

The Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

This year marks the centenary celebration of the amalgamation of the northern and southern Protectorates of Nigeria by the British colonial administration. This paper is basically geared towards a critical examination of the major factors and the processes that culminated in the amalgamation of the Protectorates. Its approach is both historical and analytical with a proposition that the amalgamation was not just a one day affair on January 1, 1914 but a combination of events right from the pre-colonial to colonial epochs, and with a submission that the final stage of amalgamation should be better appreciated and celebrated by Britain and the British.

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to examine the much-talked about amalgamation of northern and southern Protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. It is basically geared towards a consideration of the major factors and the processes that culminated in the amalgamation of the set of Protectorates. The approach is not only historical but also analytical, with some leading observations and conclusions.

2. Historical and Demographical Antecedents

The geographical expression known as Nigeria today is bounded in the South by the Atlantic Ocean, in the East and West, by the Republic of Cameroon and Benin, respectively; and, in the North, by the Republic of Niger and Chad respectively. It is the largest single African political unit and consists of a conglomeration of diverse ethnic nationalities, with each region being dominated by a major one: the Hausa/Fulani in the North; the Igbo in the East, and the Yoruba in the West. Each region has been glittered with a plethora of other diverse smaller ethnic groups conservatively put at 350 in many existing scholarly works and, as Odumosu (1963) observes:

"every group jealously presents its identity and resents any suggestion of its being absorbed into or even administered by a larger groups". Of course, the situation is still the same even in the present day Nigeria.

3. The Dynamics of Amalgamation

When one listens to Nigerians talking about the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by Sir (later lord) Frederick Lugard, one might be tempted to believe that it was a one day or one year event. Typical of the British approach to colonization all over the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, no amalgamation ever took place in one day or year. It had always been through an evolutionary and experimental process, with tact's and cautions, with administrative convenience as the dominant and underlying objective. The amalgamation of different groups of people in Africa or Asia and even North America was never seen as a one day affair but rather as a process, stretching through two or more phases with the first phase covering the pre-colonial period as indicated in this discussion.

Just like any part of Asia and Africa, there had been well centralized states in the geographical and demographical expression known as Nigeria today, long before the advent of the European influence. Some of them were already centralized even before 1000AD, while others completed the processes of centralization between 1000 AD and 1500 AD;

"with the ability to build, develop and sustain a centralized state depending on a number of factors and historical circumstances. In the North for example, two types of centralized states had emerged by 180; the first category consisting of the large and highly developed states of KanemBorno, Kano, Katsina, Zazzau, Gobir and the leading Jukun states of Kwararafa, Kona, Pinduga, and Wukari, while the second category consisted of the Igala, Nupe and the Igbira kingdoms, whose political structures and institutions, territorial extent and the number of differentiation in the rank of state officials were not as developed and well defined as the first category" (Falola, in Ngu 2003:3).

The emergence of those centralized states and their subsequent expansion were attributed to a number of factors including geographical, military and divine powers. In the first place, the terrain was conducive for easy movement of adventures. Secondly, there were claims for religious or divine interventions. Thirdly, the availability of rich minerals resources was another contributing factor for the expansion of the states, some of which

might have emerged either through military conquests or through claims to divine authority (like the present Boko Haram) or religions.

The Jukun centralized states, located to the South of Kanem-Borno empire, spreading to the Gongola and Benue River basins, exercised their own centralized authorities independent of other centralized states in the northern parts of the present Nigeria. Some of their major centralized states included Kororofa (the superior of them all), Wukari,, Kono and Pindiga, with very large and elaborate administrative structures and functions similar to those of the Kanem-Borno and Hausa centralized authorities (ibid, P12).

In the Western part of the country, many Yoruba traditions regard Ife as the origin of life on earth, and as the founding kingdom of the Yoruba people led by Oduduwa, whose two sons founded the old Oyo Empire and the Bini Kingdom, respectively. Oraniyan, the youngest son of Oduduwa was attributed to have founded the old Oyo empire and was also alleged to have been the Progenitor of the Bini dynasty. The Ala'afin of Oyo was the head of empirical administration combining both spiritual and temporal powers in his office. Spiritually, the Ala'afin was seen by his subjects as the companion of the gods; and, temporally, he had and exercised political and administrative controls over the central administration and the designated political and administrative officials throughout the provinces.

In the case of the Bini, who are also referred to as the Edo, representing both the language and the name by which the people as well as their land were known, Odumosu (1964) posits that they had been in existence right from the 12th century, although the exact date of their first settlement was not quite certain. Certain traditions even believe that they had their first dynasty, the Ogisi, from 900 AD to 1300 AD, with Igodo being the first Ogisi while Olaniyan, the youngest son of Oduduwa of Ife being the founder of the second dynasty which is the surviving kingship in Bini, after the interregnum about 1300AD, and his-son became the first Oba of Bini.

Oba Ewuare was however the first warrior-king who undertook all ambitious territorial expansions by waging series of wars, annexing various neighboring villages and increased the size and population of the Bini kingdom but covered not more than fifteen-mile radius before the 15th century. Thus, unlike the Igbo's who were more or less inclined to their well respected cultural values of lineage and clan system, which was typical of

other coastal tribes and their respective kingdoms, the savannah empires/emirates, the Kanem-Borno empire, Jukun kingdom, and the Yoruba kingdoms already mentioned in this discussion seemed to exhibit some sorts of centralized systems of administration. In fact, the processes of waging intertribal wars and annexation of smaller or weaker groups by stronger and more powerful groups was a sort of amalgamation before the coming of the Europeans to the geographical expression known as Nigeria today. Those types of annexations and amalgamation through waging wars and conquests constituted a common pattern with almost all territories in Africa and Asia, which later became colonies of Britain and other European powers.

The Akan people in Central and South-Western Ghana for example, consisted of many different ethnic groups with Fante along the coast and the Ashanti in the central part constituting the major ones.

The Ashanti consisted of several other smaller tribes including the Baule in the north and Agni in the south. Each of the other two major Akan groups: the Fante and the Twi consisted of several other smaller ones. Both the Ashanti and the Fante were however considered to be the two major pre-colonial nations or states from which evolved a multiple of other smaller ones including the Akin, Akwamu, Ewe and Isa in the Southern part of the territory, and Dagoma, Gonja, Mamprusi, and Moshi in the North. But as far as the Ashanti were concerned, all those groups were parts of the Ashanti Empire who had chosen to remain rebellious provinces of the Empire. The Ashanti decided to launch a campaign for the unification or amalgamation which lasted for many years up to the British intervention in, the 19th century.

Similarly in the pre-colonial territory known as Senegal today, the Serer and the Niominka classification was used to refer to a number of groups or tribes whose politico-social institutions differed remarkably except for the same language which was spoken by most of them, probably the Wblof, Fulbe Toucouler and the Monika tribe (Flein, 1968).

The two major groupings were the Sere-Sine found in Sime and Saloum, with rather less egalitarian and complicated social or political structures than their neighboring Niominka of the Saloum in the Delta Island, and the Serer-N'Dieghan who lived east of Portugal. A series of migrations finally brought most of those states to their present locations by the 13th and 14th

centuries. The two states of Sime and Saloum were later brought under the Djoloff Empire until the 15th and mid 16th centuries when such control became weak.

Although all those states had many similarities in their political and social organizations, they had few significant structural differences especially among the two Sere states where the Bur was seen and treated as the highest political and religious authority, a position similar to that of Achio-Ukarang Takad (Ngu, 2003), it is worth noting that many of those states had very complicated political structures, from the Bur at the apex of the hierarchy to the caste and slaves at the bottom, showing indeed that some forms of annexations or amalgamations had taken place before the advent of colonialism, just like the experience in Nigeria as already indicated in this discussion.

4. The Second Phase Of Amalgamation

The second phase of amalgamation of the geographical expression known as Nigeria today began with the activities of the British merchants, first, along the coastal areas, and later followed by extension of such activities into the interior regional groupings through conquest and annexations. The British conquest process took place in different phases; 1851 to 1900; and 1900 to 1914 which also became the last phase of amalgamation of the territory called Nigeria. The first phase could be said to have begun in 1851 with an attack on Lagos which subsequently became a British Protectorate under the Foreign Office and remained as such until June 22, 1861 when it was transferred to the Colonial Office as a British Colony, since it was claimed "that the permanent occupation of this important point in the Bight of Benin is indispensable for the suppression of the slave trade" (Odumosu, 1963:5-6).

On December 26, 1861, King Kosoko of Lagos was attacked and chased out of Lagos with the claims that he refused to sign the Anti-slavery Treaty with the British King Oba of Opobo, King Nana of the Itsekri, Oba Ororanwen of Bini, and other rulers of the various kingdoms went through similar experiences. Similarly, with the withdrawal of the Royal Charter from the Royal Niger Company in 1899, "the key Northern areas of Tiv, Borno, Kano and Sokoto, the capital of the caliphate, were attacked and brought under the umbrella of British rule between 1900 and 1914" (ibid); but first, as the Protectorate of Northern Nigerian, except the territory south of Idah since they had earlier been included in the Niger Coast Protectorate which itself

was divided into three groups of provinces for administrative convenience. Each group of province was under a Resident who was responsible to the Lieutenant Governor. The Protectorate of northern Nigerian was also divided into provinces for administrative convenience.

It should be noted that, prior to 1861, Lagos was already a British Protectorate under the British Foreign Affairs Office. When it became a colony in 1861, it was under a Governor and a commander-in-chief. In 1866, it was annexed and amalgamated forming part of West African Settlements under a Commander-in-Chief in Freetown, Sierra Leone. By 1814, Lagos was amalgamated and annexed with the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and could not regain its former status of a separate entity or Colony until 1886, the very year Sir Goldie Tubman's Royal Niger Company was granted "to dominate the affairs of Northern Nigeria (ibid).

What is not succinctly clear here is that if Lagos was a British Colony by 1861; one of the three West African protectorates in 1866; and a British protectorate annexed with the Gold coast (now Ghana) in 1874; and back to its former status of a colony in 1886; and finally amalgamated with, both northern and southern Protectorates of Nigeria to become one very large British colony called Nigeria in January, 1914, one wonders if Lagos state today could choose to celebrate the centenary of all of them, or any one or two of them and under what criteria! It is not surprising therefore that the ongoing centenary celebration of the amalgamation of the British northern and southern Protectorates of Nigeria does not seem to move the government and people of Lagos state of Nigeria; it does not even seem to amuse them.

It is also worthy of noting, however, that the colonial experiences of Lagos and Nigeria as a whole were not peculiar but, rather as a common pattern of British colonization process and techniques. What is today known as Malaysia, for example, evolved from distinct federated territories which passed through different colonial experiences in different periods through conquest, treaties and annexations or amalgamations. Malacca for example, was under the Portuguese from 1551 to 1641, when it was acquired by the Dutch and subsequently by the British through the treaty of 1874, while Panang was acquired by the British East Indian Company through a combination of force and treaty. The British government decided to transfer them from the Foreign Office to the Colonial office as an entity and Colony of Britain under the name Malaya which was renamed Malaysia at

independence. That could be seen as the British model of amalgamation which preceded that of Northern and southern Nigeria in 1914. Yet Malaysia, like many other modern states or nations with similar experiences does not express the overzealousness of any anniversary celebrations as that could only unveil the sad memories of forceful acquisitions, annexations or amalgamations. In fact, to Malaysia and many other modern states with similar colonial experiences, if there is any body or country to celebrate such memories, it is the British or Britain to where the victory and achievements lie squarely; or, the United States of America which has evolved from a self-imposed amalgamation of thirteen separate former British colonies is now a united, strong and most powerful country in centuries. Thus, for Nigeria, Malaysia and other former European colonies in Africa and Asia, such a centenary celebration could be said to be “much ado about nothing”, especially if one considers the events of the post-amalgamation years.

5. The post-1914 amalgamation

With the amalgamation of 1914, the three major groupings: East, North and West automatically fell under a Governor-general with each grouping or territory having a Lieutenant-Governor, whose area of jurisdiction was subdivided into Provinces headed by Residents. Due to financial and manpower constraints, the British colonial government was compelled to make use of the indigenous machinery of administration for effective control of the vast territory, a system of administration that both historians and political scientists refer to as “Indirect Rule”, attributed to Sir (later Lord) Frederick Lugard.

Under the Indirect Rule system, both the Emirs and paramount chiefs and their respective administrative structures were retained. They were encouraged to exercise both executive and judicial powers but with strict supervision by the British colonial officials. The system recorded some levels of successes in the North, but in some areas like Bauchi, Benue, Plateau and other states in the Middle Belt, the colonial officials became more directly involved in their respective administration. The general political, administrative and social conditions were impediments for a successful introduction and operation of the Indirect Rule system in the south generally. With the exceptions of the Yorubas, Binis and some other minor tribes, the Igbos and others in the East lacked centralized administrative structures comparable to the North. Still, that did not seem to deter Lugard's determination to operate his system of Indirect Rule in the

colony of Nigeria, which was considered to be innovative and unique, comparable only to the Dual Mandate in East Africa, while the political and administrative arrangements for the Lagos colony remained the same up to 1922.

Nevertheless, Lugard's theory and practice of administration was heavily criticized by his immediate successor, Sir Hugh Clifford (1919-1925). It would appear that no sooner than the 1914 amalgamation of the northern and southern Protectorate was accomplished than the British colonial officials became confused. Lugard's attempt to make Kaduna a capital of Nigeria was criticized and halted by Sir Hugh Clifford, his immediate successor. Sir Clifford went further to recommend the Secretary of State for the colonies, Sir A. J. Harding, some structural functional reforms in the administrative machinery to enforce efficient and effective administration of the colony, Nigeria, and was quite convinced that his proposal would make the amalgamation a reality. But to Sir A. J. Harding the Colonial Secretary, Clifford was just trying to impose his Gold Coast's experience on the population of Nigeria with total disregard to environmental difference and other inherent circumstances (Falola, Op.cit).

Although A.J Harding, Head of The Nigerian Department in the Colonial Office was becoming unnecessarily embarrassing with Clifford's pile of criticism, admitted that Lugard could not perform like he had done in Hong Kong (1900-1908), because he relied so much on Major Edward Lugard, his younger brother, who was more or less an "incompetent and highly paid private Secretary". Harding further described Lugard as "a military detector operating administration dualism whose major objective was merely administrative in the Northern groups of Provinces, while that of Southern Nigerian was primarily trade and commerce".

By January 1, 1914, Lugard had permitted a Legislative Councils not only for the Colony of Lagos and reserved his exclusive power to legislate for the Provinces of northern and southern Nigerian which Clifford replace with his new arrangements to allow separates Legislative Councils not only for the Lagos Colony, but also Northern and Southern Nigerian. Thus, in his new Constitution of 1922, Clifford abolished Lugard's Nigerian Councils and the unpopular legislative seats: One for Calabar and three for Lagos, Clifford's Constructions of 1922 empowered him to preside over the meetings of both the executive and legislative councils which was a sort of dictatorship tendency he had accused Lugard of.

Credit must however be recorded to Hugu Clifford for introducing the elective principle in his constitution which marked the beginning of democracy in Nigerian as he created the right political climate that led to the establishment of five leading Newspapers and two Political Parties owned by Nigerians: the Nigerian National Democratic Parties (NNDP) and the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). His immediate successor could not make any remarkable contribution to the political development of the country except Governor Cameron's Judicial Reform, despite Lieutenant C.W. Alexander's resistance in respect of the Native Courts in the North. In fact, by 1934, and for the first time in the history of the country, the judiciary was separated from the Executive arm of the Government, and later developed into the post-independence system.

Meanwhile, the North was becoming apprehensive of what it considered radical changes which was construed as a blatant display of anti-north attitude by the British official. In the first place, the North had felt that Lagos unduly favored by Hugh Clifford's Constitution of 1922 at its expense. Secondly, Clifford's anti-Indirect Rule system was considered as another grave exhibition of anti-north feelings. Although Graeme Thomson, Clifford's successor, had attempted to cushion such negative feelings by the North, which Lieutenant Alexander tried to rely on, Cameron's judicial and other legislative reforms merely helped to remind the North of the anti-North posture of the British officials.

Conscious of the North's apprehension, Governor Bernard Bourdillion, in his 1942 Memorandum, recommended Regional Legislatures for the North, East and western region to be constitutionally related to the Central Legislature in Lagos, with the North having greater degree of autonomy and half the total number of representatives in the central legislatures. Unfortunately, Bourbillion could not live to see to the realization of his proposals which became a reality with Sir Arthur Richard's Constitution of 1946/1947. This Richard's Constitution made provisions for Bicameral Legislature in the North and Unicameral Legislature in the East and Western Regions all of which served as electoral colleges to the Central Legislature.

The subsequent constitutions of McPherson and Lyttleton of 1952 and 1954 respectively, were mainly concerned with administrative reforms. The National Conferences of Ibadan and London in 1953 and 1957, respectively,

were more concerned with administrative reform and the Lagos question preparatory to independence National Conferences in Ibadan and the Lagos question preparatory to Independence in 1960. The Independence Constitution reaffirmed the Regional autonomy, Federal structure and put an end to the question of Lagos which made the territory the Federal Capital Territory, instead of becoming part of any Region as the West had wanted it to be.

But that did not seem to end the apprehension of the North, especially it could be observed that the Northern People's Congress (NPC) won the election to the Central Legislation but its leader, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sark of Sokoto, refused to go to Lagos and form the government as expected of the parliamentary system of government. He however delegated his deputy, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa for that purpose while, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, the leader of the National Council of Nigerian and the Cameroon (NCNC) in coalition with NPC became the Governor-General, under Her Majesty in England and later the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with the Republican Constitution of 1963.

It should be recalled that the series of conquests and annexation or amalgamated right from the pre-colonial era to 1914 had ultimately led to the emergence of one major group overshadowing other smaller groupings. In each of the three regions: East, North and the Western Regions: It should also be recalled that the "minority question" was not properly handled by both the Ibadan and London Conferences, which has continued to remain a vexed issue in Nigerian Government and politics up to date. Apart from the Mid-West Region that materialized in 1963, the political leadership of the post-independence year continued to turn deaf ears to the minority issues up to the collapse of the First Republic in 1966 through a military coup d'état. The castigation of the coup plotters who were felt to have been from one or two regions; the manner and a ways the coup was conducted, leading to more casualties in the northern region; and the intention of the coup d'état itself became suspicious of the intension of the coup plotter, despite their claim for eradication of corruption. Above all, was a manifestation of the fragile nature of unity through conquests, annexation or amalgamated from the pre-colonial period to 1914.

The military coup d'état ushered in Major General Thomas U. Aguyi-Ironsi from the Eastern Region as the first military Head of State who was succeeded, through counter coup, by (then) Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu

Gowon, from one of the minority groups in the Middle Belt Region, who served as the civil war manager was over-thrown by General Murtala Mohammed from the dominated major group in the Northern Region. Shortly before the beginning of the civil war, General Gowon had restructure the country from four Regions he inherited to twelve separate autonomous political entities called States within the Federation of Nigeria in contrast to General Ironi's proposed Unitary System which of course, could not materialize. The country was further restructured into nineteen, twenty-seven and thirty-six States and Abuja which became the new Federal Capital Territory, by General Murtala Mohammed, General Ibrahim Babangida, and General Sani Abacha, respectively.

Needless to reemphasize that the political events, right from the immediate post-independence years to date, have demonstrated clearly the adverse effects of amalgamation or annexations through conquests, and finally through diplomacy in 1914. They have not properly and adequately addressed the issues of minorities through such conquests, annexations or amalgamation as contemporary political events tend to indicate. Moreover, the national question seems to be a perpetually unresolved issue because in addition the pre-independence National Conference of Ibadan and London in 1953 and 1975 respectively, Nigerian has had not less than four other National Conferences without concrete resolution on the future of the country. Even at the time of writing this paper, there is another ongoing National Conference with the usual attendant characteristic skepticism and cynicisms. All these point to the fact that annexation or amalgamation through conquests and shoddy diplomacy are factors of fragile unity and inevitability of instability which characterize the Nigerian state like many African states today.

6. Conclusion

When some Nigerians make reference to the amalgamation of northern and southern Protectorates in 1914, they tend to create the impression that there were two distinct autonomous political entities quite reminiscent of northern and southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe). The Protectorates were merely Consula Posts in certain territories mainly for the protection of British interest or citizens resident in those territories for trade and commerce. They were never and should never be regarded as colonies, and, unlike colonies that were under the Colonial Office in London, the Protectorates remained under the Foreign Affairs Office in London.

The discussion here as has been shown is that only Lagos was a colony by June 1861, and remained the only colony in what is today known as Nigerian up to 1913. That is just a year before the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914. The discussion here as also shown that the amalgamation itself was a process that could be seen in two major phases stretching from the pre-colonial period quite reminiscent of other former British colonies in African Asia.

It is a submission in this paper that Nigerian should appreciate their ability to pass through the challenges of the two phases of amalgamation in addition to their joy for remaining together for a hundred years after 1914, which is regarded as the last day of the last event of the amalgamation process; and that the centenary celebration should be better appreciated by Britain and the British, while the Independence Anniversary or centenary is better appreciated by Nigeria and Nigerians. Nevertheless, whatever might have been the circumstances of coming to live together for the past one hundred years, Nigeria and Nigerians must continue to sustain and harness their unity for generations in centuries ahead.

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