

and obedient military governors to states other than their own ensured compliance to the dictation from the central military command.

With the death of Muhammed in 1976, Obasanjo became a powerful head of state. During his four years of supremacy, he succeeded mightily in canceling Nigeria's hard-won traditions of federalism. Virtually every institution was centralized: Universities and educational policies were taken over by the Central government. Religion, wisely a regional affair under civilians in the 1950-60s 1950s, fully became a central subject in the Obasanjo years.

Land Use Decree

The most daring program of centralization under Obasanjo was the so-called Land Use Decree. This was an olden problem dating back to Nigerian colonial history. As part of his mandate for amalgamation (1914-1918), the British colonial officer Frederick Lugard wanted to transfer land usages in Northern Nigeria to the South. The Fulani conquest of Hausa states in 1804-10 had alienated Hausas' lands on the grounds of right of conquest. When the British conquered the Sokoto Caliphate in 1803, they imitated Fulani practices by claiming that the lands of the Caliphate (as elsewhere in the North) now belonged to the British colonial government.

However, in the South, lands belonged to Nigerians, not the government. Lugard's ambition was to extend the smoother land usages in the North to contentious Southern Nigeria. However, in the face of unexpected widespread opposition, Lugard abandoned this scheme of introducing land alienation to Southern Nigeria.

Sixty years later, armed with powers of military rule, Obasanjo's government conquered what Lugard could not master. Empowered by recommendations from a "Land Use Commission," he promulgated Land Use Decree of 1978 by which the practices of the North were now extended to the South. The resentment about this decree in Southern Nigeria is pervasive.

1979 Constitution and Centralization of the Political Process

In a determined effort to achieve a strong executive presidency in a military-supervised Constitution, Muhammed/Obasanjo sacrificed the principles, practices, and processes of the 1960/63 civilian Constitution in favor of a centralized "federal" Constitution that Muhammed's surviving partner, Obasanjo, fulfilled in 1979 for use by the succeeding civilian government.

The previous civilian Constitution was constructed from below, in the Regions.