

The British's Contact with Nigeria's Peoples, Amalgamation and the Question of Minority Agitation, 1914-1999

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Abstract

The British's contact with the people of Nigeria and the amalgamation of its diverse peoples in 1914 were epochal in Nigeria's political history. The phenomena brought Nigeria's people to political limelight as well as laid the genesis of a sphere, recognizable as a polity in the global space. Despite these significant episodes, scholars perceived them differently. While some perceived them as vehicles that galvanized diverse and segmented groups into a virile political entity, others saw them as catalysts for persistent socio-political and economic convulsions in the consolidation of diverse independent political entities. They argued that the contact and agglomeration of diverse independent political groups by the British laid the genesis of troubles for Nigeria as a country. This article used historical methodology to bring to fore the altruistic position of the contextual arguments. It is the central argument of this study that the contact of the British and amalgamation of Nigeria brought into historical limelight the ethnic consciousness of diverse groups in the evolving state, which in turn sparked minority agitation. The advertent or inadvertent subversion of historical content of the peculiarity of Nigeria's ethnic groups during the process instigated fear in the consciousness of diverse groups to engender minority agitation, which has continued to constitute a clog in the wheel of socio-political and economic progress of Nigeria as a nation.

Keywords: Nigeria, British Administration, Minority, Amalgamation and Agitation

Introduction

The anthropologists have shown that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation and the most populous Black Country in the world, comprising of over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic nationalities (Nnoli, 1995:27-30; Suberu, 2001:16-19). Each of these groups was independent of one another before the British's contacts and colonialism. In addition, they had peculiar pattern of socio-political and economic administrations long before the British established its hegemony over the vast territory. Each group valued its peculiar historical background, culture, religion, kingship institutions or Emirate and had unique pattern of adjudication for maintaining laws and orders. However, the British administration used the amalgamation of 1914 to force a unity among the diverse independent groups in a structural composition, named Nigeria. Even though, the various groups were brought together as one sovereign or indivisible entity, it is evidently apparent that each of the component units in the composite structure was conscious of its identity. This development eventually gave birth to the stratification of the nation into major (mega) and minority groups. The stratification was born out of the perception of some peoples who classified the existing ethnic groups in the composite structure by size or population. The three most populous groups, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, which dominated different parts of the geographical regions of the nation, namely, the north, west and east respectively, were referred to as major ethnic groups. Other independent ethnic sub-units with lesser population were referred to as minorities. These latter groups were what Horton (1975:72-113) referred to as stateless societies. However, Obayemi, (1980:144-164) has criticized the usage of the term, "stateless societies" as rather derogating the status of the groups. He however referred to them as mini states while the major ethnic groups were referred to as mega states in his analysis.

This study focuses attention on the 1914 amalgamation and the emergence of minority agitation in the historical development of Nigeria. The central argument of this article is located within the framework of two schools of thought. The first school believed that the amalgamation of Nigeria was a miscalculated arrangement of the British government, which in her imagination could be used as a platform to bring together segmented groups in order to facilitate its rapid development. Instead of the projected idea, it rather brought diversity, mistrust and distrust among the various groups. The contraption of the groups is what Paul (2011: 67-74) sociologically referred to in his analysis as marriage of inconvenience, which has resulted in grave consequences in Nigeria's polity. The orgy consequence had manifested in diverse ethnic violence, insurrections and militias, which have ravaged the country, making peaceful co-existence of diverse groups almost a mirage (Osaghae, 2001: 2-7). The second school of thought on the other hand, believed that the amalgamation was a major factor in the transformation of Nigeria from segmentary states to a virile nation, recognizable as an entity among the comity of nations globally. This article subjects these two schools of thought into critical engagement with the aim of situating it relatively in proper perspective the amalgamation and its implications on the organic structure of Nigeria especially minority agitation, which has been a major problem in the trajectory of Nigeria as a nation.

Nigeria: The Land and People

Geographically, Nigeria lies between latitude 4⁰ N and 14⁰N. The region is located between the great *Sahara* in the north and the Gulf of Guinea, an arm of the Atlantic Ocean (Udo, 1980: 1). Nigeria is bordered to the north by Niger Republic, to the south by the Atlantic, west by Benin Republic and to the east by Cameroon Republic. The country covers an area of 356, 669 square miles. It is located within two ecological system of savannah to the north and mangrove forest to the south. The coastline stretches for over 500 miles from Badagry in the west to Calabar in the east and it includes the Bight of Benin and Biafra. Apart from this coastline and famous Niger Delta, the Nigeria landmass consists essentially of low plateau of about 600 meters (2000 feet) above sea level. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society and populated by peoples of different origins. The population figure of the country was put at 195 million (One Hundred and Ninety-Five Million) approximately as at 2017 by United Nations estimates (World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision). The peopling of Nigeria followed the usual process of migration, settlement/state formation and consolidation. This process had resulted in demographic configuration of Nigeria in contemporary times such that these large numbers of ethnic groups ranging in size from a few thousands to many millions speaking between them several hundred of languages. Though their socio-cultural organizations and languages prove very outstanding, they were grouped into a number of linguistic groups, which give a fairly good indication of their broad ethno-cultural affiliations (Armstrong, 1964:8). In most of the extant Nigerian societies, migration followed a similar pattern namely, a group of wandering people moved in search of favorable environment for human habitation. The physical environment to which a particular group was pushed in the course of migrations went a long way to determine such group's extant economic system (Ajayi&Alagoa, 1980: 224-235). For example, the Ijaw people are famous group in the low-lying region of swamps and numberless waterways and creeks. Their traditional economy revolves around fishing and salt making. Until recently, transportation in this area was mainly by the use of canoes, while migrations followed navigable waterways, which were not silted up. Outside the Niger Delta, there is no noticeable barrier to easy movement of people, except in the rugged fringes of hills along the Nigerian-Cameroon borders. Here, Pre-colonial migrations were greatly encumbered such that for instance, the Oron and Ekoi peoples of the Cross River basin might have entered Nigeria through the sea. In the far north, where the topography was largely favored by an open savannah grassland and semi desert, movement of people were facilitated by the use of beast of burden, which were mostly imported into the region from the Middle East and North Africa as far back as the seventh century.

The Linguistic feature of Nigerian societies can be deciphered in the classification done by Greenberg, (1955:108-119). He identified most of Nigerian languages as belonging to the Niger-Congo group of language family. The Yoruba, Edo, Nupe and Ibo languages are classified as belonging to the Kwa sub-family; Efik and Ibibio as well as the Tiv, speak what belongs to the Benue-Congo group; the small ethnic groups in the Benue and Adamawa provinces speak the language of Adamawa-Eastern family, the Fulani speaks the Niger-Congo family of languages; the Hausa speaks language close to the Hamitic language of the Caucasoid stock; the Kanuri speaks the Nilo-Saharan languages. It should be noted that similarities in languages among some Nigerian groups resulted chiefly from inter-group contact rather than common descent.

The displacement that characterized the pre-colonial waves of migration among Nigerians brought desert people into grassland environment, and grassland people into the forest region. For example, the Yoruba who were originally grassland people, living in mud houses with grass roofs, had to adapt themselves to a forest environment by cultivating root crops in the forest areas, and by building mud houses with mat roofs. Examples of adaptation to new environments are found among the Ijaw, other fishing tribes of the Cross River estuary, the hill peoples of the Jos Plateau and north Adamawa Highland. These peoples were not primarily indigenous to their present ecological zones, but they migrated and settled by factors of the favorable climate and geographical suitability for their adaptability. However, beyond the impact of the environment, humanity becomes the main agent of change (Akinyemi, et al, 1989:1-17). In other words, the activities of humanity across the Nigeria landscape were a major force that determined the nature and character of Nigeria's pre-colonial history. As a result of the dominant impact of rainfall on the geographical character of the tropics, the Nigerian vegetation can be seen in zones that are typical of the climate belts. Thus, we have the dried north with its shorter growing seasons, which is characterized by the dense forest vegetation. Consequently, only in few seasons can we have natural vegetation. Rather, the vegetation of Nigeria has been greatly modified overtime due to the long period of human occupation and exploitative and intensive use of land.

Across Nigeria, archaeological accounts abound to suggest that humanity had settled in some parts of the country since the Paleolithic or Stone Age (500, 000 BC). The north is populated by the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Bura etc. In the western region, there are Yoruba, Oyo Yoruba, Akoko Yoruba, Okun-Yoruba, Edo Yoruba etc. In the eastern Nigeria, there are Igbo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Abua, Odual, Ogbia, Engenni, Ogini, Ndoki, Delta-Igbo, Bini, Birom, Angass and Efik etc. Many of these groups constituted the Niger/Delta. In the Middle-belt, Obayemi, (1980: 142-164) mentioned, Nupe, Ebe, Kyede, Gbedegi, Igala, Kakanda, Bassa-Nge, Dibo, Okun-Yoruba, Egbirra, Tiv, Jukun, Idoma, Igede, etc as among the major ethnic groups that clustered around there.

Each of these ethnic groups occupies a distinct track of territory, and most of the smaller groups had very little contact with other groups before the nineteenth century. Yet, there was flow of commercial and cultural contacts between the major and minority ethnic nationalities (Obaro, 1980:264-67). For example, there were evidence of inter-group relations involving the Hausa, Fulani, Nupe and northern Yoruba in the savannah. The forest belt was also marked by the existence of a long-standing historical link between the people of Benin and Ile Ife and Lagos. This link predated the nineteenth century. The Niger Delta with its swampy terrain, and fishing and salt making as major economic activities, engaged in considerable inter-group trade with the forest people, for food stuff in exchange of fish and salt (Lloyd, 1963: 39-41). Many people among the minority groups in Niger Delta rose to prominence as a result of their roles as middlemen in the trade network with the hinterland peoples around the region. Many of the minority groups lived in segmentary lineage system. They were organized from top to bottom in terms of single, embracing genealogical scheme.

The Yoruba and Edo (in the west), and the Igbo, Ekoi and Ibibio, Ijaw, Itsekiri, among others (in the east) are the largest known peoples of the forest belt. Despite their marked differences in their socio-political and cultural organizations of the western and eastern peoples of the forest belt, there were evidences of smooth inter-group relations. The farmers had established vast kingdoms with sophisticated system even though they lived in dispersed societies.

Conceptual Clarifications

There is the need to clarify certain terms that are used in this study, which are amalgamation and minority. By the term amalgamation, we mean the merging together of diverse independent groups, which had different socio-political and economic structures, history and jurisprudence under the same umbrella body for the purpose of administration. Minority means, the ethnic groups that are not in the popular or mega in the organic structure either by virtue of their population or historical factors. According to (Fischer, 1980), minority develops only when two different groups come in contact. They are complicated by the almost universal dislike of strangers, together with the growth of larger societies composed of several groups. The minority status and question is usually manifested in the context of the state i.e. within the same body politics. Thus, it is this proximity of contact and sharing within a commonwealth of larger socio-political setting that sharpens the perceived differences, and causes them to become issues that trigger differential responses both in individual and collective settings (Osaghae, 2001:8). The differences may be traced to prehistoric times and may manifest in biological and cultural characteristics. Suberu (1999) has lent more credence to minority issues in Nigeria, when he argued that the term minority is beset by a lot of conceptual and ideological confusion. Most writers are of the view that minority or minority groups are culturally distinctive and relatively cohesive groups which occupy position of numerical inferiority.

The minority groups often experience systematic discrimination, marginalization, exploitation and subjugation in their country. In reaction to their ill-treatments, the groups often engage in violent opposition. In Nigeria, this ethnic minority ferment has engendered violence and conflicts resulting in thousands of fatalities in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta region in southern Nigeria and in Middle Belt region in northern Nigeria.

The fairly natural and common feeling among social groups that their own characteristics are better endowed than those of their neighbors tends not only to reinforce their sense of identity but also to instigate perceptions of superiority often times accompanied by pride and occasioning discriminating tendencies, hate and unhealthy competition (Bala, 2000:1-5). The feelings in most cases that one's physical characteristics, religion, culture or customs are more matured and better have been traced even to pre-modern African people and groups. Unfortunately, what could have been a primordial ideology still finds its existence and persistence in the modern age. This explains why this has posed serious challenges to the harmony of the multi-ethnic or diversified groups in many societies like Nigeria. For the purpose of clarity, it is good this subject is examined under, the Pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods of Nigeria.

British Administrative Policies in this context referred to the establishment of British administration and all the various strategies and policies formulated in running the affairs of the country.

Features of Minority Groups in Nigeria

The minority groups have certain features with which they can easily be identified. Apart from the population, authority is not concentrated as it is among the mega groups like Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. In this case, it is difficult to point at individual or group of individuals as de facto leaders. What is found instead is that authority and power are vested in the council of elders or chiefs. Obayemi (1980: 151-55) has argued that even though it appears there was no democratic process in the socio-political system in the pattern of Oyo and Benin does not make their system inferior or weak structure. Their political institutions met regularly to discuss issues relating to the general well-being of their communities. They also maintained laws and order and peaceful co-existence with the various groups under their domains. Disputes are settled at family level. However, difficult matters that could not be handled at the family are referred to the Council of Chiefs or elders to deliberate and reach a decision. Any conclusion reached on any matter is binding on the people. Secondly, no individual possessed the power for a fixed period or permanently. The council was vested with such power. The death of a council member does not have an overwhelming effect on the institution. Each of the council members is saddled with the responsibility of being the leader or head in the area he lives or resides. In this case, he oversees the affairs of the area.

Disputes are brought to him for settlements. However, difficult matters like man-slaughter are referred to the council for deliberation and settlement. Thirdly, the idea of an individual occupying the position of authority on a fulltime basis does not arise. This also explains why there was no leadership tussle among the minority groups like in the centralized political system.

Minority Question during the Pre-colonial Period

The pre-colonial period of Nigeria connotes the time that stretches from the earliest times to the period when Europeans came in contact with Nigerians culminating in the establishment of their sphere of influence by colonialism. It must be noted that Nigerians have been living together although independently before the European presence (Crowder, 1996:8). Not only that, each of the groups appeared to have developed sophisticated internal structures by which laws and orders were maintained. Indeed, most of the groups later referred to as minorities had virile political mechanisms by which political administration of their societies were run. Although they do not have complex political structure in the pattern of the major ethnic groups like the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. However, this does not imply that they lacked structural mechanism for coherent political administration. In most cases, majority of these groups lived together in sanguineous communities (Olomola, 2008:1-6). In other words, they lived in small but related groups most especially on the basis of family or clans. Related families who lived within close proximity formed larger communities. And for the purposes of coherent political administration, the earliest inhabitant of the area or the oldest person to arrive to the site of the community was acknowledged as the leader. He was not despotic in his approach but rather flexible as respected members of the community were selected or appointed to form Administrative Council. Among some ethnic groups, only those who have been initiated into a particular cult were members of Village or Town Council. There were instances where selection to the council was based on age. The council deliberated on matters relating to the progress and development of the various communities. They had the right and duties to advise the community on the general issues relating to religious, political, social and economic matters.

The relative rarity of the segmentary lineage among the minority groups is in fact not hard to understand in relation to inter-group relations. Close lineal kin are close neighbors and close social partner (Ikime, 2006: 12-19). More distant lineal kin are more distant neighbors and more distant social partners. The population of this form of organization was largely increased by birth. Secondly, the communities were expanded by means of expansion of farm lands. Farm lands were distributed fairly around the domains of this population. The land supply was such that each segment of the population could push sideways and outwards as the community expanded in numbers, whilst remaining in the same position relative to other segment; for only thus, can the correspondence between genealogical, spatial and social relationships be preserved through the process of population growth. The settlements were sometimes dispersed with fairly even density; myriads of scattered homesteads rather than a few large, compact villages.

Adjudication was an area where in the pre-colonial period of Nigeria people were taken with all seriousness. The agent of law as in the case of the Oba, Habe, Bale, Ozo and Ofo were positions with prestige and respect (Adewoye, 1968:64-73). The holders of these positions settled disputes in the families, quarters with various degrees within their domains. As such, they were expected to maintain a high degree of integrity. Individuals with questionable characters were often not appointed or selected to occupy such positions among many ethnic groups in Nigeria. Their primary duties among others were to ensure the security of the various communities. They prevented the infiltration of the external aggressors. The activities of the age-grade were much pronounced among people like Isoko, Iyede, Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw people of the coastal region along the Niger-Delta. Age-grade activities were also seen in the traditional political systems of Bura, Eggan, Jukun people in the Middle Belt and Northern parts of Nigeria. In their various communities, they performed the duty of military and police. Apart from the roles of military and police, the age-grade also ensured good sanitary condition of their communities. This shows that the people of Nigeria knew and kept the laws of environmental hygiene in their various communities. In this case, they maintained regular clearing of the market squares especially during the rainy season where buying and selling were taking place. Besides, the rivers and streams where various communities were fetching water for domestic purposes were kept clean, perhaps, to avoid contamination of the water. The clearing were done in the spirit of communalism. The age-grades fixed a day in which such communal works were done. There was no gap between the leadership and the age-grade. Decisions were communicated to the leadership who also duly inform council members in order to carry the youths in their wards or domains along. They passed down the information and everybody kept to the date and time.

The Middle Belt for example, the main feature of the political organization is the existence of a large number of small ethnic groups including the hill-inhabiting people of Jos Plateau and eastern highlands of Adamawa. The Tiv of the Benue Valley in the east and Nupe of the middle Niger Valley of the west are the two largest and most prominent peoples of the Middle Belt grassland. The Tiv, who are probably the most extreme of the non-centralized societies in Nigeria, had a highly fragmented political structure, with the compound constituting the highest unit of authority. This arrangement was more of domestic rather than political unit. However, in spite of this lack of political organization, the Tiv did not totally lack political leadership. Among them, men of great influence and impeccable personal qualities were readily recognized as leaders.

Unlike the Tiv, the Nupe had a rather integrated political structure like the Yoruba. They lived in large nucleated villages, most of which had daughter settlements, which consisted of small farm hamlets called *tunga*. Usually, this *tunga* was closely knitted with the mother village and had no considerable measure of autonomy. The Jukun from the beginning lived not under a centralized authority but in small communities, each independent of one another (Abubabar, 1980:171-173). There was no doubt that the Jukun were the most powerful group in the Middle Benue region.

Their influence had, at one time, extended westward to the Bauchi Plateau and eastward to the Mambila. The Jukun people lived in autonomous chieftaincies whose rulers, though independent politically, recognized the *Aku* of Wukari as the supreme spiritual authority. He was also the fountain and highest example of divine kingship. The local Jukun chiefs were selected by their representative communities, but the *Aku* had to perform the installation of all new chiefs. On such occasions, he used to confer gifts and pass ritual objects to the appointees. The Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri were the most prominent groups in the more open grassland of northern Nigeria. The Hausa people had evolved a form of city-state socio-political structure under Sarki. This position was the highest and most respected generally among the people before the outbreak of the Uthman Dan fodiyo Jihad, 1804-1809, which forcefully integrated the whole of Hausaland under one political umbrella of the Sultanate (Adeleye, 1977: 29-36). Even with the introduction in the 14th century, Islam remained largely unpopular among the people until the 19th century under the sweeping influence of the afore-mentioned Jihad. The local economy in Hausaland had always featured intensive cultivation of millet, beans, maize, guinea corn etc.

It must be noted that the question of minority was not an issue until after the Uthman Dan Fodiyo Jihad. The Jihad disrupted the existing order in the old north. For instance, most of the Habe rulers who were independent one of another in their various areas of jurisdictions were not only displaced but were brought under the hegemony of the Sokoto Caliphate, making it having an extensive area of administration. The misconception many people held about the north is, the region was populated only by Hausa and perhaps Fulani ethnic nationalities. There are other ethnic groups in the north other than Hausa and Fulani. Some of these groups include Bura, Mumuye, Jukun, and Kanuri among several others. All of these groups were corralled together under the Sokoto Caliphate without minding their political and religious affiliations. Many of these groups did not appreciate their subjection in the caliphate. Many of them saw their inclusion in the new political arrangement as abnormal. Hausa became the official language for political, educational and economic activities in the whole north. Apart from this, many of these ethnic groups, which were formerly independent, became rather subservient to the Hausa-Fulani group. It is this scenario that marked the beginning of minority question in Northern Nigeria. They had to pay tributes and taxes to the designated headquarters either in Sokoto or Gwandu. Many of these groups protested against this arrangement but their agitation was suppressed.

The Colonial Period

The colonial period in Nigeria connotes the time the British Government established its rule on Nigeria. All resistances of the various groups against foreign domination in Nigeria collapsed during the British bombardments, which started in Lagos in 1851. This was followed by the British claims of the area during the scramble and partition of Africa in 1884/1885 in Berlin. The outcomes of these two important events were the establishment of British administration on Nigeria in 1900. Nigeria was divided into two - Southern and Northern protectorates.

All the various ethnic groups that were geographically housed within the two administrative blocs were subjected to the whims and caprices of the dictates of each administration. This pattern of political administrations was in practice up till January, 1914 when both the northern and southern protectorates were amalgamated by Frederic Lord Lugard (Egwemi, 2012: 123-132). The implication of this political development needs to be emphasized at this point of Nigerian political development. It implies that the two separate administrative blocs, which were administered independently under different political structures, were brought together under singular political entity. This structure was in practice up to 1946. The Nigerian educated elite were not at home with the organic structure of the British government. They were disillusioned because they were not integrated in the structure of governance. The representatives of the people were the Emir, Oba and Obi who at that level of Nigerian development were not educated.

The Nigerian educated elite formed themselves into strong association and were vigorously petitioning the indirect rule of the British government through letter writings, formation of political parties and by sending delegates to Secretary of State in London expressing their grievances against the political structure. It appears initially these efforts of the Nigerian educated elite would not achieve any tangible success, but it became obvious that the efforts registered or communicated the desires of Nigerians to the British government. The educated elite generally were not accorded any significant responsibility by the British Colonial Government. Rather, they were sidelined while the Chiefs, Emirs and Obis were empowered as the representatives of the people under the Indirect Rule System. The youths were disillusioned by this pattern of divide and rule policy of the British administration. It must be emphasized that the youths, who were mostly the educated elite during the period, were aggressive in seeking their involvement in the running of the day today administration of their fatherland. They were not at home with the political and economic exclusion that seemed to have characterized the British political administration. They expressed their opinions through the available newspapers, political parties and letters to the Secretary of State among others.

We can thus argue that the various ethnic groups up to 1930s still retained their independent identities under the indirect rule system. Although each of the rulers or leaders of the various ethnic groups had lost the power and authority they wielded during the pre-colonial arrangement even though they still retained their titles, the power during this time resided with the colonizers or their representatives. In other words, the rulers or leaders were mere appendages of the enormous powers wielded by the colonial masters. In the north, for example, it was only the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group that was mostly represented in the Legislative Council. Other ethnic groups were not fully represented. Although this structure at this point was not the making of the British Government. It was partly the effects of the Uthman Dan Fodiyo jihad of 1804, which was tactically organized to remove other ethnic groups from power.

During the jihad, the Fulani ethnic group conquered all the other ethnic groups and integrated them under the Emirate system, which was the major outcome of the jihad in the north. Power then resided in the two administrative headquarters i.e. Sokoto and Gwandu. All other ethnic groups in the north was administered or controlled by either of the blocs. They paid homage and tributes to the Emirs, who in return remitted them to the District Officer (DO).

This arrangement in the north led to rebuff of the leaders of other ethnic groups who had lost their authorities and powers to the British Colonial Administrators. It also made other traditional rulers appendages of Hausa Fulani rulers. It was this development that marked the beginning of minority agitation in Nigeria especially in the north. We can argue that the reaction was much earlier in northern Nigeria because Indirect Rule System was introduced much earlier there. Hugh Clifford noted the north was made up of several nations as far back as 1920s. This must have prompted him to remark as quoted below:

I am entirely convinced of the right, for example, of people of Egbaland... of any of the great Emirates of the north... to maintain that each of them is, in a very sense, a nation... it is the task of the government of Nigeria to build and fortify these national institutions (Coleman, 1956: 194).

The above statement shows that the British administrators in charge of the north acknowledged the fact that the whole north and by extension, Nigeria was made up of different nations, which they believed they must manage carefully.

In the western Nigeria, there was not much agitation because they were used to centralized system of administration before the introduction of Indirect Rule System. In the East, the system met with abysmal failure. The Igbo and other ethnic groups that populated the area rejected the system because it was strange to them. The division of Nigeria by the Richard Constitution of 1946 into three regions i.e. The North, West and East facilitated ethnic consciousness of the various groups. The division was done along the major ethnic lines – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Indeed, the structure heightened tension especially in the east where the minority groups were many. In the North also, the non-Hausa and Fulani groups were in accordance with the development (Egwemi, 2012: 78-102). This is more noticeable around the middle-Belt area of Ilorin and Kabba, which were delimited as part of the north even though the people were Yoruba by origin and culture. Not only that, political parties were formed on regional line. For example, the Northern People Congress (NPC) was dominant in the North, the Action Group (AG) was in control in the West and National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was in control in the East. This development created fear of domination in the minds of the minority groups by the mega groups in the various regions. It was this that triggered the minority agitation in Nigeria. This was sharp in the eastern Nigeria, where many ethnic groups were predominant. There were over about twenty-eight minority groups in Eastern Nigeria alone (NAI, PR/A5A).

Three important movements emerged to champion the interests of the minority groups across Nigeria. They were Calaba-Ogoja River State Movement in the Eastern Region, the Benin-Delta State Movement, which was later changed to Mid-West in the Western Region and the Middle-Belt Movement affecting the Northern Region. The minority agitation created such a serious problem that it could not be ignored in the constitutional conference during this period. By 1954, minority agitation had engulfed every part of Nigeria. It was this minority question that necessitated the British administration to set up Henry Willink Commission to investigate the minority agitations and recommend ways to alleviate them in 1957. The Commission toured the whole of Nigeria between 1957 and 1958, receiving memoranda and also taking oral evidences from all interest groups. Based on the various memoranda and interviews conducted by the commission, it confirmed that there was basis for fear among the minority groups.

The Commission recommended as follows:

- i. The establishment of one strong police force which will not be subject to purely regional control.
- ii. The creation of special areas where special problems existed. In such areas, financial and other responsibilities would be shared equally by both the Regional and the Federal Governments. Boards were also to be set up for such areas to initiate supplementary development schemes. It declared that the Niger-Delta Area should be declared a special area.
- iii. It advocated the setting up of a Council in each of the Minority Areas which would be charged with the responsibility of bringing to the notice of the Regional Government matters relating to physical and cultural advancement, economic and social development and reporting any cases of discrimination. Two areas were designed Minority Areas – parts of Benin Province in Western Region and the whole of Calabar Province in the East.
- iv. Annual Reports for both the Special and Minority Areas were to be submitted to the Federal House of Representatives and the appropriate Regional Houses.
- v. It recommended that specific fundamental human rights be embodied in the Constitution. These included right to life and liberty, right to freedom of movement and peaceful assembly, and right to protection against retrospective legislation.

- vi. It recommended that there should be no change in the existing boundary between the North and Western Regions. Any change should be the result of plebiscite and this should only be held if it was agreed by all at the forthcoming conference. It further recommended that 60% of the votes cast should decide the issue of transfer of any area.
- vii. It recommended that non-Muslims in the North who were not willing to be tried under Muslim laws should have the option of being tried in a non-Muslim Court of Justice.

After the report of Minorities Commission had been published, a new conference was summoned in 1958 to examine its recommendations and the reports of the other Commissions. It must be noted that the Minority Commission constituted major controversies. The NPC and NCNC accepted the recommendation but the AG completely rejected it. The issue of minority became rather politicized during the 1959 general elections. The NPC, NCNC and AG were in the frontline in the politicization of the matter. As the election towards the independence was approaching, each of these major political parties with stronghold in their various regions of control needed supports of the minority groups in the Middle-Belt. It was these that necessitated the political romance with the minority political association, which resulted to political alliances (Nnoli, 2004:59-86). Major political parties threw their political ideologies and plans to the minority groups. However, the most successful among them all was the Action Group (AG) and United Middle-Belt Congress (UMBC) alliance. The politicization of this matter became a serious squabble in Nigeria political history. However, what appeared gave it a slight relieve was the threat the Secretary of State for the Colonies gave. He asserted that if the issue was allowed to linger unnecessarily, it will jeopardize the chances of Nigeria attaining independence in 1960. And since the AG believed that the question of Nigeria's independence was very important and that might even made Nigerians to see the party as unpatriotic, it agreed to the Colonial Secretary's solution. It is an unfortunate that the issue was unresolved before the Nigerian independence.

Post-Independence and Minority Agitation Groups

The dream of Nigerians and most especially the nationalists was achieved when the nation attained independence in 1960. With this development, it was largely imagined that most of the outstanding challenges such as the minority agitation confronting Nigeria would naturally come to an end since Nigerians were now in charge of affairs. However, the unresolved minority agitation which had troubled pre-colonial Nigeria's political system re-emerged despite the institutionalization of Willink Commission of 1957. The establishment of the three regions on the basis of the major ethnic groups increased the agitations of the minority groups.

The effects of this polarization came to bear during the First Republic, 1960-1966. Politicians put their regions first and foremost before the commonwealth of Nigeria. There were intrigues and counter-intrigues among the various political parties and regions. The political quagmire occasioned partly by minority agitation and ethnicity resulted to the collapse of the First Republic when the Military took over power in 1966. The coming on board of the military government could not resolve the minority agitation in Nigeria. They claimed to be umpire for redemption but the unresolved minority and ethnic problem also find its expressway into the military. The counter coup of July, 1966 was partly occasioned by the minority and ethnicity problem. The same problem also led to the outbreak of Nigerian Civil War in 1967 (Oyeweso, 1986: 34-49).

Conflicts between the major and minority groups even after independence continued as it were. This was because the roots laid in the context of the old regions where the minorities struggled to overcome domination, discrimination and assimilation by the major groups. In order to allay this minority challenge was partly the reason the military government created the earliest twelve (12) states in Nigeria in 1967 (Odey, 2012:2000). A versed to political domination and socio-economic discrimination under the unholy trinity of regional system of government, the minority ethnic groups embarked on vigorous campaign for the creation of states in which their minority status would be substantially ameliorated or completely eliminated (Abimbola, 2007:72-81). More states have been created after the initial efforts to take care of the minority question that has been on for a long time. The government also recognized the traditional political institutions of various groups and attached them with the Local Government Administration. Despite the large number of states so far created by the successive military government, the minority problems still persist in Nigeria. Although, the regions have long given way to states and minorities have won a large part of the battle to be autonomous in the states, their relations with the major groups, especially their former “oppressors” in the regions have continued along the lines of dissenting politics. This is especially true of the north where various minorities still confront the threat of Hausa/Fulani domination by way of religion, Hausa/Fulani settlers, the imposition of village and district heads by the powerful Emirs and the attempts to reconstruct northern political unity based on Hausa/Fulani hegemony.

Violent ethno-religious conflicts, demands for autonomous chiefdom and local government councils and new forms of Middle-Belt nationalism, which reject Hausa/Fulani hegemony, are some of the ways in which the minorities have responded to these problems. In the old Western and Eastern regions, attempts to forge new political identities around the old regional blocs have resurrected various forms of dissenting politics (Ayoade, 1972: 123-29). In the East, the deprivations and brutality suffered in the hands of the Igbo during the civil war continue to adversely affect minority relations with them. Attempts to create more states have resulted to another problem of minority-minority conflicts. This occurred within minority states. The dominance of these states by one or more of the new majorities that have emerged with the creation of more states such as the Bini in Edo, Tiv in Benue, Igala in Kogi, Efik in Cross River, and Ijaw in Bayelsa and Rivers, has been a major source of conflict as members of the other groups have struggled singly or in combination to liberate themselves from what some called internal colonialism.

The above argument shows that state creation alone could not solve the problem of minority question in Nigeria. Gen. Sunni Abacha regime in 1995 recognized the afore-mentioned as a serious challenge and established Federal Character Commission (FCC) (Olagunju, 1987: 152-60). The fundamental principle behind the establishment was to regulate the Federal Government's appointments to ensure all the ethnic groups are represented. Despite this effort, minority agitation continues as unresolved problem in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria is an agglomeration of different ethnic nationalities. Each of these ethnic groups was autonomous and had peculiar political structure by which they administered their societies. This study identifies two categories of the divisions, major and minorities. For the minority groups to who this article is concerned, they have their patterns of socio-political administration through which laws and orders were maintained. However, the Uthman Dan Fodiyo Jihad of 1804-1812, which brought the whole north together under the Sultanate Emirate marked the beginning of minority agitation in the north. The agitation was propelled largely by the fear of domination and struggle by the minority groups to preserve their culture. The Hausa Fulani who were the major groups in the Sultanate were in control of the socio-political order. The introduction of Indirect Rules System by the British further gave impetus to minority agitation in the north. In the southern Nigeria, the minority groups were independent of the major ethnic groups until the whole area was divided into regions. The British colonial government was aware of the danger minority agitation for independence, instituted a commission in 1957. The recommendation of the commission however did not allay the fear of the minority groups in their various regions until independence. Thus, the unresolved minority issues cut short the Nigerian First Republic, 1960-1966. The Military that took over power made every effort possible to resolve the minority challenges by creating more states. From three regions, Nigeria was balkanized into twelve states. It was later increased to nineteen, twenty-one, thirty and now thirty-six. The introduction of quota and Federal Character system in the distribution of resources and appointment of individuals to leadership positions were partly stringent efforts to reflect the Federal nature of Nigeria. Despite these approaches, the question of minority question and agitation is still a prevalent phenomenon in Nigeria.

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