



The 1914 Amalgamation of British Administrative Units in Nigeria and the Rhetorics for Secession

Isa Nambo Baba^a

^aPh.D History, Department of History and International Studies, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai.

Nigeria

drisanbaba@gmail.com

Abstract

The British amalgamation of its administrative units to what later became known as Nigeria in 1914 have over the years been subjected to implausible arguments, that the amalgamation was not conceived with the consent of Nigerians. Secondly, that such contraction had lapsed since 2014 and, therefore, Nigeria should cease to exist. All these arguments have over years led to rhetorics for secession and disintegration of the country, particularly among politicians. They failed to understand and acknowledge that the British, like the rest European colonising powers, conceived such idea at the famous Berlin Conference of 1884/5 long before they embarked on the physical conquest of the African continent. Secondly and more importantly, the present Nigerian areas were, hitherto to the advent of British and other European powers, equally coerced under arbitrary rulers and warlords in Empires, Kingdoms and small nation states. This paper adopts historical approach to re-examine the amalgamation arguments, linking perocolonial, colonial and postcolonial elites' power play in Nigeria.

Keywords: British Administration, 1914 Amalgamation, Royal Niger Company, Nigeria

Introduction

It was difficult to understand the present hue and cry over the 1914 amalgamation of two hitherto British administrative units (Southern and Northern protectorates) into one country called Nigeria in recent times. First, let us get the whole argument clear on what is a nation and a county; a nation is a body of people united by a common language, history and culture, while a country is a body of heterogenous people brought together in one territory. It is interesting to note that going by these definitions, it would be difficult to assume that all nations or countries on the earth's surface are homogeneous and monolithic. Similarly, it was safe to assume that most nations and countries were the product of wars, conquest, agreements and treaties brought together by individuals or groups of people, which can comfortably be said of Nigeria as a country. Before the advent of the British, the region today referred to as Nigeria once came under forceful and alien rulers that brought together hitherto free independent individual people and societies into a single sovereign state called a caliphate, empire and kingdom. In contrast, others that resisted such conquest and impositions remained autonomous until the advent of the British administration in the 19th century.¹

¹ Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria*, Heinemann- London- Nairobi- Lusaka- Ibadan, 1977. Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, Faber and Faber, London, 1978.



Similarly, the decisions reached by the European powers at the famous Berlin Conference to partition the African continent into their own sphere of influence predates the 20th century conquest of the continent. The outcome of the Conference on 13th November 1884 to 23rd February 1885 provided a basis for the partitioning of hitherto empires, kingdoms, autonomous settlements, and societies among the European powers. All that was required was to provide evidence of obtained signatories and trade agreements secured from African kings and rulers ceding out their sovereignty rights to European powers after the abolition of the Atlantic Slave trade in the 1830s.²

In what later became Nigeria, the British Trading Company, Royal Niger Company (RNC) did the first preliminary work for the British Government; it was granted a trade Charter under the British crown, which empowered the company to sign both trade and treaties (rights) with local rulers. By 1898, when the company was strained with the harsh economic realities of the late 19th century fall in commodity prices, it sought and gave out all its mineral rights and the administration of the region it had created to the British imperial power. It then limited itself to its primary function as a trader, having being compensated. The situation was then opened for the British imperial power to accomplish the remaining task of taking physical (military) possession of the regions and establishing its administration (colony) based on the agreement reached at the conference.

Conquest and the Amalgamation of the Nigerian area

Lagos had already been declared a British colony sequel to the dynastic feud that ensued and came under the British High Commissioner, William Macgregor in 1861. On the Delta region, the consular rule under John Beecroft brought the entire region including the Igbo hinterland under one British protectorate, known as Oil River protectorate and later renamed, Oil Niger River protectorate with its headquarters moved to Lagos and Rahil Moore appointed as its British High Commissioner, in 1897. On the upper part of River Niger, Frederick D. Lugard, a former military Colonel under the Royal Niger Company constabulary was assigned with raising two thousand troops known as the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) to ensure the submission of former members of the Sokoto caliphate and those outside it. In 1900, he was appointed British High Commissioner for the Northern region, and after hosting the British flag at Lokoja to proclaim the whole of the Northern region as a British protectorate before embarking on a piecemeal conquest of communities hitherto under Sokoto caliphate and Hausa States including those non-Muslim autonomous communities in the region that resisted the Fulani conquest and grouped together into one-fold, called British Northern protectorate in 1903.³

In 1906, the first two (Lagos colony and Oil Niger River) of the three protectorates were amalgamated and named Southern protectorate,⁴ bringing to two (Northern and Southern) remaining protectorates left for the British administration, sometimes erroneously regarded as Northern Muslim and Southern Christian protectorates. If there was no agitation and criticism against the British amalgamation of the Lagos colony with the Oil Niger River protectorate in 1906 (since they were not a homogeneous people), what then would have necessitated the agitation for the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates? However, the survival of the two remaining protectorates lasted for only eight years before they were further amalgamated by the

² Michael Crowder, *West Africa, Under Colonial Rule*, Hutchinson, London, 1968 p55-56. The conference had the presence of every major European power in Europe, Othman Empire and USA without the presence of any of the African rulers whose territories had been earmarked to be taken away.

³Ibid

⁴Ibid



British in 1914, considered the last phase in the gradual process of creating a country over the river Niger area as enunciated at the Berlin Conference before other European powers.⁵

It was important to note that prior to 1914, the British had envisaged the creation of Nigeria. In June 1885, at the Berlin Conference, the British proclaimed a “*protectorate over what it called the Niger District from Lagos across to Rio-del Rey on the coast and inland as far as Lokoja on Niger and Ibi on the Benue*”.⁶ A policy direction was later echoed by Joseph Chamberland Goldie, Chairman of RNC, responsible for winning the region for the British. In 1898, J. C. Goldie advocated the fusion of different Governments into one Nigeria” before the abrogation of the Royal Charter to his Company. In 1900, another loyal servant of the British Empire, Lugard in a private letter to his younger brother Ned in India, he declared that the three Nigerias (sic) were sure to be amalgamated one day and to be charged with this was the assignment, he would gladly have loved.”⁷ It was clear that the British Government had a mental picture of a country it intended to create long before it embarked on the conquest of the region and the amalgamation of its various administrative units towards achieving this goal in 1914.

Lugard and his colleagues in charge of the protectorates were aware of this policy direction, but he outwits them by initiating a confidential memo to the Secretary of Colonies proposing the unification of the three protectorates into one country called Nigeria in 1905. The reasons he gave in his memo for advocating the unification of the two created political units were basically finance “*to unify the finance and railways projects of the two administrative units,*” while the southern protectorate was able to raise its own revenue through custom duties on liquor to finance its administration and railway projects, the Northern protectorate, on the other hand, relied on subsidies it receives from British tax payers in London.⁸

This was shortly before the Northern and Southern protectorates were created and when he left the Northern region on a new posting to Hong Kong as its Governor in 1906. His memo was precipitated by the editorial comments in the last three chapters of African Mail, edited by E. D. Moore, who also canvassed for amalgamation of the two administrative units; this was further followed with a private letter from the Colonial Office inviting Lugard to accept such reorganization in 1911. According to the Office, It was an opportunity for Lugard to return to Africa to accept a responsibility he considered the biggest Job in the whole British Empire.⁹ In April, 1912, Frederick Lugard accepted the appointment from the Colonial Secretary and the matter was brought before the British parliament with the following words among others, “*on my earnest solicitation, he returns now to the field of his early and brilliant labors and to complete and consolidate what has proved, I think to be the greatest tropical province of the British Crown.*”¹⁰

⁵Ibid

⁶ A.H. Kirk Greene, Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria, A documentary Record, being a reprint of the Report by Sir, F. D. Lugard on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria 1912-1914, Frank Cass &Co.Ltd, 1968. P.3

⁷ P.5

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid The Secretary of State for Colonies, Mr. Lewis Vernon Harcourt (3rd November 1910-5th May, 1915) went further to privately flatter Lugard that if he turned down the offer the whole proposal to Amalgamate the two Nigerias (sic) would very likely be shelved. He was to be placed on a proposed annual salary of £6,000 and £1, 500 duty allowance. F. D. Lugard in honor to the Secretary of State for Colonies, named the present River State capital after him in 1912, when the Port was established with a railway line to tap the coal mine fields at Enugu.

¹⁰ Ibid p.8-9 In April 1912, Lugard was appointed as the Governor of the two separate administrative units in England and stayed behind to acquaint himself with important issues on the amalgamation before he proceeded to Lagos and Zungeru in September 1912. He returned to England in March, 1913 and submitted his proposals, which were accepted in September, before he returned back to Lagos in September 1913.



On 1st January 1914, the former administrative units of Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated with some fitting ceremonies. After the oath of office had taken place in hitherto capitals of the protectorates in Zungeru and Lagos in the presences of the Governor-General, Lieutenant Governors and the Chief Justice. A durbar of 30,000 strong horsemen was held in Kano with the Emirs and principal Chiefs from non-Muslim areas of the Northern region in attendance for the first time in common friendship to swear allegiance to his Majesty.¹¹ This narrative clearly confirmed that the amalgamation was a British thing on how best it intended to administer its conquered territory, just like other administrative reforms and reorganization it had carried out before and after 1914 that did not require consent, agreement and discussion with any Nigerian. These arguments were not meant to support British colonial policies, but not to blatantly deny its rights to own its decisions. Besides, the Northern and Southern protectorates before amalgamated was the creation of the British (without consultation) and the peoples in each of the protectorates were not monolithic, so what were the grave sins in amalgamating the two into a country. Worse still, if it was the wish to revert the country to its pre-conquest and pre-colonial days under its empires and kingdoms' rules, it would have amounted to an aberration since they were the product of coercion by individuals that created them.

The reactions to the Amalgamation

It should be noted that it was not possible to gauge the impulse of ordinary Nigerians, since a plebiscite was not conducted, except reactions expressed by Nigerian elites residing in Lagos on the pages of Newspapers from 1912 to 1915 and in the first half of 1919 when Lugard the first Governor-General of united Nigeria retired before he was succeeded by Governor Hume Clifford (1919-1925). The reactions of this class of people started to be featured immediately when Lugard was appointed to accomplish the task in 1912. The reactions can also be grouped under these themes; what were the derived benefits of the amalgamation to the Lagos colony, hidden knowledge of the amalgamation scheme, extension of the Nigerian System (indirect rule) to the South, possible relocation of the Nigerian capital from Lagos to Kaduna and attempt to empower District Officers with Judicial powers.¹² There was nothing to suggest that the criticism of the amalgamation scheme was the same or near to issues being raised and canvassed today on the scheme. It was also contrary to some of the misgivings and cynicism on how the amalgamation scheme was carried out.

At first, when Lugard returned to Lagos in October 1913 to commence the amalgamation task, he was presented with a memorial welcome by the local Chiefs and dignitaries in Lagos that wished him success in his plan for the unification. However, a twist to such a welcome came from the *Lagos Standard newspaper*, it raised doubts if Lagos would benefit from such scheme and recalled past experiences when Lagos colony was made subservient to the Governors of first Sierra Leone and Gold Coast, without any gain.¹³ Similarly, *Lagos Standard*, the *Nigerian Chronicle* ran a series of articles examining the implications of Lugard's inaugural speech and expressed doubts if Lagosian would benefit from the proposed economic merger; then came the bombshell from the

¹¹ Ibid p.60-61

¹² These criticisms were contrary to sentiments being expressed today; such as who were involved in the signing of the agreement(s), that the agreement for scheme had lapsed after a hundred years (in 2014), that the country should be reverted to pre 1914 status of Northern and Southern protectorates (since the North and the South were not the same people, culturally and religiously) and that the scheme itself was null and void since Nigerians were not involved or their consent were not sought.

¹³ Ibid p.19-20



German news-paper *Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung*.¹⁴ It published an article under the headlines, “Administrative changes in Nigerian” in which it asserted that it was the intention of the British Government to introduce the “Nigerian System” (meaning barbarism) to the South. The article ignited the Lagos press to spearhead opposition against the British colonial Government. *The Lagos weekly Record* queried the attempt to introduce the Nigerian System, where the British District Officers were invested with wide judicial powers against Supreme Court appeal. *The Nigerian Chronicle* on the other hand criticized the lack of inadequate information on the planned amalgamation that was hidden from the public and warned that the South was not Muslim and the principles of Northern administration were anathema. Similarly, the *Nigerian Chronicle* and *Lagos Standard* hammered on the circulated rumored that after the amalgamation, Lagos Capital would move to Kaduna.¹⁵

Thus, the Months of October and November 1913 passed without any comment from the British authorities on the nature of amalgamating its two administrative units, and two days after Christmas, on the 27th of December, 1913, the Nigerian Gazette decreed that 1st January 1914, the colony would become the Protectorate of Nigeria.¹⁶ Newspaper editorials denounced the secrecy and indecent haste at the eleventh-hour statement by Government which was sandwiched between Christmas and the New Year Public Holiday.¹⁷ After the amalgamation ceremony, most of the newspapers focused their attention on the 1st January amalgamation speech until when the *Nigerian Chronicle* wrote series of articles on the Provincial Courts Bill due to be enacted on the 1st of March, which was intended to give District Offices Judicial power like in the North. A mass protest was held at Glover Hall to raise the alarm over the enactment of the bill, seen as an attempt to trample on the judicial privileges of Lagosian.¹⁸

In June 1914, the *Times of Nigeria* came up with a headline, “The Hidden Meaning” that the unification was a sale out of the South. It described the amalgamation as the conquest and subjugation of Southern Nigeria. It went further to state that it was intended to supplant the Northern system with the South. By August, when the First World War broke out, the amalgamation issue was off the pages of the Nigerian press. As a result, Lugard used the opportunity to revise his decisions on establishing Provincial court, Supreme Court, and Criminal procedure bills through the legislative Council in September, which was a recipe to some of the criticism on the amalgamation as appeared on the press. The *Nigerian Chronicle* described his action as *fait-accomplie* under the headline “The administration of Justice in Nigeria.”¹⁹

The *Times of Nigeria* blasted the *African Mail* for its endorsement of Lugard’s wish to relocate to Kaduna to escape the “political storm center” of Lagos and gave currency to the arguments that the object of the new railway line from Port Harcourt to Kaduna was a deliberate attempt to injure Lagos by diverting Northern export trade.²⁰ On the 1st of February 1919 when Lugard retired from his appointment, the *Lagos Weekly Record*, and the *Lagos Standard* received the news with gladness.²¹ Most of the newspapers described his tenure as a huge failure for introducing the Northern Nigerian system (indirect rule), being racist, autocratic, disdain for

¹⁴ Ibid p.20

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ Ibid p.22

¹⁷ Ibid p.61

¹⁸ Ibid p.22

¹⁹ Ibid p.23

²⁰ Ibid p.24

²¹ Ibid p.25



educated Nigerians and their press.²² On the whole, the Lagos press criticism was able to prevent the imposition of the Northern Nigerian system (indirect rule, direct taxation, criminal proceeding laws, etc.) in the Southern part of the country.

Politics of Amalgamation [1]

After the amalgamation and the retirement of Lugard from the political scene, the world was caught up with the outbreak of the first world war until 1917, when the reaction against the amalgamation scheme changed to demand for the participation of educated elites in the British administration, sequel to the introduction of Hugh Clifford (1919-25) constitution, by the Lugard successor in 1922,²³ and until late 1940s when new wave of anti-amalgamation rhetoric resurfaced for political gains by new crop of politicians that emerged with the introduction of another constitution by Governor, Arthur Richard in 1947.²⁴

The effects of the Second World War on Britain, influenced its decision to give away its colonial possession all over the world. Along this line, the introduction of the Governor Arthur Richard Constitution in 1947 was the next major administrative reform (de-amalgamation) that took place in the country. Three Regional Governments were created with their headquarters located in Kaduna for the Northern Region, Ibadan in the Western and Enugu in the Eastern Regions under a Regional Premier, with semi-autonomous powers under the Governor and later Governor-General who precedes over the entire administration of the country with a Federal elected parliament from the Regions in Lagos, the Capital.²⁵

But paradoxically, the new group of Nationalists that emerged in the 1940s in the country saw nothing wrong with the splitting of the administration of the country into three Regions, instead turned their attention and criticism on the 1914 amalgamation, which took place when they were in their teens and never witnesses to it formation.²⁶ The answers to these questions may not be farfetched; it became not only a subject of criticism of the British administration but also used as a threat for political expediency and bargaining tool for positions. While for the British, it may be part

²² Ibid p.271-277

²³ Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, Hutchinson of London in Association with Ethiope, Publishing Corporation, Benin City, p.455. Hugh Clifford constitution provided opportunities for the formation of political parties and elections into the reserved three legislative seats for Nigerians in the Nigerian Council, dominated by British Officials. The new constitution made provision for the elections of four legislative Council members; three from Lagos and one from Calabar. The rest fifteen unofficial members were nominated by the Governor to represent business interests, various Southern and Northern Provinces, represented by British Officials. In the Council there were twenty-three official members sitting on the Council by virtue of their office, three nominated by the Governor, who sit as President of the Council with a casting vote and the power of veto. The Nigerian National Democratic Party, (N.N.D. P.) was the first political party to be formed by the grandson of Bishop Crowther, an Engineer by profession who dominated Nigerian politics during his time, though the activities of the political party were Lagos based. He became popular and won the three seats allocated to Nigerians during the 1931 election. The party stand against the high payment of tap water rate and the preservation of Lagos land for Monarch, Eleko earned it popular support among Lagosian, until 1938 when the party was rivalled by young Nigerian scholars and students from the United Kingdom and the USA in the Nigerian Youth Movement, won the election against its dominance before he later co-founded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons party (N.C.N.C) with Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1947.

²⁴ Ibid p.461-462.

²⁵ Op.cit Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, p.224

²⁶ New crops of Nigerian nationalists were mostly in their teens or not born when the 1914 amalgamation took place, except for Herbert Macaulay (1864-1946) who was fifty years old when the event took place in 1914. Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996) was ten years old, Obafemi Awolowo (1909-1987) was five years old, Ahmadu Bello (1910- 1966) was four years old, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1912-1966) was two years old and Aminu Kano (1920-1983) was just six years old after the amalgamation took place.



of its divide-and-rule strategy to have full grips to administer the country. This was similar to what transpired with the formation of the three protectorates at the advent of the British administration between 1900 -1903.

Examples were abounded to strengthen these arguments. After the British conquest of Northern Nigeria, most non-Muslim States in the Northern protectorate were placed under the rulership of individuals (aliens) Muslims from or outside the neighboring Muslim Emirates who were their former enemies, not out of territorial sanctions but political expediency in an attempt to Emiraticize these States. It was not until a Federation type of Administration was introduced by Governor Donald Cameron 1931-1935 for the non-Muslim communities (collections of surrounding communities) into a single central authority making it possible to rotate power among local traditional rulers from these communities for a specific period.²⁷

Secondly, the annual examination was run for the promotion and posting of British Officials for those that speak and write the dominant local Language in each of the three Regions; Hausa and Arabic (Ajimih) in the North, Yoruba in the West, and Igbo in the East. The three dominant local Languages were adopted as second to the official English Language in the Regions,²⁸ which propelled the economic, political, social and cultural dominance of these groups over the minority groups in the same Regions. Similarly, the establishment of Regional Governments also provided bases for inter-ethnic rivalry between the majority and the minority groups within the Regions and intra-ethnic rivalry among the major ethnic groups across the Regions, sometimes unconsciously supported by their minority ethnic groups in what may be regarded as micro nationalism, regional solidarity and less patriotism to the country.

Politics of Amalgamation [2]

The first new wave of anti-amalgamation rhetoric came from Obafemi Awolowo the leader of the Action Group [AG] late Premier of Western Region and leader of the Opposition in the Federal Parliament 1960-1962 in his book, "Path to Nigeria freedom," published in 1947 where he stated that "Nigeria is not a nation, it is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English" or "Welsh" or "French." The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not."²⁹ Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, leader of the NPC and who became the first and only Prime Minister of Nigeria 19160-1966, affirmed in the Legislative Council in 1948 said that "*since 1914 the British Government have been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but Nigerian people themselves are historically different from their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves the sign of willingness to unite the amalgamation of Southern and Northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria had existed as one country only on paper It is still far from being united. Nigeria's unity is only a British intention for the country.*"³⁰

The two statements from Awolowo and Abubakar were hinged on the realities of the true definition of a nation and not an expression of their apprehension of a united country. While the latter was optimistic of achieving this goal, the former was concerned with the level of

²⁷ Dr. Isa N. Baba,

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ ISSN 1712-8056[Print] ISSN 1923-6697[Online] www.cscanada.net www.cscanada.org Canadian Social Science Vol. 12, No. 12, 2016, pp. 66-68 DOI:10.3968/9079 Copyright © Canadian Academy of Oriental and Occidental Culture the Amalgamation of Nigeria: Revisiting 1914 and the Centenary Celebrations Paul Eric

³⁰ Ibid



understanding of the true state of nationhood. It was for first time (Arthur Richard constitution of 1947) that both Southern and Northern politicians came together in the act of legislative proceedings while the South had twenty-five years of parliamentary experience since the introduction of the Clifford Constitution in 1922, the North had none, represented by British officials. Educationally, the South was seventy years ahead of the North, the first Missionary school in the South was established in 1842 while the first government school in the North was established in Kano in 1909.³¹

Governor Arthur Richards admitted these sentiments and said *“It is only the accident of British suzerainty which had made Nigeria one country. It is still far from being one country or one nation socially or even economically... socially and politically there are deep differences between the major tribal groups. They do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent different stages of culture. All of these differences were obvious to Nigerian leaders who, in spite of them, decided to fight as one for Nigeria’s independence.”*³² His assertions were rights and it was an attempt to justify British amalgamation of its administration into one country in spite of it diverse people, knowing fully well that Nigeria was not the only heterogenous and non-homogeneous country the British had created and in existentin the world.

In 1950, the tone of the criticism became focus on economic and numerical interest. *The Northern delegation at the constitutional conference threatened that “unless the Northern region was allotted 50 per cent of the seats in the central legislature it would ask for separation from the rest of Nigeria on the arrangements existing before 1914.”*³³ Just three years after in 1953, the *Western Region cashing on its Revenue allocation base threatened to secede, if it’s demandsfor the inclusion of Lagos, (Federal Capital territory) into Western Region was not met.* In his telegram to the Colonial Secretary Awolowo was quoted as saying. *“I challenge you to deny that the people of the Western region have the right of self – determination and are free to decide whether or not they remain in the proposed Nigerian Federation.”*³⁴

Intense political animosity among political parties on the unity of the country began to unfold when in April, 1953 at the Federal House of Representative, the North under the leadership of the N. P.C. Ahmad Bello kicked against a *private Bill demanding self-Government for the country in 1956 presented by Anthony Enahoro from the A.G. party led by Awolowo with an amendment “as soon as practicable”....he also said “the mistake of 1914 had come to light.”*³⁵ His defense to oppose the motion was hinged on fear of domination by the South in the event ofsudden independence for the country. After the session, Northern members from the house were booed by the Lagos crowd at the rail way station on their way back to the North. Shortly the incident, a retaliatory attacked took place against AG supporters on a campaign train at Sabon Gari Kano, leading to several death.³⁶ In addition, Northern Regional House passed eight points to demand for

³¹ Sir Ahmadu Bello, *My Life*, Cambridge, At the University, press, 1962, London, p.146-147

³² *Ibid*

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *Ibid* When the Marketing Board was Regionalized and their combined reserves of £72million were distributed on the basis of derivation, £34million went to the Western Region, £24million to the North and £15 million to the Eastern Region, which invariably speaks of the economic muscles of the Western region.

³⁵ Sir Ahmadu Bello, *My Life*, Cambridge University Press, 1962, p.118

³⁶ *Ibid*



the dissolution of the Federation and its power devolved to the Regions, linked only to a central agency of a non-political character.³⁷

The incident led to the first constitutional conference in London to douse the political tension in the country in September 1953. *At the conference, the AG and NCNC, for the first time, were in an alliance that if the NPC remained intransigent on its eight points demand for the dissolution of the Federation, the south would not hesitate to demand for the creation of southern Federation, after which a compromise was reached and both Western and Eastern Regional Governments were granted self-government in 1956.* Still, at the conference, the AG brought two issues to the fold which appeared to have threaten the unity of the country. *The first was that the city of Lagos should be considered part of Western Region, being a Yoruba city and traded with the rest of Western Region. The NPC objected to the demand that the city should not be under the control of any Region, as doing so would obstruct the free outlet for its goods for export. The NCNC held similar views having much of its Igbo citizens residing in Lagos felt that a Federation should have a true Federal Capital.*³⁸ *In January 1954, at a resumed constitutional conference held in Lagos, the AG demanded for the inclusion of secession clauses in the constitution. The two demands were rejected by the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton.*³⁹

Politics of Amalgamation and Secession [3]

Sequel to the independence of the country and the outcome of the second federal elections in 1964, in which the NPC won overwhelming votes without the need for any alliance with the NCNC like they did in the 1959, Zik had this to say, *“it was better for us and many admirers abroad that we should disintegrate in peace and not in pieces. Should the politicians failed to heed this warning, then I will venture the prediction that the experience of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be a child’s play if ever it comes to our turn to play such a tragic role.”*⁴⁰ His bitterness and call for the country to integrate in peace and not in pieces was hinged on the fact that the elections results were rigged in favor of the NPC

Just two years after his speech, came the first military coup on the 15th January 1966 that overthrew the first civilian administration after the independence of the country. It was widely alleged that the pattern of the killings and victims of the coup plotters was one-sided against only the military and politicians from both Northern and the Western regions, leaving their counterparts from

³⁷Op.cit Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, p.234 Op.cit Sir Ahmadu Bello, *My Life*, Cambridge University Press, 1962, p.114 The eight points raised by the House were as follows:- Each Region shall have both Executive and Legislative autonomy with the exception of Defense, External Affairs, Customs, and West African Research Institutions, ii there shall be no central Legislative body and no central executive or policy making body for the whole of the country, iii there shall be a central agency for the whole of the Regions responsible for Defense, External Affairs, Customs, and West African Research Institutions, iv the central agency shall be at a neutral place, preferably Lagos, v the composition of the central agency shall be defined by the Commander in Chief and be apolitical, vi the services of public utilities such as railway, port, air, electricity, mining, shall be organized on inter-regional basis and administered by public corporation, vii revenue shall be levied and collected by the Regional Government except for customs, viii each Region shall have a separate public service.

³⁸Op.cit Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, p.234-236

³⁹The Constitutional conference also considered other contentious issues to keep the polity; that derivation shall be on the principles of Revenue allocation, that all imports and export duties shall be a Federal matter, that import and export duties on motor spirits and half import excise duty on tobacco shall be given to the Regions on the basis of consumption, that half of the net proceeds of all other import duties should be distributed to the Regional Governments on the basis of 40% to the West, and 30% to the rest two Regions, that Mining taxes should be collected Federally and distributed on the basis of derivation, that income taxes should also be collected Federally and distributed on the basis of derivation.

⁴⁰Ibid



the Eastern region untouched, a situation which was further worsened by the failure to try the failed military coup plotters by the Military Head of state, Gen. AguiyIronsi who incidentally happens to be an Igbo like the coup plotters from the unaffected Eastern region. The political atmosphere was heralded by the unfortunate thirty Months civil war,⁴¹ until another threat to the stability of the country came in 1993 when an alleged free, fair and credible election ever in the history of the country was annulled and the supposed winner, Chief M. K. O. Abiola of the election was denied his mandate by the Military regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1984-1993) which led to hosting of National conference to reposed confidence on the unity of the country in 1995 by the Military regime of Gen. Sani Abacha (1994-1998).⁴²

The annulment of the election threatened the sociopolitical unity of the country that necessitated the hosting of a National Constitutional Conference (NCC) in 1994/5, it was followed by National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) in 2006 as a result of agitation for resource control and National Conference (NC) in 2014 due to resentments in the national polity between the North and the South arising from President GEJ's desire to contest the 2015 general election.⁴³ But unfortunately, the three conferences were duped to have failed, for one, all the succeeding Governments in power that organized these conferences were accused of pursuing these conferences to further their political agenda, tenure elongation in power rather than burning political issues that preoccupy the minds of average Nigerians; such as political restructuring of the country, resources control, marginalization and secession issues.

After the 2015 elections, the movement for the actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB) and Indigenous People of Biafra (Ipub), an Igbo ethnic group, established to actualize the secession of the Igbos from the country surfaced under President Muhammed Buhari's civilian administration.⁴⁴ But such rhetoric's can be termed as political naivety, laziness and lack of acumen to manage to be in the opposition. In buttressing these arguments, during the First Republic, in addition to cabinet ranks, most political appointments were made up of persons of both the NPC (North) and NCNC (South East) in a political alliance between the two political parties. While the AG (South West) was in the opposition with no political appointments, and there was no agitation for marginalization among its politicians and citizens from the region or even contemplating to secede from the country.⁴⁵

Even prior to this period, during the second Republic the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) that controlled the center was dominated by politicians from the North in alliance with politicians from the National People's Party (NPP) from the South East, leaving politicians from the South West in the Unity Party of Nigeria in the opposition. There was acrimony in the polity and

⁴¹Op.cit Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*

⁴²The annulment of the election by the Military led to wide spread discontent and threaten the unity of the country, the division between the North and South. Report of the Constitutional Conference Report Vol. 1 & 11

⁴³ Interestingly, all the three National conferences were a remix of the 1994/5 National conferences with just little variations on such issues like new states creations, Public Finance/Revenue Allocation, Forms of Governments, Legislature, Local Government, Immunity Clause, Independent candidate, Governance, Anti-Corruption, Land Tenure, National Anthem, Religion.

⁴⁴The secessionist agitation is reminiscent of the declared state of Biafra by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu in 1967, which resulted in a bloody civil war until 1970 when the Biafran surrendered. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is led by Nnamdi Kanu with dual citizenship and based in London. The leader of the movement has been arrested and charged to court for inciting his followers to engage in violence destruction of Federal Government properties in the Southeast region and killings of military and police personnel and sometimes civilians and traders from the Northern region residing in the Southeast region.

⁴⁵Garba Ashiwaju and Olusegun Areola eds, *NIGERIA: The First 25 years*, Ibadan University Press, 1995 p.133



discontentment for marginalization and secession that came from the Southwest region. It was also the same during the aborted fourth Republic when the South East allied with the North in the National Republican Congress (NRC) against the acclaimed winner of the 1993 general elections from the South West region in the Social Democratic Party (SDP), M. K. O. Abiola and heavens never failed.

In the fifth Republic, during the 1999 elections, the Alliance for Democracy and All Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) (predominantly drawn from the Northwest) went into an alliance against the People's Democratic Party (PDP) with its party members drawn from the elite class across the regions, defeated the AD and Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP emerged as the nation's president in 1999. Some analysts viewed his emergence as compensation to Southwest due to the annulment of the 1993 election results by the acclaimed winner, M. K. O. Abiola from the same South West region as Obasanjo. Meanwhile, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), whose membership was dominated by politicians from the Southeast were more concerned with winning the South Eastern states, and were lucky to part away with only one state, Anambra state due to the influence of Ojukwu, its founder.⁴⁶

Similarly, fairness to President Mohammed Buhari (PMB), upon his entering into politics and to run for the presidency, under the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), he tried to build on the traditional political alliance between the North and the Southeast politicians. In his first two outings to contest for the presidency in 2003 and 2007, PMB forged an alliance with notable individuals from the Southeast as his vice-presidential candidates; in 2003 with late Dr. Chuba Okadigbo and former Senate president (1999-2003) under the ANPP and in 2007 with late Hon. Ume-Ezeoke and former Speaker of the House of Representative in the Second Republic (1979-1982) under the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), which would have ordinarily placed the Southeast in a better bargaining position but the political class from the region failed to see any vision in the project more so that they were already engrossed with APGA.⁴⁷

During the 2011 presidential elections, having being blackmailed as an Islamic fanatic fundamentalist and supporter of Shariah law, PMB shifted alliance to the Southwest for a Christian nominee as his vice-presidential candidate in person of Pastor Tunde Bakare, though lost the election to present Umar Musa Yar'adua due he partially redeemed his image. In his fourth attempt on the same premise, he had a different candidate as his vice in the person of professor of law and Pastor of Redeem Christian Church, Professor Yemi Osibanjo, the incumbent vice president, which did the magic during the 2015 elections and PMB emerged as the president. The same scenario was replicated during the 2019 election and PMB emerged victorious. In all these elections, political offices and patronage were mostly occupied by politicians from the North and Southwest. The Southeast lost out from the largess for their continuous support for the opposition parties, mostly the PDP and the APGA. Thus, the cry that the Southeast and Igbos have been marginalized and felt seceding from the country was the only option left for them.⁴⁸

Conclusion

All of these had been the crux of the matter over the years in this country. At every given instance when selfish personal interest is threatened, individuals implore sentiments and make frivolous claims of marginalization, resource control, restructuring, federal character and ends up

⁴⁶Ibid Observations and Analysis of political trends in the country.

⁴⁷Ibid

⁴⁸Ibid



with demand for session by one region or the other. If one may ask, is democracy and popular political participation based on rotation of leadership or elections. Is there a constitutional provision that states that political power in this country must rotate between the three major ethnic groups only or between the geographical North and South divide. Similarly, the rhetoric about the 1914 British amalgamation of its administrative political units were just a ruse and diversionary. The Northern and Southern protectorates before they were amalgamated was the creation of the British (without consultation) and the peoples in each of the protectorates were not monolithic, so what was the grave sins in amalgamating the two into a country. Worse still, if it was the wish to revert the country to its preconquest and precolonial days under its empires and kingdoms rules, it would have amount to an aberration, since they were the product of coercion by individuals that created them.