The Impact of Internal Boundaries and Ethnic Conflicts on Nation Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

This work "The Impact of Internal Boundaries and Ethnic Conflicts on Nation Building in Nigeria" examined the phenomenon of internal boundaries and ethnic conflicts or rivalries in post-colonial Nigeria and their impacts on nation building, national integration and socio economic development of Nigeria. It also examined the resurgences of internal boundary conflicts as a phenomenon which has bedevilled post-colonial Nigeria. The objective is to highlight the fact that internal boundaries and ethnic conflicts or relations in the country have essentially impacted negatively on the Nigerian nation building and developmental process. In fact, evidence shows that Nigeria's experiment with federalism has compromised national unity, nation building, national integration, political stability and development. The work obtained data majorly from secondary source. It submits that boundaries and ethnicity can be utilized to promote harmony and peaceful co-existence. To this effect, the work recommends the policy of inclusion, equity and justice.
Key Words: Internal Boundaries, Ethnic Conflicts, Nigeria

Introduction

Nation building according Anthony Nwabughuogu is the search for nationhood. It is the process of developing national consciousness amongst individuals and groups that are cultivating a sense of love for a given nation and accepting their commitment to the nation – state (1). He further states that, nation building involves the creation of favourable environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individuals and groups for the nation state. This favourable environment

to him involves the creation of impressive elements of organization such as political, social and economic that characterise a modern state like good roads, water supply, good facilities for education and health, efficient communication, opportunities for employment to mention a few that would make the citizens develop love for their country (Nwabughuogu 1).

There is hardly any society the world over that is completely devoid of one form of conflict or the other. Contemporary Nigeria is not an exception (Iyanya 94). The years 1861 and 1960 would forever be remembered in Nigerian historiography for two reasons. First, the declaration of Lagos as "Crown Colony in 1861, which signalled the beginning of alien rule in Nigeria" (Okoro and Omeje 3) and secondly, the lowering down of the British union jack flag in 1960 that granted political independence to Nigeria (Abubarkar 36). Since then, according to Apex Apeh (16), the problem of nation building has remained a major challenge because the various ethnic groups have been at war with each other as to who gets the upper hand in national matters. They have been living uneasily together as demonstrated in outbreaks of ethnic violence in the past (Echa 21).

The major problems that keep confronting both Nigeria and other Sub – Saharan African countries since independence, are the problems of boundaries and ethnic conflicts. Some critics at independence assumed Nigeria to be a "defective and unbalanced federation with weak socio – political structure that is heading to a rejuvenation of ethnic consciousness and rivalries" (Abubakar 36). It was also alleged that the new country inherited an inexperienced leadership that lacked national consciousness and more tuned to a subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture (36). Thus, Nigeria's future as a single country was thought to be in serious doubts (36). Other problems are leadership, corruption, injustice, religious intolerance, insecurity and recently boundary conflicts ranging from farmer's herders' boundary conflicts and incessant or frequent resurgences of intra and inter-communal, local governments and states boundary conflicts that call for both national and international concerns (Ibiang and Utomobong 1).

According to experts in the field of conflict studies, most ethnic and boundary conflicts or rivalries in Nigeria stem from the structural

imbalance of the larger Nigerian polity, which has pitched many ethnic groups in positions of perpetual disadvantage (Akpomuvie and Forae 22). They occur also in Nigeria as a result of constant attempt by groups of persons or community to increase, monopolise or consolidate another groups control over scarce resources of farmlands, fishing water, trade routes and lately oil rich communities (Ogen 96). To Akpomuvie and Forae, again, widespread injustice in the polity occasioned by the feeling of alienation, powerlessness and the psychological disorientation stemming from environmental degradation provide a common ground for status/ class consciousness, which manifest in the form of agitation or rebellion against each other as a system that has fallen short of expectations of the people (22).

Ademola Omojola further states that inadequate and improper use of spatial data in boundary management with failure or ineffectiveness of the traditional, colonial and post-colonial structures and policies relevant to proper boundary management (174) account for most ethnic and boundary conflicts in Nigeria. All these according to Dave Imbua have "eroded the country's resources, fractured its economy, becloud the people's vision and also benumbed their confidence (30). They as well constitute serious threat to national security, a scenario that reflects essentially absence or lack of nation building and national integration process (Ibiang 36). More so, boundaries and ethnic conflicts or rivalries in Nigeria have become of great concern because if they are not properly managed, they result in loss of lives and properties, fear, insecurity, distrust and economic dislocations. They as well create large streams of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Ikpe 106).

Frankly speaking, boundaries and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have adversely affected the level of development in the country as observed by scholars of developmental studies that; "boundaries and ethnic conflicts or ethnicity are the two major problems typically confronting the developmental efforts of the country" (Egbe 5). In fact, M. Weiner (52) argues that one of "the central problems of developing nations of Africa that is often more pressing than even economic development is the achievement of nation building, national integration and political stability". Nigeria is not left off the hook as a variety of boundaries and

ethnic conflicts or rivalries continued to characterise the postcolonial national integration and nation building processes.

Postcolonial Nigeria "is an amalgam of several peoples, cultures, kingdoms, empires, clans, village – groups of pre-colonial states and past civilizations" (Erim 1-2), "that were in various stages of development" (Barkindo xi). In fact, it was one of the African countries that, from the 1940s, embarked on a serious campaign for self-determination, decolonisation and independence that was later achieved on 1st October 1960, nearly after a hundred years of British colonial rule (Ejitu 1). The country came into existence in 1914, following the amalgamation of the two British protectorates of the North and South by Sir Frederick Lugard, the first Governor-General of Nigeria (Crowder 11). Although the name Nigeria was coined after River Niger by Flora Shaw in *London Times* of 8 January, 1897 by suggesting that "the several British protectorates in the Niger be known collectively as Nigeria", it did not have British government official approval until July, 1899 (Otite 18; Crowder 11).

 Nigeria is located between latitude $4^0 20^!$ and $14^0 30$ East, (Otite 18). It is bordered on the north by Sahara Desert, south by Gulf of Guinea, an arm of the Atlantic Ocean, (Udo 7). It has a geographical space of 923,768 square kilometres, a coastline of over 700 kilometres with a distance of 1,040 kilometres straight from the coast to the northern limits which consist of great diversities of vegetation, ecologies, economies and occupations (Otite 18). The swampy mangrove on the coastal areas changes to ever green rain equatorial forest and thins off into savannah grassland, desert-like conditions at the northern limits (18). Outside the Niger Delta and the coastal swamps and creeks, the post-colonial Nigerian landmass consists essentially of a low plateau of about 600 meters (2,000 feet) above sea level (Udo 8). Except in the rugged range of hills along the Nigerian – Cameroun borders, where there is no major physical barrier to the easy movement of people (Udo 8).

According to the 2006 Population Census, Nigeria's population was about one hundred and sixty million (160, 000,000) people (2006 Population Census). Nigeria is a plural society defined by cultural – institutional diversities of ethnic groups of various populations, and with people practising three main religions – Christianity, mainly in the South and

Middle Belt; Islam, mainly in the North, and traditional religion in every part of the country (Otite 18). Admittedly, Nigeria is a very complex country with the behaviour and relationships of individuals and groups determined by the imperatives of cultural symbols and strategic social institutions (18 – 19).

Background to the Creation of Nigeria State

Until the 19th century when the British began to make their political in-roads to this part of the world, the geographical expanse today called Nigeria consisted of different kingdoms, empires, nationalities and states, (both mini and mega) with well organised political systems, identities and symbols existing independently (Eteng 128; Ozumba 93). The 'mega' states consisted of extensive empires and kingdoms established by Hausa and Kanuri speaking people of Northern Nigeria, the Sokoto Caliphate that ruled Northern Savannah, the kingdoms of Ife and Benin with the most recognised and accomplished art in the world, the Yoruba Empire of Oyo with well organised system of checks and balances; and the city states of Niger Delta grown partly in response to European demands for slaves and later palm oil (Crowder 11- 14; Ozumba 103-104; Eteng 128)).

The mini-states, on the other hand, consisted of the largely politically decentralised Igbo speaking peoples of the south-east that provided the famous Igbo – Ukwu bronze and terracotta, the small ethnic groups of Plateau and the descendants of those that created the famous Nok terracotta (Crowder 11).   The states both mini and mega were, however, relatively stable with sound socio-political settings till the amalgamation on January 1914 to create Nigeria (Eteng 128). The idea of amalgamating the different ethnic groups under one political administrative unit (Nigeria), dates back to the Niger or Selborne Committee's decision of 1898 (Erim 27), which recommended that, the Colony of Lagos with its Yoruba hinterland under the Colonial Office should by 1900 formally become the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos. Secondly, that, the Niger Coast Protectorate comprising the Bights of Benin and Biafra with their hinterland under the foreign office should by 1900 become the protectorate of Southern Nigeria (27) and thirdly, that what later became Northern Nigeria under the Royal Niger Company should become a protectorate also by 1900 (27).

Meanwhile, the Royal Niger Company, empowered by the British Crown had made their debut in 1886 to the ethnic nations of Nigeria. Their major mission was to trade in all the territories of the Niger basin (Ozumba 97). Other reasons which informed the British expansionist adventure included mere curiosity search for markets and raw materials as well as the mission to civilise and Christianise the people (97). The coming of the Royal Niger Company with their explorations and trading paved way for the British control of the hitherto disparate nations that now makes up Nigeria.

With Sir Frederick Lugard's coming as first British High Commissioner for the Northern Protectorate in 1900, the British took control of the Niger Basin area (97). While the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria administered by Ralph Moore with its headquarters in Calabar (Unya 222) was originally enacted in 1893 as Niger Coast Protectorate. It became amalgamated with Lagos Colony in 1906, administered by Sir Walter Egerton under the title, "Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria" (Ozumba 97). Thus, the historical journey of Nigeria as a single geo-political entity began in 1914 with the amalgamation of the North and Southern Protectorates by Frederick Lord Lugard (Otite 18; Olasupo 123)

Conceptual Clarifications

It's expedient that a conceptual clarification of the major concepts used in this paper be made to aid proper comprehension of the topic.

Boundary

To start with the concept of boundary, it is important to note that according to A. I. Asiwaju the meaning of boundary transcend the more familiar spatial dimension, which refers to lines of demarcation between territorially defined areas of jurisdiction or ascertainable authority to the functional or symbolic category which is exemplified by perceived limits of social and organizational entities such as race, ethnicity, culture, religion, church, mosque, industry, business, corporations including multinationals, gender, age grades or generations, families, class, occupations and professions (Asiwaju 1).

The Longman Dictionary defines boundary as a "dividing line" that marks the limit of an area of jurisdiction. This however suggests that, boundaries generally are thin lines of separation or lines separating one territory from another. T. A. Imobighe defines boundary as a "line of demarcation that delimit the scope of two or more administrative jurisdictions". In other words, boundary or boundaries according to him are contact points between two objects or contact zones of different political jurisdictions that are either imaginary or actually represented on the ground in the form of pathways, fence, hedgerow, motes, and erected markers at regular intervals (13). Richard Griggs in R. T. Akinyele sees boundaries as the "interface we create or perceive between two phenomena". He further states that, boundaries can assume the form of mental categorization such as "us and them" or the physical demarcation between two administrative units. He however, warned that boundaries are not dead immobile lines in the dirt that separates administrative areas but the fulcrum around which the political, social and economic activities of people revolve (Griggs 1 in Akinyele 21).

Conflict

Generally, the term conflict as the name implies has been defined differently by different scholars with different interpretations in different context. One of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict according to Onigu Otite is by L. A. Coser. He defined conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals" (Coser 8 cited in Otite1). From L. A. Coser's definition, O. Otite avers that conflict is conceptualised as a way of settling problems originating from opposing interests and from the continuity of society. Harvard Program on Negotiation Glossary "Conflict" 2013 defined conflict as a practice of resistance, differences or disharmony ascending within a collection when the principles or activities of one or more followers of the group are either fought by or intolerable to one or more adherents of another group (www.viaconflict.wordpress.com). Conflict according to O. Otite arises between individuals and, or groups in defined social and physical environments from their pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations.

Causes of Boundaries and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

Much has been said and written on the debilitating causes of boundaries and ethnic conflicts in Nigerian Society (Akpomuvie and Forae 22). First, boundaries and ethnic conflicts according to M. S. Audu are caused by interactions of individuals who have partly incompatible ends (20). They occur according to Ogen Olukoya as a result of constant attempt by groups of persons or community to increase, monopolise or consolidate another groups control over scarce resources of farmlands, fishing waters, trade routes and lately oil rich communities (96). Inadequate and improper use of spatial data in boundary management with failure or ineffectiveness of the traditional, colonial and post-colonial structures and policies relevant to proper boundary management is also responsible for boundaries and ethnic conflict (Ademola 174).

To Akpomuvie and Forae, boundaries and ethnic conflicts stem from the structural imbalance of the larger Nigerian polity, which has pitched many ethnic groups in positions of perpetual disadvantage. Widespread injustice in the polity occasioned by the feeling of alienation, powerlessness and the psychological disorientation stemming from environmental degradation which provide a common ground for status and class consciousness, manifest in the form of agitation or rebellion against each other causes ethnic conflicts in Nigeria (22). Joint task force of the police, army and the navy patrolling the waterways or inland ways, outright attack on communities with sophisticated weapons and the declaration of a state of emergency in affected areas always cause ethnic conflicts in Nigeria (22).

Manifestations of Boundaries and Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Colonial Nigeria

It's true that the concept of defined boundaries which demarcate administrative units in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria as in most other third world countries, according to M.Barkindo is a phenomenon which came with European expansionism (XI). That, the colonial administrative units, which in most cases, did not conform to the earlier political arrangements however, gave birth to the first internal boundary conflicts (XI) in Nigeria. Hence, political, ideological and ethnic boundaries began to emerge as Nigerian foremost elites, nationalist and politicians became

influenced as they "came to understand the functions and implications of those administrative units" (XI).

Some recorded instances of internal boundary conflicts in all the six geo - political zones of the country includes the "Tiv – Jukun boundary conflicts" (Akinyele 24) in Taraba State, the "Tingo and Waduku boundary conflicts" (Amango 83), the "Zangon – Kataf boundary Crisis" (Akinteye, Wuye and Ashfa 27) in Kaduna State, the "Oma and Awe, the Fier – Mwanghavul, Ron – Mwoquadul, Pyem – Mwanghanval boundary Conflicts" (Abdulrasheed 31) in Jos, "Agrarian Boundary Conflicts in the Jos Plateau Area of Central Nigeria" (Lohor 57), "Ethno Demography of Yakurr Conflict: A Study of Ugep – Idomi War of 1992" (Oka 64) in Cross River State of South – Southern Nigeria, "Conflict between Pastoralists and Agriculturalists in North – Eastern Nigeria" (Williams, Muazu, Kaoje, Ekeh 184), "Ife – Modakeke Crisis" (Albert 142) in South – West Nigeria, "Intra – Ethnic Conflicts among the Yoruba: A Study of Igbo Ora" (Akinteye 118), in South – West Nigeria to mention a few.

Like other societies where the phenomenon of conflicts is endemic, boundaries and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have been a handmaid of the process of state formation and consolidation. The incorporation and subsequent consolidation of Nigeria as a colonial state marked the beginning of boundaries and ethnic conflicts (Okoro and Omeje 3). According to Oyeneye, Onyenwenu and Olosunde ethnic boundary conflicts or rivalries amongst the various ethnic groups of Nigeria evolved from the unevenness in social, economic and political development of the component units of the federation (162). That, the early contact of the Yoruba with European missionaries and traders put them in an advantageous position in Nigerian commerce, politics and senior positions in the federal civil service (162). The southern Igbo and Yoruba were also advanced in western education unlike the northern Hausa – Fulani, which made the northerners also fear domination by the southerners (162 – 163). The large size of the Northern Region and its unity as a single force also threatens the southern elites that even the first political parties that were formed were largely dominated by one group or another. For instance, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG) and the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) (163).

 The nationalists from the three regions who became the avant-garde of the struggle against imperial rule took the issue of territory and regional locations as given. One major problem from the structure was how to seam an integrated national entity out of the disparate groupings whose leaders saw ethnic groups and other divisions as an advantage to themselves (Egbe 86). This however opened or exposed the boundaries and ethnic politics of Nigeria and began to take the character of a tussle between three giants – the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo with each considering itself a state within a state. Thus, the neo-colonial elitist tussle rested upon three dominant political parties – NPC, AG and NCNC and many others formed in the wake of minority ethnic chauvinism (44).

Corroborating this fact, Sa'ad Abubakar observed that, Nnamdi Azikiwe and the NCNC in 1951 was so strong in Lagos and the entire Western region where he won a seat in the Western House of Assembly and had a working majority to form government (36). But, because the NCNC leader, Nnamdi Azikiwe was Igbo, the newly formed Action Group, a predominantly Yoruba party scuttle that possibility by enticing some Yoruba NCNC members to defect to AG (37). Eventually, AG formed the first regional government in the West with a Yoruba, Obafemi Awolowo, as premier. This episode historically marked a regrettable turning point in the history of boundaries, ethnic conflicts and parliamentary democracy in Nigeria (37).

According to Lloyd, this however started in pre-independence era as ethnic and cultural groupings to further protect the interest of major ethnic groups (6). The challenge radiated by politics amongst these groups galvanised the minorities into party formulation and organisation. These parties, however, did not transcend their original purposes of the existence of satisfying parochial ethnic whims and caprices (8).

At independence, the parties continued not as instruments of national unity and integration, but as platforms upon which ethnic conflicts, rivalries and competition for political power and national resources were vigorously pursued (Nnoli 96). Thus, Sklar (6-8) contends that the political leaders used ethnicity and ethnic sentiments as tools for advancing their personal and political ambition while leading their people to believe that

they were fighting for their ethnic cause. Covitz on the other hand, for instance, holds the view that, the seemingly inter - ethnic competitions in Nigeria is deeper, far beneath the surface and a struggle within the ruling class (1). While, Adekanye (64) is of the opinion that the elites are a group of privileged people competing among themselves for more than ethnic interests but who would not mind invoking the loyalty of their groups.

Impact of Boundaries and Ethnic Conflicts/ Rivalries on Nation Building
According to Nnoli (196-206) boundaries, ethnicity or sectionalism is expressed in the provision of social infrastructure and amenities. In other words, he referred to the way and manner in which the Northern oligarchy had exploited their position of power to allocate a disproportionate amount of resources and infrastructure to the North in flagrant disregard for the aspirations of the Southerners. This as well does not allow the development of committed and united Nigeria, which is a *sin qua non* for nation building (Nwabughuogu 52).

Internal boundaries and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria today have negatively inhibited national integration, the hallmark of nation building. They have also created permanent distrust amongst communities, local government and states thereby making it uneasy for groups of distrusting communities to come together to embrace a nation with a common destiny. This is so because, resurgences of boundary and ethnic disputes hinder mobility of persons, goods, services and ideas that makes the achievement of nation building difficult (Nwabughuogu 29). High costs of setting up boundary commissions and arbitration committees have become a common feature in Nigeria. These commissions and committees consume enormous resources that could have been invested in productive sectors of the economy to create jobs, provide infrastructure and improve both economic and social standard of living of the people which facilitate nation building (29).

 Boundary and ethnic conflicts have also negatively affected cooperation amongst component states of Nigeria especially at the political and economic levels. That is, as the conflicting component states close their borders against each other's citizen, the flow of goods and services are

hindered and the already small markets of Nigeria get smaller (Nwabughuogu 29).

Internal boundaries and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have divided people from homogeneous culture, placing them on either side of the divide, as a result, there exist permanent disgruntled groups within the components states of Nigeria whose loyalties do not lie in the states they are placed but rather in that which is denied them. Thus, a society like Nigeria that is prone to frequent internal boundary and ethnic disputes, questions must be called amongst others, the society's pattern of resource management and the question of the level of intra and inter – community relationship and integration, as well as its cohesion (Imobighe 1).

Resurgences of internal boundary and ethnic conflicts have greatly affected the process of nation building in Nigeria. They dissipate the resources of the country by claiming more lives and valuable property than those boundary conflicts along the borders with the limit trope countries (Aikhomu X). Thus, the cost of such conflicts usually runs in million dollars, money that could have been used to develop the communities and states involved. The cost of maintaining border communities is usually staggering especially when the conflicts drag for too long. These communities of necessity become dependent on the state for their food and sustenance since the military forces usually occupy their farmlands. The greatest victims of these conflicts are usually the young men, the productive population of the community and state who are the future hope of its development (Nwabughuogu 28).

Ethnic conflicts or rivalries in Nigerian society promote opportunism, mediocrity, discriminatory practices in appointment and promotions, admissions into institutions of higher learning and award of scholarships. It prevents nationalism among groups. It further compounds the problem of integration and development and breeds lopsided development (Nwabughuogu 52 – 55).

 Ethnic conflicts or rivalries promote the problem of integration which had been how to link the central government with the component states government to achieve a value-consensus that will propel the developmental effort of the states. The January 1966 putsch was an

anticipated outburst of impregnated situation with unprecedented disaffection. Events even on the eve of the putsch reveal the Nigeria Federation as a state beclouded in pandemonium, disarray and perpetually at war with itself. Graf (39) captures the situation more vividly by saying:

> Centrifugal federalism was the conduit for the looming Hobbesian which was of all against all; Northern population power against Southern economic power. The North and East were against West for control of the central government, the Eastern region against the Western region for civil service posts and hegemony within the South.

The point made here according to Egbe (54) is that the pattern of ethnic relations conflicts in post-colonial Nigeria as evident in the first Republic was rather a consolidation of the ethnic conflicts and rivalries of the colonial era. Ethnicity became more brazenly manipulated by the elites as it constitutes the pedestrian through which Elite-class rivalry, conflict and competition was conducted for personal and ethnic whims and caprices.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Independent Nigerian society, over the years has witnessed series of boundaries and ethnic conflicts since its inception on the early hours of 1st October, 1960. Some of these boundaries and ethnic conflicts according to scholars were/are as a result of the way and manner the colonial state was created. The paper however observed that, the existence of boundaries and different ethnic groups in the country does not necessarily lead to ethnic conflicts, but the incompatibility of the people's social, political values and traditions that makes it difficult for those groups to arrive at mutually acceptable mechanisms of resolving disagreements. The paper recommends by way of settlement that, the Nigerian government should address the more fundamental issues of pervasive poverty and diversify the economy away from reliance on petroleum oil. It concludes that, the post-colonial administrations should discard administrative policies which encourage boundary conflicts, hatred, ethnic intolerance and disunity amongst Nigerians.

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