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BRITISH COLONIAL POLICIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA, 1914–2014

ABSTRACT

The symbolic importance of the 1914 amalgamation in Nigeria's history is not in doubt. It was the year that the British colonial administration brought the culturally diverse peoples of Nigeria together under one central administration. However, 100 years after the amalgamation, Nigeria has been unable to build a nation or run the semblance of a modern state despite abundant natural and human resources. Harmonious co-existence between and among the country's constituent parts has proved most elusive. Relying on primary and secondary sources, this paper critically examines the nexus between the 1914 amalgamation and the British colonial policies that followed, on the one hand, and the challenge of national unity and harmonious inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria's centennial on the other. It argues that the challenge of national unity in post-colonial Nigeria had its root in the nature and structure of the country's foundation laid by the British in 1914. It posits that the way that Nigeria was structured by the British, the colonial policies under which the country was administered, and the nature of the transfer of power from Britain to Nigeria, bore the destructive cancer of imbalances that the British deliberately inculcated into the Nigeria project. These resulted in fault lines and fissures that have made it difficult for the constituent parts of post-colonial Nigeria to cohere. The paper submits that Nigeria's lopsided colonial structural foundation, which is still being maintained, has remained a severe challenge to national cohesion and harmonious inter-ethnic coexistence in post-colonial Nigeria.

Keywords: *Amalgamation, Colonial Nigeria, De-colonisation, Post-colonial Nigeria, Inter-ethnic relations, Structural imbalance, Constitution-making, Nation-building*

1. INTRODUCTION

The year 1914 marked an important watershed in the history of Nigeria. It was the first time that the British colonial administrators brought the culturally diverse peoples of Nigeria together under one central colonial administration. Without that amalgamation, therefore, Nigeria might not have emerged as one country. Perhaps, there would have been two, or possibly three, different countries. However, historically speaking, it would be wrong to assume that those who became the citizens of the British-created Nigerian state had nothing in common before 1914. On the contrary, the various pre-colonial Nigerian groups were closely linked by many factors, making it almost impossible for one to exist without dealing with others. Geography, particularly, favoured mobility, commerce, and cultural exchange of inhabitants up and down across the vast areas that later became Nigeria, creating conditions favourable to achieving national unity. Trade was perhaps the most important factor that linked many pre-colonial Nigerian peoples. No group or community was self-sufficient in the agricultural and manufactured goods it required. Hence, a community had to establish trade relations with others to obtain those goods that it could not produce. For instance, goods such as horses, natron, and rock salt, which were obtainable in large quantities in the savannah region were exchanged with forest goods like kola nuts and palm oil. Those involved travelled from the forest to the savannah region and vice versa through the numerous trade routes, waterways and footpaths that linked the different parts of the country. Every region had its own prominent long-distance traders. For instance, the Yoruba *alajapa* (itinerant traders) were well-known in Hausaland, while the itinerant Hausa merchants were popular in Yorubaland.[1]

The various pre-colonial Nigerian peoples were also integrated through religious, political and social institutions. In contiguous states, there were many social institutions that brought the people closer to one another. These included age-grade organisations and secret societies, oracle practices and marriage ties. A number of societies had age-grades organisations, each with a different name and leadership and all of them promoting inter-group relations. An interesting feature of these organisations was that those who were born in the same period in contiguous communities often knew one another. Friendship often developed among them even though they belonged

1 JRO Ojo, "The diffusion of some Yoruba artefacts and social institutions". In: GO Ekemode (ed.), *The proceedings of the conference on Yoruba civilisation* (Department of History: University of Ife, 1976); JF Ade Ajayi and EJ Alagoa, "Nigeria before 1800: Aspects of economic development and inter-group relations". In: O Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian history* (Ibadan: HEBN Publishers, 1980), pp. 224-235.

to different clans, villages or towns. The same was applicable to secret societies. By their very nature, secret societies often cut across village or town boundaries to involve men with similar ideas and common interests in economic, religious or political matters. Like the secret societies, the oracle system also promoted inter-group cooperation. The use of oracles was well-developed among the Igbo of southern Nigeria, where several existed, each specialising in settling disputes among different lineages and villages. The oracle at Arochukwu was the most famous, integrating almost all Igbo, Ibibio, and the people of the Niger delta city-states. In the same vein, marital relationships were common among royal families who exchanged their princesses with one another. Traders also married women from communities located on the routes in distant places so as to wield some influence in that area. Marriage connections did strengthen relations among different families and communities in pre-colonial Nigeria.[2]

There are also examples of cultural diffusion between and among the different pre-colonial Nigerian groups. Generally, people borrowed from one another, while traits spread from one area to another. Changes in a particular custom in one area might be accepted in others. This partly explained the exchange of socio-cultural ideas, namely, dresses, musical instruments, food and royal emblems between the Oyo, Ekiti, and Ijesa. Similarly, the *ndako gboya* masquerade cult spread from Nupe to Ebira, Igala, and Yorubaland.[3] In the same way, people borrowed words and phrases from the language of their neighbours or people with whom strong contacts had been established. For instance, the Yoruba borrowed several words from the Hausa. Examples include, *alubosa* (onion), *waasi* (sermon), *alaaka* (perish), *tunfulu* (new baby), and *sanmo* (sky). Borrowings often went beyond the incorporation of a few words. Indeed, contact promoted bi-lingualism among people of different groups.[4] It follows, therefore, that those who became the citizens of British-created Nigeria in 1914 were not entirely strangers brought together by British fiat. In other words, before the advent of British colonial rule, people in the geographical areas that became Nigeria coexisted, engaged in inter-ethnic trade, and practised good neighbourliness and cultural borrowing.

There is an established body of literature on the 1914 amalgamation, British colonial policies, and the transfer of power from Britain to Nigeria.[5]

2 T Falola *et al*., *History of Nigeria: Nigeria before 1800 AD* (Lagos: Longman Publishers, 1989), pp. 122-132.

3 Ojo, "The diffusion of some Yoruba artefacts and social institutions", p. 36.

4 Falola *et al*., *History of Nigeria,* p. 127.

5 AHM Kirk-Greene, *Lugard and the amalgamation of Nigeria* (London: OUP, 1968); DJ Morgan, *The official history of colonial development* (London: OUP, 1980); JE Flint, "Planned decolonisation and its failure in British Africa", *African Affairs* 82 (328), 1983; J Gallagher, *The decline, revival and fall of the British empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982); R Holland,

Scholars like Jacob Festus Ade-Ajayi, Tekena Nitonye Tamuno, and a host of others from the Ibadan School of History hold the view that the series of socio-economic and political crises that dotted the history of post-independence Nigeria may not be explained only in terms of Britain's colonial legacies. They argued that in terms of its effects and consequences, colonialism must not be seen as a complete departure from the African past, but as an episode in the continuous flow of African history.[6] However, this viewpoint has been countered by Peter Ekeh.[7] Ekeh uses Nigeria as his ethnographic case study but raises issues applicable to all colonised parts of Africa. He posits that colonialism in Africa must be accepted as a social movement of epochal dimension whose enduring significance continues to manifest in the post-independence period. Apart from Ekeh, existing studies have not devoted much attention to the connection between Britain's colonial legacies and the challenge of national unity in post-independence Nigeria. The main objective of this study, therefore, is to emphasise the correlation between the colonial experience and Nigeria's post-independence social, political and economic crises. It builds on Ekeh's argument by providing an explanation of the perception and attitudes of those saddled with the responsibility to formulate and implement Britain's colonial policies vis-à-vis the various interest groups that jostled for control of the machinery of government in post-independence Nigeria. Understanding these officials is essential as they brought their own perceptions and attitudes to bear on the issues involved.

This study argues that although amalgamation is, in itself, not a bad idea in a heterogeneous setting like Nigeria's,[8] the nature of the

European decolonisation, 1918-1981: An introductory survey (London: OUP, 1985); WH Morris-Jones and G Fischer (eds.) *Decolonisation and after* (London: OUP, 1980); JF Ade-Ajayi, "The continuity of African institutions". In: TO Ranger (ed.), *The emerging themes of African histor*y (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968); JF Ade-Ajayi and EA Ekoko, "Decolonisation in Nigeria: origins and consequences". In: P Gilford and LM Roger (eds.), *Decolonisation and African inheritance: The transfer of power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); RA Olaniyan (ed.) *The amalgamation and its enemies: An interpretive history of modern Nigeria* (Ife University Press: Ile-Ife,2003); P Ekeh, "Citizenship and political conflict: A sociological interpretation of the Nigerian crisis". In: J Okpoku (ed.), *Nigeria: dilemma of nationhood: An African analysis of the Biafran conflict* (New York: The Third Press, 1972); P Ekeh, "Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: A theoretical statement", *Comparative studies in society and history* XVII (I), 1978; P Ekeh, "Colonialism and social structure" *Inaugural Lecture* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1983); O Lawal, *Britain and the transfer of power in Nigeria* (Lagos: Lagos University Press, 2001).

6 Ade-Ajayi, "The Continuity of African Institutions", p. 24.

7 Ekeh, "Citizenship and political conflict: A sociological interpretation of the Nigerian crisis", p. 30; Ekeh, "Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: A theoretical statement", p. 19; Eke, "Colonialism and social structure", p. 10.

8 For instance, the formation of modern Germany (1871) and Italy (1861), were achieved through the amalgamation of the different Germanic principalities and Italian city-states respectively.

1914 amalgamation which gave "birth" to Nigeria and subsequent British colonial policies offered little or no thought to the harmonious coexistence of the different ethnic nationalities that were lumped together. The study demonstrates that the architects of the amalgamation failed to devise efficient mechanisms to manage the diversities and contradictions thus created to promote a shared sense of belonging and harmonious inter-group relations. Moreover, in the course of decolonisation, those considered radical were marginalised, while those perceived as conservative became the "anointed" group to whom the British devolved power. Thus, the choice of successors on the eve of independence was undertaken with meticulous consciousness so that those whose inclination was to act against imperial interests were sidelined from the transfer process.

Further, it is argued that the inheritors of the state amalgamated in 1914 accepted and consolidated the foundations laid by generations of British colonial officials. Therefore, despite waves of secessionist agitation in Nigeria before and since independence, the country has not consciously set out to create a system in which all ethnic nationalities feel there is room for self-expression. It is submitted, therefore, that the disparity in social and economic development that attended amalgamation, the mutual distrust and suspicion it engendered, coupled with the nature of the transfer of power from British to Nigerian politicians during the transition years, as well as the seeming inability of the Nigerian political elite to grapple with these in a post-colonial setting, continue to militate against genuine national integration. It is hoped that a greater understanding of Nigeria's colonial experience will aid the country's quest for genuine national unity.

The primary sources for this study derived mainly from Colonial Office papers located in the National Archives in Nigeria. The Colonial Office and its officials were the major agency saddled with the responsibility to formulate and implement Britain's colonial policies in Nigeria. Thus, Colonial Office records are a veritable mirror through which the official mind and perception of British officials who had the responsibilities to formulate and implement colonial policies could be viewed. Unpublished minutes of meetings and background comments of colonial officials also offer useful explanations for publicly-stated policies.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE 1914 AMALGAMATION

Before the nineteenth century, there was considerable interaction between and among the peoples in the Nigerian area. However, the crucial fact in that setting was that each group decided for what purpose and how it related to others. It is significant to note that a few decades before British colonial rule

in the nineteenth century, the areas that later became Nigeria witnessed the development of two opposing, if not antagonistic, cultural traditions, which lie at the root of what was to grow into a North-South dichotomy in the country's historical trajectory. In the country's northern parts, a centuries-old Muslim cultural infiltration was consolidated by the Uthman Dan Fodio-led Jihad of 1804, which instituted the Muslim Caliphate and transformed much of Northern Nigeria into a Muslim society. In Southern Nigeria, on the other hand, it was the Christian missions, through their evangelistic and social endeavour, which began about the middle of the nineteenth century that sowed the seeds of a revolutionary socio-economic transformation. The influence of Islam in Northern Nigeria was thus soon matched by that of Christianity in the South. Two competing cultures and worldviews were established in the North and South of the areas that later became Nigeria on the eve of the 1914 amalgamation. In the absence of an overarching national ethos mediated by the right kind of education, these different outlooks have made it difficult for Nigerians to develop a common outlook.[9]

The bulk of what is now Nigeria became British territory between 1861 and 1914. In 1861, the British acquired Lagos as a colony after gun-boat diplomacy. From 1874 to 1886, Lagos Colony was administered as part of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) in what was known as the Crown Colony system of administration. In 1886, the United African Company UAC, was issued a charter by the British government and its name changed to the Royal Niger Company. The charter authorised the company to trade and administer the areas covered by its commercial activities.[10] This was designed to keep other European powers from the region without any cost to the British government. By a proclamation of Protectorate in 1894, the Niger Delta states came under British authority.[11] In 1897, the kingdom of Benin collapsed and surrendered to the British. Between 1892 and 1900, all Yoruba states except Abeokuta, which fell only in 1914, came under British authority either through dubious treaties or bombardment.[12] Although the British launched their onslaught on the Eastern parts of the country with the Aro Expedition of 1901, the pacification of the different parts of Eastern Nigeria was not completed until about 1918.[13]

Meanwhile, the British government, from 1898, adopted the policy of gradually amalgamating its various administrative units in Nigeria. One

9 GA Akinola, *Leadership and the postcolonial Nigerian predicament* (Ibadan: ISH, 2009), p. 3.
10 O Ikime, *The fall of Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 62-68.
11 TN Tamuno, *The evolution of the Nigerian state: The southern phase, 1898-1914* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), pp. 49-52.
12 Tamuno, *The evolution of the Nigerian state,* p. 51.
13 JC Anene, "The protectorate government of southern Nigeria and the Aros, 1900-1902", *Journal of the historical society of Nigeria* 1, 1965, p. 34.

of the first efforts in this regard was the detailed Memorandum on British possessions in West Africa issued by Herbert Read, an official of the Colonial Office. In his memorandum, Read suggested, among other things, that the Lagos Colony, the Niger Coast Protectorate, and the Royal Niger Company, working within "inconvenient and unscientific boundaries", should be placed under Colonial Office administration and eventually amalgamated into one large colony.[14] In 1898, the Colonial Office set up the six-member Niger Committee to consider the issue of amalgamation. In line with Read's memorandum, the committee recommended the eventual amalgamation of Nigeria's various British administrative units under a Governor-General.[15] The amalgamation was to be carried out in stages: Lagos Colony and Southern Nigeria first, and in due course, the combined colonies and Northern Nigeria.[16]

On 31 December 1899, the charter of the Royal Niger Company was revoked. And from 1 January 1900, all the territories formerly administered by the company were taken over by the British government and proclaimed as the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, with Sir Frederick Lugard as the High Commissioner. In the same vein, the Niger Coast Protectorate, which covered the central and eastern parts, became the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, with Sir Ralph Moor as the High Commissioner.[17] Sir William McGregor remained the Governor of the Colony of Lagos and its Protectorate, which included the whole of Yorubaland.[18] Thus, by 1900, there were three separate British dependencies in Nigeria.[19]

Between 1900 and 1912, it became increasingly difficult for Britain to sustain three separate administrative structures and pieces of machinery in three contiguous territories. More importantly, without direct access to the sea, coupled with a larger area, with costly railway construction and river dredging projects, the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria experienced severe financial difficulties only slightly relieved by Southern subsidies and the grants-in-aid from the Imperial Treasury.[20] In 1905, the High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria, Sir Frederick Lugard, sent a detailed Memorandum to the Colonial Office outlining a plan for the amalgamation of Lagos, Northern and Southern

14 National Archives Ibadan (NAI), Colonial Office Papers 879/49/534: Memorandum on British Possessions in West Africa, 12, May 1897.
15 NAI, PRO/CO537/135/490: Foreign Office to Colonial Office (secret), 18 July 1898.
16 NAI, PRO/CO 537/135/490: Foreign Office to Colonial Office (secret), 18 July 1898.
17 IF Nicolson, *The administration of Nigeria, 1900-1960, men, methods and myths* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 60-69.
18 Nicolson, *The administration of Nigeria,* p. 62.
19 Nicolson, *The administration of Nigeria,* p. 62.
20 TN Tamuno, "British colonial administration in Nigeria in the twentieth century". In: O Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian history* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), p. 394.

Nigeria.[21] As a prelude to the larger scheme, the South and the Colony of Lagos were amalgamated into the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906.

On 21 September 1909, the issue of amalgamating Northern and Southern Nigeria was discussed on the floor of the House of Commons in England.[22] After a series of subsequent parliamentary debates, it was resolved that an amalgamated Nigeria promised administrative convenience and improved Britain's financial and economic conditions.[23] The main issues for the British, therefore, were the economic and organisational advantages of amalgamation. The decision-makers did not consider whether amalgamation was a right or wrong policy as far as the people on the ground were concerned. In consultation with Sir John Anderson of the Colonial Office, the Secretary of State for the colonies, Lewis Harcourt, chose Sir Frederick Lugard as a potential candidate to execute the amalgamation scheme. In 1912, Lugard was appointed as the first British Governor-General of Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria. In 1913, he presented his amalgamation plan to the Colonial Office.[24] However, in approving much of Lugard's plan for the proposed 1914 amalgamation, it was noted, among other things, that the scheme did not provide answers to the question of, whether Nigeria should evolve as a unitary or federal state. In the words of Mr Harding, an official of the Colonial Office,

> Sir Lugard's proposal contemplates a state which it is impossible to classify: it is not a unitary state […], it is not a federal state […], it is not a personal union of separate colonies under the same Governor […], if adopted, his proposals can hardly be a permanent solution.[25]

On his part, John Hatch, another official, raised specific fundamental questions concerning the proposed amalgamation. According to him,

> What could be the effect of uniting the Fulani Emirates – with their comparatively static, traditionalist outlook – with the thrusting, competitive individualistic society of the South, now acquiring knowledge from a growing number of mission schools, which were making available an expending clerical class? […] Should they form a single nation? If so, how could a single allegiance be created?[26]

21 NAI, PRO/CO/446/54/21112: Lugard to Colonial Office (conf), 3, August 1905.
22 NAI, CO/520/86/31372: Minutes by Fiddes, 21 September 1909, on House of Commons, Question by Mr. Harris.
23 NAI, CO/520/86/31372: Minutes by Fiddes, 21 September 1909.
24 NAI, CO/583/3/16460: Lugard to Colonial Office 9 May 1913.
25 NAI, PRO/CO 583/3/16460: Minutes by Harding, 16 June 1913, on Lugard to Colonial Office 9, May 1913.
26 A Alao (ed.), *The Nigerian state: Language of its politics: Essays in honour of Stephen Oladipo Arifalo* (Ibadan: Rex Charles and Collins, 2006), p. vii.

These officials had hoped that answers to these questions would emerge after the amalgamation had come into effect. Unfortunately, however, subsequent colonial policies failed to promote genuine integration. On 1 January 1914, the Southern and Northern Protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated under one administration. It then assumed the name of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, with SirLugard as the Governor-General. It is, however, instructive to note that the major aim of the 1914 amalgamation was to unify the colonial administrative structures in the British imperial interest, to create a unified political structure that was meant to ensure maximum exploitation at the least cost to Britain. Uniting the economically prosperous South with the impoverished North was to enable the British to govern the two disparate entities at minimal cost to the imperial purse.

3. COLONIAL RULE AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIAN STATE, 1914-1947

The 1914 amalgamation could not undo the North-South dichotomy the antecedents of which, as already indicated, are traceable to nineteenth-century developments. Instead, various aspects of British policy ensured the solidification of that dichotomy. Despite the amalgamation in 1914, the North and South did not have a standard law-making body until 1947, when the Richard Constitution was promulgated. Until that time, the Legislative Council made laws for the South, while the Governor issued Proclamations for the North,[27] thereby emphasising the differences between the two regions. Under Frederick Lugard, from 1914 to 1919, the colonial government did not encourage much interaction between the North and the South. This was due partly to Lugard's own preconceived and erroneous ideas about how the ethnically diverse peoples of Nigeria were to be ruled. He had a "brusque contempt of the South, especially because of the atmosphere of Lagos politicking"[28], which led to his determination not to bring the North into any "contaminatory contact with the fickle South".[29] To him, the North and South had an "oil and water incompatibility".[30] Lugard was also constrained by time and resources to give effect to the amalgamation and to introduce a central administration, which had been claimed as the cardinal objective of the scheme.[31]

27 A Hazelwood, *African integration and disintegration* (London: OUP, 1985), p. 7.
28 JS Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 137.
29 Hazelwood, *African integration and disintegration,* p. 7.
30 Nicolson, *The administration of Nigeria,* p. 171.
31 FD Lugard, *Report on the amalgamation of Nigeria and southern Nigeria, and the administration, 1912-1919*. (London: *s.n.* 1920).

Up to 1922, the Legislative Council and the Nigerian Council, which were established for the Lagos Colony and Southern Protectorate respectively, were in use in Nigeria. Between 1914 and 1922, the educated minority in Southern Nigeria began to demand constitutional representation.[32] They joined the National Congress of British West Africa, which was formed in the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1920. Even though he opposed vehemently the National Congress, the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Hugh Clifford, conceded to the idea of a new constitution that would allow for increased participation of Nigerians in the government of their country. Hence, in 1922, a new constitution, the Clifford Constitution, was introduced. The new constitution provided for an Elective Principle and a Legislative Council.[33] The latter was to make laws for the Colony and Southern Provinces only. It did not have authority over the Northern Provinces, whose laws were to be made by a proclamation of the Governor.[34]

The effect of this was to create a perpetual wedge between the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria. Clifford argued that he had to limit the jurisdiction of the Legislative Council to the South because he was faced with the problems posed by the sheer size of the country and the poor communication facilities.[35] He further asserted that he did not consider that a council sitting at Lagos could be entrusted appropriately with the responsibility of legislating for the Muslim emirates, which were self-contained native states, de facto governments of their respective Native Administrations and that, in any case, the emirs would resent even nominal representation in that council.[36] Similarly, whereas the Elective Principle gave rise to the growth of political parties and political consciousness in the South, the North, on the other hand, developed political consciousness relatively lately. This failure to properly integrate the North and the South under the Clifford Constitution, which remained unchanged for 25 years, strengthened the suspicion and disunity between the North and the South.

In 1939, the British colonial government in Nigeria split the Southern Province, which was smaller in area than the North, into two, namely, Eastern and Western Provinces.[37] Sir Bernard Bourdillon, then Governor of Nigeria, justified this change because the South was too heterogeneous to remain as one unit. He claimed that he and his staff had experienced delays due to

32 GO Olusanya, "The Lagos branch of the national congress of British West Africa" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* IV (2), 1968, p. 23.
33 Tamuno, "Governor Clifford and representative government" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* IV (1), 1967, p. 120.
34 Tamuno, "Governor Clifford and Representative Government", p. 120.
35 NAI, CO 583/112 Clifford to Churchill, 30 August 1922.
36 NAI, CO 583/100 Clifford to Churchill, 26 March 1921.
37 NAI, Sessional Paper No. 46 of 1937: Reorganisation of Southern Provinces.

increased work and transport and communication difficulties between Enugu, the headquarters of the Southern Provinces, and its parts.[38] By contrast, the same Bourdillon maintained that the peoples of Northern Provinces were more homogeneous in culture than those in Southern Provinces. He argued that unlike Enugu in the Southern Provinces, Kaduna, the headquarters of the Northern Provinces, provided a more central capital that reduced communication difficulties to the minimum.[39] However, as has been pointed out, the myriads of peoples and cultures in the Middle-Belt alone clearly negate Bourdillon's claim of cultural homogeneity for the North.[40] Yet, there was a sense in which Bourdillon's claim might be tenable. In the period immediately after colonial conquest, the British, through the indirect rule system, forced certain administrative homogeneity on a large part of Northern Nigeria by imposing an emirate type of organisation on people, who at that time were either non-Muslims or Muslims who refused to accept the Jihad and the authority of the Sokoto Caliphate.[41] The British also adopted the Hausa language as the language of Native Administration in the North. All these led to a greater degree of cultural homogeneity in Northern Nigeria than in the South. It also ensured that whereas the North increasingly developed into a meaningful political entity dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, the South remained the collection of different peoples and cultures that it had been at the advent the British.[42]

On 1 January 1947, a new constitution – the Richard Constitution – was introduced under the then Governor of Nigeria, Sir Arthur Richards. The constitution established regional councils for the three provinces into which Nigeria had been divided in 1939, namely North, East and West. In effect, the three unequal provinces created earlier by Bourdillon became legitimised in the Richard Constitution of 1947. This arrangement ensured that the North was large enough to exercise political domination over the East and West. Richard justified his regionalism because Nigeria falls "naturally" into three regions of disparate peoples and that the North wanted little or nothing to do with the South.[43] This moved Dame Margery Perham to complain that, "British colonial officials had become more northern than the Northerners, fostering the local sense of difference, even of superiority towards the South".[44] In the main, the Richards Constitution revoked legislation by the Governor

38 NAI, Sessional Paper No. 46 of 1937: Reorganisation of Southern Provinces.
39 NAI, Sessional Paper No. 46 of 1937: Reorganisation of Southern Provinces.
40 O Ikime, *History, the historian and the nation: The voice of a Nigerian historian* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 2006), p. 99.
41 Ikime, *History, the historian and the nation,* p. 100.
42 Ikime, *History, the historian and the nation,* p. 102.
43 *The Nation,* 28 February 2013.
44 *The Nation,* 28 February 2013.

altogether as the Northern Provinces, which the Governor had legislated for until then, were brought within the authority of a new Nigerian Legislative Council. It was also under the Richards Constitution in 1947, 33 years after the 1914 amalgamation that the representatives of the peoples of Nigeria from the three regions met for the first time at an assembly in Lagos. The Lagos meeting turned out to be a disaster and broke up with all sides protesting against the British administrative style in Nigeria. In his book, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, published in 1947, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the West stated that Nigeria is not a nation but "a mere geographical expression". The term "Nigeria", he posited, "is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not".[45] Tafawa Balewa was more critical of the British in 1948 when he stated that, "the efforts of the British to establish a united Nigeria have failed because the diverse peoples, with varying cultures and religions, were not willing to unite".[46] What this shows is that because the three colonial territories had continued to be governed separately for 33 years after amalgamation, they had diverged radically, making any form of national unity more difficult.

4. THE TRANSITION YEARS: CONSTITUTION-MAKING, TRANSFER OF POWER AND NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA, 1948-1960

Increasing pressure and agitation by Nigerian nationalists in the post-World War II period compelled the British to introduce a new dimension to the concept of colonial reform, starting in 1947. This dimension was constitution-making, which underpinned the transfer of power and became the dominant feature of the transition years. Between 1950 and 1960, nationalist politicians from the different regions were invited to no less than five conferences from which issued the various constitutions up to independence. In 1949, Sir John Macpherson, who took over from Sir Arthur Richards as the Governor of Nigeria, instituted a Select Committee of the Legislative Council to consider the problem of introducing a new constitution.[47] The committee recommended that a review of the Richards Constitution be carried out by methods that would encourage the widest possible public discussion. Consequently, there was consultation with the people starting from the village level upwards,

45 O Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian freedom* (London: Faber, 1967), p. 47.
46 SU Fwatshak, and O Akinwumi (eds.), *The house that "Lugard built"* (Jos: Jos University Press, 2014), p. 5.
47 BO Nwabueze, *A constitutional history of Nigeria* (London: Hurst & Co, 1982), pp. 46-56.

culminating in the all-Nigeria constitutional conference at Ibadan in 1950, under the chairmanship of the Attorney-General, Sir Gerald Howe.[48]

The Ibadan conference was very significant. It revealed the divisions between the North and South, which were to continue to plague the polity and hinder national unity in post-independence Nigeria. Indeed, considering the turn of events at the Ibadan conference and subsequent ones, it is difficult not to conclude that the British, who were the umpires, had some stake in ensuring that the North dominated other regions in post-colonial Nigeria. For instance, on the eve of the 1950 Ibadan conference, Britain's Under-Secretary of State for the colonies, Rees Williams, in a report of his tour of West Africa, suggested that Britain should give, "support and encouragement to our friends, especially those in the Northern territories".[49] This view indicated Britain's perception of the North as the underdog and an inviolable bloc from the rest of Nigeria. The Northern leaders, on their part, presented a picture of a group of activists operating from a position of relative suspicion and fear of Southern politicians.[50] At the 1950 conference, the Northern delegation insisted on having half of the seats in the proposed central legislature because the North contained about half of the whole country's population. The delegation also demanded that revenue derived from taxation be allocated to the regions on a per capita basis. They threatened to pull out of the Nigerian project if they were not granted their demands.[51] The Eastern and Western delegates were opposed to the North having half of the seats in parliament. Western delegates submitted a minority report. They also demanded that the Yoruba-speaking areas of Offa, Igbomina and Kabba, carved out as part of Northern Nigeria, be returned to the West. The 1951 Macpherson Constitution, the outcome of the 1950 Ibadan conference, established a central legislature called the House of Representatives. This was made up of 136 elected members, half of whom had to be from the North: 68 from the North and 34 each from the East and West.[52] The North also retained the Yoruba-speaking areas of Offa, Igbomina and Kabba. The usual explanation that the seats were distributed according to the population numbers is unfounded: had the numbers of people been the guiding principle, then the East and the West should not have been allocated the same number of seats since the sizes of their populations were different. Therefore, an arrangement whereby the North had as many seats in the

48 GO Olusanya, "Constitutional development in Nigeria, 1961-1960". In: O Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian history (*Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), p. 529.

49 NAI CO 357/3226 The Report of West African Tour by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, 1948.

50 OA Lawal, *Britain and the transfer of power in Nigeria, 1945-1960* (Lagos: Lagos University Press, 2001), p. 172.

51 NAI, CO 537/57/86 The Proceedings of the Ibadan Constitutional Talks, 1950.

52 NAI, CO/537/57/86 The Proceedings of the Ibadan Constitutional Talks, 1950.

central legislature as the West and East put together was hardly calculated to promote inter-regional accord.

The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 was subject to strains and stresses during the 27 months it operated. It was challenging to secure practical co-operation between the centre and the regions. The first elections for the new regional Houses of Assembly and chiefs under the constitution were held between August and December 1951. The results revealed the hardening of regional and ethnic lines. The Northern People's Congress, NPC, won in the North, the Action Group (AG), in the West and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, NCNC, later renamed National Council of Nigerian Citizens, in the East. This showed that each party was entrenched in the region where the majority ethnic group supported it. The nationalist movement in Nigeria thus became an affair of compromise and cooperation between the three major regional political parties. In March 1953, Chief Anthony Enahoro, an AG member of the Federal House of Representatives, moved a motion for self-government for Nigeria in 1956. This motion was vehemently opposed by the Northerners, who were convinced that they were not ready for independence and that to achieve independence as early as that would be inviting domination of the North by the South.[53] In his address to the House, the Northern leader, Sir Ahmadu Bello posited that "the mistake of 1914 has come to light".[54]

Consequently, Sir Bello, tabled a counter-motion substituting "1956" with "as soon as practicable".[55] This disagreement led to a sharp division in the House between the North and the South. The Western and Eastern regional members staged a walkout when the motion was defeated by the numerical strength of the Northern delegates.[56] As the Northern delegates were leaving they were subjected to contemptuous treatment by a crowd outside the House, which called them derisive names such as "stooges", "kola-nut men", and "His Majesty's voice".[57] The reaction of the Northerners was to issue what they called the "Eight-Point Demand" as a condition for remaining in Nigeria.[58] They were eventually persuaded to drop the idea by the colonial administration, which held the same position as the NPC in its opposition to the 1956 target date for self-government. Indeed, the Colonial Office had declared, in the course of the debate on the motion for self-government, that

53 NAI, House of Representatives Official Report of Debates, March 1953, p. 98.
54 A Bello, *My life: the autobiography of Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, sardauna of Sokoto* (Cambridge: CUP, 1962), p. 135.
55 NAI, House of Representatives Official Report of Debates, March 1953, p. 98.
56 NAI, House of Representatives Official Report of Debates, March, 1953 p. 98.
57 Olusanya, "Constitutional development in Nigeria, 1961-1960", p. 536.
58 Olusanya, "Constitutional development in Nigeria, 1961-1960", p. 539.

Britain "was not ready to be tied down to a date".[59] An official of the Colonial Office advised that the Colonial Secretary should make it clear that Britain would not persuade the Northerners to take self-government before they considered themselves ready to assume such a burden.[60] This, according to him, was because, "the North was rapidly losing faith in Her Majesty's integrity and determination to defend them from pressure without".[61]

By 1954, the Colonial Office and its Secretary, Alan-Lennox Boyd, had concluded that the Northern Region and its interests would dictate the pace of the devolution of power.[62] He told Sir John Macpherson in November 1954 that, "my main concern, like yours, was about the attitude of the North".[63] He reminded him that Britain's promise not to let the North down should translate to mean that even if all the three regions were to opt for self-government in 1956 or soon after, there would still be no question of Her Majesty's government granting self-government at the centre as long as the North wanted the federal government to remain independent.[64] Therefore, it is clear that in the years following 1953, and until independence, Britain pursued policies that reflected her preoccupation with placating the North, and correspondingly exhibiting an undisguised hostility towards the East and the West.

The political atmosphere throughout Nigeria deteriorated into party and tribal intolerance two months after the 1953 talks. During the Northern tour of the AG delegation in May 1953, riots broke out in Kano. The riots lasted for four days and resulted in the death of about 50 people with over 200 wounded.[65] It, therefore, became clear that the worsening relationship between the North and the South had made the smooth working of the 1951 Macpherson Constitution impossible. As a result, the Colonial Secretary at this time, Mr Oliver Lyttleton, declared in the British House of Commons on 20 May 1953,

> Since it appears impossible for Nigerians to work together effectively in a tightly knit federation, Her Majesty's government had regretfully decided that the Nigerian Constitution would have to be re-drawn to provide for greater regional autonomy and for the removal of powers of intervention by the centre in matters which could, without detriment to other Regions, be placed entirely within regional competence.[66]

59 NAI, CO 554/262 Williamson minutes to Gorell-Barnes, 2 July 1953.
60 NAI, CO 554/262 Williamson minutes to Gorell-Barnes, 2 July 1953.
61 NAI, CO 554/262 Williamson minutes to Gorell-Barnes, 2 July 1953.
62 NAI, CO 554/852 Extract from personal Telegram of 17 November 1954 from Secretary of State to Governor.
63 NAI, CO 554/852 Extract from personal Telegram of 17 November 1954.
64 NAI, CO 554/852 Extract from personal Telegram of 17 November 1954.
65 *Daily Times*, 16 May 1953.
66 NAI, Reports by the Conference on the Nigerian Constitution held in London July and August 1953, cmd 8934, pp. 20-21.

Consequently, another constitutional conference was summoned in July 1953, to work out a new constitution. The panel met in London from July to August 1953, and in Lagos in January 1954. The new constitution, styled the Lyttleton Constitution, established a federal system of government, and granted more extraordinary powers to the regional governments. It, however, did not address the hegemonic position of the North vis-à-vis the other regions. A central unicameral legislature was set up made up of 184 elected members, half of whom were to come from the Northern Region, and 46 each from the Western and Eastern Region.[67] The constitution also provided for a regional premier in each region, 12 ministers in the North, and eight each in the East and the West.[68] It was agreed that another conference should be convened not more than three years after August 1953, to review the Lyttleton Constitution and examine the question of self-government.[69]

Constitutional conferences were held in 1957 and 1958 to review the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution. Under these reviews, many of the earlier issues were brought up to date in line with imperial preferences, prejudices and predilections, and in line with the reactions of the nationalists.[70] The reviews also featured an element of uncertainty on the part of Britain. As a result, the discussions with nationalists between 1954 and 1959 did not lead to any constitution until 1960, when independence was granted. In essence, therefore, the reviews merely produced amendments while, in the main, reinforcing the 1954 constitution. The inadequacies of the constitution, about which politicians had complained soon after it came into effect, were not addressed. The Colonial Office perceived complaints about the Constitution as, "being irrelevant party manoeuvers inspired by personal antagonisms".[71] Hence, on matters that needed solutions, Britain adopted the policy of vacillation as a strategy. This explains the attitude of colonial officialdom to the consideration of such issues as police, revenue allocation, creation of more states, minority affairs and boundary adjustment. Therefore, the outcome of the constitutional talks of 1957 and 1958, could not efficiently address Nigeria's stress and inherent centrifugal forces.

At the 1958 constitutional conference, independence for Nigeria was fixed for 1 October 1960. This was to be preceded by a federal election. In December 1959, a general election was held to choose a federal government that would rule Nigeria for the first five years of independence. The result was

67 NAI, Report by the Resumed Conference on the Nigerian Constitution held in Lagos in January, and February 1955 cmd 9059, London, 1954, p. 80.
68 NAI, Report by the Resumed Conference on the Nigerian Constitution.
69 NAI, Report by the conference on the Nigerian Constitution held in London in July and August 1953, pp. 20-21.
70 Lawal, *Britain and the transfer of power in Nigeria, 1945-1960*, p. 170.
71 NAI, CO 554/838 Minute by Huijsman to Williamson 2 December 1954.

that no single party obtained an overall majority of the 312 seats in the central legislature. The NPC, with 134 seats, won in the North; the AG, with 73 seats, won in the West; the NCNC, with 89 seats, won in the East, while the Independents and others won 16 seats.[72] Discussions were held among the parties' leaders to foster a coalition or some form of alliance. Given the fear of Northern domination, the NCNC and the AG, which had 162 seats between them, began to hold talks on the possibility of a partnership. However, once the possibility of a coalition between the two Southern political parties appeared imminent, Sir James Robertson, the last British Governor of colonial Nigeria, invited Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the leader of the NPC, to form the federal government. His reason for this move was his fear that the North would not feel safe under a federal government created by two Southern parties and might thus opt-out of the federation. He said,

> I believe that this (AG-NCNC coalition) could be very dangerous for Nigeria's future as, from all I had learned of the Sardauna and the northerners; they might well decide to leave the Federation, for they would not readily accept a national government of the southern parties.[73]

Therefore, even though nothing of an ideological nature bound them, the NPC and NCNC coalition formed the Federal Government at independence. The NCNC had hoped to use the partnership to secure resources for the Eastern Region from the centre.[74] The AG became the official opposition headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo following the unanimous passing of a resolution calling for independence on 1 October 1960 by the newly elected House of Representatives. The British parliament reciprocated by passing the Nigeria Independence Act on 29 July 1960, agreeing to independence for Nigeria on 1 October 1960.

The transition years thus witnessed a worsening of inter-ethnic and inter-regional relations. The nationalists, the bulk of whom were essentially leaders of particular ethnic groups, may have been of one accord in wanting the British to leave, but they were hardly in agreement on how the affairs of Nigeria were to be ordered after the British left. Their central preoccupation was how to secure the most significant advantage for their particular dominant ethnic group. In effect, the movement for regaining independence in Nigeria produced no ideology that could constitute the touchstone of national politics after independence. In this circumstance, politics in post-colonial Nigeria became a matter of every region and ethnic group for itself. From

72 Ikime, *History, the historian and the nation,* p. 297.
73 J Robertson, *Transition in Africa: from direct rule to independence: A memoir* (London: *n.s.* 1974), p. 29.
74 Ikime, *History, the historian and the nation,* p. 298.

the Macpherson to the Independence Constitution, the British, who were the umpires at the conferences that produced the various constitutions, ensured the political dominance of the North in the emergent Nigerian state. With its built-in 50 per cent representation in the federal parliament, and 53.3 per cent of the country's population, the North was assured of permanent control of the Federal Government of Nigeria.[75] This arrangement negated the cardinal principle of federalism: that no one unit in a federation should be such that it can lord it over other units put together.[76] Therefore, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that in the crucial years of the transition of power, the British were anxious that the North, which they regarded as less radical than the South, should be at the helm of affairs at independence. That way, they hoped that their continuing interests and stakes in Nigeria would be more securely preserved. British self-interest thus created a situation in which at independence, a particular ethnic group dominated the polity.

5. INDEPENDENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS: THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL UNITY IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA: 1960-2014

Nigeria entered the independence era with a constitution unsuitable for a country with diverse peoples who had not yet attained full national integration. Independence and the competition for power, intense inter-regional, inter-ethnic suspicion and hostility widened the fissures and sharpened the cleavages of the union. Because each region produced its political party, dominated by the major ethnic group based there, the dominant ethnic group in each area installed itself and sought how best to win power at the federal level. The struggle over the control of the centre and the acrimonious manner in which Nigerian politicians fought for this control ultimately brought the fall of the First Republic (1960-1966). The AG crisis and the assumption of emergency powers by the Federal Government in Western Nigeria in 1962, the shifting alliances and coalitions that marked the general elections of 1964, and the total breakdown of law and order that attended the Western Regional elections of 1965, were directly or indirectly related to the quest for state resources, and participation in, or control of the Federal Government.[77] For instance, the desire of Chief S L Akintola, the Premier of the Western Region

75 J O'Connell, "The fragility of stability: The fall of Nigerian federal government in 1966". In: A Mazrui and RI Rothberg (eds.), *Protest and power in black Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 1012-1034.

76 M Burgess, *Federalism: theory and practice* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 12.

77 Ikime, *History, the historian and the nation,* pp. 298-301.

and AG's deputy leader, to reach an accord with the NPC/NCNC-led Federal Government, which triggered the crisis in the region, was designed to ensure that the Yoruba had a voice at the centre. Similarly, the controversy over the 1962 census figures, which led to the break-up of the NPC/NCNC "marriage of convenience", was based on the implications of the figures for the allocation of parliamentary seats and resources at the centre. The NCNC was also disgruntled by the First National Development Plan project, a six-year development plan that concentrated the bulk of federal capital expenditure in the North and accelerated the appointment of less-qualified Northerners instead of Southerners to top political and civil service positions.[78]

On 15 January 1966, a group of young army officers carried out a coup that toppled the government of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa. The military coup replaced a federal government headed by a Northerner with one led by an Igbo from the East. The power equation between the North and the rest of the country was thus upset by the military assumption of power in January, 1966. The coup was greeted in the South by widespread rejoicing; the coup leaders were acclaimed heroes. However, in the North, the reaction was more subdued because the bulk of the senior military officers and politicians killed were of Northern origin. General Johnson Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi, who subsequently became head of the military regime, and his advisers mistook the widespread rejoicing that greeted the coup as a mandate to unify Nigeria by decree. Believing that regionalism was the root cause of Nigeria's problems, General Aguiyi-Ironsi proclaimed himself an advocate of a united Nigeria. Hence, without waiting for official reports from his advisory commissions, he arbitrarily promulgated the Unification Decree No. 34 on 24 May 1966. The decree abolished the federation and proclaimed Nigeria to be a unitary state with a unified civil service. In the North, where the coup had claimed the life of the Premier and the lives of senior army officers of Northern origin, the Unification Decree was regarded as a plot by the Igbo of the East to gain control and to lord it over the Hausa-Fulani of the North. As a result, violent demonstrations calling for "*araba"* (a Hausa word for seceding or division) broke out in the North, followed by the killings of the Igbo on an industrial scale.

On 29 July 1966, a group of Northern officers led a counter-coup in which the Head of State, General Aguiyi-Ironsi, and scores of Igbo officers and other ranks were killed. In line with the mood of the people of the North whose clarion call during the May 29 disturbances in the North was *araba* (secede), the coup leaders moved to withdraw from Lagos, and the rest of the

78 M Meredith, *The states of Africa: A history of fifty years of independence* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 197.

South, and to secede from Nigeria. Only the wise counsel by some northern politicians that the North could not survive without the South persuaded the rebels to scrap their plan.[79] However, they insisted that a relatively junior officer, Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon, should supersede many senior Southern officers to become the new military Head of State.[80] In his maiden broadcast to the country, Gowon voided the Unification Decree and declared that there was, "as yet no basis for Nigerian unity".[81] Another upsurge of violence erupted in the North on a far more terrible scale than before. In the savage onslaught that followed, thousands of Igbo were killed or maimed. To escape the violence, a massive exodus of the Igbo from the North to the East began. The authorities did not attempt to stop the persecution and massacre.[82] On 30 May 1967, a year after the first riots against the Igbo in the North, Lt Colonel Ojukwu, who had rejected the emergence of Gowon as head of state based on seniority, announced the secession of the Igbo from Nigeria and proclaimed the independence of the state of Biafra.

Meanwhile, three days before Ojukwu announced the secession, Nigeria was reconstituted from four regions into 12 states, in a masterstroke designed to undermine Biafra territorially, with six in the supposedly monolithic North and six from the three areas in the South. In effect, the territory over which Biafra would have claimed authority was split into three states: one of them for the Igbo, and the other two for other ethnic groups in the former Eastern region. It is instructive to note that the timing of this action, and its effect in isolating the Igbo in a separate state, meant that it was essentially a calculated political manipulation.

To bring secessionist Biafra back to the Federation of Nigeria, a 30-month civil war, 1967-1970, was fought – to preserve the unity for which Gowon had said there was no basis. With the Nigerian Civil War outbreak in 1967, the North tightened its control over the Nigerian state, as the army which ruled the country was now led by Northern officers. From its first incursion into the Nigerian political scene in 1966, the military dominated the political leadership in the country until 1999, except for a stint of civilian rule between 1979 and 1983. The years of military government entrenched the Northern hold on power. It took the better part of two decades and three military regimes before the then military-political leadership began to act on national unity. From the beginning, the military had attributed the collapse of the Balewa administration to disunity and corruption. Hence, the "search for unity" became a ready rationalisation for the country's subsequent centralisation

79 Kurfi, *The Nigerian general elections, 1959 and 1979,* p. 39.
80 Kurfi, *The Nigerian general elections, 1959 and 1979,* p. 39.
81 *Vanguard,* 27 November 2005.
82 Meredith, *The states of Africa,* p. 201.

of power and unitarisation, even though this was more a reflection of the armed forces' tradition of centralised command. Consequently, five years after the civil war, the military regimes of General Muritala Mohammed and their successors returned to the same idea of unitarisation via the policy of promoting unity through centralisation, by building "Unity Schools", nationalising educational management and taking over state universities. Even the media, including state radio and television were not spared in this drive to promote instant unity.[83]

Apart from centralising power, the Nigerian military dictators also reviewed the country's administrative structure. From the creation of 12 states on the eve of the Civil War in 1967 and then a further 24, the military increased the country's administrative units to a total of 36 states, 774 local government areas, and a Federal Capital Territory. There was, however, no rhyme or reason to the process. First, it was part of a pattern that rendered the exercise futile as a device for the credible structural engineering of a stable Nigerian polity. More importantly, it also maintained the North-South physical dichotomy that had characterised the country's administrative structure from colonial times while retaining the inherent political advantages conferred on the North. For instance, it is significant to note that 19 of the 36 states and 419 local governments were allocated to the North, against 17 states and 355 local governments for the South. In one instance, Kano State, whose population and number of local governments were on a par with those of Lagos State as of 1991, was split into two states, namely, Kano and Jigawa, both of which now had 71 local governments – over three times the number of local governments allocated to Lagos State, regardless of a population equal, if not more numerous, to that of Kano and Jigawa combined. One significant implication is that the bulk of the 20 per cent of the Federation Account earmarked for local governments ended up in the North. Also, in the House of Representatives, the North had 182 seats against the South's 154. These structural imbalances of representation and allocation of national resources enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, a legacy from the military, have continued to impede the harmonious co-existence of the different nationalities that make up the Nigerian polity.

With each new state created, the centre gets more vigorous, while the constituent states get weaker. Even under the civilian government of 1979 to 1983, state governments found themselves compelled to stay "on the good side" of the central government to receive allocations of funds that would enable them to function. Therefore, the establishment of a strong central government from above instead of healthy growth from below did much to

83 Akinola, *Leadership and the post-colonial Nigerian predicament,* p. 16.

heighten the centrifugal tendencies in Nigeria. The military's concept of *esprit de corps* was its façade to impose unity from above. However, beneath this veneer of Nigerian unity, it was possible to discern preferences and commitments to sectionalism and even the promotion of an ethnic agenda. By the time of the regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida, 1985-1993, and Sanni Abacha, 1993-1998, governance in Nigeria had seemed a macabre game of self-perpetuation in office disguised as a political transition to civil rule.[84] Yet, despite all odds, Nigerians have sometimes demonstrated that they are ahead of their rulers in their understanding of what is in their collective interest. An outstanding example of this was the 1993 presidential election, when Nigerians, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, voted overwhelmingly for a Muslim-Muslim ticket of Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola and Babagana Kingibe.[85] The election, which held so much promise for national unity, was the culmination of a political transition programme that had been eight years in the making. Its annulment by General Babangida, for reasons he has never been able to explain coherently, poisoned harmonious inter-group relations and plunged the country into turmoil and retarded its political development. As Nigeria descended into violence, disorder and repression, Babangida's position became untenable, and he resigned. After a brief interregnum, General Sanni Abacha staged a palace coup, abrogated the constitution and demolished all the democratic institutions that had been established over the previous four years.[86] His dictatorship, which lasted from 1993 to 1998, became more dreaded than any preceding it.

By the end of military rule in 1999, several ethnic militias, sub-national groups and organisations, and civil society groups, who resented and raised critical questions about the nature and structure of the Nigerian union, had emerged. While the ethnic militias clamoured for autonomy and resource control, the civil society groups, especially from the South, agitated for a national conference for the peoples of Nigeria to discuss and decide the terms and conditions of their continued coexistence. The agitations that were led (and are still being led) by these groups continue to threaten national cohesion. Collectively, these groups sought to manipulate the process of national interactions to the sole advantage of the group they represented. This is an index of their loss of confidence in the Nigerian project. On the eve of Nigeria's centenary, the then President, Goodluck Jonathan, declared that the time had come for a national dialogue, at which representatives of the ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria would address the unresolved

84 Akinola, *Leadership and the post-colonial Nigerian predicament,* p. 22.
85 O Dare, "One hundred years after amalgamation: The Nigerian condition", Address delivered at the International Conference Centre, University of Ibadan, 26 May 2014.
86 Meredith, *The states of Africa,* p. 397.

issues of the Nigerian experience. However, like all such previous national dialogues,[87] roughly 50 per cent of the delegates were handpicked by the president himself, and discussion on the unity of Nigeria was foreclosed, because Nigeria is an indissoluble entity and its unity is non-negotiable. As a result, despite the seemingly feeble attempts by successive governments since the return to civilian rule in 1999 to address the problem of national unity, secessionist agitation and a demand for a genuine restructuring of the country by the various sub-national groups and ethnic groups militias has persisted. Added to these are the problems of violent regional conflicts, terrorism, the indigene-settler question, herdsmen-farmers issues, etc. These threats are not diminishing and are not likely to decrease without a substantive and far-reaching restructuring.

6. CONCLUSION

One hundred years after the 1914 amalgamation Nigeria is still in search of national unity. The inherent structural imbalance that perfused the amalgamation scheme coupled with the nature of British colonial policy generated cleavages and contours which have remained largely unresolved. The nationalists who sat with the British officials under the auspices of the various constitutional conferences that ushered in independence acquiesced to the lopsided arrangement hoping that the country would be restructured after independence. However, efforts by successive governments in this regard were characterised by distrust and hatred. Hence, the constituent parts of the federation have not had a genuine chance to determine or discuss, in an unfettered and genuinely democratic manner, the basis of inter-group and inter-ethnic relations.

Therefore, the major challenge is the unscrambling of the lopsided colonial structural heritage, which has become an “albatross” in the country. It might well remain difficult for Nigeria to have enduring peace and national cohesion, while avoiding the fate of erstwhile plural societies like the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, without embarking on transparent and deliberate political engineering aimed at restructuring the country in a way that would promote justice, equity, and a sense of shared belonging between and among the different ethnic nationalities that make up the federation. To be sure, restructuring in this context transcends a mere shift of power from one region to another; it involves a much more fundamental review of the

87 Political Bureau in the 1980s; Constitutional Conference in the 1990s; National Political Conference in 2005. At all these fora, the question of the structure of the polity was dubbed “No Go Area”. This is on the pretext that Nigeria as presently structured is “indissoluble” and “non-negotiable”. And herein lies the problem.

entire gamut of ethnic and national coexistence of the diverse nationalities that make up Nigeria. It is instructive that no plural nation-state exists, with such ethnic and cultural diversities as Nigeria, without a genuine and mutual agreement about the basis of shared nationality.