western House of Assembly on importance of local government.

17.08.52 Azikiwe’s presidential address to Fourth Annual Convention of NCNC held in Lagos City College auditorium.

03.10.52 Azikiwe’s presidential address to National executive Committee of NCNC in Owerri Hall, Port Harcourt.

\_\_.\_\_.53 Awolowo’s speech in defence of Chief Samuel Akintola to the Western House of Chiefs.

28.01.53 Azikiwe’s speech to Western House of Assembly during debate on Appropriations Bill.

14.02.53 Azikiwe’s speech to NCNC rally in Rex Cinema, Enugu.

31.03.53 Awolowo’s speech to House of Representatives on self-government motion.

31.03.53 Bello’s speech to House of Representatives on self-government motion.

04.04.53 Bello’s statement to Northern Nigerians addressing self-government issue.

18.04.53 Azikiwe’s address to guests at close of Sixth International Athletic Meeting between Nigeria and the Gold Coast in Lagos.

12.05.53 Azikiwe’s speech on self-government crisis and Northern threats of secession delivered to caucus of NCNC Working Committee at *West African Pilot* office at Yaba, Lagos.

29.08.53 Azikiwe’s speech to public meeting in Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos, on occasion of NCNC delegation from constitutional negotiations in London.

06.01.54 Azikiwe’s speech to Sixth Annual Convention of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons at Dayspring Hotel, Enugu.

28.01.54 Azikiwe’s address to Conference for the Revision of the Nigerian Constitution at the House of Representatives.

02.04.54 Azikiwe’s speech accepting honorary membership of Ibadan University Students’ Union in University College, Ibadan.

03.04.54 Azikiwe’s speech after the All-Nigeria Athletic Championships held in University College Sports Ground, Ibadan.

\_\_.05.54 Bello’s speech to NPC party members and supporters at its annual convention.

31.07.54 Azikiwe’s speech to Parliamentary Party of NCNC on economic mission to Europe and America.

16.08.54 Awolowo’s speech on the Supplementary Appropriation Ordinance to the House of Representatives.

23.08.54 Azikiwe’s speech to House of Representatives criticizing ‘squandermania’ of University College, Ibadan.

23.08.54 Azikiwe’s speech to House of Representatives on issue of Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation.

10.09.54 Azikiwe’s radio message on Nigerian Broadcasting Service following announcement Obafemi Awolowo, leader of Action Group, would visit Eastern Region to campaign for upcoming federal elections.

01.10.54 Azikiwe’s inaugural speech during his installation as Premier of Eastern Nigeria in the Eastern House of Assembly.

07.11.54 Azikiwe’s radio broadcast on national program of Nigerian Broadcasting Service on eve of federal elections.

14.11.54 Azikiwe’s speech to NCNC supporters following triumph of NCNC over Action Group in western Regional election at Benin.

15.12.54 Azikiwe’s speech opening debate on the second reading of the Criminal Procedure (Adaptation) Law in Eastern House of Assembly.

19.12.54 Azikiwe’s speech to Thirteenth annual assembly of Ibo State Union in Owerri Hall, Enugu.

08.01.55 Azikiwe’s address to joint meeting of NCNC Federal Parliamentary Party and National Executive Committee held in the Assembly Hall of Lagos City College, Yaba.

18.01.55 Azikiwe’s speech welcoming the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Allan T. Lennox-Boyd during his visit to Enugu, capital of the Eastern Region.

02.03.55 Awolowo’s budget speech to Western House of Assembly.

14.03.55 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly on Eastern regional government’s financial policies.

18.03.55 Azikiwe’s address to Eastern House of Assembly on questions of expatriation allowance and local government issues.

22.03.55 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly supporting motion to abolish provincial system of administration.

29.03.55 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly on regulation of newspapers in region.

06.04.55 Azikiwe’s radio speech on East Regional Programme of Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation on issue of local government law.

09.04.55 Azikiwe’s speech to plenary session of Economic Planning Commission in Eastern House of Assembly.

21.04.55 Azikiwe’s speech to Afkipo District Council.

05.05.55 Azikiwe’s presidential address to Sixth Annual Convention of NCNC at Mapo Hall, Ibadan.

18.05.55 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly on establishing a university in the Eastern Region.

17.06.55 Azikiwe’s speech at a rally in Isalegangan Square, Lagos in connection with the suspension and deportation of the Alaafin of Oyo.

22.12.55 Azikiwe’s presidential address to National Executive Committee of NCNC in dayspring Hotel, Enugu.

\_\_.\_\_.56 Bello’s speech welcoming Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Northern Nigeria.

20.03.56 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly, seconding the motion for the second reading of the Abolition of the Osu System Bill.

28.03.56 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly moving second reading of Recognition of Chief Law bill.

20.05.56 Azikiwe’s radio broadcast on Nigerian Broadcasting Service in connection with elections to the Western House of Assembly.

25.05.56 Azikiwe’s campaign speech in Lagos on eve of elections to the Western House of Assembly.

30.05.56 Azikiwe’s post-election speech to NCNC members of Western House of Assembly following victory of Action group in Western regional elections.

27.06.56 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly during a debate of confidence in the government of the Eastern Region.

09.07.56 Azikiwe’s welcome address in the Chamber of the Eastern House of Assembly at the opening session of the Eastern Region Summit Conference.

\_\_.\_\_.56 Awolowo’s summer school lecture to Western Nigerian students on the implications of a federal constitution.

02.08.56 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly in connection with on-going constitutional crisis in the Eastern Region.

15.09.56 Bello’s speech at opening of new premises of Barclays Bank at Kaduna.

14.12.56 Azikiwe’s address to Eastern House of Assembly on occasion of Sir Robert de Stapleton’s assumption of office as Governor of the Eastern Region.

09.03.57 Azikiwe’s radio address on Nigerian Broadcasting Service in connection with elections to the Eastern House of Assembly.

20.03.57 Azikiwe’s statement following NCNC victory in elections to Eastern House of Assembly.

19.04.57 Azikiwe’s presidential address at Special Convention of NCNC in Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos.

11.06.57 Azikiwe’s speech at Oxford University on the development of political parties in Nigeria.

11.07.57 Azikiwe’s farewell address in London on occasion of departure from the United Kingdom to Nigeria after leading the NCNC delegation to the Constitutional Conference.

20.07.57 Azikiwe’s speech at reception given by Dr M.A.S Margai, Chief Minister of Sierra Leone in Executive Council Hall, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

08.08.57 Azikiwe’s radio broadcast on Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation on occasion of attainment of self-government by Eastern Region.

18.09.57 Bello’s speech during send-off party for Sir Bryan Sharwood-Smith, outgoing Governor-General of Northern Nigeria.

20.09.57 Azikiwe’s speech made at opening of Biafra House in Port Harcourt.

28.10.57 Azikiwe’s speech to NCNC annual convention at Rex Cinema, Aba.

16.11.57 Azikiwe’s speech delivered during centenary celebrations of Niger Mission of the Church Missionary Society at Onitsha.

07.01.58 Azikiwe’s speech to Annual Convention of the Nigerian Union of Teachers at Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha.

05.02.58 Bello’s speech to Minorities Commission opposing division of Northern Region.

13.02.58 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly supporting modification of Universal Primary Education Scheme.

04.03.58 Azikiwe’s speech to Legislative Council at Kaduna appealing for national unity.

20.03.58 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly on changes proposed to local government structure.

27.03.58 Azikiwe’s radio broadcast over the Eastern Regional Programme of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation on the occasion of Youth Day.

04.04.58 Bello’s speech to Northern public service officers on what to expect come Northern self-government.

11.04.58 Azikiwe’s speech to Eastern House of Assembly on the University of Nigeria.

22.05.58 Bello’s speech to Northern House of Assembly on Northernisation policy.

04.07.58 Bello’s speech to first group of 14 Northerners who completed Administrative Service Training Course at the Institute of Administration, Zaria, Kaduna.

14.07.58 Azikiwe’s speech to National Executive Committee of NCNC at Lagos City College.

06.08.58 Bello’s speech to Northern Assembly moving motion for elf-government for Northern Region.

15.09.58 Awolowo’s speech to journalists during press conference in Ibadan discussing constitutional issues.

17.09.58 Awolowo’s speech broadcast over Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation radio discussing constitutional issues.

19.09.58 Awolowo’s speech at press conference in London before upcoming constitutional conference.

19.09.58 Awolowo’s speech addressing Western Nigerian community of Great Britain and Ireland in London.

22.09.58 Awolowo’s speech to British and Commonwealth press in London on constitutional issues.

24.09.58 Awolowo’s address to American press during London conference on need for American involvement in Africa.

25.09.58 Awolowo’s speech to dinner party in House of Commons on impending Nigerian independence.

28.09.58 Awolowo’s recorded speech for Nigerian broadcasting Corporation preceding start of London conference.

29.09.58 Awolowo’s speech at opening ceremony of the Resumed Constitutional Conference in Lancaster House, London.

27.10.58 Awolowo’s post-conference speech recorded for Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation.

13.11.58 Bello’s speech welcoming visiting foreign mission to Northern Region.

16.11.58 Azikiwe’s statement made on his 54th birthday on board the M.V. ‘Aureol’.

20.11.58 Bello’s speech to members of the Christian Missionary Society on impending Northern self-government.

12.12.58 Bello’s speech to Northern House of Assembly on reforms to legal and judicial system of the Northern Region.

13.01.59 Bello’s speech during 4th meeting of Northern Provincial Council.

29.01.59 Bello’s speech welcoming Dr. Kwame Nkrumah during his visit to the Northern Region.

03.02.59 Azikiwe’s welcome address on behalf of Eastern regional government on occasion of Dr Kwame Nkrumah’s visit to Eastern House of Assembly at Enugu.

02.03.59 Bello’s speech during registration exercise for upcoming federal elections.

15.03.59 Bello’s speech to Northern crowds from balcony of Lugard Hall, Kaduna on occasion of attainment of self-government by Northern Region.

15.03.59 Bello’s speech to Sokoto crowd celebrating achievement of self-government by Northern Region.

18.03.59 Bello’s speech closing official celebration of Northern Nigerian self-government at state dinner held in Lugard Hall, Kaduna.

03.04.59 Bello’s address to colonial officers about their future in independent Nigeria at cocktail party in his residence.

14.05.59 Bello’s speech during formal opening of the Kaduna exhibition.

14.05.59 Bello’s speech made at formal acceptance of gift of fountain by A.T.M.N Limited on behalf of the Nigerian Chamber of Mines to mark the attainment of Northern-Nigerian self-government.

15.05.59 Bello’s speech during self-government celebrations at Lugard Hall, Kaduna.

18.05.59 Bello’s speech delivered to Northern Assembly on occasion of laying of second foundation-stone of House of Assembly.

18.05.59 Bello’s speech closing official celebrations of Northern Nigerian self-government at a state dinner party held in the restaurant at Lugard Hall.

01.06.59 Bello’s speech during opening of Kubani Bridge, Zaria, Kaduna.

04.06.59 Awolowo’s speech presenting Action Group 14-point programme during press conference held in the premier’s office at Ibadan.

31.07.59 Azikiwe’s speech to London branch of NCNC at Carlton Rooms, Maida Vale, London.

22.08.59 Bello’s speech during a cocktail party in honour of Lord Perth, Her Majesty’s Minister of State for Colonial Affairs.

03.09.59 Awolowo’s summing-up of his years as Western Region premier to the press at Racecourse, Lagos.

16.09.59 Bello’s speech presenting NPC’s programme for independent Nigeria at party press conference held in Kaduna.

02.10.59 Azikiwe’s presidential address to NCNC Special Convention in Enugu.

17.12.59 Azikiwe’s speech to caucus of Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries of the government of the Eastern Region on relinquishing office as Premier of the Eastern Region.

22.12.59 Azikiwe’s speech to NCNC National Executive Council at Lagos City College following 1959 federal elections.

24.12.59 Bello’s Christmas message to Northerners broadcast over radio.

11.01.60 Azikiwe’s speech to Nigerian Senate accepting election as President of the Senate.

14.01.60 Awolowo’s speech to House of Representatives on impending independence.

27.02.60 Bello’s speech delivered at formal opening of the headquarters of the Northern Cultural Society.

03.03.60 Azikiwe’s speech to Provincial Council of the University of Nigeria at the Premier’s Lodge.

15.03.60 Bello’s speech to Northerners on first anniversary of attainment of self-government by the Northern Region.

25.03.60 Bello’s speech during opening of Mando Road Investigation and Veterinary Training Centre.

07.04.60 Awolowo’s speech on the Appropriation Bill and his approach to rapid economic development in the House of Representatives.

04.05.60 Azikiwe’s speech to Nigerian Senate in connection with proposed Defence Agreement with the United Kingdom.

06.07.60 Bello’s speech at dinner given by African-American Institute in New York with guests including Governor Rockefeller.

07.07.60 Bello’s speech at Carnegie Foundation, United States during US visit.

11.07.60 Bello’s speech on Northern Nigeria in Nigeria Office, Washington, US.

16.07.60 Bello’s speech on Northern Nigeria at VIP dinner party in Los Angeles.

29.09.60 Bello’s speech to Northerners in Kaduna on independence and what it means.

12.10.60 Bello’s welcome address on arrival of Princess Alexandra of Kent, the Queen’s representative, at the Nigerian independence celebrations in the Government House of the Northern Region.

07.11.60 Awolowo’s presidential address to the Eastern regional conference of the Action Group at Achukwu hall, Onitsha.

16.11.60 Azikiwe’s inaugural speech as first Nigerian Governor-General of Nigeria.

21.11.60 Awolowo’s speech on nationalisation to the House of Representatives.

23.11.60 Bello’s speech during opening ceremony of Daura water works in Daura.

01.01.61 Bello’s speech during opening of the Electric Power Station in Bida.

04.01.61 Bello’s speech during laying of foundation stone of New Kaduna Hotel.

27.01.61 Awolowo’s lecture on politics and religion to students of the Adventist College of West Africa at Ilishan, Remo.

04.02.61 Awolowo’s speech on the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact at the Nigerian college of Arts, Science and Technology, Enugu.

15.03.61 Bello’s message to Northern Nigerians on the second anniversary of the attainment of Northern regional self-government.

\_\_.03.61 Bello’s speech to Northern House of Assembly following Northern Cameroon plebiscite.

\_\_.04.61 Bello’s speech presenting manifesto of Northern People’s Congress party.

04.04.61 Awolowo’s speech to House of Representatives during motion for creation of more states.

12.04.61 Awolowo’s speech on agricultural development.

27.04.61 Bello’s speech at press conference in Kaduna on political situation before upcoming elections to Northern Assembly.

13.05.61 Bello’s speech to joint session of Northern House of Chiefs and House of Assembly in Kaduna following elections to Northern House of Assembly.

28.06.61 Awolowo’s speech to the press on African unity at Action Group federal headquarters, Lagos.

03.08.61 Bello’s speech to Zaria Native Authority Council.

03.09.61 Awolowo’s lecture on his philosophy for an independent Nigeria delivered to Nigerian students at Conway Hall, London.

28.10.61 Bello’s speech in response to article of Mr Justin Price criticizing Northern Nigeria penal code.

18.11.61 Awolowo’s speech on balance of payments to House of Representatives.

18.12.61 Awolowo’s speech to Federal Executive Council of Action Group party in Ikeja, Lagos.

02.02.62 Awolowo’s presidential address to the Eighth Congress of the Action Group party held at African Games Club, Jos.

22.03.62 Bello’s speech to Northern House of Assembly on measures for achieving economy in public expenditure.

23.03.62 Awolowo’s speech to House of Representatives on second reading of bill to create new Mid-West state.

29.03.62 Bello’s radio broadcast preceding planned census in Northern Nigeria.

14.04.62 Bello’s speech to Northern House of Chiefs with regard to relationship between Northern regional government and the Native Authorities.

29.05.62 Awolowo’s speech opposing Prime Minister Tafewa Balewa’s motion seeking to impose a state of emergency in the Western Region.

21.06.62 Bello’s welcome address to the new Governor of the Northern Region.

20.07.62 Bello’s address to press conference at Nigeria House on reports of agitations for nationalization of industries in Nigeria.

11.10.62 Bello’s speech during opening of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria as the first chancellor of the university.

\_\_.\_\_.62 Azikiwe’s speech on the Future of Pan-Africanism.

20.03.63 Bello’s speech to Northern House of Assembly on new constitutional bill for Nigeria adopting a republican constitution.

29.03.63 Bello’s address to Northern House of Assembly on Northern officialdom and alleged threats to his life.

06.07.63 Awolowo’s speech read out at the Western Regional Conference of Action Group held at Ibadan while he was in detention.

23.08.63 Bello’s speech at the opening of the first meeting of Islamic Advisory Committee held in Lugard Hall, Kaduna.

11.09.63 Awolowo’s speech to High Court following his guilty sentence on charges of treasonable felony.

16.09.63 Bello’s speech addressed to all institutions of learning in Northern Nigeria delivered at Government College, Zaria to secondary school students.

01.10.63 Bello’s speech on 3rd anniversary of Nigerian independence.

23.11.63 Bello’s speech during first convocation as first chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Kaduna.

30.11.63 Bello’s speech during opening of Native Authority Police Wing of the Northern Police College.

01.01.64 Azikiwe’s presidential New Year broadcast to the nation.

31.10.64 Bello’s speech to rally at Ahmadu Bello stadium in Kaduna during launching of Nigerian National Alliance (N.N.A) party.

\_\_.\_\_.64 Bello’s speech to Muslim World League meeting in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

06.03.65 Bello’s radio broadcast message addressing census controversy.

29.05.65 Bello’s speech to Kaduna victory rally following victory of NNDP allies in Western regional elections.

01.01.66 Bello’s speech welcoming the birth of Northern daily newspaper called *New Nigerian.*

04.08.66 Awolowo’s address during his first press conference after release from prison in Ikenne.

11.08.66 Awolowo’s speech opening meeting of leaders of thought of Western Region held in Ibadan.

01.05.67 Awolowo’s speech to Western leaders of thought at Ibadan.

30.06.67 Awolowo’s speech to graduates of University of Ife.

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