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Nigeria and the Challenge of National Integration: Lessons from Pre-colonial Diplomacy

By

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Abstract

One of the major challenges facing Nigeria is that of national integration. Although political instability, generally, is prevalent in every human society, the Nigerian scenario is such that generates tremendous concern. The heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society, consisting of about 450 ethnic groups results in relations among competing ethnic nationalities being punctuated with suspicion, fear and crisis. The peculiarity of scenario lies in the fact that, while it may be easy to acknowledge the ethnological visibilities and boundaries of the majority ethnic groups like the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, it is not easy to demarcate the boundaries of the numerous minority ethnic nationalities that spread across the various geographical zones. This presents a unique challenge of how best to achieve social cohesion and integration or the much publicized “unity in diversity”. Coupled with the underlying issues is the assertion that the geopolitical entity known as Nigeria is an artificial creation of the British. However, even though the British imperialists played a significant role in the evolution of Nigeria, irrefutable, evidence abounds to confirm that the people that merged to form the modern day Nigeria were never too strange with one another. Rather, intense diplomatic intercourse existed between them. The work which adopted an analytical historical methodology, therefore, sought to dismantle the destructive myths and assertions arising from gross ignorance of the practice of pre-colonial diplomacy in Nigeria. It examined the pre-colonial contacts and the variables that propelled them. It was concluded that these historical factors should be adapted for national integration process.

Keywords: Challenge, National Integration, Lessons, Pre-colonial Diplomacy

1. Introduction

National integration can be regarded as a sub-process of the wider concept of nation-building which is very complex. Amucheazi (1980) defined it as the bringing together of the various relationships, with the loyalty of the nation placed above other loyalties. One may describe it simply as a concerted effort on the part of the individuals,

as well as the government of a geo-political entity, to consolidate diverse people, communities and socio-cultural groups under the canopy of a broad concept of nationality. It entails the successful development of common institutions and norms by the diverse groups in a political system, geared towards settling conflicts peacefully and pursues collective goals cooperatively. The rationale here is to change the existing “traditional” inward-looking attitudes of ethnic groupings and inculcate in the citizenry a sense of loyalty, belonging and patriotism to the new and larger geo-political entity. It involves natural understanding and interdependence, as well as the replacement of old habits and commitments with new and relatively wider ones (Ajayi, 2005).

Nigeria has been unable to evolve an inclusive society since her independence in 1960, owing to the fact that clannish loyalty takes precedence over national orientation. The monster that has dwarfed every attempt at national integration is that of Nigeria being an “artificial creation” of the British imperialists. However, Ikime (2006) noted that those that peddle this idea fail to understand the fact that no nation of the world as we know today came into existence in one fell swoop. All nations are therefore, products of history, which often involved periods of imperial subjugation of some groups by other groups. In that sense all nations are “artificial creations”.

Geographical factors show that Nigeria is a country whose major zones complement one another in terms of human needs. The major geographical zones are mangrove swamps, forests, semi-savannah and grassland or savannah. None of these peoples living in any of these zones had been able to live unto themselves (Ajayi, 2005). There were far more ties between the various groups than we want to concede today. Social and commercial intercourse on a huge scale made the Edo, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ibibio, Nupe, Itsekiri, Urhobo and the Igala far more aware of each other than we sometimes think. Various imperialisms (long before British imperialism), brought different groups together under one political centre for different length of times. For instance, the Benin Empire conquered some parts of the present day Yoruba states including Lagos, the Jukun’s influence at a time extended westwards to the Bauchi Plateau and eastwards to the Mambila (Abubakar, 1980), while the Fulani conquest brought the states in Northern Nigeria under its hegemony. These imperial powers exercised authority over their subjects like the British colonialist later did to Nigerians. This meant that different Nigerian peoples learnt to co-exist under some measure of common direction for varying periods. In other words, long before the British conquered us and forced us to live under a single government; our various peoples had knowledge of themselves and had devised various formulae for co-existence and intercourse (Ikime, 2006).

Indeed, most of the ethnic nationalities that exist today are actually branches of the existing groups and the languages spoken by many of the ethnic nationalities are actually dialects of the major groups because most of the sub-group languages are traceable to a common family of languages. For instance, the Niger-Congo family of languages has seven-sub-groupings (Benue-Congo, Ijoid, Adamawa/Ubangian, Mande, West Atlantic, Kwa and Gur) and is the largest language family in Nigeria. More than two thirds of the languages spoken in Nigeria belong to this family. Within the Niger-Congo phylum, the dominant sub-family is the Benue-Congo, which has 319 of the 515 languages (Urua, 2007). Unfortunately, these robust historical undercurrents have not been fully tapped for national integration efforts. By drawing attention to these features of our past, history can provide some answers to the problem of our diverse origins.

In the light of the foregoing facts, the paper assesses the challenges associated with national integration in Nigeria, in view of the heterogenous nature of the country. The paper also assesses the precolonial diplomacy with a view to drawing from the rich historical antecedents to propel the national integration process.

2. National Integration: A Conceptual Clarification

According to Weiner (1965), integration may refer to the process of having together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit. This definition presupposes that there are in existence an ethnically - pluralist society in which each group is characterized by its own language or other self-conscious cultural qualities. This territorial integration implies that the territory must be in existence under the control of one state and one government, like the Nigerian state. It also implies the authority of the central government must be firmly established over the country's territories. This is known as state-building, as opposed to the process of nation building.

National integration is one among the five types of integration identified by Weiner. The others are territorial, value, elite-mass and integrative behaviours. National integration refers, specifically, to the problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. This integration involves amalgamation of disparate social, economic, religious, ethnic and geographic elements into a single nation state, a homogenous entity, like that of Platos's *Polis*, the City-State. This kind of integration implies that both the capacity of government to control the territory under its jurisdiction as well as to stimulate a set of popular attitudes described as loyalty, obligation, allegiance, patriotism and willingness by the people to place national interest above local or parochial concern towards the nation generally. Also, where national integration thrives, the individual realize their rights and privileges identify with the state and owe allegiance to it, because they see themselves as standing in direct relation (Okoli, Anamndu and Udokang, 2004).

The Nigerian nation-state is a pluralist state. It came into existence on the 1st of January, 1914, when the Northern and the Southern Protectorates were amalgamated by Lord Lugard, who thereafter became the first Governor-General of a united Nigeria (Akpan, 1978). Since then, Nigeria has metamorphosed from two units to 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Ifamose, 2011).

There are many theories of national integration which would be suitable for studying the Nigerian-state. Some of the approaches include the functionalist, the federalist and the cybernetic. The functionalist approach requires the study of Nigeria within the primordial ethnic, cultural, economic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity and the need to drive the citizens into homogenous unit which may permit participatory government (Nye, 1968). This may be performed through the process of political socialization. The federalist model extols the creation of a central government that coordinates the constituent units, while the cybernetic approach emphasizes the establishment of contacts and promotion of interactions through which the component units would understand and appreciate themselves better. These approaches are said to contribute to effective national integration which fosters political unification of the component parts into one whole unit. This ultimate goal of national integration as a process, irrespective of preferred strategy, is the political unification of the constituent units into one whole nation, the type of Platos's *Polis* (City State) (Okoli, Anamdu and Udokang, 2004). This study adopts the functionalist approach.

Pre-colonial Diplomatic Relations Influenced by Geography and Economy

As it is well known, Nigeria is squarely situated in the tropics. It is flanked to the North by the Sahara Desert and the South by the Gulf of Guinea. The country has an area of about 923,768 square kilometers. At least, two broad geographical zones can be identified in Nigeria, namely: (i) the tropical rain forest which stretches from the coast to about 9⁰ North Latitude; and (ii) the Savannah zone which covers the rest of the country, up to Nigeria/Niger boundary (Okpeh, 2008). Geographical variations and differences in natural endowment gave serious support to the philosophy of comparative cost advantage. These in turn created the enabling ground for inter-ethnic trade in the pre-colonial times. In attempt to explore and exploit nature for the purpose of life sustenance, groups produced goods in surplus and in the process these surpluses were exchanged with people who were members of their immediate communities and those outside their areas (Usman and Odeh, 2015).

Evidences of trade relations, trade routes and markets abound in Nigeria areas during the pre-colonial times. It was through the networks of trade that goods that were obtainable in the Savannah (North) were taken to the South where there were ready buyers. Multiple trade routes existed, linking Hausa land with Borno; Borno with Adamawa and Benue valley; Hausa with Nupe and the confluence; Yorubaland and Yorubaland with Benin (Usman and Odeh, 2015). Hausa traders had travelled to the coastal centres of Porto Novo, Badagry and Lagos for trade and the principal commerce of Kano such as cotton and cloth got as far as the shores of the Atlantic (Hopkins, 1975) also potash from Borno was exported to Yorubaland (Lavers, 1980). Moreover, there was a consistent traffic on the Niger-Benue way and on the creeks and lagoons. Among the pre-colonial people, periodic markets also existed. The markets were held on the one cycle of four to five days and it usually covered a distance of 5 to 15 kilometres and traders were expected to return the same day, the reverse was the case in terms of the long distance ones. Markets were important not only as a place for buying and selling, but also a meeting place for relatives, friends, traditional authorities; to hear news, dispatched gifts, meet lover or in-law, pay debt, settle disputes, pay respect to an elder; and some organized and held meeting of their periodic thrift or mutual aid (Usman and Odeh, 2015).

Studies concentrating mainly on the period since 1800 or so, have established beyond all doubt that Southern Nigeria and the entire valley of the Benue constituted a very dynamic trading area. The major routes included the Niger itself; a lead route going from Elugwu Igbo through Efure in Igala to the Benue at about Amaegede; another land route from Eastern Igboland through Utonkou, Yangede and Otukpo to Ibi, also on the Benue; and still another trail linking the Tiv with the people of Ogoja. Among the main articles of trade along these routes were slaves, woven cloth, cam wood, tobacco, salt, ivory, agricultural tools, household utensils, livestock (such as horses, donkeys, rare birds, goats, domestic fowls and so on) beads and farm produce. Among the leading traders were the Ijaw, the Aboh, the Igala on the Niger, the Awka, the Nri, the Aro, the Tiv, the Jukun and Idoma on the land route. Through these contacts, certain currencies had also come to be widely used in the region. These included brass, rods, manilla, cowries and the indigenous money known variously as *akika* among the Idoma, *ibia* among the Tiv and *umumu* among the Igbo (Afigbo, 1997).

Okpeh (2008), noted that the existence of trade routes and water-ways suggest the integrated nature of the economic activities of the people in the past. Popular land route like Kano-Badagary route crossing the Niger; N'Garzagamu (Borno)-Yola route which

criss-crossed the Jukun and Igbo countries as well as areas in modern Cross River and Akwa Ibom States and through Bauchi with connecting centres in the Panda, Abinchi, Ibi, Muri, Wukari and Alagoland; and water ways like the Niger and its tributary, the Benue and network of creeks which spanned from Badagary in Western Yorubaland to Efik in the east all facilitated the movement of people from one region to another.

An important dimension of this phenomenon was the emergence, growth and development of commercial centres in most parts of the country. For example, Raba was the location of the ancient market where the Nupe met with the Yoruba, the Bariba, the Hausa, Igbo, Ibibio, Ijaw, the Igbirra, Igala, Tiv and Idoma and so on. Dike (1956) has shown how the increase in commercial activities in the Niger Delta contributed to the emergence of such thriving commercial centres like (the main town in brackets): Itsekiri (Warri, Ebrohimi), Brass (Akassa, Nembe), Ekem Bonny (Bonny) and Calabar (Duke Town). It was in these towns that besides trade, other forms of interaction took place all of which generated the sense of awareness among these diverse groups (Okpeh, 2008).

Evidence abounds that, there had existed a formidable trade link between the Cross River region and the area across the Benue during the pre-colonial era. Hausa/Fulani merchants came into Calabar on foot through Ogoja-Ikom-Calabar route (Akoda, 2005). Effa-Atoe (1997) has identified some of the most important routes that facilitated the contact. The first route ran from Ibi, on the Benue, via Wukari (the Jukun capital), Yala, Ogoja, Ezza, Uburu, Afikpo, Bende, Arochukwu to Itu in Akwa Ibom State, where it joined the main Cross River route at Calabar. The land route may have ran from the Calabar estuary through the Qua territory to Akamkpa, Yakuur, Ikom up to Ogoja, Obudu, extending to the Benue valley region. She also notes that the commodities of trade along these routes varied. However, the most important were slaves, ivory, wild rubber, various food crops, which were exchanged for European wares such as gunpowder, textiles, tobacco, gin and so on. She stresses that the Benue valley was one of the greatest suppliers of slaves to the port of Calabar.

Effa-Atoe (2015) added that this commerce did generate benefits to the participants. It fostered inter-group relations between peoples of the two regions. Thus, apart from exchange of services, certain social, cultural and even political ideas were exchanged. This led to a proper consolidation of the relationship between peoples of the two areas and consequently a relatively conducive environment for the growth and expansion of trade. As noted by Alagoa (2009) the slave trade became a great agent for linking peoples. The slaves that arrived at the ports in the Niger Delta came from all parts of Nigeria, and not all of them were exported to the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe, hence, a substantial number were retained in the Niger Delta city states and incorporated and acculturated as full citizens.

Traditions of Origin/Migration and Pre-colonial Diplomacy

In addition to the geographical and economic factors, cultural forces also engendered contacts and inter-dependence between groups. Indeed, such cultural factors like traditions of origin, migration, language, folklore, religion, philosophy and cosmology; art, dance and music, marriage, customs and modes of dressings and so on promoted relations between the peoples of Nigeria before the colonial era (Okpeh, 2008). Tradition of origins and migrations of several Nigerian ethnic groups provided an important contact, interacting and integrative mechanism in the pre-colonial Nigeria. Although characterized by controversies, claims and counter claims, it is important to point out that certain areas in Nigeria such as the Upper-Benue valley, the Niger-Benue

confluence; the Central highlands of the Middle Benue, Ibom in Arochukwu region have been identified as centres of origin or parent stock from which many groups in Nigeria, such as the Yoruba, Igbo, Igala, Ibibio and so on branched out to their present areas of settlement (Afigbo, 1997, Jimada, 2005, Okpeh, 2008). In the course of migrations, it is now clear from available evidence, that many groups came into contact with one another and mutual cultural borrowings impacted on one another (Bassey, 1999, Okpeh, 2008).

A circumspective analysis of the legends of origin of most groups in Nigeria shows their inter-relationship and traces of transculturation. For example, the Oduduwa myth links the Yoruba with the Edo, just like the latter's ancient history links it with Igala. Indeed, research reveals that the Igala, the Idoma and Yoruba have not separated from each other for a very long time as glotto-chronological studies would have us believe and also the cultural affinities and linkage of common sojourning in the Kisra legend linking people from the Lake Chad Basin to Bussa in the middle of Niger (Usman and Odeh 2015). Erim (1981) confirms that "the traditions of the Yoruba, Edo, Igala, Idoma are interlocked. According to Ajayi (2005) traditions of origin of the Nigerian peoples and their dynasties indicate that there was a great deal of interaction among the various groups, leading to the forging of inter-ethnic and cultural unity. In some of such traditions, there are existing accounts of contact between and among peoples who today belong to different cultural groups but who would still regard themselves as offspring of the same ancestors e.g. in the Bayajidda legend, we have seven original Hausa states and seven subordinate states among which are included the Nupe and Ilorin Yoruba. Other traditions are the *Nri* tradition and Oduduwa/Oranmiyan connection between Ife and Benin.

Afigbo underscores the idea that the Igbo and other Southern ethnic nationalities migrated from the "Sudanic" homeland thus:

...when we bring evidence uncovered by linguists, we begin to reach more precise conclusions on the more or less exact meaning of this earlier "Sudanic" homeland of Southeastern Nigerians and Southern Nigerians. Two locations have so far emerged as the least candidates for these earlier "Sudanic" homelands. One is the region of the Niger-Benue confluence. The Kwa speaking Nigerians are now believed to have derived from ancestors who spoke proto-Kwa languages which are said, in all probability, to have had their origin around the confluence region. For Southeastern Nigeria, this means that its dominant population, made up of the Igbo and Ijaw, derives from such proto-Kwa speakers, who at one time may have lived in the confluence region. If we bring into consideration all Southern Nigeria (as geographical concept referring to Nigeria South of the Niger and Benue), similar conclusions become applicable to the Yoruba, speakers of Edo – related languages, the Igala, the Idoma and the Iyalla (Afigbo, 1997).

He added that:

The second centre with a strong claim to being considered as the earlier "Sudanic" homeland mentioned in the traditions of some Southeastern Nigerians is the area of Benue-Cross River watershed from where according to Joseph Greenberg, the ancestors of the Bantu-speakers of Africa set off their successful bid to conquer and tame the entire Southern sub-continent of Africa. The peoples of the Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, classified by linguists as

Benue-Congo speakers – belong to this group that is believed to have started off from the watershed (Afigbo, 1997).

Language and Pre-colonial Diplomacy

Okpeh (2008) asserted that the dynamics of the dispersal and movement of people from one place to another necessarily brought them into close contact with each other, providing the basis for a *modus vivendi* which was fundamental for their subsequent growth and development. As the people moved from one place to another and settled in one place or the other, they borrowed from each other. Current studies in historical linguistics in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, suggests immense inter-cultural communication. The result of this is the bilingualism which characterized most neighbouring communities in Nigeria, such as the Nupe and Yoruba, Ibibio and the Cross River Igbo and so on before the advent of colonialism.

Williamson cited in Jimada (2005) observed that it is likely that the mother language of the whole of Benue-Congo branch of Niger-Congo family of languages, to which the Nupe and Yoruba dialects belong, came into the Nigeria area, by way of migrations from a homeland further upstream on the River Niger, most likely, by canoe, down the Middle Niger. He supports this assertion with an entry in Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther's journal on the 25th of June, 1957, in which he recorded learning that the earliest speakers of Yoruba lived in Mokwa – Jebba area. In Nupe heartland of today, several Nupe-sub-groups, such as the Dibo, the Ganagana and the Ebe, speak Nupe dialects strikingly similar to some Yoruba dialects. He adds that there seems to be no single element of Nupe dialects that is not shared by one or another of the Yoruba dialects, and vice-versa.

Among the Nupe sub-groups of Gbedegi, Ebangi, Bini, Batati and Cekpan, the Yoruba sub-groups of Oyo, Igbomina and Ibolo. Between these Nupe and Yoruba groups tonal and lexical features are so commonly shared that it is difficult to distinguish Nupe – speech and Yoruba – speech. For Egungun and other festivals, prominent parts of Yoruba land, a combination of Nupe and Yoruba words are used in praise and in incantations (Jimada, 2005).

Ajayi (2005) corroborated the assertion that relations among the existing groups were forged by language. According to him, linguists have classified the various African languages into groups according to how closely related they are to each other. It is believed that most of these languages broke from a common parentage i.e. proto language and most West African languages belong to what linguists call the Niger-Congo group of language. The Kwa-sub-group, to which many Nigerian languages belong, has a list of more than 60 language units including Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Nupe, Ijaw, Igala. Even among the Kwa languages, some are more closely related to one another than other members of the group. For example, Igala language is more closely related to Oyo – Yoruba. It is estimated that 90 per cent of Igala language is Yoruba.

Ajayi (2005) added that the study of loan words among language groups has also helped to improve our knowledge of culture change and contact in the past. For example, there are several Kanuri loan words in the Hausa language. Similarly, many Arabic words which the Hausa people borrowed through their contact with the Arabs are today found in Yoruba language e.g. *alafia, wakali, wahala, anfanni, alubosa* and so on.

According to Abasiattai (2010), through linguistic and archaeological researches, scholars have discovered that the people we know today as Ibibio and other groups in Akwa Ibom State, the Efik, Agwagune (Akunakuna), Kiong (Okoyong), Legbo and Yakurr in Cross

River State and the Ogoni in Rivers State, emerged as a distinct ethnic and language groups only between about 4,000 or 5,000 years ago. Simply stated, further beyond the 5,000 years, one could not distinguish the Ibibio or the Kiong or the Ogoni any longer. This is because beyond those years, the Ibibio, for example – or more correctly, their very distant ancestors, together with the very distant ancestors of the Agwagune, Kiong and other speakers of the Delta-Cross formed a single group that lived or were associated together, not in their present locales in Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Rivers States, but most probably in the middle regions of the Benue Basin. This scenario seems to portray the fact that these people emanated from a common stock.

Efik language became the medium of commerce and commerce in the Cross River region by the first half of the 20th century. It was widely spoken all the way up the Cross River into the Cameroons and conservative estimates put the number of its speakers then at three million (Noah, 1980, Uya, 1987). The Igbo language exercised such absorptive power, that it many frontier communities bordering on the Igbo became bilingual i.e. speak Igbo alongside their mother tongue. It is known that this was so with the Ibaji in Igala, with such Niger Delta communities such as Obolo (Andoni), Okrika, Opobo and Bonny. The same institution was reported among the Annang communities bordering on the Ndoki Igbo. The practice of bilingualism helped in forging stronger diplomatic ties.

Political Institutions, Cultural Borrowings and Pre-colonial Diplomacy

According to Usman and Odeh (2015), in the pre-colonial epoch, there were recognized centres of political authority which in the present day Northern Nigeria included the following: the Habe State of Kano, Rano, Gobir, Katsina, Daura, Kebbi and Zaria; and also the Kanuri State of Kanem Borno that produced the Saifawa dynasty, which existed between 800 AD to 1800 AD. In the middle belt region there was the famous Jukun confederacy of Kwararafa whose influence stretched as far as Kano and Zaria. Its political authority expanded westward to Benue State of Idoma, Nupe and Igala. There existed monarchical kingdoms of Yoruba, Benin, Itsekiri and Aboh. The significance of this in the analysis of the pre-colonial intergroup relations in Nigeria is that these ancient kingdoms freely borrowed political institutions from their neighbours. For instance, the Idoma borrowed the chieftaincy titles from Jukun and Igala people. The Urohbo, Isoko and other communities in present Edo and Delta States, went to the Oba of Benin for investiture ceremonies. A section of Igbo took titles from the Igala, while the Tiv borrowed the Tor U-Gbande (Drum Chief) from the Jukun and even visited Wukari frequently for investiture ceremony.

In his work on Idoma, Erim (1981) noted that the sovereignty of the Kwararafa confederacy, which was one of the seven greatest kingdoms of the Sudan, whose territory included all the lower and part of the middle portion of Hausaland, to the south, their sovereignty extended beyond the Cross River region as far as the Atlantic. He cites the description given of the Kwarafafa by Sultan in 1827, that:

Among the provinces of Bow-sheer (i.e. Bauchi) the following are the most considerable...and the ninth is Koronorfa which embraces about 24 divisions, ruled by one king, who often sailed forth upon Kanoo and Barnoo....Near the province there is an anchorage or harbor for the ships of the Christians (Erim, 1981).

The reference to “the Cross River as far as the Atlantic” and the “harbour for the ships of the Christians” certainly seems to refer to the area later known as Calabar. This

may be combined with the fact that in Calabar, there is a community known as Abakpa, the name used for Abakpawariga (Hausa) in the Benue valley. Unfortunately, historians working on the pre-1600 history of Calabar have not sought to investigate the connection between Kwararafa and the sea port (Erim, 1981).

There are existing evidences of pre-colonial relations in the works of arts, archaeological researches which show similarities between the works of art found in one area and those in another. Studies by archaeologists and art historians of the artifacts from Nok, Diama, Ife, Benin and Igbo-Ukwu have revealed striking similarities in production techniques and design. These are strong indicators of pre-colonial contacts and influences among the various groups (Bassey, 1999, Ajayi, 2005). Jimada (2005) opined an early cultural link in the development of the material art, and of dynasties, between the Nupe, the Yoruba and Benin. His observations about the Benin sculptures are that, some of them bore the cat whiskers facial marks, characteristics of some Nupe and Yoruba groups today, and were, therefore, cast by people familiar with traditions of bronze and brass casting, to the north of Benin. The Esie and Igbaja figurines have these Nupe and Yoruba facial marks.

The Nupe and Yoruba share traditions of clothing going back far into the distant past. There is evidence indicating that the technique of broad horizontal cloth weaving was common among the Nupe and the Yoruba. The prominent feature of the clothing traditions of the Nupe and the Yoruba was the multiple interconnections between them and with the clothing traditions of Hausaland and Borno and areas further north. For instance, the now common Yoruba traditional cap, known in Yoruba as *fila etu*, was most likely derived from the Nupe dark woven blue Phrygian cap called *fulan zabo* by the Nupe. Jimada (2005) noted that 1826, Hugh Clapperton observed at Oyo-ile, that Oyo chiefs widely and frequently wore Nupe cloths of various patterns and dimensions. After a rather panoramic survey of the history of the major cultural and ethnic groups in Nigeria, Obaro Ikime (1982) observed that:

Kanuri culture, which appears dominant in the present day Borno State, is basically an amalgam of the cultures of the early agricultural and pastoral peoples of the pre-Kanem-Borno Empire, modified by the deliberate cultivation of the idea of divine kingship during the empire period, and the coming of Islam with the introduction and consolidation of Islamic law and jurisprudence. Hausa culture, as it evolved by the twentieth century, had borrowed cultural traits from non-Hausa peoples in the course of Hausa "conquests" of many groups in the North; in the pre-Jihad period, during the Jihad....(Ikime, 1982).

Throughout history, the Hausa ethnic unit has shown itself as an assimilating ethnic entity, and the Hausa language as a colonizing one, to the extent that many people, who were not originally Hausa and did not use Hausa language as their first language, later became Hausa through assimilation. Summing up the overall impact of the wars of the nineteenth century, the coming of the Christian missions, and the Moslem intrusion into Yoruba land, Ikime (1982) concluded that, "the main features of Yoruba culture have certainly survived, but there can be no doubt at all that a certain blending, a certain accommodation of old and new, have had to be arranged".

Prominent among the principal cults of the Yoruba, which are of Nupe origin, is the cult still practiced today known as *Gugu* in Nupe and as *Egungun* in Yoruba. The *Ifa* divination like *Egungun*, is also of Nupe Origin. The Nupe, *Eba* and the Yoruba *Ifa*, are

the same rituals of divination practiced from early times. The Yoruba also borrowed the *Igunnu*, the principal anti-witchcraft and anti-crime, masquerade from the Nupe. There is also a tradition that early Nupe settlers of Northern Yoruba practiced the *Ogboni* earth cult at a place called Ogboi-ere in Igbomina (Jimada, 2005).

The Cross River with her major tributaries, has indeed been a highway for culture interchange between the peoples of the region because it served as a major artery of communication for those who lived on its banks, the riverine peoples of the region like some Ibibio groups, Oron, Efik, Akanukuna, Umon and so on. Through trade and fishing and other levels of contacts the people gained intimate knowledge and reciprocal influences of each other before the advent of the Europeans. Through interactions on the river, the Cross River Igbo came to be influenced by borrowing important cultural traits like secret societies and age set among others (Uya, 1987). Anwana (2002) has noted that *Ekpe*, one of the most widespread and powerful institutions in the South Eastern Nigeria in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria emanated from the Ejagham people of the present Cross River State. Similarly, Onor (1994) has confirmed that *Nsibidi*, an important medium of communication in the traditional Cross Region spread from Ejagham and was assimilated by many communities in the South eastern part of Nigeria.

Bassey (1999), stated that the Long *Juju* of Arochukwu served as an instrument of inter-group relations. The people were attracted to the oracle because of the belief that it could forecast the future and solve many problems ranging from childlessness, ill-luck, poverty, infertility to malaria epidemic. The Long *Juju* was placed “at the apex of the people’s political, judicial and religious pyramids”. Consulting the oracle as “an imperial external arbiter”, undoubtedly prevented innumerable local wars, and thus promoted integration, co-ordination and persuasion. Northrop (1978) also observes that the Long *Juju* was the most powerful and influential oracle in pre-colonial West Africa. Its agents covered the entire region of Southeastern Nigeria – Igala, Idoma, Ogoja, Ibibio, Ijaw portions of Eastern Edo and then of course Igboland where the oracle situated. By the 19th century, the people of Aboh, the important trading town on the River Niger, also held the oracle in high regard and travelled to it via the Delta and Ndoki area. In 1854, Bishop Crowther met an Aro man and his son in a village south of Aboh, who were probably on oracular business. According to Bassey (1999) the frequent movements of the oracle’s agents helped to promote inter-group relations among the various ethnic groups. It is therefore not illogical to suggest that, but for colonialism, a theocratic state could have been fully formed based on the Long *Juju* oracle. Such a centralized state which was no doubt in the process of development would have covered the whole of the present Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa, Abia, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and parts of Benue and Delta States.

This view is supported by the British scholar, Margery Perham who stated that:

Some (colonial) officers who have studied the past of Aro and observed their intelligence...have regretted that an attempt was not made by the government to utilize their dominant position in administration....The Europeans in penetrating a country (in Africa) came into collision with a native institution....(But) it is after it is destroyed or driven underground that it is realized in the task of reconstruction, that it supplied a social nexus which the anthropologists appearing late upon the scene, are sometimes able to define (Perham, 1962).

Another cultural factor of contact was marriage and there is evidence throughout Nigeria that it promoted inter-group contact and integration during the period. The

traditions of most Nigerian ethnic groups are replete with example of nuptial relationship with others, a development which helped to concretized cross-cutting loyalties between them long before the advent of the British. Okpeh (2008). Afigbo (1987) had demonstrated this in the case of Igbo and their Igala, Benin, Ijaw and Ibibio neighbours. Similarly, Okpeh (2006) has shown how the Idoma intermarried with their Igbo, Iyala and Bekwara neighbours. In the Hausa legend of origins, Bayajidda is said to have married the Queen of Daura and in fact settled there. This tradition of inter-ethnic marriage was further reinforced as the process of contact matured between groups. Thus, throughout the pre-colonial era, marriages between different groups helped to promote and /or cement inter-group relations in Nigeria (Okpeh, 2008).

For instance at Ibom where diverse ethnic groups lived together, Igbo groups such as the Ada, Ututu, Abam and Ohafia who trace their descent to a common ancestor, inter-married with the Ibibio, Efik, Annang and other Ibibio sub-ethnic groups. Such union produced distinct but blood related groups such as the Ada-Ibibio. Bassey (1999) opined that the Ibibio for instance, gave and are still giving a very high regard to in-laws (*ukod*) and grand children (*ayeyen*) from their married daughters. In-laws and grand children are sacred to Ibibio people. They could not be punished or killed for any reason including crimes such as adultery, stealing or offence against secret society. The personal safety of the *ukod* and *ayeyen* was, and is always guaranteed and they fear neither being killed, charmed, and poisoned nor being violently attacked by their in-laws or mothers village. With this kind of condition, the *ukod* or *ayeyen* were safe in their wife's or mother's village or clan in times of trouble or war. This explains why the Ibibio and Igbo formed alliances and sealed them with marriage contracts especially among the peoples living on the common borders.

There is, also a tradition that Onojo Oboni, the Igala war lord married an Onitsha prince called Usse from whom he got a son Idoko. Idoko was said to have spent some time at the court of the Atta of Idah before coming back to Onitsha to introduce a number of changes in Onitsha regalia, as well as Onitsha traditional religion and masquerading traditions. Similarly, we have among the Ubuluku of the Western Igbo tradition about one of their rulers who was so powerful that the Oba of Benin, having failed to conquer him by force, sought to win him over by giving him a Bini princess, known as Ogogo, in marriage. These traditions suggest that all along the frontiers where the Igbo met with their neighbours, inter-ethnic marriages took place and that these helped to promote or indeed cement inter-ethnic relations (Afigbo, 1987).

Warfare and Pre-colonial Diplomacy

War was a factor in inter-group relations in pre-colonial Nigeria whose significance has been blown out of proportion by ethno-centric scholars. It should be noted that Nigerians (and in fact Africans) were never as belligerent as portrayed by European scholars and their African lackies. Of course war existed in pre-colonial Nigeria and was a factor of contact and interaction. However, it should be added that, it was never a method that was in frequent usage by people. As a necessary consequence of the complex nature of inter-group relations, it remained the last resort, that is, where other normal and usual methods have been exhausted. What is more, at the end of every war, be it to occupy or establish a political hegemony over a territory, or resist domination, or in fact fight internal enemies; peace and normalcy was usually restored for the emergence, growth and development of a functional *modus vivendi* between groups (Okpeh, 2008).

A war was preceded by diplomatic exchanges, and there was no fighting during religious festivals, or if one side suffered from a disaster such as fire. At the end of the war, compensation was awarded for casualties – which therefore tended to be kept low. The people of the Jos Plateau similarly followed a well defined set of diplomatic and military conventions. The Birom fought only at community boundaries, and never burnt villages or destroyed crops (Isichei, 1983)

Relations that Underpins Diplomacy

Diplomacy, the fundamental means by which foreign relations are conducted, concluded and foreign policy implemented, far from being an invention of the modern nation state, is found in most communities and seems to have been evolved independently by peoples of all parts of the world (Smith, 1989). Diplomacy may be conceptualized as the “how” of diplomacy. The essence of diplomatic craft in pre-colonial times was to promote peace, conclude treaties, maintain and break alliances, establish boundaries, develop and protect trade and pay tribute. This craft were determined by same factors which have been maintained till contemporary times (Usman and Odeh, 2015).

Several diplomatic methods were employed by rulers to maintain ties. These included the following: exchange of gifts, sending regular messages, uses of accredited agents and diplomats and so on. For example, the Yoruba sent gifts to their Nupe and Edo neighbours and Bagirimi to Borno. The exchange of gifts was done to strengthen the bond of relationships. Gifts included; slaves, cloths, cowries, beads, kola nuts and so on. The commonly used modes of sending were symbolic language which could not be easily interpreted. Officials could send message in a twisted form to prevent understanding. Material objects such as shells, sponge, soap, salt, palm frond, palm kernels, feathers and cowries were used to convey requests, responses, sentiments and ideas. The objects when combined created the impression that the recipients would understand (Usman and Odeh, 2005).

According to Isichei (1983) in some parts of Yorubaland like Ijebu, Ife and Ondo, very interesting symbols of sending messages. For instance, charcoal depicts mourning; a piece of mat depicts family closeness (between those who have sat or slept on the mat). Odd cowries meant hostility, paired cowries facing each other meant a close relationship; cowries back to back reproach a defaulting debtor who has turned his back on his obligations

Hopkins (1975) cited Bishop Crowther’s affirmation of the use of symbolism as a pre-colonial diplomatic strategy thus:

One of the sailors was this bearer of a symbolic letter to a Nupe relative in Sierra Leone. This letter consisted of a red parrot tail tied to a white cotton thread at one end, with small piece of hard wood, burnt black at one extremity, fastened to the other end of the thread; four cowries being attached to the middle of the thread, two facing each other, with the small ends upward, and the other two in like manner with the small ends downward, and the other two in like manner with the small ends downward. This may be interpreted as follows: the piece of head wood burnt at one end man mean – we are well and strong, but have been mourning for your loss, and our hearts are as black as coal fire. The parrot tail may mean – we are all in good circumstances, and are expecting your return as soon as possible with the speed of a parrot. The

pair of cowries with the small ends upward, facing each other, may mean we wish to see you face to face. The inverted cowries may allude to the disorderly state of the country, as if all things have been upside down. These facts prove the willingness of the people for the return of their people, and their desire to enter into trade with the English (Hopkins, 1975).

Also accredited agents were employed by states to represent their interest of states. The Ibibio and Igbo for instance used traditional priests in this regards. These diplomats used emblems such as cane, traditional whistle, fan, sword and so on and peculiar uniforms which ensured their free passage in alien territories. These diplomatic privileges caused them to be immune from unwarranted attack and arrests (Usman and Odeh, 2015). Oyo Empire frequently exchanged ambassadors with her neighbours. States which had important dealings with each other sometimes maintained permanent embassies at each others' courts, and often merchants abroad acted as diplomatic representatives on their "country's" behalf. On some occasions, ambassadors were mishandled, but in general diplomatic immunity was recognized and practiced (Isechie, 1983).

Relations between Lagos and Nupe involved exchange of emissaries. Emissaries were sent with gifts from Lagos to the Etsu's court in Bida. It was through this means that the leaders of Bida and Lagos were able to secure free trade routes through the squabbling Yoruba states of Ijebu, Egba and Ibadan. It seems that these economic relations between Lagos, Bida and other states in the interior facilitated the rapid economic, social and political development of Lagos (Jimada, 2005).

Conclusion

This discourse has revealed that Nigeria inherited a history of beneficial ties that pre-dates the colonial experience and that the historical experiences the present generation inherited from their forebears are profoundly interlocked. According to Ajayi (2000), contrary to the views of Eurocentric scholars, Nigeria of today was neither a cultural nor economic vacuum into which the British implanted Nigerians. Based on the evidences adumbrated, it is not right to hold on to the opinion that before the colonial period, Nigerians had nothing in common and that the various groups that constitute Nigeria were entirely strange to themselves. By stressing the links between the Nigerian peoples before the colonial period, however, it is not being suggested that they had no differences at all. In spite of the theory of language with common parentage, there is no doubt that the different groups spoke different languages.

Isichei (1983) opined that the history of the many peoples who comprise modern Nigeria is, very largely, a history of the bonds which unite them. She notes that the labels of ethnicity appear to be of recent origin. The geographic areas they describe change over time. "Tivland" was very different in 1860, from what it had been in 1800, or from what it was to be in 1960, and "Hausaland" has expanded dramatically since the 16th century. "Yoruba" is a word of Hausa origin, which was originally used by northerners to refer to the Oyo Empire. It was first used in modern sense in 1832, by a foreign missionary, Raban, engaged in linguistic studies in Sierra Leone. His usage was challenged at the time, but since triumphed. An Ijebu who left his homeland in 1820, had never heard the word "Yoruba".

As noted by Ikime (2006) until the emergence of the colonial state in Nigeria, what was head were myriads of groups, some of which spoke variants of the same

language and possessed certain common or similar cultural traits. Identity or similarity of language and culture did not, however, result in common political action as a matter of routine. In that kind of setting, it did not make sense to speak of Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ibibio or Tiv. It made far more sense to speak of Kano, Katsina, Zazzau, Awka, Onitsha, Afikpo, Ife, Ijebu, Ondo, Oyo and so on, to speak in terms of groupings that regarded themselves as socio-political units. It was between such socio-political units that one could meaningfully discuss inter-group relations.

The above observation is in line with Northrop's (1978) assertion that in the pre-colonial times, the largest unit of identity for most inhabitants does not appear to have been the primary ethnic unit such as Igbo or Ibibio, but rather, smaller dialect or cultural group. For example Igbo-speakers enslaved in the 1820s and liberated in Sierra Leone, claimed never to have heard the name "Igbo" in their homelands and could identify themselves only by name designating very much smaller units. Because of this, the main linguistic boundaries proved no real barrier to trade, and trade routes cut across them. Members of one ethnic group might attend the markets of another and vice-versa. This is not to say that ethnicity counted for naught, but economic transactions between cultural sub-groups took place and readily across linguistic frontiers within them. Citizens of Southeastern Nigeria during the pre-colonial period were much more concerned with trade than with "tribe".

The challenge now rests on the present generation to hand it over to the next generation of Nigerians, a united country, full of potentials and cordial relations. As Fanon cited in Usman and Odeh (2015) argues "each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it". From Fanon, one takes a charge to ensure that Nigeria does not disintegrate, particularly in the age of globalization when destinies are interwoven and states cannot compromise anything else for inter-group relations. For instance the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria lack cattle which the Fulani herdsmen possess. Palm oil which exists in abundance in the Eastern part of Nigeria is scarce in the North, and kolanut of which the Hausa-Fulani are the greatest consumers are produced in the Western part of the country. The bulk of the food crops of the country come from the Middle Belt region and crude oil which is the engine room of the nation's economy is derived from the Niger Delta region.

There is a critical need to re-think the amalgamation which was a milestone on the history of inter-group relations in Nigeria. It was an exercise that created a vast country blessed with abundant natural and human resources with blends of diversity, thus a culmination of centuries of inter-dependence of our forebears. Unfortunately, Nigerian government does not pay attention to the study of history in schools any longer and this means that the knowledge of the robust pre-colonial diplomatic intercourse and the embedded ingredients for national integration would continue to be elusive. Indeed, the rich pre-colonial diplomatic lessons appear to be a panacea for steering Nigeria into an era where mutual co-existence, brotherhood and integration would be assured. History has shown that ignoring the sustained pre-colonial diplomatic roadmap and footprints of the forebears is not in the interest of the nation. There is the urgent need to revive the spirit to solve the challenges of insurgency, economic recession and other challenges confronting the Nigerian polity.

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