

1914 AMALGAMATION: A CURSORY EXAMINATION OF NIGERIA AT CENTENARY

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Abstract.

1914 amalgamation is one of the major landmarks in the Nigeria's history, as the various nationalities that make up the country were formally brought together under a single colonial administration. As the country moves towards 100years of her creation, it is necessary to re-examine this colonial decision vis-à-vis her current state of being. With the use of descriptive survey methodology, this paper, thus, examines the amalgamation of 1914 in Nigeria in relation to the state of the country after almost 100 years of her creation. The examination shows that the amalgamation is a major source of Nigeria's persistent crisis of unity, peaceful coexistence and development, as it succeeded in creating Nigeria but not Nigerians. It is therefore concluded that instead of elaborately and flamboyantly celebrating the event, marking it in sober reflective mood is what required.

Keywords: Amalgamation, Centenary, Colonization, Celebration, Leadership.

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Introduction.

By January 1st 2014, Nigeria will be 100 years old having come into existence on January 1st 1914 with the merger of the then Southern and Northern Protectorates by Lord Fredrick John Lugard. Before then, the two protectorates lived as distinct and separate entities; not having much in common (Ige, 2002; Lasisi, Ige, & Yusuf 1999; Oke, 2013). Nigeria is thus, a colonial creation whose creation, though gradual and systematic, began long before the amalgamation of 1914. Earlier in the 19th century, the British had occupied the different parts of the present Nigeria at different times, and established control over them. These areas were grouped into protectorates namely Lagos/Niger Coast Protectorates which was known as Southern Protectorates and the Northern Protectorates. These two protectorates were merged together in 1914 by the British to give birth to what is presently called Nigeria (Oke, 2013).

With the amalgamation, Nigeria was placed under one Governor-General (Lord Lugard) who assumed full control of the country as a polity. In essence, the amalgamation, both in theory and in practice, marked the beginning of Nigeria being placed under one ruler as it is with modern state (Ige, 2002). The country became a state with a statute book. The general order and memoranda of instruction guiding issues in administration were revised and updated in accordance with the principle of amalgamation. Also, the Nigerian national emblem was created, a new badge for the flag of Nigeria made and a new seal for the country was approved (Nwabueze, 1982). In sum, the 1914 amalgamation is a major landmark in Nigeria's history as it climaxed the process of bringing the various nationalities that make up the present Nigeria into one administration. The decision of the government of the day to celebrate the centenary of

the existence of the country as a single political entity is not unconnected with the significant historical importance that the date symbolizes in the history of the country.

There have, however, been divergent views as to the rationality or otherwise of the celebration. The proponent of the celebration, the Federal Government, is of the belief that the celebration is not only desirable but imperative because of the landmark achievements the country has recorded in the last 100 years since her amalgamation. It believes that the celebration will offer Nigerians an opportunity to rejuvenate and have faith in the country and her potentials (Ben, 2013). On the other hand, some concerned citizens have taken the position that Nigerians have no business celebrating a colonial misadventure, an event that a founding father once referred to as “the mistake of 1914” (Fawole, 2013a). They are of the opinion that the event is nothing but a project in which the government will engage in pointless jamborees mainly to massage the ego and satisfy their sense of celebration, reeks of insensitivity, if not sheer immorality, in country of millions of unemployed youths, broken down infrastructure, decaying educational and health institutions (Fawole, 2013a; Oke, 2013).

It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine the amalgamation of 1914 in Nigeria vis-à-vis the state of the country after the exit of the amalgamator (Britain). With the use of descriptive survey research methodology, it seeks as a subject of investigation, the mode and motive of the amalgamation and its implications on Nigeria’s social, economic and political development. This is necessary in order to determine the desirability or otherwise of the ongoing centenary celebration in the country. The paper is structured into five sections. The introduction is followed by an insight into the state of Nigeria at centenary. The desirability or otherwise of the

centenary celebration is the thrust of the fourth section. The fifth section concludes the examination.

The 1914 Amalgamation Revisited

The ideological underpin that propelled European colonial expansion and domination of Africa has been attributed to various factors among which economic motives are the most pronounced. The crude logic of capitalist imperialism is believed to breed colonialism (Fawole, 2013a). The industrial revolution in Europe produced an economic motive for colonial expansion in the 19th century as it created an impulse to find new markets to sell excess products and raw materials for industries (Ejimofofor, 1987). The Europeans thus, began the scramble for territories and resources in Africa. This scramble was legitimized through the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, during which Africa continent was arbitrarily partitioned among the European countries.

During this conference, Britain secured an international licence to rule an undermarked chunk of land that later merged together to be known as Nigeria (Ejimofofor, 1987). These territories, which were occupied in different stages at different time, were grouped into protectorates of Lagos, Niger Coast and Northern Protectorates. In 1906, the Niger Coast Protectorate was merged with Lagos creating Southern Protectorate, thereby reducing the protectorates from three to two i.e. Northern and Southern Protectorates. On January 1st 1914, the amalgamation of the two protectorates into one administration took effect with Lord Fredrick Lugard as the first Governor-General. The name, Nigeria, was said to have been suggested in 1898 by Flora Shaw who later became Lady Lugard.

Series of explanations have been offered by historians and other scholars on the motives of Britain to embark on amalgamation. Some argued that the decision was for administrative convenience while others argued that the decision was taken to balance the administrative shortages being recorded in the Northern Protectorate. In the view of Ejimofor (1987: 36-37), the British decision to amalgamate Southern and Northern Protectorates “came about at a time when both her private commercial and humanitarian interests complemented her national interest”. Similarly, some observers hold the view that the amalgamation of the two protectorates was just meant to further the parochial interest of the British administration which never brought real development to most of the countries she colonized (Kirk-Green, 1968; Whitaker, 1970; Oke, 2013; Oweh, 2013). Others see the amalgamation as nothing but the culmination of years of conquest of independent kingdoms, empires and states that were then forcibly merged together for greater exploitation (The Punch, August 19, 2012).

Fafowora (2013) is of the opinion that economic interest was the main reason for 1914 amalgamation in Nigeria. He noted that Britain was not really looking for new colonies in Africa, but trade and market. In achieving this objective, colonization, through amalgamation, was embraced. That was the reason why the hitherto distinct and separate entities, with no or little things in common were merged together by fiat. No account was taken of differences in culture, tradition, religion etc (Oke, 2013). According to Tamuno (1998), the decision to amalgamate the existing protectorates was to reduce the imperial cost of administering them. In his statement:

British tax-payers were reluctant to bear a heavy burden for the administration of these British holdings. Not everyone of these could balance its budget from local sources of revenue. Nor were their actual and potential resources equal. British policy-makers, therefore, explored new ways of doing old things (to optimize colonial control with minimum resources). Pragmatic, economy-based considerations, such as these provided the *raison d'être* of the 1898-1914 schemes concerning amalgamation in Nigeria. Local public opinion, for or against these schemes, was neither sought nor given. The prime-movers were British, their own interest, no matter how strictly defined and applied, mattered most to them. Their prime consideration.....was to use the funds available from the richer "south" to offset the adverse financial standing of the less prosperous "North" and so reduce fiscal dependence on scarce imperial grant-in-aid (Tamuno, 1998: 15).

It can therefore be argued that the colonial amalgamation that gave birth to Nigeria was not altruistic (Fawole, 2013b). This explains why Britain had no definite plans for the future of the country as well as her other colonies. There was little long range planning in Britain for the future of her colonies since her sole purpose was to extract their resources for the benefit of the Britons. The resultant colonial state created by the 1914 amalgamation, as observed by Fawole (2013b) "was highly centralized, bureaucratic, predatory and violent; it severely excluded the colonial peoples from participating in governance and had no corresponding responsibilities towards them beyond what is necessary to facilitate resource exploitation".

Consequently, the amalgamation of 1914 is believed to be a major source and fountain of Nigeria's persistent crisis of peaceful coexistence. Lord Lugard succeeded in creating Nigeria but failed to create Nigerians (Fawole, 2013b). The colonialists did not bother to create Nigerians by welding the diverse people together. As observed by Ejimofor (1987), the fact that British colonial policies discouraged interregional migration and cultural diffusion culminated in the series of intra and inter-tribal crises being experienced in post-colonial Nigeria. In other words, the preference of the colonialists

for keeping the separate nationalities apart is partly responsible for the ethno-regional fault-lines affecting Nigerian politics and governance till date.

An Insight into the State of Nigeria at Centenary.

An insight into the contemporary state of Nigeria cannot be done in isolation of an understanding of the afore-stated historical antecedence. Though it seems unfair to attribute every deformity in the polity on colonial amalgamation, the impact of this singular epoch on the country's social, economic and political formations cannot be over-emphasized (Ajayi, 2007). Generally, colonialism with its exogenous character laid the foundation for the dislocations being experienced in trade, industrialization, education, political parties and peaceful coexistence (Ake, 1981; Nnoli, 1981; Onimode, 1982). In this sense, the system that Britain bequeathed to Nigeria at her independence in 1960 was full of too many conflicts and contradictory to be able to stand the rigours and demands of post-colonial centrifugal pressures (Ejimofor, 1987).

It is not surprising therefore that at centenary; Nigeria is yet to find her bearing as a country capable of fulfilling the purpose of her existence. At independence in 1960, the country had a great promise for Nigerians, Africa and black people all over the world. But down the line, due to systemic stress and bad leadership, things went wrong. That is why at hundred years of age, the unity and corporate existence of Nigeria is very much in doubt because of drifting leadership, insecurity and poverty in the midst of plenty. This is despite the fact that the country is lavishly endowed with abundant resources which place her in an enviable position among the comity of nation. Unfortunately, these resources have not translated into a stable political and economic

system being witnessed in smaller and less endowed states. The experience of Nigerians is that of “a paradox of political savagery in the midst of economic abundance” (Ajayi, 2007: 10). Hundred years after amalgamation, the country is still in search of nationhood and national integration.

In addition to her underdeveloped status in the comity of modern states, Nigeria’s global image continues to sore. The country is seen as “as a big-for-nothing nation of corrupt and incompetent rulers, fraudsters and election riggers, a post-colonial hell, and a bad advertisement for the black race” (Fawole, 2013a). This is due to the malady of corruption which, despite the pretence of being crusading against continues to gain momentum. At international gatherings, Nigeria’s positions are no longer respected in spite of her enormous contributions, most especially in Africa. Consequent upon this, the recent World Bank ranking shows that Nigeria is among the global failed states. The country is ranked as the 8th worst country to be mother globally (Daily Trust, May 8, 2013).

Most disturbingly, Nigeria currently appears to be sitting on the keg of gun powder with numerous centrifugal forces that threaten her continuing existence (Ajayi, 2007; Fawole, 2013a; Fawole, 2013c). As observes by Fawole:

Nigeria is currently in the grip of pernicious domestic terrorism and other forms of anti-state violence unleashed by malevolent Boko Haram and their likes. Nigerians are living in mortal fear in most parts of Northern Nigeria because of Islamist terrorists who have declared war on them for no justifiable reasons. The conditions in the Southern states are not much better; kidnapping for ransom and criminal extortion have become a booming trade, armed robbery, pipeline vandalism and sundry other violent crimes have become so pervasive as to make the country unstable. Different centrifugal forces are clawing at the soul of the Nigerian state. In general, living in Nigeria has become so

dangerous that thousands of our children are daily voting with their feet and becoming economic refugees in other countries (Fawole, 2013a).

Other centrifugal issues include resource allocation and control, power rotation among the geopolitical zones, respect for constitution and constitutionalism, inter/intra-party wrangling and the resort to the use of impeachment as a weapon to settle political scores (Ajayi, 2007). Most unfortunately, the political maneuvering towards the 2015 general elections are being predicated not on nationalistic issues of how to get the best men and women to run the country but rather on primordial considerations of where power to and which ethnic group(s) should provide the president (Fawole, 2013c).

Nigeria's efforts to deal with these growing centrifugal tendencies have not yielded desirable results. The country's ruling elites since independence through the military epoch, till date have concentrated on maintaining power to the detriment of the masses. Nigeria's ruling elites, without a clear pan-Nigerian vision of national integration and transformation, continue to make the country a laughing stock of other countries by arrogantly displaying signs of ineptitude, ineffectiveness, idiocy, tribalism, nepotism and favouritism. As observed by Fawole (2013c), "Nigerians are today defined more by primordial criteria, while faith in the so-called nation is waning at such terrific rate that the prediction by the US intelligence community that Nigeria could vanish from the world map by 2015 risks becoming self-fulfilling prophecy".

In sum, the trajectory of Nigeria's creation remains the most debilitating obstacles to her development. With the amalgamation of 1914, the British brought together several hundreds of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups and initiated policies that discouraged interregional migration and diffusion (Ejimofofor, 1987). This largely accounts for the

systemic stress that is being experienced in the country. In essence, the seed of discord planted by the colonialists, nurtured and nourished by their Nigerian successors is now breeding fruits.

The Desirability or Otherwise of Centenary Celebration

On February 4, 2013, the Nigerian government launched a year-long programme in commemoration of Nigeria's centenary, signaling 100 years of the existence of the country as a single entity. However, controversy lingers, and grows by the day, on the rationality of such celebration. There have been divergent opinions as to the desirability or otherwise of the centenary project. The main advocate of the celebration, the Federal Government, is of the opinion that 1914 is a notable historical landmark in Nigeria and thus worthy of elaborate celebration, while some people have taken the position that the celebration is uncalled for as 1914 symbolizes nothing but Lord Lugard's opportunistic administrative colonial date fixing.

In justifying the celebration, the government opines that it is not easy for the country to exist for 100 years, especially given the political and social upheavals that have hastened the demise and balkanization of many countries in recent history. It is believed that despite the socio-politico-economic challenges being faced by the country, there is still something to celebrate i.e. that spirit that builds great nations and civilizations, that unflinching optimism and resilience of Nigerians who remain proud of their national identity and strive daily to recover that special spirit that enable them to triumph over every adversity as a people (BusinessDay, 2013). The celebration would, therefore, offer Nigerians an opportunity to rejuvenate and have faith in Nigeria and her potentials. It

would also be used to replace pessimism with optimism to make Nigeria rise above her challenges (Ben, 2013).

It is believed that the celebration would offer an opportunity to renew the citizens' trust in Nigeria and be more committed to the country as well as drive her to greatness, just as it was envisaged by her founding fathers. In other words, the celebration is seen a medium to re-brand, rejuvenate and pursue the true ideals for Nigeria (Oweh, 2013). In sum, the celebration is hoped to be a rally point for the unity of Nigeria, a reminder of Nigeria's entity, unity and oneness. The celebration is therefore not only desirable but imperative given the landmark achievements Nigeria has recorded globally since her creation. The country has played significant roles in world affairs like great contributions to the decolonization of Africa, sporting events and global peace operations.

In order to make the celebration a memorable event, series of programmes have been outlined. Most of these programmes are anchored on Nigeria's cultural heritage. This is premised on the government's belief that its commitment to transform Nigeria will be strengthened by a new understanding of her history, the visions of her founding fathers, Nigerians' collective achievements and the promise of the nation of their dreams. The celebration would involve arts exposition, literary festivals, essay competitions, photo exhibition, telling story through captivating poetry and an interpretation of Nigeria's globally acknowledged music as a way of sharing the uniqueness of Nigeria's story. One of the endearing legacies of the celebration would be the development of a Centenary City in Abuja (Oweh, 2013). Meanwhile, the government has consistently given the assurance that no public funds would be committed to the projects as it would be private sector sponsored.

However beyond all these justifications, most Nigerians have come to greet the celebration with mixed feelings (Ben, 2013; Fawole, 2013a; Fawole, 2013b; Fawole, 2013c; Oke, 2013; Oweh, 2013). Beyond the historical perspective, some observers hold the view that the amalgamation of the two protectorates was just meant to further the parochial interest of the British administration, which never brought real development to most countries they colonized, as such should not be seen as a memorable event (Oweh, 2013). The British amalgamation is believed to be nothing but the culmination of years of conquest of independent kingdoms, empires and states that were then forcibly merged together for greater exploitation, and no reasonable people celebrate their defeat and subsequent subjugation by a colonial power (The Punch, August 19, 2012). It is therefore argued that what is worth celebrating is the colonial opportunistic merger. On the contrary, what is worth reflecting on for nation building is the struggle of Nigeria's founding fathers for independence, which materialized in 1960, and Republic Day of October 1963, when Nigeria became a Federal Republic within the commonwealth (Issa, 2013).

In the opinion of Fawole (2013a), the celebration of the 100 years anniversary of a country brought together by colonial adventurers when that same country is tottering dangerously on the edge of disintegration and collapse is unreasonable and in bad faith. In this line, some people have argued that Nigeria is going through a very troubling time and, instead of wasting resources on centenary celebration, the government should concentrate on solving the problems confronting the country. This is necessary as Nigeria's current travails as a conglomeration of disparate nationalities is directly traceable to the 1914 colonial state formation. In colonial Nigeria, with over two hundred

and fifty nationalities, it was deliberate British policy to create gulfs and division between the various groups, such that forging a single united nationalist opposition to foreign rule proved difficult (Fawole, 2013b). Hundred years of her creation, Nigeria continues to be hunted by these disintegrative policies.

The re-inspiration of the unity of Nigeria and her ability to weather the storms she had endured is the main reason being advanced by the government to justify the celebration. Some people however believe that this claim does not stand on firm ground. In the first instance, Nigerians were not part of creating Nigeria; and there has been no effort to ascertain whether her unity will persist if her diverse people were given the option of voluntary and peaceful exit. It is thus believed that the absence of a peaceful exit strategy, not a sense of a deep-seated amity, helps guarantee that the storms did not sunder the country (Fawole, 2013c). Another germane question begging for answer on Nigerian unity, as noted by Oweh (2013), is: Unity for what benefit, and at what cost? According to him, the question arises, mainly as a result of the failure of past and present leaders to make the unity of the country count, or reflect in improvement in her development indices.

Some concerned and well meaning Nigerians also view the assurance by the government that the celebration would not involve the use of public funds as deceptive.

This is because, no private sector organization will commit billions of naira to a public project without getting its money back through shady contract deals and other phony patronage from government. This assumption is further buttressed by the fact that no private sector organization existing in the country will dole out its profits to government projects on altruistic basis, as their primary motive is profit maximization at all costs

(Oweh, 2013). It is thus argued that, instead of wasting resources on centenary celebration, the urgent task before Nigerian leaders should be how to restructure the country for development in the face of the failure of the current structure to deliver unity among the various ethnic nationalities that were forcefully merged together with the amalgamation of 1914.

Conclusion.

It has been established in this paper that Nigeria is a creation of the European domination, as the various parts that make up the country were amalgamated on January 1st 1914. 1914 is, thus, an important historical date in Nigeria's history. It was the year that the British brought the culturally diverse people of Nigeria together under one administration. However, the British and her Nigerian successors did not work for the unity and harmonious coexistence of the diverse ethnic nationalities that were merged together to create the country. Consequently, Nigeria remains largely alien to the people, a colonial artifact, and an atavistic reminder of a century of colonial domination and oppression by a foreign power (Fawole, 2013c). That is why today, the unity and corporate existence of the country is in a precarious condition. This is coupled with the drifting leadership, insecurity and poverty in the midst of plenty.

Though the Nigerian Government has already launched the centenary celebration, some people are of the opinion that rather than engage in such venture, the government would do better by engaging in sober reflection on the dangerous and pathetic state of the country, particularly in seeking out ways to surmount the challenges bedeviling the continuing existence of the country. This is necessary as the only thing that seems to

keep the country together is the crude oil. However, it is widely believed that division would not solve the Nigerians' problems as they stand to gain more by staying together. But the foundation of the unity and oneness needs to be decided by the Nigerians. This explains the frequent call for the convocation of sovereign national conference. Thus, rather than expend energy on celebration of centenary, the government and every stakeholder should come to terms with the reality that Nigerians need to negotiate the basis of their togetherness (The Punch, August 19, 2012).

It is also important to note that no nation develops as long as her citizens and leaders romance over the past. The past is gone for good but Nigerians can tap from the mistakes of the past by charting a bright course for Nigeria. The country is endowed with all the necessary requirements to be among the best nations in the world. What is dwarfing her development is the lack of committed, transparent and 'national' leadership.

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