

## NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA SINCE 1914: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

*The entity called Nigeria was prior to 1914, a fragmentation of different independent 'a and autonomous communities and empires which comprised of former free born, slaves, v returnees, royal born, etc, who have had a long history of intergroup relations dating back to the era prior to the coming of the Europeans. In post independent Nigeria, the narrative has laid emphasis on factors that disunite the ethnic groups which makes up Nigeria. This paper provides a historical perspective of the process through which various ethnic groups and successive government have tried to build a Nigerian nation. Historical method was used in this research. Evidence were collected from both primary and secondary sources. All evidence was critically analyzed, interpreted and used for the reconstruct. It was discovered that in post independent Nigeria, several interethnic conflicts bothering on parochial interest exist. The frequency of these conflicts which threatens the existence of Nigeria as a nation has triggered the feeling of pessimism amongst Nigerians; leading to the narrative that the various ethnic groups which constitute Nigeria, were never united and so nation building in Nigeria is a farce. The paper argues that on the evg of independence, all of the ethnic groups cum tribes saw themselves as Nigerians. Ethnicity and regionalism were not emphasized. Leading personalities like Namdi Azikiwe from the South-East of Nigeria, was based in Lagos. There was formation of forces through labour and trade unionism which became stronger, just as political formations along party system emerged to form some forces for a collective front towards nationhood. The paper submits that nationalism which was a collaborative effort of all ethnic groups in Nigeria was the fulcrum of nation building.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Nation Building, Ethnicity, Post-independence, Colonial Administration.

### **Introduction**

In historical past, the world was built and constituted a number of chiefdoms, kingdoms and empires as in pre-colonial Nigerian. In the modern days, we have had nations or nations states which replaced the empires as a basic unit of political

organizations. At pre-colonial era, Nigeria was at a state of development economically and politically. Example, Kanem-Borono was the largest empire at this time which rose and later experience decline. In the case of Hausa land, there were conflicts among states Zazzau against Gobir and so on, the customs and traditions at that time in Hausa land overshadowed the law such as tax, music and women that necessitated a reform that gave rise to a fundamentalist and a reformer in person of Usman Danfodio who transformed the state beyond Hausa land across Central Sudan. In south western Nigeria, there was a growth of Oyo Empire beyond the region the areas of Togo and bene republic there were also confederated political system with a central government as a result of the expansion of the area. A fundamental issue worth noting is that, Nigeria was a collection of nations, such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other ethnic nations such as Tiv, Igala, Idoma and so on around the Central Benue Basin. These nations grew up socio-culturally, politically, economically independent of each other. Although they enjoy some level of economic and socio-cultural relationship example, Yoruba land enjoyed trade route relationship across the Atlantic, the Hausa land experienced earlier penetration of Arab traders across the Sahara (Trans-Saharan trade route). Nigeria is not a mere geographical area but a group of people who had little contact with each other in a question of what is called "reprocity"<sup>1</sup>. The contact started re-structuring what was existing in the state it is likely seen as sources presented by Arab travellers and European missionaries writing about the area they came in contact with. Other external forces were seen in the coastal area. Such penetration was to lead to conflict among natives and foreigners which culminated into easy resistance against external influence into the internal affairs within Nigerian area the contact led to the emergence of nuclear and new center of political power which some scholars sees it as a period when Nigeria witnessed decline and a period of cultural revival through the spread of new ideas especially Christianity and Islam. At this period there was a change in economic activities in Europe that led to the obnoxious slave trade in human a result of which also led to penetration and subjugation of the area and subsequently, colonization of the whole region from South to North, East and the West under a political institutions broken by the popular Lord Lugardian Indirect Rule. The institutions were led to flourish under the tooth let of the European powers, the question of self-determination by the people became a mere mirage, sense of nation-hood were battered by the activities of the colonial administration. A deliberate attempt to ensure they continues the exploitative activities by the European couple with the Industrial Revolution in Europe by the end the 17th Century and other reasons that relates to Lord Lugards ambitions led to the merger of the colonial areas of

the North and the Southern regions of Nigeria (Amalgamation) the fallacy was how two distinctive nations became one?. In this light the paper looked at the Historical Perspective of the 1914 Amalgamation and Nation Building in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

**Nigeria:** The name Nigeria has been coined by Lugards wife flora Shaw a colonial editor of the time newspaper 1897.<sup>2</sup> The area called Nigeria now is a home to ethnically based kingdoms and tribal comities before it became European colony. The Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and other "minor" ethnic groups in spite of the European contact, the communities maintained their autonomy until the attic. When the colonialist consolidated their dominance in Nigeria. In 1914 two different nations of the North and South were regionally different but emerged together as a protectorate which marked the beginning of an entity called Nigeria on 1960, she became independent from British rule and became Democratic Republic from 1963.

**Nation Building:** Nation Building is about a political entity which concerns to a given territory based on some generally accepted rules, norms and principles and common citizenship. It is also about building an institution which symbolizes political entity such ass bureaucracy, economy, judiciary, universities, civil service and civil organizations<sup>3</sup>.

**Ethnicity/Tribe:** It is a term used to categorize human groups who have a conviction that they have a common identity origin, kinship ties, traditions, common, history, language and culture, it

differ from tribalism through operates same in principles. Tribalism is selfish of one's own tribe and support at all times whether good or bad, right or wrong. The tribalism sees nothing evil but good in his tribe's people. Tribalism is narrower than ethnicity. It defines people in an inbreed moment on customs while ethnicity is out breeding which rest in religions cultural, racial and linguistic affinities to identify and define a group of people with seemingly same linguistic, cultural and religious practices. Nigerian history is deplete with the search for a viable political arrangement of power sharing between the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo known as "majority "group.

**Post-independence:** This is known as the period in the history of Nigeria when the colonized nations under an entity called Nigeria were said to have become independence of both the economy and political systems under its masters (The British). It was a supposed period of self-actualization and national identity though not free from the colonial experience of the pre-independence era. As

period which some scholar's considered as a period of "deceit" as the Europeans confirmed with their activities in the area in some quarters (neocolonialism).

### **Nigerian - Colonial Experience**

Nigeria is a complex society that if anyone tries to understand it is either deceptive or a liar because it comprises of so many ethnicities and perspective in this, the question of nation building in the means of these diverse politics is a problem. The colonial was only motivated by the economy of the nations in the area<sup>4</sup>. They also knew that the unity of the nation militates against its interest. There has never been a time they seek for the growth and development of Nigeria. They adopted the means of violence and coercion to conquer the area. They were basically interested in the area they systematically conquered. First, the oil river protectorate from Bight of Benin which they transformed to Niger West-protectorate in 1893. It was also known as Eastern Nigeria in the mid-20th C. Secondly the 1862 annexation Lagos as crown colony. They overflowed Lagos to the whole of Yoruba land and administered the area known as western Nigeria.

Thirdly in 1888. J. Goldie successfully conquered and acquired the political and administrative powers over arrow belt of the territory from the sea to Lokoja that by the 20<sup>th</sup> C it came to be known as the northern Nigeria. It went in that by 1897, three block of territory had emerged as British colonial possession, Hence, the emergence of Nigeria became clear as a master plan of British administratively and politically<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Amalgamation**

The amalgamation started since 1898 with the appointment of the so called Niger committee chaired by Lord Selbourne. Its main term of reference was to look into and advise how to manage the anbirds of the territory in a way that would best promote efficiency and the economy in British interest<sup>6</sup>.

From the foregoing, the British never wanted a Nigerian nation state but all they did was to build colonial administration suitable for exploitation of the area. The appointment of Frederic Lugards the high commissioner at northern protectorate (1900 - 1906) was an implementation of an amalgamation agenda. Lugards was trapped in the middle of regional forces of the north, south and west he could not create a central secretariat. With all his practice and agenda, lord Lueards ran short of growth of Nigeria into nationhood but only converted the state into a battle field. While north wanted to incorporate south into the indirect system, the south wanted to incorporate the north through expansion and Extension of power into

the modern bureaucracy. Western education, commerce and legal system where the amalgamation remained a debating issue till 1960<sup>7</sup>.

Politically, except with the establishment of Nigerian council who met once a year to listen to Lugard's speech, there was never a legislative administration or forum where Nigerians were to sit and air their view. The Nigerian councils only emerged to hear the speech Lord Lugard's was to give annually. Their successive government were of Lugard's ambience. In 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford introduced the elective principles for legislative rights. In 1946 Richard constituted a regional comas consisting of house of assembly in each of the northerneastern and western provinces. The growth of the Iberia gave was influenced by the constitutional conference that took place between 1951 and 54 which was between political leaders and the British government. Since then, building a nation through self-determination became constitution ally dwindling affairs with Lugard's principle of centralization of administration replaced by decentralized system.

### **The Amalgamation and Post-Colonial Nigeria**

Colonialism was a system of foreign domination that had no consideration about the development of the natives but how to ensure the objectives and condition for exploitation of the economic and human resources of the colony<sup>8</sup>. Under colonialism Nigeria lost a of relatives autonomy. Nigeria and its activates reveals that its colonial pedigree has tremendously implicated its existence in terms of what it is today <sup>9</sup>.

Though the first republic was manipulated in a shaky ground on how to unite the three region of North. West and South, the feeling of belonging to a nation was under taken with a priority to the successive governments. In the decades of independence so many initiatives were founded by the government to consolidate towards unification shortly after independence and the civil war expedience, the regime of Yakubu Gowon come an idea of building a Pegler with a feeding of nationwide by introducing National Youth Service Commission (NYSC) there was state and local government areas 1967 & 1996, creation of new federal constituency creation of certain bodies notable the National Character Commission, creation of unity schools, and subsequently the composition of the National Anthem and Pledge. The historiography of the post-colonial Nigeria state has it that within the last decade of her existence, it has not been one to forge an agenda for national development in terms of human and institutional structure<sup>10</sup>. The amalgamation of the 1914 provoked crisis among the Igbo nationality by introducing 'warrant chief because it marshalled in an authoritarian possibility in indigenious cultures. The amalgamation in retrospect threw various nationality competing with one

another for control. Thus, the political party which emerged in the first republic were anchored around ethnic and regional home lands. Northern People Congress (NPC) dominantly the Hausa Fulani in the North. Action Group (AG) the Yoruba South – West, the National Council of Nigeria Citizen (NCNC) was dominated by the Igbo South – East. It was this character led by thug, electoral rigging etc. that culminated into the civil war (1967-1970). The contemporary manifestation of Lugardian project were what defined Nigerian state after the nationalist earlier effort at nation building.

### **Nationalist Movement and Nation Building in Nigeria**

Nigerian colonial experience from the very on set was built on the fact that the unity and the combined effort of the natives would militate against its interest Just like any society nations and nation state have replaced empires as the basic unit of human politics. The historical legacies of nationalist toward nation building were felt in the collective struggle from individual groups and civil society toward nation building (Nigeria) throughout over fifty years ago Lagos became a melting point for all discourse toward the struggle for an independent Nigeria, Lagos witnesses a massive movement of individuals and groups driving within and outside the nation through the formation of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC). This mass meeting way connected and seasoned by the national Students Union (NUS). It was instituted by the principal of Grammar School Abeokuta Ransome Kuti, at the meeting were other forty organizations including political parties, tribal union, trade unions literary associations, professionals associations, religions groups, social clubs<sup>11</sup>. Herbert Macaulay became the president and Nnamdi Azikiwe became the secretary. The NCNC was the first national and mass political movement in Nigeria with a group other than individual membership.<sup>12</sup> By this time, the NCNC was opposed to the Richards constitution which reconstituted legislative council, created Regional Council constitution of house of Assembly in each of the eastern, western and northern region the constitution was designed without full concerns with Nigeria. One most significant movement was the settlement of Nigeria from various regions in Lagos to form a strong force towards building a Nigeria of their own. The NCNC officials to Richard was a success While in Lagos, Zikist movement was inaugurated suggested by four radical journalists are militant nationalist Kolawole Balogun, MCK Ajubu Nwanan, Abiodun Aloba and Nduka Eze. The initial objectives of the young men were to protect zicks but it soon changed. They claimed that the ideology of Zickism foundation by Nwafor O. in his book "without bitterness" was

opposed to regionalism, individualism and gradualism but embrace positive action to liberate African, as advocated by Zik in his book "Ramascent Africa".<sup>13</sup>

From this stand point, nation building as posited by Professor Gambari, we could see a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny a collective imagination of belonging.<sup>14</sup>

According to Obafemi Awolowo in 1947 says "Nigeria is not a nation, it is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are no "English", "Welsh" or "French" the word "Nigerian" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundary of Nigeria from those who do not (Coleman 1964).<sup>15</sup>

The early nationalist where focused and had the survival of the country as their point of interest against any political administrative ambition<sup>16</sup> General. The spirit of nation hood that flourished at the birth of an entity "Nigeria" was to be affected gradually by the challenges instituted through the divide and rule system and ethnic policies that were rooted by the British just to promote their selfish and mercantile interest in Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> It is in this light that from historical perspective lies the Lugardian project and the contradiction of the national question with some illusions to the 1914 amalgamation such as Electoral Crisis, Sharia Law Mayhem, Militancy, Boko Haram and so many instabilities that remains problematic to socio-political, economic, religious, contradictions rooted from 1914 and has become a problem to the search for nation hood.<sup>18</sup>

It has become historic that the challenges of socio-economic, political and religious inequalities couple with constitutional challenges, institutions and developmental building and leadership has been hampered by the 1914 Lugard project as against multiplicity and the establishment of self-government in the originally existing systems prior to the amalgamation.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we were able to establish the fact that Nigeria was a mere geographical entity with many nationalities which evolved as a result of the British interest in the area of Niger Benue and was transform into Colonial territory characterized by so many antecedents that later today in international law was known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria<sup>20</sup>. Like any nation. Nigeria remain the part of modern society and an integrated part of United Nations an organization that was setup to ensure peaceful co-existence and socio-economic development of the work. Nigeria as an important part of the world is also with the need for

Nation Building. However, Nigeria was beddable with a peculiarity of multiplicity in times of language, culture, tradition and the question of Nation Building became untenable due to foreign domination and acculturation as against what was supposed to be a generally accepted rules, norms, and principles of common citizenship as well as building institutions for bureaucratic, judicial as well as civil organization. The entire nationalities that made up Nigeria were coerced into singular administration and control since 1914 as an amalgamation project which transforms these institutions through the measure adopted by Lugard (Divide and Rule System). The paper was able to point out the nature of colonial influence on Nation Building in Nigeria especially as seen in the constitutional arrangement of elite and non-elite policy of separation among the natives into various forms of identities and divide along regional, cultural, religious affiliations. The nationalist question was corrected at the point of independence of Nigeria under colonial rule through individuals and groups that form a strong force against the divisive tendency of colonialism to a radical non individual, non-tribal and non-sectional feeling but of a strong formidable body of a council in search of a nation hood (NCNC).with a membership that saw themselves as a strong force to achieve true federalism in Nigeria as against confederated Richards provision among a young Nigeria as a nation an idea among them which if maintained over the decades as against regionalism, ethnicity and other personal aggrandizement could have built a better nation in Nigeria.

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