

TWO. THE POLITICAL TIME

Ethnicity and Violence, 1948–1970

In August 1950 a young member of the new Northern House of Assembly tabled a motion to empanel a commission of inquiry into the native authority system of Northern Nigeria. In the speech introducing his motion Abubakar Tafawa Balewa called the emirate governments corrupt and autocratic, noting that they systematically demanded bribes from ordinary Nigerians and that they ruled with no regard for popular consent. Emirate governance—and by extension the colonial system of indirect rule—he claimed, was incompatible with the modernizing ethos demanded by the postwar world. Calling the native authorities “the system which has outlived its usefulness so long that it now constitutes the chief barrier to our progress,” he advocated a reform that would “retain whatever there may be of value in the traditional pattern” by means of “grafting modern ideas on the old stock.” His proposal addressed the problems of an autocracy unsuited to modern conditions: “One of the biggest defects of the system is the complete ignorance of everyone from top to bottom about his rights, his obligations and his powers.” Emirs were unsure of their proper roles. Common people, similarly ignorant, were never consulted about public affairs at all. A source of hope was the emergence of a “new class” of northerner created by “Western education and world conditions.” Giving this class of northerner a formal political role would, Tafawa Balewa implicitly argued, be a critical part of salvaging emirate authority.¹

The speech was provocative and bold, both as a political initiative and for the legislator personally. Tafawa Balewa came from relatively humble origins. His parents were servants of officials of Bauchi emirate, a position of practical privilege. But it was not the same as being a member of the aristocracy, and his ancestry was symbolically at a remove from the freeborn talakawa as well. His family's connections were sufficient to win him a place at Katsina College, Northern Nigeria's elite secondary school for boys mentioned in the previous chapter. Tafawa Balewa was one of the first cohort of Northern Nigerians educated there, and he was not the only graduate of relatively humble background. Because of ambivalence about Western education, emirs had often hesitated to subject their own families to the schools; nonetheless the boys who went (and who therefore ultimately benefited from the opportunities that became available to the Western educated) tended to have strong emirate ties. For a time after his graduation, Tafawa Balewa worked in the Bauchi native authority as a teacher and administrator. He then earned a teaching certificate from the University of London. When a new constitution was implemented in 1946, inaugurating a new, appointive regional House of Assembly, Bauchi's emir nominated him to it. This position provided the platform to launch his attack on emirate officials. Balewa had many allies among his colleagues in the Assembly, which was largely populated by men of similar outlook, self-consciously modernizing young men who also had strong emirate ties. Not coincidentally, membership in the regional assembly was heavily skewed toward graduates of Katsina College.

As newspapers such as Zaria's Hausa-language *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* gave Tafawa Balewa favorable coverage, these reformist parliamentarians joined the Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA, lit. Association of Northern People), which had been a cultural association. In that guise, the JMA had existed for several years already. It had vaguely reformist goals, which it made clear did not include national independence for the foreseeable future, and it too emphasized the reform (rather than the abolition) of emirate governance. This reformist but accommodationist stance helped to ensure at least a modicum of official toleration. It was a comfortable ideological home for Tafawa Balewa and his cohorts, for like them the JMA was skeptical about the more authoritarian qualities of the native authority system. It thus combined moderation with a commitment to modernizing change. Nonetheless, an organization that brought together a community of northerners outside the rubric of established emirate or religious auspices—and which leveled criticisms against the current order—was potentially subversive. Accordingly the government stance was ambivalent. This ambivalence was heightened when, with the addition of these

reformist parliamentarians, the JMA incorporated itself as a political party the year after Tafawa Balewa's speech and also became known by its English-language name, the Northern People's Congress (NPC).²

The emergence of the NPC was as moderate a nationalist development as the colonial and emirate governments could realistically have expected. Despite Tafawa Balewa's emphasis on the shortcomings of emirate governance and the need for modernization and reform, his political program clearly envisioned a continued role for the native authorities and emphasized political continuity rather than revolution. By contrast, just before Tafawa Balewa's speech a group of relative radicals split off from the JMA, forming a more confrontational political party, the Jam'iyyar Neman Sawaba (Association Seeking Salvation), known by its English-language name of Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). Its declaration of principles, which it called the Sawaba Declaration, developed a quasi-Marxist critique of class domination of the talakawa by the masu sarauta. The declaration identified "the shocking state of social order" that emerged from the emirates' nature as hereditary monarchies. More specifically, the declaration claimed the problem came from a class divide between the talakawa and the masu sarauta (whom NEPU termed "members of that vicious circle of Native Administration"). The Northern Elements Progressive Union condemned British colonialism for having supported emirate aristocracies, asserting "the entire Machinery of Government, including the armed forces of the nation exist only to conserve the privilege of this selfish minority group." Political parties, it claimed, "are but the expression of class interest." The Northern Elements Progressive Union proposed to represent the interest of the talakawa.

With fewer personal connections to emirate aristocracies, NEPU's leaders were less likely than those of the NPC to have high levels of Western education (though some, including NEPU's leader, Aminu Kano, were also Katsina College graduates and had postsecondary Western educations). More subversively, they had ties to nationalist parties from other regions, most notably Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, whose base was in the Igbo-speaking southeast. A number of NEPU's leaders were also respected religious scholars and came from well-recognized scholarly lineages. Their center of gravity was in Kano and with the Tijaniyya sufi order, specifically a reformed branch that followed Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé of Senegal. Although not all NEPU leaders were reformed Tijanis (nor all reformed Tijanis sympathetic to NEPU—indeed their Nigerian political head was the emir of Kano), an emerging NPC/NEPU split did tend toward expressing a perceived opposition between the Tijanis and the Qadiri order of the founders of

the Sokoto caliphate, and also a regional rivalry between Sokoto and Kano.³ Although the NPC's reformist ambitions were potentially uncomfortable for emirate officials, NEPU's intertwined political and religious criticisms of emirate governance were potentially more dangerous to elites that wanted to prevent political pressure for substantial administrative change.

Bold and provocative as his comments in the House of Assembly were, Tafawa Balewa's intervention positioned him well for an era of electoral politics that was just beginning. Interdependent tropes of corruption and reform functioned as a way of consolidating Tafawa Balewa's own position as a figure in the emerging order; they also helped to articulate patterns of political transformation as they unfolded. In 1951 a new constitution made a majority of seats in the Northern House of Assembly subject to indirect election through a tiered system of electoral colleges. Meanwhile, the central legislative council in Lagos was expanded into an elective parliamentary chamber whose members were elected by the regional houses of assembly. The logistical demands of electoral politics, however indirect, helped to spur the consolidation of political parties everywhere. By this point national independence was clearly in the cards, though its terms and timetable were still unclear. The political parties in the north both responded to this new institutional pressure and to the potential challenges of developments in southern Nigeria.

Nationalist political parties had long existed in the south. By 1951 the dominant party across southern Nigeria was the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). The NCNC's real base of support was in the southeast part of the country, which at that point comprised the Eastern Region of Nigeria. In the Western Region, a new party called the Action Group (AG) was also founded in 1951, emerging from a Yoruba cultural association called the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, under the leadership of a brilliant young activist and barrister named Obafemi Awolowo. Quickly the NCNC lost much of its support in the west to the new regionally based party. Both southern parties were assertive about the prospect of national independence (in 1953, an AG member of parliament moved to declare "a primary political objective" self-government in 1956, which the NPC opposed, substituting "as soon as practicable" in place of 1956). In part because of nationalist pressure from the southern parties and left-wing pressure from NEPU, northern native administration officials formed an alliance with the new NPC, hoping thereby to domesticate the threat it might have represented. The Northern Elements Progressive Union soon made a tacit alliance with other nationalist parties and with a dissident party of minority ethnic groups in the southern portions of the Northern Region, termed the "Middle Belt." This political organizing quickly convinced both British and emirate au-

thorities that the left-wingers were a far more pressing threat than the NPC could ever be. At the time the 1951 primary elections were held, NEPU was the only organized political party in the far north, and emirs saw NEPU challengers defeat many of their favored candidates in the selection process.⁴ Another new constitution in 1954 brought ministerial responsibility to a federal government in Lagos and provided for direct elections to the federal parliament.

In 1950 it was not yet clear that party politics would emerge in the forms they did or that independence would begin to loom so large. Nonetheless, it was obvious that change was in the air and that the organs of emirate governance would need to adapt. Tafawa Balewa's speech suggested a course of action that reformed native authorities instead of abolishing them. However, his criticism of emirate institutions coupled with his humble origins to make him unacceptable to the masu sarauta as NPC leader. Instead, official support gravitated to Ahmadu Bello as leader of the party. Bello had not been one of the JMA's original leading lights, nor had he been one of the more significant politicians who transformed it into a political party in 1951. He had other advantages. Bello was a member of the Sokoto royal family. He held the Sokoto title of sardauna, and he was a descendant of the caliphate's founder, Usman dan Fodio. He was also a graduate of Katsina College and had been a teacher and native authority employee before his appointment as district head of Rabah in Sokoto. Charismatic, fluent in English, and highly intelligent, he was a reassuring figure both to worried emirs and to a British bureaucracy still ambivalent about the emergence of a Western-style political elite.

Delivered at this juncture, Tafawa Balewa's identification of autocracy and bribery as major shortcomings of the existing regime is revealing. It addressed a system in transition from the systems of administration that had emerged across the 1920s and that persisted through World War II to those that would superintend the transition to independence. Tafawa Balewa's empirical claims were unexceptionable, though one can understand the emirs' discomfort with the criticism their administrations received. Nonetheless, it was clear that the emirates of Northern Nigeria were autocratic (the main point of contention was whether this was for good or ill), and it was also difficult to deny that bribe taking and other forms of official malfeasance were quite common. Although the speech was not retailing unknown information, it was nonetheless noteworthy as a political performative. Giving the speech and publicly articulating its sentiments itself transformed what was politically possible. It signaled a new departure in Northern Nigerian politics.

Tafawa Balewa identified elite oppression of ordinary people as both an evil in itself and as a roadblock to modernization. Where British colonialists had

proposed a superficially similar program, balancing a need for the “progress of the country” against a respect for “native tradition,” Tafawa Balewa inserted a critique of corruption as it was then understood. His claim that “the giving and taking of bribes occupies the attention of all degrees to the exclusion of the ideals of disinterested service” inserted a novel idea into the familiar colonial dichotomies of indigenous and modern. By formulating his critique as addressing *corruption*, Tafawa Balewa suggested governmental reform would require constitutional change. Bringing the emergent NPC (and himself) to power was a logical corollary. By this point, modernization was popularly invoked as necessary, inevitable, and good. The postwar period was the occasion of a considerable systematization of what had hitherto been somewhat scattershot notions of economic change and a transformation toward modernity.⁵ Tafawa Balewa not only suggested a political program with his allies at the head; he proposed a reformist agenda that would consolidate the new system of self-rule under their authority. The issue was not just one of a specific political struggle; it concerned the identity of Nigeria’s postcolonial ruling class, and the ideological justification of its qualification to rule.

The proposal worked. Tafawa Balewa became Nigeria’s first—indeed, as it turned out, its only—prime minister when that position was created in 1957. But something more interesting was at stake than the consolidation of a new political class, aligned with but not identical to emirate aristocracies. The political transformations of the 1950s created a new dynamic in which two bodies of Northern Nigerian officials, each subject to colonial control, shared responsibility for public affairs. Beyond this, it brought the political tensions of Northern Nigeria’s ruling elites into direct interaction, and contention, with those of Nigerians from other regions. The emergence of the federal parliament and responsible ministerial government created an entirely new forum within which Nigerian political life was negotiated. These linked transitions had wide-ranging consequences for the corruption-complex as well. Material practices that could be labeled “corruption” would be transformed by the shifting constitutional structure. The advent of regional (and emerging from that of ethnic) competition at the center changed the incentives to exercise office for ends different from those of the regime’s formal logic, and it transformed the normative terrain on which such practices were publicly evaluated. Ongoing instances of political malpractice that erupted into the public sphere or caused political crisis helped to change the legal status of such endeavors and indeed the nature of what people expected from political leaders. The result was the emergence of what one might finally term a truly national Nigerian corruption,

emerging from the various political and cultural traditions that intertwined in Nigeria's federal center.

"Corruption" and an Emergent Political Class

The power of Tafawa Balewa's speech transcended its timely advocacy of a novel constitutional settlement. It suggested a new form of politics for the coming era. *Constitutionally*, the native authority/colonial dyad had accepted tradition and modernity as opposed categories. *Politically*, the regime had depended on Lord Lugard's old claim that colonialism's tutelary function demanded indirect rule as an expedient formula for the legitimacy of British rule: colonial interference was explained as the instruction necessary for improvement and social modernization. Tafawa Balewa's formulation demanded a new order: the old complementarity of the traditional and the modern had broken down; the myriad postwar changes, which had transformed the meaning of modernization and development, required a new politics as well. He accepted the long-established British claim that corruption and oppression were natural outgrowths of rulers' more primitive impulses, and he also accepted the claim that precolonial systems of rule had inherent strengths that should not be sacrificed. But instead of arguing for continuity with the native authorities' traditional practices, which could be ameliorated by colonial tutelage, he implied the new circumstances dictated more radical reform. Nigerians were ready to break with their traditional past because it had already broken down. Even while Tafawa Balewa's rhetoric suggested that corruption and oppression, like modernization and progress, were absolute qualities with fixed meanings, he also invoked the fact that contemporary politics had transformed what the positive terms meant. Where in the past they had implied economic transformation and adoption of European modes of living, they now had different political and social implications. Nigeria could not be modern unless people's welfare was improved. The revised position opened up the possibility of a progressive modernity under the direction of Nigerian officials. With the prospect of a new political order, "corruption and oppression" also shifted in meaning. In previous decades, corruption was held to be a natural consequence of the preservation of precolonial systems of rule; it was invoked as a problem demanding attention with regard to the failings of individual officials. Tafawa Balewa's innovation (at least for an establishment northern Nigerian politician) was to identify oppression—"corruption" in this emergent sense—as a systemic problem in need of systemic solution. The problem was

less the immoral conduct of specific officeholders than an outmoded system of government. And ultimately, the solution was to grant power to someone like himself.

Tafawa Balewa's speech was a symptom of change rather than a catalyst for it. The old regime purported to be a faithful instantiation of the principles Lord Lugard had articulated in his policies of indirect rule as outlined in his *Political Memoranda* and *Dual Mandate*.⁶ Governing practices had always been more complicated than this ideological representation would allow: the principle that indigenous practices would be permitted to persist was more a convenient fiction than an exhaustive description of practice on the ground. Instead, ideologies of indirect rule led to bureaucratic debates conducted in the idiom of political tradition. In the process considerable change was effected, sometimes deliberately and sometimes not.⁷ The ultimate effect of indirect rule as a system of government was that the basic organs of administration remained more or less constant, even while their practices (and often the social logic behind them) were systematically transformed. The basic structures of indirect rule took on their general outlines by the end of the first decade of colonial rule. Categories of tax were consolidated. The district structure of local administration was worked out. The network of courts took shape. And as outlined in the previous chapter, the corruption-complex was a natural consequence of this politico-administrative conjuncture. Its material manifestations emerged from the structural imperatives on officials, and its discourses emerged from a discrete set of normative and legal doctrines indirect rule had instituted. By the 1920s, "corruption" was a self-evident reason to depose an official, even an emir, but the irony was that the references to particular acts grouped under that label were somewhat less distinct than a contemporary reading of the term would imply. The administrative reorganization of emirate government, the institutionalization of the distinction between public revenue and private income, and the bureaucratic elaboration of public office all tended toward making "corruption" refer to a more delimited set of crimes. Even so, a basic dynamic remained of using "corruption" as a strategy of accomplishing diverse political ends.

Careful attention to the corruption-complex thus provides a window onto the stresses and strains inherent in this constantly evolving system. Officials who found themselves in difficulty were enmeshed in a system that increasingly envisioned their official conduct as being in accord (or not) with a set of bureaucratic rules and with norms of behavior that rigorously distinguished between public and private resources. So were all officials. Misbehavior in office was described in terms of this ideological grid. The administrative appara-

tus of the native authorities helped to bring particular material practices into being, as with inflated tax assessments, and at the same time colonial rule created a normative apparatus for describing those practices. Just as significantly, indirect rule constituted the political conjuncture in which those normative codes could apply. Thus, not only was colonialism the context in which Emir Aliyu engaged in a particular set of political and economic actions; it also imposed a code of conduct that could be used to evaluate them. Moreover, the political struggle between Aliyu, his rivals in the emirate, British colonial officers, and the missionary Walter Miller was conducted in the idiom of (in) appropriate official action. Dubbing an official “corrupt” or not was as much effect as cause. Aliyu was only vulnerable to being called “corrupt” when he became a political liability to the colonial administration. Sani Kacako’s overlord, the hakimi, was not found to be corrupt as a result of Sani’s woes, even though he was politically vulnerable in other regards. All of this is to suggest that “corruption” both signaled the ideological limits of indirect rule as a doctrine of governance and provided a means through which it could be adjusted.

This process of constricting the referents of “corruption” even while retaining its deployment as a political weapon is illustrated by a somewhat later example, that of Tafawa Balewa’s soon-to-be NPC superior Ahmadu Bello. He had been an unsuccessful contender for the throne of Sokoto when Sultan Hassan died in 1938. Appointed district head of Gusau and to the office of sardauna after the selection of Sultan Abubakar III, Bello had a rocky relationship with the British colonial administration in his new capacity. Gusau was a commercially dynamic town at a remove from Sokoto and with substantial numbers of southern Nigerian inhabitants. The areas surrounding Gusau had proven difficult to administer because of their distance from Sokoto. The administration proposed a new arrangement in which the fourteen districts in the region were placed under the supervision of an emirate councilor, who would reside in Gusau as a superordinate district head. Bello was selected for this honor. The plan was that his high level of Western education would allow him to provide close, modernizing oversight to his subordinates in these eastern districts, while his regular trips to the capital to attend council would facilitate ready communications with the sultan and political officers. As matters played out, the Sardauna preferred spending time in Gusau and the areas under his direct authority to being in Sokoto where he was subject to his successful rival, the incumbent sultan. He kept his time in the capital to a minimum.

British reports on the situation suggest increasing frustration across the several years following his appointment.⁸ From their point of view, the Sardauna was too little involved in Sokoto politics and too inclined to supervise the

activities of his subordinate district heads, or to do their work himself instead of teaching them proper methods. In the meantime, other forces began to move against him. In his autobiography, Bello reports his appointment to Gusau was “not lacking dark undertones and hidden motives.” This was demonstrated in 1943 when a friend came to warn him of a plot against him: “When I asked what sort of plot, he said that people were being organized to lay complaints against me so that I would be involved in a court case.”⁹ Soon thereafter he heard that a group of cattle herders was being pressured to report he had extorted tax from them that he had not passed on to the Sokoto treasury. The cattle tax in particular was something of a sore point in Sokoto province. By the 1940s, Fulani pastoralists had become skilled at evading it, and officials in Sokoto were also known for inflating their assessments of the cattle herds. Both tendencies resulted in substantial shortfalls. These shortfalls had been the subject of a major investigation in 1937–38, which found huge discrepancies between the receipts given pastoralist taxpayers and the counterfoils recording the revenues collected and passed on. The latter were much smaller than the former, which suggested the district heads and their subordinates were retaining large sums for their own purposes.¹⁰ The issue was still sensitive five years later, when Ahmadu Bello faced his accusers. He was especially vulnerable as a result of having already frustrated his British supervisors. He was tried in the sultan’s court, convicted of embezzling cattle tax and of receiving bribes from herdsmen, and sentenced to a year’s imprisonment. His conviction was overturned on appeal before the High Court in Zaria, but not until after a period of considerable anxiety and an expensive court case that required him to leave his home base in Sokoto.

The details of this court case are somewhat shadowy, but it is clear that Bello’s rivalry with the sultan—the “dark undertones and sinister motivations”—singled Bello out for scrutiny, ensuring his conviction in the sultan’s court, and winning his appeal. British complaints about his disinclination to visit Sokoto also point to a tense relationship with the sultan. That British officers recorded their frustration underlines his vulnerability to the charges against him. Complaints about an official tended to be phrased cautiously when that official’s position was unimpeachable. The political machinations behind the case can only be inferred, but an obvious conclusion is that the Sardauna was prosecuted for conduct which was anything but unusual. One charge he faced had to do with gifts he received in the course of his duties in Gusau, many of which he regifted to others. Even if such behavior was not, strictly speaking, legal, it was part and parcel of the gifting relations a Sokoto official was expected to engage in. By folding the issue into the broader charges of corrup-

tion laid at Bello's feet, the prosecution demonstrated a further development in the formal criminalization of long-standing gifting practices. Where receiving gifts from Sani Kacako constituted a crime for relatively junior district officials while being ignored on the part of their superiors in 1920s Kano, a senior royal could be prosecuted for the same in 1940s Sokoto.

While the very nature of crimes susceptible to prosecution may have been shifting, there was also a selective quality to Bello's case. Whether or not he had actually diverted a portion of the cattle tax to his own purposes (a sympathetic biographer asserts there was "no evidence to suggest that the Sardauna misappropriated public funds, and he was regarded as scrupulous in separating private and public funds"),¹¹ Sokoto's regular problems with the cattle tax demonstrate many other officials had done the same thing, and relatively few of them had been prosecuted. The empirical conduct of individual officeholders had less to do with their being investigated and deemed corrupt than did their broader political context. Corruption was less a discrete set of practices, though it was that as well, than it was a free-floating charge that could be applied to individuals under the right circumstances.

The question of whether Bello *truly* misappropriated public funds is less important than the issue of how and why his actions might have been—and ultimately were not—found to be criminal corruption. The charge was a political weapon that could be used against an official who was vulnerable. Bello's longer-term vindication suggests something more. The case shows a transition in the corruption-complex, a shift in how corruption talk functioned as a political performative. The case's emphasis on the purely financial aspect of his misconduct demonstrates a constriction of the crimes that could be deemed "corruption" rather than simply criminality. The first part of the drama, up to Bello's conviction, is similar to that of Emir Aliyu. But ultimately the Sardauna was more than vindicated; his misadventure strengthened him in the long term. During this trying period, he made a number of key allies. The ciroma of Kano, who would become emir ten years later, was a key supporter. Many of his friends from his Katsina College days made it a point to visit him. Indeed, the legal case helped to galvanize this new class of educated northerners to understandable ambivalence toward existing native authorities. If a young man of elite lineage like Bello could find himself on trial, the older generation might pose dangers to any ambitious member of the new cohort. On his return to Sokoto, the Sardauna was moved from his position in Gusau and instead took over managing the Sokoto native authority's central office. This administrative role was a powerful position for an ambitious politician when widespread politics began a few years later.

The Sardauna's experience in 1943 reveals a system already in transition. The motor for change was the cohort of young men who supported Bello. His prosecution helped to consolidate an alliance that would enable the emergence of the NPC. Their support facilitated the Sardauna's appeal, and it also signaled new political possibilities, which would be manifested as representative politics created a forum for their consummation. Again, the shifting contours of the corruption-complex provide a window onto this more fundamental transformation. The corruption-complex had emerged as a key part of colonial systems of indirect rule—a charge and a legal category as much as a set of objective material crimes. The political changes that unfolded after Tafawa Balewa's speech led to a constitutional transformation, which then created a fundamental change in the corruption-complex as well. Before and during World War II, Nigerian officials were largely limited to the confines of the native authorities.¹² To the extent “corruption” was perceived to be an integral feature of Nigerian governance, it was as corruption existed or persisted as a feature of emirate governance. There were too few Nigerian officials elsewhere in the colonial administration for their malpractices to be viewed as a systematic problem rather than as an individual moral failing. British officials, by definition, were not corrupt.¹³ One does not need to conclude from this that only Nigerian officials ever exercised their offices improperly or benefited from economic considerations in ways the rules did not allow. In practice, corruption was treated as an African attribute. The distinctions emerge in the different material positions of African and European officials and in the distinct political logics of applying “corruption” as a label emerging from normative or legal codes. For this reason alone, the transition to self-rule was a watershed in the history of Nigerian corruption. The very administrative locations in which material practices of corruption could occur were altered, as legislative bodies and responsible ministries were created and as increasing numbers of Africans entered the civil service. With these changes, African officials began to operate from new governmental locations.

At the same time, the administrative structures of the native authorities went through a revolution. The postwar emphasis on development as social welfare touched off major investment in roads, hospitals, schools, public health, and agricultural improvement.¹⁴ Much of this investment was channeled through the native authorities. As the 1950s progressed and then gave way to the postindependence era, institutions of emirate governance were superseded by organs of the secular state. Elected councils were instituted in the districts, for example, and these were gradually transformed into the primary institutions of local administration, forming the precursors of today's Local Govern-

ment Councils. In this process, hakimai gradually lost their direct administrative role. Meanwhile, regional governments took on direct responsibility for infrastructure.

At the same time that the transformation in government structure helped to alter the material contexts in which government practice took shape, party politics intersected with the emergence of a new print culture to create new valences to “corruption” as a potential charge that could be made against officials. The NPC (as opposed to its culturalist precursors) was brought into being by the inauguration of elective positions within regional and federal houses of assembly, as well as by the maneuverings of people wanting to channel (or blunt) the population’s restiveness under emirate rule. Of almost equal significance to these constitutional changes was the emergence in the north of new communicative media. A northern Nigerian structural transformation of the public sphere was touched off in part by a Sierra Leonean named Samuel Cole-Edwards, who had originally come to Northern Nigeria to work with Lugard. His business interests had been destroyed by the Great Depression. Disillusioned by the government’s response to this crisis (and by its ignoring his personal grievances), in 1930 Cole-Edwards founded Northern Nigeria’s first newspaper, the short-lived *Nigerian Protectorate Ram*. With a small Anglophone readership, the *Ram* published relatively mild criticisms of British rule, which were little threat to the regime. It nonetheless prompted the administration to sponsor a pro-government outlet, *Northern Provinces News*, which published articles in Hausa and was distributed for free around the protectorate. The *Northern Provinces News* gave writers like Tafawa Balewa their first mass audiences. It also created a novel public forum, however propagandistic.¹⁵ In 1938 this forum was consolidated with the establishment of the Gaskiya Corporation, a quasi-official body whose original charge was to engage in public “education” that would consolidate popular loyalty to the British Empire and would quiet fears of or hopes for German conquest. Gaskiya began publishing a Hausa-language newspaper, *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*, which provided a public forum for political debate to be conducted. Popular discourse about public affairs was not absent before, but a newspaper is structurally different from devotional poetry, sermons, songs, praise poetry, and other longer-established forms of public discourse that also had political valences. Although *Gaskiya* was aligned with the moderate opinions of the NPC, its elaboration of new forms of Hausaphone public debate created the possibility for mass politics and official practice.¹⁶

In addition to this new Hausaphone public sphere, the press that had been established along the coast for many decades was finding a larger northern

audience in the postwar period. The spread of Western education meant there was an increasing cadre of people who could read English-language newspapers, and in this way a nationalist English-language press helped to consolidate a nationalist public sphere in the north. Where *Gaskiya*'s audience tended to align with the NPC and the political establishment—as befitted a quasi-government entity—the audiences of newspapers like Nnamdi Azikiwe's *West African Pilot* or the nationalist *Daily Comet* were frequently more sympathetic to the demands of NEPU. Scholars from Benedict Anderson onward have underlined the role print media have played in the consolidation and reconsolidation of particular political forms.¹⁷ Of particular interest here is that the lively press emerging across the first half of the century was not merely instrumental in consolidating various national, regional, or ideological publics. The press also constituted a new forum in which discourses of corruption could circulate, and therefore in which the corruption-complex itself could take shape.

Corruption in Kano: Emirate, Region, and Emir Sanusi

Although the NPC emerged as a political party slightly after NEPU did, that initial disadvantage was quickly overcome by the benefit of the NPC's close ties to the region's aristocracies. It immediately became dominant in the Northern Region. In part because of the indirect system of elections in 1951, NEPU failed to gain any seats in the regional assembly, but the NPC continued its dominance in the 1954 elections, also aided by organizational problems in the opposition party. Power in the Northern Region guaranteed national power as well.¹⁸ This is not, however, simply the story of an entrenched aristocracy that had converted its power into electoral success. The controversy Tafawa Balewa had touched off in 1950 signaled continuing points of tension. Northern People's Congress politicians shielded the northern aristocracy from the prospect of an independent Nigeria and changes that might threaten aristocratic power, but a number of them remained critical of at least some excesses of emirate rule, and some of them were of commoner or slave lineage. The aristocracy was not convinced of the necessity of transferring administrative authority from emirate structures to the regional assemblies and ministries, and aristocrats formed a key conservative constituency within the party leadership. Even when the transfer was to a regional government headed by a royal like Ahmadu Bello, tensions remained. These tensions played out in struggles that were conducted in the idiom of corruption accusations. Unsurprisingly, while the basic accusations may well have been accurate, they were also a way of expressing these much more fundamental varieties of political contest.

The abrupt end of the reign of Emir Sanusi I of Kano was a demonstration of this new state of affairs. Emir Sanusi had been emir since the end of 1953, when his father, Emir Abdullahi Bayero, died. British officials were initially hostile to his candidacy: the district officer of Kano identified him as “undoubtedly corrupt, more for power than for money, though the latter motive is close behind” and complained that he was an ultraconservative, by which the district officer meant unwilling to compromise about the powers exercised by the native authorities. The district officer argued that Sanusi would either need to be allowed to succeed his father as emir or be exiled, because his political support within Kano would make his continued presence there liable to catalyze violent protest.¹⁹ His superiors, most notably the governor of the Northern Region, Sir Bryan Sharwood-Smith, admitted Sanusi was “fundamentally traditionalist in outlook and eager for power, lacking in scruples and progressive measures . . . inspired more by political ambitions than liberal outlook,” but argued ultimately that there was little point in spending the political capital necessary to block his election.²⁰ Looked at askance from the start of his reign, Emir Sanusi continued to surprise.

The new emir was something of a reformer—he restored women’s right to inherit houses and farms under Maliki law, for example²¹—and in his inaugural address he emphasized the need to modernize practices of emirate administration and for the reform of past injustices.²² This emphasis brought him at least superficially into line with the position staked out by Tafawa Balewa and his fellow politicians several years earlier. Indeed, Emir Sanusi’s support for the Sardauna during the latter’s troubles when district head of Gusau helped to propel him to a role in formal electoral politics as well. As the NPC emerged as a political party he became a senior figure in it, serving as a minister without portfolio in the regional government. In 1961, after independence, he even served briefly as acting governor of the Northern Region. Emir Sanusi was no radical activist and indeed became known as a particularly brutal opponent of the NEPU opposition in Kano.²³ Accordingly, the left-wing party was vociferous in decrying both native authority oppression of talakawa²⁴ and his arbitrary arrests of NEPU activists.²⁵ Judges in Kano repeatedly convicted NEPU activists on relatively minor charges, sentencing them to substantial terms of imprisonment or beatings. Some were convicted of spurious charges of *lèse-majesté*. It quickly became difficult and dangerous to be active in opposing NPC hegemony, which helped to ensure the NPC would win all elections. In some ways modernizing and reformist, and a stern partisan of NPC power, Sanusi was more or less the ideal figure of an emir for independence, at least by the lights of the north’s dominant party and the departing British administration.

There was a religious element to his reformist leadership. His reinstatement of women's inheritance rights, for example, was a canny step in blunting NEPU criticism: Kano's brief experiment with denying those rights was legally dubious. Maliki law is quite clear on the rights of a number of categories of women inheritors, most notably daughters, who should receive shares half the size that sons receive. Emir Usman had justified his exclusion of women in 1923 by noting Kano had been conquered in the Fulani jihad. Kano's status as conquered territory implied it was legitimate to abide by Hausa customary practices rather than the Maliki law of succession. Activists for NEPU attacked Kano's practice as evidence of the native authorities' lack of proper religious scruples. The reform helped to bolster the NPC's claims to being Islam's true protector in the region. Sanusi's status within the reformed branch of the Tijaniyya sufi order was a point of strength, but that too existed uneasily with the religious credentials of the NEPU leadership.²⁶

Despite establishment and populist bona fides, all was not well. Emir Sanusi's long-standing alliance with Ahmadu Bello did not prevent tensions from emerging between Kano's emir and the senior leadership of the NPC. Various versions of the split have been retailed. Some suggest the tension arose between Sanusi and the Sardauna himself, sometimes centering on Sanusi's stint as acting governor of the Northern Region in 1961, where some allege he was insufficiently deferential to the premier.²⁷ Others say that relations between the two were always excellent but that the emir treated other prominent northern politicians with appalling disdain; essentially, the falling out emerged from a tension between two institutions, the emirship and the regional government.²⁸ It is also true there were considerable religious tensions between reform Tijanis like Sanusi, and Qadiris, which were only exacerbated when the Sardauna attempted to create a new sufi order around the figure of Usman ḍan Fodio.²⁹

Influential though he was, the emir evidently gained increasing numbers of powerful enemies, which made him particularly vulnerable when he found himself in difficulties soon after independence. In October 1962, public attention was riveted by a breaking news story: the Kano Native Authority declared it had a serious funding shortfall and needed a loan of £260,000 from the regional government if it was to meet that month's salary obligations.³⁰ This was a strikingly public admission of crisis, but it was not the first rumbling of trouble. For some months already, the regional government had been forced to take notice of fiscal and administrative difficulties in the Kano Native Authority. On 18 September, just before Kano admitted its shortfall, the government had appointed a British civil servant, David Muffett, as sole commissioner of an inquiry into emirate finances. Muffett was personally close to the Sardauna.

His charge as sole commissioner was to discover what had caused Kano emirate's perilous financial position. He chose a broad approach to this task and began investigating corruption and oppression widely construed, taking evidence from across the emirate. He received the regional government's enthusiastic support in this undertaking. Under pressure, the madaki of Kano issued a stern directive to masu sarauta and other officials of the Kano Native Authority warning that any attempt to interfere with witnesses and people trying to communicate their complaints would be dealt with severely.³¹

The inquiry leaked enthusiastically. The British deputy high commissioner in Kaduna reported in September 1962 that there were widespread "reports" of abuses. In his report the diplomat mentioned rumors that the emir was repaying misappropriated native authority funds, and that the commissioner had received overwhelming numbers of reports of extortion: "It is said that Native Authority officials seeking car advances had to pay the Emir £50, with corresponding payments for motor-cycle and bicycle advances; nomination as a candidate for the Regional elections cost the applicant £400; appointment as District Head or Alkali cost the individual £700–£1000. (An Alkali's salary is in the region of £400 per annum.) On Native Authority contracts the Emir has expected between 30% and 50% of the contract price. Indeed, the picture conveyed by such reports is one of organised extortion throughout every sphere of the Native Authority administration."³² The outlines of the case were little surprise and tended to confirm accusations long publicized by NEPU activists. Officials did not waste much energy denying them. Indeed, many details required careful framing even to come across as problematic or corrupt. For example, the issue of the payments made by alkalai and hakimai on their appointments sounds like kudin sarauta; comparing those payments to the offices' annual salaries would, in that context, have been something of a red herring, ignoring the ongoing situation in which official salaries were lower than social logic would have placed them. It also ignored the fact that such positions' formal compensation was not the whole story. An alkalai could doubtless have made considerably more than £400 in bribes. Similarly, the exchanges of £50 consideration for a car advance sounds like an updated version of reciprocal prestation. While obviously such exchanges violated a boundary between the Kano treasury and Emir Sanusi's private income, it was at best disingenuous to suggest the practice was exceptional, or indeed to maintain such arrangements violated long-standing norms.

In the logic of the inquiry, however, the only real question was whether the commission "will be able to bring [the emir's financial malpractices] to light." This was a political question, echoing the politics of Emir Aliyu's deposition in

Zaria forty years earlier. An inquiry into official malpractice got under way, but it was not until the emir was generally recognized as being politically vulnerable that substantial numbers of people became willing to testify against him, as had also been the case in Zaria in 1921. Under the new regime, however, the Special Branch of the federal police had been collecting information of emirate corruption, as had agents working directly for Ahmadu Bello. British diplomatic observers were convinced that the real question was how determined NPC forces were to depose the emir. The appointment of Muffett was held up as evidence of that ambition: he was “widely recognized as the Premier’s favourite hatchet man.” The deputy high commissioner speculated that an immediate show of force from the regional government had already emboldened witnesses to testify against Sanusi and would provide the government with sufficient evidence to remove him by convincing potentially reluctant witnesses they would be safe if they revealed details of Sanusi’s malpractices. He would be removed from office and would therefore be unable to retaliate against them.³³ By the beginning of November, the deputy high commissioner reported so much scandal had been uncovered that the regional government really would need to depose the emir; his political power had eroded to such an extent that he was no longer able to keep scandal from surfacing.³⁴ The latter comment was perceptive, indicating an awareness that the issue was not Sanusi’s having given grounds for complaint but rather his inability to prevent them from surfacing. The commissioner provided the government an interim report in November, which outlined evidence of substantial malpractice,³⁵ but there the matter remained for the next four months. In late January and early February, British diplomats reported Ahmadu Bello was having difficulty deciding what action to take. They reported rumors Bello owed Sanusi a considerable debt the latter would publicize if deposed. He was worried about losing the party leadership to a rival. He was afraid of spells being cast by the Kano palace. The rumors of magic led to a popular conviction the Sardauna had contracted leprosy as a result of the emir’s spells, and he was obliged to make many public appearances and show off his healthy limbs in order to dispel the stories. Despite these anxieties, the government did eventually make up its mind, and the governor of Northern Nigeria accepted Sanusi’s resignation in March. The government followed this development with a press release outlining a set of proposed reforms to the Kano Native administration that would, allegedly, prevent such abuses from occurring in the future.³⁶

The episode is fascinating, less for the revelations made about improprieties in the emirate government than for the ways in which they were raised as issues for public policy and criteria on which Sanusi’s continued tenure should

be judged. As Alhaji Yakubu perceptively notes, “No doubt the Muffett Commission uncovered fraud, miscarriage of justice and general abuse and misuse of office by the emir, his officials and notable supporters. To many who were closely associated with the regional Government, these were not startling revelations; they were practices prevalent in many *NAS*.”³⁷ He goes on to suggest that Kano was perhaps exceptional for the scope of its corruption, but that is easily explicable given its population and relative wealth. Indeed, even at the time the difficulties in the Kano Native Authority were not seen as extreme or exceptional. The Zaria Native Authority had gotten into very similar financial difficulties only a few months earlier, and its emir (the successor to Aliyu’s successor) had been allowed to remain in office. Moreover, Sanusi’s financial crimes were, quite overtly, broadly shared in the political class as well.

As Sanusi was officially excoriated for his mismanagement, the British were also complaining about Ahmadu Bello’s “growing megalomania and squandermania.” About the latter, “His presents increase in magnificence and frequency; his largesse abounds. One can only guess at the sources of income from which the largesse flows.”³⁸ They did acknowledge Nigerian politicians needed to distribute money to their followings: “In the North it is traditional that great men like the Sardauna do give ‘dash’ to their dependents periodically and this is widely expected. Nevertheless the scale and extent on which the Sardauna is giving away money and presents at the present time has apparently started to get out of hand. [His permanent secretary] reckons that the Sardauna is now giving away money at the rate of at least £50,000 a year. This means he is undoubtedly indebted financially to several people, not least Leventis—a Greek-Cypriot of unsavoury character.”³⁹ However complicated the corruption-complex at this moment in history, it was also clearly ubiquitous. What, then, made Sanusi vulnerable to the charges that brought him down?

Previous commentators have located the deposition of Sanusi in the context of his political career within the *NPC*, either directly in a fight with Ahmadu Bello, or more generally as he attempted to retain the prerogatives of the native authorities against political attempts to increase the direct authority of the secular state. They also point to Sanusi’s prominence in the reformed Tijaniyya sufi order (he would become its head after his deposition),⁴⁰ which placed him in opposition both to traditional Tijanis in the region and to the Qadiriyya order, which was historically dominant in the Sokoto Caliphate. The latter rivalry also tended to recapitulate a rivalry between Kano and Sokoto, which Sanusi and Bello literally embodied as members of those royal lineages. Sanusi himself exacerbated the problem by pushing for a Kano state independent of the Northern Region. His timing was unfortunate; all three regions contained

restive areas, and a more complex federal structure was being discussed. The NPC's federal dominance already faced challenges from southern Nigeria, the Northern Region, and from its own fractious Middle Belt, which was a center of opposition both in the federal parliament and in the regional assembly. Kano's restiveness in the Hausa heartland was not at all helpful. While all of these dynamics contributed to the government's determination to see Sanusi investigated and deposed, they do not fully bring into focus the role corruption (either as a material matter or as an ideological charge) played in the entire drama.

In this regard, Muffett's own explanation for why Sanusi was deposed is instructive. Muffett claimed the difficulty was less positive instances of corruption than it was his lack of legitimacy, and that the difficulty stemmed from the fact he should not have been appointed emir in the first place. According to Muffett, Sanusi's difficulty was that he was the son of his predecessor, Emir Abdullahi Bayero. This was a problem, because candidates for the Kano emirship were required to be sons of an emir, but a son was not supposed to be his father's immediate successor. For this reason, one of Bayero's brothers should have been appointed, or a son of his predecessor and uncle, Emir Usman. Only after an emir from one of these other branches of the royal lineage had reigned could a son of Bayero take the throne.⁴¹ This proposal is somewhat disingenuous, overlooking several cases in the nineteenth century when an emir was immediately succeeded by his son, and ignoring the fact that Sanusi was only the fourth emir to reign since colonization.⁴²

Muffett ascribes Sanusi's forced abdication to a lack of traditional legitimacy rather than to a naked power play or an exceptional instance of malpractice understood in bureaucratic terms. According to Muffett, Sanusi's political troubles emerged from the cultural basis of Kano's throne rather than from regional politics or from formal misuse of office. Muffett's article not only ignores his own role in the entire drama but implicitly claims the deposition was neither the result of a power struggle nor a response to corruption. It is unsurprising that a figure previously known as the Sardauna's "hatchet man" would be disinclined to acknowledge the possibility of political calculation in these events. But the latter omission is more telling. For if the sole commissioner himself did not consider Sanusi's alleged crimes to be the cause of his abdication, the obvious conclusion is that the commissioner either considered them not to have happened, unexceptional, or perhaps unexceptionable. Even if Muffett's claim about Sanusi's lack of legitimacy was unconvincing on its own terms, it points to something more interesting: the issue was not about corruption conceived in bureaucratic terms. It was about vulnerability. Whatever

role the charge of corruption played in the drama, a key player did not view it as sufficiently compelling to explain his own actions. Corruption did not make the treasury shortfall into a scandal, and it did not determine Sanusi's resignation. The precise reason Sanusi was vulnerable is somewhat more elusive: Why did the Sardauna equivocate in January and February? Why was Sanusi targeted at all? The charges of corruption do not indicate anything about his actual conduct in office. Rather, they indicate rather more Machiavellian patterns of political maneuvering within the northern Nigerian political elite, making him vulnerable to deposition and at the same time pointing to the ideological basis of state politics at the time.

Even if the precise reasons for Sanusi's fall are not entirely clear, the fact he came out the loser in a confrontation with the Sardauna points to traditional rulers' eclipse by secular politicians in the governance of the Northern Region.⁴³ Even though emirate apparatuses would retain considerable degrees of direct responsibility for some time and maintain enormous influence to the time of this writing, by 1963 they were already administratively the junior partner to NPC politicians. When they came into overt confrontation, they would lose. And although traditional rulers retain considerable influence even today—as evidenced by the fact state officials are still wont to maneuver for traditional titles, and to intervene to appoint and depose particular officeholders—they are very much subordinate to other state officials. Charging Sanusi with corruption reveals this process of supersession was nearly complete by 1963, providing a window onto politics that would otherwise remain invisible. The continuities between this case and previous instances of the adjudication of corruption within native authorities only partially mask the basic fact that powerful chiefs like Emir Sanusi were losing their central political position.

For this reason, the key ways in which corruption and corruption allegations were negotiated and transformed became ever more centrally determined by federal politics than by local political culture. Thus, by the early years of the First Republic, the corruption-complex had taken on substantially new form. A logic of politics determined through forms of reciprocal prestation endured, as did an incompatibility with the bureaucratic logic of the secular state: the “private” resources officials could gain access to according to the rules of office were insufficient for their politico-social obligations. “Corruption” retained a role as a charge that could be leveled against officials, but its application was haphazard and partial. Far from being automatically a career-threatening scandal whenever it was committed or even when it was discovered, it channeled how officials might be attacked. These logics persisted, but other forces

were bringing about a broader transformation. As “development” became the primary way in which social goods were delivered to the population, and as the shifting fiscal basis of the state made the financing and delivery of development money key political questions, the inauguration of a national parliament brought the material interests of different regions of the country into direct competition, touching off a mass politics of region and ethnicity. Concrete acts of corruption and official responses to the crime of corruption thus themselves took on new forms as a result of the politics of independence.

Party Politics and Centrifugal Federalism

The case of Emir Sanusi provides a sounding into a political process that was close to complete by the 1960s, as Northern Nigeria’s native authorities were eclipsed by the political structures of the Nigerian state. “Corruption” was now more than a euphemized excuse for colonial intervention in local political hierarchies. It had become a label under which more fundamental political contests among Nigerians were conducted. A new federal arena, which created national-level politics for the first time, touched off profound changes. It was more than a new locale for an established set of politico-cultural logics. The corruption-complex was fundamentally changed, even while it retained much of its earlier character. The transformation was gradual and took most of the 1950s.⁴⁴ The Richards constitution of 1946 had begun to change regional politics, as the emergence of the JMA demonstrated. At the center, however, the governor and his executive council continued to exercise authority, though a representative legislative council did allow a role for some Nigerian politicians.

The center took on increasing importance in 1951 with the promulgation of the Macpherson constitution, which replaced the legislative council with a parliament. While the legislative council had included members from across the country, only a few were directly elected. The emergent political parties played little role in the others’ appointment. The new parliament for the first time brought the complex chains of authority, patronage, and obligation that constituted political relationships in the north systematically into relation with analogs from other parts of the country.⁴⁵ As the NPC grappled with the question of how emirate aristocracies would give way to the institutions of the secular state and how the talakawa would find enfranchisement after centuries of subjugation to a tiny elite, southern Nigerians responded to distinct concerns. Many areas were under the control of native authorities analogous to emirate governments, though even there their authority tended to be less absolute than in the Sokoto Caliphate.⁴⁶ Labor regulation, education, access to pub-

lic employment, and nationalism loomed large. Even in the southern part of the Northern Region, a political party called the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) emerged among “minority” and frequently non-Muslim groups. Its challenge to the hegemony of emirate aristocracies was different from that of NEPU, reflecting the distinct aspirations of groups who had frequently chafed at being subject to Hausa-Fulani-dominated systems of administration under colonial rule.⁴⁷

During the early part of the decade, the most intensive political maneuvering took place outside of parliament, in party and constitutional negotiations. The new central parliament dictated the start of party politics, but their stakes remained relatively low. However, the Macpherson constitution was quickly superseded by the Lyttleton constitution in 1954, which provided ministers with greater responsibility and devolved more autonomy to each region, whose assemblies and regional governments enjoyed a corresponding increase in their power. With this development, the three major political parties consolidated their holds on their own regions and moved more directly to exercise their influence on the federation as a whole, as political contests at the center became a more pressing issue. Accordingly, the federal election in 1954 was seriously contested. The advent of responsible government brought into relief what had previously been easier to ignore: different parts of the country had enjoyed vastly different degrees of infrastructural investment. Western education was far more widespread in southern Nigeria, and peasant producers in the southern part of the country sold more profitable crops—southern cocoa and palm products were producing far more federal revenue than northern groundnuts and cotton.

Where Northern Nigeria had been a relatively stable geographic unit ever since the onset of colonization, Southern Nigeria had been slowly assembled, with the merger of several protectorates in 1900 and the addition of Lagos in 1906; it was then divided into the Eastern and Western Regions in 1939. National party politics started within a three-way federation whose character helped to define the parameters of political contestation. In the Northern Region, the NPC was rivaled both by NEPU and by the UMBC, but in part because both the native authorities and the colonial administration placed overwhelming support behind the conservative party, it attained absolute dominance. The other two regions also ended up under the domination of a single party. The displacement of the NCNC by the AG in the Western Region was uneven: although the AG was able to form the western government in 1951, it actually gained fewer federal seats in the west than the NCNC in the election of 1954, as the result of rivalries between different Yoruba towns. The NCNC also retained

a center of support in the eastern portion of the region.⁴⁸ In the east, the NCNC retained absolute dominance, though the AG did manage some support, and small parties aligned with the NPC gained a following in “minority” non-Igbo areas. Each region was dominated by its own political party, and in each case the dominant political party had rivals whose base of support was inflected by ethnic and regional difference.⁴⁹

These regional differences, combined with very different histories of political organization, translated into distinct positions on the question of constitutional change. For southern politicians, the primary question to be negotiated at the center was that of national independence—the first motion for national independence was made by Anthony Enahoro of the Action Group in 1953, a move strenuously opposed by the northern representatives. Even if southerners had not been eager to govern themselves, their political constituents were pressing for change, as were the assertive and eloquent educated elites, who communicated through a well-developed press, both English-language and vernacular, and who had well-developed ties with other African countries, the metropole, and beyond. Northern politicians perceived their region as being at a relative disadvantage. Their English-speaking elite was comparatively small, and only a few of these had postsecondary education. Moreover, the NPC party establishment was committed to maintaining the primacy of the northern elite, even if it was attempting substantially to alter the structures through which that elite ruled. But as constitutional structures for a federal government were proposed, these developments threatened the NPC’s fundamental political commitments. Too-rapid national independence would ensure southern domination of central political institutions because not enough northerners had the kind of training that would allow them to take power. But given the NPC’s determination not to allow NEPU and its political base to assume significant degrees of power, the emergence of a Westernized class would itself pose substantial political dangers.

The reasons for regional tension and competition were not mysterious. Ethnicity served as a proxy for regional origin, and regional questions had substantial material consequences. As Nigerian ministers gained autonomy, the question of where in the federation those resources should be channeled became one of increased salience and potency. The postwar years were a time of rising expectations. The stringencies of the Depression and war had given way to demands for greater material benefits for the colonized population, both from the people themselves and from the international community. Improved living standards required ever-greater involvement in world markets. Accordingly, the colonial government increased its expenditures on

basic infrastructure, leading to a shift in the very paradigms for understanding such investment. Calls for hospitals and clinics, schools, roads, electricity, well drilling, and other forms of investment became widespread and were made as demands for development, but “development” in a new sense, which coupled ideas of economics and technical change with ideas of social welfare. Demands for development were a new mode of making claims on the state. Arguments over where to invest funds for development thus were ultimately ones in which different regions attempted to make claims on national resources for the local good.⁵⁰

As the routes to temporal power shifted to electoral politics, appealing to nascent political constituencies became an item of politicians’ acute concern. Since issues of social welfare had been folded into the overarching program of development, and since those goods were zero-sum and locally specific (only so many schools could be built, only so many roads surfaced, and all of these were in specific locations), the populist politics of social welfare pitted one area against another. And to the extent that resources were finite and social needs pressing, issues of where to target investments had the potential to touch off dangerous rivalries, particularly in a context where politicians’ political base reinforced regional splits—as regional political parties inevitably did. Political life had played out as acts of patronage, but now patronage became increasingly inflected by region. In the institutional contours of Nigeria’s federal system, the rivalries between regions took on ethnic overtones. Ethnicity could serve as a proxy for region. More than this, to the extent patronage is an affective relationship, the commonalities of culture made patron-client ties particularly easy to form between members of the same ethnicity. Any political system dependent on patronage tends toward ethnic exclusivism, but this three-way federal system of patronage greatly exacerbated that tendency. As parliamentarians and ministers debated these questions at a national level, party imperatives paralleled and helped to heighten the regional and ethnic divisions the federal structure reinforced.

The British deputy high commissioner’s derogatory comments about the Sardauna’s “squandermania” underlined an element of this dynamic, identifying Ahmadu Bello’s flamboyant practices of distributing largesse as a pathology of governance. Insofar as the distribution of state resources was generalized to entire neighborhoods, towns, and constituencies, the very concept of “development” became the governing idiom for describing how those allocative decisions could be made. That is to say, the label of “development” was used to articulate the relationship between political calculation—as politicians attempted to ensure their support by bettering the lives of potential voters—and

the allocation of national resources. As many authors have noted, retail politics tended to transform competition into a zero-sum game: winning candidates gained office, and through that they gained access to resources, which could then ensure their reelection. Losing candidates had no such resources and therefore were less likely to attract future voters. But that very logic also made incumbent politicians less likely to tolerate the possibility of electoral defeat, since the lack of future resources would make their return to office much less feasible.

By itself, this political tendency was ominous. The economic, historic, and cultural gulfs between different areas of the country exacerbated the difficulty, all the more so given how abruptly the regions were brought into political competition at the center. The potential for a redistribution of resources between regions coupled with the differences that already existed in their infrastructures to make issues of development more than a concern for individual politicians. Regions were aggrieved if they had enjoyed lower levels of investment during the colonial period (as had the Northern Region) or if they faced the possibility of paying more into federal coffers than they received from them (as was true of the two southern regions). Thus, from the very beginning of responsible federal government, there were already substantial structural tensions between the regions. These were exacerbated by the nature of the political parties that emerged. The NCNC had quickly made a political alliance with NEPU, and as the 1950s progressed, the Western Region's Yoruba-dominated Action Group made common cause with the United Middle Belt Congress, which had emerged among the smaller ethnic groups who inhabited the southern reaches of the Northern Region.

The problem of where development monies would be deployed pushed politicians toward regional and ethnic rivalry. A related problem emerged from the issue of revenue and its derivation. The critical shift at this time was the establishment of the commodity marketing boards in the postwar years. In 1947 the government established a marketing board for cocoa, and in 1949 this was extended to groundnuts, oilseed, and cotton. The boards' purpose was ensuring peasant producers a minimum price for their cash crops even during years of depressed world market prices. This was a pressing concern in the aftermath of the Great Depression. The colonial government had pressured Nigerian farmers to expand into cash crop production during the first decades of colonial rule, and it had invested significant sums of money in enabling the emergence of a cash crop sector. The Great Depression temporarily diminished the significance of cash cropping to government revenue. Lower demand and thus market prices diminished the revenue the government received through export taxes. De-

pressed prices to some extent undid colonial agricultural agents' efforts to expand production for export; the Depression ultimately shook farmers' confidence in producing cash crops as a route to individual prosperity.⁵¹ Nigeria's future prosperity (and its utility to the British Empire) depended on its role as a producer of these goods, so it was important to restore farmers' confidence in the markets they were to supply. That, at least, was the idea behind the marketing boards. Their purpose was "to secure orderly marketing and give the producer the benefit of absolute price stability" by guaranteeing farmers a minimum price for the products during periods of low market prices.⁵² The boards would build up the funds to enable this guarantee by paying slightly below market prices during good years. Substantial reserves were thus a necessary part of the system. While the marketing boards initially appeared to be a relatively minor development, they would have a transformative effect on the nature of the Nigerian state, and on development spending in particular. Before the boards, the state's primary source of revenue was duties leveled on international trade and taxes paid by peasant producers. From their early years, the marketing boards' reserves were invested in the United Kingdom, helping to finance postwar reconstruction. In 1954, however, the new constitutional order went along with a regionalization of administration and finance. The marketing boards came under the control of the regional governments, and the formula for distributing revenue was also altered, the first of many adjustments attempting to deal with the tricky question of how to balance different regions' contributions to national funds with their need for investment. The principles of the new system emphasized the areas from which revenue originated, which meant in practice that the Western Region received a much greater proportion of revenue; cocoa was the most lucrative export. With the regionalization of the marketing board, the Western Region enjoyed a period of relative prosperity and development.⁵³ As the boards developed substantial cash reserves, those funds became the primary financing mechanism for infrastructural investment, for the forms of "development" that increasingly were the government's claim to benefit the Nigerian population. As the boards became central to state financing, they also helped to create a new point of regional tension, since the revenues for the southern export crops of palm oil and cocoa were much greater than northern groundnuts and cotton. Given that the south had already benefited from much greater infrastructural investment across the previous decades, the north had a lot of catching up to do. But the south was providing the bulk of the income.

During the relatively buoyant period of postwar commodity prices, the marketing boards made the financing of new infrastructural investments relatively

painless, albeit through what amounted to a heavy tax on producers of cash crops. The situation could not last forever. It intensified an already-existing political-economic dynamic. The Nigerian state mediated the relationship of Nigerian producers to the global economy, a form of state practice Cooper has called the “gatekeeper state.”⁵⁴ That structural feature substantially predated the marketing boards, but they intensified the dynamic. As “development” became not just a preoccupation of economic planners but a social welfare issue affecting the regime’s international legitimacy, the demands of electoral politics also made delivering development key to political success. The federal structure that emerged from Nigeria’s successive postwar constitutions guaranteed that local demands for development would translate directly to contests between the three major parties in the center. With the charge of “corruption” already well established as a means of conducting political rivalries and substantial patronage demands on officeholders creating a need for substantial income, it is little wonder the corruption-complex was transformed by this new political-economic system and became central to it. The legacy of pre-war administrative practice had already made material practices of corruption feasible and near-mandatory for Nigerian officials, and it had also made the accusation of corruption a key tactic for political competition. Ahmadu Bello’s tribulations as Gusau district head demonstrated the dynamics were still at play for the new generation. They would accompany this cohort as it assumed positions in the emerging structures of the secular state.

During the first years of politics, the NPC manifested ambivalence about the federal government and the dangers it posed for existing political relations in the Northern Region. The north needed investment in order to catch up with the south (even just in terms of creating a sufficiently sizeable cohort of northerners with high levels of Western education) so as to avoid southern domination of government. This ambivalence was reflected in some of its choices of personnel. Ahmadu Bello, who was the party’s leading light and, from 1954, was its president, remained based in the north, first as minister of works, and from 1957 as premier of the region. By contrast, Tafawa Balewa, who became Bello’s deputy as the NPC’s vice president in 1954, went to Lagos as a member of the federal parliament and government minister. In 1957, he became prime minister of the federation, leading an all-party coalition government. The NCNC’s Nnamdi Azikiwe ultimately went to Lagos as governor general (becoming non-executive president when Nigeria became a republic in 1963) after stints in the Western Regional legislature and as premier of the Eastern Region. The AG’s Obafemi Awolowo entered the federal parliament,

becoming a minister and then in 1959 leader of the federal opposition when the AG left government.

Just as the NPC determined to slow the transition to full independence for as long as possible, other issues became increasingly relevant. Ministers obtained increasing responsibility for the disbursement of federal revenues just as those revenues were substantially increased by the profits of the state marketing boards while at the same time infrastructural investment was increased by the government's commitment to postwar development. The control of these resources therefore became a matter of acute political concern. A regionalization of the marketing boards in 1954 heightened this tension: cocoa was by far the most profitable export crop and the profits the Western Region obtained from it dwarfed those of the other regions, most acutely the north given the great difference in overall population.

This was no simple matter of bureaucratic decision making, or of issues of how most equitably to distribute revenues also generated in rather unequal ways. The practice of retail politics emerged from the political logic that had long obtained under other systems of government, which is to say it was essentially clientelistic and redistributive. Especially as parties moved into competition with one another (an issue that was particularly acute in the far north, with the NPC continually under fire from NEPU), having access to federal and regional largesse, both in formal development projects and in the resources that could be irregularly extracted from them, was a critical ingredient for political success. The possibility of losing elections became ever more dangerous to political parties dependent on their access to government office as a means of cultivating their own constituencies.⁵⁵

The consequence of these patterns of political competition was a ratcheting up of regional tensions, which was expressed in ethnic terms. An initial point of tension was in the reception northern members of parliament received in 1953 after they had acted to block the motion calling for self-government by 1956. Nationalist crowds disgusted at the northern position gathered and treated the northerners with great disrespect, an insult quickly answered by northern violence against AG organizers during their political tour of the north. But insults and violence were not conducted only in an idiom of policy debate over national independence or regional rivalry over economic resources. Each of the three regions was dominated by one of the three biggest ethnic groups, and each major party therefore became associated with that ethnicity—the NPC with the Hausa-Fulani, the NCNC with the Igbo, and the AG with the Yoruba. Communal tension was then exacerbated as the process of politics itself became

increasingly violent. When AG politicians were attacked in the north, the ostensible grievance was less that they were purveyors of a policy the masses disliked or representatives of an economically advantaged region. It was as Yorubas and servants of Yoruba interests. All political parties maintained youth wings, which had substantial ties to groups of unemployed young men willing to act as political thugs for their party leaders. In the course of post-colonial politics, thuggery of this form attained disturbing dimensions, which then became immediately ethnic as well. As this took place, mass riots made ethnicized violence more general, and much more deadly. While it would not be accurate to suggest that politicians touched off violence through their most volatile supporters, which then became ethnic riots—the relation was not so direct, so unilinear, or so easily comprehensible as that—nonetheless, there is a certain trajectory here worth taking into account.⁵⁶

After the federal election of 1959, the NPC controlled most but not all of the northern seats in the federal parliament, the remainder going to NEPU and the UMBC. The NPC's failure to win all northern constituencies dictated a coalition government: the Northern Region enjoyed a slight majority in seats within the federal parliament, and the NPC held a plurality in parliament. It therefore entered a coalition with the NCNC. Meanwhile, the AG announced what it termed a social democratic political program, and the Western Regional government invested substantial sums in initiatives like universal primary education. Because of the substantial autonomy regions enjoyed and because of the profitable nature of the Western Region's prime export, cocoa, its government had substantial resources despite its party's exclusion from the federal coalition. Although the AG did not have patronage to offer in the east or north, the example of its investments in the west did open the disquieting possibility it might chip away at NPC and NCNC dominance in their home bases. In the north, the threat was manifested through an alliance with the UMBC, but in the east, there remained a real possibility the AG might attract substantial support both from political radicals unhappy with Dr. Azikiwe's relatively accommodationist leanings or from members of ethnic minorities unhappy with Igbo domination of the Eastern Region. Both members of the ruling coalition therefore had reasons to attempt to neutralize future threats the AG and its leadership posed. And the corruption-complex provided precisely the techniques necessary to do so.

In 1962 tensions had emerged between Awolowo and his deputy, S. L. Akin-tola, who had succeeded him as premier of the west when Awolowo moved to the federal parliament. Akin-tola complained that Awolowo was continuing to attempt to govern the region from Lagos, and he himself increasingly advo-

cated attempting to join the federal governing coalition. Awolowo, however, maintained a strong grip on his party and eventually sponsored a vote of no confidence in the Western Regional House of Assembly, seeking to replace Akintola with another AG leader more sympathetic to Awolowo's leadership. Awolowo's sympathizers made up a clear majority of the Western House of Assembly but Akintola's minority of supporters disrupted its proceedings and prevented the process from playing out. Eventually the federal police were called in. Courts ruled that Akintola should remain the premier. The case was appealed to the Privy Council in London, which found for Awolowo's majority faction of the AG. The federal parliament responded by removing the Privy Council's appellate jurisdiction. In the interim many members of the regional and federal parliaments defected from Awolowo's faction of the AG to Akintola's faction. Meanwhile, a cache of weapons was discovered in Lagos, which the federal government alleged was evidence of a plot masterminded by Awolowo to take over the government. He and a number of AG politicians were tried for treason, and Awolowo was ultimately sentenced to ten years in prison. The consequence of this drama was that the sitting Western Regional government lost a considerable amount of its popular standing. However, the federal coalition faced much less active competition from the western regime. However, the AG remained something of a threat to both members of the coalition, even though Akintola's faction party had chosen to join it.⁵⁷

Corruption in the Western Region

The chaos of the Western Regional crisis emerged directly from the competitive logic of party politics in the First Republic, both internally as the Action Group debated whether it was better to join the government or remain in opposition and across the federation as the three major political parties maneuvered for advantage and for inroads into their rivals' home bases. Political and constitutional logic intersected with the new forms of government financing and with the mass politics of development as a means of conceptualizing public entitlement. The rest was ugly. The politics of the Western Regional assembly and rumors of coup plots were only the most dramatic end of a broader and more systematic shift in how government was negotiated. Where the case of Emir Sanusi exhibited considerable continuities with cases of corruption at earlier periods, the new domain of mass electoral politics and ministerial government dictated corresponding shifts in the corruption-complex, manifested in the role "corruption" played in the regional crisis. Accusations of corruption played a critical role in Chief Awolowo's sidelining and the destruction of the

Action Group. Looking at that process in more detail thus is a useful window onto how corruption was transformed in this period.

A drama that played out alongside the Awolowo/Akintola split and Chief Awolowo's treason trial began in May 1962. The Western Regional Marketing Board was discovered to be operating on an overdraft from the Bank of West Africa of approximately £2.5 million despite having taken in revenues of £68.6 million across the eight years of its existence. The marketing board's legitimate activities and investments did not seem to equal such substantial outgoings. As a consequence, the federal prime minister appointed a commission of inquiry to investigate where the money had gone. The Coker Commission took testimony across the rest of 1962, returning its report on 31 December. The commission's specific charge was to examine six statutory corporations that had received loans or other payments from the marketing board, thereby depleting the latter's funds.⁵⁸ The commission discovered serious irregularities in each corporation; these are documented exhaustively in its report. These irregularities were complex, ranging from questionable investments and sweetheart deals to money that had vanished entirely. While the details were bewildering, the commission's basic findings were more straightforward: marketing board funds had been improperly funneled toward political expenditures meant to bolster the Action Group. The party had subsidized its own activities with funds that were supposed to be devoted to stabilizing export crop prices and investing in development projects. The board had also deposited money into banks controlled by people with tight connections to the Awolowo faction of the Action Group, thereby profiting them personally. Some of these people had also received support for their businesses through grants from development authorities.

The Coker Commission's report was not shocking in and of itself. The diversion of marketing board funds had been talked about for years, and reports of misconduct included all regions. As with the case of Emir Sanusi, the only real question was whether the activities documented by the Coker Commission were any different from activities going on in the Northern and Eastern Regional governments. Indeed, Dr. Azikiwe had been the subject of a similar investigation in 1956, when he was premier of the Eastern Region. The allegations against him were that the Eastern Regional Marketing Board had deposited substantial monies in the African Continental Bank, which Dr. Azikiwe founded and which he and his family continued to control. That commission of inquiry found shocking irregularity in these business transactions and ruled that "his conduct in this matter has fallen short of the expectations of honest, reasonable people" and that "he was guilty of misconduct

as a Minister.”⁵⁹ Despite such criticism, Dr. Azikiwe was not prosecuted, nor did his political career suffer. Chief Awolowo did not emerge from his scandal similarly unscathed. The underlying issues in the Western Regional scandal were strikingly similar to those in the Eastern Regional affair: in each case, funds meant to stabilize producer prices or to fund development were diverted for politicians’ self-interest. If anything, the Western Region’s scandal was less personal: where Dr. Azikiwe benefited personally from official malpractice, Chief Awolowo seems to have benefited politically rather than personally. While some Action Group officials were found to have improperly benefited their own enterprises with funds taken from the Western Regional Marketing Board, Awolowo did not so immediately serve his own interests.

The authors of the Eastern Region Commission of Inquiry were if anything concerned to preserve Dr. Azikiwe’s political career, but the Coker Commission had no similar compunction. The differences are evident in how the Coker commission framed the question of Chief Awolowo’s culpability. Its report was published in four volumes, which describe in detail the testimony taken before it, and the reasons it arrived at conclusions about guilt or innocence. In this regard, the report is extremely compelling, at least so far as such reports can be: its conclusions and analysis are dry, dispassionate, but occasionally biting. Damning conclusions appear all the more so because they follow a list of particulars presented with disinterest. Testimony and evidence are weighed, reasonable conclusions drawn. The tenor is moderate; condemnations come only after dry conclusions about factual misstatements. Few figures come out well; some are adjudged dishonest and malign, others stupid or incompetent. This method is the report’s power. Tracing what happened in particular transactions or deals ultimately can demonstrate particular officials’ honesty or dishonesty, and thus their worthiness to remain in office or not. The report’s conclusions about Chief Awolowo, thus, appear to emerge only from an incremental evaluation of the marketing board’s financial history.

The report’s topline conclusion was that Chief Awolowo orchestrated all financial malpractices in the Western Region. His deputy, successor, and rival, Premier S. L. Akintola, was adjudged largely innocent of wrongdoing. Akintola’s vindication was not the most ringing endorsement ever made: “He . . . impressed us as a veritable deputy who all along the line had relied upon his leader. We are satisfied with his evidence to the effect that appointments to all political offices in the Region even during his tenure of office were made by him only with the consent of Chief Awolowo.”⁶⁰ Chief Akintola could not be held responsible for his own government’s financial mismanagement. By contrast, the report would argue at length for a portrait of the federal leader of

the opposition as a spider whose web of corruption ensnared public monies to his party's nefarious aims. The conclusions of Awolowo's guilt and Akintola's innocence are doubly striking, since they were published in the immediate aftermath of Akintola's triumph over Awolowo and his faction of the Action Group. Interpreting the premier as a mindlessly loyal deputy took determination. Like Akintola's innocence, Awolowo's guilt emerged as a series of assertions and interpretive leaps carefully developed through an intricate narrative structure.

The report's rhetorical crafting is central to this process. To take an instance almost at random, the report contains an extended discussion of the regional government's acquisition of the land occupied by a village called Moba. The village was bought from its original owners for £11,000 by two officials of the National Bank of Nigeria who were also senior AG officials in October 1958. Shortly afterward, they sold it to a businessman for £150,000. This buyer sold it again, this time to the National Investment and Properties Company for £718,000 in July 1959. The regional government then requested a firm of valuers to assess the land, and it found it to be worth £850,000. Accordingly it paid that sum in June 1961. The company's managing director, Chief S. O. Shonibare, also a senior AG member, then made a series of payments to the AG's treasurer for slightly more than that total.⁶¹

The commission took testimony into these transactions and also into the conduct of the survey firm that came up with the valuation, concluding that the complexity of the transactions was a way to disguise the principals' intention to transfer government money to the Action Group. It also concluded that the survey firm had involved itself in numerous conflicts of interest and that its valuation was suspect: the relatively high valuation of the land presupposed the development projects the land was being acquired for. If anything this land was less valuable than other nearby plots. Chief Shonibare was held up for particular opprobrium and represented as having been the organizer of much of the fraud in this case—the surveyors' overvaluation of the property and the peculiar chain of ownership after the land's original sale.⁶² Ultimately, however, Chief Awolowo was the responsible party: it was “entirely impossible that as the Federal President of the Party and as the evidence establishes the man in charge of and in absolute control of the Party funds he should be unaware of the whole plan and purpose.”⁶³ While Shonibare was the managing director of the National Investment and Properties Company, Awolowo “organized [its] formation,” and “the multitude of entries in his diary about [it] clearly demonstrate how much he had the matter of the National Investment and Properties Company Limited at heart. He it was who nominated the directors, and we are satisfied that the character Shonibare derived all his inspiration with regard to

the affairs of the Management of that Company from Chief Awolowo.”⁶⁴ The positive testimony cited in support of these conclusions is somewhat less than compelling. Claiming that Chief Awolowo had been concerned to acquire Moba quickly lest the federal government buy it first and realize the substantial profits to be made there, the witness reported he had gone to Premier Akintola to report Awolowo desired to acquire the land quickly, which the regional government then did as a matter of urgency.⁶⁵ That detail does support the conclusion that Awolowo rather than Akintola was the guiding light even in regional policy, but it also suggests he was deluded about the prospects for profit from the Moba undertaking. There is no reason to construe the evidence differently from the Coker Commission or absolve Awolowo (or the AG leadership more generally) from the charge of funneling government resources to their own ends. But at the very least Chief Awolowo managed to maintain what might have appeared plausible deniability to a friendlier tribunal.

The Moba incident illustrates a more general quality of the report: the rights and wrongs of the government’s case against Chief Awolowo were less important than its general tenor. It is not unreasonable to suppose Awolowo was ultimately responsible for systematically diverting the marketing board’s funds for the benefit of his party and his supporters—not just in a ministerial sense of collective responsibility but in the sense of having crafted the policy. Nonetheless, the specifics of the case against him were more suggestive than definitive, and they depended on a literal hermeneutics of suspicion: damning testimony was balanced by exculpatory testimony or by absence of other forms of direct evidence. Chief Awolowo’s guilt in specific instances was demonstrated by the miasma of misconduct emanating from the totality of the transactions under investigation.

In this regard, the Coker Commission is similar to the Muffett Commission. Both investigations publicized malpractice and did so judiciously. Both are ultimately unconvincing, or at least they beg the question of why they attacked their specific targets while others remained relatively unscathed: the emir of Zaria retained his office in 1963; Premier Azikiwe did the same in 1956; the Sardauna of Sokoto’s conduct as premier of the north was not investigated at all. Why Emir Sanusi and why Obafemi Awolowo? As was the case in much earlier times, the obvious answer lay in their vulnerability on other fronts. However, something novel was at play in the investigation of Obafemi Awolowo, emerging from the period’s poisonous federal politics, and demonstrated by the commission’s determined absolution of Chief Akintola.

It is far-fetched that a panel as distinguished as the Coker Commission would have reached its conclusions without any awareness of their political

convenience to the government. The commission's findings required construing Chief Awolowo's actions as uncharitably as possible while remaining almost manically convinced of Chief Akintola's innocence. It was disingenuous to construe the latter as a "veritable deputy," given his actual conduct in office. The commission's report—and indeed, much popular Nigerian political history—tends to construe corruption as being a set of nefarious plots orchestrated by singular villains. In that regard, the image of an Awolowo who orchestrated all Action Group misconduct is a familiar trope. The more obvious conclusion would have been that sweetheart deals and public funds diverted to political parties and to corporations controlled by their members were a more-or-less universal feature of First Republic politics. If Akintola was less the architect of such schemes than Awolowo, that presumably has more to do with his subordinate position than with absolute innocence. And the commission's great enthusiasm for construing innocence and powerlessness on favored figures and damning others for their villainy almost certainly has more to do with the politics of 1962 than with such people's empirical actions.

Awolowo, by contrast, was portrayed as a much more sinister figure, who "was responsible for all the ills of the Western Region Marketing Board."⁶⁶ He was the architect of "the most infamous part of the set-up," and even when there was no direct evidence of his improper interference in any of the board's transactions, scrutiny of his diary showed he had held meetings about the board's beneficiary organizations. The tricky part was that "Chief Awolowo did not himself take any steps which will clearly show that he was involved in any matter; indeed in almost all the transactions in which the events revealed him as the motivating spirit, his name does not appear on the record. He always did everything through the hands of somebody else." Nonetheless, the commission continued, "We are satisfied by and large that Chief Awolowo knew everything about this diversion of large sums of money both from the National Bank of Nigeria Limited and the National Investment and Properties Company Limited into the coffers of the Action Group. His scheme was to build around him with money an empire financially formidable both in Nigeria and abroad, an empire in which dominance would be maintained by him by the power of the money which he had given out." The commission also referred darkly to "Chief Awolowo's continued association with foreign institutions, newspapers, or political associations" though it made no direct accusation about where such invidious contact might have led.⁶⁷ In the context of Awolowo's trial for treason, his association with foreign institutions needed little additional comment.

The report of the Coker Commission was not Obafemi Awolowo's greatest problem, unlike Commissioner Muffett's report for Emir Sanusi. In Chief

Awolowo's case, corruption was not the main explanation for his political relegation. Rather it was part of a much more systematic attempt to remove his influence in the run-up to Nigeria's federal elections in 1964. His regional powerbase was destroyed by the defection of Chief Akintola and his faction. His liberty, and his position as leader of the opposition, were taken away as a result of his treason trial. Nonetheless, the accusation of corruption attacked his legitimacy as a political leader. In that, it failed miserably. The AG's supporters were unimpressed by the findings of financial shenanigans. The basic logic is nicely captured in Wole Soyinka's description of the popular reception accorded Adegoke Adelabu, an NCNC leader from Ibadan whose mass following posed the greatest challenge to the Action Group and Chief Awolowo:

Such was his hold on his followers that when, as a then regional Minister, he was accused of financial wrongdoings, he drove his newly acquired motorcar into Dugbe market and invited the throng to ride in it and treat it as their own, protesting: "This is what I bought with the money I am alleged to have stolen. It belongs to you all. Treat it as your very own property." If they could have done so, the ecstatic crowd would have lifted the car, with him in it, and danced round the town. It was, however, one of those long, gaudy American limousines so beloved of the first-generation politicians, so they settled for carrying him shoulder-high all the way from Dugbe to Mapo Hall. . . . They proceeded to the living quarters of his main detractor, summoned him out, stripped him naked and ransacked his residence.⁶⁸

It is striking that Awolowo's reputation—very much in western Nigeria, but more broadly as well—was not seriously harmed by the condemnatory words of Justice Coker and his colleagues. However one construes "corruption" as an activity or as a charge, the memory of Obafemi Awolowo seems to be determined primarily by assessments of the goods he brought to his political constituencies. And those, as a general principle, continue to be judged as substantial. Even his less politically inspirational subordinates, such as Alfred Rewane, are remembered less for crimes during the First Republic than for their subsequent activities. Rewane, like too many others, is remembered for his martyrdom during the regime of Sani Abacha more than shady business dealings during the 1960s. This is a pattern that would occur and recur in subsequent decades.

Party Politics, Ethnicity, and the End of the First Republic

Toward the end of 1963 the federal government conducted a national census. A census conducted in 1950–53 had found a slightly larger population in the Northern Region than in the two others combined, and this finding had been the justification for the northern advantage in parliament. The new enumeration discovered an inexplicably large increase in the Eastern Region's population, an increase large enough to destroy the north's popular majority. This result was attacked as fraudulent by northerners and westerners, and the census results were canceled and rerun the following year. The only difference in 1964, however, was that the other regions, especially the north, vastly overreported their populations as well. The country returned to using the results from the census of 1953, conducted under British auspices. Meanwhile, the ruling coalition substantially changed Nigeria's federal politics by carving a new region out of the Western Region, centered on the non-Yoruba areas in the region's east. This new region, named the Mid-Western Region, promptly elected an assembly dominated by the NCNC.

This political maneuvering was a dispiriting prelude to the federal elections held in 1964. The NCNC and Awolowo's faction of the AG allied with the dissident parties of the north—the UMBC, NEPU, and a new Kano People's Party that supported Emir Sanusi. The NPC campaigned in tandem with Akintola's faction of the AG, which by this point he was calling the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). It became clear before the election, however, that the dissident coalition was unlikely to prevail, and it therefore called for a boycott of elections, though this ultimately proved successful primarily in the Eastern Region. The outcome was somewhat unfortunate, at least from the standpoint of the NPC's opponents. The lack of competition allowed them to increase their margins in many northern and western constituencies and to defeat a number of NEPU and AG MPs. But after the election, the NCNC again entered into coalition with the NPC and NNDP, and the government lurched along, through an election in the Western Region in 1965, which was marred by wholesale fraud and an unconvincing though overwhelming NNDP victory. It is not clear where the federal government would have gone after this. It was overthrown in a military coup on 15 January 1966. A number of politicians, including Tafawa Balewa, the Sardauna, and Akintola, were assassinated in the process.

The coup was masterminded by a group of young army officers, mostly Igbo, and it was not carried out with uniform success. As it turned out, the politicians who were killed in the coup tended to be members of the NPC or NNDP.

Although the plotters had also intended to assassinate President Azikiwe and Michael Okpara, the premier of the Eastern Region, these Igbo NCNC politicians were spared because of a series of accidents. Suspicions, particularly northern suspicions of an Igbo plot against them, were heightened when the figure who emerged as military head of state was the army commander, General J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, who was also Igbo. General Ironsi quickly identified Nigeria's federal structure as behind many of the country's problems, and he therefore attempted to ameliorate them by abolishing the regions and establishing a unitary state. The reform did not get implemented, because the Ironsi regime was toppled in a second coup in July, led by northerners. General Ironsi and many of January's plotters were killed in turn, and a northern-dominated military regime took control under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, who was from the Middle Belt. As military governor of the Eastern Region he appointed Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, who would shortly become internationally famous.

The counterpoint to this drama of political sectionalism was a series of increasingly deadly riots, beginning with one in Kano in 1953. The Kano riot had been touched off by a series of confrontations among politicians—starting with the AG motion that year for independence in 1956 and then the harassment of NPC politicians by street gangs in Lagos following their opposition to the AG motion, and followed by the AG/UMBC tour of the northern provinces to garner political support. The riot in 1953 killed a number of southerners—ironically, mostly Igbo despite the AG's role in touching them off—but they were followed across the next thirteen years by many more, in both the north and the south and with both religious and ethnic elements to them. The violence came to a climax in September/October 1966, when the riots grew so systematic and so bloody that the substantial Igbo diaspora in the north fled en masse, even though the trains transporting them back to the Eastern Region were often attacked and their passengers murdered. Tensions continued to increase across late 1966 and early 1967, until in May 1967 the Eastern Region's military governor, Colonel Ojukwu, declared it independent as the nascent Republic of Biafra, leading to the brutal civil war that resulted in the death—by violence or starvation—of a significant portion of the eastern population.

The politics of Biafran secession were heightened by the ethnic politics of the Nigerian political economy. Rich oil deposits had been found in the delta of the Niger River. Though in the Eastern Region, the delta was not inhabited by Igbo people but by ethnic minorities. These groups were often hostile to the NCNC and had provided the NPC-dominated electoral alliance with some support during the federal elections in 1964. The NCNC had systematically

quashed this dissidence, and more generally the region's lack of incorporation into NCNC politics had resulted in their receiving much less government money than other areas of the region. Relative deprivation meant that delta peoples were not great supporters of Biafran secession. One event immediately preceding Biafra's secession was Colonel Gowon's announcement that, like General Ironsi before him, he would attempt to ameliorate the centrifugal pressures of the regional structure by reforming Nigerian federalism. In place of the four regions, he instituted a system of twelve states, which were supposed to correspond to existing patterns of ethnic affinity. The Eastern Region was broken into three, and the state that would be dominated by Igbo was, by virtue of its geography, likely to be impoverished. The areas about to begin oil production were hived off into other states, and the Igbo state corresponded closely with the areas inhabited by Igbo people—inland, with few productive resources except for palm oil trees. (See Map 3.) Given Igbo grievances about the violence they had been experiencing, it was a provocative move, and it helps to explain Colonel Ojukwu's precipitate secession.

It is relatively straightforward to distill a story of ethnic sectionalism from this, but the more important conclusion to be drawn is of how these events completed the transformation of corruption as a political category. The basic dynamic illustrated by the deposition of Emir Sanusi remained at play. Malfeasance in office was a potent charge and could make an official's continued tenure impossible. But the case of Sanusi also demonstrates that malfeasance was not sufficient for deposition, and it is possible it was not necessary either. Across the colonial period, accusations of political malfeasance were only taken seriously by the government when the officials in question were already vulnerable. That basic political logic linked the cases of Emir Aliyu and Emir Sanusi. Both rulers almost certainly committed what could be interpreted as grave violations of the rules governing their offices. Nonetheless, that alone was not what ended their careers. Aliyu was the victim of a long campaign of vilification by the missionary Walter Miller, and Sanusi was undercut by political strains within the NPC itself. The continuities between the two cases, however, are dwarfed by the governmental transformation between 1921 and 1963. Where Emir Aliyu's real political constituency was the British political staff in the region, Sanusi's constituencies were more diverse. He took office at a time when the British were still potent political actors, though the records indicate their reduced scope for maneuver, given their disfavor of Sanusi's candidacy. The new emir was also subject to the constraints of the NPC hierarchy and to public pressure as well, epitomized by a thriving public sphere in both Hausa and English and by the political critiques advanced by NEPU and its southern

political allies. Public opinion and opposition-party pressure became a serious vulnerability, however, only when Sanusi lost his base of support within the NPC. By itself this shift toward officials' dependence on diverse constituencies documents an important transition but a limited one. It has not been entirely appreciated how profound the change was as power within the northern elite shifted from the aristocracy of the Sokoto Caliphate and its officeholders to the NPC—even while that party's personnel largely emerged from the aristocracy. That transition was profound, in no small measure because it allowed narratives of corruption to take the forms familiar to a modern nation-state. Nonetheless, the case illustrates a process of transition only partway complete.

The scandals that wracked the First Republic at the federal level—even and especially when they centered on accusations of corruption and the misuse of office—took very different shape when they were tied to issues of interregional tension. Where Emir Sanusi's fall was due to his position within the NPC, Dr. Azikiwe's vulnerability stemmed from tensions within southern progressive politics and specifically the challenges that occasioned the rise of the Action Group and its supplanting of the NCNC in the Western Region. While the specific accusations against Dr. Azikiwe involved his violating the ministerial code as premier of the Eastern Region, his counterattack was to highlight AG malfeasance in the west. And, of course, the initiative was not successful. Azikiwe was not removed from office, and indeed he won the following election. Nonetheless, the *forms* of political vulnerability had begun to demonstrate the significance of regional and ethnic politics.

The Western Regional crisis, the Coker Commission, and the trial of Obafemi Awolowo illustrate a similar logic, though of course the coup plot Awolowo was alleged to have been involved in would not be classified as misuse of office. Nonetheless, the basic dynamic of interregional interest and political vulnerability is very similar. In this regard it is little wonder the outcome was different from the inquiry into Dr. Azikiwe. Where the latter had been able to depend on his party as a base of support, the former was faced with the rebellion of his chief deputy, Chief Akintola, even while the federal government and judiciary were controlled by the NPC/NCNC ruling coalition. Thus, already by 1962, the basic political logic of charges of political malfeasance had become largely federalized and regionalized.

Narratives of the end of the First Republic that emphasize politicians' misuse of office or the burgeoning of ethnic tension fail to appreciate some of the subtler transitions within the logic of corruption discourse. Across the federation, the First Republic had established a powerful dynamic of channeling federal resources to local constituencies. Given the coincidence of region and

political party, this logic was always also ethnic, and it also helped to dictate a particular pattern to the diversion of state resources to private or extralegal ends, just as surely as the constitutive logic of the native authorities had in the early colonial period helped to dictate how, why, and under what circumstances emirs and their subordinates exercised their offices in irregular ways. To the extent that accusations of corruption became a tool that might be used by a politician's enemies even while the political system dictated some form of extralegal action by almost everyone, corruption discourse became something more than a mode of critique. "Squandermania" was a relatively insignificant material outgrowth of this political logic, at least during the 1960s. By the time the coup ended Nigeria's first experiment with democratic government, increasing levels of political violence and the use of ethnic terror had dwarfed simple instances of misuse of office. But given that violence and coercion had been a part of the repertoire of state officials for many decades before that, the change was one of degree rather than kind. At the same time, the political logic of the corruption-complex reached an end point in the secession of Biafra. Only in the aftermath of the civil war and reconstruction could a different distributional logic move corruption in new ways. In later years it would remain regionalized, but the pressure would become, at least to some extent, integrative rather than centrifugal. One long-term lesson of the civil war was the need to make the corruption-complex a means of giving elites access to federal largesse.