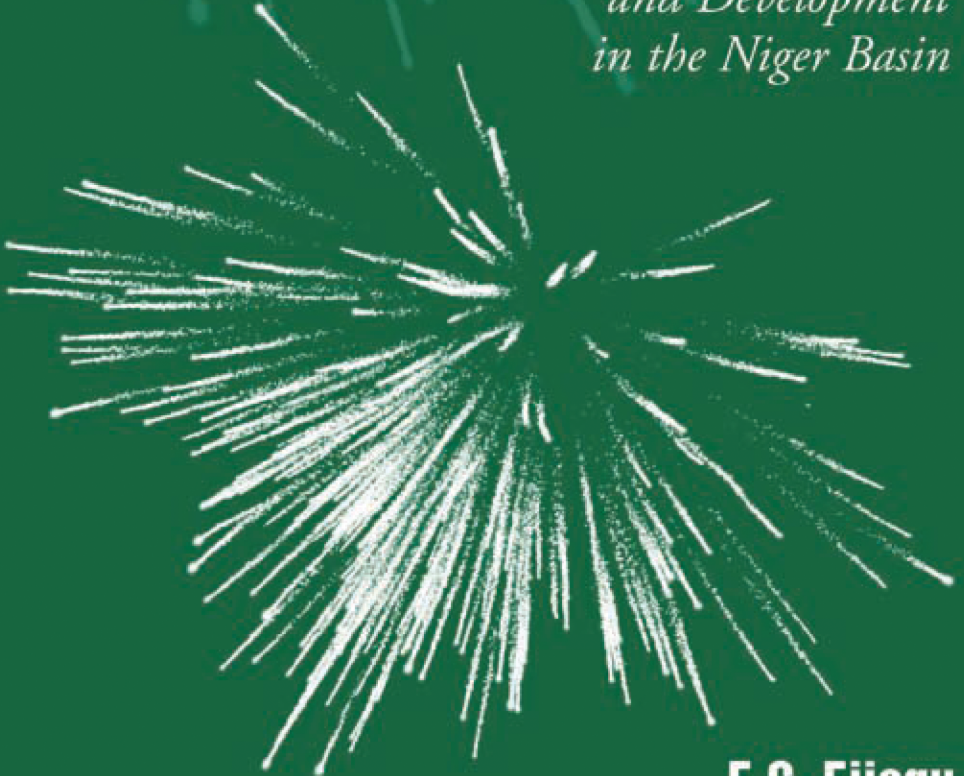# The Roots of Political Instability in Nigeria

Political Evolution and Development in the Niger Basin

ROUTLEDGE

E.C. Ejiogu

THE ROOTS OF POLITICAL
INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA

*To my parents Raymond Chilaka, and Rose Ojiakuede Ejiogu,
and Ngozi, Nwamaka, Amanze, and Chimeerem*

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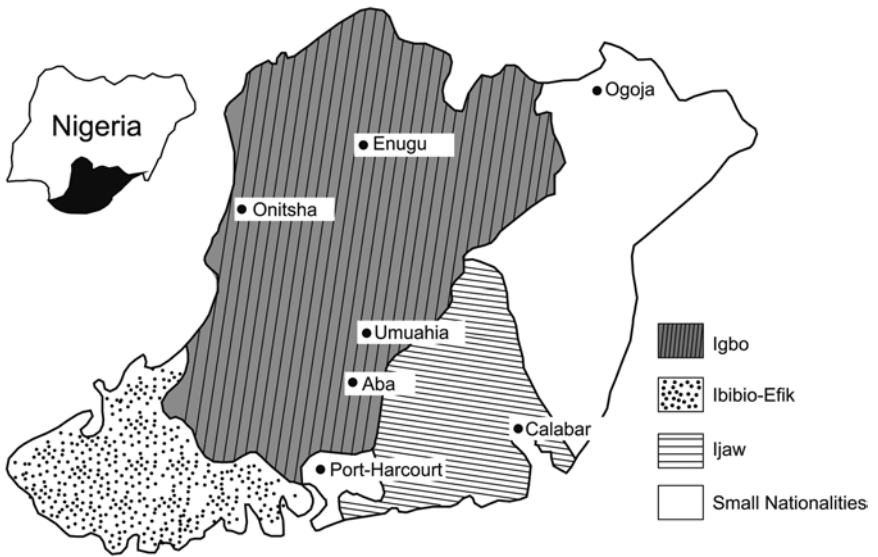
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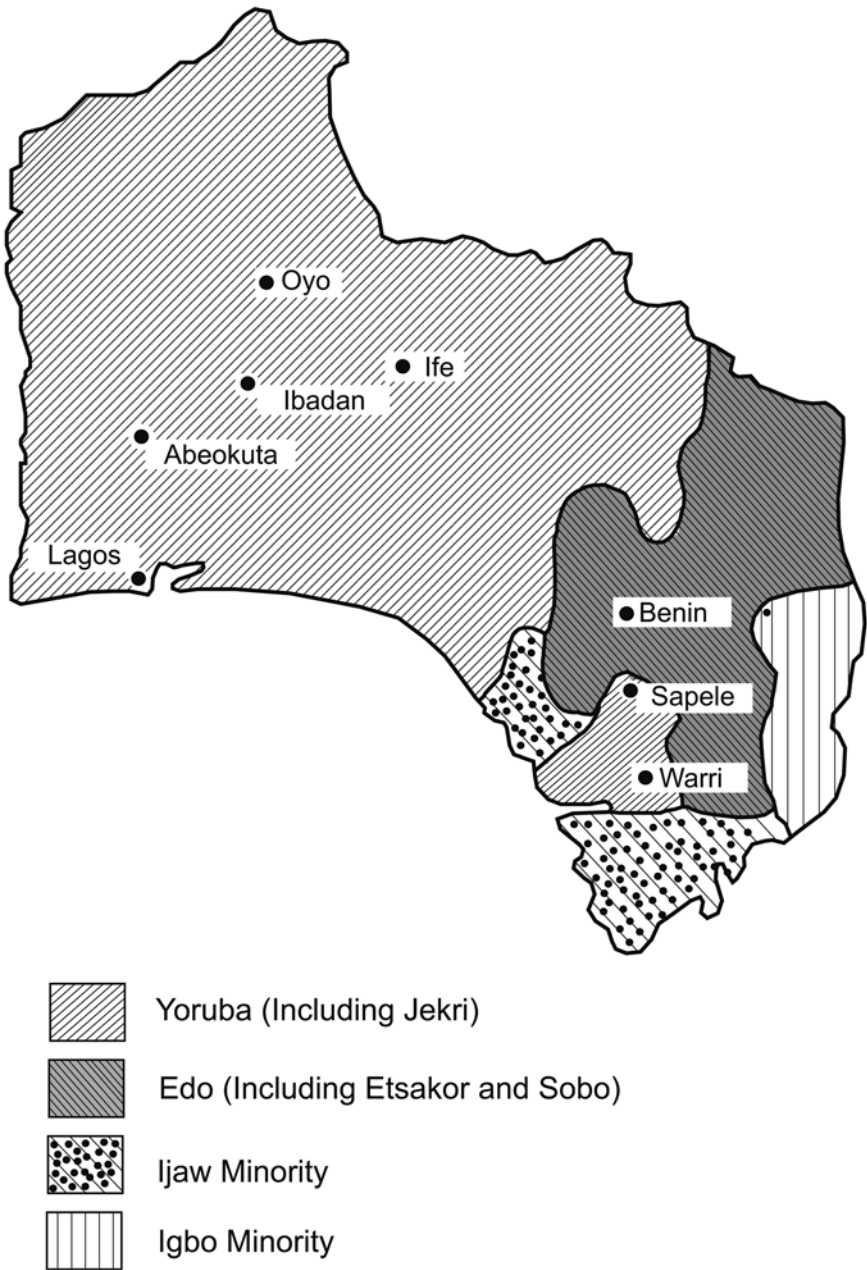
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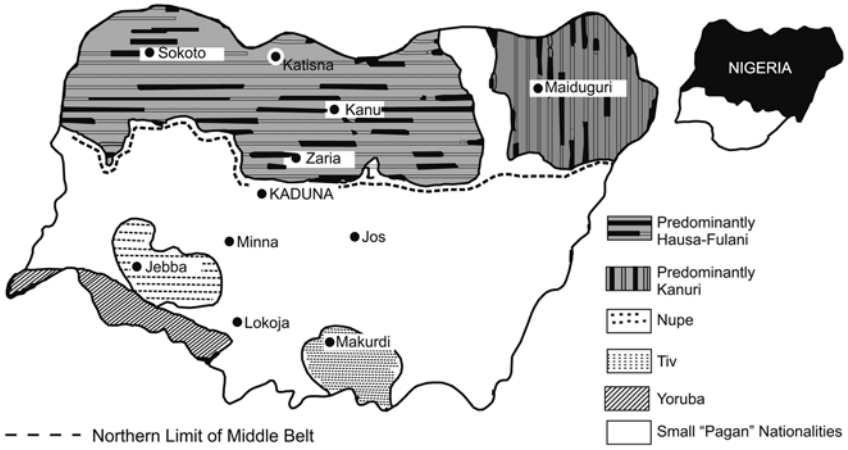
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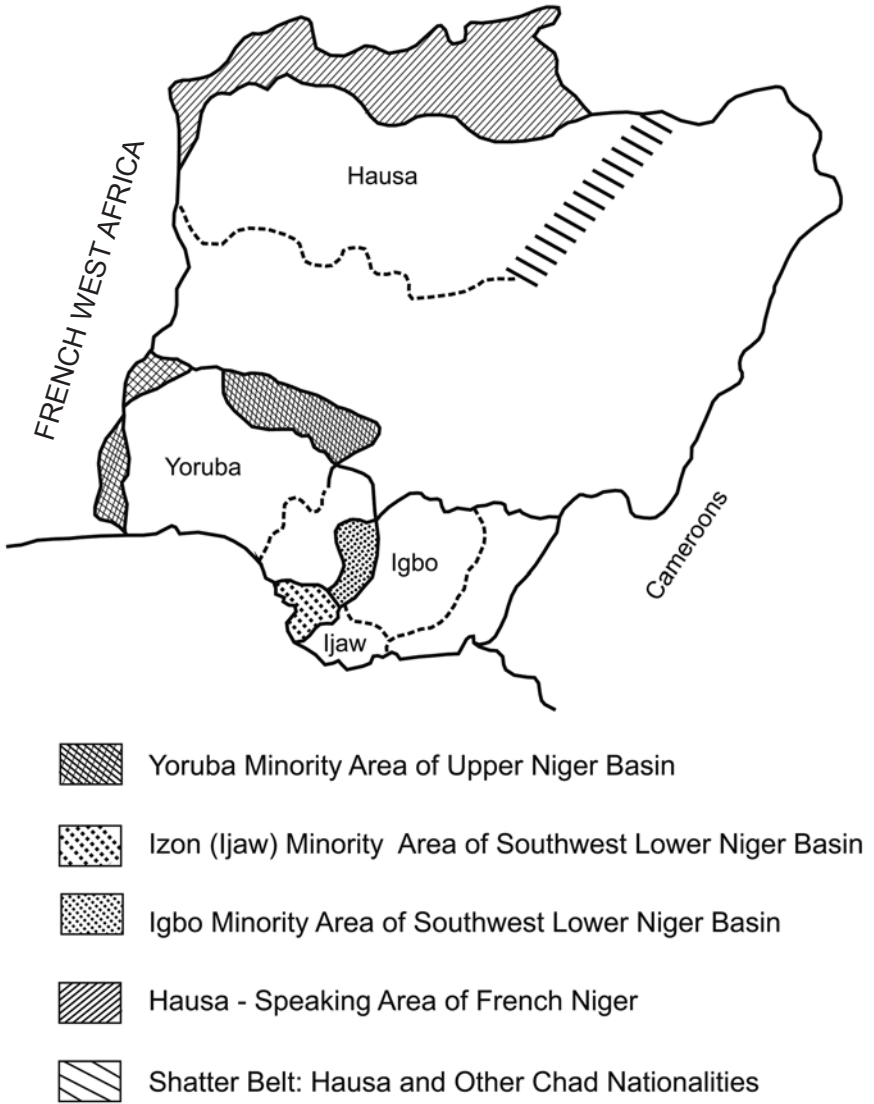
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Preface

The constant drum beat of headlines about Dafur, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Somalia, as well as the other states in Africa that are beleaguered by political instability had made the causes of failed states and intra-state political conflicts a major issue, both academic and practical. Latter day scholars, including Larry Diamond (2008), Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (1999, 2001), Ian O'Flynn and David Ressell (2005), Donald L. Horowitz (2006), Julius O. Ihonvbere and John M. Mbaku (2003) and a host of others have brought up issues of democratic rule and the need for consolidating what may have been accomplished in that regard in Africa since the new wave of political transition in the 1990s. However, the slant of the discourse has not shifted that much to include definitive prescriptions on how to utilize the diversity of Africa's age-old cultural patterns as the foundation of durable state building. Culture matters and cultural factors play crucial roles in social, economic, and political development of societies (Huntington 2000). At a time when "cultural obstacles to Africa's development" (Harrison 2000: xxiii) have been raised (Etounga-Manguelle 2000) severally in social science discourse, it's imperative also to bring forth specific aspects of Africa's cultural patterns that remain relevant and worthy of adoption in the search for stable political development on the continent. If the diversity of cultures and patterns that abound in Africa can't be wished away as obstacles to state building as used to be the case (Young 2002), they should be better understood and harnessed in the search for viable forms of political arrangement. It's not sufficient to simply submerge the issues that tug at the heart of political conflicts in Africa in the context of "ethnic groups in conflict" as Donald L. Horowitz (1985) has done. Instead, Africa's ethnic diversity, which ordinarily is often framed as a large and negative anachronism could perhaps be utilized in our quest to understand how we could build viable states on the *differences* in authority patterns in Africa's distinct nationality groups.

This piece of work addresses the following four crucial elements that have been ignored in the discourse on the causes of political instability in contemporary African states:

1. It advocates and takes an evolutionary perspective across a century of time to account for political developments in and amongst the distinct nationalities that constitute Nigeria, which is also one of Africa's largest and most critical contemporary states.

2. It recommends and adopts the Eckstein-Gurr congruence-consonance theoretical framework to examine the internal variations evident in the Nigerian state and to account for why it experiences political conflict.
3. It utilizes the same framework to describe the differences in authority patterns of some of the nationality groups that constitute the Nigerian supra-national state as another cause of the instability that it experiences and why it might even fail if the authority patterns of those diverse groups are not properly harnessed and channeled into meaningful state building. The concept of supra-national state is coined and used in the book to describe a polity that emerged from an arbitrary colonial process to comprise hitherto distinct and autonomous nationality groups that still lay claims to their distinctiveness. Most if not all of Africa's contemporary states can rightly be called supra-national entities.
4. It also, examines the causes and consequences of colonial policies as conscious state building measures that established a socio-political legacy that spawns political instability in post-colonial states.

In both conception and its execution, this is an interdisciplinary undertaking that targets practitioners and students in Political Science, Sociology, African Studies, International Relations, and History, and related disciplines as its audience. At a time when the question of state building in Africa is still unresolved as is made evident by recent and continuing political disorder in African states, the book's relevance for policy makers who grapple with the issues that are associated with Africa's political disorder and the other social problems that result from that is considerable. Since the mechanisms utilized in the analysis and accounts of events provided in the book are expressed in general terms from the Eckstein-Gurr framework, they can be applied to any multicultural or ethnic society whether in Africa, Asia or the Muslim world to provide an in-depth understanding of how differences in authority patterns can lead to conflicts in expectations and also how the origin of those differences can be related to geographic and cultural differences, which is not to deny other causes of conflict in polities especially those that are products of European colonialism in Africa, like religious dogma.

Why This Book?

The unique contributions made by the book are several. The work and scholarship covered in it involved an intensive case study of especially the three large nationalities in the part of the Niger basin that the British carved into Nigeria across several centuries of time. Two sets of detailed mechanisms for generating political conflict in former colonies are explored in the book, namely, (a) the arbitrary incorporation by colonial fiat of distinct nationalities without regard to their distinctiveness, into a supra-national state, (b) through specific colonial policies that achieved colonial state building and rule over them in ways that

consciously favored one nationality and neglected the rest. The outcome provides some important findings that are quite different from conclusions that are provided in existing studies and books that focused also on political instability in Nigeria. One of the unique facts about the findings made in the book is their applicability to other parts of Africa. The final product and the findings it contains suggest two important alternative explanations for political instability. The first of the two sets of mechanisms mentioned above, explored in the discourse, which applies to many former colonies, especially in Africa but also in parts of Asia and in the Balkans, is that most post-colonial states combine nationalities that have not only different religions but varying levels of economic development and disparate histories of how power and authority are distributed in society. In the case of the Niger basin, Nigeria was built and made to incorporate particularly distinct nationalities including the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbo nationalities, that are also the three biggest in population and territories as well as several others that are not as populous as they are. Nigeria at its birth can therefore be described as inherently unstable partly because it is at best a disparate combination of distinct peoples some of whom may frequently but not always have had prior histories of conflict amongst them. In other words, when a supra-national state is imposed by a colonial power on distinct nationalities that have disparate patterns of social, political, and economic institutional patterns, that imposition may inevitably lead to political conflict in the quest for control of the state by politicians. This is more than the simple argument about religious differences being the principal cause of Nigeria's political instability.

The second set of mechanisms that also affects political stability in former colonies is found in colonial policies. In a territory like the Niger basin which is inhabited by diverse nationalities, the preference by a colonial power to ally itself with one out of the several nationalities that inhabit it increases the unhealthy rivalry and competition between all the nationalities in the context for and control of state power and the benefits that are associated with it. In the specific case of Nigeria, the British who were impressed by the inherent autocratic traits of the Hausa-Fulani authority patterns, and were averse to the democratic traits of the indigenous Igbo and Yoruba authority patterns, formulated and implemented state building policies that favored the Hausa-Fulani but not the Igbo, the Yoruba, and others during the course of their colonial rule in the areas of the Niger basin that they subsequently carved into Nigeria. Yet, the irony of the choice of an alliance with the Hausa-Fulani by colonial administrators is precisely that it was contradictory to Britain's evolving state building policy at the time which espoused the idea of building a democratic state out of distinct nationalities. Britain's preferential embrace of the Hausa-Fulani and the co-option of their autocratic authority patterns partly prevented the Nigerian supra-national state from being perceived intrinsically from the onset as legitimate by the Yoruba, the Igbo or the other nationalities who were deemed qualitatively unfit as allies in colonial rule.

One of the specific contributions of this body of work is its examination of region-specific patterns of political conflict in the politics of the incipient

Nigerian supra-national colonial state prior to independence, which provides an entirely different perspective on the absence of political stability in colonial and contemporary Nigeria. The supporting analysis demonstrates that there is congruence between the authority patterns of the Nigerian supra-national state and Hausa-Fulani authority patterns on the one hand. Yet, in contrast, it also shows that Hausa-Fulani authority patterns and the authority patterns of the Nigerian supra-national state are incongruent and inconsonant with Igbo, and Yoruba authority patterns respectively, as well as the authority patterns of the other nationalities that are found in the study as being normatively democratic. The said incongruence and inconsonance derive from the fact that, unlike Igbo, Yoruba, in deed the authority patterns of the other nationalities respectively, Hausa-Fulani authority patterns and the authority patterns of the Nigerian supra-national state lack democratic dimensions. The resultant state of affairs from that in Nigeria's body politic led to poor political performance at the regional and national levels long before Nigeria's independence in 1960 and even after.

The other contribution made by the scholarship here is that it established that there are distinct and peculiar differences in the authority patterns of nationalities that inhabit the entire Niger basin. Those differences were largely underscored by pre-colonial political developments, even in the Caliphate Sultanate imposed by the Fulani through military conquest; on some of the nationalities that inhabit parts of the upper Niger basin. The said incongruence and inconsonance between the respective authority patterns of the nationalities—except in the case of the Hausa-Fulani—that inhabit the Niger basin and the authority patterns of the Nigerian supra-national state; led to considerable pre-independence political conflicts in parts of the former except in core Hausa-Fulani areas. That fact is largely ignored in orthodox accounts of political instability in Nigeria.

Even as analysts and writers in mainstream Western media sustain their arguments that the underlying causes of political violence in Africa in the post-Cold War era is "new barbarism" or "ancient tribal hatreds"(Kaplan 1994: 44–76 in Young 2002: 534), scholars such as Stephen Ellis (1999), Ted R. Gurr (2000), Donald L. Horowitz (2001), Mahmood Mamdani (2001) and Luis Martinez (2000) have come forward with impressive works to answer in the affirmative the question: "Does identity politics provide the key to deciphering African disorder?" (Young 2002: 534). It is because this author subscribes to the analytical rationale that the bodies of literature that the aforementioned works belong to— relevant as they are—"fail to identify the analytical connective (sic) tissue that joins the phenomenon of sustained state crisis with patterns of mobilized identity politics" (Young 2002: 536) that he reiterates Crawford Young when he argues that: "ethnicity is a sociological reality to acknowledge and value" and not "a pathology to exorcise", that "state crisis is not a passing moment in the life of the African polity, but is instead a long-term condition" (Young 2002: 556, 557) and that "there lies a very large domain of still uncharted analytical territory" (Young 2002: 557) beyond the bodies of literature that take ethnicity in Africa seriously. The discourse and analysis presented here are meant to address many over-looked

aspects of the Nationality Question amongst the inhabitants of what became Nigeria and the impact of that Question on the course of politics in the latter. Hence, the other contribution made to the body of political economy literature is that terms such as "democratic" and "centralized" that are often used to describe the set of authority patterns that are associated with European states, polities and social units can be applied also to parallel social, economic, and political structures that exist in distinct nationalities and groups in Africa and elsewhere in the non-European world. The findings made in the study clearly establish the resilience of the set of authority patterns—with attributes that qualify them as "democratic" and "centralized"—that are also found to exist in colonized societies in the Niger basin through the course of colonial rule and after.

Another contribution made by the study is the argument that the application of the Eckstein-Gurr's (1975), especially p. 53, hereafter referred to as the Eckstein-Gurr analytical scheme, four-dimensional scheme for analyzing authority patterns not only of the state and polities but also of smaller social units such as the family and the community in Western societies, is also relevant in studies of non-European societies. The four dimensions are: *Directiveness*, *Participation*, *Responsiveness*, and *Compliance*. In other words, what has been made clear here is that the Eckstein-Gurr scheme can also be used to analyze authority patterns in Africa's distinct nationalities prior to and after colonial rule on the continent. When the scheme is used, it makes clear that contrary to the perception that most if not all ethnic groups in Africa have some form of centralized authority patterns, some of them—including those that evolved monarchical political systems with clearly defined institutional structures—have democratic authority patterns that engender popular participation in the direction of society and its affairs. In the case of Nigeria, the authority patterns of the Igbo, Yoruba, and several others reflect democratic patterns, while those of the Hausa-Fulani do not. In addition, the cases that have been examined in the study represent the first time that the Eckstein-Gurr scheme has been applied to Africa with its diversity of distinct nationalities. Thus, this work is a useful extension of the application of the Eckstein-Gurr framework which has up until this time been applied exclusively in studies of European societies and polities, to an African case.

Furthermore, the analysis provided here underscores the fact that the attention that scholars still pay to the causes of political conflict, instability and state failure in former colonies is critical for both theoretical reasons and for practical political considerations. On the theoretical side, such attention allows us to further develop alternative theories of how states are formed and the consequences of their origin for stability. It also moves us away from one of the dominant Political Science perspectives, which posits that all states evolve towards the Western model of political development. Indeed, the Eckstein-Gurr analytical scheme provides some new ways of thinking about political development in non-European societies. On the practical side, the enormous problems that range from genocide to "ethnic" warfare and pervasive corruption that have emerged and persist in post-colonial Africa require new ideas about how to resolve them. Understanding the etiology

of these problems could potentially lead to new kinds of enduring solutions for them.

Given the findings made here, one might raise the argument about the relevance of the applicability of the Eckstein-Gurr framework beyond Nigeria. As was suggested above, the specific causes of poor governmental performance and political instability in Nigeria are discerned and given in such general terms that can also be applied to other former colonies and the propositions raised in the account of events and analysis can be tested anew in each case. As another way of demonstrating that applicability, the arguments and propositions raised have policy implications as well as constituting a reasonable base for understanding the patterns of political conflict in a number of other former European colonies in Africa. This is particularly important because most if not all of those former colonies started with and still grapple with the challenges evident in situations where heterogeneous authority patterns inter-play with and against one another in national politics. There might be some exceptions though, but they may not provide evidence for the general rule.

The narrative in Chapter 1 brings the reading audience up to date on Nigeria's tumultuous experiences in political instability over the years and paves the ground for subsequent parts of the discourse.

Chapter 2 outlines and examines the rationale that underpins the choice of the Niger basin and the distinct nationalities that inhabit it as the focus of this longitudinal and comparative historical analysis of political development in and amongst them. The shift in emphasis in the analysis from the macro, i.e. the Nigerian supra-national state as the focus to the micro, i.e. the distinct nationalities that compose it; is a deliberate measure aimed at identifying the true origins of the political crisis that Nigeria experiences. One must emphasize that in the discourse, the Nigerian state is not treated as a given. Instead, it is viewed as the outcome of social engineering by an external colonizer and administrators who served a cause that fostered an imperial design with little or no regard for the indigenous groups that inhabit the area. The argument is that it is much more realistic to examine societies for regional differences, whether defined in terms of geography or nationalities or both. In this case I settled for both. The Niger basin is one of Africa's several microcosms. It encompasses the continent's rich socio-cultural diversity that can often become a suitable benchmark for sociological inquiry. The supra-national state which resulted from Britain's external intervention in the Niger basin is endowed with peculiarities that distinguish it from other polities elsewhere that resulted from similar circumstances. Those peculiarities that derive largely from the distinctive peculiarities of its inhabitants make the Niger basin a more extreme case of diversity, which in turn makes it quite deserving of serious social research attention. By studying this more extreme case of diverse composition, it becomes easier to discern patterns and develop hypotheses and theoretical generalizations that can be applied to other cases that exist in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

This chapter equally raises the argument that it is theoretically useful to search for internal variations in the nationalities that were made to constitute Nigeria. Emphasis is placed on three of those nationalities, i.e. the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani, whose respective significant population constitutes the rationale for the prominence that they often receive from scholars who study Nigeria. Also, the chapter makes the case to substantiate why the discourse settled for the three nationalities as cases. The chapter includes a tight summation of some existing theories of political instability in former colonies, which serves as a necessary prelude to subsequent analysis in the rest of the discourse.

The analysis in Chapter 3 presents the central role played by the geography and ecology of each portion of the Niger basin that each distinct nationality inhabits and calls its own *homeland* in the evolution of the nationality's socio-cultural peculiarities and the impacts of those peculiarities on the nationality's political development. Some of the social, cultural, political, and even economic disparities that exist between the distinct nationalities can be traced to the geographical differences found in the environment and ecology of their *homelands*. For instance, geography played a role in the racial make-up of the inhabitants. This is in the sense that unlike inhabitants of the thick ever-green rainforest zones, inhabitants of the open savanna were exposed to racial and cultural intermingling with even groups from outside their *homelands* (Buchanan et al. 1955: 80, Falola and Heaton 2008). The maps shown in the text validate this assertion. The maps show that the nationalities inhabit the Niger basin in almost a neat non-co-terminus pattern. This chapter shows that there are also some aspects of the disparities between the nationalities that can be traced to the striking differences in the kinds of state, systems of governance, and the nature of social, economic and political authority patterns that each one of them evolved during the Common Era prior to British conquest. In fact this chapter affirms an evident truism that the Niger basin is demarcated by nature into distinctive geographic regions (Coleman 1958).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 unite Sociology and Political Science tenets around the basic issue of the evolution of distinctive authority patterns amongst the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani respectively. In respective terms, each of these three chapters accounts for the socio-cultural evolution evident in each of the three nationalities across time. The Eckstein-Gurr scheme was used to delineate the disparities found in the set of respective authority patterns evolved by the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani. Indeed, the detailed analysis presented in these three chapters provides an example of the usefulness of the E-G scheme for understanding the essence of the internal variations evident in distinct African nationalities in their socio-political development. The reader is given the benefit of seeing how the E-G scheme reveals the distinctiveness of each nationality's authority patterns as well as a prelude to how their arbitrary combination in a supra-national state provokes tension and political instability.

Chapters 7 and 8 document the gradual evolution of the authority patterns of what then became the Nigerian supra-national state and the extension of classical colonial rule to the rest of the Niger basin in the period that began in about 1851.

This is another important addition to existing body of knowledge on political development in the social sciences literature because it contributes a relatively ignored topic to the literature on colonial state formation in Africa. How Britain extended its control over the entire Niger basin and its distinct inhabitants is analytically documented in both chapters. Also documented are the various shades of resistance to colonial conquest in Igboland, Yorubaland, and Hausaland during a period that lasted up until 1914 when British colonial rule was finally consolidated in the entire Niger basin with the amalgamation of the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria by Frederick Lugard who also elevated himself from the position of High Commissioner of the Protectorate Government of Northern Nigeria, to the first Governor-general of Nigeria.

The evolution of the colonial state called Nigeria was the result of the implementation of four state building strategies devised by British colonial administrators who were assigned to serve the British Crown as empire builders in the Niger basin. Their objective in that regard was to realize a colonial state that would accommodate Britain's imperial interests in the Niger basin for an indefinite period of time. Britain's imperial interests ranged from the extraction of cheap raw materials for its factories, and to source military manpower in its colonies. Four of those state building strategies, i.e. the Indirect Rule policy, the Amalgamation of the north and the south of Nigeria in 1914, colonial education policies, and the evolution of policies that guided the recruitment of indigenous men into the military forces, are discussed and analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 9. The analysis in Chapter 9 reveals that those four specific state building policies and the manner in which they were articulated and implemented to further Britain's colonial desires amongst the inhabitants of the Niger basin produced a major dysfunctional legacy that spawns political instability in the Nigerian supra-national state even before and after 1960 when Britain bequeathed self rule to Nigeria. The account of events in Chapter 9 is therefore a sound argument that Britain's colonial state building in the Niger basin was a conscious social engineering endeavor that sought and achieved political alliance with the Hausa-Fulani ruling elite while at the same time it excluded a similar alliance with the other nationalities particularly because of reasons that have to do with their normatively democratic authority patterns. The principal reason for that political alliance with the Hausa-Fulani ruling elite was that British colonial administrators cherished the similarity in the inherent autocratic authority patterns of the Caliphate's political system and the authority patterns of the incipient colonial state, and worked hard to co-opt the Caliphate's autocratic authority patterns into colonial state building and bureaucratic administration. The Igbo, Yoruba, and the rest of the nationalities were deemed unfit for such preferential alliance principally because their authority patterns configure in democratic dimensions that run contrary to the autocratic and centralized authority patterns in the Caliphate society and the colonial state. Furthermore, the analysis and argument in Chapter 9 represent a detailed explanation of some of the roots and dynamics of political instability in Nigeria