Colonialism and Origin of Boundary Crisis in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is on "Colonialism and the Origin of Boundary Crisis in Nigeria". It examines the origin of boundary crisis which started in Nigeria due to the introduction of the concept of defined boundaries, a European phenomenon of colonialism which historically is to demarcate the administrative units in Nigeria as in most other third world countries. That prior to the arrival of the European imperialist, the Nigerian area contained an amalgam of ethic, cultural and linguistic groups spread over numerous states with the British Government adopting the twin-policy of gradually amalgamating its various administrative units into one country while at the same time balkanising the country into smaller hierarchical administrative units. The colonial administrative units, which in most cases, did not conform to earlier political arrangement, gave birth to the first internal boundary crisis in Nigeria. The aim of this paper is to highlight the negative impact of internal boundary crisis on the Nigerian nation while the historical methodology adopted for the paper involved the use of both primary and secondary sources. The paper submit that internal boundary crisis right from the colonial period have been moderated by incessant conflicts which in turn led to the destruction of properties and loss of lives. It recommends that both federal and state governments as well as non-state actors should adopt an imaginative policy option that would lead peaceful settlement of boundary crisis.

Introduction

There is strong evidence historically that, the concept of defined boundaries which demarcate administrative units in Nigeria as in most other third world countries of the world is a phenomenon which came with European colonialism (Barkindo Xiv). There is also a strong consensus of opinion within the academic and the official circles that, colonialism played an unqualified role in the arousal and perpetuation of ethnic boundary crisis and prejudices in the evolution of Nigerian Federation (Adekanye 46). That rather than

tolerate, accommodate and orientate ethnicity as the substratum for national unity, inter-group relations was manipulated, conditioned and orientated as a manifest source of conflict (Adekanye 48). To this extent, the contention of this paper is that inter-group was only a potential source of conflict which requires manipulation by a more dynamic source of conflict. In this connection Graf posit that:

> The mere facts of physical territorial barriers, ethnic plurality, separate historical experiences, different customs and languages, uneven levels of development and social class cleavages are not in themselves necessary causes or facilitators of conflicts and competition. Indeed, the ostensible centrifugence of these interacting elements can equally be viewed in terms of centripetence, that is, of fundamental units in all this diversity (12).

The implication of this paper's contention is that plurality contains the proportional potential for both unity and conflict. However, according to Egbe, Boypa, given the epochal acknowledgement of inter-group relationship as a major determinant of national integration and the attendant effort by Nigerian policy makers since independence to harness the ethnic platform for this purpose, it is convincing that ethnicity has had dysfunctional impact on Nigerian federation; a topic that borders on making illuminating insights into the manipulation of the variable in this dimension (23).

The analysis and understanding of the changes of ethnic relations to the status of a major determinant of unity can only be anchored upon the premise of the more dynamic and manipulative sources of conflicts (23). It is contended here in this paper that colonialism, in its height of operation transformed inter-group relations and ethnicity from a latent to a manifest source of conflict, giving birth to the first internal boundary crisis in Nigeria. Thus, this paper not only examines but analyses colonialism from a plethora of perspectives to ascertain the authenticity or falsity of the assertion that colonialism hardened intergroup relations to prejudice and created boundary crisis in Nigeria. Nigeria today has behind it a colonial history whose territory was delimited by the imperial legal order that came with colonialism and involved the British decision to integrate two distinct colonial territories of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 into one modern nation-state (26).

Evolution of Nigeria

Historically, the amalgamation of the two protectorates namely the North and South was heralded by the 1898 Selbourne's Committees' decision that the three administrative divisions then in operation be unified (Ballard, 334). These administrative units – the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria had until 1900 when they were brought under the same secretary of state, been under different ministries with different forms of administrative policies (336). But quite certainly, the two Nigeria's following the integration of the two Southern administrative units in 1906 into the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria has been distinctively administered until the debut of Fredrick Lord Lugard in 1912 to begin the processes of the amalgamation in 1914 (340). According to Osuntokun (94) different colonial administrations had developed in the two Nigeria's distinct characters of their own which made reconciliation difficult.

In fact, the paper argues that the two areas of Nigeria in the short period between 1900 and 1912 diverged radically in administrative style and purpose. It was also a period with duality as its distinctive character, a duality marked by mutual suspicion and conflict between the North and the South. According to Afigbo (71), throughout this period, the British saw Nigeria as a loose "federation of two different cultural and administrative worlds". This is corroborated by Nicolson (35-36) that:-

> In the short period between 1900 and the beginning of amalgamation by Lord Lugard in 1912, the administration of North and South managed to develop strikingly different patterns- so different that they seemed more like the products of the influence of different ruling powers than the same Secretary of State, brought up by the same ministry, colonial office.

To this extent, Osuntokun (34) further states further that, when Lord Lugard began his amalgamation mission, he was confronted with merging a region, where emirate independence had been nurtured as the aim and purpose of government, with another region where the administration rather than bolster up the power of African rulers, was in fact, ruling almost directly (32). Yet, it was under this conflicting and antagonistic circumstance initiated by the colonial policy of indirect rule that Lord Lugard in 1914 created a territorial unit through the establishment of a national authority over an ethnically plural society that is characterised by self-conscious cultural qualities (35). Indeed, the various Nigerian peoples and groups were effectively welded territorially by the imperial order of Britain (Egbe 46).

Put differently, the evolution of the Nigerian federation started with the unilateral and arbitrary acquisition and merging of various hitherto disparate, mutually exhaustive and incompatible ethnic-cultural units which in 1914 culminated in a 'Sharcy' so-called single political entity (46). According to Coleman (45) this Act of 1914 has since remained a landmark that marked the beginning of ethnic polarisation in Nigeria.

The Indirect Rule System in Nigeria

Indirect rule and its fundamental defects continued and became even more incandescent from 1914 with the official institution of the North-South boundary dichotomy and hence, the duality (Bienen 432). These were deliberately furthered by the colonial policy of appointing avowed nationalists as residents in the north. This no doubt fired the indelible imprint of the impregnable Charles Temple on the principle and application of indirect rule policy. He saw Africans as "notable savages" (Osuntokun 95), who must be preserved in their natural state and became a staunch defender of the Lugardian system which he interpreted rightly as meaning that Africans could never develop along modern lines, but that a separate road to modernization along their own lines must be found for them. He and his fellow racist, Richmond Palmer, practically indoctrinated northern emirs about that they were politically and racially different from their Southern counterparts (96).

Across the Muslim north, indirect rule was quite functional (in terms of colonial purposes) for it involved the imposition of one more layer of authority upon an already hierarchical, authoritarian, centralised and many tiered systems of governing. This was hardly so in Yoruba land and much less so in Igboland (Egbe 40).

Yet, indirect rule remained the operational policy throughout the period of informal federation' (1900 – 1946) and hence the entrenchment of the policy of dual development. This duality, a dangerous rift in sentiment, outlook and psychology between the north and south was the most important contribution made by colonialism during this period (Adekanya 57). It was a marriage of convenience between two incompatibles (Erim 18). The North looked down on the South as uncivilised, pagan undisciplined, rowdy and nakedly materialistic. The South returned this contempt with compliments, regarding the north as feudalistic, conservatives, illiterate (in the western sense) and a pliant tool in the hand of the master (48). According to Afigbo (9) it was a country with two different administrations and a growing schism in tradition, character and orientation.

Put differently, there was deliberate arousal of ethnic sentiments and accentuation of ethnic disharmony through the colonial policy of indirect rule, which was predicated upon the selfish and incongruous assumption that the colonised peoples were fundamentally and qualitatively different from

one another (Egbe 60). *Ipso Facto,* commonalities among African groups were deliberately de-emphasised as a possible source of unity, rather, an awareness of separate identity or ethnicity was consciously fostered and perpetuated (63). Practically, this policy of "divide and rule" was highly functional in terms of colonial interests, for colonialism was to ensure effective and unchallenged exploitation of the colony to the benefit of British finance and industry. Indirect rule, therefore, placed a formidable ideological and psychological barrier in the way of the evolution of a mass-based, supra-regional and unified anti-colonial movement, through appeals to ethnic group cohesiveness, tribal customs and distinctiveness from adjacent groups (Egbe 38).

The point made in this paper is that, integration of the existing political units into the government was anti-colonial in the context of colonial objectives. Thus, indirect rule made for easy conquest and domination and began the process of distrust and disunity among the people as Onwona (8) pointed out;

> The non-integration of these diverse groupings under the guise of indirect rule adequately served the colonial interests as emphasis was placed on the obstacles to the building of strong and united Nigeria while the colonial merchants ravaged the economy.

Colonial rule nurtured and fostered disunity, boundary crisis through its policies. For instance, even though the amalgamation was in 1914, yet no concrete step was taken to fuse the different ethnic, cultural, religious and social groups together. This effectively solidified the North-South dichotomy and ethnic polarisation (Onwona 22). In fact, the Hugh Clifford's Constitution of 1922 which created the legislative council where the first elected African members in British Africa were included, excluded the northerners (Egbe 18). The exclusion of the North originated pyschological boundary crisis and also had the effect of fuelling ethnic prejudice as it stimulated northern political awareness and created some fears on the part of Northern leaders of the threat posed by the domination of one section of the country (Nwabueze and Muller 216). In fact, before 1946, while the legislative council made laws for the South, the governor general issued edicts for the north, thereby emphasising the disparity between the regions. Indeed, the policy of indirect rule made it that in theory and practice, the North and South were kept rigorously apart and to see themselves as ethnically incompatible (217).

In consonance with the policy, too frequently, uneven patterns of development followed the dichotomy and ethno-geographical boundaries were co-determined by the pre-colonial social organisation (Billard 267). The south with its relative amenability to foreign influence was viable for rapid

dissemination of trade, commerce, transport and communication, Christianity, western education and other forms of new administrative and social organisation (Egbe 32). In contrast, the North, impervious to Western ways and in keeping with colonial design, was averse to the growth of mass education, the implanting of new belief system, the rationalisation of economic life and the balanced development of capitalist economic activities which were the indices of modernization and development (Egbe 44).

This culminated in a (structural) socio-economic imbalance and hence, inequality of opportunities among the country's multi-ethnic communities, a situation designed by colonialism and which mirrored the economic priorities and policies of the colonial state (Agabi 14). This disparity and the need to balance it has remained one of the sorest points of Nigerian federalism (Nwabueze 16). Thus, Younger (64) points out that in terms of education and training, the North lagged behind the South in their potential to replace the medium and high-level manpower which the departure of the British on the eve of independence necessitated. In contrast, the South could boast of more than sufficient personnel with which to take off, and this naturally bred Northern envy culminating subsequently in suspicion and then fear of domination (65). This situation, Nnoli (191) submits magnified the ethnic gap.

Afigbo (9) also, alluded to the pattern of segregated ethnic settlement which has become a major feature of the Nigerian Federalism due to the discriminatory policy of direct rule. According to him, the policy also provided the basis for restricting Southerners living and doing business in the North to the Sabon-Gari. This policy no doubt aggravated ethnic distrust and separateness, North-South dichotomy and the duality. In fact, it is a psychologically dissonant perspective of Nigerian Federalism that till today, though with minor de-emphasis, in all the major cities of North and South, there are particular areas of residence to which non-indigenes are confined (9). This is a colonial legacy, a strategy that was devised by colonialism to emphasise the differences between the people and keep them perpetually at that (Egbe 48). Afigbo in Egbe's work emphasized again that, the orchestrated duality between the North and the South had so conditioned the outlook of the two teams of British administrators serving in these areas as acted as irritant in relations between them that it became a standard joke in the 1930s that but for the Nigerians, the two teams would go to war against each other (Egbe 42).

The point is made that British imperialism through the colonial policy of indirect rule and its kingpin, "divide and rule", used ethnicity as a mechanism to divide the Nigerian People, maintain its domination over them and stultified every potential source of unity. The impact of Indirect rule on

inter-group relations between the North and the South is aptly captured by Okonjo (335) that:-

> The principle of Indirect rule provided a strong argument for keeping the course of development in the Northern and Southern provinces rigorously apart, for reducing contacts between the peoples of the two groups of provinces to the absolutes minimum and for excluding the former groups of provinces from the sphere of the legislative council.

The process of ethnic sensitization, Nnoli (68) in Egbe's work also observed and assumed a more perilous dimension through colonial urbanisation. Colonial Urban, he contended, constituted the cradle of ethnic awakening as it provided the point of convergence of the different pre-colonial polities and diverse linguistic and cultural formations (68). Indeed, it is not inappropriate to assert that, it was in the colonial urban that ethnicity in Nigeria intensified a meaning which properly fits Halpen's definition of the term as "tribal solidarity formed not by the perpetuation of accustomed structured but under the stress of modernization in the midst of organised strangers" (Egbe 44).

In fact, inter-group relations acquired unprecedented common consciousness in the colonial urban. Nnoli (78) asserts further that contact alone did not cause ethnic consciousness but that competition for scarce resources among different groups' enhanced people being conscious of the group they belonged to. Graf (198) advanced a plethora of reasons why ethnic awareness and eventually assertive ethnic nationalism largely received so much impetus in the colonial urban and areas of extraction. Amongst the reasons are:

(a) Exposure – the development of the colonial political economy, with its growth in Europe-oriented supra-regional trade, its commoditization of many agricultural products, its increase in migrant wage labour, both in the farms and in the cities, and its greater social mobility set in motion processes of migration and interaction on a scale hitherto unknown in the 'Nigerian' area, particularly in the colonial enclaves and towns, with greatest opportunities for work and trade, people were intensively exposed to members of many different ethnic groups, with their 'foreign' customs, beliefs and languages (199). In many respects, these relations were precipitated and forced, so that "paradoxically", the most important problems of integration facing the nation seem to result from the imposition of economic intercourse with each other upon the various groups of people who happened to fall within the borders of Nigeria, and who would have otherwise have remained separated for much longer (Koko 82).

(b) Socio-economic competition – Far from being natural or amiable, this initial intergroup intercourse operated in a situation of extreme competitiveness (172). Drafted in the impersonal colonial-capitalist milieu characterized by extreme disparities of wealth and privileges subject to low or subsistence wages, and often forced to endure wretch working and living conditions, migrants to colonial enclaves soon found themselves in competition for a whole range of essential, and scarce, social resources; money, jobs, education, training, housing, the entire spectrum of social services and even the right to vote (Graf 174). Given the novelty, to them, of the capitalist economy, the absence of developed class consciousness, and the impossibility of organizing social class defense groups under the conditions often sought the solidarity which was psychologically and sociologically necessary within ethnic groups associations, voluntary communication organizations and patron-client linkages based primarily on ethnicity (Egbe 68).

(c) Insecurity – Any situation of extreme insecurity tends to produce a state of mind conducive to hostility, in-group out-group identifications and general alienation from one's surrounding and place of work. In colonial Nigerian, extreme dwellers tended to react in this way to the situation of extreme exploitation, anomie and physical dislocation in which they found themselves (Graf 198). The stabilisation psychological factor enabling them to come to terms with this situation was ethnicity; a projection of apprehensions, resentments and frustrations on to other groups, combined with a feeling of community and security deriving from intra-ethnic-group solidarity (168).

The colonial urban dwellers saw ethnicity metamorphosed into a political arsenal and the conduit pipe through which the processes and benefits of development in a modern society were realised (Bienen 162).

The perpetuation of ethnic sentiment assumed an equally dastardly dimension in 1939 when the South was further split into West and East by Bourdillon on the flimsy excuse that the South was too heterogeneous to remain one unit, and that there were communication problems between Enugu, the headquarters of the Southern Provinces and its component parts (Tamuno 468). However, the North to Bernard Bourdillon was culturally more homogenous. In consequences, the North developed a meaningful entity while the South was cut into more splinter zones. This administrative step left the heritage of the mistaken sacrosanctity for the tripartite division of Nigerian till 1963 (Tamuno 395).

Once again, new stereotypes corresponding with the three administrative units emerged with this new arrangement. Northern Nigeria emerged as the home of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality, the Western

Province (of the South) as the land of the Yoruba culture while the Eastern Province were given a predominantly Igbo image (Agabi 29). While the cultural reality of these stereotypes was incongruous, they were demographically real as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo were the majority ethnic nationalities (Afigbo 45). In 1946, when the Richard constitution was to be imposed on Nigerians, the idea had already gained currency that each of those blocks of the territory was a homogenous political and cultural entity and could operate as an organic unit within a looser federal structure. Federalism, it was argued, should be introduced in order to encourage, indeed enable each of these groups or provinces to enjoy development at its own pace without upsetting, or being upset by, its neighbours (Afigbo 11).

In fact, in 1946, Arthur Richard articulated in a constitutional form, the reality of Nigerian politics of divide and rule, which the British have trenchantly fostered despite the effort of nationalist forces in the direction of unity and independence (Osuntokun 100). One result of these ideas and the policies based on them was the imposition on the duality of a new less dangerous trinity – the Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo and the Yoruba – as the only ethnic nationalities worthy of consideration in the emerging Nigerian political scene, and the problem posed by these groups were usually believed to exhaust the problems of British colonial administration. The attitude of Richard himself on this is self-evident as said by him in 1948 (Osuntokun 97).

As far as the British were concerned, the inter-relationships between these three major ethnic nationalities constituted Nigerian Politics and the whole elaborate façade of constitution-making from 1946 to 1958 as an attempt to work out a stable federal balance between the three regions or the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The events of this period inevitably affected the character of the Nigerian federation severally (98).

First, there was the tripartite conflict between the major ethnic nationalities. This was articulated in the emergence of their diametrically opposed competitively, ethnically and culturally rooted political parties (Afigbo 98). The Northern People's Congress, an offshoot of a Hausa-Fulani cultural association, in *Jamiyya Mutanen Arewa* was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, the Action Group emerged from a Yoruba socio-cultural association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa, was dominated by the Yoruba in the West while in the East, the NCNC, and an offshoot of the Igbo State Union, was dominated by the Igbo people (Awolowo 43). There was also three dominant rival political leaders – Ahmadu Bello (Fulani), Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (Igbo) and Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Yoruba). These three ethnic groups compete for the control of the allocation of scarce resources through these regionally-based political parties. Indeed, according to A. E. Afigbo, the politics of this phase of Nigerian history

and their leaders cut across from time to time by the old unresolved conflict between the North and South (22).

It was not long after Richard's exercise and in consonance with the newly acquired spirit of ethnic antagonism that Nigerian nationalists began to make utterances alluding to the kind expressed by G. Richard as to the separateness of the Nigerian people.

Even Nnamdi Azikiwe, who has been unitary in inclination and ideology expressed a similar opinion in his advocacy of federalism later on. (Azikiwe 242 – 246). The articulation of ethnic disharmony and incompatibility assumed a more disastrous and demonstrative dimension in the 1950s sequel to the official institutionalisation and fractionalization of nationalism and regionalization of politics by the 1951 Macpherson's constitution (Egbe 52).

This realisation endangered in the submerged minorities of deep suspicion, or even dislike for, those ethnic nationalities whose interests and aspirations were taken for the interests and aspirations of all Nigerians. One result of this was the tension or conflict, between the ethnic minorities on the one hand and their 'oppressors' on the other, a scenario that was demonstrated in the struggle of different combinations and permutation of minority groups aimed at dismembering the three monster-regions which were the monuments to their humiliation and submergence (Egbe 53).

In fact such parties as the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), the Calabar Ogoja Rivers (COR) Movement, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), Niger Delta Congress (NDC) etc., displayed a considerable degree of ethnic chauvinism and compelled the colonial administration to set up the Willink Commission of 1957 into the fear of the Minorities and how to allay them (12). According to A. E. Afigbo, the Report of the Commission was an exercise in hypocrisy and ostrich-postures (88). For while the majority ethnic groups were anxious to defend and preserve the regions which they were beginning to look upon as their patrimonies, the British on their side remained committed to upholding the triangular structure they had, in their wisdom, decided had the best hope for Nigeria (88). The Commission did not see the creation of new states as the solution to the problems of the minority in Nigeria and thus lost the first change to ensure that the dominant character of Nigeria's federal society was fully reflected in the structure of the Nigerian federation. The suspicion of the majority ethnic groups by the minorities remained a prominent feature of the Nigerian federation and its politics (Boypa 62).

In fact, the point made here is that even at independence in 1960, Nigerian unity was still not on secure ground and whenever a party feel sufficiently aggrieved over issues, the natural thing it did was to threaten secession from the federation (65). Such as what the North did in the 1950

Constitutional Conference in Ibadan, and Obafemi Awolowo in 1953 (Osuntokun 101). In the main, the Nigerian federation which culminated from the 1954 federal constitution survived on the threat of force applied by the colonial office, for Oliver Lyttleton told Obafemi Awolowo that the British government would use force to bring any region that rebelled against the Nigerian government back into the union (124). In the final analysis, inter-group relations and North/South dichotomy became cemented in 1954 federal constitution in which the North had many seats in the central legislature as the West and East put together. This made it clear even to the uninterested observer of our political scene that the British had a stake in ensuring that the conservative North dominates the Nigerian political life (127). Naturally, other groups remain resentful to that development, thus jeopardising our search for national unity. The search that has continued ad nauseam. On this grounds, Awolowo (62) insisted that: "in all honesty, British rule was immeasurable baneful to Nigeria and Nigerians".

This is an analysis of inter-group relations during the colonial era. It manifests in all ramifications of colonial rule, ethnicity and intergroup relations was brazenly manipulated through the colonial policy of Indirect Rule and its kingpin of divide and rule which created unprecedented ethnic awareness and consciousness making it dysfunctional in the society (Ogen 54). That the manipulation of this relations was inevitable to sustain the momentum of colonialism and maximise imperialist gains, in this way, the crisis of ethnicity became the most incandescent to the course of national unity (Ogen 34).

The decolonization process merely intensified ethnic hostilities making national unity dicey. The failure of the British to negotiate a peaceful federation was manifested when, in the face of blossoming nationalism and separatist agitation articulated in the plethora of secessionist threats by various ethnic nationalities, Britain threatened that coercive measures would be used to prevent the dismemberment of any nationality in the union (32). Thus, the Nigerian union was contracted, not willingly altogether but because a forceful reprisal awaited any defiant. The conflict-ridden federation acquired a further precarious character when by design, the British gave disproportionate seats in the federal legislature to the North. More so, the tripartite structure had remained a sore point (68).

The question is considering the shape, character and orientation of the Nigerian federation at independence, was it really reflective of the Nigerian peoples, its history and geography? Put differently, what type of federalism was evolved or midwifes for us and what were its premises? How satisfied was the British official mind that form of federalism was rooted in

federalism as a mechanism of the solution to multi-ethnicity? What and where were their "requisites for successful federalism" (Ramphal, xviii).

Perhaps, this quotation answers the above questions. It is manifest that after the imposition of a territorial hegemony the colonialist spared no effort to integrate the diverse people into a common political consciousness and process (xviii). Rather conscious efforts were made to put a wedge between the unities of the people. the North-South dichotomy had been fostered and Nigerians along these lines saw themselves as distinctively disparate, a tripod character had been sealed emphasizing the pre-eminence of only three and major nationalities and the corresponding negligence of the many others, competitive and antagonistic ethnic politics had held sway and the elites (Egbe 18), especially from the nationalities given a stake in the Federation, had to grapple with this practice as the modus operandi in a federation, it had been broadly understood by all, arising from the practice of indirect rule that political power held the ace to enrichment and wealth or alternatively economic power (6), the discrepancy between the elites and the masses abysmally tremendous, the ubiquitous but unrecognised minorities had felt much more aware and conscious of their plight and had grown more assertive as a result of their negation, and therefore, a feeling of non-belongings. In fact, there was no subjective feeling to the federation (22). There was really no federal feeling. There was no meeting point, no shared values and no common ground among the Nigerian peoples. Here in lay the integration problem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, the achievement of territorial integration under colonial rule and the inevitable policies of the colonial state created the problem of integration which the new regimes that took power after independence had to contend with. A unified national entity in which loyalties shift from smaller political entities to the central authority had been our greatest need from independence. A lot of inputs have been made in this dimension.

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