

From Amalgamation to Nationhood: A Critique of Nation Building Process in Nigeria Since 1960

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Abstract

Nigeria as a nation has been grappling with issue relating to nation building since its independence in 1960. The historical antecedent of its diverse ethnic configuration cum political gimmicks and antics has shrouded the gains of her common existence as a modern state. This has undermined the unity of the nation while granting currency to the appellation of a mere geographical expression. The paper argues with concrete example with evidence derived from primary and secondary sources (oral and written) to demonstrate the cultural and economic interdependence among various regions of the country to present a narrative against the notoriety of a mere geographical expression. The paper maintains that, far from being a mere geographical expression Nigeria is and remain a classic of a modern state, the bane being the way our mutual existences have been mismanaged.

Introduction

This paper attempts to present a narrative that presents the gains on the process of nationhood since independence. The position of the paper is that Nigeria is a classic of a nation state, not minding the political gimmicks cum its diverse ethnic and religious configuration that have shrouded the gains of its common existence. We maintained that, far from the appellation of a mere “geographical expression”, evidence from economic and cultural interdependence of various regions showed that Nigeria is a classic of a Modern State.

In articulating our position, we, to a large extent, relied on the contributions made by scholars on the occasion of the Colloquium organized by the Historical Society of Nigeria as her contribution to the centenary celebration of the Amalgamation in 2014, published in a book titled “The House that Lugard Built” edited by S. U. Fwatshak and Olayemi Akinwumi. In our view, the position of these scholars reflects to a large extent the actual narrative to the motions, pains and gains of our sojourn to nationhood since the amalgamation of the various regions. This is because the contributors are renowned, shrewd and impeccable in their craft

as historians. However, evidences from other sources shall be utilized to complement their positions.

Historiographical Issues Relating to Nigerian Nationhood¹ and Nation Building²

There are two but related appellation the Nigerian nationhood has been associated with. The first is that “Nigeria is a geographical expression”⁷³ and the second, “Amalgamation of 1914 was a mistake”⁷⁴. It should be stated early that this positions were made by respected personalities in the build up to independence. These were Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Sir Ahmadu Bello respectively. Other leaders at different times had made similar claims. It should be known that, whether or not they were quoted out of context, one thing that cannot be denied is the fact that, these statements have been cited whenever centrifugal tendencies were invoked to stimulate separatist tendencies. The question now is how plausible are these claims?

On the first claim, the notion has always been that Nigeria is an artificial creation or a creation of the British, Toure Kazah-Toure⁵ maintained (which we subscribe to) that most nations if not all were artificially created and that no nation was naturally created. It is ahistorical to give a social phenomenon a biological or natural attribute. This is in consonant to the fact that nations are always multi-ethnic and multi-racial in some cases as a result of political, cultural, social and economic historical interactions that have translated in the formation of peoples. Not even China and India that are perceived to be homogenous are also multi-ethnic, a common feature of the Nigerian Nation.

On the second claim, in our view, for the British the amalgamation was not a mistake but a deliberate and strategic decision to enable the exploitation of the human and natural resources of the Nigeria area. More to this is the fact that the amalgamation was done in consideration of the existing socio-cultural, political and economic relationships. Just like the British modified and adopted the Caliphate System as a model for the practice of the Indirect Rule so also they exploited the existing relationships to their advantage, a view that most scholars agree with. In our view, all the pre-colonial process of state formation was also a case of conquest and amalgamation in order to establish centralized political systems. For instance, Benin, Oyo, Hausa states, Nupe, Igala, Sokoto caliphate etc. are examples of such process, even though, the context and intent may differ the result was the creation of a much larger political unit.

This position is akin to that of CBN Ogbogbo as captured thus: “... that the first building blocks for what came to be known as Nigeria began during the period of state formation and empire building process of most Nigeria peoples; centuries before 1914”⁷⁶ Maintaining that, “... the popular episode popularly called Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria was a mere icing on the cake whose baking began far into the pre-colonial era”⁷⁷. It is clear from the foregoing that the argument for “Geographical Expression” and “Amalgamation of 1914 was a Mistake” cannot explain the failure of Nation-Building in Nigeria. One thing that remains obvious is the inability of successive government to bolster national

cohesion resulting to the thorny issues of the National Question and the Indigene-Settler dichotomy which have obscure the gains of our nationhood.

The Motions, Fault lines to National Integration

The motions to Nigeria's nationhood in our view are crisis relating the question of Nigeria unity and the Nigerian citizenship. This because each time these issues are raised it challenge on the one hand and can strengthen national cohesion and deepen the Pan-Nigerian (inclusive citizenship) on the other hand respectively. This crises or as it was called by S. U. Fwatshak violent and intellectual discourse⁸ provide opportunities that could be utilized to neutralize fears of being dominated or marginalized whether perceived or real. As it is known nation-building is work in progress. In our view, is the effort to mend all areas of disagreement especially that which undermined national cohesion sustain and deepen inclusive citizenship are efforts of nation-building. It is the mending of these areas of disagreements that is truly lacking in the journey to Nigerian nationhood. To drive home this point positions of four prominent and seasoned scholars used.

For instance Prof. Attahiru Jega states; "that the post-colonial project of constructing a common citizenry with the same aspiration, one pan-national identity and a cosmopolitan outlook, instead of ethnic and 'tribal and sectarian religious loyalties, has essentially failed.'"⁹ In the same way Abubakar Momoh opine that; "... ethnic, religious, gender, regional and other identities have become major challenges in the polity because these are somehow associated with the perception of discrimination and the prevailing limitation of inclusive citizenship."¹⁰ From the foregoing, it is clear how a common citizenship and national unity appears to be fragile or non-existence. Argued, Toure Kazah-Toure, a result of "decades of post-colonial project experienced government becoming more authoritarian, excluding sections of the population from participating in the affairs of state and denying them equality in the sharing of resources and social provisioning"¹¹ it is this situation that have strengthen and gives current to our argument that it is the way our mutual existence have being managed that gave current to the notion that Nigeria is a geographical expression. Bala Usman on his part, present the lack of will on the part of the state to take advantage lessons therein, from these violent discourses when he asserts that, "even the few tribunals and commissions of inquiry established to investigate these conflicts produce reports, which sometimes lead to white papers, which hardly go beyond the desk of top government officials and some editors of media houses."¹² It is the neglect and non-implementation of reports that has resonated fear of marginalization and injustice in many quarters and has diffuse faith in the Nigeria project by victims.

Efforts of Nation Building Since Independence

Successive governments have made attempts to deepen national integration in different ways. The extent to which such efforts have succeeded is a matter of perspective. However, whichever school of thought one belongs, the role played by the creation of states and local governments, National Youth Service Corps, Unity Schools, Federal Character, Federal Roads and Federal Revenue Allocation

to mention few, have played a role in giving a sense of belonging to the different political zones in the country. These were the observations derived from the presentations of representatives of the six geopolitical zones in the Colloquium organized by HSN on the Centenary celebration.¹³ From their various submissions, at one time or more had claims of being marginalized, the question now is who is marginalizing who? The answer to this question is Corruption “Marginalizing Poor Nigerians” as a result of weak institutions engendered by the failure of state building. This is because corruption has altered standards of conduct legally and professionally in public affairs violating the integrity of an entity and subverting quality and capacity. This is manifesting in the form of ethnic and religious identities, authoritarianism in governance, inclusion and exclusion of some groups by ruling elite and the control and distribution of resources, economic privileges not being extended to all section of the citizenry. It should be noted that the have-nots are the victims of this dichotomy in the scheme of things. Above all it is lack of trust among the different regions that raises the issue of fear of marginalization.

Gains of Nation-Building in Nigeria

While there is little trust in political interactions and distribution of resources among various regions of the nation this is not true in other sphere. However, the contradiction is, the cooperation and trust among the political class in the various regions who benefit from the proceeds of corruption is not in doubt. A good example is the ethnic and religious composition of the beneficiaries of the “Dasuki Gate” which defile the existing dichotomies and reflect a “pan-Nigeria corruption”.

On the other hand, trusts abound in the area of economic and cultural interactions. Existing trading and cultural interactions has been used to justify the amalgamation, highlighting that the rivers were links to various regions rather than barriers and deferent geographical regions provides various environmental opportunities that have deepened and sustained the interdependence of these various regions. It has even been strengthen by modern means of transportation today. For instance, food crops, cattle, vegetables among others are exchange for palm oil, cola-nut, and other manufactured products between the north and the south. Interestingly, most of these transactions are done without physical presence but via phone calls and internet and mobile transfers. In fact, an informant said as a southerner, he prefers doing business with people of northern origin than southerners. Gambo saidu a grain seller in Gombi Local government Area in Adamawa State explained that he had not meet or see some of his buyers but complete all transactions via phone.

On the cultural sphere, inter-marriages have been and are on-going among Nigerian across ethnic divide. Most importantly, are the foods and snacks of the various ethnic groups which people from other groups enjoy. For example, some northerners like eating *Eba* and *oha* or *orkazi* soup. Also *amala* and *ewedu* soup are taken across the divide. *Tuwo da miya ku ka* is also enjoyed across the divide. *Suya*, *kilishi*, *masa*, *kulikuli* and *gari*, plantain chips, *abacha* are snacks taken by Nigerians, these are just some examples. Similarly, the cultural dresses also show the level of integration. Today across regions *buba* from the south-west is worn by

women all over the country. The *etibor* or what is otherwise called south-south is also attire for all Nigerians; this is also the case of dresses of other regions. For those who may not be convinced that cultural and economic interactions can be used as evidence for national integration, needs to understand that part of the evidence and argument for globalization has been cultural and economic interactions. If eating foreign food, wearing foreign cloths and trading with people across the globe is considered integration and the world is seen as a global village, then it is save to argue that trading, eating and wearing attire across the different regions of Nigeria make us more Nigerian and shows the high level of national integration.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that Nigeria is not a geographical expression as believed in some quarters but a classic case of a modern state. The bane of it is predicated on the way our common existence has been managed. Using evidence from cultural and economic integration the paper shows the gains of our nationhood. The paper further argues that, based on the historical antecedent of Nigeria, the nation-building process had been fostered by longstanding cultural and commercial nexus, that predates colonialism. These variables were however threatened by the excesses of political actors since the attainment of independence in 1960.

Footnote

1. Nigerian Nationhood connotes, as perceived by the authors, as a Pan-Nigerian identity with a common citizenship and aspiration. It is the aggregate of Nation Building efforts.
2. Nation Building is often confused with State Building or is sometime used interchangeably. Nevertheless, there are entirely different. State Building is the task of strengthening state institutions and building functional state capable of exhibiting the essential attributes of a modern state. Nation Building on the other hand, refers to the process or efforts of developing a shared identity among various groups within a state. It is also concern with the character relations between citizens which suggest that, Nation Building is a continuous process and can be enabled by a functional state.
3. This statement was cited by Prof. Siyan Oyeweso in his presentation titled "Perspectives of South-West on the Centenary: The Gains and Pains since Amalgamation and the Agenda for the Future" in *The House that Lugard Built* edited by S. U. Fwatshak and Olayemi Akinwumi, published in Jos and by Jos University Press, 2014. P. 136
4. Also this statement was cited by S. U. Fwatshak in his presentation titled "The North-West in Nigeria's First Centenary" in *The House that Lugard Built* ... p. 167
5. Kazah-Toure T., "A Discourse on the Citizenship Question in Nigeria" in Journal of West African Affairs Vol. 4, No. 1 pp. 41-63. P. 42
6. CBN Ogbogbo " 100 years of the South-South Zone in the Political Economy of Nigeria: The Pain and Gain" in *The House that Lugard Built*...p. 105
7. CBN Ogbogbo "100 Years... p.107.

8. S. U. Fwatshak, gave an x-ray of all the conversations relating to the Amalgamation. He identified two forms of these conversations namely Violent and intellectual discourses. He presents the various violent crises and conferences that raises issues concerning national unity, since independence up to the forth republic. For more details, see, S. U. Fwatshak and J. M. Ayuba "Amalgamation Discourses in the 'Lugardian House' During Nigeria's First Century in *The House that Lugard Built...* pp. 1-34.
9. Kazah-Toure T., "A Discourse on the Citizenship Question in Nigeria" ... p. 42
10. Kazah-Toure T., "A Discourse on the Citizenship Question in Nigeria" ... p. 42
11. Kazah-Toure T., "A Discourse on the Citizenship Question in Nigeria" ... p. 42
12. Y. B. Usman, "The Violent Community Conflicts in the Central Nigeria Uplands and the Middle Benue Basin in a Historical Perspective" in Gorge A. k. et al. (ed) *Beyond Fairy Tales: Selected Historical Writings of Dr. Yusuf Bala Usman* (Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research, Zaria, 20014) p. 194
13. For instance, Monday Y. M. presented for the Middle-Belt, I. L. Bashir, presented the case for the North-East and Ijioma Okoro made a case for the South-East. In the same way, C.B.N Ogbogbo summited for the South-South, Siyan Oyeweso for the South-west and S. U. Fwatshak for the North-West. For details see in *The House that Lugard Built...*