

## **The Amalgamation of 1914 and the Lingering Challenge of Nation-Building in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The first building blocks for what has come to be known as Nigeria began during the period of state formation and empire-building processes of most Nigerian peoples several decades before the 1914 amalgamation. The development of early urban centers laid the foundation. The unification of hitherto autonomous groups under one political umbrella called the Sokoto caliphate represents a major building-block in the march towards what came to be known as Nigeria. In the south there was, the development and consolidation of the Oyo Empire, Benin Empire, City states in the Niger Delta and Nri influence across what is now Igboland and later the Aro confederacy within and beyond Igboland. By the late nineteenth century, religion also played a vital role in uniting the various people of Nigeria. Islam had united most of the Hausaland and made headway to Yorubaland especially the Ilorin and Lagos. Christianity from the southern coast had started uniting the various peoples of the Niger Delta, the Igbo and the Yoruba and had made headway to the Middle Belt. The research method employed was the qualitative analytical method which involved content analysis of relevant documentary data on the subject. The approach adopted was also thematic. The research finding showed that two sets of forces were at work in the evolution of the Nigerian state. These are the pre-colonial social economic formations and the colonial social formation. It also showed that there was a relative harmonious relationship among the people before colonialism in Nigeria, but this was altered by colonial policies. It, therefore, concluded that beyond the amalgamation of 1914, the Nigeria state would have evolved, and perhaps under a different name and size.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Ethnic Nationalities, Amalgamation, Nation Building, Colonialism, Diversities

### **Introduction**

Throughout the annals of human history, the recurring narrative has been one of the rise and fall of individuals and civilizations, a timeless cycle that continues to shape our world. Empires and kingdoms have ascended and crumbled, paving the way for the emergence of modern nation-states. Often, the consolidation of these entities was achieved through conquest and coercion, with empires like Rome, the Ottoman Empire, and more recently, Germany and Italy, forged through the force of arms. In some cases, nation-states were amalgamated without the consent of indigenous peoples, a reality exemplified by the histories of both the United States and Nigeria.

In the context of United States colonial history, amalgamation was orchestrated by the British crown in the seventeenth century and this was done on the authority of King James, whose "knowledge of a French design to encircle the English colonies... persuaded him to combine all the northern ones, for purpose of defense in one dominion."<sup>1</sup> This amalgamation aimed to consolidate the northern colonies for defensive purposes against perceived threats, illustrating the imperialist motivations behind such actions. Similarly, Nigeria's formation followed a similar pattern, yet Nigerian elites, politicians, and scholars have often propagated the notion of Nigeria as a "mere geographical expression," emphasizing ethnic diversities and discord to serve their own interests. This narrative has been internalized by

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 118.

subsequent generations, hindering their ability to critically examine the historical realities and envision alternative paths for the nation's development. However, it is worth considering that, in the absence of colonialism, Nigeria may have still emerged as a unified state, albeit under different circumstances and with the potential for a different trajectory and territorial extent.

The study adopts the Ethno-nationalism theory as the framework of analysis. Ethno-nationalism examines the interplay between ethnic identities and nationalist sentiments within a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> This framework helps understand how historical events, such as the amalgamation, have shaped ethno-national identities and contributed to challenges in nation-building, including ethnic tensions, identity politics, and struggles for power-sharing and resource allocation among different ethnic groups. Ethno-nationalism theory, also, provides insights into how historical legacies influence contemporary socio-political dynamics, fostering a deeper understanding of Nigeria's nation-building challenges and potential pathways for reconciliation and unity amidst diversity

### **Pre-colonial intergroup relations**

There are abundances of evidences to show that there are more forces making for the integration of the peoples of the Nigeria in pre-colonial period. Geographical factors, traditions of origins and migrations, socio-economic relationship and so on thoroughly tended to mix up the people of the Nigeria. In the context of geographical factor, the major geographical zones of Nigeria are mangrove swamps, forest, and semi-savannah, as well as grass land.<sup>3</sup> In terms of human needs, the zones complement one another. None of the people living in any of these zones had been able to live by themselves in isolation of others. For instance; it is well known that the dwellers of the mangrove area in the earliest times produced basically fish and salt. As man cannot live on fish and salt alone, the mangrove dwellers required tuberous products like yam, cocoyam and others from the forest area to balance their diet in their daily meals. For these products they exchanged their fish and salt which the people in the forest zone also needed to supplement their diet. Similarly, the forest dwellers needed the grains and cattle of the savannah region in exchange for their kolanuts, palm oil and such other products of the forest zone needed by the inhabitants of the savannah region. The contact here therefore was fostered by economic and dietary necessity.

Traditions of origins and migrations of different Nigeria ethnic groups indicate that most Nigeria ethnic groups shared common ancestry or origin. For instance, the Ibibio people shared common ancestry with the Annaag and Efik people. The Annang, Efik, Eki, Oron and Ibeno share personal names, cultures and traditions with the Ibibio and speak closely related varieties of Ibibio-Efik, which are more or less mutually intelligible. Traditions clearly establish Oba Osigie of Benin and Aji-Attah of Idah as brothers and offspring of Oba Ozulua (c. 1482 to 1509).<sup>4</sup> Yoruba traditions describe the Edo-speaking peoples and Jekri tribe as merely an offshoot of the Yoruba. There are certain Edo institutions markedly similar to those of the Yoruba. Some Western Igbo communities such as Onitsha and some other Umuezechime groups claim Benin ancestry, just as some Isoko clans of Enwhe, Igbide and Ume are said to be of Igbo origin, the founders having come from the Igbo country. In the Bayajidda legend we have seven original Hausa states and seven subordinate states among which are the Nupe, Jukun and Ilorin-Yoruba.<sup>5</sup> In the region north of the upper Benue valley, the various ethnic groups, Higi, Gude, Fali, Kilba, Gabuna, Hona, Lala and the Gudu, do not trace their origin to any place beyond Mandura. The Ba-sharawa and

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<sup>2</sup> Brendan O'Leary, "On the nature of Nationalism: An appraisal of Ernest Gellner's writings on Nationalism", *University of Pennsylvania*. Available online at: <https://www.polsci.upenn.edu> Accessed 3 March, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Ikechukwu Okpoko, "Archaeology and the study of early Urban Centres in Nigeria". *African Study Monographs* Vol. 19 No. 1, (1998); 35-43.

<sup>4</sup> Robert A Sergent, *Economics, Politics and Social Change in the Benue Basin, c. 1300-1700*. (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers Co. Ltd, 1999), 10.

<sup>5</sup> See S. U. Fwatshak, "The North-West in Nigeria's first centenary", In S.U. Fwatshak and Olayemi Akinwmi (eds) *The House That "Lugard Built": Perspectives on Nigeria's First Centenary. The Pains, the Gains, and the Agenda for the Future*. (Jos: Jos University Press Ltd., 2014), 161; Shehu Sani, *The killing fields: Religious violence in northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2007), 9-10.

the Lerawa among others, trace their origin to Borno.<sup>7</sup> The clans of the Igbirra Tao (Okene area), the Osomari Igbo south of Onitsha, some clans of the Idoma and Agatu claim migrations from Igala territory.

Linguistic data contain evidence of the close historical relations and cultural contacts that have existed between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Most of West Africa languages belong to what linguists called the Niger-Congo phylum. The Kwa-sub-group, to which many Nigerian languages belong, has a list of more than sixty languages units including Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Nupe, Ijo, Igala and Efik *et cetera*. By comparative linguistic it has been established that most Nigerian ethnic groups came from the same ancestral tongue. For instance, it was conjectured that Igala, Idoma and Yoruba became offshoots of the Qua family of languages about two thousand years ago.<sup>6</sup> A close observation of these languages would show the rationale behind the theories of the linguists. A few illustrations may suffice. The word “water” is spelt *omi* in Igala, Itskiri and Yoruba. “Amen” is spelt “ise” in Igbo, Edo and Urhobo; *Oko* means husband in Yoruba and in Igala, just as ‘Oba’ refers to king in Yoruba land and in Edo *et cetera*.

We now turn to socio-economic relations and interaction among the various ethnic groups in pre-colonial Nigeria. There were prominent trade routes, linking Hausa land with Borno; Borno with Adamawa and the Benue valley; Hausaland with Nupe and the confluence, Hausaland with Yorubaland; Yorubaland with Benin. In addition, there were constant traffic on the Niger-Benue waterway and on the creeks and lagoons. These were in addition to the innumerable branch routes and networks of local routes linking various periodic markets. Clusters of traders and experts were established all over the region, unrestricted by political or ethnic boundaries. According to Robert Sergent:

Bini trading colonies were established along the upper Benue, Idah weavers and dyers operated far beyond the confines of their homeland, and Jukun entrepreneurs were settled in Pindiga, on the Jos Plateau, throughout the middle belt, and as far south as Calabar, and Awka iron producers travelled and settled across much of the region.<sup>7</sup>

Kano supplied horses to the Jukuns, and received slaves in return. Various goods and services were traded including trade in slaves, which serves as a source for recruiting skilled labour from other communities. By the end of the eighteenth century, colonies of strangers originating in such slaves existed in different parts – Nupe warriors in Lagos, Hausa horse attendants and veterinaries in different parts of Yorubaland, Awka blacksmiths in Benin, Igbo farmers in Calabar etc. It is important to note that not all the strangers were necessarily of slave origin, but the slave trade provides a most widespread network of inter-group mixing in Nigeria.

Intermarriage was also a mechanism in strengthening inter group relations, as well as a mechanism whereby entrepreneur could penetrate an alien market and establish legitimacy in business relations in a distinctive population. A classic example is the marriage of princess Ennobi of Idah, the daughter of Attah (king) Ayagba (c. 1687-1717), to the Onitsha Monarch, Chima Ogbnefi. The offspring of Ennobi and Chima Ogbnefi, Eze Anoli, was educated in the Idah court during the reign of Attah Ocholi Ohemein c. 1752-1765.<sup>8</sup> In addition, during the reign of Obi Omozole in Onitsha, Attah Ogala of Idah provides royal regalia for the installation ceremonies of the new Onitsha Monarch.<sup>9</sup> As a result of wide-scale intermarriage, some Fulani have lost most of the distinguishing physical characteristics of their race, and the majority of them speak only Hausa as their mother tongue.

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<sup>6</sup> See A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of sand: Studies in Igbo history and culture* (Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1981), 16; M. A. Onwuejeogwu, “Akala aka among the ndigbo of Nigeria: Destiny among the Igbo”, *Ogirisi-Igbo annual lecturers* (Awka: Cifogne production, 2004), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Robert A Sergent, *Economics, Politics and Social Change in the Benue Basin, c. 1300-1700*. (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers Co. Ltd, 1999), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Sergent, *Economics, Politics and Social Change in the Benue Basin...* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers Co. Ltd, 1999), 49.

<sup>9</sup> R. N. Henderson, *The king in every man* (New Haven, 1972), 88.

There is also evidence of considerable internal assimilation across the various ethnic groups in pre-colonial era. For example elements of the Gwari-speaking peoples living in the Zaria Emirate have become markedly differentiated from the original Gwari stock. Similarly, Nupe-speaking peoples resident in Yorubaland have tended to become Yorubaized. Indeed, it is difficult to find a single ethnic-linguistic population that does not contain trace elements of other cultures and ethnic groups. In the Benue Basin, for instance, the Idoma Nokwa or Greater Doma were affected by the Bini, Abakwariga, Jukun, Koro and Pabir and in their turn they influenced the development of the Labirra, Iyala, Igala, Etulo, Aro, Okpoto and Alaga.

The extensive network of social and economic relations, based on intermarriage, migration and acculturation as well as commerce tend to mix up the peoples of the Nigeria in pre-colonial era. It also creates some basic uniformity in social structure. For instance, throughout Nigeria the fundamental kinship units is the lineage (Hausa-dangi, Igbo-Umunna, Yoruba -Idile) a portion of clan living together in a given locality. There are, therefore, various forces of integration in pre-colonial Nigeria.

### **Laying the Foundation for a United Nigeria**

The foundational elements of what would eventually coalesce into Nigeria began to take shape long before the 1914 amalgamation, rooted in the state formation and empire-building endeavors of diverse Nigerian peoples. The emergence of early urban centers laid the groundwork for societal organization and political consolidation. In the north, entities like Kenem-Borno, Kano, and Zaria rose to prominence, with notable figures such as Queen Amina of Zaria leaving a lasting legacy through military conquests and infrastructure development. For instance, between 1421 and 1438, Queen Amina of Zaria conquered all the towns as far as Kwararafa and Nupe.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in the south, the Oyo Empire and the Benin Kingdom flourished, expanding their territories and exerting influence over neighboring regions. Urban centers like Nri, Arochuku, and Onitsha also played pivotal roles in shaping local dynamics and facilitating trade networks.

During the nineteenth century, significant internal amalgamations reshaped the political landscape of Nigeria. In the north, Othman dan Fodio's Jihad against the Hausa states resulted in the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, consolidating diverse groups under a unified political authority. In the south, entities like the Oyo Empire, Benin Kingdom, and Nri exerted their influence, while the spread of Islam and Christianity fostered religious cohesion and contributed to the formation of collective identities across regions. These developments, characterized by both political and religious factors, laid the groundwork for the eventual emergence of Nigeria as a unified entity, marking the culmination of centuries of societal evolution and intergroup interactions.

### **Colonialism and the 1914 amalgamation**

The journey towards the formation of what came to crystallize as Nigeria began before the 1914 amalgamation. The annexation of Lagos in 1861 flagged off the process of British formal control and by implication, the creation of what came to be Nigeria. From 1898, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria. The British colonial office set up the six-member Niger committee (also known as the Selborne committee in 1898) to consider the future administration of the Royal Niger Company's territory. On the key question of amalgamation, the committee in its report dated 4 August, 1899 recorded that "we are of opinion that the object to be aimed at is the eventual establishment of a Governor-General for the whole of the territories, resident in those territories."<sup>11</sup>

Several British colonial officials used coercion and diplomacy in former Northern and Southern Nigeria to reduce indigenous opposition to a minimum. By 1900, the colonial government began with Frederick Lugard, as High Commissioner of the Protectorates of Northern Nigeria, Ralph Moor, as High

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<sup>10</sup> Sergent, *Economics, Politics and Social Change in the Benue Basin...* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers Co. Ltd, 1999), 108.

<sup>11</sup> A. H. M. Kirk-Greens, *Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria. A Documentary Record.* (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1968), 5.

Commissioner of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and William Macgregor as Governor of the Lagos colony. In 1904 the southern administrations were brought under the same governor (Walter Egerton), and two years later (1906) the colony of Lagos and the protectorate of southern Nigeria was amalgamated under the title of colony and protectorate of southern of Nigeria.<sup>12</sup>

Effort was made to speed up the amalgamation process. In May, 1912, Lugard was formally appointed to carry out the amalgamation scheme. Lugard sailed from England for his preliminary tour of investigation on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1912 reaching Lagos on 3 October, 1912. By the beginning of 1913, he had toured the whole country and by 9 May, Lugard had forwarded to the colonial office his proposal on amalgamation. Lugard proposal was given parliamentary approval in September 1913, and Lugard was back in Lagos in October. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1914, the southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated under the name Nigeria. The name “Nigeria” was first suggested by Flora Shaw, one-time correspondent of the London Times, in an article in The Times of January 8, 1897. According to Flora Shaw:

...the title “Royal Niger Company’s Territories’ is not only inconvenient to use but to some extent is also misleading... The name “Nigeria”, apply to no other portion of Africa, may, without offence to any neighbours, be accepted as co-extensive with the territories over which the Royal Niger Company has extended British influence...<sup>13</sup>

However, the first official recognition of the name “Nigeria” appeared in the debate in the House of Common of the Royal Niger Company Bill in July, 1899.<sup>14</sup> Despite the amalgamation of 1914, the administrative individuality of the former separate territories was maintained.<sup>15</sup> The colony of Lagos preserved its unique legal status until the inauguration of the 1951 constitution. From 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1939, the government split the former Southern provinces into Eastern and Western provinces. Thus, the tripartite administrative formation of Nigerian State before dependence was laid. The Nigerian inheritors of the state amalgamated in 1914 accepted and consolidated the formation laid by British colonial officials.

### **Colonialism and Nigeria’s disunity**

The current state of disunity in Nigeria can be traced, in part, to the nature and impact of British colonial policies and their evolution since the early 1900s. While acknowledging the positive contributions of British colonialism, such as the pacification of the country, establishment of administrative structures, and maintenance of a basic standard of justice, it is essential to recognize the overarching disintegrative tendencies that counteracted these integrative efforts. Despite the 1914 amalgamation, the colonial administration maintained the separate administrative identities of the former territories, with distinct bureaucratic systems and even different official languages: In the north it was Hausa; in the south it was English.

The exclusion of educated Nigerians from governance and legislative council further exacerbated divisions, as the British preferred to engage with traditional rulers rather than the emerging educated elite. The application of indirect rule reinforced tribal parochialism, leading to the fragmentation of the country as various groups sought autonomy within their tribes.

British policies on education, particularly in Northern Nigeria, perpetuated segregation and hindered the development of an English-speaking educated class, contributing to disparities in educational infrastructure and fostering resentment between North and South. The contrast in educational development between Northern and Southern Nigeria underscored the disintegrative impact of colonial policies, leading to socio-economic imbalances and exacerbating cultural differences between regions.

<sup>12</sup> J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria Background to Nationalism* (Benin City, Bioburg and Wistrom, 1986), 43-45.

<sup>13</sup> J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria Background to Nationalism* (Benin City, Bioburg and Wistrom, 1986), 44.

<sup>14</sup> Coleman, *Nigeria Background to Nationalism* (Benin City, Bioburg and Wistrom, 1986), 44.

<sup>15</sup> Coleman, *Nigeria Background to Nationalism* (Benin City, Bioburg and Wistrom, 1986), 46.

The perpetuation of these disparities and cultural differences by British colonial policies has had far-reaching implications for nationalism and unity in Nigeria, fueling tensions and hindering efforts towards cohesive nation-building.

### **Diversity and nation-building in Nigeria: The lessons of history**

Throughout history, many modern states have emerged from what were once mere geographical expressions, inhabited by diverse peoples with disparate cultures and traditions. Germany and Italy serve as prime examples, both achieving national unity and consciousness through forced amalgamation led by visionary leaders. In the case of Germany, Otto von Bismarck orchestrated a series of liberation wars to unify the German states under Prussian dominance, overcoming centuries of division along ethnic, religious, and geographic lines.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Italy, described as a "geographical expression" by Garibaldi, underwent a process of conquest and amalgamation, led by figures like Camilo di Cavour, Garibaldi himself, and Giuseppe Mazzini, culminating in the formation of a unified Italian state in 1871.<sup>17</sup>

The United States shares parallels with these European examples, evolving from a diverse array of tribes, races, and nationalities into one united nation. Initially colonized and contested by various European powers, including Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Britain, the USA's formation was marked by a combination of consensus-building, annexation through war, and strategic purchases of territory. Despite the challenges and divisions inherent in its early history, the United States eventually coalesced into a powerful and cohesive nation, bound by a common nationality, culture, and destiny. However, this unity did not come without struggle, as evidenced by the Civil War and subsequent efforts to bridge divides and promote national identity.

### **Conclusion**

The work set out to investigate the state formation and empire-building processes of most Nigerian peoples prior the British colonial amalgamation of the Northern protectorate and Southern protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. It found out that the development of early urban centers laid the foundation; while the unification of hitherto autonomous groups under one political umbrella called the Sokoto caliphate represents a major building-block in the march towards what came to be known as Nigeria. In the south there was, the development and consolidation of the Oyo Empire, Benin Empire, City states in the Niger Delta and Nri influence across what is now Igboland and later the Aro confederacy within and beyond Igboland.

By the late nineteenth century, religion also played a vital role in uniting the various people of Nigeria. Islam had united most of the Hausaland and made headway to Yorubaland especially the Ilorin and Lagos. Christianity from the southern coast had started uniting the various peoples of the Niger Delta, the Igbo and the Yoruba and had made headway to the Middle Belt.

In conclusion, the research finding showed that two sets of forces were at work in the evolution of the Nigerian state. These are the pre-colonial social economic formations and the colonial social formation. It also showed that there was a relative harmonious relationship among the people before colonialism in Nigeria, but this was altered by colonial policies. It, therefore, concluded that beyond the amalgamation of 1914, the Nigeria state would have evolved, and perhaps under a different name and size.

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<sup>16</sup> S.U. Fwatshak and J.M. Ayuba, "Amalgamation Discourses in the "Lugardien House" During Nigeria's First Centenary" in S.U. Fwatshak and Olayemi Akinwmi (eds) *The House That "Lugard Built". Perspectives on Nigeria's First Centenary. The Pains, the Gains, and the Agenda for the Future.* (Jos: Jos University Press Ltd., 2014), 26.

<sup>17</sup> Fwatshak and Ayuba, "Amalgamation Discourses in the "Lugardien House" During Nigeria's First Centenary" in S.U. Fwatshak and Olayemi Akinwmi (eds) *The House That "Lugard Built" ....* (Jos: Jos University Press Ltd., 2014), 26.