Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies
JICS 2025, 1: 194-211
DOI: 10.29329/almamater.2025.1286.12

An Enquiry into the Processes of Ethno-Religious Gaslighting in Nigeria

Patrick Agbedejobi[1]

Abstract

Systemic covert and overt inherent ethno-religious structures remain deeply entrenched in the ideological configuration of the Nigerian state. I argue that the process of ethnic and religious gaslighting encompassing pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial socio-economic, cultural and political relations between the ruled and the rulers have had a pathologising impact, the roots of which are deeply entrenched in historical relations of class struggle and failed multiculturalism. This paper presents a path dependency framework for comprehending how ethnic and religious markers are sustained through process tracing, which generates a causal mechanism of contemporary socio-political relations and the importance of ethno-religious gaslighting in Nigeria. The paper offers a theoretically driven discussion which examines two questions: (1) What is ethno-religious gaslighting? (2) How are ethno-religious structures sustained and maintained?

Keywords: Gaslighting, hegemony, ethnicity, religion, democracy, colonialism, post-colonialism, Nigeria.

Introduction

The concept of gaslighting originated from Patrick Hamilton's 1928 play, *Gas Light* (known as *Angel Street* in the US). The plot revolves around a husband's attempt to convince his wife that she is insane, so that he can gain access to her inherited jewels.

Beerbohm and Davis (2021, p. 869) depict gaslighting as an effort to change the victim's worldview or perspective or to cause them to doubt epistemic evidence. They further opine that political gaslighting affects the worldview of citizens by diminishing confidence in beliefs or epistemic evidence. Thus, from a post-colonial perspective, colonial powers subjugated their subjects with mind manipulation by introducing them to a superior culture, to a "modern or a new worldview" and by forcefully rewriting certain institutions and belief systems (Falola, 2021, pp. 3–24). This occurred over time through first contact, the transatlantic slave trade, post-1884 conference mapping, anthropological analysis of colonial subjects and the enforcement of colonial dominance (Falola, 2021).

Succinctly, gaslighting indicates the deprivation or loss of something by one party to the advantage of another. Agbedejobi (2021) and Rietdijk (2021) depict political gaslighting as an

[1] M.A. Independent Researcher, Germany, patreader82@hotmail.co.uk

How to cite this article: Agbedejobi, P. (2025). An Enquiry into the Processes of Ethno-religious Gaslighting in Nigeria. In: *Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies 2:1*, 194-211.
Submitted: 01.10.2024
Accepted: 20.12.2024

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attempt to disorientate and destabilise epistemic truth or reality through symbolic buffoonery, speech acts, dialectical relational tensions and incessant rhetoric or discourses that fuel hegemony and control over victims.

Morrock (1973, pp. 129–130) argues, retrospectively, that British colonialism utilised an ethno-religious gaslighting scheme based on three major strategies. The first was based on the settlement of large populations of colonialists at the centre of power among Indigenous peoples. The second was the practice of bribery and corruption to gain the support of Indigenous elites which, according to Osaghae (1991, p. 28), included giving dictatorial powers to local chiefs, warrant chiefs, emirs and kings to instil conformity to the colonialist plan. The third were divide and rule policies that created the administrative and political bases for hegemonic colonial rule. Morrock (1973, p. 129) defines the latter as "the conscious effort by an imperialist power to exploit the existence of cultural, ethnic, tribal, linguistic, religious difference among the Indigenous people or conquered colony."

"Conscious effort" is the critical phrase here, which deserves further deconstruction. It denotes an active action comprising the foremost path – the mode of conquest (predominantly force), followed by the power to frame, rewrite or replace aspects of Indigenous culture, traditions or religions deemed 'inferior' by the coloniser. Thus, existing traditions or cultures was replaced through the use of force and acts of rewriting and replacing.

A further internal examination of conquered colonies of Indigenous peoples is crucial.

From this perspective, it should be noted that certain colonial governors approved anthropological investigations that would optimise the divide and rule policy to the advantage of the imperial authority (Loomba, 1998; Lewis, 1973; Busia, 1967). Within this system, anthropological research built on the assumption that existing Indigenous structures were inferior to equivalent European structures, thereby bolstering the claim for the need of modernisation (Falola 2021, p. 29–33). Morrock (1973, p. 130) further elaborates on how divide and rule strategies were implemented. Tactics included the creation, amplification and exploitation of differences among subjects and a politicisation of those differences that has extended well beyond the colonial era. These tactics were successfully utilised and upheld in post-colonial institutions. It begs the question- how do such stubborn structures outlive the colonial era to forge stronger, deeper and unparalleled impacts?

Conceptual framework

Scholars of psychoanalysis describe gaslighting as a transfer of psychic conflicts from the perpetrator to the victim or, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the act of manipulating someone through psychological means into doubting their own sanity. In the social sciences, the concept has evolved with diverse connotations over time. In psychology, it represents an individual's efforts to destabilise another's confidence and reality by manipulating the victim to question their judgement and sanity (Haider, 2019). In family therapy, gaslighting is a situation in which one partner attempts to control the other. A typical example is a promiscuous individual who tells their partner that their perception of inappropriate or deceitful behaviour is false. In other words, gaslighting revolves within gender related dominance. Some political psychologists have questioned the tenability of gaslighting

in politics. In response, Beerbohm and Davis (2021) suggest that the political variant of gaslighting is not simply a function of partisan followership; rather the aim is to alter reality and substitute it with narratives of deflationary epistemic singularity (Lewandowsky, 2019). From this perspective, Beerbohm and Davis (2021) posit three ways through which gaslighting might be attained and retained: citizens as victims, citizens as enablers and citizens as self-manipulators. The citizen as victim is a creation of second-personal authority or dominance of political rulers. In other words, elected leaders hold the power to spread false beliefs which subdue epistemic evidence or beliefs in the public sphere. The citizen as enabler is the citizen's ability to differentiate between what is constructed and epistemic evidence. However, citizens take falsehood cues from politicians based on shared ethnic or tribal affiliation or views. Lastly, the citizen as self-manipulator is a situation in which citizens, rather than political actors, form the middle ground of dispersing falsehood, misinformation and gaslighting.

A singular narrative and the ability to act as collaborator in dispersing falsehoods energises populism and post-truth politics (Agbedejobi, 2021). In other words, political evidentialism, or the regime of facts is sacrificed for second-personal reasons that emanate from positions of authority and hegemony. Second-personal authority seeks to manipulate the victim's perception of reality. Such worldview manipulation can be socially constructed through truth deflation, memory politics and epistemic fact deconstruction to facilitate partisan or group advantage (Baldwin, 2019). In the context of ethnic politics, gaslighting is fostered by state sponsored control of the narrative which ensures that cumulative historical events are transmitted from one generation to another based on the perpetrator's perspective and not the victim. This implies that ethnic configuration in politics – who gets what, when and how – aligns with competitive class and power struggles which consolidate hegemony and authority to construct certain collective memories (Baldwin, 2019). According to Osaghae (2003, p.57–58) ethnic marginalisation leads to ethnic mobilisation which results in ethnic clashes and conflicts. However, ethnicity is dynamic, suggesting that it is susceptible to shifts and reconstructions. In the context of this analysis, the nature of ethnic interests and competition for resources are important (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 5–7). Some ethnic interests have changed over the years, while some have not. This assumption acts as a qualifier of the Nigerian polity. Ethnic interest among the three major ethnic groups – Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba – have not changed over the decades, while ethnic interest among other, supposedly minority, groups have declined, retreated or halted.

Osaghae (2003, p. 60) explores four arenas of ethnic politics: individual, inter-group, intra-group and ethnic-state. These offer a platform through which ethnic relations and dominant political constructs have been negotiated. Given Nigeria's intra-group conflicts and ethnic-state negotiations, these two are the highest arenas of relations among the three major ethnic groups and other minority groups. In the next section, historical path dependency analysis will be used to understanding these constructs. However, the ethnic-state is a basic unit of political relations in postcolonial Nigeria. In other words, the dominance of a specific ethnic group, from a postcolonial perspective situates the hegemonic ties of the past and present which further aids cultural memory suppression. Cultural memory suppression stems from the historical singularity and victimisation discourse of specific ethnic groups as traitors and unworthy of trust, while others are upheld as heroes of the Nigerian state. The Biafran Civil War and the Ogoni genocide, to mention but two, attest to physical violence or overt/covert forms of aggression towards dominance, cultural memory repression and submission

(Onuoha, 2016). As such, ethnic interests, hegemony, the control and suppression of cultural memory or continual othering of victims by perpetrators indicate a long-term plan for mnemonic erasure (Fasakin, 2022; Onuoha, 2016).

Christianity in Nigeria builds on the ethnic narrative and owes its existence to colonialism. Pre-colonial sources indicate that due to trans-Saharan trade relations, northern Nigeria was in contact with North African traders who introduced Islam in the 11th Century under the political systems of kingdoms, empires and caliphates (Reynolds, 1997; Olukoju, 1996; Onwubu, 1975). Other sources suggest that the scholar Uthman dan Fodio consolidated the practice of Islam through his six-year jihad that began in 1804. Preferential treatment was accorded northern Nigeria, with the colonial administration refusing Christian missionaries' entry into the region, thus retaining pre-colonial religious, socio-political and economic structures (Falola and Heaton, 2008; Falola, 2021). These structures continued into the post-colonial era, creating a socio-economic dichotomy between north and south (Falola, 2021).

Cleavages in modern-day Nigeria can be accounted for through a discourse of ethnic and religious gaslighting. These two forms of gaslighting are also mobilising tools in garnering political support, allocating resources and othering.

Islam is the major religion in northern Nigeria, while Christianity dominates elsewhere. This divide informs political cleavages during elections, when ethno-religious resources are mobilised and exploited. Marx's structural functionalist critique of organised religion suggests that the masses blindly elect leaders not on merit, but on ethnic and religious loyalties that sustain the status quo of hegemony and class dominance.

In the Nigerian context and with regard to the strategies utilised by British colonialists (Morrock 1973, p.129), ethno-religious gaslighting is a second-personal authority plot to maintain polarisation through institutionalising discourse and neglecting aggrieved or marginalised ethnic groups with the sole aim of controlling certain cultural memories and sustaining the political hegemony of the majority ethnic group, thereby pathologising those who resist.

This conceptual definition is oriented towards cultural hegemony and depicts the victim as the marginalised, with the ruled or those who obey depicted as the multitude and, in particular, those who do not hold public office. Ethno-religious gaslighting can be observed in the victim-perpetrator nexus and the sustained systemic chain of authority from the hegemony of the perpetrator. The British colonial strategies of divide and rule, buying Indigenous loyalty and the maintenance of hegemony align with the goals of ethno-religious gaslighting.

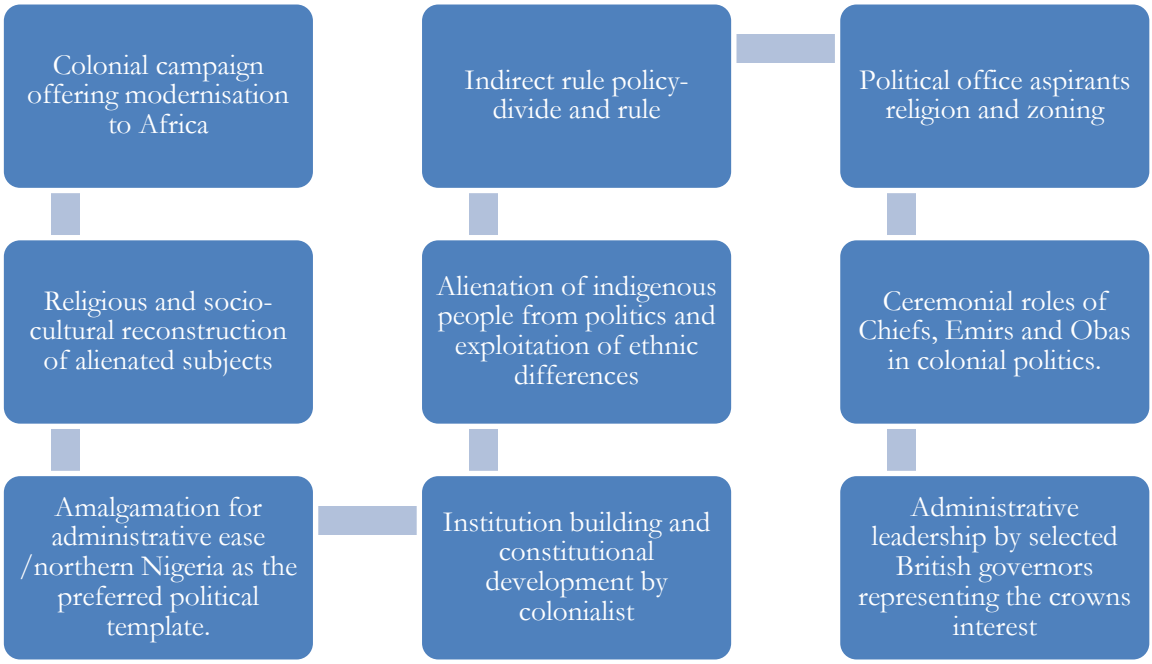


Fig. 1: Ethno-religious gaslighting path tracing of colonial administration

Source: Author

Ethno-religious gaslighting

Agbiboa (2013, p. 6) defines ethnicity as an institutional marker deployed to successfully appropriate and harness power, resources and political hegemony. It is a tool for maintaining competitive advantage over other ethnic groups in conflicts over power and resources. Religion, meanwhile, aligns with a paternalistic perspective buttressed by the role of guardians or counsels representing the roles and duties of religious institutions in the lives of adherents. Guardianship and counselling are further espoused in Pogge's (2008, pp. 40–42) criteria for effective paternalism include a concept that demonstrates human constructed institutions in which certain basic freedoms are acceptable, alongside a criteria of minimal intrusiveness. Such criteria should not be comprehended as exhaustive, thereby leaving leeway for infinite modifications to meet individual or group needs, and additional considerations introduced by the ambitious criteria of justice must not be permitted to compensate for the modest considerations. The structural hierarchy of traditional religions in Nigeria, such as Ifa, Ogun and Amadioha, emulate similar authority structures such as modern-day pastors or imams as arbitrators and counsellors for worshippers or as middlemen to the divine; these roles ultimately shatter the criteria of minimal intrusiveness (Onwubu, 1975). Thus, as with other institutions, religious institutions can be intrusive, dictating or suggesting rules of interaction or the role of the state, intermingling competition and restriction, and nudging individuals or groups towards particular actions or identities to fit the discourse narrative. Ethno-religious gaslighting combines hegemony and subservience at the core of ruler-ruled interactions. However, ethno-religious gaslighting narrative requires historical analysis to highlight critical junctures and the establishment of norms and institutions entrenched in the Nigerian polity

that point to institutionalised gaslighting. As such, an examination of certain events in Nigeria's pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history sheds light on the process of ethno-religious gaslighting in relation to majority and minority ethnic groups.

Pre-colonial political and economic relations

Colonial rule was heralded by European exploration and exploitation of human and non-human African resources. At the end of the 15th Century, Portuguese traders visited what is now Nigeria (Dusgate 1985, p. 15), although Portuguese historiography suggests that contact with Indigenous ruler dates back to the 14th century when Portuguese emissaries visited the court of the Oba of Benin. At first, the Portuguese traded in goods such as pepper, spices, gold and ivory (Isichei, 1983, p. 9). Trade in goods and enslaved developed over time with the Portuguese offering aid to Benin in its wars of expansion in exchange for access to the port of Benin.

Historical scholarship of the period 1800–1880 is underpinned by Marxist perspectives that depict relationships contingent on class struggle, antagonism and hegemony resulting from different individual and group interests (Attah 2011, pp. 85–88). Other scholarly literatures specified the need for consensus in human relations and is anchored in the mutual benefits of cooperative rather than conflicting relations. Still other scholars combine both perspectives in explaining political and economic relations between 1800–1880 in pre-colonial Nigeria (Otite, 1988; Olukoju, 1996; Okwudiba, 1978). However, other narratives are influenced by social psychology dynamics which conceptualise pre-colonial inter-group relationships as between *social units* with each social unit having unique values that constrained or influenced its conduct with other units.

Okpeh (2006, pp. 11–12) suggests a topology of pre- and post-colonial relations, including contact and interaction, compromise and cooperation, competition and conflict, and assimilation and integration.

This paper situates pre-colonial relations in Nigeria as the first three elements of Okpeh's topology. Depictions of the era as chaotic or characterised by wars and conflicts are not entirely representative. Rather, the local pre-colonial economy was anchored in subsistence agriculture (Iliffe, 1983). Inter-group relations between the Igbo, Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba were partially destabilised due to the commodification of enslaved, which proved a critical juncture in inter-group, political and economic relations. Northrup (1978) reiterates that pre-colonial era subsistence agriculture led to the commercialisation of palm oil, while gold dominated economic relations within ethnic groups. While there is consensus regarding trade in the Eurocentric literature, Ekundare (1973) suggests that subsistence agriculture remained the mainstay of the pre-colonial economy. This suggestion is buttressed by its eventual progress to commercialisation during the colonial and post-colonial eras.

Some scholars, such as Olukoju (1996), depict the plurality of pre-colonial Nigerian society with its mega and mini states and the existence of over 400 language groups (Okwudiba, 1978). Mega states were comprised of extensive empires and kingdoms, such as that of the Hausa-Kanuri speaking people, or the Jukun Igala, Nupe and Yoruba-Oyo empires (Attah, 2011, p.88–90). The confederacy of the Yoruba-Oyo empire, for instance, was composed of mega and mini states that paid political allegiance to Alaafin of Oyo (king). This sophisticated empire

had emirates and military and administrative positions, including Bashorun (prime minister), Are Ona Kakanfo (military commander-in-chief), Eso (war chief), Oyo Mesi (panel of chiefs responsible for confirming or denying candidates for the throne and acting as checks and balances in governance), Ilari (bodyguards and messengers), Ogboni (religious leaders), Oloye and Baale (chiefs and titled elders over mini-states) (Drewal, et al., 1987). The centralisation of political authority vested on the Oba was evident through the structure of governance.

Mini states, such as those that predominated among the Igbo, were communities lacking political structure above the village level, creating a loose confederation of small communities ruled by chiefs who answered to the Obi (Afigbo, 1972).

Nigeria's pre-colonial societies had systems of governance prior to colonial occupation. Juxtaposing these against imposed colonial systems of governance helps delineate between critical junctures and self-reinforcing institutions. Northrup (1978, p. 13) best depicts the contrasting situation of the social units in different mega and mini states as follows:

> Here, in sharp contrast to the urbanised Yoruba to the west of the Niger, compact settlements were a distinct rarity in the pre-colonial era. Even 'villages' were customarily only political and social units, not actual clusters of dwellings, and the family compounds of a village were normally scattered throughout its territory. Only the coastal ports, fishing villages cramped for dry land, and places fortified against attack were compact settlements.

Unlike the Igbo who lived under a decentralised system of governance, the Hausa-Fulani were one empire, due to the jihad of Uthman dan Fodio which led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804. A cumulative event like the jihad also led to the assimilation of the largely urban Hausa by the rural and Muslim Fulani through intermarriage and hegemony. In contrast to the Igbos and Yoruba, the Sokoto Caliphate specialised in textile and leather manufacture alongside subsistence agriculture. The former was notable among the Nupe people, and ethnic groups with cross-cultural relations with the Hausa culture. Leather and textile manufacturing became a major mainstay of the Sokoto Caliphate, which also participated in the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Hill, 1976). The internal economy of the Sokoto Caliphate relied on slavery to sustain the subsistence agricultural economy (Hamza, 2004, p. 125). During the pre-colonial era, there was long- and short-distance trade in kola nuts, palm oil and slaves across the Sahara Desert (Lovejoy, 1980, 2005).

Unlike other empires, the Sokoto Caliphate was decentralised into two administrative units – one in Sokoto and the other in Gwandu. Thus, the emirates (a loose confederation of several mega states) were under the control of both administrative units, with the Sultan of Sokoto as the head of government. The Fulani dominated administrative positions, with later cross-cultural intermarriage resulting in Hausa-Fulani fusion that governed the Sokoto Caliphate.

Nigeria's pre-colonial kingdoms of mega states and mini states demonstrated the political heterogeneity or plurality of inter-group relations, as exhibited in the Sokoto Caliphate and the Oyo Empire. In the scholarly literature, issues of territorial expansion, trade and the slave trade are depicted in diverse terms. Religion and ethnicity played a passive role; however, the need to cooperate for mutual survival seemed to have been the driving force behind successful relations between pre-colonial social units.

Colonial Nigeria

The 1884–1885 Berlin conference signalled the advent of colonialism. This historical gathering of European powers was the formalisation of the rules of engagement in colonial partitioning, the slave trade and imperial rule in Africa which continues to have a profound influence on African politics (Uzoigwe, 1985; Anghie, 2005). Craven (2015, p. 32) argues that the covert aim of the conference was to manage the ongoing process of African colonisation to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict between rival colonial powers. At a critical juncture, it accounted for the gradual or partial dismantling of existing institutions, economic and political systems, norms and beliefs. What followed was a transition period that introduced indirect rule which, according to Afigbo (1972), from 1880 onwards, introduced intermediaries who acted on behalf of the colonial government. These warrant chiefs, who formerly held considerable influence in Indigenous institutions and communities, now did the bidding of their colonial masters. The installation of handpicked warrant chiefs was driven by administrative convenience and a desire to reduce transaction costs. This led to gradual interference in pre-colonial socio-political institutions and was a direct consequence of the 1884–1885 Berlin conference that rendered African states and territories *terra nullius* and in need of partitioning for European exploration and exploitation. As a result, many African territories became European protectorates. Partitioning led to the subtle creation of new institutions and new institutional artefacts, such as constitutions and tax systems. The Court of Equity, for instance, was founded to settle mercantile disputes between coastal traders – both European and African – in southeast Nigeria. As such, pre-existing forms of dispute settlement were abolished to accommodate European interests. Subtle alterations or complete dismissal of Indigenous institutions were met with resistance from Indigenous people.

The battles of Aro, Esu Itu and Arochwukwu, among others, highlight the resistance that met the installation of these foreign systems. The Yoruba exhibited similar resistance in southern Nigeria after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914. This important epoch in Nigeria's history marked the transition from a loose confederation of vassal states in the pre-colonial era to a unitary form of government based on British political and administrative hegemony (Adebanwi, 2019, pp. 167–169). This epoch also saw the introduction of a unifying currency to ease British administration. To comprehend the reason for the amalgamation, the multicultural nature of the pre-existing protectorates and forms of representation and governance highlights the importance of transferred artefacts from the colonial to post-colonial era. In summary, rather than being a planned multicultural project with the consent of Indigenous rulers or representation, Nigeria was borne out of necessity, ease of administration and political subjugation.

Deng (1996, pp. 62–63) offers the example of the ease with which the Sultan was installed as an intermediary between the British government and the Indigenous people. The administrative system was then meant to be replicated across the newly amalgamated provinces. However, the backlash from the Southern and Eastern protectorates led to conflicts and uprisings which eventually resulted in the creation of eastern and western regions of the Southern protectorate (Okonofua, 2011). During the creation of Nigeria's regions, the Northern protectorate remained intact and represented the template on which colonial governance was consolidated. This opportunistic dependence on the Northern protectorate and the subsequent creation of buffer zones of ethnic minorities with less contact in the

eastern and western regions marked the beginning of inter-intra ethnic rivalry. This event also set the stage for eventual Hausa-Fulani ethno-political hegemony and successive northern hegemony in post-colonial Nigeria (Okonofua, 2013, p. 3).

Amalgamation led to the centralisation of control under British rule and the highly successful Northern protectorate administrative unit became a template for indirect rule and post-colonial rule with Hausa-Fulani dominance (Hale, 2004). The amalgamation of the protectorates led to discontent among minority ethnic groups, leading to further agitation of colonised subjects and the formation of new regions and states combined with constitutions spelling out Britain's administrative and political powers and its relations with its colonised subjects (Falola, 2021). The first of these was the 1922 Clifford Constitution, named after Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor General of Nigeria, the purpose of which was to create and foster legal and electoral institutions. The former included a legislative council composed of 46 members, 23 of which were official, 19 unofficial and the remaining four were related to the latter. This meant that Nigeria's first electoral system included only four slots for Indigenous representation, three of which were for Lagos and one for Calabar (Asiwaju, 1976; Miles, 1987). Franchise was also limited to those with an annual income of at least £100. The alienation and lack of representation of Indigenous people in the development of the constitution led to calls for reform. The 1944 Richards Constitution, named after Sir Arthur Richards, provided for greater political participation, with a new legislative council comprised of a governor, 16 official members and 28 unofficial members. Of the 28, two were nominated by the governor and four were elected. In this constellation, the Northern region had 11 members, the Western region had eight and the Eastern region had six. It differed from the Clifford Constitution by introducing regionalism and greater Indigenous participation in politics. However, franchise in both Lagos and Calabar required a payment of £50, thus disenfranchising many Indigenous people. The 1944 constitution also provided a platform for a regional House of Assembly, the members of which were nominated by native authority. However, these were not legislative bodies; rather, the house was a forum for discussing national issues, although members of the house were further nominated into the legislative council. This paved the way for unicameral legislatures in both Eastern and Western regions, while in addition to the House of Assembly nomination, the Northern region also had a House of Chiefs (Miles, 1987, pp. 236–238). The 1951 Macpherson Constitution avoided the pitfalls of the preceding constitution and opened the door for further Indigenous representation. It allowed for the inclusion of Nigerians in the constitution-making process and the 1950 Ibadan Conference was acclaimed as a cornerstone of the constitution. This new constitution paved the way for a federal legislature or House of Representatives with 136 elected representatives, six ex-officio members and six members nominated by the governor. Regional division of the members of the legislatures meant that 68 were from the North, 34 from the West and 34 from the East (Mackintosh, 1964; L.P.M, 1953). The constitution was unique in its empowerment of regional legislators who could make regional laws. Despite this increase in representation, the constitution failed and was replaced by the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution. The events surrounding the demise and replacement of the Macpherson Constitution are worth mentioning. The proclamation of independence by Pan-African nationalists led to negotiations at constitutional conferences in London in 1953 and Lagos in 1954.

In summary, the colonial period marked the displacement of pre-existing Indigenous forms of governance by imposed British institutions. These were designed to assimilate Nigerians into

the British system and led to several historically-induced negative backlogs which remain the bane of modern day Nigerian political system (Miles ,1987, pp. 237–239).

Pre-colonial era	**Colonial era**
15th–17th Centuries: existence of kingdoms and wars of conquest- interactions with European traders and the slave trade.	Scramble and partition for resources pre- and post-Berlin Conference leading to conquest and European imperialism.
Political system based on loose confederation, empire or vassal states (mega and mini states, local villages and communities). Central political system with the king, emir and chiefs at the highest position of authority.	Unitary system with the British Governor at the central helm of affairs; warrant chiefs', emirs' and kings' gradual alienation from power.
Pre-existing political systems and leadership, e.g., Alaafin of Oyo (king), Oyo Mesi (privy and administrative council of the king), Bashorun (prime minister), Are-Ona-Kakanfo (military commander)	Indirect rule under British governors, chief commissioners with the nomination of Indigenous stooges and disenfranchisement (1914–43); covert replacement of existing institutions through gradual assimilation process; forced marriage of different ethnic groups-ethnic minority and majority groups.
Loose confederal systems under vassal state systems.	Transition from unitary (Clifford Constitution) to federal system (Lyttleton Constitution).
Local arbitrary courts in kings' chambers, communal chiefs court for dispute settlement, age grade chiefs and advisory councils.	Local arbitrary courts replaced with West African court of appeal; later Lyttleton Constitution replaced this with courts in each region, a supreme court of appeal and judicial committee of the privy council (highest ranked court).
Indigenous languages were the main source of communication; trade by barter followed Indigenous translators with competence of foreign languages.	At the onset of the colonial era, interpreters and translators were needed, with the gradual assimilation of Indigenous people, followed by the emergence of educated elites of native origin; use of the pound as currency is evidenced by the institutionalising of an electoral fee.
Traditional religion or beliefs were intact, although in some quarters, such as northern Nigeria, due to trade and migration, Islam was introduced in 11th–12th Centuries.	Local beliefs were overtly replaced by Christianity based on manipulations/stick and carrot reward structure, psychological warfare/coercive means.

Table 1: Distinctive processes, critical junctures and epochs created by author

Colonial legacies and post-colonial artefacts

The Nigerian construct was officially propagated by the colonial government after amalgamation by Lord Lugard. That specific critical juncture continues to echo during ethnic and racial conflicts, in past civil wars and military uprisings, during the Biafra War and the incessant bid for secession by a group of Biafrans in modern-day Nigeria. In order to comprehend the impact of this critical juncture alongside the consequent artefacts it produced, an examination of multiculturalism, constitutional development and institution building, mode of knowledge production, governance between pseudo-federal structure and other discourses is required.

Multiculturalism refers to a society or world in which "many cultures interact in a significant way with one another" (Gutmann, 1993, pp. 171–172). Despite the simplicity of this definition, one variable stands out – 'the interaction of many cultures in a significant way with one another.'

The nature and scope of interactivity is subjective, prone to interpretive or polemical perspectives that can be either objectively or subjectively expressed. Interaction may be in the form of cooperation, conflict, competition for power, and its scope may be fluid, embracing inter-intra ethnic cooperation or conflicts, national unity embedded in shared history and culture, or negating national unity towards secession and conflict. The nature and scope of such interactivity was coercively forced during Nigeria's amalgamation in 1914 and during the colonial era. It continues to be enforced in the present day with Nigeria depicted as a mere geographical expression by one of its most distinguished nationalist figures, the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Taiwo, 1993; Onwubu, 1975; Adebanwi, 2019; Yusuf, 2018, Falola, 2009; Dudley, 1968). The forced union of the multitude of cultures, and ethnic groups with diverse languages is a foundational misgiving which in modern Nigeria is evinced through the echoes of marginalisation by aggrieved groups, the clamour for new states during the colonial and post-independence eras, secession plots and political and geographical zoning, to mention a few. This evergreen experience alludes to the reality that multiculturalism can yield both negative and positive experiences. In the Nigerian context, the use of coercion and the lack of a referendum or vote on the unity of several ethnic groups or cultures has created an issue that continues to be rigorously debated in academic and non-academic circles. For instance, the impact of this forced union created divisions within the British designed unitary regional structure. This structure created the template for modern-day Nigerian dominance by major ethnic groups over minority groups, as evinced in the formation of erstwhile political parties along regional and ethnic lines. Party formation and composition are the foremost variables of how successfully multiculturalism is embedded in a national context. In Nigeria, party formation between 1940 and 1960 was constituted on a regional basis, with party leadership and key positions always under the banner of one of three major ethnic groups. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), for instance, was led by the late Dr Nnmadi Azikwe and Herbert Macaulay, among others. The Northern People's Congress represented a regional interest, and prominent leaders included the late Malam Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Aminu Kano. A similar regional outlook was evident in Action Group (AG) which emanated from a Pan-Yoruba cultural organisation. Its influential leaders included the late Chief Bode Thomas and Chief Obafemi Awolowo.

Two notable factors in party formation are replicated in modern-day Nigeria. First, is the large concentration of a particular ethnic group in a particular party and competitive superiority of one ethnic group over another in the federal structure (Hale, 2004, pp. 173–174).

Second, is the aggregation of tribal support alongside religious membership to form political parties or organisations. Religious membership and ethnic group membership thus have become currency for political participation and group interest alignment.

Constitutional development vis-à-vis nation and institution building is another critical juncture which must be analysed, particularly with regard to the enactment of foreign constitutions imposed on Indigenous Nigerians (Falola, 2009).

Constitutional development from 1922 to 1999 hinged on cloning Western institutions and constitutional architecture rather than addressing the foundational structural problem of the forced unification of Nigeria or seeking an Indigenous template to fit the geopolitical ethnically diverse configuration that is Nigeria. According to Suberu (2019), this critical juncture is divided into three phases –1914–1966, 1966–1999 and post-1999. The phases encompass a forceful power grab, a transition of power through a nationalist proclamation to a more democratic transition, military intervention followed by civil wars and a return to democratic rule. Nigeria's constitutional journey reflects different critical junctures and fluctuating patterns between the struggle for power and numerous internal divisions. Nonetheless, the basic elements of these struggles – ethnic and religious conflict, geopolitical power-sharing mechanisms, military superiority syndrome, centralised federalism, a presidential system of government, weak institutions – have remained integral throughout the transition and democratisation phases. Apart from these struggles, the evergreen issues of competition between majority and minority ethnic groups remain constitutionally and institutionally unsolved. The latter led to series of national conferences, including the most recent in 2014 during which over 500 delegates representing different interest and ethno-regional groups deliberated for five months concerning Nigeria's divisive political structure, ethnic differences and marginalisation.

Past forums to redress the imbalance and forced nature of the Nigerian construct proved futile. The overall outlook of this inner division and resulting conflicts harks back to the architecture of multiculturalism and constitutionalism right from the beginning. A crucial juncture was the demise of Nigeria's First Republic (1960–1966). At least four institutional factors contributed to its demise, namely, an uneven federal territorial structure, the dissident power of large regional units against the central government, the division and weakness of the central political executive in addressing regional divisions and, most importantly, weak institutions that could not curtail or restrain control of political power.

During the First Republic, the federal structure was comprised of ethno-federal arrangements or segmental federalism which caused the failure of the constituted polity (Hale, 2004, pp.165–166, 170). It is argued that institutional arrangements alongside the impact of strong ethnic diversity and the allocation of competitive resources by political elites promoted marginalisation and secessionist activity. This directly mirrors the post-independence situation in Nigeria when the predominantly Muslim Northern region was engaged in a classic power rivalry with the less populous Eastern and Western regions. This classic power rivalry sought to determine who controlled the central government. Divisions were deepened by the state of economic and social development in the Eastern and Western regions, which were comparatively more advanced than the educationally underdeveloped poor and backward Northern region (Suberu, 2022). This structural imbalance and 'Northern hegemony' further deepened ethnic insecurity and created a game of numbers concerning who had greater representation in federal political institutions and central government, fuelling ethno-secessionist conflict and civil war. The subsequent clamour for self-government by minority ethnic communities, such as the Kanuri, Nupe, Igala, Jukun, Ilorin-Kabba, Efik, Ibibio and Ijaw also demonstrated their active marginalisation by the ethnic majority and a failure to address these issues in the First Republic constitution. The fragility of the federal territorial structure was further aggravated by the constitutional powers of the region, causing a vehement inter-regional distrust of contending ethnic nationalism. Departing from this trend

was an elite-based consensus regarding federal character leading to a centripetal integration of how to deal with ethnic conflicts in the 1979 Constitution (Suberu, 2022). Although the ambiguous scope of federal character or its quota system have been criticised by many scholars, it formed a basis for dealing with inequality, revenue sharing and addressing marginalisation to some extent. This turning point had an impact on federal office appointments, so that the composition of major political parties reflected the federation and not simply ethnic group membership. The 1999 Constitution embraced further developments in federal character, policy making and appointments. However, in some quarters, this has not produced holistic inclusiveness. According to Maduagwu (2019, pp. 131–133), the existence of federal character as a rationalisation for a special quota in federal government institutions has only served the interests of some ethnic groups with their numerical strength, thus creating a questionable status quo and precedence, although the logic behind a quota system is clear. It has, however, created a loophole for Northern hegemony or for a competitive state grab by the major ethnic groups.

Another colonial/post-colonial artefact is the mode of knowledge production. Colonialism's disruption of Nigerian socio-historical development and the consequences of implanting and overwriting foreign institutions on pre-existing institutions displaced existing modes of knowledge production. This critical juncture is crucial in understanding the country's ethnic and religious oriented politics and democracy. Taiwo (1993, pp. 891–894) argued that the transition from a confederal unit mode of knowledge production founded on allegiance to local rulers, priest, kings and Obis and the existing political system created a hole that was quickly filled with Western philosophy and institutions. Colonialism, as an agent of change, erased, transformed or repressed religious and cultural practices and institutions. The exclusive nature of colonialism meant that Indigenous people were at first excluded from governance and voting. This changed with the emergence of educated Indigenous elites and with nationalist movements. The damage caused during this epoch is evident in modern Nigeria where Christianity is the dominant religion in the southwest. The introduction of Christianity, which had a longer descent than colonialism, eventually deposed traditional religions. The impact of this cultural religious disruption can be seen in the establishment of multiple unregulated churches and places of worship in modern Nigeria. Scholars have depicted this disruption as a turn in the development of the colonized (Loomba 1998; Taiwo 1993; Osaghae 1991). The disruption also marks a struggle between earlier and later identities, thereby leading to a hybridized struggle felt in all spheres of social relations in modern Nigeria.

Christianity impacts modern Nigeria from the personal to the institutional unit. Some scholars claim that this identity deficit is responsible for the religiosity of many Nigerians within and outside the public sphere. Such religiosity is seen in the names of past religious deities or traditional beliefs changing due to the manipulative means exploited in instituting Christianity in Nigeria. This is evinced in surnames or first names such as Fayemi, Ogunleye, Ifagbemi or Fagbemi changing to Christian or English names, such as Goodluck, Monday, David, Esther or Paul, indicating conformity to the new worldview. This worldview derived from the era of colonialism which was instituted through falsehood, gaslighting, supremacy and hegemony. In other words, the mode of knowledge production in pre-colonial Nigeria was erased by a foreign mode of knowledge production which instituted a hybridized culture with deep roots and dominant appeal.

In summary, ethno-religious gaslighting is the production of power relations, hegemony, exploitation of ethnic difference or othering and the need to sustain a competitive edge or monopoly over 'others' in a multicultural environment. It is a persistent mental as well as socio-political hegemonic representation of certain formal or informal structures on a repetitive spin which runs from one generation to another. This is successfully embedded in certain stubborn structures where no matter which form of government- the same set of elites or their offsprings or benefactors have political power or rule the state. This is a perfect aspect of Nigerian governance and politics which is less studied.

This pattern was laid down during the colonial era and extends beyond colonial rule. Figure 2 represents the artefacts and the channel through which ethno-religious gaslighting occurs in Nigeria. The main goal of ethno-religious gaslighting in the Nigerian polity is suppressing the electorate from asking crucial questions or prioritising accountability by substituting these with ethnic and religious sentiments, and using cultural memory repression when dealing with minority groups.

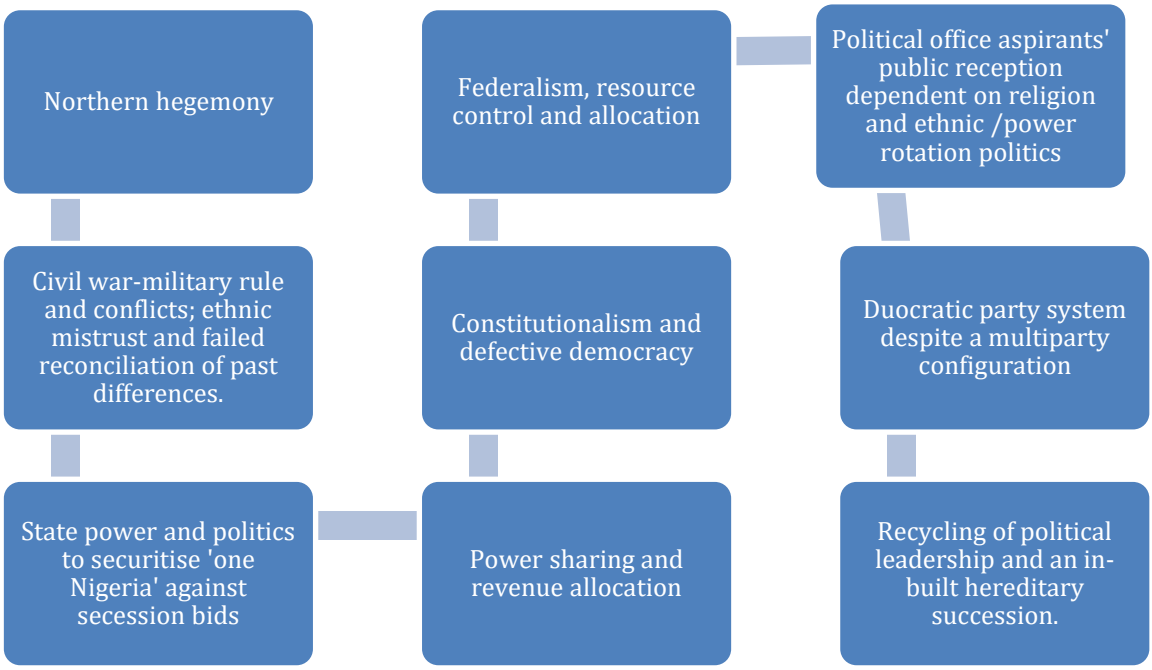


Fig. 2: Post-colonial ethno-religious gaslighting processes created by author

Scholarly discourses indicate a mix between a state shaped by colonialism and one without a concrete identity (Decker, 2016). According to Falola (2021 pp. 10–36, 41) Nigeria's modernisation journey has taken different shapes through the adoption and trial implementation of several systems, including parliamentarianism, regionalism, presidentialism, military rule and federalism with a 'no one size fits Nigeria' appeal. The journey continues with several hybridised versions mirroring Western political systems and a confused political elite class. However, revisiting the Nigerian construct by acknowledging past or current deeds begs

the question of how long Nigeria's multicultural experiment can withstand the tides of political pressure from internal secessionist plots and dichotomies?

Conclusion

Based on the path tracing exercise- we can allude to the fact that Nigeria's superstructure is built on a confused identity. It is a patchwork similar to Frankenstein's monster. Ethnicity and religion play crucial roles in politics, socio-economic relations and in the preservation of certain cultural memories or versions of the same.

Ethno-religious gaslighting controls the public sphere narrative of hegemonic representation of certain ethnic or religious groups, class dominance and institutional capture. The extent to which post-colonial Nigeria is ready to reconstitute these two crucial mainstay artefacts and its identity, to nurture a healthy culture despite division, socio-economic imbalance and political regression remains to be seen. Ultimately, a successful multicultural society will depend on 'oneness of a state or one Nigeria' rather than divisive relations or intra-relations under ethnic and religious banners.

The challenge of administering a multicultural society dates back to the era of colonialism and to the lack of a social contract between elements that were forcefully amalgamated. As noted in the analysis, pre-colonial Nigeria did not exist. Rather, it was a loose confederation of vassals, kingdoms and empires each with its own unique system of government, economic and religious institutions. Colonialism uprooted those institutions and overwrote them with new sets of institutions and culture.

During decolonialisation, indigenous people reacted to colonial assimilationist and integration policies by staging nationalist movements rooted in pre-colonial experiences, or hybridized versions of pre-colonial and colonial experiences. These hybridized versions created stubborn relationship structures which led to friction in the First Republic, civil war, military rule, democratic rule and secessionist campaigns. Thus, the two main currencies of these hybridized versions of decolonisation exist with intra-inter ethno-religious relationships fuelled by hegemonic control of narratives or cultural memory repression in the Nigerian state.

Democracy functions best in a multicultural society with the realisation that no one group supersedes the state or its institutions. Unity in diversity and one people within a territorial boundary are embraced, informing the need to cooperate and collaborate along institutional and economic lines.

Disclosure statement

There is no competing interest nor financial or non-financial interest to declare for this paper.

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