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# "To find the flow of life, push against the current:' Canada's Engagements with Nigeria, 1960-70"

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

“‘To find the flow of life, push against the current:’  
Canada’s Engagements with Nigeria, 1960-70”

by

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## Abstract

The 1960 was a momentous year for Nigeria as it made a transition from British to self rule. But this change in status posed serious difficulties: because of her size, economic potential and the possibility of playing a leading role in African affairs, she was vulnerable to being influenced by the Soviet Union and its communist ideology. For the West, it would be a huge embarrassment if Nigeria, and indeed, Tropical Africa, fell into communist hands. As a committed member of the Western 'Free World' alliance, Canada saw in the Cold War rivalry an opportunity to engage pragmatically with Nigeria to ward off communist interests. Aid was a principal tool used to achieve this objective. Engagements with Nigeria, however, simultaneously created opportunities for Ottawa to advance its foreign policy goals of promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law as well as trade.

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My gratitude also goes to Ken Atere, my spiritual and career counsellor, whose soul-lifting words, wisdom and insights into life have given me renewed hope to trudge on in the face of despair. The same can be said of Dooshima Abeghe, whose constant encouragement made me see the proverbial 'light at the end of the tunnel'. Nelson Osamudiamen has been as wonderful as a brother including for reading the first draft of my Introduction, while Ngozi Obasi's constant asking about my academic progress did a lot of good. My colleagues in the History Department were wonderful but David Gallant stood out. He was always offering me tips on how to approach my project as well as the expectations of my supervisor.

My family, especially my mum, Serah Peters, has been the hardest hit by my decision to study abroad. I want to assure you that your prayers and fasting have not been in vain. I pray that you will eat the fruit of your labour. My twin sisters, Taiwo Amore and Kehinde Semako, have been fantastic; so are my brothers, Gbenga and Michael Peters.

While all credit for the completion of this thesis goes to Dr. 'B' for his unflinching help and support, I should be held accountable for all errors, omissions and commissions.

## Dedication

To Almighty God, the Greater than the greatest, the source of all wisdom and the One who knows the end from the beginning. You are God, that is your name; You will never share Your glory with anyone (Isaiah 42:8)

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## Introduction

This thesis assesses Canada's engagement with Nigeria in the first decade of Nigeria's independence, 1960-70. It argues that Canada's relations with Nigeria during this period were strategic, pragmatic and sustained. The impetuses for these relations were Cold War realities, Nigeria's economic potential, and the political choice of democracy, which path the country had decided to take at independence. This work approaches the relations between both countries from a thematic outlook, focusing on human rights, the promotion of democracy and rule of law, and Canadian aid to Nigeria. A chronological approach, while not impossible, poses real difficulties because some of the puzzles and events that shaped relations between both countries were scattered, overlapping and tangled. Focusing on themes, therefore, offers a comprehensive methodology for analysing Canada's engagement with Nigeria during this period.

The end of the Second World War marked a watershed in Canada's relations with the outside world. This period redrew the map of power in international diplomacy, reconfiguring the international order. Canada emerged from World War II one of the direct beneficiaries of the new international system. Canadian diplomats could no longer be ignored at international forums.<sup>1</sup> Canada had come of age. Its voice had to be heard even if concrete actions were not necessarily to be taken or the voice heeded. Canada's role in World War II could not be questioned. It had committed human and material resources to the war and its soldiers, sailors

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian diplomats actively participated in the formation of a new international order that was instituted after the Second World War. For instance, Mackenzie King led a Canadian delegation to San Francisco to contribute its ideas to the drafting of the Charter of the United Nations. See F. H. Soward and Walter O'Hearn, *Canada and the United Nations* (New York: Manhattan Publishing Company), p. 1

and airmen contributed to the Allies' decisive victory which tilted the balance of the war.<sup>2</sup>

Wartime efforts had to be rewarded. Its contribution to the war had positioned it in a strong bargaining position, in a new international system where collective security had gained new currency.

The refinement of the League of Nations into a more inclusive international organization saw Canada play pivotal roles in the new international arrangement. In a period described by Lincoln Bloomfield as “a relatively Golden Age of international political inventiveness and institution-building,”<sup>3</sup> Canadian diplomats actively contributed to the making of this new international arrangement by participating in conferences that culminated in the new order as well as rendering valuable contributions where and when needed. All these developments led Canada to hold membership in or chairmanship of important committees like the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). Although Canada became recognized by the major powers and became involved in the formulation of policies that shaped the new world order, it is important to note that Canada's recognition did not come *à la carte*. The major powers, led by the United States, were unwilling to allow lesser powers to participate directly in the formulation of policies that would shape the entire world. This position heralded a confrontation with a rising Canadian nationalism that demanded a voice in the international system. Canadians persistently argued that authority in international affairs should not be the sole prerogative of the major powers. In addition, Canadians also reasoned that authority could not be divided among the over thirty sovereign states that constituted membership of the United Nations. Championed by Hume

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<sup>2</sup> J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*, Second Edition (University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 217-309; Paul Keery, *Canada at War: A Graphic History of World War Two* (Madeira Park, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2012). See chapters five and six: “The Invasion of Sicily and Italy” and “Joint Forces – The Invasion of Europe,”

<sup>3</sup> Lincoln Bloomfield, “Nuclear Spread and the World Order”, *Foreign Affairs*, LIII, July 1975



Wrong, Canadians argued for a ‘functional principle’ in which representations in international organizations would be determined “on a functional basis which will admit to full membership those countries, large or small, which have the greatest contribution to make to the particular object in question.”<sup>4</sup> The ‘functional principle,’ or ‘functionalism’ as it was called by Canadian diplomats, was embraced by Canadians because they understood that if they were to gain relevance in international affairs, they had to hold important positions in organizations where they had vital interests and were making a significant contribution of national resources. Consequently, the explanation of functionalism was laid out in broad terms in the House of Commons by the Canadian prime minister, Mackenzie King on July 9, 1943. This was communicated to all government departments and other countries. The essence of this was to win the principle’s acceptance by the major powers.<sup>5</sup>

To assume that the great powers would easily accede to this request was premature. They were bent on maintaining the status quo that allocated them their dominant roles. As it turned out, the first opportunity for Ottawa to put the functional principle to the test came towards the end of the Second World War when the newly-formed UNRRA was established to serve as the conduit through which aid and relief materials would be provided for displaced persons in war-ravaged Europe. Canada fought for representation in this body on the grounds that it was to be a major provider of UNRRA’S relief materials. Canada staunchly refused to participate in the Relief Administration if its constitution was not modified to reflect Canadian interests. This dogged fight to be represented where it had been ‘taxed’ tilted Canada’s way as Lester Pearson became the chairman of the Committee on Supplies and one of those who shaped the policies of

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<sup>4</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, Vol. 1., p. 35

<sup>5</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, Vol. 1, p. 35

UNRRA.<sup>6</sup> Having won in the UNRRA debate, Ottawa pleaded its case on the functionalist argument and got itself places on numerous boards and committees of the United Nations and other international organisations. From the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the World Bank and the International Civil Aviation Authority and International Postal Union, Canadians were ably represented. They were not just represented to sit on the boards and committees, but made valuable contributions towards fashioning the new international order. Sir Roy Harrod, for instance, commented that although the Bretton Wood system was a product of British and American inventiveness, it was made possible with “valuable assistance from the Canadians. They [Canadians] were represented on successive occasions by able men, including Messrs. Rasminsky, Towers, MacIntosh and Pearson.”<sup>7</sup>

It was within this setting of a new international system that Canada was destined to play pivotal roles in global affairs. For diplomat and scholar John Holmes, the emergence of these international institutions ensured Canada’s relevance in international relations. Most importantly, through these institutions, Canada helped to shape international peace and security.<sup>8</sup> Holmes’ conviction of Canada as a peacemaker stemmed out of its strategy to influence Washington’s Cold War policies to match more closely Canada’s more nuanced Cold War policies in altercations between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), especially in the first two decades after World War II when both countries were bent on cancelling out each other ideologically.<sup>9</sup> There is a consensus among scholars of Canadian

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<sup>6</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, Vol. 1, pp. 39-42

<sup>7</sup> Sir Roy Harrod, *The Life of John Maynard Keynes* (London, 1951), p. 579 quoted in John Holmes, *The shaping of peace*, p. 53

<sup>8</sup> John Holmes, *The shaping of peace: Canada and the search for world order, 1943-1957, Volume 1* (University of Toronto Press, 1979)

<sup>9</sup> The Korean Crisis of 1950-53 serves a useful reference here. Canada’s opinion was independent of that of the United States, even if broadly supportive. Canada wanted the West to

diplomatic history that Canada's approach to engaging the world after World War II was shaped to a very substantial degree by the Cold War as Canadians tried to maintain influence with Washington and other states that believed in the ideas of political and economic freedom as advocated by the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the United States and the Soviet Union had been embroiled in an ideological battle which viewed global warfare from the standpoint of economic and political systems. For the United States and the Soviet Union, the urgency was to promote their ideologies to the world, leading to pervasive international friction.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the world, Washington and Moscow armed their satellites. During this period Canada actively supported Western defence pacts that strengthened the position of the 'Free World' to continue to engage the Soviet-led East in the ideological battle.

One important factor that shaped postwar Canada's foreign policy was its strong relationship with the United States. Despite occasional fissures, the governments of both countries had developed a healthy relationship as the Americans had supplanted Britain as Canada's dominant trade partner while the Canadian public had embraced a strong, and by historical standards, very warm relationship with their southern neighbours. On the other hand,

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resist North Korea to prove to the communist world that aggression did not pay. Ottawa reasoned that if the Korean Crisis led to confrontation between the United States and China, the Soviet Union would reap huge benefits. Ottawa therefore sought to maintain peace by constraining the conflict and keeping sight of larger goals – Western European security. See Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, p. 152

<sup>10</sup> Canada's Policy during the Cold War was curtailing the spread of communism. Interestingly, the "Igo Guzenko affair" has been seen by scholars as the beginning of the Cold War. Reginald Whitaker and Steve Hewit, *Canada and the Cold War* (James Lorimer and Company, 2003); Reginald Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: the making of a national insecurity state, 1945-1957* (University of Toronto Press, 1994); Richard Carvell, ed. *Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada's Cold War* (University of Toronto Press, 2004)

<sup>11</sup> Don Munton and David Welch, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: a concise history*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011)

the Canadians were suspicious of the Soviets. The Igor Guzenko spy affair clearly told the tale. More tellingly, given Canadian geography and the fact that Canadians had a lot in common with the Americans, it was a matter of time before both countries came up with common policies to ward off the Soviet threat, culminating in the establishment of the North American Air Defence (NORAD) agreement in 1957 and earlier, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, institutions that served as the pillars of Cold War Canada's foreign policy.

As has been pointed out, the new international institutions which Canada had helped shape offered a multilateral template for Canada to flex its muscle in the world. From John Humphrey who helped in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' document of 1948, to Lester Pearson, who helped broker peace among the powers during the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, Canadian diplomats positioned their country to have relevance in this new international order. A part of this, for Ottawa, was the transformation of the 'White' Commonwealth of Nations into a multiracial institution which Canada helped to establish and in which she played key leadership roles while using the platform to reach out to Third World countries. It is within these multilateral institutions that Canada's engagement with Africa can be properly understood; and it is within this setting that Canada's bilateral relations with Nigeria can also be properly understood. We should hasten to add here that world diplomacy during this period was effectively bilateral, the US and USSR having monopolised world diplomacy. Similarly Canada's crucial relations with the US were also bilateral. Third World diplomacy, however, offered Canada multilateralist options, the history of which could be traced to the 1947

independence of India that set the tone for the metamorphosis of the old Commonwealth into a multiracial one – an initiative greatly facilitated by creative Canadian diplomacy.<sup>12</sup>

For Canada, it had a responsibility, together with the Western powers, to contain communism. Canada's relations with Nigeria, as with the rest of the world, were driven by Cold War considerations. For a country as big as Nigeria to fall into communist hands would amount not only to huge embarrassment for the West, considering the long period of Western influence in the region, but would result in a major setback in the West's bid to curtail the menace of communism. Canadian diplomats were aware that the Soviet threat was more potent than ineffectual and if policies were not put in place to discourage African states on the brink of becoming sovereign nations from embracing communism, it was a matter of time before communism dominated the world, or at the very least Black Africa. Consequently, Canada and other Western powers were understandably concerned about the political and economic fragility of African and Asian countries approaching nationhood. Initially Ottawa's focus was on states that were in the Commonwealth – former British possessions. Newly independent African and Asian countries were weak and poor and would require aid to survive and develop. Logically, these emergent countries would seek aid wherever they could find it, and if it came from Moscow, it would come with policy support instruments to ensure that they embraced or at the very least were sympathetic to 'international socialism'.

This concern was raised in a May 1957 memo sent from the Defence Liaison Division of the Department of External Affairs and copied to the Commonwealth, European and Middle Eastern Divisions. In "Russian Interest in Africa", G. G. Crean explained that the Soviet Union

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<sup>12</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order 1943-1957*, Vol. 2 (University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 165-187

was accentuating old techniques of recruiting Africans into communism and were also developing new models for the same purpose. According to the memo, the former were the reliance on Communist Front Organizations and local communist parties while the latter were “the policy of penetration through trade and economic aid.” The memo concluded that the new Soviet policy in Africa “represents a real threat, particularly to countries approaching self government.”<sup>13</sup> For the West, therefore, developments in the prospective new nations were more brittle than imagined. It was within this mindset that Canada sought to relate to Nigeria.

In order to help the West fight the encroachment of communism, Canada adopted a three-pronged approach to engaging African and Asian countries: the United Nations, the Commonwealth<sup>14</sup> and direct bilateral relations. Canada benefited significantly from the multilateral nature of the United Nations as she used the UN umbrella to support the peaceful self-determination of African and Asian colonial peoples.<sup>15</sup> Ottawa was also instrumental in the transition of the old Commonwealth of Nations which comprised the United Kingdom and the ‘old’ or ‘White’ Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa to the multiracial Commonwealth which accommodated non-White peoples who were hitherto under the British Empire’s suzerainty.<sup>16</sup> The objective of this new Commonwealth arrangement was to maintain an association among the former colonies of Britain for cooperation and development

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13 LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40 “Russian Interest in Africa”, 27 May 1957

14 In the case of the French speaking peoples of Africa, a relationship with “La Francophonie” was instituted.

15 Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984*, p. 305

16 G. de T. Glazebrook and Alexander Brady, “Canada and the Commonwealth,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 60: 240 (1970), pp. 557-564; Lorne Kavic, “Canada and the Commonwealth: Sentiment, Symbolism and Self-Interest,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 65: 257 (1975), p. 37

purposes.<sup>17</sup> A more pressing practical objective of the Commonwealth, one which was just beginning at the time of its formation, was to create a shield for newly independent countries of Asia and Africa against the infiltration of communism. To achieve this, it was realised efforts had to be placed on improving the economic and social condition of members in Asia, with the richer members coming to the aid of the poorer ones. This was essentially what the 1950 Colombo Plan of Action – a Commonwealth instrument to provide aid to newly independent members in Asia – sought to achieve, with its objectives subsequently being extended under the aegis of new arrangements to African Commonwealth countries after they gained independence beginning in the late 1950s. Apart from these two means, Canada engaged with newly independent countries of Africa and Asia bilaterally.

Canada's approach to engaging African countries like Nigeria during the decolonization period was more ideological and somewhat 'pragmatic.' Compared to Britain and France, Canada was only concerned with preserving capitalism and increasing trade and establishing lasting Western values like democracy and the rule of law. Britain's unwillingness to cede tropical Africa to Russia because of her political, economic, and military interests in the region only reinforces the argument that Canada applied a liberal perspective in its engagement with Africa, which was contrary to Britain's and France's realist viewpoint.

In a telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office to the Dominions, the British highlighted that "because of Tropical Africa's political, economic and military importance to the

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<sup>17</sup> Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State? External Aid in Canada's Foreign policy* (University of Toronto Press, 1966), pp.53-75; John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*, Vol. 2 (University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 165-187

West, it is imperative that the present dominant Western political influence be maintained.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite Canada’s clear opposition to communism’s spread, it was adamant that in the pursuit of its interest in Africa, the West should consider the interests of Africans. Canada obviously did not envision her relations with African states as a zero-sum game<sup>19</sup> and wanted Western states to abide by the same philosophy. Consequently, Canadian diplomats, in their discussion with United Kingdom officials, held the position that:

“The needs of the emerging states should be considered realistically and sympathetically by the West and, while not trying to match or better every Soviet offer of assistance, the West should never leave in any doubt its sincere desire to help. It would be dangerous... to perpetuate the old view that Africa was an economic appendage of Europe existing to redress any imbalance on the Continent.”<sup>20</sup>

Canada’s relations with the sub-continent, in this regard, were strong, purposeful and pragmatic. It gave the impression that it was concerned about the welfare of the sub-continent and gave aid and other incentives which drew her close to hearts of the leadership in West Africa in the 1960s.

Why is this work important? Why should we care about Canada’s relations with Nigeria and not any other country in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Ghana? What implications does this have for Canada in its relationship with the African continent? What was the net effect on Nigeria?

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<sup>18</sup> LAC, RG 25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File No. 12315-40, “Communist Influence in Tropical Africa,” 20 May 1957

<sup>19</sup> The British and French embraced a winner-take-all mentality in the administration of their colonies in Africa, making it apparent that Britain and France could not be trusted. In the heat of the Cold War, Canada’s position was that even if Britain was to exploit West Africa politically and economically, this should not be made obvious. Considerations should be given to African feelings and to giving them the impression that the West wanted to genuinely help them.

<sup>20</sup> LAC, RG 25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12653-M-40/12315-40, “Discussions on Africa with United Kingdom Officials,” 11 December 1959, p. 2



A survey of the pertinent literature reveals that there is a sizable gap in the study of Canada's policy towards Nigeria and Africa. Those who have written about the continent did so as part of a holistic study to explain Canada's policy in the world. Here, John Holmes' *The Shaping of Peace*<sup>21</sup> comes to mind. The main components centre on the actors and institutions that shaped Canada's relations with the world and since the Commonwealth served as the bridge between Canada and Africa, Holmes gives a concise evolution of the Commonwealth and explains Canada's role in the transition of the 'White' Commonwealth to the multiracial Commonwealth that accommodated African nations. While Holmes focused on the Commonwealth as a medium through which Canada related with African states, Keith Spicer's *Aid and the Ebb Tide*<sup>22</sup> analyses how Canada used aid as an instrument to achieve its foreign policy goals. Like Holmes, an analysis of Canadian aid to Africa was part of a central study of Canada's aid and technical assistance to the outside world, especially Third World countries. While Spicer focused on Ottawa's aid policy, some scholars examined the same concept within the framework of development in the Third World. Robert Miller's edited book, *Aid As Peacemaker: Canadian Development Assistance and Third World Conflict*,<sup>23</sup> analyzes Canadian aid to the Third World and argues that it proved invaluable in the promotion of international peace and security. In a similar vein, Basil Robinson explores the attitude of the Diefenbaker-led government towards *apartheid* South Africa in his larger study of the administration and

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<sup>21</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*, Vol. 2 (University of Toronto Press, 1982)

<sup>22</sup> Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State? External Aid in Canada's Foreign Policy* (University of Toronto Press, 1966)

<sup>23</sup> Robert Miller, Ed. *Aid as Peacemaker: Canadian Development Assistance and Third World Conflict* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992)

personality of John Diefenbaker.<sup>24</sup> But just like Holmes and Spicer, the treatment of Canada's engagement with Africa occupies a fraction of the work. The same can be said for John Hilliker's and Donald Barry's<sup>25</sup> work, which looks at the 'golden era' of Canadian diplomacy under Lester Pearson as Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. It addresses policy formulation and implementation towards Commonwealth countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South Africa, although it falls short of explaining the driving forces behind these policies. Linda Freeman explores Canadian aid and the promotion of peace in Southern Africa, looking at apartheid, and instability in Mozambique and Namibia.<sup>26</sup> Cranford Pratt<sup>27</sup> examines Canadian aid and contends that Canada had a moral obligation to come to the aid of the poor and most vulnerable. This book, however, is contradictory. It claims that there were a web of factors that determined the choice of recipients of Canadian food aid and the metrics for allocation included historical and political considerations, with emphasis on curbing the spread of communism and helping commonwealth states in developing countries to overcome the challenge of poverty, which begs to ask whether containing the spread of communism in Third World countries was a moral or political objective? One major problem with all this literature is that they are general and fail to explain the underlying causes of Canada's engagement with Africa. This perfunctory approach to looking at Canada's relations with the continent tells us less about its strategic relations with Nigeria. Africa was not a country,

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<sup>24</sup> Basil Robinson, *Diefenbaker's World: A Populist in Foreign Affairs* (University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 122-8, 174-89

<sup>25</sup> John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs, Coming of Age, 1946-1968, Vol. 2* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995)

<sup>26</sup> Linda Freeman, "Canada, Aid, and Peacemaking in Southern Africa," in Robert Miller, Ed. *Aid as Peacemaker: Canadian Development Assistance and Third World Conflict* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992)

<sup>27</sup> Cranford Pratt, ed. *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies: An Appraisal* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994)

nor each country in Africa a continent. Even though most African countries were beginning to get disentangled from the mantle of colonialism, Canada related with them based on their strategic significance except in cases where their needs and aspirations were unifying and obvious, just as during the period of decolonisation.

A number of contributions to the literature, however, attempted to look at core issues as they affected Canada's foreign policies. Brian Tennyson's work<sup>28</sup> provides a vivid description of the relations between Canada and South Africa starting with the Boer War to 1961 when South Africa pulled out of the Commonwealth. But most of these literature was 'reactionary' in nature in the sense that the authors analysed how Ottawa reacted to certain international concerns without necessarily addressing the roots of Canada's policies with these countries. Both Paul Harnetty,<sup>29</sup> and Douglas Anglin,<sup>30</sup> for instance, examine Canada's reaction and ambivalence towards racist South Africa, with Harnetty correctly asserting that Canada was unwilling to condemn South Africa in public in the interest of Commonwealth solidarity. It can nonetheless be argued that these works provide insights into human rights as one of the pillars of Canadian foreign policy, hence, a reason why it has generated some commentary among Canadian scholars. From this standpoint, Kathleen Mahoney's article<sup>31</sup> focusing on human rights questions in Southern Africa falls into this category.

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<sup>28</sup> Brian Tennyson, *Canadian Relations with South Africa, A Diplomatic History* (Washington: University Press of America Inc., 1982)

<sup>29</sup> Paul Harnetty, "South Africa, and the Commonwealth 1960-61," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1963)

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Anglin, "Canada and 'apartheid'" *International Journal*, Vol. 15, Issue 2 (April 1960), pp. 122-37

<sup>31</sup> Kathleen Mahoney, "Human Rights and Canada's Foreign Policy," *International Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 3, Canada and the New World Order (Summer, 1992), pp. 555-594

Very little was written on Nigeria during this period except for Michael Carrol's work,<sup>32</sup> which contested Nigeria's role in the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) because of its 'terrible' human rights record and Douglas Anglin's article<sup>33</sup> on Nigeria's political and economic attitude towards the West in the heat of the Cold War. Anglin's work looked at Nigeria's reaction to the West's (and Canada's) bid to contain communism and not directly on Canada's relations with Nigeria while Nigeria was also not the central object of study in Carrol's work.

This thesis is, therefore, an attempt to explain Canada's policy on Nigeria using as template for analysis, the promotion of human rights and democracy and the rule of law – broad pillars of Canada's foreign policy – as well as the instrument (aid) employed to achieve these foreign objectives in Nigeria. It makes no grandiose claim that it has unearthed all the issues in the relations between Ottawa and Lagos during this period, but opens questions that had long yearned for answers.

Before Nigeria became a sovereign nation in 1960, Canada had understood the practical importance of relations with Nigeria. For Canada and the entire world, Nigeria held considerable promise, not the least a country capable of leading Africa on the international stage. Its population of 40 million and substantial economy dwarfed those of all its West African neighbours. More so, Nigeria was seen by Britain and Canada as having the potential of developing along western lines of democracy.<sup>34</sup> Canadian diplomats had all this information and were prepared to cement relations with this emergent regional power. It was only by engaging

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Carrol, *Pearson's Peacekeepers: Canada and the United Nations Emergency Force, 1956-67* (University of British Columbia Press, 2009)

<sup>33</sup> Douglas Anglin, "Nigeria: Political Non-Alignment and Economic Alignment," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (July, 1964), pp. 247-263

<sup>34</sup> LAC, RG 25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, File 12831-40 "Canadian Representation in Nigeria," 25 January, 1960

with Nigeria that Canada could hope to achieve its foreign policy objectives of spreading democracy and preaching the principles of human rights to the newly independent peoples of Africa, with the goal, of course, of insulating them from communist subversion. In fact, Canada understood that Nigeria was capable of exerting influence on the smaller and weaker countries of Africa to accept pro-Western international norms and conventions. This fact was well illustrated in a report by a diplomat in the Canadian High Commission during the diplomatic row between Nigeria and Ghana in 1962 over the political situation in Nigeria and Nigeria's position in the evolution of a new Africa where he observed that Ghana resented Nigeria and opposed it on the future of Africa because of Nigeria's potential to assume leadership of Black Africa. He concluded that "the key to the different approaches of the two countries lies in the fact that Nigeria by virtue of its size can become the leader of Black Africa without trying nearly as hard as Ghana has to."<sup>35</sup>

Armed with this insight, Canada put in place various policies and arrangements to strengthen her relations with Nigeria in the first decade of independence. Using aid as a medium, Nigeria was the recipient of technical assistance and capital projects. No doubt, this aid had a far reaching effect as trade increased between the two countries with Canada simultaneously earning Nigeria's trust. The central argument which holds true throughout this work is that Canada's policy on Nigeria during this period was coherent, unambiguous and pragmatic.

Canada's relations with Nigeria in the first decade of the latter's independence was very strong as the Canadians helped Nigeria at every stage of her development, increased aid and ultimately increased bilateral trade. Yet, these gains were offset by successive decades of policy

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<sup>35</sup> Mr. R. Hathaway's report on the diplomatic row between Nigeria and Ghana in 1962 sent to the Under-Secretary for External Affairs, Ottawa. LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7833, File 12729-40 [pt. 1.2], "Nigeria-Ghana Relations," July 7, 1962, p. 2

somersaults that eventually strained relations between the two countries. It is only recently that Ottawa has begun to reignite the passion of the independence decade by considering Nigeria's growing importance in Africa. Therefore, a study of Canada's relations with Nigeria is important because of the need to understand why Canada started so well with Nigeria in the 1960s yet still remains a small player in Africa's political economy.

To assume that Canada's relations with Nigeria started in 1960 when Nigeria became a sovereign nation would be premature and amount to academic laziness in tracing the roots of relations between the two countries. In fact, relations between them started a century earlier. While relations with Nigeria at the infant stage was economic with the focus on trade and skills' transfer, engagement with Nigeria after 1960 was purely motivated by political sentiments. These sentiments portrayed Canada in good light in Nigeria and Africa, and were enough for Canada to play a commanding role in Nigeria's political economy.

The fact that Nigeria held great economic prospects had been well-known to Lord Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, the British Colonial officer who, in 1914, amalgamated the states, kingdoms and chiefdoms that constituted modern-day Nigeria. In Lugard's view, it would simply be easier to administer the two Protectorates by amalgamating them. In addition, Nigeria could only be self-reliant and developed if a transportation system was put in place to facilitate the transfer of agricultural produce from the hinterland to the coast where these goods could be shipped to Britain and to a lesser extent, the British Dominions.<sup>36</sup> Lugard highlighted the need to develop the colonial economy, which, in his view, would bring untold advantages to the British

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<sup>36</sup> Lugard Frederick John Dealtry, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922)

and the colonies in tropical Africa<sup>37</sup> and before he resigned as Governor of Nigeria, encouraged trade between Nigeria and Britain and the Dominions. Canadian trade with Nigeria in this regard was ignited by Lugard who sent out letters promoting Nigeria as a trade destination for the Dominions. Lugard's efforts and drive to develop tropical Africa was met by a corresponding letter from George Foster, Canada's Minister of Trade and Commerce, who asked in a February 1920 letter to Lugard that preferences be granted Canadian exports to Nigeria. He disclosed that Canada was interested in Nigeria and that since February 1st, 1913, Nigeria had been on Canada's preferential list. He further pinpointed that the Canadian Government Merchant Marine was considering putting on a direct steamship service between Canada and Ports in West Africa.<sup>38</sup>

Another issue to which the Colonial government in Nigeria devoted its attention was skills' transfer to Nigeria. Although inundated with vast economic resources, tropical Africa was a dangerous place for the European bourgeoisie to live. Its climate was hot and humid, with precipitation either too much or too little. Malaria, the deadly disease in West Africa killed Europeans in droves and tropical Africa was seen as the "white man's grave."<sup>39</sup> Since colonialism in Africa was looked at by Europeans from the prism of a zero-sum game, European colonisers of tropical Africa believed it was expedient to live in their areas of influence lest they lose these territories to their European rivals.

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<sup>37</sup> Lugard Federick, *The Dual Mandate in tropical Africa* ; Toyin Falola and Michael M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. xxvii

<sup>38</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 1260, File No. 25107, "Certified copy of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council, approved by His Excellency the Governor General on the 5th February, 1920," 7th February, 1920

<sup>39</sup> Tamuno Takena, "British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century" in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Lagos: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), p. 397

In Nigeria, the British needed medical doctors to help colonial administrative staff and others survive their periods of service. The body charged with the responsibility of employing medical staff into the four British territories in West-Africa was styled the “West African Medical Staff.” Nigeria ultimately benefited from the expertise of Canadian medical doctors in the 1920s as they were recruited by the West African Medical Staff to work in the country.<sup>40</sup>

Canada’s economic relations with Nigeria continued on a helter-skelter basis until the outbreak of the Second World War. By creating an atmosphere where it was difficult to facilitate international trade, the Second World War had enormous impact on Canada’s trade relations with Nigeria. Trade relations improved after the war and by 1957, three years before Nigeria became independent, two-way merchandise trade peaked at just under four million dollars.<sup>41</sup>

If before 1960, Canada’s policy towards Nigeria was primarily economic, independence in 1960 added political dimensions. Ottawa clearly recognized the role an independent Nigeria could play in Africa’s political economy. A memo sent from the office of Canada’s Undersecretary of State for External Affairs to Canada’s Prime Minister Mr. John Diefenbaker noted that “Nigeria will be the most populous state in Africa. It is a country with considerable potential for development, and it is expected to play an important role in African affairs.” The report added that as developments in Nigeria unfolded, there would be opportunities for trade expansion, which could benefit Canadian businesses. The memo highlighted Canada’s cordial relations with Nigeria and how Nigerian government officials had visited Canada to seek advice

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<sup>40</sup> LAC, RG25, Canada House Records, A-2, Vol. 180, File 23-C, “Government House,” 23 October 1920. Letter No. 672

<sup>41</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, File 12831-40, “Canadian Representation in Nigeria: Notes for answers to possible questions in the House of Commons following the statement,” 25th January, 1960, p. 3



on governance from time to time in the course of preparing themselves for self rule.<sup>42</sup> Although Canada's diplomatic relations with Nigeria was subsumed within the framework of Cold War realities, the Canadian government also wanted to preserve a shared history (Commonwealth) and trade with Nigeria.

Conscious that Nigeria would join the ranks of independent nations in ten months, Canada announced the opening of its new Mission in January 1960. The diplomatic outpost was to be headed by Thomas Carter, whose appointment was announced in the House of Commons on January 28, 1960. Carter was a seasoned diplomat with experience in various diplomatic posts abroad such as Warsaw, Brussels, and Rome. Trained at Bishop's University and the University of London where he earned a Master's degree in economics in 1939, Carter served in the Canadian army from 1940 through 1945, serving with distinction with the field artillery in the Italian campaign.<sup>43</sup> Carter joined the Department of External Affairs in 1945 after the War ended and had served in Canadian Embassies in Brussels and Rome. Between 1952 and 1954, he was Chargé d'Affaires of the Canadian Legation in Warsaw and the following year, head of the American Division in the Department of External Affairs. He held this position until 1957 when he represented Canada at the International Commission for Supervision for Control in Vietnam. It is instructive to note that the Department of Trade and Commerce also had an officer in the new Mission, Howard Richardson, who had been appointed to represent the Department's interest in Nigeria.<sup>44</sup> The new Canadian mission was subsequently opened in April 1960, six

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<sup>42</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, File 12831-40, "Press Release," 28th January, 1960

<sup>43</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, File 12831-40, "Thomas LeMesurier Carter, M. C."

<sup>44</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs fonds, Volume 7845, File 12831-40, "New Mission in Nigeria," 22nd January, 1960

months before Nigeria became a sovereign nation, thus benchmarking Ottawa's commitment to deeply engage Nigeria politically and economically.

Although Cold War commitments dominated Canada's policy during the East-West struggle, Ottawa saw inherent gain in it. It saw the Cold War as an opportunity to promote its own distinct brand of foreign policy: the preservation of human rights and the promotion of democracy and the rule of law.<sup>45</sup> These twin objectives were to be achieved through aid, especially to newly independent multiracial Commonwealth countries. Herein lies the reason for the establishment of the Colombo Plan in 1950, which effectively launched foreign aid to developing countries as a centrepiece of Canadian foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> This work therefore takes a retrospective look at these themes in the relations between Canada and Nigeria. The central argument that runs through the theme is that Ottawa's relations with Nigeria during the independence decade were pragmatic and sustained, a fact anchored on Cold War considerations and Nigeria's political and economic potential.

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<sup>45</sup> Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt, *Canada and the Cold War* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd, 2003), pp. 10-12

<sup>46</sup> Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State?* pp. 96-100

## Chapter One

### Human Rights in the Relations between Canada and Nigeria

“In war, truth is the first casualty.” Aeschylus (525 BC-456 BC)

Between July 6, 1967 and January 15, 1970, Nigeria was embroiled in an internal crisis that shook the country to its foundations – the attempted secession of the Eastern region. This catastrophic situation led to the Nigerian Civil War, six years after the country became a sovereign nation. The Eastern region of Nigeria<sup>47</sup>, called Biafra, cited political annihilation as its main reason for attempting to secede from the Nigerian federal state. With a well-oiled public relations campaign, the leaders of the Biafran secessionist bid took the war to a crescendo that they, perhaps, did not envisage as their campaign helped heap international opprobrium on the Nigerian state. Like the Congo Crises of 1960 to 1966, which almost tore that country apart and drew international attention, the Nigerian Civil War was not devoid of external influence and interests. Some states, notably Gabon, Tanzania and Côte d’Ivoire, made political capital out of the war by recognising the right of Biafra to secede from Nigeria. Others, like Britain, were concerned about their economic interests in the world’s most populous Black country, one that held great commercial promise, but which in the years immediately following independence in 1960, had yet to be fulfilled. Canada’s interests were particularly unique. On one hand, the Canadian public was incensed that the Federal Military Government of Nigeria was orchestrating a premeditated genocide against the Igbo people and therefore urged their government to wade

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<sup>47</sup> This Region was one of Nigeria’s federal divisions since 1954 after the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954. It was largely populated by the Igbo-speaking peoples who traced their settlement in the area to 4, 500 BC. The Region also had other ethnic groupings like the Kalabari and Efik but the Igbo constituted the largest single element by less than fifty percent – about a third of the population of the Region.

into the crisis on humanitarian grounds to save the Igbo. For the Canadian public, the Nigerian Civil War was a question of human rights. The public felt that the Igbo had a right to secede from Nigeria if they no longer felt secure, and that the central government should not make onerous demands on them simply because they wanted to exercise their rights. Three factors shaped Canadian public opinion during this period: Canadian missionaries working in Nigeria, whose presence predated their government's engagement with the country, represented the largest group of Canadians living in Nigeria during the war. Having helped the Igbo to make the conversion<sup>48</sup> from paganism to Christianity in the first decade of the twentieth century, felt that the leadership of Nigeria, led by the Moslem North, was unjustly persecuting the Igbo. The second factor that shaped the attitude of Canadians to the war was the role of the Canadian media. Starting from 1968, growing attention was devoted to the war by journalists of the major Canadian newspapers<sup>49</sup> as well as the publicly-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the largest commercial television network, CTV Television Network, with virtually all of them placing their weight behind the Igbo secessionists and urging Ottawa to impose sanctions on Nigeria. These two elements were helped by the third factor, the public campaign embarked upon by Biafra to raise international support for its 'cause.' Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of the Biafran secession, had engaged a professional public relations firm whose responsibility was to make known to the world the "atrocities" being committed by the Nigerian Government in the Eastern part of the country. These media brought to Canadian homes, through their television sets, images of starving Biafran children, with predictable results,

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<sup>48</sup> A. E. Afigbo, "The Eastern Provinces Under Colonial Rule," in Obaro Ikime, ed, *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Books, 1980), pp. 425-6

<sup>49</sup> A lot of the stories and article on the war from the *New York Times* were reprinted in the *Globe and Mail* and since some of these stories from the foreign press found their way into Canadian homes, I decided to use sources outside of the Canadian media.

given that Canadians broadly considered themselves a ‘civilised’ people committed to the furtherance of human rights, and were deeply concerned about ethical issues in international affairs. Most Canadians could not comprehend why the Nigerian Government could be so cruel as to starve babies. Repeated in the media day after day, these images convinced Canadians that the Nigerian Government embarked on the course of a carefully-planned genocide. Thus, the Canadian public was concerned about the rights of these children, and indeed all Igbo, as well as that of Biafra to secede and establish itself as an independent country. Ironically, allegations and conclusions like these, after a careful examination of the documents pertaining to the war and factors that led to it, were unfounded.

Simultaneously, the Canadian Government, after analysing the causes of Nigerian Civil War, came up with its official position, although this was not made public because of the sensitivity of the situation and even more so because it would have proved unpopular amongst Canadians. Ottawa found itself in a diplomatically difficult and politically uncomfortable position because its private assessment demonstrated that although there were problems associated with Nigeria’s federalism, the Igbo, led by Ojukwu, were placing unrealistic demands on the Nigerian government and that the war could be avoided if commonsense prevailed among the Igbo to work with their Nigerian counterparts in an effort to create a stronger Nigerian state. Ottawa understood that the war was essentially a question of rights but it could not toe the line of the public and found it increasingly difficult to explain to the public the position that circulated in official circles. This chapter will review Canada’s policy on the War, and the role it played in trying to resolve the conflict, arguing that the Government’s decision to stall for time in the face of the public’s demands for action was the best alternative for Canada and that the overwhelming

public opinion in Canada to save the Biafrans from the claws of the Nigerian Government was based overwhelmingly on sentiment and misinformation.

Did the Federal Government of Nigeria violate the human rights of a segment of its population? Was the Canadian public justified by concluding that Nigeria's motives against the Igbo were unduly sinister? Was the Canadian government's policy to continue to engage Nigeria during the civil war appropriate? Were there ethical issues that pertained to the war that Canada should have addressed? Clearly, an attempt to define 'human rights' is necessary to proceed with the historical analysis that will answer these questions.

But attempting to define human rights is a highly contentious exercise. What appeals to one group as rights may be interpreted as taboo by another. Since there is no uniformity of culture, different cultures have their own notions of rights, a fact that makes Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab submit that "all societies have notions of human rights."<sup>50</sup> However, the notion of human rights is highly subjective and relative, changing and not historically definitive. Different cultures understood human rights in varying constructs. The Islamic civilisation's conception of human rights has roots in the Quran with certain duties towards God and human beings. These rights and duties are encapsulated in the Sharia code.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the notion of human rights was a core component of pre-colonial African societies.<sup>52</sup> This same argument that human rights were ingrained in early Confucian civilisation has been advanced in a number of

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<sup>50</sup> Adamantia Polis and Peter Schwab, "Introduction," in Adamantia Polis and Peter Schwab, ed. *Human Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

<sup>51</sup> Abdul Aziz Said, "Precept and Practice of Human Rights in Islam" in *Universal Human Rights* 1 (1), p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> S. K. B. Asante, "Nation Building and Human Rights in Emergent Africa" in *Cornell International Law Journal* 2 (Spring): 72-107; Asmarom Legesse, "Human Rights in African Political Culture" in Kenneth W. Thompson, ed. *The Moral Imperatives of Human Rights: A World Survey* (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1980).

sources.<sup>53</sup> In making a claim for Western civilisation, however, Jack Donnelly dismisses claims that the underlying tenets of human rights existed in other civilisations. He claims unapologetically that the idea of human rights was a Western conception that could be traced to the Westphalian era which ushered modern states into international politics. For him, progress made in the West culminated in agreements which ultimately led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Donnelly goes as far as to say that the idea of modernity arose from the West thereby bringing into the human rights debate the binary relationship between “the West and the Rest” or the “self” and the “other.” This chapter clearly rejects this teleological conception of rights.

The idea of treating non-western societies as an “imaginary waiting room of history”<sup>54</sup> or having to catch up on modernity clearly does not explain the historical development of rights agreed to by the international community or what Jean-Marc Coicaud, Michael W. Doyle, and Anne-Marie Gardner call “the globalization of human rights.”<sup>55</sup> The teleological explanation of human rights by Donnelly deprives the concept of the richness and robustness it would have had if human rights practices in non-western societies were examined in a holistic manner. This concern was clearly raised by Chakrabarty when challenging Western notions on developments in non-western societies. For him, the problem of modernity should not be viewed as a “sociological problem of historical transition” but that of translation as well.<sup>56</sup> It is not that

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<sup>53</sup> Chung-Sho Lo, “Human Rights in the Chinese Tradition” in UNESCO, ed. *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949); Yanlong Han, “Legal Protection of Human Rights in China” in Peter R. Baehr, Fried van Hoof, et al, *Human Rights: Chinese and Dutch Perspectives* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thoughts and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 8

<sup>55</sup> Jean-Marc Coicaud, Michael W. Doyle, and Anne-Marie, *The Globalization of Human Rights* (United Nation University Press, 2003)

<sup>56</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 17

certain knowledge in Western and non-Western societies is not compatible, but scholars at times find a convenient platform in historicism in their analysis. Building on the idea of Meaghan Morris, Chakrabarty correctly notes that the effects of translation on phenomena scholars believe are mutually incompatible “is neither an absence of relationship between dominant and dominating forms of knowledge nor equivalents that successfully mediate between differences, but precisely the opaque relationship we call difference.”<sup>57</sup> While Charkrabarty’s argument, no doubt, sees the West as vanguards on the need to protect man against man, he equally suggests these ideas can be supplemented by notions of human rights from non-western societies.

Having established that notions of human rights were prevalent in different civilisations, albeit with peculiar characteristics, how then do we synthesize this knowledge into a concrete whole to explain questions of human rights in the relations between Canada and Nigeria since both existed in a world of “historical difference”? Simply put, how do we write a narrative that produces clarity in two opposing worldviews? For the sake of this paper, the International Human Rights theory provides a solid foundation for explaining human rights within the context of Canada and Nigeria. International Human Rights theory, as suggested here, is a creation of the entire world, whether deliberately or spontaneously.

What is International Human Rights theory? At the core of this theory is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a document approved in 1948 on the floor of the United Nations, and in which Canadian diplomat John Humphries played an important drafting role. What makes this document unique is that it lists a range of social, economic and political rights which human beings in all parts of the world are entitled to by the virtue of the fact that they are

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<sup>57</sup> Meaghan Morris, “Foreword” to Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. xiii; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 17



humans. This document harmonizes “particularism” into “universalism,” and is especially striking because most countries of the world accepted it as one of the preconditions for the new international order. For William Sweet, the “practical agreement” premised on “practical truths” enshrined in the UDHR was a tremendous feat, signposting “a new age of civilisation”, and in the words of the French philosopher, Jacques Maritain, would “recognize and define the rights of the human being in his social, economic, and cultural functions.”<sup>58</sup> While this statement is subject to debate from the standpoint of the jurisdiction of national and international courts, it holds true that the UDHR document provides an *a priori* basis to call states and individuals into account on questions of human rights. It is on this theoretical foundation that we shall seek to explain Canada’s role in the Nigerian Civil War during the period 1967 through 1970.

The Nigerian Civil War was in a sense a war about human rights and entitlements: political, social, and economic. Scholars have explored this topic from different disciplinary perspectives with far-reaching conclusions.<sup>59</sup> While many address human rights in passing in their work, it was not their central theme even though a number of them, either as a result of ignorance of the remote and immediate causes of the war or owing to personal sentiments, concluded that the Nigerian government violated the political, economic, and social rights of the Biafra people. In his personal memoir of the war, Chinua Achebe, who until his death was a poet, professor and social critic, concluded that the Nigerian government deliberately carried out “ethnic cleansing” on the Igbo.<sup>60</sup> Achebe blames nearly everyone for the inability of the Igbo to

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<sup>58</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 104 quoted in William Sweet, “Theories of Rights and Political and Legal Instruments” in William Sweet, ed. *Philosophical Theory and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2003)

<sup>59</sup> Very few Canadian literatures that touch on study have been surveyed in the Introduction. See pp. 11-4

<sup>60</sup> Chinua Achebe, *There was A Country* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012)

see the war through and achieve statehood – from Harold Wilson, then the British Prime Minister, to General Yakubu Gowon, the President of Nigeria; Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Federal Commissioner for Finance; U Thant and the United Nations; the United States, and Canada – the list is endless.<sup>61</sup> One major concern with Achebe’s book is that it gives little evidence to support his claim. In addition, it is important to understand where Achebe was coming from. He was of the Igbo ethnic stock from Eastern Nigeria and was an important government official in the failed administration of Ojukwu. Achebe did not accept the failure of the Biafra experiment and until his death, did not probably forgive the actors involved, actors who, in Achebe’s view, were not fair to the Igbo cause. When one reads Achebe’s work, it is easy to understand why, despite Achebe’s contribution to Nigerian, African and world literature, he consistently refused national awards accorded him by successive Nigerian governments.

If Achebe’s views were coloured by personal sentiments, it is difficult to peg where Stephen Lewis belonged. Lewis was a New Democratic Party member of the Ontario Legislature (and son of the federal NDP leader) who became enamored by developments in the Eastern part of Nigeria and wrote widely about them in Canada, Britain and the US. Commenting on the question of genocide and the violation of human rights by the Nigerian government, Lewis surmised that “if any foreign observer says there is no genocide in Biafra, he is either on the

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<sup>61</sup> Achebe, *There Was A Country*, pp. 209-239. Achebe describes U Thant as a pacifist who, when Biafra was in dire need of the United Nations to mediate a ceasefire, turned a deafening ear and instead, turned to the Nigerian government for direction. He describes the United Nations as having a “vacuum in moral and humanitarian leadership”, thus paving the way for Nigeria to commit all sorts of atrocities; Harold Wilson is described as a hypocrite who pretended to help resolve the impasse between Nigeria and the Biafra secessionists but was doing the bidding of Nigeria; The United States is accused of being uninterested in the mass killing of an ethnic group; Chief Awolowo is accused of being driven by an inordinate ambition for power and the need to secure the place of “his Yoruba people” in Nigeria’s political economy; while Canada is criticized by Achebe on page 222 because Canada openly criticized the Ojukwu administration for being “more interested in getting arms than food or medical supplies and had made up reasons for rejecting [humanitarian aid].”

payroll of Britain or he is a bloody fool. If anyone wants to see genocide, he should come to Biafra.”<sup>62</sup> The preceding statement suggests that Lewis visited the Eastern part of Nigeria to witness, firsthand, what he called “genocide” although there is no evidence to support the assumption that he was in Nigeria during the period. Certainly what has to be said is that Lewis’s view mirrored the dominant reception within the Canadian public space, with the public consistently pressing the government to come to the aid of Biafra, especially its starving children.

The need to aid Biafra and its starving children was one of the focal points of *Canada and the Biafran Tragedy*. Written by Andrew Brewin<sup>63</sup> and David MacDonald,<sup>64</sup> Members of Parliament who were concerned about the attitude of the Canadian government towards the Biafran cause, this book tells the tale of how the two MPs visited Biafra and argued that there the Nigerian government carried out genocide on the Igbo although they concluded that the war could have been avoided. While Brewin and MacDonald obviously wrote about what Canadians wanted to hear, their methodology was flawed. They only visited the *Uli* airstrip, one of the few strategic places that had not been occupied by Nigeria in October, 1968, and submitted that “the stories of starvation were no figments of imagination or propaganda.”<sup>65</sup> Fortunately, the authors admitted their limitations: they were no authorities on Africa and did not seek to produce a comprehensive history of the war. Rather their intention was the “determination to do all in our

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<sup>62</sup> Stephen Lewis, “Editorial”, *Guardian*, 11 October, 1968 quoted in Bolaji Akinyemi, “The British Press and the Nigerian Civil War”, *African Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 285 (Oxford University Press, October 1972), p. 418

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Brewin was the NDP MP for Toronto-Greenwood and was member of the executive of the Canadian Institute for International Affairs

<sup>64</sup> David MacDonald was a United Church minister and the Conservative Party MP for Egmont riding in Prince Edward Island and member of the House of Commons Committee on External Affairs and Defence

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Brewin and David MacDonald, *Canada and the Biafran Tragedy* (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel Publishers, 1970), p. 4

power to arouse the Canadian Parliament and people to active participation on a double front: both pressure for a ceasefire, and the mounting of a massive effort against the threat of starvation.”<sup>66</sup> Brewin and MacDonald did not wholly assess the origin and causes of the war as well as the persona involved, thereby invariably producing a jaundiced view of the Nigerian crisis.

In retrospect, the ignorance of the Canadian public on the facts of the war exceeded their knowledge in a large margin. Canadians clearly did not get a clear picture of its causes, nature and extent, and had to make do with the information supplied to them by journalists who probably did not leave their desks in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver and who did not have sufficient knowledge of the history of Nigeria and the interplay of forces that shaped the war.

Apart from the view that has become widespread, especially in the West, that the war was a battle between the biblical David and Goliath with the latter suppressing and denying the former their just entitlements, most academics and journalists drew certain conclusions about the war in a derisory manner. Many believed that the war was a ‘tribal’ conflict in which ethnic groups decided to split along tribal lines because they could not manage their differences. *The Globe and Mail* of November 3, 1967, for instance, ran a story with the title, “Tribal bitterness extends tragedy of civil war in Nigeria.”<sup>67</sup> Walter Schwarz, a correspondent for the *London Observer Service* ran a story which was reprinted in the *Globe and Mail* and asked: “Can Nigeria

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Brewin and David MacDonald, *Canada and the Biafran Tragedy*, p. 4

<sup>67</sup> Charles Taylor, “Tribal bitterness extends tragedy of civil war in Nigeria,” *The Globe and Mail*, Friday, November 3, 1967, p. 7

survive its tribal heritage?”<sup>68</sup> The *New York Times* was more direct in its simplification of factors that led to the war with the headlines that “Regime Political Break-up Looms in Nigeria as Ibos Challenge,”<sup>69</sup> and “Revolts Cripple Army in Nigeria: Tribal Warfare Decimates and Divides the Military”<sup>70</sup> On October 6, it was more virulent in its denunciation of the conflict as entirely rooted in tribalism with the headline, “Hopes of Nigeria ebb in the strife: fears seem to be tearing Nation into Tribal states.”<sup>71</sup> Commenting on the war, the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that Africans were still savages with its editorial that “The Federal ... government, though not unacquainted with the odd tribal massacre, simply does not know the procedure for starting, let alone keeping up a proper, sophisticated Western-type war to end the secession of Biafra. Even the abortive set-to like the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 is beyond its means.”<sup>72</sup> Some, like Peregrine Worsthorpe, who had a column in the British *Sunday Telegraph*, generously used words like “savages” in her commentaries on the war. For instance, she wrote that “how much longer can the civilized world be expected to treat men like General [Yakubu] Gowon<sup>73</sup> as ordinary Heads of State? If they behave like savage chieftains, that is how they may come to be treated. This is how colonialism began, and it is how it could start again.”<sup>74</sup> Such views found

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<sup>68</sup> Walter Schwarz, “Can Nigeria survive its tribal heritage?” *The Globe and Mail*, August 30, 1967, p. 7

<sup>69</sup> Lloyd Garrison, “Regime Political Break-up Looms in Nigeria as Ibos Challenge,” *The New York Times* (New York, August 3, 1966), p. 6

<sup>70</sup> Lloyd Garrison, “Revolts Cripple Army in Nigeria: Tribal Warfare Decimates and Divides the Military” “Revolts Cripple Army in Nigeria: Tribal Warfare Decimates and Divides the Military,” *The New York Times* (New York, August 9, 1966), p. 7

<sup>71</sup> Lloyd Garrison, “Hopes of Nigeria ebb in the strife: fears seem to be tearing Nation into Tribal states,” *The New York Times* (New York, October 6, 1966), p. 12

<sup>72</sup> Daily Telegraph, Editorial, 20 June 1967 quoted in Bolaji Akinyemi, “The British Press and the Nigerian Civil War”, p. 421

<sup>73</sup> His assumption of office as Nigeria’s president was one of the factors that triggered the war

<sup>74</sup> Peregrine Worsthorpe, “Nigeria: The Limit of Toleration,” *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 August 1968 quoted in Bolaji Akinyemi, “The British Press and the Nigerian Civil War”, p. 421

their ways into Canadian homes and the result was a heavy backlash by Canadians against their government's posture on the Nigerian crisis.

To dismiss the argument that the Nigerian Civil War was a tribal warfare fought by “savages”, it is important to examine the real origins of the war. What factors led to the war? Could the war have been avoided? What were the implications of the war on Nigeria's external image, especially in Canada? To analyse these questions, it is necessary to provide a prelude to the war.

Chibuikwe Uche, a professor at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) traces the origin of the Nigerian Civil War to the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914 by the British. In Chibuikwe's view, Moslem and non-Moslem Nigerian states did not have anything in common and saw no reason why the British should amalgamate two nations with different cultures and identities. For Uche, the creation of Nigeria by the British was the genesis of the war.<sup>75</sup> Uche forgets that Nigeria existed before the advent of colonialism as there had been decades of contact and unity between what he calls “Mohammedan and non-Mohammedan” states. Ade-Ajayi shows that the creation of Nigeria started with the Islamic *Jihad* of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804 in which the Islamic cleric unified the Northern emirates. This Jihad extended to parts of the Yoruba lands like Ilorin in the South. The Jihad facilitated inter-group movements and the development of trade routes while it also aided the acculturation of the different groups. This accounts for why over half of the population in Western Nigeria, a region populated by the Yoruba, are Moslems.

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<sup>75</sup> Chibuikwe Uche, “Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War”, *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 49, No. 1. (Cambridge University Press, March 2008), pp. 111-135

The making of Nigeria reached a new climax six decades later with the making of Ajayi Crowther the archbishop of the Niger Methodist diocese in 1864, the first African to attain that position. Bishop Crowther was one of the slaves that returned from Britain via Sierra Leone. These men had been educated and were seen as vehicles to propagate the gospel among the heathen primitive people. Bishop Crowther did a great deal of work to spread Christianity in both the South and North. Furthermore, the African missionaries, led by Crowther, were cosmopolitan in outlook with skills that could be utilised to develop the land of their forebears. They helped to translate the Bible from English to different vernaculars, and also facilitated the reduction of vernaculars to written languages. Their influence penetrated the South and the North. *Ipsa facto*, when the British were amalgamating Nigeria in 1914, they were only putting the finishing touches to a process started by Uthman Dan Fodio and Bishop Ajayi Crowther in the nineteenth century. We have to understand that the British were just traders driven purely by economic concerns when they merged the two sections of Nigeria together.<sup>76</sup> As J. F. A. Ajayi has opined, “the amalgamation was an act of the British. But it was guided and to a large extent dictated by existing unities... geographical, commercial and cultural.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, Uche’s claim that the genesis of the war could be traced to 1914 should be ignored. Rather, it should be argued that constitutional developments, which started in the 1920s and gave Nigerians the opportunity to participate in the art of governance and policy-making, ushered in feelings of suspicions among the ethnic groups, feelings that became destructively manifest in 1967.

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<sup>76</sup> J. F. A. Ajayi, *Milestones in Nigerian History* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 27

<sup>77</sup> J. F. A. Ajayi, *Milestones in Nigerian History* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 27

Nigeria under colonialism has been seen by some as one of the great success stories of the British Empire.<sup>78</sup> Apart from leading the way in tropical Africa when the elective principle was introduced into the 1922 Clifford Constitution,<sup>79</sup> the transition to nationhood was one of the most orderly during the decade of independence in sub-Saharan Africa. The introduction of the elective principle was to serve as a blessing and as a curse. It was a blessing in the sense that the West looked at Nigeria as the biggest Black democratic country in the world. But it was a curse, too, in that whatever benefit this status harboured was undermined as the greed for political power and the benefits that came with a public office coupled with a winner-takes-all mentality adopted by the groups that constituted Nigeria reared their ugly heads in 1967 and almost destroyed the gains made since 1960. Herein lies the remote cause of the Civil War.

The 1922 Constitution was a watershed in the history of constitutional developments in Nigeria. Four Nigerians were to be elected into the Legislative House populated by British civil servants. Out of these four, three were to be elected in Lagos, the seat of the Crown Colony, and one in Calabar, the administrative capital of the Southern Protectorate. The consequence of this was the establishment of political parties by Nigerians. In Lagos, where the seat of the colonial government was located, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), led by Herbert Macaulay and formed to contest the 1923 elections, won all three legislative seats. This party dominated politics until the 1930s, a period that witnessed the emergence of young intellectuals like H. O. Davies, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr James Vaughn, Dr Kofo Abayomi and Obafemi Awolowo. These men had been educated in England and the United States and although they resented colonial rule, had an objective to build a “united nation” governed by Nigerians within

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<sup>78</sup> David Hunt, “Diplomatic aspects of the Nigerian civil war”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 3:1 (1992), 5-22

<sup>79</sup> Gbenga Olusanya, “Constitutional Developments in Nigeria 1861-1960” in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), p. 524



the British Empire. These men protested against objectionable British policies and their concerns heightened when it dawned on them that the British were not willing to give Yaba High College – founded to open higher education to Nigerians – university status. In response, the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) was formed to organise Nigerians who desired higher education against the British colonial administration. This movement was later renamed the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) to give it a national status and contest elections, which it did in 1938, winning all the black seats. Trouble, however, began to brew three years later.

In 1941, Dr Kofo Abayomi, one of the representatives of the party on the Legislative Council, decided to resign his seat and travel to Britain for further studies. The vacuum created by his resignation revealed the depths of suspicion which the major ethnic groups had harboured towards each other. His vacant seat in the Legislative Council had to be filled and two members of the party emerged for nomination: Samuel Akinsanya and Ernest Sessi Ikoli. While Obafemi Awolowo supported Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe lent his weight to Akinsanya. Awolowo prevailed and to the consternation of all, Azikiwe decided to withdraw all Igbo from the NYM because he felt his interests could not be protected. Azikiwe would later go on to float the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), a political party founded along tribal lines.

The Western part of Nigeria followed suit in 1950 by founding the Action Group (AG), a purely regional party, while the North completed this trend in 1951 with the establishment of Northern People's Congress (NPC) with the motto, "One North, One People, irrespective of religion, rank or tribe."<sup>80</sup> As it happened, these regional parties could not form a national government after independence and had to bargain with each other by forming a government of

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<sup>80</sup> I relied heavily on Gbenga Olusanya's work for this account. See Gbenga Olusanya, "The Nationalist Movement in Nigeria" in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 545-69

compromise despite their deep-seated policy differences. In other words, largely owing to the fear that each region feared domination by the others, they had different visions for Nigeria: visions premised on the need to hold power to guarantee the interests of their respective tribes.<sup>81</sup> These incompatible visions were clearly spelt out throughout the constitutional conferences Nigerians attended from 1950 to independence.

Because Nigerians were narrowly concerned about themselves and holding political power for their regions, the country lost as much as it gained both domestically and internationally. On the international front, the West saw Kwame Nkrumah as the father of Africa's nationalism. It is true that Ghana gained independence in 1957 but Nigeria should have attained nationhood before then if all the leaders had had a sense of unity and set aside ethnic differences and personal ambitions. Nnamdi Azikiwe, one of the nationalist leaders from Eastern Nigeria, had, before Nkrumah, laid the foundation for British Africa's independence. Azikiwe was one of those who inspired Nkrumah in the nationalist struggle because when he [Azikiwe] graduated from Lincoln University in the United States, he returned to Africa, making a stop in Ghana where he founded the *West African Pilot*, a newspaper devoted to fighting the ills of colonialism. In fact, when Azikiwe was busy fighting the colonial government using his paper as a tool, Nkrumah was a student in the United States. But largely owing to personal ambition, ego and a host of other intervening factors, Nigeria, led by bright and educated young men like Azikiwe and Awolowo, could not harmonize their differences to bequeath independence to their country before 1960. On the national front, these personal differences became manifest in the series of political developments that started with the federal election of 1959. Looking at the remote and immediate causes of the war, Okoi Arikpo, Nigeria's External Affairs Minister in the First

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<sup>81</sup> G. N. Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood: Prelude to the Nigerian Civil War, 1960-1967* (Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2011), pp. 3-13

Republic, was probably right when he concluded that “it was the Nigerians themselves who created the schisms that almost destroyed their country.”<sup>82</sup> The Civil War could and should have been avoided; a war Ali Mazrui, the Kenyan professor of Islamic Studies and North-South relations, referred to as a waste of time and that “those who had championed and defended the cause of Biafra were guilty of a tragic miscalculation.”<sup>83</sup> But events that happened after independence made this inevitable.

The 1959 federal election produced no clear-cut winner but the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) had more parliamentary seats than the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG). The onus then fell on the North to form a coalition government, which it could do by inviting either the NCNC, dominated by the Igbo, or the AG, dominated by the Yoruba, to join with them in forming a national government. In the end, the NPC, led by Tafawa Balewa, preferred the NCNC to serve as a junior partner in a government of national unity. These two parties had mutually incompatible objectives, but as it happened, Balewa went on to become Nigeria’s prime minister and Azikiwe, the leader of the NCNC, the governor-general, a portfolio that was later styled ‘president.’ Awolowo, on the other hand, having not been able to realise his ambition of governing Nigeria at independence, rallied his people to form a bitter opposition against the national government after personal efforts to join the coalition government stalled.<sup>84</sup>

The clear sense of lack of unity in Nigeria had been noticed by Canada three months after independence. Jaja Anucha Wachukwu (an NCNC member), Nigeria’s Minister of Economic

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<sup>82</sup> Okoi Arikpo, *The Development of Modern Nigeria* (Penguin Books, 1967), p. 55

<sup>83</sup> Ali Mazrui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, African Writers Series (London: Heinemann, 1971), pp. 144-5

<sup>84</sup> G. N. Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*, p. 19

Development and Acting Permanent Representative of Nigeria and Chairman of the Nigerian Delegation to the United Nations, had visited Carleton University on December 3, 1960 to deliver a speech on the Nigerian state of affairs. Canadians knew little about Nigeria during this period but were eager to know because of their conviction that Nigeria held great promise for Africa and also because Nigeria had, at independence, embraced parliamentary democracy. Wachukwu's speech at Carleton left much to be desired. He spoke glowingly of Nnamdi Azikiwe, the leader of the NCNC, and avoided making reference to the Prime Minister, a representative of the NPC. His resentment of the Prime Minister, his party and the North was so glaring that he avoided mentioning his name even when he quoted him verbatim. Although Canadian diplomats did not record that there was no political unity of purpose in Nigeria, they did observe from his speech that "he is not a devoted supporter of his Prime Minister."<sup>85</sup>

Signposts to possible disaster loomed as early as 1962. Since 1960, NPC had seen the opposition AG led by Awolowo, and to some extent the NCNC, as a real menace to its political future and was determined to break their backs. The NPC also feared a political union between the AG and NCNC because it would rob the North of the political leadership of Nigeria. The opportunity for trouble nonetheless provided itself with the regional election in Western Nigeria. In 1961, the ranks of the AG, which controlled the region, had become divided over which ideology to follow. Awolowo, the party's leader and premier of the Western Region, preferred to be in opposition to the central government, but Chief Ladoke Akintola, his deputy, saw no reason why the West should continue to isolate itself from national politics. Things became heated between the two and when a motion was moved on the floor of the Western Regional House of Assembly to remove Akintola as deputy premier, the House was thrown into a free-for-all-fight,

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<sup>85</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, "Visit of the Hon. Jaja Anucha Wachuku," 12th December, 1960

a scenario that made Tafawa Balewa declare a state of emergency in the West and install his friend, Dr. M. A. Majekodunmi, as the administrator of the region. This decision made a regional crisis assume national dimensions, which subsequently had major implications for national unity.

A High Court later absolved Akintola of any blame and ordered him reinstated as premier of the Western Region. While this was going on, the government of Tafawa Balewa charged Awolowo with corruption. This reached a new height when, weeks later, he and thirty others were charged with treason. All efforts by Awolowo to get a fair trial were blocked, and eventually he was sentenced to ten years imprisonment while Akintola was exonerated and reinstated as the premier of the West. As Awolowo's trial was going on, Akintola formed a new political party, United Peoples Party (UPP), and allied with the NCNC members in the Western House of Assembly as Akintola gained a foothold on the House while the disgraced Awolowo was on his way to Calabar prison.<sup>86</sup>

If the crisis in the Western Region was to open a sore that refused to heal, the 1963 census clearly complicated Nigeria's political arrangements and questioned the basis of Nigeria's existence. Before now, the relationship between the NPC and NCNC at the national level had become fractured and Akintola's UPP (later renamed the Nigerian National Democratic Party, NNDP) had usurped the NCNC as the NPC's coalition partner at the centre. Unsurprisingly, before the census figures were released, it was the Eastern-led NCNC that refused to accept it, claiming that the figures were concocted to give Northern Nigeria an edge in the politics of allocation. When revised census figures were released, the East yet again refused to accept them. The West was mute because under Akintola, it had joined forces with Balewa's NPC to form a

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<sup>86</sup> G. N. Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*, pp. 21-3

national government.<sup>87</sup> By 1964, faced with endemic political scheming and infighting, doomsayers had begun to predict the breakup of Nigeria. These predictions were not assuaged by the 1964 federal elections in which the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA)<sup>88</sup> was bent on using its national might to not only whittle down the powers of opposition groups but to make Nigeria a one-party state. Even before elections were held, the NNA claimed it had won unopposed 61 of the 167 seats that were constitutionally allotted to the North in the Federal House of Representatives.<sup>89</sup> This did not go down well with the opposition group led by Dr. Michael Okpara, the premier of the Eastern Region who concluded that the North not only planned to rig the December 1964 election but had a long-term objective of dominating the entire South. The North too, harboured the same feelings. It saw the South, led by the Igbo and Yoruba, because of their early exposure to Western education, as too dominant in the federation, and an element which must be resisted at all cost.

As it turned out, the South lost out in the political calculations at the federal level after the 1964 elections and when the West descended into political chaos after the 1965 regional elections, it was obvious to keen observers that disaster loomed on the horizon. Nigerians were fed up with their politicians who, until launching their political careers, had been teachers and journalists, but who had since decided to risk tearing the country apart because of their greed and selfish desire to be elected into high office. With the politicians battling for political sweepstakes during this period, it is safe to conclude that public office was a means for Nigerian politicians to enrich themselves and their families. This conclusion is given added credibility by the reactions of ordinary Nigerians to the ostentatious lifestyle of their politicians. They not only wondered in

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<sup>87</sup> G. N. Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*, pp. 25-33

<sup>88</sup> This party was formed by the Northern Peoples' Congress in alliance with Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party

<sup>89</sup> Post and Vickers, *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria*, Chapter 7.

bewilderment at how public office transformed the lives of politicians economically, but were convinced that their political leaders bickered amongst themselves<sup>90</sup> out of their own selfish interests and prayed for an end to the waste of scarce national resources.

The voters' prayer was answered three months after the October 1965 election in the Western Region. On January 1966, a group of hotheaded soldiers, largely of Igbo background, took over the reins of government through a coup. The coup claimed the lives of Nigeria's Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa; the Sultan of Sokoto and leader of the North, Sir Ahmadu Bello; the Premier of the Western Region, Chief Ladoke Akintola; Nigeria's Minister of Finance, Chief Okotie Eboh and a host of government functionaries from the North, West, and Mid-West. No Igbo politician was touched. To complicate matters, General Aguiyi Ironsi, the Igbo General Officer Commanding (GOC) the Nigerian army – who became Nigeria's president after Balewa was killed – refused to convict the Igbo officers who had carried out the coup plot. The North, for its part, believed that the Igbo were out to dominate the country while subjugating them. Citing the killing of their leaders and the sparing of the coup plotters as evidence. Concerns were heightened when Ironsi changed Nigeria's constitution from a federal structure to a unitary state. Key government appointments were left for Igbo in the new political structure. Developments were not helped by Igbo residents in North who taunted Northerners after they lost their leaders in the January 1966 coup. Pictures of Northern leaders were often displayed and the Igbo would ask sarcastically, "Was this not your god? Where is he now?"<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Larry Jackson, "Nigeria: The Politics of the First Republic," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (March 1972), pp. 277-302

<sup>91</sup> Effiong Noah, "The Nigerian Civil War and the Gullibles", *Africa Today*, Vol. 17, The Scholar's View: A Book Review (Indiana University Press, March-April 1970), p. 5

The immediate reaction to these sarcastic remarks was the counter coup of July 1966 which claimed the life of Ironsi and made Yakubu Gowon, a northerner, Nigeria's head of state. Before then, Nigeria had become hugely unsettled. There were serious riots in Northern Nigeria in May and September in which the Igbo were the main targets. In all this turmoil, there were signs that the Igbo might secede. Various efforts were made by the new Nigerian government to arrange for the participation of Eastern Nigerian representatives in national meetings to resolve the tense situation in which the nation now found itself, but all efforts came to naught. Amid all this, Ottawa expressed worry and continued to exchange views with its High Commissioner in Lagos and the British Government "as to what friendly countries like Canada could do to assist Nigeria in its difficulties."<sup>92</sup> One thorny issue was the difficulty of agreeing on a meeting place that would suit all participants, especially the military Governors. Appeals by Gowon to representatives of the Eastern Region to meet federal authorities in Lagos since Lagos was the federal capital fell on deaf ears. The representatives of the Eastern Region did not accept the assurances of their safety accorded to them by the federal authorities in Lagos. Amid this backdrop, the Nigerian Military Government made a covert approach to Canada asking that a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) aircraft be sent to Nigeria for a week or two so as to permit the Military Governors of the regions in Nigeria to have a meeting spanning several hours in the aircraft while they flew between two Nigerian cities. This request was tabled by the Department of National Defence (DND) to the Prime Minister, but after due consideration, Lester Pearson refused Nigeria's application. The Nigerians were informed that Canada was not ready to

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<sup>92</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, Memo for the Acting Minister, "Nigeria: British Proposal for Reconnaissance Mission Concerning Assistance to Nigeria", 9 November, 1966.



provide an aircraft for such a purpose.<sup>93</sup> Canada's objection may have stemmed from the desire not to be directly involved in the internal affairs of Nigeria. It is also probable that the Canadian government did not want to give the impression that they had taken the side of the Nigerian government since the request for RCAF assistance was made by the Nigerian federal government. In any case, it became obvious during the course of the war that the sentiments of the Canadian government rested with Nigeria.

As Nigeria was not conducive enough for the federal government and representatives of Eastern Nigeria to meet, the president of Ghana, General Joseph Ankrah, offered a way out, suggesting that the Nigerians meet in Aburi, Ghana for their constitutional talks. Surprisingly, Ojukwu agreed to this proposal! As preparations were made for the Aburi talks, the Nigerian federal government considered the use of the services of a Canadian expert when the constitutional negotiations had reached some advanced stage<sup>94</sup> but could not contact Canada eventually because the war did not provide room for dialogue between the representatives of the Nigerian government and their Eastern counterparts as both sides held uncompromising positions, which made negotiations impossible.

The Aburi Accord, as it has come to be known, resolved few of the problems faced by Nigeria. Gowon arrived in Aburi with the goal of mending fences with Ojukwu and gaining acceptance of the concept of one indivisible Nigeria, but Ojukwu came to Aburi with a different mindset. He wanted a confederal arrangement for Nigeria with a weak central power.

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<sup>93</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, File 20-NGA-14, Memo for the Acting Minister, "Nigeria: British Proposal for Reconnaissance Mission Concerning Assistance to Nigeria", 9 November, 1966.

<sup>94</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, File 20-NGA-14, Memo for the Acting Minister, "Nigeria: British Proposal for Reconnaissance Mission Concerning Assistance to Nigeria", 9 November, 1966.

Furthermore, Ojukwu wanted each region to have its own military composed of indigenes of the respective regions, a position to which Gowon was not ready to acquiesce.<sup>95</sup> Ojukwu, under the influence of top Igbo civil servants like Pius Nwokedi, Pius Okigbo and Cyprian Ekwensi – all of whom were determined to secede from the Nigerian state – addressed a press conference in Lagos on January 26, 1967 where he interpreted Aburi differently. To Ojukwu, Aburi meant a return to the *status quo* of January 17, 1966 when Ironsi made Nigeria a unitary state. Failing to do this, the East threatened to take a unilateral action to implement the provisions of Aburi by March 31, 1967 if the federal government refused to do so.<sup>96</sup> The implication of this is that the East, led by Ojukwu, had concluded to secede from the Nigerian state. Efforts by the Gowon-led federal government to stymie this move failed. Ojukwu rallied Igbo in other parts of Nigeria to ‘come home’. This exodus saw the Igbo vacate their properties and businesses in the North and West. As the Igbo flocked to their ancestral homeland, foreign governments such as Britain, the United States and Canada knew that Nigeria was on the brink of disintegration and were poised to mediate between the federal government and Ojukwu-led breakaway Eastern region.

Desperate diplomatic efforts thus began. The British, out of political and economic concerns, were the first to intervene. Sir David Hunt, the British High Commissioner in Lagos, went to Enugu to warn Ojukwu of the consequences of his actions and the probability of not being recognised by Commonwealth African countries, but Ojukwu boasted that Gowon dared not attack him and that it was time he sent troops to Lagos to “clear up the mess there.”<sup>97</sup> He also believed that the British favoured Northerners over Igbos. Consequently, he refused all entreaties to be pacified. He saw no Igbo future in the unity of Nigeria and when the United States

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<sup>95</sup> John de St Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), pp. 91-103

<sup>96</sup> St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War*, p. 102

<sup>97</sup> Sir David Hunt, “Diplomatic aspects of the Nigerian civil war”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 3:1 (1992), p. 12. St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War*, p. 104

Ambassador to Nigeria interceded on behalf Nigeria, warning him of the economic consequences of secession, Ojukwu reportedly said “all these factors had been considered.”<sup>98</sup> Ojukwu’s position drew strong criticism from the Canadian High Commissioner in Nigeria who asked: “is emotion in [the] East [Eastern Nigeria] now so high as to set them on [an] illogical and irrevocable path?”<sup>99</sup>

The Canadian government, considering the merit of the crisis, the international climate of opinion, the position of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and its own problem of internal separatism (Quebec), was not interested in a dismembered Nigeria. Canada also saw no merit in why Ojukwu should remain adamant after several compromises by Gowon to resolve the constitutional problems peacefully, and external pleas by foreign governments. Canada’s position was for Nigerians to resolve their crisis without partition and this was frequently debated among Canadian, British and American diplomats in Lagos. Even though Canada had some economic interests in Nigeria, it did not see those as factors justifying the lending of its weight behind Nigerian efforts. Canadian diplomats thoroughly analysed the situation without showing undue favouritism to either party. This view is brought home by correspondence exchanged by Canadian and British diplomats in November 1969.<sup>100</sup>

As was stated in one of the preceding paragraphs, the British had invested far too massively in Nigeria’s political and economic space to allow it to fracture. Sir David Hunt, the

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<sup>98</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, File 20-NGA-14, Action Copy from the Canadian High Commission, Lagos to Department of External Affairs, “Nigerian Political Situation”, 4 August, 1966.

<sup>99</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, File 20-NGA-14, Action Copy from the Canadian High Commission, Lagos to Department of External Affairs, “Nigerian Political Situation”, 4 August, 1966.

<sup>100</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, “Nigeria: British Proposal for Reconnaissance mission concerning Assistance to Nigeria,” 3 November, 1966

British High Commissioner in Nigeria during the civil war, was honest enough to admit this in his notes on the war,<sup>101</sup> but claimed that his government's reason for supporting Nigeria was not economic but political and that even though Nigeria's oil was in the hands of Biafra with Shell urging Britain to support Biafra, it refrained from doing so. In any case, British support for Nigeria was real and the government of Harold Wilson made no pretence about it. The British government knew that the Igbo constituted the bulk of the officer corps in the armed forces with the Hausa-Fulani and Mid-West tribes comprising the infantry, and probably thought that in the event of a civil war, the Igbo might run roughshod over the poorly trained Nigerian army. And so, on October 20, 1966, the British approached the Department of External Affairs to enquire about the prospect of a Canadian participation in a reconnaissance mission to Nigeria by White Governments of the Commonwealth to assess Nigerian economic and military needs in light of the developments there.

Even though Canada had an excellent working relationship with Britain, it was not ready to be embarrassed over an international issue it was still trying to assess. Canada's fears were heightened when its diplomats found out that Britain's military aid to Nigeria might expand beyond the training of officers on a large scale to providing British officers in operational roles as well as to the provision of a 'peacekeeping' force.<sup>102</sup> Canada's immediate reaction to the British proposal was to contact Australia to seek its views on the wisdom of the fact-finding mission. The Australians told their Canadian counterparts that they were not ready to provide military assistance to Nigeria but would view a request for economic assistance with consideration should the Nigerians request it.

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<sup>101</sup> Sir David Hunt, "Diplomatic aspects of the Nigerian civil war", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 3:1 (1992)

<sup>102</sup>LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, "Nigeria: British Proposal for Reconnaissance mission concerning Assistance to Nigeria," 3 November, 1966.

With the Australian position known and after deliberations by cabinet, Paul Martin, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, wrote to the British explaining that Canada was not convinced that the Commonwealth reconnaissance mission suggested by London was the most effective method to tackle Nigeria's economic and technical assistance problems and that any request by Nigeria for technical assistance from Canada should continue to be handled along established lines. Martin, however, assured the British that Canada would be prepared to be pragmatic in handling the situation if they received any such requests.<sup>103</sup>

Canada should not and did not have problems giving aid to Nigeria. In fact, since 1959, Nigeria had been Canada's priority on the aid-recipient list for Commonwealth African states. The prelude to the civil war nonetheless called for caution. Canadian diplomats reasoned that if aid was to be given to Nigeria, it should be channelled through international aid agencies engaged in Nigeria so as to avoid the awkward implications which a White Commonwealth 'reconnaissance' might bring. More importantly, Canadians were of the opinion that the reconnaissance mission might infringe on Nigeria's sovereign rights by favouring one region over another.

It is true that on the eve of the war, the Nigerian government warned against external involvement, but beneath the façade of Canada's decision to turn down the British proposal to participate in the reconnaissance mission was the need to give the warring parties and indeed the outside world notice that Canada was diplomatically neutral in the storm ravaging Nigeria. Largely owing to the balanced image it wanted to maintain, the Canadians, in an aide-memoire

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<sup>103</sup>LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, "Nigeria: British Proposal for Reconnaissance mission concerning Assistance to Nigeria," 3 November, 1966.

on Nigeria prepared by the Department of External Affairs, highlighted that “we [Canada] should need to be sure that the request [by Nigeria] was endorsed by Regional Governments.”<sup>104</sup>

On the eve of the war, the prospects for the survival of one Nigeria looked bleak with foreign governments brainstorming on what to do to calm nerves on both sides. The American Embassy, the British High Commission and the Canadian High Commission exchanged views on what might be done to break the gridlock between Gowon and Ojukwu. All agreed that Ojukwu had been insensitive and that he wanted a unified Nigeria only as long as the Igbo were in control in Lagos. Since Ojukwu saw the British as an ear of the Nigerian government, London thought Ottawa stood a better chance of persuading Ojukwu to drop his ambition to break away from Nigeria. According to Foreign Office officials, “we agree thoroughly that Canadians on the whole stand [a] better chance of being regarded as friendly advisers not interlopers or spokesmen for more interested great powers.”<sup>105</sup> As it happened, Ojukwu had made up his mind to fight perceived injustice and liberate his people from Northerners whom he felt had nothing in common with the Igbo.

Before the war began in July 1967, Ojukwu attempted to gain the sympathy of foreign governments. He wrote personal letters to foreign powers who could pressure Lagos into submitting to his demands. In his personal letter to Prime Minister Lester Pearson, dated March 16, 1967, Ojukwu explained that since July 1966, Nigeria had teetered on the edge of disintegration and that the indiscriminate killing of Eastern Nigeria military officers by their Northern colleagues had destroyed the unity of the army. For him, Nigeria was turning into a

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<sup>104</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs records, Volume 9329, File 20-NGA-14, “British Aide-Memoire: Nigeria”, 19 October, 1966.

<sup>105</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs records, Volume 9329, File 20-NGA-14, “Nigeria: British Views”

failing state, a reason why he initiated the Aburi meeting in January 1967. But to his chagrin, Ojukwu argued, Gowon had failed to implement the terms of Aburi. Ojukwu then added that he “[could not] allow this Region [Eastern Nigeria] to be enslaved through military occupation neither will I budge from the position that Aburi decision must be fully implemented.”<sup>106</sup> In presenting his case, Ojukwu failed to mention that it was Ironsi’s May 24 decree, ordering a unitary government for Nigeria, which had sparked rioting in the North. As Walter Schwarz has noted, Ironsi made a catalogue of political errors during his six months’ interregnum as Nigeria’s head of state and these ultimately set Nigeria on the path to civil war.<sup>107</sup>

Hostilities broke out on July 6, 1967 with the Eastern troops adopting a Napoleonic strategy which involved a straight thrust to Lagos. They crossed the River Niger, gaining decisive victories along the way, until they had reached the Mid-Western state with Lagos, the nation’s capital, not far away. Following that, the Federal troops took the offensive and slowly captured each of the rebel-held towns. The Federal troops’ strategy was to encircle and blockade the landlocked Eastern region, a plan that swung the tide of victory in their favour.<sup>108</sup> This strategy truncated Biafra’s access to the sea and cordoned off economic and military supplies. But Biafra was not ready to give up despite being isolated. The immediate reaction was to use the media to tell the world the atrocities the Nigerian government was committing. This was done by hiring *Markpress*, a Geneva-based firm, to carry out this assignment. *Markpress* reported to the world how genocide was being carried out in Eastern Nigeria, and how extermination of the Igbos was a deliberate policy of the Federal government. Images of starving

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<sup>106</sup> Personal letter from Ojukwu to The Rt. Hon. Lester Pearson, PM of Canada dated March 16, 1967 in LAC, RG25, DEA fonds, Volume 9410

<sup>107</sup> Walter Schwarz, “Political errors by Ironsi,” *Manchester Guardian*, July 30, 1966, newspaper clipping in LAC, RG25, DEA fonds, Volume 9410

<sup>108</sup> Sir David Hunt, “Diplomatic aspects of the Nigerian civil war”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 3:1 (1992), p. 13

‘Biafran’ babies coupled with those that had developed *kwashiorkor*, a West African protein deficiency, were brought to Canadian homes through the media. Lloyd Garrison, a reporter for the *New York Times*, whose columns frequently appeared in major Canadian dailies, wrote that “Despair shrouds Biafran Hospital as Children Die,”<sup>109</sup> while Charles Taylor reported on the “Horrors of war in fallen Biafran city.”<sup>110</sup> Stories such as these as well as letters to the editor such as Timothy Obiaga’s piece on Nigeria where she berated the Canadian government for not coming to the aid of suffering Biafra and asked why “Canada, as a senior member of the Commonwealth,” was insensitive “to the systematic annihilation of the 14 million people of Biafra,”<sup>111</sup> aroused the interest and reaction of Canadians and wondered whether the Nigerian government was not downright evil in deliberately starving babies and children? Television coverage, relayed to people’s living rooms almost daily, was even more effective in this regard.

Indeed, the Igbos won the media war as the effect of *Markpress*’ campaign reverberated throughout Canada, the United Kingdom and Western Europe. The media war was so effective that Adepitan Bamisaye, a Nigerian scholar of politics, asked: “Was it that the Biafran propaganda machinery under the direction of Bernhardt, of Markpress, in Geneva, was so efficient that it successfully misled everyone? Or did the gross inefficiency of the Nigerian information service compound the general ignorance about the complexity of the situation?”<sup>112</sup> In Canada, the public was enraged and saw the war as a ploy by northern Muslims to eliminate Christians in the East. They consistently urged their government to ‘act’ in the interest of the

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<sup>109</sup> Lloyd Garrison, “Despair shrouds Biafran Hospital as Children Die” *The New York Times* (New York, August 1, 1968), p. 1

<sup>110</sup> Charles Taylor, “Horrors of war in fallen Biafran city,” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, November 7, 1967), p. 33

<sup>111</sup> Timothy Obiaga, “Nigeria,” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, October 31, 1967), p. 6

<sup>112</sup> Adepitan Bamisaye, “The Nigerian Civil War in the International Press,” *Transition*, No. 44 (Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 32



Christians.<sup>113</sup> The *Globe and Mail*, for instance, noted “the old incompatibilities of Moslem north and progressive south are the recent slaughtering and suspicions.”<sup>114</sup> The one-sided position adopted by the Canadian public was also helped by the fact that the Nigerian government did little to quell the impression that the Igbos were hated and being exterminated as a result of the hatred. This period was politically and emotionally charged in Canada. Yet, the Canadian government found it uncomfortable, not to mention difficult, to explain to the public that the Nigerian civil war had transcended rights’ claims and had metamorphosed into a war of ego.

Ottawa believed that “the terms regarding the guarantees already put forward by the Nigerians at peace talks remain[ed] valid.”<sup>115</sup> Canada clearly understood that the rebels had employed propaganda with great dexterity and was sympathetic to the Nigerian situation because it knew the Federal government of Nigeria had been lax in presenting the merits of its case. According to the official, put private government view, “the public impact of the propaganda would have been much less if there had been vigorous and effective Nigerian information in Canada.”<sup>116</sup> Canadian diplomats hoped that Nigeria might mount a spirited campaign that would make the world see its side of the story, yet they did not relent in their efforts to see that the cessation of hostilities, once negotiated, was observed by Nigeria and ‘Biafra.’

One such effort were the attempts by Canadian-born Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Arnold Smith, to organise peace talks between the warring parties,<sup>117</sup> attempts

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<sup>113</sup> See letter from G. R. Harman, Office of the High Commissioner, Lagos to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, “Biafran Personalities”, June 26, 1970 in RG25, DEA fonds, Volume 9164

<sup>114</sup> Editorial, “Blockade in Nigeria,” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, July 8, 1967), p. 6

<sup>115</sup> LAC RG25, DEA fonds, Volume 9202, “Talking Points, Nigeria: Visits of Chief Enahoro”

<sup>116</sup> LAC RG25, DEA fonds, Volume 9202, “Talking Points, Nigeria: Visits of Chief Enahoro”

<sup>117</sup> Alan Harvey, “Canadian begins bid to reunite divided Nigeria,” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, July 7, 1967), p. 3

that bore fruit with their first meeting in May 1968. This session laid the foundation for an international observer group to visit Nigeria and 'Biafra' five months later to assess the genocide claim of the Biafran secessionists<sup>118</sup> with observers from Canada, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN).<sup>119</sup> Its term of reference was to investigate a "planned programme of systematic and wanton destruction of the Ibo people and their property."<sup>120</sup> Canada played an active role in this exercise "which demonstrated that allegations of genocide are unfounded."<sup>121</sup> The report of the observer team, however, did not portray Lagos in a favourable manner for the Canadian public.

Increasingly, the Nigerian government, too, became more sensitive to the negative campaign it was being subjected to from abroad as a result of the 'Biafran' propaganda and decided to send officials to friendly countries whose citizens were enraged because of the atrocious stories they had either read or seen on television and which were certainly widely believed. In Canada, the public continued to react to the crisis by condemning Lagos. This continued denunciation prompted the Nigerian government in 1969 to arrange a visit to Canada of Chief Anthony Enahoro, the Commissioner for Information and Labour, and Dr. Joseph Eytayo Adetoro, the Commissioner for Health, to clear the air on the position widely held by the Canadian public on the war. This visit to Canada was billed to serve two purposes: cooperation

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<sup>118</sup> Sir Rex Niven, *The War of Nigerian Unity, 1967-70* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1970), pp. 143-4

<sup>119</sup> The UN was represented by N. G. Gussing, the UK by Major-General Henry Alexander, Sweden by Major-General Arthur Raab, Canada by Major-General William A. Milroy and Poland by Colonel Alfons Olkiewicz. The OAU representatives were Major-General Sliman Hoffman from Algeria and Brigadier-General Negga Teghegn from Ethiopia. The UK later replaced Alexander with Brigadier Sir Bernard Fergusson. See Annex A, Cmnd. 3878 Nigeria no. 1 (1969), "Report of the observer team to Nigeria," 24 September to 23 November 1968,"

<sup>120</sup> Cmnd. 3878 Nigeria no. 1 (1969), "Report of the observer team to Nigeria," 24 September to 23 November 1968," p. 4. Also, see House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online to retrieve this document.

<sup>121</sup> LAC RG25, DEA Records, Volume 9202, "Talking Points, Nigeria: Visits of Chief Enahoro"

and assistance. The Nigerian delegation explained to the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs (SSEA) that Nigeria understood the continuing Canadian interest in the conflict stemming out of humanitarian concerns over the reported suffering of civilians in the Biafran area. This delegation attempted to clarify to the SSEA that reports heard and believed in Canada were propagandist in nature and that breakaway Biafra was in rebellion. Enahoro solicited the assistance of Canada on the need to supply arms to Nigeria so as to crush 'rebel' resistance once and for all.<sup>122</sup> The SSEA, despite the request, was not ready to budge on Nigeria's request, being readily aware of the political sensitivity of the crisis which had so heated up Canadian public opinion. He therefore told the Nigerian delegation that the position of Canada was quite clear: "Canada has no intention ... of interfering in what we recognize to be an integral Nigerian problem to be resolved primarily in a Nigerian and African context.... Canada continues to hope [that] the Nigerian civil war can be concluded through negotiations leading to the restoration of one peaceful federal Nigeria."<sup>123</sup> Canada's decision to not favour a 'crushing' of Biafra by arms, but at the same time her insistence on a united Nigeria are attributable to a myriad of factors: the effect on Canada's domestic politics, the nature of her relationship with Nigeria, her interest in Africa, and the nature of the climate of opinion on the issue.

The Canadian attitude to the civil war has been explained earlier but what needs to be stressed here is that the unwillingness of Canada to provide arms to Nigeria may be seen as Ottawa's strategic initiative not to be perceived by the public as aiding a "corrupt" Nigerian government, which, in the eyes of Canadians, had lost all sense of judgment and moral balance. In addition, there was also the domestic issue of Quebec separatism which the government had to

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<sup>122</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9202, "Talking Points, Nigeria: Visits of Chief Enahoro"

<sup>123</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 9164, "Talking Points"

grapple with.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, because of the domestic separatist threat – which began to manifest after the leftist *Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale* (RIN) with other separatist groups, won nine percent of the electoral votes in Quebec and reached a new height when the *Parti Québécois* was established in 1968 – the Trudeau government was adamantly opposed to sanctioning the legitimacy of separatist movements in federal states. More broadly, Ottawa traditionally opposed political change by force, a history that dates back to early Cold War threats in Europe. Canada's stance on the Czech communist coup of 1948 is a case in point. Giving the Nigerian government the license to crush Biafra might accord a measure of legitimacy to the secessionist desires of the Quebec *indépendantistes*. It could also have meant agreeing with Charles de Gaulle, the French President, on a policy on Nigeria, for de Gaulle had been an advocate of the dismemberment of Nigeria and had also lent public support for the 'state' of Quebec. De Gaulle favoured the partitioned (and hence weakened) Nigeria because from the perspective of Paris, a united Nigeria posed an ominous threat to the weak francophone states that surrounded it. On Quebec separatism, de Gaulle did not see any reason why Quebec, with its distinctive culture and identity, should continue to be in a federal arrangement in Canada where it constituted a minority. De Gaulle's views obviously were not ones Canada was interested in following. It is therefore not surprising that when a reporter sought the views of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau on Biafra, he sarcastically replied: "Where is Biafra?"<sup>125</sup> Canada's warm economic and political relations with Nigeria as well as the notion that Nigeria was capable of leading the rest of Africa

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<sup>124</sup> For a full understanding of Quebec separatism, see Samuel, T. J. (Thengananani John). *Quebec Separatism Is Dead: Demography Is Destiny* (Ottawa, Ont: John Samuel & Associates, 1994); Naidu, M. V. (Mumulla Venkatrao). *Quebec Separatism, Canadian Unity: Issues, Opinions* (Brandon, Man.: M.I.T.A., 1995)

<sup>125</sup> Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, p. 307; J.L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, *Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 276

to democracy certainly also influenced Ottawa's decision to favour a united Nigeria. Moreover, African countries, under the auspices of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU), a body formed in 1963 to provide a forum to pursue the African cause in the world, and whose mandate Canada had broadly supported, was averse to the idea of secession. The OAU preferred that the existing boundaries created by the colonialists be left intact. And coupled with the decision of the United States and Britain, two powers that impacted all facets of Canadian life, to favour a united Nigeria, Canada's decision was a logical one to make. In other words, it was simply in the interest of the Canadian government to have a strong and united Nigeria on the African continent, one that it could partner with to achieve its African and by extension, global objectives.<sup>126</sup>

As evidence has shown,<sup>127</sup> the genocide mantra of Biafra was invented, an unfortunate scenario that misled the Canadian public to believe that Lagos was deliberately exterminating the Igbo. What the Biafran propaganda succeeded in ingraining into the minds of Canadians and the West in general was a feeling that the Igbo were victims of an orchestrated plot to wipe out a successful ethnic group from the Nigerian state because they were perceived as threat to the "backward" Hausa/Fulani group in the North which held national power. In reality, in the proposed "Biafran state," the Igbo numbered no more than a third of the entire population.<sup>128</sup> There were other large ethnic minorities like the Efik/Ibibio and Kalabari who favoured a

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<sup>126</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 9410, "Niger Coup – Nigerian Views", May 1, 1974 Numbered Letter from Canadian High Commissioner in Lagos to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa)

<sup>127</sup> Cmnd. 3878 Nigeria no. 1 (1969), "Report of the observer team to Nigeria," 24 September to 23 November 1968"

<sup>128</sup> Effiong Noah, "The Nigerian Civil War and the Gullibles," *Africa Today*, Vol. 17, No. 2, The Scholar's View: A Book Review Issue (Indiana University Press, March-April, 1970), p. 6

federated Nigerian state and did not see their future in an Igbo-dominated Biafra.<sup>129</sup> Having analysed the remote and proximate causes of the war, it is safe to submit that the civil war was not all about the Igbo but a motley group of Igbo elites whose sense of patriotism had been eroded by their appetite for power. If the war were about the Igbo, all Igbo citizens would have supported the cause, but this was not to be. Some Igbo leaders clearly saw the futility of a strange ambition by some subversive elements to partition the country but were afraid to speak since overt opposition might have led to prosecution and even death. Such Igbo leaders, like Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ozumba Mbadiwe, had toiled for and believed in a united Nigeria, because it held great political and economic promise and could dominate the African political-economy. Consequently, the participation of these men in the Biafran struggle had been passive. Indeed, Azikiwe probably could not fathom why he had to take up arms against his friends in Lagos, people with whom he built Nigeria together. Instead of supporting the Biafran cause, Azikiwe advocated dialogue with the Nigerian government, an opportunity that almost presented itself at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting in London in 1969. Regrettably, these men came to London but were unable to actualise their mission because Ojukwu sent a 'Biafran' delegation to London to scuttle whatever initiatives Azikiwe and Mbadiwe had in mind.<sup>130</sup>

London had been designated as the venue for Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting in 1969 and Dr. Azikiwe and Obadiwe had gone there from Europe ostensibly to arrange discussions with the visiting Nigerian delegation. It is not clear how the 'Biafran' "hardliners" got to know that Dr. Azikiwe and Obadiwe were in London to meet the Nigerian delegation but

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<sup>129</sup> Effiong Noah, "The Nigerian Civil War and the Gullibles," *Africa Today*, Vol. 17, No. 2, The Scholar's View: A Book Review Issue (Indiana University Press, March-April, 1970), p. 6

<sup>130</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9164, "Nigeria: Rebel Presence in London during Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting" (Letter from Skrabec to Mr. Riddell of the DEA)

as it happened, the ‘Biafran’ delegation arrived in London to thwart the objectives of Azikiwe and Obadiwe. Led by P. C. Nwokedi,<sup>131</sup> Dr. Pius Okigbo,<sup>132</sup> and Godwin Onyegbula<sup>133</sup>, the delegation from Umuahia<sup>134</sup> neither spoke to the Nigerian delegation nor attended the Prime Ministers’ meeting but did enough to prevent Azikiwe and Obadiwe from having a discussion with the Nigerian delegation.<sup>135</sup> With their mission frustrated, the duo went back to Europe.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, Azikiwe and Mbadiwe’s resolve to seek audience with the Nigerian representatives at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ meeting only adds fresh significance to British views that many Igbo politicians were uncomfortable with the dominating role Ojukwu had chosen to play in the bid for secession without consulting them. The British were nonetheless right that many Igbo politicians supported him, though by no means all.<sup>137</sup>

As the war dragged on, it was apparent that Biafra was getting fatigued. If the Canadian public was moved by Biafran propaganda, their government was not. Having dissected the intersecting issues that led to the war, Ottawa reasoned that a united Nigeria would be in the interest of all. Consequently, it advocated the cessation of hostilities and urged both parties to embrace dialogue. Furthermore, the Canadian government promised that it would assist Nigeria

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<sup>131</sup> Former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs in Lagos prior to his retirement and subsequent commitment to Ojukwu’s cause)

<sup>132</sup> An economist employed by the Nigerian government who acted as economic adviser to Ojukwu. Like Ojukwu, he was from Nnewi.

<sup>133</sup> Onyegbula was Counsellor at the Nigerian Embassy in Washington until his return to Nigeria in late 1966 when he was appointed

<sup>134</sup> The Administrative Capital of Biafra

<sup>135</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9164, “Nigeria: Rebel Presence in London during Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting” (Letter from Skrabec to Mr. Riddell of the DEA)

<sup>136</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9164, “Nigeria: Rebel Presence in London during Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting” (Letter from Skrabec to Mr. Riddell of the DEA)

<sup>137</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9329, “Nigeria: British Views”

in its rehabilitation and reconstruction programme after the war.<sup>138</sup> Preaching dialogue did not make the Canadian government a pacifist. On the contrary, categorical imperative<sup>139</sup> demanded that a unified Nigeria be supported because if allowed to unravel, the Nigerian federation might leave in its wake a trail of chaotic governance by Africans who were still learning the art of governing their people through Western democratic methods. Biafra certainly had no *locus standi* for secession. The point being emphasised is that Biafran secession, without any valid argument, would have been a dreadful precedent for Africa with cyclonic effects. After all, when Gnassingbe Eyadema, a Togolese soldier trained in the French army, ousted Togo's first president, Sylvanus Olympio, in 1963, it only took less than two years for most African states to embrace the new "political order", an order that gained credence in Samuel Huntington's 1968 book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.<sup>140</sup>

From hindsight, the civil war was a needless exercise which robbed Nigeria far more than the country gained from it. The war no doubt decimated Nigeria's political economy. Although the Nigerian government tried to mend fences with representatives of Biafra, a lot of damage had been done. Prominent Igbo citizens who still felt aggrieved that their dream of a state did not come to fruition decided to apply their talents elsewhere. The case of Professor Sam Onwuka Dike is worth illustrating.

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<sup>138</sup>LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9202, "Talking Points, Nigeria: Visits of Chief Enahoro"

<sup>139</sup> This concept forms the kernel of Immanuel Kant's deontological moral philosophy. It advocates a moral obligation that must be respected at all times and not bound by a person's inclination. Ethically, the facts of the Nigerian case put a 'moral obligation' on Canada to not support the dismemberment of the country as it was capable of setting a dangerous precedent. For in depth understanding of the term, see, Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the 'Metaphysics of Morals'*, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

<sup>140</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Yale University Press, 1968)



Professor Dike was the first indigenous vice-chancellor of the University of Ibadan and the founder of the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) in 1955 along with its flagship journal, *The Journal of Nigerian History*, both of which promised to give life to research and the dissemination of scholarly Nigerian history. During the war, Dike served as Ojukwu's representative in Côte d'Ivoire and at times, combined this with a position styled "roving ambassador." Rather than return to the University of Ibadan after the war, he decided to take up a teaching assignment as professor of History at Harvard University in September 1970.<sup>141</sup>

Dike's case, however, was one of the few isolated ones. The civil war had shown that various ethnic groups in Nigeria had permeated each other's cultures to the extent that it became difficult to break the umbilical cord. For instance, Colonel Victor Banjo,<sup>142</sup> a Yoruba, fought on the side of Biafra in the course of the war. Similarly, certain Yoruba elements were punished for their association with what the Nigerian government perceived as a "subversive" Igbo cause. Wole Soyinka, Head of the Drama Department at the University of Ibadan, was detained under the government's emergency regulation on charges which included being in constant contact with Ojukwu and undertaking "commissions on behalf of the rebel leader, among them attempts to procure aircraft for the East."<sup>143</sup> In the same manner, certain Easterners pledged their loyalty to the Nigerian government throughout the Biafran campaign. For instance, three months after the war started, the Nigerian government established an interim administration in Enugu in the

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<sup>141</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9164, "Biafran Personalities", September 1, 1970, (Letter from Canadian High Commissioner in Lagos to the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs)

<sup>142</sup> He was later court-martialled and executed by Ojukwu because Ojukwu saw him as a traitor

<sup>143</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9164, "Appointment of Federal Administrator for Enugu," November 3, 1967, (Letter from Canadian High Commissioner in Lagos to the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs)

East and appointed Mr. U. A. Asika, an Igbo and lecturer in economics and political science at the University of Ibadan, as the Administrator of the Eastern Region.<sup>144</sup>

No doubt, women and children in Biafra were victims of the war as they lacked access to food and supplies. This was not a deliberate policy of the Nigerian government as Biafran propaganda had conditioned the world to believe. The Nigerian government had opened a ‘corridor’ for relief agencies to send food and supplies to Biafra with a proviso that each aircraft be inspected. The Nigerian government decided to scrutinise all relief supplies to Biafra because it harboured the feeling that “foreign elements” might conceal arms in goods allowed into the rebel territory. Nigeria’s proposal, however, did not go down well with Ojukwu. His reaction was that the food being sent by relief agencies would be poisoned if the Nigerians were allowed to inspect it. Such fears, as Ojukwu later commented, were unfounded. His reasons for rejecting the Nigerian proposal, as he told Lord Carrington who paid him a visit in the last quarter of 1969, were “mainly political.” If the Biafran people saw food coming from Nigeria with the permission of the Nigerian government, they would cease to believe the genocide story which was the core component of his internal propaganda.<sup>145</sup> It is distressing that the people of Canada bought into this propaganda and raised funds for the Igbo cause while denouncing their own government for not intervening on the Biafran side. Nonetheless, the Canadian government stuck to its guns by refusing to budge to what it conceived the ill-informed views of its citizens. Not that the government was callous; on the contrary, considering the facts of the case and the international ramifications of its policy on the war, it was only expedient that the government pursued its core interests regardless of public sentiments.

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<sup>144</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9164, “Appointment of Federal Administrator for Enugu,” November 3, 1967, (Letter from Canadian High Commissioner in Lagos to the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs)

<sup>145</sup> Sir David Hunt, “Diplomatic aspects of the Nigerian civil war”, pp. 17-8

Canada clearly analysed the merits of the case and acted in the right manner. While Ottawa had built up trust and was in a position to 'influence' Lagos, it still believed that the Commonwealth should be used as a channel for relating with Third World countries. While the Commonwealth continued to preach for dialogue and ceasefire, it was evident that it wanted a united Nigeria that would continue to play a leading role in African affairs. As has been said elsewhere, the contribution and the leading role played by Canada in the Commonwealth knew no bounds. It is doubtful if the Canadian media understood this aspect of Canada's relations with the Third World – a reason why they urged Ottawa to come to the needs of suffering Biafran babies. Needless to say, it would have been diplomatic suicide to be swayed by a public opinion that lacked an in-depth understanding of the case, in a world where collective security was the order of the day. The United States and Britain, after analysing the war, concluded that Ojukwu was fighting a lost battle. If these members of the Western alliance saw the war from the same lens as Canada, why should public opinion cause Canada to recognise a self-motivated, rent-seeking group of rebels and their hirelings bent on taking Nigeria backward? The 'Quebec Question' – which led to Ottawa's consistent opposition to any sort of ethnic-based separatist movement - should not obscure our understanding of Canadian policy during this period. While it was significant, extraneous factors like Ojukwu's insistence on ruling Nigeria, the attitude of the Commonwealth, OAU, and UN as well as the consensus of the positions privately held by British, American and Canadian diplomats, rendered whatever 'sympathy' Ottawa had for public opinion in Canada ineffectual.

## Chapter Two

### The Politics of Canadian Aid to Nigeria

“All animals are equal but some are more equal than others.” George Orwell.

The history of Canadian aid to Nigeria can be located in changes that unfolded after the Second World War: the creation of economic institutions for the planning of postwar economic order, the ideological rivalry between East and West that reshaped political alignments amongst states, the independence of states previously under the yoke of colonialism, and the need of developed countries to curry friends in the newly independent states and gain access to their markets. Canadian aid to Nigeria was subsumed within these changing international political, economic, and social nexuses. This chapter argues that Canadian aid to Nigeria was driven by an overwhelming conviction that Nigeria stood to play a significant role in achieving some of Canada’s primary international objectives. It will unsettle the notion harboured by the Canadian public that their government gives aid to the developing South out of ‘altruism.’ Ademola Adeleke’s doctoral dissertation, which focused on the Colombo Plan of 1950, has already argued that Canadian and indeed, Western aid to the South, was bound with “strings,”<sup>146</sup> and intended to achieve at least as much for the donor as the recipient nation.

Canada’s involvement in aid to the South is situated within the broad framework of the Colombo Plan of Action announced in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1950. The Plan was conceived after a proposal for an aid programme for Asia was presented by the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Percy Spender.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, the Plan became imperative because South-East Asia was deemed vulnerable to the communist threat, and to stem the tide, economic aid was seen by

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<sup>146</sup> Ademola Adeleke, “Ties without strings? The Colombo Plan and the geopolitics of international aid, 1950-1980” (University of Toronto: Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, 1996)

<sup>147</sup> Adeleke, Introduction, p. 1

the “White” Commonwealth as a tool to win over the newly-independent former British colonies of Asia.<sup>148</sup> There were other issues involved in the decision of the Commonwealth to give aid to the newly-independent countries of Asia such as the need for the regions to become economically developed and the continuous allegiance of newly-independent states to Western political and economic values, with the King as head of the Commonwealth,<sup>149</sup> but more fundamentally was the Communist threat, which was already making incursions into Asia after the inability of Korea to hold unification elections in 1948 led to greater division with the North establishing a communist government and the South, a right-wing, pro-American political system. These developments undeniably led to the Korean War (1950-53) and a lack of unanimity in the opinions of states in South-East Asia as the nature, degree, or even existence of the ‘communist threat’.

While Canada later enthusiastically embraced the Colombo Plan, its initial reaction was “niggardly.”<sup>150</sup> Canadians did not see any reason why taxpayers’ money should be expended on an Asian region which had little to render to Canada. Perhaps, Canadians were still wedded to the dream of the “North Atlantic triangle”, which involved the United States and Britain as the bedrock of Canada’s engagement with the outside world. The Canadian parliament and lawmakers dissected the pros and cons of Canadian aid to Asia, arguing that since Canada had

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<sup>148</sup> Adeleke, “Ties without strings?,” pp. 1-11

<sup>149</sup> There were two declarations by the Commonwealth member-countries in 1947. The first professed India a Republic and member of the Commonwealth while the other, signed by other states, acknowledged the King as the head of the Association. See Arnold Smith and Clyde Sanger, *Stitches in Time: the Commonwealth in World Politics* (Deutsch, 1981); John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada’s Department of External Affairs, Coming of Age, 1946-1968*, Vol. 2 (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), pp.35-7; 81-2

<sup>150</sup> I borrowed this word from Dominique Clemont’s article, Human Rights in Canadian Domestic and Foreign Politics: From “Niggardly Acceptance” to Enthusiastic Embrace, *Human Rights Quarterly*, Volume 34, Number 3, August 2012. Pp. 751-778

already committed itself to aid Asia through the United Nations,<sup>151</sup> it would amount to duplication of efforts if Canada sanctioned the Colombo Plan.<sup>152</sup> Few Canadian government officials supported a central Canadian role in the Plan. Nevertheless, its chief proponent, Lester Pearson, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, was able to convince the Canadian parliament that Canada's bilateral assistance to South-East Asia was in the overall political and economic interest of the country. Pearson understood that the struggle with the Soviets could and would not be restricted to Europe because it was assuming a global dimension. More so, the poor peoples of South East Asia were vulnerable to the enticement of communism through Soviet aid. All this made Pearson argue "that national isolationism, even Regional isolationism, was no longer possible in an international society which was becoming increasingly interdependent."<sup>153</sup> Eventually, he was able to convince his colleagues that "the only way to defeat communism was to show the people of Asia that it was the western democracies and not the Soviet Union that could best help them to achieve 'economic and social progress.'"<sup>154</sup> Thus, the controversy which plagued the Canadian parliament over the decision to embrace the Colombo Plan dissipated in favour of the senior diplomats who strongly supported the scheme: Lester Pearson, Escott Reid, Arthur Menzies, and Douglas LePan. It was these men who represented Canada at the Colombo Commonwealth Conference in Ceylon, which culminated in the successful negotiation of the Colombo Plan of Action. Contrary to what the name suggested, the Colombo Plan was not a

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<sup>151</sup> The United Nations was already funding an aid programme to South-East Asia under the United Nations Extended Programmed for Technical Assistance (UNEPTA), in which Canada was a participant.

<sup>152</sup> Jacqueline Shaw, "Grudging Gifts: Canada, the Colombo Plan and the Formation of an Aid Policy" (Carleton University: Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1992)

<sup>153</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 2285, "Commonwealth Meetings on Foreign Affairs, Colombo, 9 January, 1950"

<sup>154</sup> L. B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, 22 February, 1950, *House of Commons Debates, second session-21st Parliament* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950), quoted in Jacqueline Shaw, "Grudging Gifts," p. 37

broad plan at all, but rather a country-to-country arrangement in which the rich Commonwealth countries, specifically the “White Commonwealth,” pledged to aid the newly-independent countries of South East Asia. It was a bilateral arrangement that focused on consultation between donor and recipient countries.<sup>155</sup> The Colombo Plan was development-oriented in nature with the richer states, predominantly in the North, pledging to provide assistance to the less developed countries of Asia using their development plans as a guide over a six-year period.<sup>156</sup>

Even though Canada afterwards saw the utility of an outright embrace of the Colombo Plan, Jacqueline Shaw is critical of the attitudes of Canada after the original proposal by the Australians to set up an aid structure. Shaw argues that Canada was at least initially disinclined to see the need to give aid to South-East Asia, and in sharp contrast to the argument by Cranford Pratt that Canadian aid to South-East Asia was based on the new spirit of “internationalism,”<sup>157</sup> Canada’s aid was little more than “grudging gifts”.<sup>158</sup> Shaw demonstrates that Canadian government officials embraced the Commonwealth plan to aid South-East Asia because of the changing political realities of the time,<sup>159</sup> and the need for Canada to create trade and economic links with these new states.

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<sup>155</sup> David R. Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide: A History of CIDA and Canadian Development Assistance* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), p. 30

<sup>156</sup> A. F. W. Plumptre, “Perspective on our Aid to Others”, *International Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3, (Summer, 1967), p. 487; Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State? External Aid in Canada’s Foreign Policy* (University of Toronto Press, 1966) p. 71

<sup>157</sup> Cranford Pratt, “Middle Power Internationalism and Global Poverty,” in Cranford Pratt, ed., *Middle Power Internationalism: The North South Dimension* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), p. 5

<sup>158</sup> Jacqueline Shaw, ““Grudging Gifts”: Canada, the Colombo Plan and the Formation of an Aid Policy” (Carleton University: Unpublished Masters Thesis, 1992)

<sup>159</sup> The most important of this was the Korean Crisis which convinced Canadian politicians of the need to give aid to South-East Asian states under the Commonwealth Plan because of the necessity to prevent the infiltration of communism. Since communist and non-communist states would benefit from UNEPTA alike, it was sensible to make a commitment towards the Commonwealth Plan because helping

Nevertheless, the Colombo Plan marks a watershed in Canada's engagement with non-Western states: it laid the foundation for Canada's bilateral aid programmes with South-East Asian states, helped strengthen Canada's trade relations with them, helped position Canada as a key actor in the Commonwealth, and most importantly, served as a precursor to Canadian aid to independent African Commonwealth states, starting with Ghana in 1957.<sup>160</sup>

Little literature exists on Canadian aid policy in Africa during the independence decade. Like Canada's late entry in its relations with African states, most literature focuses on the 1980s and beyond.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, most scholarship is subsumed within the broad spectrum of Canadian aid to the global South. David Morrison argues that Canadian aid to Africa and indeed the South was characterised by humanitarian, political, and economic concerns; a tripod he calls the "trinity of mixed motives."<sup>162</sup> Using copious examples from the speeches of Canadian statesmen, Morrison argues that the trinity of motives formed the bedrock of Canada's aid policy. For him, Canadians had a penchant to assist the poor and less fortunate, stem the tide of communism in these countries, and promote Canada's commercial activities. Morrison's argument clearly aligns with Keith Spicer's view in *A Samaritan State?* Unlike Morrison, Spicer

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Commonwealth South-East Asian states in their economic development would promote the unity of the Commonwealth while shielding members from associating with communism. Additionally, Canada's position was such that it would play an expanded and leading role within the organisation. See Chapter Three of Shaw's work, pp. 78-104

<sup>160</sup> John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs, Coming of Age, 1946-1968*, Vol. 2, pp. 81-3; Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State?*, pp. 96-100

<sup>161</sup> Examples are: David R. Black, Jean Philippe Therien, and Andrew Clark, "Moving with the Crowd: Canadian Aid to Africa", *International Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 2, The New Development Debate (Spring, 1996), pp. 259-286; *Africa Matters: Time for a Renewed Commitment to Economic and Social Justice for Africa* (Ottawa: Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 2010); Dane Rowlands and Ian Ketcheson, "Multilateral Aid Coordination by the International Financial Institutions: An Examination of Canadian Development Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa" in Mak B. Arvin, ed. *Allocation of Foreign Aid and Economic Development: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives* (Greenwood Press, 2002), pp. 27-56

<sup>162</sup> David Morrison, *Aid and the Ebb Tide*, p. 12



is more critical in his assessment of Canada's aid policy. Even though there were pockets of humanitarianism in it, Spicer is right to conclude that political and economic imperatives predominated.<sup>163</sup>

Indeed, the humanist argument as advocated by Morrison is too cosmetic. As this chapter will show, Canada's aid policy to Nigeria was driven by political and economic rationales. Oft-repeated statements by Canadian policymakers that the country needed to come to the aid to states suffering in Africa did not align with the pattern of aid disbursement during the first two decades of Canadian aid to the South. Spicer shows in his work that over ninety percent of Canadian aid to the South in the 1960s went to Asia, with the remaining percentage – Nigeria getting a huge proportion – for African and Caribbean states.<sup>164</sup> This is a serious indictment of Pierre Trudeau's 1968 convocation address at the University of Alberta where he declared that "never before in history has the disparity between the rich and the poor, the comfortable and the starving, been so extreme; never before have mass communications so vividly informed the sufferers of the extent of their misery... We are faced with an overwhelming challenge. In meeting it, the world must be our constituency."<sup>165</sup> Unfortunately, these were words that failed to translate into actions. Canada's aid to Ghana, Nigeria, and later, francophone West-African states, showed that humanitarianism, if it existed in the early years of Canada's bilateral aid programme, paled in comparison to the premium placed on politics and economics. Africa loomed modestly on the horizon of Canadian thoughts during this early period. So did the Caribbean and Latin America. Nigeria enjoyed considerable Canadian aid because it was seen by

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<sup>163</sup> Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State? External Aid in Canada's Foreign Policy* (University of Toronto Press, 1966)

<sup>164</sup> Spicer, *A Samaritan State?* p.

<sup>165</sup> Speech by the Prime Minister of Canada to a Convocation Ceremony, which signalled the Diamond Jubilee of the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, May 13, 1968 quoted in David Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, p. 12

Canadian diplomats as a bastion on which Canada could anchor the political and economic thrusts of its foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa. Canadian diplomats saw Nigeria as a model for Africa – a prototype for championing Western causes. Moreover, Canada believed that there were vast opportunities for trade and political exchanges with a “developed” Nigeria in a changing world.<sup>166</sup> It was on this basis that the Canadian government announced its aid package for Africa in 1958. As Morrison has noted, “the anticipated emergence from colonial rule of Nigeria and other British African territories prompted a new Commonwealth Technical Assistance Program.”<sup>167</sup>

While the remote origin of Canada’s aid to Nigeria lay in the Colombo Plan of 1950, the immediate origin could be traced to the September 1958 Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference in Montreal. Indeed, the idea to give aid to Africa was conceived in 1958 and on September 4, a memorandum concerning the Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference to be held in the same month in Canada was submitted to the cabinet of the recently elected Diefenbaker government. The memorandum recommended the extension of the Canadian technical assistance programme to accommodate areas of the Commonwealth not covered by the Colombo Plan or comparable West Indies Program. The memorandum impressed on cabinet that these areas were predominantly in Africa. Since this proposal had to do with taxpayers’ money,

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<sup>166</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, File 12831-40, “New Mission in Nigeria,” 22nd January, 1960

<sup>167</sup> Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, p. 34. Plumptire, “Perspective on our Aid to Others” commented on Nigeria as an important factor in the floating of Canadian aid to Africa that “it is sad to think of her [Nigeria] jovial Finance Minister [Okotie-Eboh] lying, some years later, murdered in a ditch.” P. 490

it suggested that the cost of the proposed program not exceed \$8, 500, 000 for several years. This proposal was promptly approved by cabinet on September 7.<sup>168</sup>

The Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference was convened by Donald Fleming, Canada's Minister of Finance, and held at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal.<sup>169</sup> Trained as a lawyer, and a long-time activist in the Conservative Party, and more recently a Toronto-based MP, Fleming's first experience with Africa was in September 1954 when he was selected as part of a Canadian delegation to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, but it was not until the 1958 Conference in Montreal that his 1954 experience bore fruit. Fleming had been thrilled by his two-month visit to Africa, and his Toronto home became a "Mecca" of some sorts for Canadians interested in learning from his experiences. He also spoke to a number of groups including the Canadian Clubs of Toronto and Ottawa on various aspects of African life as he had seen it.<sup>170</sup> Increasingly, he found himself becoming more involved and interested in African affairs. Indeed, African affairs were to take centre stage at the 1958 Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference in Montreal, whose organisation fell into Fleming's lap by the virtue of his position as Canada's new Finance Minister,<sup>171</sup> thereby putting him in a position to make a case for sub-Saharan African countries making a transition from British rule to independence.

Canada's objectives for championing the conference were both economic and political. These were succinctly encapsulated in Fleming's budget speech on June 17, 1958, where he noted that the essence of Canada's participation at the conference was to increase avenues for

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<sup>168</sup> "Technical Assistance to Nigeria" LAC, RG25, DEA Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1

<sup>169</sup> A. F. W. Plumptre, "Perspective on our Aid to Others", p. 490

<sup>170</sup> Donald Fleming, *So Very Near*, pp. 274-5

<sup>171</sup> Donald Fleming, *So Very Near*, p. 510

trade between Canada and the expanding numbers of countries of the new Commonwealth, encourage “world liquidity in the means of international payments”, and “assist in the economic development of Commonwealth countries, particularly the new members which are less industrially advanced....” He also noted that these objectives would help deepen relations between Canada and the multiracial Commonwealth and “contribute more effectively to our joint economic and political strength and in all these ways, by our achievements, defeat the threatening inroads of communism.”<sup>172</sup>

The priority the new Canadian government accorded the conference revealed their desire to expand trade and create a network of friends in the South. Fifteen preparatory meetings were held by the organising committee prior to the opening of the conference. When the conference officially started on September 15, it was only logical that Fleming be made the chairman. He was joined on the Canadian delegation by cabinet colleagues Gordon Churchill, James Macdonnell, Raymond O’Hurley and Sidney Smith.<sup>173</sup> The British also had the privilege of being represented by four ministers: Derrick Heathcote-Amory; the Earl of Home and Chancellor of the Exchequer; the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations; and the President of the Board of Trade, Sir David Eccles; and Paymaster General, Reginald Maulding. Australia was represented by its Deputy Prime Minister who also doubled as the country’s Minister for Trade, John McEwen, while New Zealand and South Africa were represented by A.H. Nordmeyer and A. J. R. Van Rhijn, their respective Finance Ministers. Independent states of South-East Asia like India and Pakistan, which had enjoyed Commonwealth aid since 1950, were also participants.<sup>174</sup> In total, eleven sovereign nations were represented. Apart from Ghana, whose Finance Minister,

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<sup>172</sup> Donald Fleming, *So Very Near*, Vol. 1 pp. 509-10

<sup>173</sup> Sidney Smith was Secretary of State for External Affairs but unfortunately died soon

<sup>174</sup> Donald Fleming, *So Very Near*, Vol. 1, pp. 511

K. A. Gbedemah, attended, other African states who came at the conference were still under colonial rule and had to participate by proxy. They were led at the conference by the Earl of Perth, Minister of State for Colonial Affairs. Nigeria was represented by its Finance Minister, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, a big, flamboyant man who became the favourite of all with his keen sense of humour. Fleming wrote that “when he [Okotie-Eboh] was about to say something humorous he would begin to laugh before he even uttered it. This set the delegation laughing before they heard the joke.”<sup>175</sup>

The two-week Montreal Conference was an epoch-making one, focusing on a broad gamut of economic challenges bedeviling the world. Different aspects of economics were discussed, from macro and micro economics, to monetary and development economics. The conference ended with a report which announced the Commonwealth Scholarship Project, a scheme designed to permit one thousand scholars to study in other Commonwealth countries at any given time, with the United Kingdom defraying half the total cost, and Canada a quarter. The Canadians also seized the opportunity the conference afforded to announce an annual increase from \$35 million to \$50 million for the Colombo Plan over a three-year period, an increase to the tune of \$10 million to the Federation of the West Indies as part of the Canadian aid scheme to Caribbean Commonwealth countries, the contribution to the Commonwealth Scholarship Programme, and increased technical assistance, loans and grants to the less-developed countries which would enable them to buy Canadian agricultural products, notably wheat and flour, which only served to cement the country’s leadership role in the Commonwealth. In addition, the Canadians, through their Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, announced a \$500, 000 aid package

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<sup>175</sup> Donald Fleming, *So Very Near*, Vol. 1, p. 515

for Africa.<sup>176</sup> The Canadians thought that since Ghana had assumed independence a year earlier and Nigeria would become free in less than two years, it was important to provide them with development assistance. This aid package was an important initiative by the Canadian government considering Canada's other commitments to international organisations as well as the fact that the 1950s was an age of gargantuan domestic projects like the St. Lawrence Seaway and Trans-Canada Pipeline which put heavy demands on the Canadian treasury.

At the end of the conference in Montreal, on September 22, Mr. Fleming announced the Canadian Government's intentions for Africa. He pointedly made it obvious that the new program would be for Africa with the initial package "subject to reconsideration." It is instructive to note that this program covered territories outside Africa, the Canadians stating that "we have no intention to extend [the] programme to cover non-commonwealth territories in Africa or elsewhere."<sup>177</sup> The aid package for Africa had nothing to do with the Commonwealth Scholarship Program, which was jointly agreed to by all the conferees, and which was a separate bilateral programme for the emerging colonies in Africa. This was expanded in 1959 under a new nomenclature: the Special Commonwealth Africa Aid Program (SCAAP) under the auspices of the Commonwealth.

In a nutshell, Canadian aid to Nigeria from 1959 came under these broad categories: Special Commonwealth Africa Aid Program (SCAAP), Commonwealth Technical Assistance Programme (CTAP),<sup>178</sup> and the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP).<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Donald Fleming, *So Very Near*, Vol. 1, pp. 509-520

<sup>177</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Technical Assistance to Nigeria"

<sup>178</sup> This accommodated countries that were hitherto omitted from SCAAP

<sup>179</sup> Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State?* pp. 55-56

In Africa, Ottawa had its preferences on which states should benefit from the Canadian package. The Department of External Affairs believed that emphasis should be on the independent Commonwealth states, namely Nigeria and Ghana. Ghana had already become independent and was getting Canadian aid under a different aid umbrella which had ended on March 31, 1958. Nigeria, for its part, was seen by the Canadians as having a population which dwarfed that of Ghana and was scheduled to become independent on October 1, 1960.<sup>180</sup> In other words, Nigeria represented a bigger prospect for actualising Canadian policy in Africa. Economically, it represented a huge potential market for trade, a fact the Canadians were to emphasize later in their relations with Africa. Politically, its system was modeled after the West. Canadians, therefore, saw in Nigeria the right mix of systems with which to forge an alliance which served as a more than sufficient premise to allocate it substantial Canadian aid.

If the conference put the Commonwealth on the African map, it also positioned Canada on Africa's horizon. Independent and colonial African countries alike saw Canada as a country genuinely interested in their welfare and development. The various speeches made by the Canadians and the announcement of a special aid package for Africa meant that Canadian statesmen were 'honest' in their intentions for Africa. This landmark event heralded Canada's entry into the turbulent waters of Africa's political economy as an aid-giver with an apparently deep-seated interest in the welfare of the continent. The end of the conference marked the beginnings of Canada's aid to Nigeria.

It appears that certain elements in the Canadian society were also interested in the disbursement of aid to Nigeria. One of such group was the missionary arm of the Presbyterian

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<sup>180</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Technical Assistance to Nigeria"

Church of Canada. These Canadian missionaries were one of the Western missionary groups involved in evangelising work in Africa. Their history in Africa dates back to the last decade of the nineteenth century where they began their attempts to convert the natives to Christianity.<sup>181</sup> These Church groups had contributed to the colonial development of the natives by establishing schools, ostensibly to enable them to read and write, and subsequently help in proselytizing the gospel to the natives in the hinterland areas.<sup>182</sup> These missionaries were agents of change, with their activities in Africa preceding those of their government. Although the Presbyterian Church in Canada was a late entrant into missionary work in Nigeria, it worked in close cooperation with the Church of Scotland, which had operated in Nigeria for over a hundred years. As of 1959, a year before Nigeria became a sovereign nation, the Presbyterian Church of Canada was responsible for the instruction in 23 Nigerian primary schools. What is more, it played a part in the administration of some secondary schools and teacher training colleges.<sup>183</sup> Despite its efforts, the Presbyterian Church of Canada was convinced that it needed to do more to expose the natives in Nigeria to Western education and the Christian gospel but was hampered by a shortage of funds. The Church, therefore, felt that since a new aid program had been announced for Africa, it should turn to the Canadian government and try to influence the percentage that would be allotted to Nigeria. It is unclear if the Missionary wanted to access some funds for its schools but what is known was the Missionary crusade to influence a substantial percentage of Canadian aid for Africa to Nigeria.

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<sup>181</sup> Jacob Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: the making of a new elite* (London: Longman, 1965)

<sup>182</sup> Jacob Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: the making of a new elite* (London: Longman, 1965)

<sup>183</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Technical Assistance to Nigeria"



On February 13, 1959, Norman Robertson, the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, received a Presbyterian delegation led by Reverend Dr. E. H. Johnson, the General Secretary of the Board of Missions, and a layman, Mr. H. M. Jackson of Simcoe, Chairman of the Overseas Committee of the Board. Dr. Johnson explained to Robertson that he and Mr. Jackson intended to press the government on the importance of Canadian economic assistance to Nigeria. He stressed that the Presbyterian Church was engaged in missionary work there and that activities had reached an advanced stage, pointing out that Nigeria, with a large population which was predominantly Black, would become an independent member of the Commonwealth in the following year. According to Johnson, the absence of a significant White settler faction, coupled with the administration of the British, meant that, Nigeria was “emerging into independence with very little of the animus against Whites and the West that was so noticeable in other African countries.” Consequently, Dr. Johnson suggested that “a modest [amount] Canadian aid might do a disproportionate amount of good.”<sup>184</sup> The deputation of the Presbyterian Church of Canada revealed that interested parties within Canadian society favoured Canadian aid to Nigeria.<sup>185</sup> It also demonstrates that these parties preferred that the Canadian government concentrated its aid efforts on areas where it could see results rather than scatter it across a range of countries where its impact might be insignificant.

In response to the Presbyterian Church of Canada’s deputation, Mr. Robertson answered Dr. Johnson that “he was really preaching to the converted,” explaining that the Canadian government was anxious to provide technical assistance to Nigeria and that an initial programme

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<sup>184</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, “Technical Assistance to Nigeria”

<sup>185</sup> Johnson does not provide information on “interested parties” that favoured Canadian aid to Nigeria. But we can safely conclude that there were other Canadian missionary groups in Nigeria that were disposed to more allocation of Canadian aid to Nigeria.

which accommodated Nigeria had been announced at the 1958 Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference in Montreal. Mr. Robertson, however, did not disclose to Dr. Johnson that the Canadian plans were being scuttled by the absence of direct representation in Nigeria.<sup>186</sup> This was settled by the expedient of shifting responsibility for communications with the Nigerian authorities on technical matters to Canada House in London. Canada House was later replaced by the Office of [High] the Commissioner for Canada to Nigeria on June 1, 1960,<sup>187</sup> the date Canada opened its diplomatic office in Nigeria, four months in advance of the country's independence.

Certain features are noticeable in the aid disbursement to Nigeria. First, the aid was technical. Second, the aid was "tied." Third, the Canadian government employed a programme approach. And fourth, the aid was for specific projects aimed at addressing recipient country needs which Canada had the ability to shoulder.

Technical assistance has to do with the provision to the recipient country by the donor of experts in fields which the aid terms cover. This includes the training of nationals of the recipient country to take over from the experts at the expiration of the terms of the aid. The training may be held anywhere: in the recipient country, in the donor country or any other place both parties deemed appropriate for the training to occur. In the case of Nigeria, Nigerians were trained by Canadian experts in Nigeria as well as in Canada, and in rare cases, in the United Kingdom.

Another feature of the aid package announced by the Canadians at the end of the Montreal Conference is that it was "tied," which simply means Canadian aid was to be spent in

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<sup>186</sup>LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Technical Assistance to Nigeria"

<sup>187</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Technical Assistance to Nigeria"

Canada. Except in cases where a concessional loan was given, most of Ottawa's aid was tied and therefore had to be spent on Canadian products. Under the agricultural scheme, aid was spent, notably, on wheat and flour,<sup>188</sup> while foreign nationals had to come to Canada for education, with the money used to pay tuition in Canadian universities.

The Canadians also adopted a "program approach" in the implementation of their aid. This was done by first ascertaining the amount of aid a recipient country should enjoy. Once this was figured out, Ottawa tried to determine whether the aid requested by the recipient was incorporated into the country's development plan and whether Canada had the capacity to provide it. This was not static but subject to the changing priorities of Canadian foreign aid policy. Initially, Ottawa saw education and surveys of natural resources as priorities for Africans; communications and transport equipment for the Caribbean; and for India and Pakistan, power and irrigation coupled with agricultural commodities.<sup>189</sup> The planning approach, which was the final component of the Canadian aid package, involved "built-in" arrangements which included other variables to improve the impact of aid. For instance, if a donor requested capital aid, the Canadian government would incorporate technical assistance in the package as an added component. Spicer calls the result of this a "composite project."<sup>190</sup>

There was a marked feature in the disbursement of Canadian aid to Nigeria prior to independence. While External Affairs bureaucrats revelled in the idea of channelling their resources through the Nigerian central government, the crevices that shaped Nigeria's political contours precluded it from doing so. Before independence, Nigeria's political structure revolved around a central government and three big provinces - the Northern, Western and Eastern regions

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<sup>188</sup> Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State?* pp. 76-89

<sup>189</sup> Spicer, *A Samaritan State?* pp. 65-6

<sup>190</sup> Spicer, p. 66

– with one of the provinces (the Northern region) so big that it towered above the other two. Owing to certain British policies and the need to protect their economic and political interests, these provinces were divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. Even though the multifaceted ethnic groups that constituted the geographical enclave called Nigeria were working towards an independent country, they embraced different identities. Before and after independence, Nigerians first identified themselves with their regions, and only then their country. Their representatives in the regional governments recognised this dual identity and integrated it in their domestic policies and relations with foreign governments. This was to play its part in the politics of aid.

When the British colonial oligarchy granted the regional governments self-rule,<sup>191</sup> they masterminded their relations with foreign governments based on cultural characteristics and political affiliation. For instance, the North, which was predominantly Muslim, preferred to relate to the Islamic states in the Middle East. It was a cardinal policy of the Northern government not to have relations with Israel. This was borne out of solidarity with the Palestinian cause, which in the Northerners' view, was a premeditated conspiracy against Muslims. The Eastern region, on the other hand, related with Israel and saw no reason why it should start relations with the Muslim states in the Middle East. For the West, its relations were dictated by pragmatism. The region had drawn up a development blueprint for the area, but this could not be achieved without foreign governments coming to its aid. The Western region continued to strengthen and expand relations with foreign governments that could assist in its development. It is thus not surprising that the region was the first to benefit from the newly announced Canadian aid for independent Commonwealth African countries in 1958.

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<sup>191</sup> The East was the first to be granted self-rule in 1957. It was followed by the West in the same year and two years later, the North.

One of the first aid initiatives Nigeria enjoyed from Ottawa was the provision of six months' training in Canada for two cooperatives' officials from the Western region as well as the assignment of an expert who acted as Chief Executive Officer for the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria.<sup>192</sup> Western Nigeria was noted chiefly for the export of cocoa, and during the booming years after being granted autonomy by the colonial government in the 1950s, had founded the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria. Managing this cooperative required a degree of managerial competence which the region could not provide, yet it was in dire need of an expert to fill the post of Chief Executive Officer of the Cooperative Union. The Union undertook education as well as publicity programs on behalf of all cooperative societies in the region. It also trained staff for the promotion and extension of cooperation and arranged for the audit of registered cooperative societies. In addition, the Union needed the services of such an expert to train local staff in advancing the cause of the Union. The Western Region wanted this because it believed this expertise would improve the management of the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria, which would ultimately result in an increase in the number of societies and membership and consequently a larger volume of agricultural products that would be marketed by the societies. The foreign expert was expected to work for two years, help reorganise the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria, and pattern it along the objectives of the Union.<sup>193</sup>

Before the Canadians announced their aid package for Commonwealth African countries, the government of Western Nigeria had understood that to develop its Cooperative Union, it needed to take a cue from the well-developed and flourishing cooperative scheme operating in

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<sup>192</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, Letter from K. Goldschlag of the Economic Division II, Department of External Affairs to Mr. G. Lamarque, United Kingdom High Commission, June 2, 1959

<sup>193</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Application by the Government of the Western Region: Exchange of Personnel between the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria and the Cooperative Union of Saskatchewan."

the province of Saskatchewan in Canada. Seen as the “Banner Province of Co-operation,” almost every type of cooperative could be found there.<sup>194</sup> At the core of the Saskatchewan cooperative movement was the need by many citizens, particularly those involved in agriculture, to come together to address common economic challenges. Needless to say, cooperation formed a fulcrum of Saskatchewan social and economic life. Indeed, the development of cooperatives among the people of Saskatchewan arose out of necessity. This became imperative because farmers and local producers needed to get favourable markets and pricing for their produce in order to earn and sustain a decent standard of living.<sup>195</sup> From the cooperative grain marketing to consumer cooperatives to financial cooperatives, the province of Saskatchewan proved a potent example of how local ingenuity could be developed to meet local needs. This social innovation did not go without notice outside Canada, especially in the Third World, as states emerging from colonial rule sought the expertise of Saskatchewan’s Cooperative Union to develop a prototype in their countries. By contributing to the development of cooperatives in Third World countries, the Saskatchewan Co-operative Union served, in Christine Purden’s words, as “agents for change.”<sup>196</sup>

With the Western Nigerian government seeing the Cooperative Union as a model, it sent a deputation to the province to see firsthand how the Saskatchewan Cooperative Union was being administered. In the last week of September 1957, Chief C. D. Akran, the Region’s Minister of Development, in the company of his under-secretary, Mr. P. H. Balmer, visited the Department of Cooperation, Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan. He had an interview with the Premier, T. C. Douglas, who had come to power in 1944 after the electoral victory of the

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<sup>194</sup> Forest Scharf, *Co-operatives in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1959), p. 17

<sup>195</sup> Scharf, *Co-operatives in Saskatchewan*, pp. 21-5

<sup>196</sup> Christine Purden, *Agents for Change: Credit Unions in Saskatchewan* (Saskatchewan: Credit Union Central, 1980)

Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, a socialist movement with deep roots in the cooperative movement. Chief Akran spent considerable time at the province's Department of Cooperation, trying to gather all the information and advice he could for the advancement of his home region. He also had a short meeting with the directors of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and was thereafter taken for a drive by the officials of the Department of Cooperation to the Federal Department of Agriculture's Experimental Station east of the capital.<sup>197</sup>

Although it recognised that the Canadian government had announced an aid package for Commonwealth African countries, the Region left no stone unturned in its bid to ensure that it got assistance from the Department of Co-operation in Regina. As a result, the Western Region in 1959 applied to the Canadians for the exchange of personnel between the Co-operative Union of Western Nigeria and their Saskatchewan counterparts. From the way the application was designed, it was obvious that Western Nigeria was determined its application be not turned down and, therefore, included certain cost-sharing mechanisms as inducements, especially to part with an expert from the Department of Cooperation. The Region promised to pay for these services with housing, office accommodation and local transport to the tune of £7, 260, a pledge the Canadians considered generous.<sup>198</sup> Whether Western Nigeria had introduced cost-sharing features in their application for an expert to manage their Co-operative Union or not, the Canadians were nonetheless ready to approve this application.

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<sup>197</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Re: Chief C. D. Akran," Numbered Letter from the Department of Co-operation, Regina, Saskatchewan, dated October 2, 1957. It was addressed to W. C. A. Knights, Esq. Executive Asssistant, Saskatchewan House, Chester Street, London and signed by B. N. Arnason, Deputy Minister.

<sup>198</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File No. 14020-N7-1, "Application by the Government of the Western Region: Exchange of Personnel between the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria and the Cooperative Union of Saskatchewan."

Western Nigeria considerably exploited the loopholes in the Canadian aid scheme for Africa. It continued to send to the Canadians applications for technical assistance, most of which were granted by the Canadians.<sup>199</sup> In August 1960, Chief Simeon Adebo, the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury of the Western Region, visited Ottawa to negotiate training for five nursing tutors. This request was granted by McGill's School of Graduate Nurses.<sup>200</sup> It was hardly surprising, given the initiative shown, that the Western Region of Nigeria led the way in the percentage of Canadian aid allotted to Nigeria.

While Canada was trying to help get Nigeria on its feet, it was setting a bad precedent. Giving aid to governments along regional lines would be inequitable since the three regions had different needs. More so, Nigerians administering the government of Northern Nigeria were inexperienced and were naïve in the politics of applying for aid from foreign governments. While the Western and Eastern governments applied to Canada for aid under the Commonwealth Technical Assistance Programme (CTAP), Northern Nigeria did not. Of the three regions that emerged before independence, it was the least developed, a political entity with which the Canadians were uncomfortable. Yet even though Ottawa was still ready to help, the Northerners did not make requests for aid. Under the CTAP, African countries had to seize the initiative to apply for aid. Ottawa, however, was still hopeful that it would be able to help Northern Nigeria.

The opportunity to do so came when Saudana of Sokoto (Sir Ahmadu Bello), the leader of the North, decided to visit Canada before independence in 1960. Canadian officials were

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<sup>199</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, Outgoing Message from the Department of External Affairs to Lagos High Commission, "Nursing Tutor Trainees Western Region," August 24, 1960.

<sup>200</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, Outgoing Message from the Department of External Affairs to Lagos High Commission, "Nursing Tutor Trainees Western Region," August 24, 1960.



interested in committing Canadian aid to the North and were determined to ask him what his administration was doing towards meeting Northern Nigeria's developmental goals. In 1955, the Northern Region had designed a five-year development plan for the rapid material progress of the area. Under the plan, capital expenditure was earmarked for the construction of roads and other public works, education, water supplies, agriculture and health. Sixty-eight percent of the funding for the development plan was expected to come from local sources, twenty-five percent from colonial development grants and the remainder from loans and grants from the Nigerian Government.<sup>201</sup> The North had not understood the practical art of making aid work for development, a factor behind their not requesting assistance under the CTAP. When the Northerners eventually requested technical assistance under the CTAP, the timing was wrong. In mid-1960, the North sent an application to Ottawa – a request for a research entomologist. This request was made at a time when the Canadian government had committed all funds budgeted for the CTAP in 1960-61, but officials in the aid office were prepared to ask cabinet “to consider sympathetically a few requests, of high priority for economic development”<sup>202</sup> in the interest of Northern Nigeria.

The Northern region had cause for requesting a research entomologist. It had been ravaged by tsetse flies, which had resulted in severe outbreaks of sleeping sickness in the region, and efforts by the Tsetse Control Unit to stem the tide had produced few results. The Northern

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<sup>201</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, “Technical Assiatnce to Nigeria,” From Economic Affairs Division, July, 20, 1960.

<sup>202</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, “Technical Assiatnce to Nigeria,” From Economic Affairs Division, July, 20, 1960.

region, therefore, needed an entomologist who could immerse himself in research into insecticides so as to generate an effective method to control the sickness in the region.<sup>203</sup>

The requesting of aid from foreign governments by the three regions obviously revealed the deep fissure that was a central component of politics in Nigeria. Policymakers in Ottawa knew they were not going to continue along this line for long, and sought ways to harmonize Canadian aid to Nigeria, but it appeared Nigerians were not ready to set aside their ethnic differences and work together for the sake of their common development and national unity. Ottawa understood that the three regions had grown to be suspicious and jealous of each other and did not want each region to construe its intentions as favouritism for one over the other. Therefore it had to contend with the issue of maintaining a “balancing act” in its relations with the three regional governments. This reared its head in March, 1960 when the opportunity came to send career civil servants to Canada for training in public administration at Carleton University. Canada had earmarked three slots for Nigeria but a problem arose when an automatic spot was handed over to the Federal Government of Nigeria, leaving the three regions to juggle for the remaining two positions. This was a source of concern for Canadian diplomats, especially officials in Canada House in London. They were hopeful that a fourth spot might be conceded to Nigeria to demonstrate, at least, that Canada was a neutral player in the murky waters of Nigeria’s politics. Consequently, J. M. Harrington of the Office of the High Commissioner of Canada in London wrote to G. C. Hall of the Economic and Technical Assistance Branch in the

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<sup>203</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, “Canadian Technical Assistance,” Letter from K. D. S. Baldwin, Senior Assistant Secretary for Economic Planning, for Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Finance, Northern Region to Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Finance, December 29, 1959

Department of Trade and Commerce, Ottawa, that a fourth slot be given to Nigeria in the Carleton program so as not to cause unhealthy rivalry among the three regions.<sup>204</sup>

This request was granted by Canada but fortunately the government did not have to concern itself with such dilemma in the future. The independence constitution had placed the responsibility for direct communications with foreign governments in the hands of the Nigerian Federal Government. More so, the Nigerian government had followed this up by setting up a section in the Ministry of Economic Development to supervise all matters relating to technical assistance. This was done with a view to harmonizing and improving arrangements for foreign aid.<sup>205</sup> This new arrangement enabled Lagos to become the effective coordinator of aid with foreign governments and international agencies. It was within this setting that Nigeria enjoyed a productive aid regime from Ottawa in the post-independence decade.

Another consideration that should not be overlooked when putting into perspective Canada's aid to Nigeria is that it was encapsulated within the orbit of Nigeria's national development plan. Development planning had been a key feature of Nigeria's domestic policy since the colonial era. It involved laying out broad policies for improving the various segments of Nigerian society and the means for achieving them. This was a phased approach with the intent of improving social life while trying to metamorphose the Nigerian economy and society from a rural, agrarian base to a more complex socio-economic organisation.

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<sup>204</sup> J. M. Harrington, "Commonwealth Technical Assistance", LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 36-9E-01. March 11, 1960

<sup>205</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, "Technical Assistance in Nigeria," Numbered letter from Tom Carter to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs

During the early period starting in 1914, development planning was a top-bottom arrangement with the colonial government planning for Nigeria through the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the United Kingdom, and meant to satisfy British ends.<sup>206</sup> Developments after World War II altered this motive. The wave of nationalism that swept through Asia and Africa meant that the sun was about to set on the British Empire. Consequently, colonial officials formulated plans that would ensure the economic and social stability of dependencies while at the same time giving natives the opportunity to contribute to the development of their countries by participating actively in the implementation of those matters directly affecting them.

In 1946, although still a colony, Nigerians had the opportunity to build their own nation. This owed largely to the Colonial and Welfare Development Act, passed in Britain in 1940 and amended in 1945 to indicate a commitment to the economic and social development of its colonies in Asia and Africa as well as beginning the process of ceding constitutional power to them. For Nigeria, what emerged from the Act was a ten-year plan for the development and welfare of Nigeria. This plan was expenditure-driven with the objective of putting the funds for development released by the imperial government into constructive use.<sup>207</sup> It guided planning in Nigeria from 1946 but had to be revised in 1951 to accommodate constitutional changes in the colony.<sup>208</sup> As this plan neared its termination stage, a temporary plan, Development Finance, was put in place between 1955 and 1956. Then in 1956, an economic blueprint<sup>209</sup> for Nigeria was

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<sup>206</sup> Ladipo Adamolekun, *Public Administration: A Nigerian and Comparative Perspective* (Lagos: Longman, 1983), p. 157

<sup>207</sup> Ladipo Adamolekun, *Public Administration*: p. 157

<sup>208</sup> Ikeanyi Okey Marcellus, "Development Planning in Nigeria: Reflections on the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2003-2007," *Journal of Social Sciences* 20 Vol. 3 (2009), p. 200

<sup>209</sup> This was called "Economic programme of the government of the federation of Nigeria 1955-60"

announced by the government, which remained in place until independence, and it was on this development platform that Nigeria largely profited from Canadian aid.

Canadian assistance to Nigeria was mainly in the forms of technical assistance<sup>210</sup> and capital aid. Canadian officials reasoned that since Nigeria was preparing for independence and the responsibility of governing the country would rest on Nigerians themselves, it was important to train them so as to prepare them for the looming task of administering their country.

Capital aid, on the other hand, comprises funds and services that contribute to the permanent social and economic architecture of a recipient country, and encompass projects, commodities and financial aid.<sup>211</sup> Under the SCAAP, Canada placed undiluted emphasis on projects and technical assistance. Nigerians were to be educated so as to allow for a seamless transition from colony to nationhood. More so, Canada invested in projects that would enhance the economic well-being of this country that was solely populated by its original African inhabitants. Although a few loans were granted to Nigeria, these paled in comparison to the amount spent by Canada on technical assistance and the implementation of projects in the country.

It is obviously a herculean task to analyse all Canadian aid to Nigeria in the first decade of independence. Moreover, listing each item would be tantamount to taking an inventory, and tell us little more about the scope of the program or especially its impact. Therefore, the approach that follows will be to select a single example from both the technical and project assistance categories, analyse them and evaluate their impact on the overall objectives of

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<sup>210</sup> This has been defined earlier.

<sup>211</sup> Keith Spicer, *A Samaritan State?* p. 124

Canada's policy during the independence decade. It is noteworthy that Canadian aid during this period followed the same trajectory in planning and execution.

One salient feature of Canadian aid to Nigeria during this period was that most aid was "development-oriented." Admittedly, donors aid provided to recipient countries, more often than not, was laced with a political mindset, engaging in certain types of aid that boosted their prestige or enhanced their political status in recipient countries. It was not uncommon to see donors invest in visible projects that were the cynosure of all eyes. For Canada, power and irrigation schemes to Southeast Asian states under the Colombo Plan were good cases in point. In the case of Nigeria, however, the favourable political impact of most of the aid was not immediate. It is difficult to evaluate what Canada stood to gain in the short run by giving "development aid" to Nigeria in the 1960s, but in the long run, this became noticeable in the warm disposition of local newspapers towards Canada, the positive attitudes of Nigerian government officials towards Canada, and the overall perception among the citizenry that Canada was a benign power.

The major component of Canada's technical assistance to Nigeria was the training of Nigerians to take over the reins of administration from the British who were packing their bags to leave the country. This took different forms: from the training civil servants in Canada to the Canadians who were enlisted to work in Nigeria under SCAAP, Canadians actively prepared Nigerians for the onerous task of governing their nation. This measure under Canada's technical assistance programme was divided into four components: the education, medical, engineering and agricultural fields.<sup>212</sup> One area where the impact of Canadian aid can be felt and easily

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<sup>212</sup>LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, "Canadian Technical Assistance," Letter from the Treasury Department of Western Nigeria

assessed is in the establishment of Nigeria's department of foreign affairs, a case which clearly mirrors Canadian thinking on, planning of, approach to and execution of aid programmes in Nigeria. It also reflected Nigerian attitudes and the premium placed on Canada as a "trusted" power that could steer Nigeria on the path of development.

A foreign affairs department is *sine qua non* for every modern state. It is the conduit through which every state engages in intercourse with the outside world. It is the face of every state and the medium through which official communications to states are channelled. For Nigeria, therefore, the department of foreign affairs was one of the government ministries that quickly had to be created. The significance of this lay in the fact that Nigeria, under colonial rule, had been seen as a success story. Foreign governments were thus anxious to start relations with it as soon as it emerged from its colonial status. Hitherto, the colonial office in London was responsible for Nigeria's conduct with the outside world, a role that overnight would fall to Nigerians themselves.

Establishing a department of foreign affairs and corresponding foreign missions requires adequate planning. Most importantly, a career in Foreign Service requires the expertise of officials who are skilled in the art of diplomacy and combining this with language skills needed to excel in the field. Nigeria had few of such officials. Even then, most of them had been trained and had gained what experience they had under the British who managed the Nigerian civil service prior to independence. It is therefore difficult to gauge the administrative competence of the Nigerians saddled with the task of establishing a department of foreign affairs for the country.

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to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, signed by O. I. Afe, Director of Recruitment and Training.

The lot of establishing the Nigerian Foreign Service fell on L. O. V. Anionwu,<sup>213</sup> a Nigerian civil servant with over a decade's experience in the employ of the British colonial administration. Putting in place modalities to establish a government department is, no doubt, a difficult exercise. Indeed, Anionwu's problems were compounded by the lack of skilled personnel and funds to execute this assignment. Nigeria's purse was relatively lean during this period that the Prime Minister had, in the first quarter of 1960, authorised Anionwu to establish a basic Department of Foreign Affairs and a limited number of diplomatic posts, focusing initially on the United Kingdom, the United States, the United Nations, Liberia, Ghana, the Congo, Sierra Leone, and consular facilities in Khartoum and Jedda.<sup>214</sup> The selection of these outposts was strategic: Britain's decades of controlling Nigeria meant that the Nigerians saw inherent gains in maintaining a close affinity with the former colonial power; the position of the United States in global politics could not be taken for granted; while the new international order was centred on the United Nations. The choice of Ghana and Sierra Leone was owed largely to a shared colonial and political heritage (the choice of Liberia was unclear) while the Congo represented a prospect for trade. The proposed missions in Khartoum and Jedda were largely out of consideration for the Northern emirate, which preferred to maintain trade and cultural relations with the Muslim world.

This, however, did not mean that Nigeria did not see the possibilities of deepening political and cultural relations with countries like Canada. On the contrary, at the outset, the paucity of funds was a handicapping factor that precluded Nigeria from actualising its broad plans. This was evident in 1960 when Lem Carter, the Canadian High Commissioner, inquired of

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<sup>213</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, File 12831-40, "Assistance to Nigerian Department of External Affairs," 12 September, 1960

<sup>214</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, File 12831-40, "Assistance to Nigerian Department of External Affairs," 12 September, 1960



the Nigerians their time-table for opening a mission in Ottawa, the Nigerians making it clear that Ottawa was one of their priorities as soon as funds became available.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, the need to open a Nigerian embassy in Canada became a point of note when A. Haastrup of Nigeria's Ministry of External Affairs paid a courtesy call on the Canadian High Commission in Lagos, some weeks after Nigeria's independence. He seized the opportunity the visit afforded him to discuss pressing issues about Canada-Nigeria relations, noting that despite the fact that Canada had opened its embassy in Nigeria, a reciprocal arrangement might not be in the offing because "there would be so many calls on the personnel and funds of the new Nigerian diplomatic service in the next year or so." Instead, he suggested that for now informal contacts be maintained between Nigerian Foreign Service officers and the DEA. In his view, "the best course would be for the Nigerian Permanent Delegate to the United Nations and the officers of his staff to make visits to Ottawa from time to time, particularly during quiet periods at the United Nations."<sup>216</sup>

While Canada would have preferred to deal directly with a Nigerian embassy in Ottawa, Canadian diplomats understood the financial limitations imposed on Nigeria. Consequently, they were content with transacting with Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs pending the opening of a Nigerian consulate in Ottawa. The Nigerian position to not open an embassy in Ottawa in 1960 is necessarily explained when one considers that the Nigerian parliament only approved a budget

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<sup>215</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, File 12831-40, Numbered Letter from Carter to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, "Canadian-Nigerian Relations, 26 October, 1960

<sup>216</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, File 12831-40, Numbered Letter from Carter to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, "Canadian-Nigerian Relations, 26 October, 1960

of £500, 000 that year for Anionwu to execute his assignment,<sup>217</sup> which included staff recruitment, allowances, communications, and general administration.

By 1959 Anionwu had known that he would be saddled with the responsibility of establishing Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had taken proactive steps to ensure that the project was executed to the best of his ability. One of the decisions he made in 1959 was to visit the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa to seek help in setting up a sister department for Nigeria. After meeting and discussing with some officials at the DEA, he was given some extracts from the Department Manual of Instructions and some administrative papers that it was assumed would help him in setting up Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Ministry.

No doubt, Anionwu found his trip to Canada richly rewarding. He considered the administrative papers very useful but hoped that more could be done to help him in his assignment. Canada was nonetheless itself constrained in this period. The SCAAP had not been introduced and it was difficult to train Nigerians under the package for Commonwealth African countries announced by Fleming months earlier in Montreal. Canadian officials reasoned that if Nigerians could not be sent to Canada for training, Canada might as well deploy staff from the DEA to Nigeria to help the country set up its foreign ministry. The Canadians had already seconded a trained diplomat to Ghana and another to the Federation of Nyasaland, and when officials at Canada House suggested this avenue to Anionwu, he was receptive to the possibility. Canada's motive was well captured in a letter by Graham McInnes (posted at Canada House) to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs in which he suggested that Nigeria should be

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<sup>217</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, File 12831-40, "Assistance to Nigerian Department of External Affairs," 12 September, 1960

assisted because “there exists here [Nigeria] a real opportunity for specialised technical assistance in a field where it would pay immense dividends in goodwill.”<sup>218</sup>

The setting up of Nigeria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one area where Nigerians benefitted from Canada’s technical expertise. Canadian officials were seconded to Nigeria to share with their Nigerian counterparts their ideas and ways and means of organising the Ministry. More so, as funds became available under the SCAAP, Nigerians who were to hold the reins in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were sent to Canada. For instance, Mr. Haastруп, who would later become the head of the political section of Nigeria’s Ministry of External Affairs, was trained by the DEA in Ottawa.

Canada’s technical assistance continued to follow this two-way process in the 1960s. Canadian experts were detailed to Nigeria to oversee various fields while concurrently, Nigerians were sent to Canada for training. Nowhere was this more visible than in the areas of education, health, agriculture, and co-operatives. By 1960, Nigerian students in Canada numbered 41, with half of this number (20) at McGill, five at the University of Manitoba, and two each at Dalhousie University, St. Mary’s Hospital in Montreal, the Ontario Agricultural College, the University of Guelph, and Sir George Williams College in Montreal. There was one student each studying at the University of Toronto, the University of Ottawa, the Provincial Mental Hospital, British Columbia, and Montreal General Hospital.<sup>219</sup> Nigeria was highly favoured and enjoyed more Canadian aid in the development decade more any country in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1960 alone, Nigeria made a request for 16 trainees and 22 experts, which included eight teachers, a principal

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<sup>218</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7845, File 12831-40, Graham McInnes, “Assistance to Nigerian Department of External Affairs,” 12 September, 1960

<sup>219</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1. 2, Memo from Carter to the Information Division of the DEA, “Nigerian Students in Canada,” March 22, 1960.

for the Cooperative College, Ibadan, three teacher training advisers, a pathologist, a radiologist, an obstetrician and gynaecologist, research entomologist<sup>220</sup> and a commercial broadcasting expert for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>221</sup> Excepting the broadcasting expert, whose posting was arranged under SCAAP, all Nigerian requests were granted.

Undoubtedly, Canada contributed to the development and stability of Nigeria during the independence decade under SCAAP despite the obvious reality that Canadian aid to Nigeria was in conformity with Canada's political and economic objectives in sub-Saharan Africa, which were the discouraging of African states from entertaining communism as an option and the deepening of trade ties. That said, Africa was given less priority compared to South Asia because of the Soviet's (and China's) relative lack of involvement in Africa and their geographical proximity to South Asia which enabled them to more easily influence that region. Unfortunately, space does not allow us to attempt a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the impact of Canada's technical assistance on the various sectors in which Canadian experts helped Nigeria in the independence decade, but it was clearly beneficial.

Apart from technical assistance, special projects constituted a focal area where Canadian aid benefitted recipient countries. In the case of Nigeria, these projects were multifaceted and spanned different sectors of the economy. There were projects in power and irrigation, communications and transport, industry, health, education, and natural resources.<sup>222</sup> The planning and implementation of these projects assumed the same line with the recipient making a

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<sup>220</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1. 2, Letter 475 of March 2, 1960 from Canada House to the DEA in Ottawa.

<sup>221</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1. 2, Letter 317 of March 1, 1960 from DEA to Canada House.

<sup>222</sup> O. I. Afe, Director of Recruitment and Training, Western Region of Nigeria to the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, "Canadian Technical Assistance," LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7898, File 14020-N7-1, 18 March, 1960.

request and the Canadian government determining the merits of the project and whether or not it had the capacity to grant the aid. Two examples of such aid are central to our discussion. The first was the aerial survey and mapping of Nigeria, which began in 1961 and continued until 1965, and the construction of the Kainji Dam across the River Niger between 1964 and 1968. These projects were distinct for their contributions to the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria. While the Kainji Dam contributed immensely to hydro-electric power generation in the country, generating 760 megawatts for the major cities in Nigeria, its impact paled in comparison to the aerospace survey, a project wholly funded by Canada at a cost of nearly \$3.5 million.<sup>223</sup>

The Kainji Dam was a monumental project in development planning. Once the project was approved, a Canadian, Jasper H. Ings, was made the chairman of the Niger Dam Authority.<sup>224</sup> Executing the project came at a price.<sup>225</sup> In the end, it was completed in 1968 and commissioned in 1969. The Kainji Dam is still central to power generation in Nigeria today.

The aerospace survey represented by far the most significant contribution by Canada to Nigeria's development plans of the 1960s. This project was significant because of the cost involved and its nature. Unlike the Kainji Dam that was visible and one from which Canada could make political capital, the aerospace survey was a non-visible venture, yet one that exercised an enormously beneficial impact. The comprehensive mapping of the newly independent country's natural resources became imperative as it entered a phase where it needed to plan based on the resources available as well as to attempt to develop those resources for economic growth and development. This project was the first in the history of Nigeria's

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<sup>223</sup> This figure is worth \$27 million in buying power today. See the United States' Bureau of Labor Statistics, [www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm), accessed on July 15, 2013.

<sup>224</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 9410, no date.

<sup>225</sup> Canadians grappled with heavy clouds, harmattan haze and periodic rainfall, which stymied the rapid completion of the project.

developmental planning. Although the British colonial government held conferences on Nigeria's resources, the aerospace survey by Canada was *primus inter pares* because Nigeria it resulted in being able to locate where her natural resources lay and thus the survey's results served as a guide and blueprint for national development. The desire to map out the country's natural resources was first identified by the Nigerians before independence. W. D. Scott of the country's Ministry of Economic Development had in June 1960 written to Thomas Carter, Canada's High Commissioner in Nigeria, highlighting the benefits that might accrue to Canada and Nigeria if Canada invested in an aerospace survey and training. For him, "this is one of the fields in which Canadian technical assistance could be of great value...[and]... it might be worth looking into the matter now with a view to starting a project next financial year."<sup>226</sup> In his response, Carter confirmed that this request was sensible.<sup>227</sup>

This project was started in 1961 and completed in 1964, with the Canadians providing the aircraft for the project and pilots to fly them. Indeed, the attitude of Nigerians through different stages of the project demonstrated their need for it and the confidence they reposed in the Canadians. Indeed, those who participated had vivid memories of Nigeria as they were provided with comfort they never experienced anywhere in the form of decent accommodation and transportation to move freely around the countryside. Spicer points out that in executing the project, Canadians experienced no problems with Nigerians, a far cry from their experiences in other Commonwealth developing countries where Canadians often expressed frustration and

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<sup>226</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, Numbered letter from Carter to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, "Technical Assistance – Experts in Survey Training", June 22, 1960.

<sup>227</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, Numbered letter from Carter to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, "Technical Assistance – Experts in Survey Training", June 22, 1960.

even indignation at their treatment by locals.<sup>228</sup> As Spicer has argued, while Nigerians' attitude to Canada was secondary, it helped built up the morale of the Canadian technicians, which on the whole proved central to the timely completion of the project itself.<sup>229</sup>

No doubt, the aerospace survey was a landmark in the history of Western aid to Nigeria. It helped the country discover her "mineral deposits, forests, arable land, waterways and likely sites for power schemes, irrigation projects, roads, and railways,"<sup>230</sup> which enabled the country rationally to plan for future development. This project also, unequivocally, presented Canada in a favourable light to Nigeria: a partner-in-the-progress of the country.

The Nigerian case was one in which the donor felt satisfied because its objectives for engaging in the project in the first place were met. Nigerians understood the importance of the project and were grateful for it. For instance, of all the ongoing projects in the country in 1963, the Canadian aerospace survey was the only project mentioned by Nigeria's President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, in his independence anniversary broadcast on October 1, 1963.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, Nigeria put to use all the maps produced by the Canadian contractor that oversaw the execution of the project. The importance attached to the project by Nigeria as essential component for national planning was not shared by some newly-independent Commonwealth states. The Pakistani experience is a case in point. Canada had expended \$ 3, 3000, 000 on the survey of West Pakistan soils and geology but unfortunately, the Pakistani government, citing

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<sup>228</sup> Spicer, *A Samaritan State?* pp. 153-161

<sup>229</sup> Spicer, p. 158

<sup>230</sup> Spicer, p. 155

<sup>231</sup> Spicer, p. 161

external security, banned the use of the maps. In the end, only about ten of the 450 maps produced were put to use.<sup>232</sup>

In sum, Canadian aid to Nigeria in the development decade was a solid investment that earned Canadians the goodwill of Nigerians because the manner in which projects were planned and executed left them with the impression that Canada was an honest power and not pursuing sinister goals. Despite having to spread its resources to accommodate other developing countries, the value of Canada's aid to Nigeria ranked at the very top, only eclipsed by the amount of British assistance.<sup>233</sup> Canadian aid to Nigeria concurrently benefited the recipient and the donor. The Nigerians not only put the Canadians in a position of trust, they sought them out at every opportunity for consultation and assistance. On the Canadian side, new economic markets were potentially opened. Unfortunately, this early engagement was not sustained in later decades as a constellation of negative factors: fiscal indiscipline, corruption, a lack of entrenched democratic culture and gross violation of human rights on the Nigerian side, and the general Canadian apathy toward most issues African, sadly eroded the gains made in the 1960s.

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<sup>232</sup> Spicer, pp. 157-158

<sup>233</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, "Technical Assistance in Nigeria," Numbered Letter from Thomas Carter to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 8 June, 1960. It should be noted that as at 1960 when Nigeria became independent, the United States had not started its programme of technical assistance in Africa but it was projected that once it started, it would provide Nigeria with \$5 million. See Carter's letter to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7898, File 14020-N7-1, "Technical Assistance in Nigeria," 8 June, 1960. It is however unclear when the US started its African aid programme but primary documents available suggest that Canadian aid ranked at the top.



## Chapter Three

### The Communist Factor in the Promotion of Democracy in Nigeria

“Democracy and socialism are means to an end, not the end itself.” Jawaharlal Nehru

Nigeria was ushered into nationhood a full-fledged democracy. From an embryonic stage when it led the way as the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to introduce elective principle into its constitution in 1922, the country’s democracy and its institutions had, by 1960, matured to the point where it had become strategic to Western interests in Africa. Western countries courted this “African bride” by providing aid incentives and institutional support mechanisms to help her nurture her democracy to stability, and Canada was not left out. This chapter assesses Canada’s contribution towards the building and development of democratic “culture” in Nigeria in the first half of the independence decade and concludes that Cold War considerations apart, the impetus to trade with Nigeria was a strong factor that propelled Canada to contribute to the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria before the gains made were swept away by the ugly developments of 1966, which led to the civil war the following year. This argument rests largely on the connexion – which Canada held firmly – between democracy and free trade as central to economic growth and development.

The period leading to the independence of most African states was greeted by an East-West rivalry that reached a fever-pitch and Canada, therefore, in the first decade of Nigeria’s independence, demonstrated that the country was concerned about democracy and saw an inherent logic in sound democratic culture as a requirement for trade to thrive in Third World countries. As Strobe Talbott has noted, “democracies are more likely to be reliable partners in

trade and diplomacy.”<sup>234</sup> Indeed, Talbott reinforces the oft-held democratic peace theory by Immanuel Kant that democracies do not go to war with one another although Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder have challenged this view.<sup>235</sup> Its inconsistencies notwithstanding, democracy provides a template for people to participate in the overall process of governance, and also provides a framework for people to have a say in those issues that directly affect them. International trade is well served by democracy because players are partnering along the same philosophical lines.

Democracy as a foreign policy recipe has been served by liberals in Western societies to their non-Western counterparts since World War I but it was not until World War II that it gained steam as Allied powers equated the notion with freedom of states under oppression, with the West making a claim for independent states in Eastern Europe that were occupied by Germany during the war, and under Soviet domination following World War II. The political nature of democracy was diluted with economics after the Second World War with the world bifurcated by two opposing ideologies: capitalism and communism. It was during this period that Canada’s foreign policy became assertive.

The promotion of democracy as a foreign policy option to be pursued by Canada can be located in the developments that occurred after World War II. The wartime alliance which comprised the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, Canada and others had been destroyed over ideological differences which the United States and the Soviet Union found impossible to bridge, the outcome of which created a rivalry that was to define international politics for forty

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<sup>234</sup> Quoted in Anthony Fenton, “Canada’s Contribution to “Democracy Promotion”, in *Canadian Dimension* Vol. 40 No. 6 (Nov/Dec. 2006), p. 27

<sup>235</sup> Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Belfer Center Studies in International Security, The MIT Press, 2007)

years. The Soviets had introduced communism and were convinced it was the natural path to follow. On the other hand, the West, led by the United States, believed that communism was evil because it would stifle democracy and human freedom and was incompatible with the capitalist economic system. Amid all this, there was confusion everywhere including Canada. As Denis Smith has observed, “post-war Canada thus found not security but [a] new anxiety; not quiet independence but new dependence in the conflict of the superpowers.”<sup>236</sup> This was not what Canada had hoped for. It had hoped that the end of the Second World War would put an end to global insecurity and usher in a period of relative peace and stability where Canada could play a modest role shaping the broad configuration of decision-making as well as participating in the framework for the implementation of those decisions. Now, Canada had to devise a new policy for a world where rival economic and political ideologies were drawing states to the arena of war with statesmen preoccupied with the tasks of avoiding another major conflagration. It was clear where Canadian sympathies would ultimately be in this rivalry – firmly in the ‘Free World’ camp - but at the outset of the East-West rivalry, Canadian diplomats debated the complex issue and hoped that the United Nations would guarantee global peace and security by resolving the competition between the two competing ideological blocs. Sadly, the United Nations proved feeble, and was paralysed by the Cold War, a huge setback for advocates like Lester Pearson, Canada’s Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, who commented “that little confidence can be placed in the ability of the United Nations to guarantee security, until it can reflect friendly relations between the Great Powers themselves.”<sup>237</sup> East-West rivalry had gained a new political primacy and Canada quickly lined up behind the United States to fight what it

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<sup>236</sup> Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear: Canada and the Cold War, 1941-48* (University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 5

<sup>237</sup> John English, *Shadow of Heaven: The Life of Lester Pearson, Vol. 1* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen, 1989), p. 300

considered the evils of communism. Indeed, the unease between the Soviets and the United States became the overriding factor in the development of Canadian foreign policy.<sup>238</sup>

The shaping of Canadian policy, however, did not come without vigorous debates. Mackenzie King, the prime minister, initially favoured a situation where Canada would favour both the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>239</sup> In other words, he hoped that the Cold War could be avoided and Canada able to continue to relate to both powers. King's views were naïve to say the least, as relating with both powers in a confident manner with Cold War tensions rising was certainly not a viable option. Besides, Canada had, during the war, carved a niche for herself as anti-communist, and after the Igor Guzenko espionage incident, newspapers in Russia had derided King and Canada for taking the espionage charge seriously, downplaying the information received as insubstantial. Certainly, Russia was bound to retaliate, and the withdrawal of Russian envoys from Ottawa<sup>240</sup> served to confirm that Moscow had seen Canada as an unfriendly country, a close ally of the United States and a threat to its foreign policy objectives. Russia's shift in policy towards Canada certainly worried King, but to his cabinet and diplomats, Russia's attitude towards Canada and the rest of the West was a more reason why Canada should move closer to the United States.

In a bid to convince King and make a case for the Western bloc, Pearson wrote to him asking:

“Is it possible for the western democratic world to work out, if not a friendly, at least a tolerable relationship with a state, organized on a police basis, governed by ruthless despots, inhabited by millions of fighting men to whom life is hard and cheap, and with a dynamic

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<sup>238</sup> Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear*, p. 147

<sup>239</sup> Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear*, p. 149

<sup>240</sup> Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear*, see Chapter Four, “The curtain descends,” pp. 110-146

communist ideology? My own view, for what it may be worth, is that without some fundamental change in the Soviet state system and in the policies and views of its leaders, the U. S. S. R. is ultimately bound to come into open conflict with western democracy... The Russian leaders themselves insist on this. We should not make the mistake we made with Hitler, of refusing to take seriously the words these leaders utter for home consumption.”<sup>241</sup>

Pearson’s view, coupled with the positions of Dana Wilgress, Canadian ambassador to the USSR; Norman Robertson, Canadian High Commissioner in London; George Glazebrook of the Department of External Affairs;<sup>242</sup> Arnold Smith, associate director at the new National Defence College in Kingston; Brooke Claxton, Minister of National Health (in 1946 he was appointed Minister of National Defence); and Louis St Laurent, French-Canada’s senior minister and the Prime Minister’s heir-apparent,<sup>243</sup> serve to illustrate that King’s argument that Canada should help to restore peace and avoid the Cold War was incompatible with the realities of the time.

King was probably living in an earlier century when he cautioned his cabinet on the importance of not ‘offending’ Russia despite the latter’s expansionist ambitions. The Soviet leaders made no pretense about their ambition to expand and in April 1945, Joseph Stalin told the Yugoslav Military Mission that “this war [WWII] is not as in the past, whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.”<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> John English, *Shadow of Heaven*:p. 300; Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear*, p. 167

<sup>242</sup> Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear*: their positions are well treated in chapter five, “Preparing for war? Pp. 147-179

<sup>243</sup> The views of Smith, Claxton and Laurent can be found in chapter six, “Pax Americana,” Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear*, pp. 180-225

<sup>244</sup> Quoted in Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear: Canada and the Cold War, 1941-48* (University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 73-4

With Stalin making such a threat, it is not surprising that the world, a year later in 1946, became ideologically divided with Eastern Europe the centre of the struggle between the two blocs. But this struggle would not be limited to Europe. Other parts of the world, notably Asia, were rapidly moving towards their independence from colonialism and it was important for the Western Bloc to befriend these states so as to put mechanisms in place to forestall the spread of communism. Canada had hoped to achieve this objective by figuring prominently in the activities of the United Nations, but it appeared the United Nations offered little hope of serving as an antidote to the communist threat posed by the Soviet Union and its satellites. As Pearson was later to reflect, “I had become a strong believer in an activist policy for Canada in the development of strong international organizations for collective security and economic progress. I still hoped that the UN might become the instrument for this, though disappointed at the setbacks and frustrations which the Cold War had already brought to the world organization.”<sup>245</sup>

The failure of the United Nations to address the mutual fear and antagonism between East and West, and coupled with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, complicated foreign policy-making tasks of Canadian diplomats. These new countries had to be courted while downplaying the essence of the courtship. To continually court them, a way had to be found for them to remain in the British Commonwealth. Herein lay the reasons underlying the transition to a multiracial commonwealth. The key Canadian diplomat that played a central role in shaping Canadian policy towards India was Escott Reid, who served as Canada’s first High Commissioner in India<sup>246</sup> and prior to that, orchestrated the reform of the Commonwealth’s

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<sup>245</sup> Lester Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Vol. 1 (University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 294

<sup>246</sup> Greg Donaghy, “The Most Important Place in the World: Escott Reid in India” in Greg Donaghy and Stephane Roussel, *Escott Reid: Diplomat and Scholar* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), pp. 67-81; See Escott Reid, *Envoy to Nehru* (New

‘constitutional’ structure to permit India to join the association. These achievements, according to Patrick Brennan, “were real.”<sup>247</sup>

Indeed, the transition from the ‘White’ commonwealth to a multiracial one was born out of necessity. Canada for one did not favour the transition to a multiracial Commonwealth but Cold War imperatives had made Canadian statesmen come to the conclusion that to preserve democracy and human freedom, communism and its evil had to be contained. As Pearson told the group of Foreign Ministers at the Commonwealth Meeting in January 1950 in Ceylon, “Canadian foreign policy was greatly influenced by consciousness of two dangers: the ‘aggressive imperialism’ of the USSR and the increase of communism through the inability of countries to deal with their own economic and social problems.”<sup>248</sup> He added that the soundest bulwark against communism was a domestic policy that would factor in the economic needs of the people within the framework of political democracy. For him, “there was little value in preaching the virtues of the democratic way of life to starving people, we would be prepared to play our part in any practical scheme for promoting world stability and peace.”<sup>249</sup> The new Commonwealth of Nations (and later Commonwealth) was to fill a void no other institution could at that time. It was to be an informal association where members could relate to one another with candour and friendliness – and full equality – knowing full well they had a common history rooted in the British Empire.

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York: Oxford University Press, 1981) on how Reid helped formulate a special relationship between Canada and India.

<sup>247</sup> Patrick H. Brennan, “Escott Reid: Diplomat and Scholar (Book Review), *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 2006), p. 515

<sup>248</sup> John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis, ed. *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Vol. 2 (University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 107

<sup>249</sup> John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis, ed. *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Vol. 2, p. 107

Indeed, the new Commonwealth would not have achieved its objectives were it for the tiresome efforts of Canadians (and others) that were desirous of promoting democracy and global peace and security and a leading role for Canada in the pursuit of same. Consequently, in the making of the Commonwealth, compromises had to be made. For instance, the Indians were not ready to accept that they were Commonwealth subjects under the British Crown, and out of compromise and the desire to make India part of the commonwealth family, two separate declarations were made at the 1947 Commonwealth Meeting in London: one proclaiming India as a republic and member of the Commonwealth and the other signed by remaining states, signalling their intention to become part of the Commonwealth while holding allegiance to the British Crown as head of state.<sup>250</sup> Thus, the independent Asian states were the first set of non-White ex-British colonies to join the ‘old’ Commonwealth’s club.

No doubt the independence of the first former British colonies in what came to be called ‘Third World’ and their commitment to remain in the Commonwealth under appropriate arrangements accommodating their sensibilities about their previous colonial status was a watershed in the development of the organisation because it provided a broad template for Canada to achieve her foreign policy, which was global in nature, and included the containment of communism, preservation of peace and security, and the promotion of trade and democracy. Reflecting on India’s decision to remain in the Commonwealth, Pearson noted that it “was the most important landmark in the history of the Commonwealth.... Had we been unable to solve the problem of India’s admission as a republic, we would not have the Commonwealth we have today with all the new members from Asia and Africa.”<sup>251</sup> The new Commonwealth had come to

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<sup>250</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, Vol. 2, pp. 168-174

<sup>251</sup> John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis, ed. *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Vol. 2, p. 107



stay with Canada constantly demonstrating leadership, and it was through this medium that Canada's policy was to resonate most in African affairs.

Canada's first test to promote democracy and the rule of law in Africa under the auspices of the Commonwealth soon came. The difficult question to be addressed was *apartheid* in South Africa, an orchestrated system of racial segregation introduced in the early part of the twentieth century, but which had gained enormous momentum after the Afrikaner-controlled Nationalist Party (NP) won a sweeping majority in the 1948 national polls. *Apartheid* became an official policy of the government and South Africans were classified into four racial groups: "Native," "White," "Coloured" and "Asian." The "Natives" (Blacks) occupied the bottom rung on the classification scheme, and despite constituting the majority and being indigenous to South Africa, became strangers in a land that once belonged to them. The idea of racial superiority had been propounded by European philosophers but it is striking that South Africa incorporated *apartheid* into its legal documents despite the fact that the international climate of opinion was no longer disposed to it. Indeed, this was a difficult period for Canada because Canada continually preached against *apartheid* and all forms of racism but in practice, it harboured a history of racial tendencies of its own. For instance, it was not until the 1970s that Canada became less 'discriminatory' in its immigration policy. Similarly the treatment of Native people in Canada was steeped in racism. This international double-standard was sheer hypocrisy and proved embarrassing for Canada when the South African question was brought to the fore, especially in the Third World. How should South Africa's racial policy be addressed and what implication would Canada's position have on its global image as well as her relations with South Africa?

The racial policy was not a South African domestic problem. The various acts were as inhuman as they were ruthless and drew worldwide criticisms. By 1952, it had become a thorny subject to be debated on the floor of the United Nations General Assembly. To be fair to Liberal party spokesmen, they openly lamented racial discrimination but fell short of singling out South Africa for condemnation and opposed any attempted bid by the UN to investigate the situation. The successor Conservative government followed the same path until April, 1958, when the Nationalist Party again triumphed in the national elections ushering in Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd as Prime Minister. Verwoerd had been the Minister of Native Affairs in the previous regime and the driving force behind *apartheid*. His elevation to the prime ministership meant that Blacks were destined for a wilderness where their escape route could only come from the outside. Verwoerd's election in 1958 clearly sent negative signals to the world, not the least Canadian statesmen, in an unprecedented manner, expressed "regret and concern" that the Union of South Africa continued to wallow deeper in its policy of racial discrimination.<sup>252</sup> Yet in 1959, Howard Green, Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs and head of Canada's delegation to the UN General Assembly, abstained from voting to sanction South Africa, with Third World countries like India and Ghana expressing disappointment in Canada, leading journalist Douglas Anglin to submit that "if Canada's position had been tragically misunderstood, she only has herself to blame."<sup>253</sup> The criticism of Canada, while justified, was because Ottawa did not reach out to independent Third World Commonwealth states to see the South African question from their point of view. Ottawa believed that the racial discrimination in South Africa was an anathema to Canada's policy yet in the interest of the Commonwealth, Canada believed Pretoria must be

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<sup>252</sup> Douglas Anglin, "Canada and Apartheid," *International Journal*, Vol. 15, Issue 2 (April 1960), p. 123

<sup>253</sup> Douglas Anglin, "Canada and Apartheid," p. 124

persuaded by reason and not compelled to shelve her discriminatory racial policy. As a senior member of the Commonwealth, Canada believed that it had a manifest responsibility to “refrain from judging the behaviour of a fellow-member of the Commonwealth.”<sup>254</sup> For Canada, the major issue was the Commonwealth and the Canadians did not want a situation whereby South Africa would be pushed to the point where she would announce her withdrawal from the organization. In thinking along this line, Canada failed to realise how damaging the issue had become for non-White Commonwealth states. Canadians believed that membership in the Commonwealth was permanent and saw no reason why there should be exit routes. In the case of South Africa, she was highly valued by Canada as a member of the old “White” Commonwealth, and its former leader, Jan Smuts, and Canadian Robert Borden, were often credited as founders of the modern Commonwealth.<sup>255</sup> More so, the Union of South Africa had cooperated with Canada and the Western world to contain the spread of communism into Africa. Even though the psychology of the Afrikaner differed from the typical Westerner,<sup>256</sup> they were firmly anti-communist and ensured that the Soviets did not gain a foothold in resource-rich southern Africa. As a White, Western-style capitalist regime, Pretoria was seen as a bulwark against Communism.

Far more important than maintaining economic and other ties with the White regime, however, Canada did not want the Commonwealth to split, and it was quickly becoming clear to Ottawa that it would have to be one or the other. The old “White man’s” club had turned into a multiracial one where the European population was just 85 million; African, 90 million and Asian, 525 million. Asian and African voices had to be respected and it was this approach that Canada increasingly took because, in the opinion of Pearson, taking a stand to defend South

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<sup>254</sup> Douglas Anglin, “Canada and Apartheid,” p. 126

<sup>255</sup> Douglas Anglin, “Canada and Apartheid,” p. 127

<sup>256</sup> Anglin says in the Afrikaner’s “single-minded pursuit of apartheid, facts mean nothing. It is the righteousness of their cause which matters, not its hopelessness,” p. 132

Africa was angering Asia and Africa and endangering Canadian relations with them.<sup>257</sup> Thus, Canada and the rest of the Commonwealth began to demand more responsibility from South Africa and the outcome was the country's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961 as the public criticism of its racial policy by Commonwealth members infuriated Afrikaner opinion.

It is regrettable that South Africa had to exit the Commonwealth because if Black majority rule had come into being (there was little likelihood of that in the 1960s) she would have created a formidable partnership with Nigeria to help solve some of Africa's problems. More so, having South Africa and Nigeria as regional influencers would have afforded Canada the policy alternative to strategically work with the two countries, thereby advancing her interests in Africa. But this was not to be, at least between 1960 and 1970, as Canada deepened her relations with Nigeria while cutting her ties with South Africa.

Certainly, the fear that colonized states approaching independence would likely be seduced by the Soviet bloc was a primary concern for Ottawa and underlay Canadian determination to promote democracy in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa and Asia. In other words, Cold War motivations were overriding factors in Canada's resolve to deepen relations with Nigeria in the first decade of her independence. In Canada and everywhere in the West, the fear of communism had been the norm, with Canadian statesmen and diplomats employing all the weapons at their disposal to fight the menace. Embassy officials in Rome, Moscow, London and elsewhere continually exchanged correspondence with the Department of External Affairs and the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs on the best way to curb the spreading influence of communism. African states under colonial rule were on the threshold of independence and once they assumed that status, they would have to take sides or at best, remain

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<sup>257</sup> Douglas Anglin, "Canada and Apartheid," p. 136

cautiously non-aligned, often attempting to play one side against the other. The West was not disposed to the communist penetration of African political, social and economic life and was determined to see that the Soviet bloc did not subvert nascent African democracy. It is from this perspective that we can best understand why Canada deepened relations with Nigeria on the eve of independence and for the first decade thereafter.

But let us pause to ask: was the Soviet bloc interested in Africa? How severe was Soviet threat? Was it over exaggerated? How did Canada react to Soviet policy in Africa? What were the broad effects on Canada's relations with Africa in the case of Nigeria? A thorough grasp of these puzzles require an analysis of Soviet intentions and initiatives in Africa and how the West, especially Canada, reacted to these initiatives.

Soviet activities in Africa, as we shall see later, proved more threatening than brittle. Having attempted to dismantle Western democracy and encourage political neutralism in Asia in the years following World War II, the Soviets subsequently decided to turn their attention to Africa. Indications that the Russians had begun to look towards of Africa started during the Korean War when Soviet publications began to 'criticise' the government and academics for their lack of interest in African affairs and the dearth of a coordinated study of African history and culture. These criticisms, surely authorised by the state, had a strong effect on academics, and by 1954 the Academy of Social Sciences in Moscow, after a symposium, produced a 700-page publication entitled "The Peoples of Africa," which was described as "the first attempt of Russian and Soviet science to produce a work on the history and ethnography of the peoples of Africa on the basis of Marxist-Leninist methodology."<sup>258</sup> By 1955, Moscow's attempt to gain a

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<sup>258</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, "Russian Interest in Africa: An appraisal of Soviet policy towards Africa in the light of development since

foothold on Africa had become a core policy of the government which had put in place several institutional mechanisms for achieving this purpose. For instance, the Academy of Social Sciences published a report in 1955 claiming that “having recognised that African studies were a backward sector of Soviet science,” it had decided to situate the study of the peoples of Southern and Central Africa in the Institute of Ethnography, with the Institute saddled with the task of compiling dictionaries in Swahili and Hausa languages,<sup>259</sup> languages that were widely spoken in sub-Saharan Africa. The objective of this was to focus more on Africa so as to have an in-depth understanding of the continent, penetrate it and use the information and knowledge garnered to dismantle Western interests there.

The determination to destroy Western interests in Africa and elsewhere rested on the basic communist assumptions about the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system. The Communists were convinced that the capitalist system would be destroyed by a lack of internal cohesion or what they called “contradictions.” Consequently, it was the duty of the Communist to fast-track its collapse. According to Communist thinking, three basic contradictions that manifested in the capitalist system were conflict between the proletariat and capitalist, class conflict between the coloniser and the colonised, and conflict between the capitalist powers themselves. As seen by the Communists, ‘colonised’ countries included the territories in Africa that were still under colonial rule as well as the continent’s independent countries which,

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the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956,” 27 May, 1957

<sup>259</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Russian Interest in Africa: An appraisal of Soviet policy towards Africa in the light of development since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956,” 27 May, 1957

according to the Communists, were underdeveloped. Liberia, Sudan and Egypt were among those in the latter category.<sup>260</sup>

Indeed, Soviet leaders, through their pronouncements, made no pretense about their aim to dismantle the capitalist system and entrench their own brand of “democracy” that would liberate the oppressed peoples of the world. Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, told delegates at the 20th Party Congress in February, 1956, that “the disintegration of the imperialist colonial system, now taking place, is a post-war development of world historic significance. The complete abolition of the infamous system of colonialism has been put on the agenda as one of the most acute and pressing problems.”<sup>261</sup>

Similarly, Radio Moscow in a February 1957 broadcast argued that:

“[the] peoples freeing themselves from the foreign yoke could make use of the achievements of the world socialist camp without any military or political obligations. Their most active friend is, as always, the Soviet Union, which is helping countries hampered in their development by the colonial regime. The Soviet Union actively contributes to the aspirations of all peoples who are freeing themselves from the foreign yoke.”<sup>262</sup>

To achieve this objective, the Communist ‘Front’ Organisations<sup>263</sup> were, in 1955, detailed to lead the onslaught against the West in Africa. Having spearheaded Communist incursions into

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<sup>260</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Russian Interest in Africa: An appraisal of Soviet policy towards Africa in the light of development since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956,” 27 May, 1957

<sup>261</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “The Communist Drive into Africa,” February, 1958

<sup>262</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “The Communist Drive into Africa,” February, 1958

<sup>263</sup> V. I. Lenin muted the idea of a “Communist Front” in his 1902 manifesto, “What Is to Be Done?” The idea was to reach a preponderant number of people in disparate areas for membership into his Organisation. This term gained worldwide acceptance during the Cold War

South East Asia a few years earlier, they sought to do the same in Africa. This was a period in which Africans sought more advanced educational opportunities, both in quality and quantity, with the few colleges established by the colonisers reserved for a privileged minority. Aware of the desperate African need, the Communist-inspired Colonial Bureau of the International Union of Students (IUS) was revived in 1955 with the mission to create and increase employment prospects among colonial students. In 1956, the IUS held a seminar in Prague and of the 23 Students' Unions that attended, eleven were from Africa.<sup>264</sup> This was a significant breakthrough for the Soviets, one which inspired them to further efforts.

These efforts, without mincing words, yielded results as they continued to gain adherents. By the end of 1955, the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) had gained as members the African Youth League (AYL) of Ivory Coast, the Maabang Youth Association (MYA) of Gold Coast, the Nigerian Youth Peace Congress (NYPC) and the Togoland League of Rural Youth (TLRY). Apart from these successes, the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), at its Executive Committee Meeting in Peking in 1956, had as guests delegates from the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast.<sup>265</sup>

From this period onwards, African stories became a recurrent feature in Soviet tabloids, portraying the Soviets as 'saints' and Westerners as 'sinners' in their relations with Africa, the

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as the West used it to refer to organisations put in place by the Soviets to woo Asians and Africans into the Communist fold.

<sup>264</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, "Russian Interest in Africa: An appraisal of Soviet policy towards Africa in the light of development since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956," 27 May, 1957

<sup>265</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, "Russian Interest in Africa: An appraisal of Soviet policy towards Africa in the light of development since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956," 27 May, 1957



objective being to infiltrate and influence public opinion among the educated elites in Africa. The labour newspaper *Trud* in its December 29, 1955 edition noted that Liberia participated in the Bandoeng [Bandung] Conference<sup>266</sup> of Asian and African countries of 1955 and “came out unanimously against colonialism and [for] the peaceful cooperation of all peoples.”<sup>267</sup> *Red Star*, the official organ of the Soviet Red Army, published a reference note on January 4, 1956 focusing on Sudan’s independence and how Britain had lost out in its bid to continue to oppress its former colonial possession. The paper declared that it “rejoice[d]” with the people of Sudan as they consolidated their national sovereignty and the development of their economy and culture.<sup>268</sup>

Soviet penetration of Africa was causing the West serious worry with diplomats closely monitoring the situation and reporting their findings. In a ‘Weekly Divisional Note’ of the Commonwealth and Middle East Division of the DEA, O. C. McInnes raised the concern that since 1954, there were indications that the Soviets were taking their activities in Africa to a new scale and had been compiling dictionaries of African languages.<sup>269</sup> This was a source of worry in Western capitals, with Britain potentially going to be the hardest hit because of its long-standing and considerable political and economic interests in the region, and therefore ways were sought

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<sup>266</sup> This was the first major Afro-Asian Conference that took place in Indonesia in April, 1955 and organised by Indonesia, Burma, Pakistan, Ceylon and India, with twenty-nine countries in attendance. The aim of the Conference was to promote Afro-Asian economic ties and to oppose colonialism or neocolonialism by either the East or the West in the Cold War. This conference was a forerunner to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a group of states that were not formally aligned with or against either of the two power blocs.

<sup>267</sup> Newspaper clipping in the despatch from the Canadian Charge d’Affaires, Moscow, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, Africa and the Soviet Union,” 6 January, 1956

<sup>268</sup> Newspaper clipping in the despatch from the Canadian Charge d’Affaires, Moscow, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Africa and the Soviet Union,” 6 January, 1956

<sup>269</sup> Weekly Divisional Note, LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Communism in Africa,” 11 July 1956

to contain the infiltration of Soviet ideology into the region. This could not be achieved alone so assistance was sought from Western allies.

Consequently, the British, in a desperate telegram sent to the Dominions and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland stated that “because of Tropical Africa’s political, economic and military importance to the West, it is imperative that the present dominant political influence be maintained. It would be a major victory for the Sino-Soviet bloc if Tropical Africa could be detached from the West.”<sup>270</sup> The telegram further noted that there was convincing evidence that the Soviets had a long-term ambition to dominate and “Sovietise” the continent but their immediate purpose was to “detach Tropical Africa from the West, both economically and politically, thus weakening the position of the Metropolitan Powers and the rest of the free world” in Africa. The telegram suggested that to counter Soviet intentions, the West must “pursue systematically the constructive policy of leading dependencies as rapidly toward stable self-government or independence in such a way that these Governments are willing and able to preserve their political and economic ties with the West.”<sup>271</sup> Preservation of political, economic and friendship ties with Africa was a plausible proposition (promotion of trade was another) and one of the reasons why Canada and other Western states decided to make the promotion of democracy a priority in Black Africa. But as the West was thinking about spreading and preserving democracy in Africa, the Soviet bloc was also thinking about how to gain the sympathy of Africans.

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<sup>270</sup> Outward Telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office, LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Communist Influence in Tropical Africa,” 20 May, 1957

<sup>271</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Communist Influence in Tropical Africa,” 20 May, 1957

As a result, the technique of relying on Communist Front Organisations was strengthened and new tactics for penetrating Africa through economic aid and trade were introduced. This new measure, according to a memorandum from the Commonwealth Division to the Defence Liaison (II) Division of the DEA, “represents a real threat, particularly to countries approaching self government.”<sup>272</sup> The Commonwealth Division was right in its assessment of the situation. African countries preparing for self government needed the injection of aid for their economies to “take off”<sup>273</sup> from their traditional (agrarian) economic society and would accept aid whenever and from wherever available. This was to happen after Nigeria became independent and received aid from the West and the Soviets despite claiming it was a member of the non-aligned movement, a development that had Douglas Anglin conclude that Nigeria was non-aligned politically but economically aligned.<sup>274</sup> Indeed, Nigeria was economically tied to the West as over eighty percent of its imports, aid and investment came from that region while ninety percent of its exports went to the West, as well. As the largest producer of columbite in the world, the U.S. Defense Materials Procurement Agency stockpiled Nigeria’s output and even gave a 100 percent bonus if production was doubled. The outcome was a windfall increase in revenues from the sale of columbite and in the second half of 1962. Then, just as quickly, the US reduced demand and production, supply and price came crashing down. This made Nigeria look elsewhere for markets and it claimed that it needed to open its doors to all ‘destinations’ because

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<sup>272</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Russian Interest in Africa,” 27 May 1957

<sup>273</sup> See Walt Whitman Rostow’s *Politics and the Stages of Growth* (Cambridge University Press, 1971). This work proposes that economic growth occurs in five stages with the “take-off” central to the “drive to maturity” because the economy makes a transition here from an agrarian system to the manufacturing of secondary goods. The Industrial Revolution is cited as a classic example of the “take-off” stage.

<sup>274</sup> Douglas Anglin, “Nigeria: “Political Non-Alignment and Economic Alignment,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (July 1964), pp. 247-263

it did not want to be seen as taking sides in the East-West rivalry. Despite an American threat of stopping aid, Nigeria shipped columbite to the USSR and added communist countries to its list of most 'most favoured nations.'<sup>275</sup>

Soviet aid and propaganda during this period proved too enticing to resist, and consequently a number of independent African states opened up to the warm embrace of Soviet aid. Having established relations with Egypt in a bid to destabilise the Arab world, the Soviet bloc approached Egypt with offers to help it with the High Dam project as well as the exchange of educational and agricultural ties. More alarmingly from Western perspectives, Egypt's openness to Soviet policy culminated in the supply of arms by Czechoslovakia and the U.S.S.R. in 1956. Similarly, the Sudan opened payments agreements with East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia while China established missions in Sudan and Ethiopia.<sup>276</sup> The penetration of Africa by the Communist powers, and especially the Soviet bloc proceeded, *pari passu* with the study of African history and society. Seen as part of 'oriental studies,'<sup>277</sup> the Russians pursued aggressive research into different elements of African social life. In the words of I. I. Potekin, Deputy Director of the Moscow-based Miklukho-Maklay Institute of Ethnography, "the object of research is to help the peoples of Africa in the struggle against

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<sup>275</sup> Douglas Anglin, "Nigeria:", pp. 249-53

<sup>276</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, "Russian Interest in Africa: An appraisal of Soviet policy towards Africa in the light of development since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956," 27 May, 1957

<sup>277</sup> According to Mikhail Pavlovich, founder of Soviet Oriental Studies, "By 'the East' is understood the oppressed population of the whole colonial and semi-colonial world, that is to say, of the black and yellow continents," see LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, "Leningrad University Expanding of African Languages," 14 October, 1958

colonialism.”<sup>278</sup> Research on Africa was quite revealing as it followed a sustained trajectory - attacking Western “faults” in Africa. Studies were carried out under the titles: “The economic development and the struggle of the peoples of Nigeria against imperialist domination after World War II,” “The economic development and struggle of the peoples of French West Africa after World War II,” “Liberia under the yoke of American monopolies,” and “Social-economic changes and English colonial policy in British Africa,” to mention a few.<sup>279</sup>

All these developments caused consternation in the West and when, in 1958, the Soviets held an Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity conference in Cairo and subsequently established a permanent secretariat in Egypt with the objective to “develop and supervise a whole network of Afro-Asian front organisations”<sup>280</sup> to bring colonial rule in Africa to an end, it was evident that the Soviet bloc was getting closer to its objective of neutralising Western influence in Africa. Delay in combating the growing influence was no longer in the interest of the West which had to act if the Soviets were to be contained. In the light of this, the British sought the views of Canada on the relationship between the newly formed United Arab Republic (UAR)<sup>281</sup> and the USSR and wondered whether Gamal Abdel Nasser, the head of the union was leading a communist conspiracy against the West. After assessing the situation, the Canadians pointed out that Nasser only wanted independence for all African peoples and was not necessarily fostering the Soviet

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<sup>278</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “African Studies in the Soviet Union,” 24 August 1959 (Numbered Letter from the Permanent Delegation of Canada to the North Atlantic Council and the OEEC to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs)

<sup>279</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Extract from British Communist Activities,” No. 72, January 1958

<sup>280</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “The Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Cairo,” 21 August, 1958

<sup>281</sup> This was the short-lived union between Egypt and Syria from 1958 to 1961.

objective.<sup>282</sup> Canada's assessment showed sound judgment, for even though Nasser had been a 'friend' of the USSR, he was not necessarily a communist. In fact, it was in a bid to nip the Communist threat in Syria in the bud that both countries agreed to form the UAR. Moreover, Nasser, just like Kwame Nkrumah, the president of Ghana, was genuinely interested in the self-determination of African peoples and both leaders' causes of liberating African peoples seemed 'congruent' with the Soviet African mission as far as it went. Nasser's cause to fight for the independence of African peoples side by side with Nkrumah, however, may also not be unconnected with the fact that Nkrumah's wife was an Egyptian. Regardless, their apparent willingness to accept Soviet 'help' was viewed with alarm in Western capitals.

Even though the Canadians' conclusion on the relationship between the UAR and the Soviets was sound logic, they left no stone unturned in order to stem the tide of communism in Africa. External Affairs' officials knew that as Britain handed over power to African peoples, they would become vulnerable to Soviet enticement because the latter would come with offers of trade and aid as well as the opening diplomatic missions. This was a burning issue in the Canadian foreign policy community because of Britain's central involvement and secondly, because Canada, as a member of the Western alliance, had a responsibility to contribute to global peace and security while helping to contain Soviet expansion. And so, in November 1959, the Canadians held a session chaired by John Holmes focusing on Soviet activities in Africa and the trend towards independence of European (NATO) powers' colonial territories in Africa.<sup>283</sup> At the session, three United Kingdom Officials, Mr. Hunt (Commonwealth Relations Office), Mr. Eastwood (Colonial Office), and Mr. Ross (Foreign Office), were on hand to discuss Soviet

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<sup>282</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, "Meeting with United Kingdom Officials on Africa," 11 December, 1959

<sup>283</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, "Discussions on Africa," 16 November, 1959

threats in Africa and presented a paper entitled “Africa – The Next Ten Years” which offered guidelines for Britain’s and Canada’s constructive engagement with Nigeria and the rest of the British colonial possessions on the continent.

The case of Nigeria is particularly unique. In 1953, Anthony Enahoro, an MP from Western Nigeria, had moved a motion on the floor of the Nigerian House of Representatives that “this House accepts as a primary political objective the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956,”<sup>284</sup> the legislature deriving its powers from the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 which gave elected Nigerians the complete power to make laws for the peace and good order of the country but with the clause that the Secretary of State for the Colonies was vested with the authority to disallow a law even if the governor assented it.<sup>285</sup> It was against this background that Enahoro moved the motion for independence. But the North, through their leader, Sir Ahmadu Bello, claimed that it was not yet ready for independence (though it would be ready “as soon as practicable”<sup>286</sup>) made the British postpone Nigeria’s independence date. In the autumn of 1957, however, the British granted Eastern and Western Nigeria self-rule. Despite this progress, Soviet propaganda was quick to berate Britain for its willingness to delay the granting of independence to Nigeria. In an article published in the *Contemporary East* in August, 1957, the author claimed that

“the British Government promised to grant independence to Nigeria but drags out the settlement of this question by all possible means. As soon as a united front against colonial enslavement began to form the British

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<sup>284</sup> <http://www.anthonyenahoro.org/speeches/176-motion-for-self-government.html> accessed on 24 July, 2013; Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent Nation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 276

<sup>285</sup> Michael Joye and Kingsley Igweike, *Introduction to the 1979 Nigerian Constitution* (London, 1982), p. 27

<sup>286</sup> <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/67.htm> accessed on 29 July, 2013

colonialists began to incite national enmity between the peoples of Nigeria – the Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa.”<sup>287</sup>

Russian propaganda, coupled with the growing influence of communist front organisations in Nigeria’s Trade Unions and the activities of the Nigerian Youth Peace Congress,<sup>288</sup> meant that, from a Western perspective, Nigeria had to be guided and supported through her period of transition if Western-style democracy and political institutions were to be established and maintained.

If the Russian ‘threat’ offered Canada the opportunity of a focused and pragmatic engagement with Nigeria, it also provided her with the option of trading with Africa’s most populous country. Indeed, shortly before independence (Canada opened its mission in Nigeria in July, 1960) promotion of trade was a term of reference handed to Thomas Carter when he was appointed High Commissioner to Nigeria in the winter of 1960. A quote from his letter of appointment indicated Ottawa’s policy towards Lagos:

“Whereas the following paragraphs reflect our general concern with developments in Nigeria, an important part of your duty is the advancement of specifically Canadian interests. The first of this is trade. In recent years Canadian exports to Nigeria have run at \$1000000 or less and the largest item is flour. Imports from Nigeria have averaged about \$ 2000000, with cocoa beans being the principal commodity. You should give every assistance to the Commercial Secretary in his efforts to increase this trade. Among Canadian companies interested in Nigeria are the Aluminium Company of Canada and the Bata

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<sup>287</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Communist Drive into Africa,” February 1958

<sup>288</sup> Outward Telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office, LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Communist Influence in Tropical Africa,” 20 May, 1957; LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7740, File 12315-40, “Russian Interest in Africa: An appraisal of Soviet policy towards Africa in the light of development since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956,” 27 May, 1957



Shoe Company. In each case factories are being built in Nigeria by local companies associated with the Canadian companies. Robin Hood Flour Mills Limited is currently negotiating with the Nigerian Government for the building of a flour mill at Lagos under a similar arrangement. Although these three companies have international associations, you should give them general support in their dealings with the Nigerian government, and you should adopt the same attitude in the case of other proposals for investment in Nigeria where there is a strong Canadian interest.”<sup>289</sup>

Notable Canadian businesses like the Aluminium Company of Canada had prior to independence shown interest in the Nigerian economy. In 1959 J. A. Paterson and D. E. Davey, in conjunction with their Nigerian and British counterparts, had founded two companies: Tower Aluminium (Nigeria) Limited and Nigeria Aluminium Products Limited,<sup>290</sup> to produce aluminium and steel products for the West African market. The Bata Shoe Company followed suit and expanded to Nigeria in 1960,<sup>291</sup> and in the winter of the same year, Roy Thomson International of Toronto agreed to a 50-50 partnership with Amalgamated Press of Nigeria<sup>292</sup> to improve and expand Nigeria’s biggest newspaper publishing enterprise. Similarly, Robin Hood Flour Mills of Montreal gained entry into the Nigerian market in the same year,<sup>293</sup> signposting Canada’s growing interest in deepening trade with Nigeria.

The promotion of trade seemed an obvious choice considering Nigeria’s post-independence economic prospects, which made Canada (and the West) consider it important.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7, “Letter of Appointment for Commissioner to Nigeria,” 21 March, 1960

<sup>290</sup> The equity of these companies was held by Aluminium Limited of Canada, the Midland Mental Spinning Company of Wolverhampton, the Western Region Development Corporation and a Nigerian investor. See Letter from the Office of the Commissioner for Canada in Nigeria to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, File 12831-40, “Complaint of Alcan Africa Limited to Nigerian Authorities,” 23 May, 1960

<sup>291</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7845, File 12831-40, “Canadian Interest in Nigeria – Bata Shoe Company,” 4 March, 1960

<sup>292</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7833,. Action Copy from the DEA.

<sup>293</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7833, File 12831-40, 16 August, 1960.(Letter from George McIvor to Evan Gill, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs)

<sup>294</sup> Nigeria was a leading producer of cocoa, palm oil and groundnut during this period.

After all, on the eve of independence, Nigeria's population of approximately 40 million was increasing at a rate of 2 percent per annum. In real terms, this represented a population increase of 800,000 every year. Furthermore, prior to independence Nigeria constituted 15 percent of the total population of Africa and save from the Belgian colony of Ruanda-Urundi<sup>295</sup>, was the most densely populated country on the continent. Two-thirds of the adult labour force was engaged in agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry, but owing to the winds of change which culminated in independence in 1960, Nigeria's urban population had continued to swell as people moved from the rural to the urban areas, excited at the possibility of taking up "white collar" jobs from the departing "White man." It was a movement that was intensified by the spread of education and the development of Nigeria's industrial sector.

Before 1958, it was obvious that Nigeria, given its economic potential and especially its growing population, was destined for the political and economic leadership of Black Africa. Politically, its politicians were ready to learn the skills of governance from their British colonial masters. Even before the winds of change that blew across Africa began, with the independence of Ghana in 1957, Nigerian politicians who had been schooled in Britain and North America outnumbered those of any other colony in Africa. Politicians like Obafemi Awolowo,<sup>296</sup> Nnamdi Azikiwe,<sup>297</sup> Kofo Abayomi,<sup>298</sup> Ozumba Obadiwe, James Vaughn<sup>299</sup> and others were not only

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<sup>295</sup> Present day Rwanda and Burundi.

<sup>296</sup> Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo (1909-1987). Attended St. Saviour's School, Ikenne and Imo Wesleyan School in the 1920s; Wesleyan College, Ibadan (1927); University of London (1947); was awarded Bachelor of Commerce and the Bachelors of Law by the same institution. He was called to the Bar by the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple in November 1946. He founded the Action Group, a pan-Yoruba political party that made its mark in the Nigerian politics between 1954 and 1963. He also founded the Nigerian Tribune in 1949, a newspaper used to champion the cause of the AG and as well as regional causes.

<sup>297</sup> Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996). He attended high schools in Onitsha, Calabar, and Lagos. He then spent almost ten year (1925-34) in the United States studying in various universities including Lincoln and Howard Universities, Washington, DC. After he completed his studies, he

equipped to take over the reins of administration from the British, they had been exposed to Western education in Britain and the United States and understood what it meant to combine political theory with praxis. Indeed, these politicians, who also doubled as journalists, maintained a vibrant press that commanded a wide audience among the substantial and expanding literate class.<sup>300</sup> Economically, the country continued to grow. Between 1950 and 1957, Nigeria's national income increased by the equivalent of 4 percent per annum, and three years before independence, it was estimated at not less than £ 812 million, impressively large by African standards, and dwarfing the combined national incomes of the whole of British East Africa and of the Central African Federation.<sup>301</sup>

Political and economic imperatives, therefore, conditioned Canada's policy to have a pragmatic and sustained engagement with Nigeria. In an age when the East-West rivalry was competing for African and Asian friendship, it only made logical sense to win over Third World

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returned to Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1934 where he founded the *West African Pilot* and served as mentor to Kwame Nkrumah, (Ghana's first president). He returned to Nigeria in 1934 and became immersed in politics. Towards the end of the 1940s, he began to champion Igbo causes, a policy that was well reflected in the activities of the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), a party in which he played a key role. He went on to become Nigeria's first president.

<sup>298</sup> Dr. Kofoworola Adekunle Abayomi (1896-1979) was educated at Methodist Boys' High School, Lagos. He studied pharmacy at Yaba Higher College, Lagos before proceeding to Medical School at the University of Edinburg, UK and graduated in 1925. He was a member of the Legislative Council until 1939 when he vacated his seat and decided to return to the UK for a postgraduate study in ophthalmic surgery and medicine. He was one of the founding members of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1933.

<sup>299</sup> James Churchill Vaughn (1893-1937) attended King's College when it was founded in 1909. He and Isaac Ladipo Oluwole were the first set of Nigerians to attend the University of Glasgow, where he studied medicine from 1913 to 1918. Like Kofu Abayomi, he was one of the founders of the NYM and was the organisation's first president.

<sup>300</sup> Michael Seng and Gary Hunt, "The press and politics in Nigeria: a case study of developmental journalism," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, Vol. 6, Issue 2 (Summer 1986), pp. 85-110; Fred Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria, 1880-1937* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978)

<sup>301</sup> *Economic Survey of Nigeria, 1959* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1959)

countries with offers of whatever help they needed, all the more so if that help made them more 'Western'. All African countries emerging from colonial rule needed some form of aid. In the case of Nigeria, it needed the educational training of its citizens so that its development could continue apace. Canada's vision for Africa, Nigeria included, was well attuned to this. However, to help train nationals, a vehicle was needed – with the Commonwealth serving as the medium by which Canada helped to develop and promote Nigeria's democratic institutions. Canada placed considerable importance on the Commonwealth as a bridge between the West and Asia and Africa, but the significance of the strength of the Commonwealth in shaping peace in Third World countries was captured by Charles Malik, the Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States in his address to the World Council of Churches in Evanston in 1954:

“For all their intricacy, the political, the social and economic problems of Asia and Africa are nothing compared to the intellectual and spiritual problems. For we can already see with some assurance that if people do not yet completely rule themselves, they will sooner or later; if people are not yet fully able to exploit their own resources, they are on the way to doing so; and if social discrimination and injustice still prevail, the one pronounced temper of the age is precisely to attack them. In these fields we can see ahead, albeit more or less dimly.

But what is going to happen to the mind and soul of Asia and Africa? – [T]hat is the question. Nor is it true that once people have achieved their political independence, once they have attained economic plenty, and once they have brought about social justice, the spirit then will take care of itself. This is the greatest fallacy of the present age, that the mind, the spirit, the soul of man, the fundamental bent of his will, is derivative from, subordinate to, a function of, his economic and social existence.

Before leaving this subject of understanding between systems of society and civilizations, I would like to mention – the unique role which may be played in this matter by the Commonwealth of Nations of which Canada is privileged to be a member. This is a loose but intimate association which

includes in its membership nations from each of the continents. Its value as a bridge of understanding between the West and Asia and Africa is very great in this age of suspicion and strain where there are few such bridges.”<sup>302</sup>

Canada’s policy to shape relations with Third World countries was premised on her national interests and not because it wanted to follow Britain’s lead in Africa. Similarly John Holmes argues that the Commonwealth was a counter-weight against continental domination in international affairs by its southern neighbour because

“it gave Canada an alternative association that provided leverage, and introduced a modification or shading between the United States and the rest of the non-communist world... There was no doubt occasions on which Canada, by combination with Commonwealth countries, was able to have more diplomatic impact on the Americans...”<sup>303</sup>

When it came to the Third World, the Commonwealth was certainly not meant to rival the UN in Canadian thinking. On the contrary, it was meant to complement Canadian activities in the UN and serve as a conduit to reach out to Third World nations and promote Canadian values such as democracy and the rule of law.

Canada’s policy in promoting democracy in Nigeria, developing democratic institutions and building on the achievements of the British colonial government became visible with the different aid schemes announced for Africa, starting with the 1958 Montreal declaration of a Special Fund for Africa. Canadians thought that the human capacity of African countries emerging from colonial rule should be developed because “they [African countries transitioning to nationhood] would no longer have access to the services of colonial administrators and

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<sup>302</sup> Quoted in Lester Pearson, *Democracy in World Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 94-5

<sup>303</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, p. 180

advisors.”<sup>304</sup> Technical assistance was seen as the panacea to strengthening democracy in those African countries that were within sight of independence. The need for Canada to provide technical assistance to these countries became more acute when considered against the backdrop that once independent they would no longer be eligible for development assistance from the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC),<sup>305</sup> a postwar British arrangement to assist and prepare dependencies for nationhood.

In this respect, educational training of nationals was the best form of technical assistance that Canada could provide for these African nations emerging from colonial rule because it would equip Africans with the skills needed to manage their civil service and other institutions central to the perpetuation of democracy in these emerging states. Secondly, educational training was a viable option because Canada had the means and knowhow to provide this form of technical assistance. In other words, the skills required by these emerging African countries were at a premium but could and would be augmented by Canada, a developed country that was endowed with the capacity to provide them to emerging African countries like Nigeria.

Training Africans to take over administrative reins from the outgoing colonialists was core thinking among Canadian diplomats during this period. It is, therefore, not surprising that under the Canadian Technical Assistance to Africa and other Commonwealth Areas initiative, a new programme was announced at the Montreal Conference of 1958 “to offer up to five places for a one year course in fundamentals of community planning beginning September 1959 at the

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<sup>304</sup> Report by Department of External Affairs, “Assistance to Africa and the West Indies” RG25, DEA Fonds, Volume 7845, 14020-N7-1, June 29, 1959

<sup>305</sup> Report by Department of External Affairs, “Assistance to Africa and the West Indies” RG25, DEA Fonds, Volume 7845, 14020-N7-1, June 29, 1959

University of British Columbia.”<sup>306</sup> This course comprised a lecture series, seminars and a series of workshop projects modeled to expose students to the practical problems of community development and their solutions. It is noteworthy to mention that the Colombo Plan of 1950, a form of ‘Marshall Plan’ for poor states emerging from colonial rule in Asia, was a precursor for this form of aid initiative.

This educational training was of utmost importance to Nigeria. For one, it afforded the Nigerians the opportunity to learn, understand, and appreciate the intricacies of a “modern day” civil service, and lessons learned were applied to their nascent civil service. Second, since the civil service was seen as a vehicle that could propel states during periods of regime change and stress (political instability), it was important for Nigerian civil servants to be properly trained to prepare for such challenges. More importantly, the British were packing their bags and, therefore, the necessity for Nigerians to be trained if the Nigerianisation of the civil service was to be successful. This fact was well brought home in the letter from the Canadian Embassy in Rio de Janeiro to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs that there were arrangements by the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries to “help prepare members of the Nigerian civil service to become Foreign Service Officers when Nigerian missions are opened abroad after independence,”<sup>307</sup> a Nigerian civil servant, Godwin Onyegbula, having been seconded to the Canadian embassy in Brazil to understudy consular and diplomatic officials. Furthermore, Nigerian External Affairs secretaries were trained in Ottawa in August 1960,<sup>308</sup> and

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<sup>306</sup> Report by Department of External Affairs, “Assistance to Africa and the West Indies” RG25, DEA Fonds, Volume 7845, 14020-N7-1, 29 June, 1959

<sup>307</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7833, File 12831-40, “Nigerian Foreign Service – Mr. Godwin Onyegbula,” 17 June, 1960

<sup>308</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7833, File 12831-40, “Training of Nigerian External Affairs Officers,” 24 June, 1962

two months before then, 23 Nigerian civil servants visited the Civil Service Commission<sup>309</sup> in Ottawa to observe and gain exposure to administrative practices in the Canadian civil service. Training and visits of this nature to Canada not only exposed Nigerian civil servants to Western administrative practices, they also strengthened the bilateral ties between the two countries, dissuading Nigeria from a strong engagement with Moscow until 1962 when Nigeria decided to establish relations with the Soviets.

The 1960s were important not only for the development of Nigeria but for the development of Africa as a whole with preponderant number of African states attaining independence during that decade. This was important because Canada, through the aid scheme announced at the Montreal Conference in 1958, placed a premium on national growth and economic development of countries attaining nationhood. One of the schemes put in place by this middle power was for newly independent African states to send their nationals to Canada for educational training. As has already been mentioned, the Canadian government had recognized the need to train nationals of these countries in the rudiments of public administration and, therefore, in conjunction with the Faculty of Public Administration at Carleton University, developed a special course in the 1959-60 academic year to train indigenous people to take over the administration of their respective civil services.<sup>310</sup> This initiative attracted Commonwealth African countries as they were more than eager to send their citizens, notably government officials and civil servants, to Canada for training in public administration. This course ran for eight months, and its main modules were a series of daily lectures and seminars which were augmented by directed reading and the preparation of assignments. While the course

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<sup>309</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7833, File 12831-40, "Visit of 25 Nigerian Civil Servants," 21 June, 1960

<sup>310</sup> Economic Affairs Division, "Technical Assistance to Nigeria," RG25, DEA Fonds, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, July 20, 1960



concentration was on the principles of administration and office management, the full syllabus included principles of national government, types of state and municipal governments, intergovernmental relations, administrative organisations, public finance and elementary accounting, office management and work simplification, elementary economics, and the inter-relation of government services and administrative responsibility.<sup>311</sup> The curriculum was also designed to accommodate short visits to federal government departments in Ottawa to obtain hands on experience.<sup>312</sup> No doubt, the civil service is an essential state component that ensures the smooth running of governmental processes even in times of transition. Canada's assistance in developing an effective civil service in emerging states in Africa was the grand objective of the Carleton University program and by implication, of Ottawa. This programme proved highly successful and as a result, the Canadian government repeated it in the 1960-61 academic year, with Nigeria getting four nominations despite keen competition to participate.<sup>313</sup> Canada, in part, decided to concede four slots to Nigeria because Nigeria's federal composition was such that, as we have already seen, each region had to be considered for Canadian aid. On the eve of independence, Nigeria had three autonomous regions and a federal government, and owing to the politics of jealousy that had developed among the three regions prior to independence,<sup>314</sup> it only made sense for Canada to allot educational slots to each region. Failure to do so might be considered blatant favouritism of one region at the expense of the other. This allegation was not one Canadian officials were ready to shoulder, therefore, officials in the aid office conceded a

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<sup>311</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2

<sup>312</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2

<sup>313</sup> Economic Affairs Division, "Technical Assistance to Nigeria," LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, File 14020-N7-1-40-PT. 1.2, 20 July, 1960

<sup>314</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria* (Avebury, 1995)

place in the Carleton programme in Public Administration to each region as well as the Federal Government of Nigeria.

The candidate of the Nigerian government for the programme was Zaccheaus Omololu, a Nigerian civil servant who made the most of the opportunities training abroad afforded. Prior to his being endorsed by the Nigerian government to serve as its flagbearer in the Carleton programme, he had taken up scholarship opportunities offered by the British government. Having started out at Baptist Boys' High School in Abeokuta and Ibadan Boys' High School in Ibadan between 1943 and 1948 where he earned his Cambridge School Certificate, he got his A-level in 1955 at Bradford Technical College. He then proceeded to the London School of Economics where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics in 1958. Omololu worked for the Nigerian Ministry of Finance as an assistant secretary until he elected to take up the Public Administration programme at Carleton University.<sup>315</sup> Omololu's candidacy ultimately highlighted the importance both countries attached to developing Nigeria's democracy through capacity building; it also revealed both countries' commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.

Training of Nigerians along governmental lines was a rational option because Canada was trying to preserve Nigeria's internal cohesion while warding off external (communist) threats. The former point deserves emphasis when considered against the backdrop that problems associated with federalism had, before independence, been the *bête noire* of Nigerian political life. The beginning of the festering problem associated with Nigeria's federalism can be traced to the decision in 1939 by Sir Bernard Bourdillon, the colonial governor, to divide the Southern Protectorate into Western and Eastern Provinces, with these headquartered in Lagos and Enugu,

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<sup>315</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 7898, File 14020-N7-1, "Commonwealth Technical Assistance Programme: Form of Nomination," no date

respectively.<sup>316</sup> Bourdillon justified his decision on the grounds that he and his staff had experienced delays in executing key governmental functions in the eastern part of Nigeria. He also argued that ethnographical considerations inspired him to submit that the lower part of the Niger river offered a precise administrative contour to split Southern Nigeria, and that the northern part of the country could not be split at this time [in 1939] because the Northern Province was populated by a culturally homogenous group of people with Kaduna providing a satisfactory central base as capital for the Province.<sup>317</sup>

While the administrative inconvenience<sup>318</sup> offered by Bourdillon as central to the division of the Southern Province made sense, the other two arguments were clearly off the mark. The lower part of the Niger River consisted of peoples with different identities,<sup>319</sup> but these identities had little to do with the cultural characteristics of the Yoruba and Igbo groups that constituted the nucleus of the new Western and Eastern Provinces, respectively. Nor was the Northern Region as homogenous as Bourdillon had claimed. Although the Hausa-Fulani group predominated, there were over a hundred ethnic minority groups in the north.<sup>320</sup> Therefore, Kaduna could not have

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<sup>316</sup> *Sessional Paper* no. 46 of 1937: *Reorganisation of the Southern Provinces* cited in Tamuno Takena, "British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century," in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), p. 394; Julius Ihonvbere and Timothy Shaw, *Illusions of Power, Nigeria in Transition* (Africa World Press, 1998), pp. 1-30

<sup>317</sup> Tamuno Takena, "British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century," in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), p. 394

<sup>318</sup> This was a ploy by the British to establish an effective presence in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Previous attempts had been resisted by the peoples of the East (Aba Women's Riot of 1929) and effecting government policies in the region had been difficult because of the distance required to travel there. Besides, the transportation system was ineffective and since it was the outbreak of World War II, the British needed to make the most out of their protectorates in order to contribute to the war effort.

<sup>319</sup> Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Tradition* (Ibadan University Press, 1972)

<sup>320</sup> George Moses, "The Fulani," in Marcellina Okehie-Offoha and Mathew Sadiku, *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria* (Africa World Press, 1995); Sir John Alder Burdon, *Northern Nigeria: historical notes on certain emirates and tribes* (Gregg International Publishers, 1972)

represented the interest of these minority groups in the north. Indeed, the decision to split the Southern Province and leave the North intact left in its wake an imbalance in Nigeria's federal architecture, which would later have catastrophic consequences on the unity of the nation. This statement is well served by Tamuno Takena's view that the "administrative step taken by Bourdillon in 1939 left the heritage of the mistaken sacrosanctness of the tripartite division of Nigeria till 1963."<sup>321</sup> From this period onward, Nigerian politicians in the defunct Southern Province became withdrawn to their provinces as the politics of ethnicity became the order of the day. The North, too, continued its "regional" policy under its leaders.

The British policy to not divide the North was a deliberate one, one that caused consternation among Canadian missionaries who had been carrying out their missionary work since the nineteenth century but were largely stationed in Southern Nigeria. Having had a measure of success in the South, they decided to take their gospel to the North but colonial government officials in Nigeria precluded them from doing so. Out of protest, the Canadian missionaries working in the Sudan Interior<sup>322</sup> complained to the Canadian and United Kingdom Governments against what they called "undue restrictions imposed by Colonial Government on missionary effort in Nigeria."<sup>323</sup> The Canadian government at this time was not familiar with the British Colonial policy in Nigeria but promised the missionaries that it would investigate the situation. Consequently, the Canadians sent a letter to the Dominion Office in London seeking

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<sup>321</sup> Tamuno Takena, "British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century," in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), p. 394

<sup>322</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa was referred to as Sudan in the eighteenth nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>323</sup> Imperial Cable from the High Commissioner, Ottawa, sent to the Dominions Office, London, June 13th, 1927, RG25, Vol. 1495

clarification over the British policy on the propagation of Christianity in Northern Nigeria.<sup>324</sup> In response, the British claimed that after Lord Lugard conquered the Hausa states towards the end of the nineteenth century and issued a letter of appointment to each Emir, he categorically stated that there should be no interference by government with the religious activities of the Moslems.<sup>325</sup> Sa'ad Abubakar, however, believes that the colonial government adopted this policy because it was determined to develop Northern Nigeria along "native lines," adding that the British in the Northern Protectorate were not averse to converting the people to Christianity but were mainly concerned with "avoiding hostile reaction from the Muslim rulers if the missionaries were allowed to freely and openly undertake such a task."<sup>326</sup> Justifying this position, Abubakar cited Northern Nigeria's *Annual Reports*, in which it was clear that the colonial government tried to develop Northern Nigeria along traditional lines. They sought to do this by encouraging the mallams, who were already versed in Islamic education, to learn to write in *boko* (Roman script) as opposed to the Muslim *ajami* (Amharic script), which some British officials found difficult to comprehend.<sup>327</sup> This would assist the British Resident Officers in the field to effectively administer the emirates.

Even though the British, through the 1939 mistake by Bourdillon, may have laid the foundation for Nigeria's flawed federalism in the first decade of independence, the onus was on Nigerian politicians to reconcile whatever differences they had against one another and work in the interest of the nation. Instead, ethnic chauvinism became a mantra associated with the three

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<sup>324</sup> Imperial Cable from the High Commissioner, Ottawa, sent to the Dominions Office, London, June 13th, 1927, RG25, Vol. 1495

<sup>325</sup> Letter signed by H. J. Read from Downing Street and addressed to Rev. R. V. Bingham, General Director of the Sudan Interior Mission, October 18th, 1929, RG25, DEA Fonds, Vol. 1495

<sup>326</sup> Sa'ad Abubakar, "The Northern Provinces Under Colonial Rule: 1900-1959," in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 474-5

<sup>327</sup> Sa'ad Abubakar, "The Northern Provinces Under Colonial Rule: 1900-1959," p. 475

regions. The expression, “us” versus “them”<sup>328</sup> became the working capital of the regions. It was not uncommon to hear of clashes between Christians and Moslems, the North and South, Hausa and Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa, Ife and Modakeke, Ijaw and Itsekiri.

After 1939, successive Nigerian constitutions only cemented Boudillon’s tripartite arrangement. The Richards Constitution of 1946, for instance, provided for a new Legislative Council whose jurisdiction covered the whole of Nigeria but it also provided for the establishment of Regional Council in each of the three regions. This constitution proved unworkable because the three regions could not agree on a range of ethnic issues that tied them together and by 1951, it was replaced by another constitution: the Macpherson Constitution, which was an improvement on the 1946 constitution as it provided for the establishment of a House of Representatives at the centre while the regions were converted into Regional Houses of Assembly.<sup>329</sup> Hopes that Nigerians would promote unity in diversity were soon lost as the regions continued to bicker over what percentage of the nation’s revenue would accrue to them. By 1958, it was certain that the “minorities” had no place in Nigeria’s political future because the “big three” – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba – were not ready to pay attention to problems of marginalization and ethnicity that the minorities harboured. This was confirmed in a 1958 Report by a Minorities Commission set up by the colonial government to look into the fears of the minorities which declared that their fears well founded and it was likely the minorities would be ‘consumed’ by the “big three” in the new Nigeria. According to the Commission, this was “a

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<sup>328</sup> Pita Ogaba Agbese, “Managing Ethnic Relations in a Heterogeneous Society: The Case of Nigeria,” John Mukum Mbaku, et al, *Ethnicity and Governance in the Third World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 125-148

<sup>329</sup> Gbenga Olusanya, “Constitutional Developments in Nigeria 1861-1960,” in Obaro Ikime, ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 518-544

threat to democracy.”<sup>330</sup> Unfortunately, lip service was paid to these federal questions and Nigeria entered into independence with deep fissures that continued to plague the country.

Problems associated with federalism, without mincing words, constituted a tear in the flesh of the Nigerian state. What is striking is that Canada, too, was a federal state with ten provinces. Hers was a classic example of an ideal federation with power shared between the federal government and ten provinces largely without the acrimony that was associated with Nigeria’s federalism. Since 1949 when Newfoundland and Labrador joined the federation, the ten provinces had experienced no calls for the creation of additional provinces as evidenced in Nigeria. Quite contrary was the Nigerian situation where cases of boundary and ethnicity continued to plague the country before and in the first decade of independence. Indeed, it can be argued that the Canadians attached considerable importance to the civil service as an engine of progress of the Nigerian state in keeping with the mandate given Carter that he “should encourage the Nigerian authorities to send in proposals directly related to economic development and the maintenance of essential government services in the present period of Africanization of the Civil Service.”<sup>331</sup>

Once the civil service settled down into the routine function of providing day-to-day administrative services for the smooth running of the Nigerian government, Canada – starting in 1961 – placed emphasis on encouraging Nigerian students to study in Canada under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP). In addition, the period occasioned high level of visits by Nigerian government officials to Canada, thus strengthening the bond

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<sup>330</sup> Great Britain Colonial Office, *Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the fears of Minorities and the means of allaying them*, Cmnd 505, London, 1958, p. 90, cited in Gbenga Olusanya, “Constitutional Developments in Nigeria 1861-1960,” p. 542

<sup>331</sup> LAC, Department of External Affairs Records, Volume 7898, “Letter of Appointment for Commissioner to Nigeria,” 21 March, 1960

between the two countries. This continued until 1966 when a new chapter opened in Nigeria's political history when Lagos' attention towards seeking stronger ties with Ottawa became diverted when Nigeria's political structure was nearly reduced to rubble as political unrest erased the political gains of the first few years of independence.

Unlike during colonialism when the British, out of selfish concerns, decided to 'build' the Nigerian project, Nigerians, during this period, out of identical/selfish reasons, decided to 'tear apart' the project, the foundation of which had been laid by the British. Canada, meanwhile, toiled to help Nigeria to 'stand up' during her teething period, but Nigerian politicians were ready to discard all. It is unclear if Ottawa thoroughly understood the dysfunctional nature of Nigerian politics during this period. Canadian policy was incentivised by geopolitical and economic objectives. Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory<sup>332</sup> was probably resonating in the mind of Ottawa when it made Nigeria a 'pivot' in its struggle to contain the spread of communism in Africa and saw political – and administrative – stability as the key to achieving this goal. The fear of communism had become a watchword and Canada had to factor this into account. This policy to contain the spread of communism through the promotion of democracy and deeper ties with Nigeria brought certain rewards in trade. Canadian businesses made inroads into the Nigerian economic space and Nigeria gravitated unremittingly towards the West, with the roots of the attraction traced both to its colonial history and to Western capitals' policies toward Nigeria following independence.

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<sup>332</sup> Halford Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal*, Volume 23, Issue 4 (April 1904), pp. 421-437



## Conclusion

This work has attempted a statist explanation of Canada's engagement with Nigeria from 1960 to 1970, the first decade of Nigeria's independence, that is, it looks at how Nigeria reacted and interacted with policies formulated in Ottawa during this period. Canada's foreign policy during this period was dominated by Cold War considerations, and policies towards its relationships with other states were rooted in the aim of the West to contain the spread of communism in the Third World. And as such, relations with Africa (and before Africa, Asia) were governed by such concerns.

Canada, just like the senior members of the Western alliance, the United Kingdom and the United States, chose to strategically engage Nigeria because of the political and economic potential it saw in Nigeria. Politically, Nigeria did not disappoint in its foreign conduct during this period although same cannot be said for its domestic politics. Nigeria positioned itself as a middle power and although it had little influence at the global level, it had considerable influence in Africa, championing Africa's cause and serving as a bridge between Africa and the world on matters of African concern. *Apartheid* South Africa was an issue that Nigeria pressed vigorously, repeatedly calling for racial equality between Blacks and Whites. Similarly, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by the Ian Smith government in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) prompted questions that Nigeria and Canada attempted to find solutions to through the Commonwealth, with Nigeria also aiding opposition groups. In all these, Nigeria followed a conventional Western approach to solving the problems in Southern Africa.

Needless to say, the ferment that the East-West rivalry generated touched the entire world, and Nigeria was not excluded. Nigeria, through its history and educational development,

was a product of the West, but immediately after independence it chose to follow Indian Prime Minister Nehru's Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The NAM was a group of independent states in Asia and Africa that preferred not to be embroiled in the East-West rivalry by taking sides with either bloc but rather chose to remain neutral. In truth, it would have not cost Nigeria much to take sides with the West,<sup>333</sup> but it decided to remain neutral. As Asisi Asobie has argued, Nigeria became a member of the non-aligned movement not because it could not have handled the heat of the Cold War but because of extraneous factors that had nothing to do with the Cold War itself. Asobie believes that the beginnings of the policy and the movement were enshrined in the history of colonial rule, in the decolonization process that led to independence and in the sociological, political and economic conditions of the new state and its peoples.<sup>334</sup> The history of colonial rule was a master-servant relationship where the European bourgeoisie's political, economic and social exploitation of the colonised reached a new dimension. It was during this period that a certain class of European writers deemed the colonised (especially Africans) unfit to govern themselves and their economies were forcefully incorporated into the world capitalist system. These writings resulted into the classification of human beings into classes (races)<sup>335</sup> with Africans occupying the bottom rung of the ladder. If it was possible for Nigerians (and

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<sup>333</sup> Nigerian soldiers fought on the side of the British in the First and Second World Wars. See Akinjide Osuntokun, "Disaffection and Revolts in Nigeria During the First World War, 1914-1918," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring, 1971), p. 171; E. N. Mordi, "The Nigeria Win the War Fund: An Unsung Episode in Government-Press Collaboration in Nigeria during the Second World War," *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 24, Issue 2 (August 2010), p. 88-9; Edmund Georges, *The Great War in West Africa* (Hutchinson and co. Ltd, 1930); Editorial Notes "West African Frontier Force in India," *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 43, No. 171 (April 1944), pp. 52-3; C. G. Bowen, *West African way: the story of the Burma campaigns, 1943-1945* (S.N., 1945)

<sup>334</sup> H. Asisi Asobie, "Non-Alignment: The Problems of a Political Concept in a Changing International System," *The Non-Aligned World* (A Quarterly devoted to the policy of non alignment and the non-aligned movement, Vol. II, No. 4, October-December 1984), p. 496

<sup>335</sup> Charles Seligman, *Races of Africa* (Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1930)

indeed Africans) to forget this aspect of their history, the process of decolonisation was fresh in their memory. The West, in its conception of freedom, had not had Africa in mind. It was only concerned about the states under the yoke of oppression in Eastern Europe but Cold War realities demanded that the idea of freedom be extended to other oppressed peoples. Coupled with these reasons, these new states at independence needed their own version of the 'Marshall Plan' to put their economies on a sound footing. Being neutral was, therefore, a safe policy. Nigeria at the outset of the non-aligned movement was ambivalent and reluctant to accept its doctrines<sup>336</sup> because of its sympathy for the West, but owing to these historic realities (colonisation and decolonisation) had to subscribe to the movement.

As a junior member of the West's alliance against communism, Canada had no such history. However, Ottawa's policy during the of years immediately before Nigeria's independence showed that Canada had little interest in Nigeria and that had it not been for the communist threat, Canada would not have strengthened relations with Nigeria in the first decade of its independence. Although the strengthening of relations created an opportunity to increase trade, this paled when we compare total trade with Nigeria to that transacted with Canada's principal trading partners. This premise tells us that Nigeria loomed less on Canada's horizon but when it needed Nigeria out of a pressing international concern, it intensified relations with the country.

This argument, therefore, leads us to provide a theoretical background for understanding Canada's engagement with Nigeria during this period. Was it shaped by realism or idealism or a combination of both? Was it behavioural? While it is difficult to conclude that Canada's policy

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<sup>336</sup> G. O. Olusanya and R. A. Akindele (eds), *Nigeria's External Relations: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1986), p. 149

towards Nigeria was shaped entirely by one of these notions, elements of all are traceable in its engagement with Nigeria. Although Canada before the Second World War was a nation of immigrants, its 'ideal society' excluded Africans and Asians as they were seen as undesirables. When we attempt to analyse a periodization of governments and attitudes to non-Whites, it was the same. In fairness to Ottawa, it was not totally comfortable with other races breaking into the 'White world'. It was not concerned about Africa, nor was it not overtly concerned about Asia and Latin America except where there were prospects for trade.

The new international makeup coming out of World War II, however, with the emergence of international security and economic organisations, created a retooling of Canada's approach to engaging the world because the international organisations were seen by its policymakers as a framework where the country could exert considerable influence in the world. In the United Nations, Canada found a convenient platform to shape global peace as a middle power and in some cases, such as in UNRRA and the Suez Crisis of 1956, demonstrated leadership. To engage former dependencies of Britain in Africa (and Asia), a renewed Commonwealth was employed as a platform. To understand the Commonwealth as an instrument of Canadian foreign policy, it is important to classify its role within the Canadian context into two broad categories as used by Timothy Shaw in his classification of the features of Nigerian foreign policy: the super-structural perspective and sub-structural perspective.<sup>337</sup> One of the features of the super-structural perspective is that it is concerned with the analysis of the roles of statesmen, which is viewed from the prism of national interest. Seen from this perspective, Canada used the Commonwealth to advance its national interest. The counterweight

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<sup>337</sup> Timothy M. Shaw, "The State of Nigeria: Oil Crisis, Power Bases and Foreign Policy," in Timothy M. Shaw and Olajide Aluko (eds), *Nigerian Foreign Policy: Alternative Perceptions and Projections* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 395

theory, as suggested by John Holmes, offers an interpretation of how Canada employed the Commonwealth to checkmate the overbearing influence of the United States and at times, influence policies in Washington.<sup>338</sup> In the same vein, Canada used the Commonwealth to advance its foreign policy goals of promoting human rights and the rule of law as well as democracy. Indeed, the super-structure model portrays Canada from a realist standpoint, which, more often than not, is self-seeking. While this model explains in part Canada's policy to engage Nigeria through the Commonwealth, it is too simplistic and fails to demystify the idealism inherent in Canadian foreign policy. Again, it should be noted that the goal of every assertive foreign policy is to make other states react to and possibly interact and embrace the action of the state initiating it.

Contrary to the super-structural viewpoint, the sub-structural sees Canada as a middle power in international politics which serves as a bridge between Third world countries and their interests in international institutions. Seen from this context, Canada played a role in championing the cause of the global South in the United Nations using the Commonwealth as template. For instance, Canada agreed with African states in the United Nations that *apartheid* was inhuman and that all states should abide by the Commonwealth principle of racial equality.<sup>339</sup>

These two perspectives aptly summarise Canada's Africa's policy using the Commonwealth as a framework although it is important to emphasise there were times when its actions were behavioural, such as during the Nigerian civil war when the effect of supporting

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<sup>338</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for Order, 1943-1957*, Vol. 2 (University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 288

<sup>339</sup> Douglas Anglin, "Canada and 'apartheid,'" *International Journal*, Vol. 15, Issue 2 (April 1960), pp. 122-137

breakaway Biafra might have had repercussions domestically. But it should be stressed that the fear of Nigeria pulling out of the Commonwealth was another concern. It is therefore not surprising that during the Civil War, the Commonwealth (contrary to the United Nations), under the leadership of Arnold Smith, was able to earn the trust and respect of Nigerian and Biafran officials as Canada seized the opportunity the organisation afforded to advance its foreign policy goal of the promotion of human rights and the rule of law by organising several peace meetings in the United Kingdom between the warring factions. Unsurprisingly, the Civil War provided a test case for the human rights principle, which Canada held tenaciously. Although the Canadian public did not totally understand why Ottawa continued to engage Nigeria in the face of perceived human rights abuse, it is clear that if it was found that Lagos violated the rights of its citizens, Ottawa might have voiced its concerns even if it wanted to stop short of recognising Biafra. This had certainly happened in the case of South Africa, even before the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Canada, through the Commonwealth, did its due diligence and found little evidence to support the genocide claim made by the Igbo and the international propaganda campaign run by *Markpress*. In truth, we cannot erase one or two cases of abuse during the Civil War; but this was not the policy of the Nigerian government. It was fighting for survival and self-preservation and had to use ‘reasonable brutality’ to achieve its purpose. After all, as William Shakespeare suggested in *Macbeth*, in war, “Fair is foul and foul is fair.”<sup>340</sup> Ottawa clearly understood Nigeria’s position, Ojukwu’s recalcitrance and the well-choreographed international propaganda, and sought ways to end the conflict while simultaneously looking forward to how it could assist Nigeria in its postwar reconstruction.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1.1.11-12)

<sup>341</sup> LAC, RG25, Department of External Affairs Records, Vol. 9164, “Talking Points”

Before the Civil War, Nigerian was a major recipient of Canadian aid to Africa. From the standpoint of Ottawa and because of the economic and political values it brought to the table, it was more equal than other African countries. It is true that Ghana had become independent by 1957 but the anticipated independence of Nigeria made Ottawa initiate a bilateral aid scheme for Africa. More so, various regional governments in Nigeria began to enjoy various forms of assistance before Nigeria became independent. Ottawa's thinking was that the more it strengthened relations with Nigeria, the more difficult would it be to be persuaded by communist enticements. In achieving this objective, the warm attitude of officials like Norman Robertson, Dana Wilgress and Donald Fleming (and successive Canadian Prime Ministers) to Nigeria proved decisive in the strengthening of relations with Africa's most populous Black nation.

The promotion of democracy and the rule of law followed the same direction as Ottawa concentrated on training Nigerians, especially current or future civil servants, to accept Western democracy as opposed to communist doctrines. Training essentially took place in Ottawa and in some cases, in Canadian embassies abroad. In all these programs, the Commonwealth provided a channel to meet with Nigerians (and Africans) and exchange views whenever possible. No doubt, the Commonwealth served as a Canadian tool to engage Africa and ward off communist threat.

All these varied threads were tied up in Canada's bid to help halt the spread of communism as thinking in Ottawa was suffused by cold war concerns throughout the period examined, yet this provided an opportunity for Canada to cement its place in the new

international order, what Holmes calls “the search for equilibrium.”<sup>342</sup> Canada was, therefore, pragmatic in its approach to relating with Nigeria.

Indeed, the enthusiasm with which Canada pursued the perpetuation of the Commonwealth was to prove invaluable in its fight against communism in Africa as well its bid to assert its foreign policy and demonstrate its leadership in the organisation. The Commonwealth was an association where peoples of different races met. Some were rich, but the majority were poor. Common ground had to be found: Britain was still looked at by Asians and Africans with suspicion; Australia was not interested in Africa; Canada was interested in the Commonwealth as a tool to achieve its foreign policy goals and demonstrated that it was sympathetic to African affairs, a reason why African states which had been former British colonies (except Sudan) embraced the Commonwealth and came to trust Canada’s leadership. But it is doubtful if Nigerian leaders understood that Canada’s principal goal was to use the Commonwealth to achieve its central foreign policy objective – containing the spread of communist influence.

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<sup>342</sup> John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for Order*, Vol. 2, pp. 377-393



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