CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

From Kampala to Cape Town, from Dakar to Dar-Es-Salaam, Africans are being stirred by new hopes for democracy and peace and prosperity. . . . Now, nations and individuals finally are free to seek a newer world where democracy and peace and prosperity are not slogans, but the essence of a new Africa. – President Clinton, Accra, 1998

Since 1999, over 10,000 people have died in a series of clashes. – Reuters on Democratic Nigeria, January 6, 2003

In 1999, Nigeria welcomed democracy, and Nigerians began dying. In a most tragic irony, Nigerians expecting a freedom-inducing, peace-instilling, conflict-resolving, wealth-enabling democracy, instead found violence, warfare and death. Compounding this tragedy, the scholarly community has not offered a satisfactory explanation as to why this bloodshed occurred. Many scholars have described communal conflicts in democratic settings. Others have prescribed institutional means to prevent or restrain communal violence in democratic states. Scholars have fallen short, however, in their ability to explain adequately how democracy can become such fertile ground for communal violence. In particular, they failed to explore how democracy had been articulated and how these articulations relate to communal conflicts.¹ I propose to begin

1. Articulation is “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105). Articulation is the practice of linking and differentiating meanings within a discourse.
that exploration – to consider issues of discourse and communal relations in order to understand how democracy was written and read across the North-South and international-domestic divides, and to reveal how the accompanying representative practices affected Nigeria’s domestic communal relations.

In particular, I will explore how the Clinton Administration articulated democracy in ways that filled democracy with pragmatic and economic value while emptying its more liberal content. I will then relate how these messages were heard within Nigeria where democracy came to be understood among the Nigerian elite and within the Nigerian populous as a path to economic prosperity and national status. Finally, I will describe how Nigerian religious and ethnic groups found themselves in violent competition over efforts to fill democracy’s remaining void by incorporating ideas of fair political representation, fair distribution of resources, and the degree to which religious law should be accommodated.

In pursuing this line of inquiry, I am accepting the challenges put forth by Roxanne Doty in the closing chapters of Imperial Encounters (1996). There she begins to “call attention to the meanings and identities that are constructed in the process of promoting democracy and human rights and the meanings these signifiers are given” (1996, 144, emphasis in the original). Building on her observation that the Reagan administration’s promotion of democracy “enabled a particular construction of the meaning of democracy,” she argues that we must examine “the representational practices that occur in the process of [democracy’s] promotion” and ask “What meanings and identities are being (and will be) constructed?”(144).
Regarding the relationship between the empirical and the discursive, I especially appreciate Gramsci’s use of a German pun to clarify the need for the material world to be understood in social terms. In his *Prison Notebooks*’ section on the Study of Philosophy, Gramsci asks “What is man?” In answering this question he takes Fauerbach’s focus on the material aspects of the pun “Der Mensch ist was er ißt” as a primary instrument in that policy. This fits with Doty’s notion of foreign aid “as a specific technique in the more general field of exercising power” (129). Doty explains, “The importance of conceptualizing foreign aid in this manner is that it focuses . . . on what foreign aid, as a *practice*, does” (129). “Foreign aid” she continues, “is but one of numerous domains for the deployment of disciplinary techniques. So understood, the practice of foreign aid . . . is part of the continuing drama in which meticulous rituals of power are played and replayed with various twists, turns, and modifications” (129). It is these twists, these turns, and these modifications that make Nigerian democratization and the role of U.S. foreign policy in that process so intriguing.

Following Doty’s lead, I shall use understandings of power, representation, and disciplinary techniques familiar to discourse analysis. Discourse analysis – having been motivated by reactions to positivism, rationalism, and structuralism, and drawing on linguistic insights – enables scholars to see through overt expressions of power and identity to interpret and better understand the empirical world around them. More
specifically, I follow theoretical trails blazed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and the “Essex School” they inspired. This approach to discourse embraces the poststructural and the postpositive while simultaneously working through methodological and epistemological issues in order to “put forward plausible and empirically justifiable explanations of the social and political world” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 1). Howarth and Stavrakakis label this poststructural approach to the empirical world “discourse analysis,” and employ a toolbox of representational categories that aid in deciphering the discourse that always pervades the empirical world’s phenomenon, problems, and questions.

The discursive approach incubating at the Essex School offers a particularly appropriate means to understand Nigeria’s democratic conflicts for five reasons. First, 'isst ' – you are what you eat. It is, of course, true that the material nature of food contributes to the material matter of a human, but that is decidedly uninteresting to the philosopher or the political scientist. It is more relevant in a social sense that you are what you eat. Diet, like housing and dress, “are elements in which social relations as a whole are manifested in the most evident and widespread (i.e. mass) fashion.” (1971, 354-5).

3. This “novel conception of discourse” (Laclau 2000, x) has been crafted and nurtured at the University of Essex’s graduate program in Ideology and Discourse Analysis. The research pursued there “makes it possible to articulate the original system of categories introduced in Hegemony [and Socialist Strategy, 1985] in a more precise and detailed way” (Laclau 2000, x).

4. Chapter 2 will examine six of these representational practices: nodal points, presuppositions, classification, positioning, and the logics of equivalence and difference, and the empty signifier.

5. That discourse analysis provides the appropriate tools to understand rather than to prove, verify, or falsify places it within a particular category of inquiry often described as interpretive or hermeneutic. These approaches to knowledge possess many strengths like those listed in the following paragraphs, but they also introduce several limitations on what the reader should expect. Although a series of links are revealed
its deliberate focus on discourse enables me to take seriously the speech, actions, and identities of the Nigerian people as the window to understanding this moment in their history. Second, having self-consciously developed a discursive epistemology, this approach to discourse analysis is manageably applicable to the empirical Nigerian case. Third, Laclau, Mouffe and their students take agency seriously: “questions surrounding the way social agents ‘live out’ their identities and act – questions that pertain to the concept of subjectivity – are of central importance” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 12). Taking agency seriously enables me both to assign responsibility to those agents whose practices articulate and sustain dangerous discursive constructions, and to give life and
voice to the Nigerian people who currently suffer under those constructions. No understanding of Nigerian politics can be complete if it disempowers the Nigerian people to either an abstraction of Nigeria or to an autonomous, disembodied discourse. I agree with Donald Horowitz that a “bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory” (Horowitz 1985, 140). Fourth, the Essex approach has an explicitly political orientation, especially in their consideration of the empty signifier around which “various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack” (Laclau 1996, 44). The heart of this

6. Although I propose to “assign responsibility” and “give life” to certain agents I shall not endow agents with an autonomy outside of the discourse(s) they inhabit. Nor shall I suggest here that agents exist ontologically prior to discursive structures. Throughout this dissertation I shall explore how agents (embedded in discourse) find and express their voices, their desires, and some measure of freedom especially where they find themselves on the borderlines between discourses. In this sense I draw on Doty’s 1997 application of the insights of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to craft an understanding of the agent-structure problematique. Building on the conception of practice and the understanding of subject-position that follows, Doty draws on Laclau and Mouffe to demonstrate that these understandings enable “us to conceptualize agents and agency without falling into the trap of attributing some timeless and unexplained quality to all subjects. . .” (Doty 1997, 384). Especially since “discourses are inherently open, contingent and overlapping [and] can create spaces within which practices of resistance are made possible,” and because discourses are “often contradictory, as are the subject-positions that are made available within them,” agency becomes possible (Doty 1997, 384-5). I shall return to this point in Chapter 2.

7. Laclau explains that “an empty signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified” (1996a, 36). I shall apply the concept of the empty signifier to various applications throughout this dissertation and thereby contribute to the development of this embryotic concept. Foremost, I shall consider the empty signifier, democracy, and address how democracy has filled most of the world, while simultaneously the meaning of democracy has been selectively emptied. This phenomenon has effected communal relations in Nigeria both because what remains of democracy’s hegemonic meaning is decisively economic in nature, and what has been emptied represents a void over which Nigeria’s communal groups have engaged in deadly competition to fill. I shall consider the nature of the empty signifier in much more detail in Chapter 2.
dissertation explores the *empty signifier* named democracy – that signifier which has been selectively emptied of its meaning in the discourse of democratic enlargement thereby creating a void which Nigeria’s domestic communal movements compete to fill. Fifth, as Aletta Norval points out, “For Mouffe, as for Laclau, politics is essentially concerned with the formation of an ‘us’ as opposed to a ‘them’” (Norval 2000a, 224). This is especially appropriate to my purpose since the political divisions and conflicts between democratic and nondemocratic states in the international arena and the divisions and conflicts between ethnic, religious, and regional groups in the domestic arena are so central to this study.

Building on these discursive insights, I intend to study democratization in Nigeria, its ties to Nigeria’s domestic communal identities and relationships, and how U.S. foreign policy and democratic discourse interact with those identities and relationships. Nigeria is an ideal case for such a study. Nigeria’s social context in the greater global society (i.e. its historical-linguistic, geopolitical, and economic characteristics) provides a unique opportunity to address how discourse transfuses national-international and North-South boundaries. Nigeria’s colonial history and its subsequent position in the international world-economy has left it with a widely-spoken national language, English, which facilitates the relatively easy diffusion of discursive practices across international, national, and subnational barriers. Furthermore, because
Nigeria occupies two subject-positions8 important to policy makers and academics: first, as a geopolitical hegemon in the West African security bloc and second, as a source of oil in the international political economy, there exists abundant text to make such analysis possible.

Nigeria’s international democratic identity and Nigeria’s intranational communal identities are both in states of flux9 that coincide temporally and geographically thus demanding an explanation of their possible links. Regarding Nigeria’s international democratic flux, Nigeria has, since the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998, moved steadily toward assuming an internationally acknowledged democratic identity, culminating in the popular election and inauguration of President Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. Thus began Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, the heir to three previously failed attempts at democratization. Nigeria’s democratic transition takes place upon a discursive field within which the international community, and especially U.S. foreign policy makers, had selectively emptied democracy of most of its content. This enabled Nigeria to be christened an internationally recognized democracy, while facing little domestic resistance despite a variety of political, economic, and social costs Nigeria’s

8. A subject-position is the position a subject (person, state, etc) occupies which is made possible and meaningful by the discourse that subject inhabits. For example, a particular person I met in Nigeria may adopt positions of a Nigerian, a woman, a Muslim, or a Yoruba based on her positions in the nationalist, gendered, religious, or ethnic discourses she inhabits.

9. “Crisis” might substitute (Laclau and Mouffe seem to prefer “revolution”) for “flux,” which is a fluid yet identifiable point at which events have enabled a rearticulation of certain signifiers.
inhabitants would have to pay, and despite the great benefits the U.S. would stand to reap.

Regarding Nigeria’s domestic communal flux, Nigeria offers a mosaic of subnational identity groups, varying in type (religious, ethnic, and regional), size, and access to political-economic resources. The power relations among these communal groups are even more fluid than is the U.S.-Nigerian hierarchy depicted above. Such groups find themselves in positions to gain or lose according to how democracy is articulated and applied, and they consequently compete to fill the democracy’s void through more or less overt forms of conflict.

It is remarkable how violent these conflicts have become, costing by one estimate 10,000 lives in the first four years of Nigeria’s Fourth [democratic] Republic. It is likewise remarkable that as the discourse of democracy has evolved in those four years, the nature of the conflicts has shifted from those ethnically based conflicts more typically considered in the academic literature (conflicts over scarce resources and political representation) to conflicts based more exclusively on ambitions to fill the empty signifier, democracy. The international discourse pitting the U.S. “democracy” against the Nigerian “pariah” temporarily united Nigerians, but the subsequent contests to fill democracy with a particular meaning have divided those who link democracy to Sharia from those who did not. In other words, a rapid adoption of Nigeria’s democratic identity has accompanied the rapid transformation of the type of conflicts associated with that transformation. This transformation, considered in Chapters 4 and 5 represent Laclau’s claim that “as society changes over time this process of identification will be
always precarious and reversible and, as the identification is no longer automatic, different projects or wills will try to hegemonize the empty signifiers of the absent community.” This he claims “is the starting point of modern democracy” (Laclau 1996a, 46). Laclau explains that “various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function” (Laclau 1996a, 44). These attempts at hegemonization permeate this dissertation from the beginning, when the Clinton Administration articulates one “filling,” to the end, when Nigeria’s communal groups compete violently to articulate another.

Exploring this transnational discourse (and the representational practices that constitute it) enables us to understand better both the Nigerian state’s position with a global context and the relationship among communal groups within Nigeria. Such an exploration also promises to expose the political practices that enable some agents to benefit from the discourse or to manipulate it. The possibility that people continue to die, in part due to U.S. foreign policies and the discourse of democracy, motivates me to understand better these processes and their consequences. Positivist theories of frustration-aggression and democratic transition might provide some insight, but such insights cannot be separated from the discourses within which they proceed.

Only with an exploration of how national and subnational relations are being rearticulated and redefined can one begin to see how rising expectations and frustration might result. Only with an exploration of how national and communal identities are rearticulated, can one begin to comprehend the emotional fire that accompanies that
frustration and understand why some targets are selected for its release. Only in seeing how representational practices constitute discourse and how discourse overflows international, national, and subnational boundaries, is this exploration of Nigerian identities possible.

In this dissertation, I shall use Nigeria’s unique context to explore links underlying the two central phenomena: first, the international and domestic articulations of democracy; and second, the reorganization/redefinition of Nigeria’s domestic identities and communal relations. In the international arena, a global society that is dominated economically and politically by the United States, that also incorporates Nigeria is productive of a discourse of Nigerian democracy. Within this discourse, certain meanings and identities become privileged while others become marginalized and rendered insignificant. Consequently, certain performances become necessary while other are made unnecessary. Among these consequences, it becomes necessary for Nigeria to assume a democratic identity in order to receive privileged social status and concrete economic rewards. Within the domestic arena, a community of previously imagined and continually reimagined communal groups (ethnic, religious, and regional in composition) tune in (i.e. they eavesdrop) on the transnational discursive practices and privileged meanings of democracy, interpreting for themselves the meanings associated with the expectations and promises of democracy. These communal groups adapt their performance and redefine their intercommunal relations in accordance with what content of democracy remains—a content which privileges a zero-sum, economistic, and competitive ontology.
To represent these relationships visually, imagine first that we can temporarily isolate three subject-positions: U.S. policy-makers, Nigerian leaders, and the Nigerian public who have been pre-identified as politically and socially demarcated communal groups. These subject positions and their verbal and behavioral acts are all bound and structured within a “discursive totality” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 107).

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10. Discourse analysis prevents us from ever treating these subject positions as essentially separate or unrelated positions. Interestingly, in (particularly) North American academic discourse one is likely to face little resistance to depicting the U.S. and Nigeria as separate, but it will more likely solicit criticism depicting a “Nigerian State” as opposed to “Nigerian communal groups.” A political state entails a population, yet for my purposes, they must be kept distinct, because the contested terrain of international discourse surrounding democracy (What will it take for Nigeria to become a democracy?) is quite different from that of the national discourse.

11. Laclau and Mouffe assert “that every object is constituted as an object of discourse... [and] that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioral aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities” (1985, 107).
Within the discursive totality, representations of something that has become known as “democracy” have been percolating for millennia. Since the advent of the Clinton Administration’s articulation of “democratic enlargement” and academic articulations of “democratic peace,” a particular discourse regarding the nature and content of democracy has been expressed. For purposes of this dissertation, I focus initially on how these expressions are manifested in a dialogue between U.S. and Nigerian policy-makers which takes place within this broader global discourse on democracy. This dialogue, represented by the vertical arrows at the left of Figure 2, opens a window to a state centric discourse in which democracy is focused on the demands of state behavior and the promises of reward for a state’s performance. Notice in this visual representation that the shading is not especially uniform, representing the unequal status of the two subjects positions (U.S. and Nigeria) as well as the disparate

![Figure 2. State-centric democratic discourse.](image-url)
power relations which advantages the U.S. to define both the content of democracy as well as Nigeria’s democratic identity.

At this point the signifier, democracy, becomes emptied for reasons more fully explained in Chapter 2. This does not mean, however, that these representations rob the signifier, democracy, of its power. On the contrary, a set of meanings is established and alternative understandings of democracy are disempowered. From these representational practices, certain performances emerge as natural and necessary. The U.S. must “encourage” Nigeria to adopt a democratic identity\(^\text{12}\) while at the same time, U.S. policy makers must actively seek to redefine what democracy is in a way that allows the U.S. to overlook many seemingly “undemocratic” Nigerian attributes and actions\(^\text{13}\) and to provide seemingly undemocratic forms of geostrategic assistance and economic exploitation while preserving these policy-makers’ idealistic rhetoric. Nigerians are likewise engaged in a limited performance made necessary by the democratic discourse in order to don its democratic identity; Nigerians must hold elections through which it can legitimize a set of local and national leaders. Beyond that performance, little else must change. Thus U.S. policymakers are able to pursue economic and geopolitical interests without the troubling accusations of hypocrisy. Nigeria finds in its democratic

\(^{12}\) The choice of tools which the U.S. employs in its foreign policy is circumscribed by yet another discourse underlying foreign policy implementation. A deep-seeded and unspoken discourse constrains what is thought possible (even what is imaginable) and limits foreign policy options to those of material and social rewards and punishments.

\(^{13}\) How this discourse justifies behavioral inconsistencies and minimizes a great deal of cognitive dissonance in the U.S. relations with Nigeria will be considered extensively in Chapters 3 and 4.
status the opportunity to re-engage with the United States and reaps the political and
economic benefits bestowed directly from the United States as well as those garnered
from the larger global democratic society (debt forgiveness, developmental assistance,
and the cessation of sanctions).\textsuperscript{14}

This democratic discourse, its expanding horizons, and its accompanying
performances are not, however, without many unintended consequences. The discourse
articulating a meaning of democracy between Nigerian and U.S. policy makers is
overheard by the Nigerian population who are Africa’s largest literate and politically
engaged population, one with easy access to a free and prolific printed press and radio in
a widely understood language. As the U.S. models what appears to be a successful and
prosperous democracy, and as U.S. policy-makers begin to actively market democracy to
the Nigerian state with all its accompanying promises, Nigeria’s population hears the
many promises linked to democracy. As Nigeria dons an international democratic status
with its requisite election, Nigeria’s population understands that all of these spoken and
unspoken promises are soon to be fulfilled.

Graphically, we might again imagine that horizons of this discourse have now
grown beyond the elite social circles and have penetrated into Nigeria’s domestic
relations. However, the global expansion of this democratic discourse had largely
emptied it of its meaning, and the elite discourse was so state-centric it was devoid of
sufficient meaning for local application. Although a democratic identity has taken hold
at the state level, those particular meanings associated with democracy presupposed in

\textsuperscript{14} Chapter 3 will provide substantially more evidence for this argument.
Chapter 5 will focus on the signifier “dividends of democracy” to which many other meanings, expectations, and demands are linked.

Figure 3. The horizons of the democratic discourse expand from the international elite spheres to penetrate Nigeria’s domestic realm.

the elite-driven discourse are now open to struggle among groups attempting to fill the void of the empty signifier, democracy.

Regarding the state-wide acceptance of a democratic identity, Nigeria’s population is unified in its acceptance of the democratic label and its accompanying promises, but they are not unified in how they seek to fulfill these promises. Often they find themselves in competition with each other or at odds with the national government from whom they seek to receive the benefits they have associated of democracy.¹⁵

Nigeria’s policy makers, on the other hand, face both discursive and material constraints as they try to respond to the Nigerian population. The Nigerian elite, embedded in this particular discourse and bound by the increasingly scarce material

¹⁵ Chapter 5 will focus on the signifier “dividends of democracy” to which many other meanings, expectations, and demands are linked.
conditions Nigerians are facing, find it necessary to play a two-level (international and domestic) game on both rhetorical and material planes. On the rhetorical plane, the elite must convince the international community and the United States that they are sufficiently democratic to reap the accompanying rewards. They must also convince the public to participate in the democratic performance which might otherwise be undermined by grassroots boycotts or violence. Yet, contrary to their efforts to solidify their democratic status abroad and market democracy at home they must be careful not to overly inflate expectations among the communal groups—an unavoidably impossible task given the ‘dividends of democracy’ already articulated in the elite discourse. Lacking the national unity that might make competing domestic politics demands more easily handled, the Nigerian state must instead contend with many incompatible demands made in the name of democracy by communal groups whose identities become increasingly fixed.

Upon this material plane, the Nigerian state awaits the political support and economic windfall that might boost the state’s capacity to meet the communal groups’ material demands, and Nigeria must continue its political performance on the international stage in order to increase the odds that these initially promised windfalls arrive. Yet, in the short term, the Nigerian state lacks the material and rhetorical resources needed to address the communal groups’ demands; it lacks the physical resources and the institutional capacity to prevent or contain the violence that might erupt due to this inevitable discontent; and moreover, as it has engaged in the new democratic
discourse it has forfeited the brute ‘undemocratic’ tools that it employed in the past to stamp out communal violence.

This violence (the focus of Chapter 5) pervades Nigeria in the first years of the Fourth Republic and costs thousands of lives. Unfortunately, these types of conflict (conflicts divided along communal lines and driven by expectations that cannot be met) is only the first phase of communal violence to access the democratic discourse. In addition to these conflicts, the more discursively driven Sharia conflicts have cost many more thousands of lives in democratic Nigeria.

Although the entire state has adopted the democratic identity, Nigeria’s Islamic and non-Islamic populations diverged profoundly in how they fill democracy’s void. The individualist-competitive elements that are so naturally linked to democracy in the U.S. centered discourse are easily integrated into the southern Nigerian’s world view. There, the greatest danger is the propensity to intensify conflict around democratically-driven competitions. In the predominantly Islamic northern regions, however, these so-called ‘western’ elements of democracy are easily discarded or reinterpreted in ways thought unimaginable in the western discourse of ‘democracy.’ As a result, a series of devastating conflicts has emerged as each struggles to fill the democratic void with their particular vision of democracy.16

16. It is important to note here that the visual imagery of an empty signifier may introduce the danger of confusing it with a floating signifier, or that competition to hegemonize its content be confused with a simple proliferation of meaning. These differences will be further explained in Chapter 2 in discussion of Laclau’s hegemonic relationship (1996), and Howarth’s (2000b) and Clohesy’s (2000) empirical applications to South Africa and Northern Ireland. Until then, Clohesy’s brief clarification might help. In his discussion of the empty signifier, justice, in Irish Provisionalist discourse, he states
This dissertation suggests that a democratic discourse represented initially in U.S. and Nigerian elite communications has privileged a construction of democracy in economistic, easily marketable terms and in a way compatible with, and not undermining of, the global capitalist project. This articulation and promotion of democracy largely emptied ‘democracy’ of its meaning. Yet, the generative effects of that discourse are three-fold. First, the Nigerian state is engaging in a democratic performance. Second, this discourse has penetrated Nigeria’s domestic arena where previously constructed communal groups, whose own identities and intergroup relationships are always in flux, hear its promises and internalize its anticipated benefits and permissible behaviors which edge them toward violent competition. Third, the emptying effect exacerbates a fault line between those Nigerians seeking to fill the void with Islamic content and those who do not. As each group attempts to realize their vision of democracy, violence ensues.

Nigeria provides a fascinating case within which to explore issues of discourse, democracy, and communal identity. First, the recent transition to democratic governance provides the requisite opportunity to observe what made this transition possible and what the transformation has since enabled. Second, the presence of historically established (however problematic) ethnic, regional, and religious identities within the Nigerian population provides a set of subject-positions with histories against which we can track communal relations and identity shifts.

that, “it is precisely because it is a signifier that can accommodate so many different interpretations that it must always be understood as empty or, at least, partially empty in that, although its meaning will always be contested, at any time there will always be a dominant discourse that will be controlling and delimiting its meaning” (Clohesy 2000, 74).
Third, Nigeria’s unique linguistic position presents a rare opportunity to observe the diffusion and penetration of discursive practices and effects. Although Nigeria’s population speaks approximately 400 distinct languages, English is the official language. Furthermore, and in part because of the vast variety of native tongues, English is widely spoken. In all official state announcements and almost all publications, English is the language of choice. This allows international discourse to filter easily down to the population without the substantial barrier that translation represents in many developing countries. Moreover, because no translation is necessary, one substantial and inevitable bias is not introduced as to what will or will not be made available to the population in an understandable language.

Almost as important as the use of English in this case selection, is the presence of an informed and literate population. The oil boom of the late 70's enabled massive investments into Nigeria’s human capital, and a large segment of the population became literate. In a country populated by about 120 million people, of whom some sixty percent are literate, this represents a massive audience. In fact, despite the years of military rule which limited freedoms of the press, Nigeria has one of Africa’s most active and best read presses.

To explain how democracy relates to communal bloodshed, I rely primarily on a discourse analysis of many relevant texts: Nigerian media reports, official U.S. governmental communications, Nigerian governmental communications, descriptions and interviews in the Nigerian media, and my first-hand observations. The theoretical underpinnings of discourse analysis with its supporting literature will be considered in
greater detail in the following chapter. By way of introduction, however, it is necessary
to lay out at least my justification for its use and a few of its potential benefits.

First, the claim that communal identities are socially constructed has recently
risen to the status of truism in the discipline of political science. Academic consensus
dictates that ethnic identities and boundaries have no essential nature and little
permanence. The now all-encompassing literature on social constructivism has easily
latched on to the ethnic project as one of its own. Social constructivism, popularized by
Nicholas Onuf (1989) and Alexander Wendt (1992, 1999), boasted of disclosing the
social nature of relations between communal groups or between democratic and
democratizing states.\(^{17}\) Likewise, studies on social and political identity in general have
found a comfortable bunk in the social constructivist camp. These now-mainstreamed
constructivist efforts, however, do little to delve beneath the apparent contingencies
regarding ethnic composition and boundaries. Despite their indispensable focus on the
intersubjective nature of identity and all representation, theories on social constructivism
tend to neglect agency and even more importantly, they\(^{18}\) neglect the processes that tie

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applications of social constructivism to communal relations. Regarding social
constructivism and democracy, the very prolific literature on Democratic Peace Theory
considers in its dyadic, normative school the social relationship among democracies, that
makes it ripe for application of a social constructivist approach. More directly Mark
Peceny (1999) suggests that although many scholars of democratization hint at social
constructivist processes, they do little to capitalize on the social or international natures
of that process.

18. Checkel cites Nadelmann, 1990; Finnemore, 1993 and 1996a; Strang and
Chang, 1993; Klotz, 1995; and Katzenstein, 1996 among others as examples, but he does
not elaborate on these sources in any way (Checkel 1999, 84). Let me, therefore,
elaborate briefly. Nadelmann considers how norms that affect the enforcement of
the agents to the structures of meaning (Checkel 1999, 84). Furthermore, they do little to place these constructions within the larger context of discourses that reach beyond a simple ethnic content.

Given the profound limitations of this constructivist approach, this dissertation will ground its ontology and epistemology in the poststructural. Following Laclau and Mouffe’s lead and the subsequent developments of the Essex school they inspired, I will explore the meanings and identities so central to Nigeria’s democratization and the communal conflicts associated with it. Such an approach must begin with a clear understanding of the discourse of ‘democracy.’ The meaning of democracy is likewise...
never fixed, and despite academic and policy attempts to conjure a stable democracy with a solid center, those attempts are necessarily undermined by the contingency of that attempt. Rather than lend power to these attempts to represent an essential meaning of ‘democracy,’ whose only impediment is a rational operationalization, I suggest that the language and discourse surrounding democracy reflects a constant struggle among political forces to naturalize its meanings.

I will expose the contingent nature of both democracy and communal identities in Nigeria today. I will explore how the discourses surrounding democracy and communal identities have been constructed in specific ways in this particular temporal, economic, and geostrategic case. Finally, I will present how elements of democracy are linked up with those elements defining communal identities and relations in ways that can lead to violent communal conflict. This particular discourse of democracy will therefore become implicated in communal rivalries, and will likewise expose the broader social context (policy makers who cheapen democracy), a broader economic context (how North-South relations enable certain linkages to gain privileged status), and a broader geostrategic context (how realist considerations enter to compel the disguising of realism as humanitarianism).

Methodologically speaking, how can these goals be realized? First, this study will consider its primary data to be text, broadly defined. Unlike the positivist endeavors of the physical sciences, one cannot measure any tangible, essential, objective meanings of the key elements of this study: ‘democracy,’ ‘ethnicity,’ or even ‘Nigeria.’ Instead, a discourse generates temporally, contingently fixed meanings of these elements. This
discourse consists of the rhetoric among policy makers; words spoken and images interpreted in the news and on radio; images found in advertisements, posters, and campaign literature for candidates and office holders; the spoken word of average people, professors, and students; the actions of policy makers and the public interpreted through their audiences’ particular cultural lense—all the forms of communication that together generate meaning and portray as given the underlying elements of democracy and communal identities. These texts will be presented, interpreted, categorized, and shown to contain implied and explicit content with generative capacity. Some of these texts are introduced and described below.

Embedded within these texts are representational practices that illustrate the privileging of various meanings and relationships. These representational practices follow a few key patterns (Doty 1996, 10-12). The first among these is the use of nodal points, those privileged signs upon which meanings are fixed. ‘Democracy,’ ‘Sharia,’ ‘Pariah,’ ‘human rights,’ and ‘civilized’ are all crucial nodal points whose meanings will be disclosed in subsequent chapters. Second, one finds presuppositions, those self-evident truths whose potentially political nature has been neutralized by the discourse. Presuppositions, important in their own right, are also most revealing in that they underlie the next two practices: classification and positioning. Third, classifications or the presupposed categorization of states, people, and governments are evident in how U.S. policy makers and Nigerians alike understand Nigeria’s international and domestic

political relations. Fourth, these classifications are especially important in the
*positioning* of states (U.S. and Nigeria), communal groups (Ibo and Hausa), religious
groups (Christian and Muslim), and governments (democracy and nondemocracy) as
similar, opposed, or complementary. Fifth, the *logics of equivalence and difference*
illuminate how political frontiers discursively divide political space into opposing camps
or, instead, undermine that division. How international space is divided between
democracies versus others will be the focus of Chapters 3 and 4, and how Nigerian space
is divided between religious and ethnic groups is a central focus of Chapter 5. Finally,
I’ll add to Doty’s list a sixth concept, the *empty signifier*, developed by Laclau in two
1996 publications\(^{20}\) to which I shall return in much greater detail in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2 (Theoretical Background), I examine separate literatures on
communal relations, democratization, and discourse, to which I attempt to draw points of
mutual relevance pertinent to the Nigerian case. To this end I focus particularly on the
agent-structure debate and suggest that a poststructural discursive approach is useful in
overcoming the limitations the other literatures.

Chapter 3 (Discourses of Democracy) builds on Claude Ake’s observation that
“Democracy spreads because it has been rendered meaningless and innocuous without
losing its symbolic value. While it spreads, our world is more repressive” (Ake 1997).
Chapter 3 examines the discourse of Clinton Administration officials to demonstrate that
as the Clinton Administration promoted democracy in Nigeria, it employed

\(^{20}\) This concept, more than the others, remains underdeveloped (Norval 2000b),
and such development will be yet another challenge taken on by this dissertation.
representational practices to enhance the likelihood of its success, by rendering democracy meaningless as a substantive guide to governance while enhancing greatly its symbolic value in both social and economic terms. Most notably, the Clinton Administration engaged in a consistent discourse that naturalized the social and economic costs and benefits it wished to have associated with democratization. This enabled the depoliticization of their efforts of democratic enlargement which limited grounds for resistance and ensured both Nigeria’s elite and popular acceptance of the U.S.-defined democratic performance.

In particular, the Clinton Administration crafted a dichotomous classification scheme pitting Nigeria as a pariah against Nigeria as a democracy, which further enabled the logics of equivalence to empty democracy of its political content. In the Clinton Administration’s discourse, the signifier, democracy, was constructed in social terms and linked to natural economic benefits which hide both self-serving economic interests and the overt expression of political and economic power employed to serve those interests.

Complementing Chapter 3, which documented which messages were sent by the Clinton Administration, Chapter 4 (Discourse on the Ground) examines the other side of the discursive coin. Chapter 4 recounts what messages were heard by the Nigeria public and how that population began to find its voice. It therefore makes the case that U.S.-Nigerian relations manifested not only a U.S. monologue but a U.S.-Nigerian dialogue in which some of the Clinton Administration’s articulations were received, interpreted, and then expressed.
In the first four years of Nigeria’s Fourth democratic Republic (1999-2003) an economistic understanding of democracy and democratization took root, the dividends of democracy became understood largely in economic terms, the calculus used to measure democracy’s utility began to be expressed in predominantly economic terms, and the overall economic expectations began to rise profoundly. At the same time, Nigeria’s adoption of its democratic identity and the world’s embrace of that new identity effectively extended the logic of equivalence to further empty democracy of its political content.

Chapter 5 (Democratic Conflicts) addresses how Nigerian’s are mobilizing to express their communal identities and their discursively driven expectations. First, I review four years of Nigerian news and quantify any reference to deaths resulting from communal violence. I thus track trends in communal violence and suggest what broad effect democratization exerts on communal relations. Next, I categorize according to a theoretically informed typography a litany of cases of communal conflicts based on political representation, distribution of resources, and the desirability of religious law. I describe the history of these conflicts and the relevant background. Most importantly, I analyze a wealth of textual and verbal cues surrounding and describing each conflict which reveal a connection in the minds of the participants tying that particular conflict to their understanding of democracy. The second half of the chapter then focuses in great detail on those communal conflicts sparked by Nigeria’s Northern states’ implementation of Sharia. This section portrays the communal nature of these conflicts and then analyzes
scores of quotes that reveal how those people involved in these conflicts have interpreted democracy in ways that directly and almost unavoidably contribute to the conflicts.

Chapter 6 will conclude the dissertation. Nigeria’s Fourth Republic survived its first four years and weathered its second presidential election, yet Nigeria continued to face severe challenges linked to the Clinton Administration’s policies of democratic enlargement and the discourse that pervaded those policies. My conclusion attempts to recapture the human element of the problems Nigeria faces. Thereafter, the conclusion presents a final textual snapshot of the discourse surrounding Obasanjo’s second inauguration in 2003. Finally, it concludes with the theoretical assessment by restating the nature of the problem, recounting the path I followed to achieve some explanatory satisfaction, reasserting the strength of those explanations, and suggesting paths for future research.