



## **Colonial Origins of Nigerian Federalism: A Blight on the Nigerian Federation**

by

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### **Abstract**

*The paper concisely surveyed the historical origins of Nigerian federalism under British colonization, beginning from the acquisition of the territories that now constitute Nigeria to 1960 when Britain granted independence to the country. While early colonial officials preferred Unitarianism, Nigerian societies' heterogeneous socio-political matrices necessitated Britain's final choice of federalism for Nigeria in 1954. The paper, therefore, examined the impact of the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism on the order of the Nigerian federation. The paper adopted the historical and descriptive research methods. It argued within the framework of imperialism theory that the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism, although created a somewhat sound federation initially, ended up creating substructural problems—such as geographical imbalance, political exploitation of the imbalance, exaltation of major ethnic groups and failure to address ethnic minority groups' concerns and fears among others—that continuously affect the politics and organization of the Nigerian federation up to the present time. The paper revealed that these problems are fundamentally responsible for inter-ethnic rivalry, minority fears and agitation for state creation, unequal access to power and benefits from government, hindrance of national integration and unity, and the problem of resource control. It recommended that the problems can be minimized with the division of Northern Nigeria into two parts; cultivation of nationalist, patriotic and receptive attitudes; provision of legal check against identity politics; and creation of ethnic minority commission and affirmative action programmes.*

**Key words:** Colonialism, Constitutional development, Ethnic group, Federalism, Imperialism.

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### **1. Introduction**

Prior to the British colonization of Nigeria, many of the societies that now constitute Nigeria had their respective systems of socio-political organization. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups had the most developed, stable and entrenched

traditional system of government among all of them. The Hausa-Fulani people had a theocratic, monarchical, absolute and centralized system of government. Quite like the Hausa-Fulani people, the Yoruba ethnic group had a theocratic, monarchical, semi-absolute and quasi-centralized system of government. On the contrary, the Igbo ethnic group had democratic republicanism and decentralized power structure with some level of liberalism. However, all these historic and time-honored systems of government ended when imperial Britain subjugated them and other neighbouring peoples and forced all of them into Nigeria, under its colonial rule. The ninety-nine years between 6th August 1861 when the British government annexed Lagos as British Crown Colony in British West Africa and 1st October 1960 when Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule, were a long period of time that saw the exercise of British imperial leverage on the societies that now constitute Nigeria, the creation and colonization of Nigeria and the metamorphosis of the country's political system from Unitarianism (which started on 1st January 1914 with Sir Frederick Lugard as governor-general), through regionalism and quasi-federalism to federalism, which was achieved in 1954 with the Sir Oliver Lyttelton Constitution and bequeathed to Nigeria at independence.

After about a decade of development, federalism was adopted in Nigeria in 1954 when the country was barely six years away from attaining independence. During this period of time, also, nationalist struggle intensified but Nigeria's ethnic nationalities, especially the three major and dominant ethnic groups—Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups—failed to cultivate a strong relationship or forge a bond among themselves. The choice and acceptance of federalism respectively by British colonial authorities and Nigerian nationalist leaders from the Northern, Western and Eastern Regions of Nigeria were considered an appropriate decision based on their understanding of the fact that the country is a highly complex heterogeneous political society comprising over five hundred indigenous languages and at least two hundred and fifty ethnic nationalities all of which have very diverse socio-cultural characteristics and many of which had organized systems of local administration prior to colonialism.

However, the colonial origins of federalism in Nigeria created some problems which continue to impede the development of Nigerian federalism and hinder efforts towards building national integration and unity. To understand these problems, the paper poses the following question: in what ways did the colonial creation of Nigerian federalism impact on the politics and organization of the Nigerian federation? In the light of this, the paper provides a brief account of the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism and an assessment of their impact on the order of the Nigerian federation. Towards this end, the paper is divided into four parts. The first part describes some of the nationalities that form Nigeria's heterogeneous society, the basis of which federalism was adopted. The second part accounts for the history of the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism. The third part explains the impact of the colonial creation of Nigerian federalism on the politics and organization of Nigeria, which include geographical imbalance of Nigerian federal structure, political exploitation of the imbalance of territorial size, politicized ethnicity, exaltation of major ethnic groups, and failure to address ethnic minority groups'

concerns and fears among others. The fourth and last part presents the findings, summary and conclusion, and recommendations of the paper.

## **2. Objective of the Study**

The paper aims to determine the ways in which the colonial creation of Nigerian federalism impact on the politics and organization of the Nigerian federation.

## **3. Methodology, Hypothesis and Theoretical Framework**

The paper relies on the historical and descriptive research methods. With the former, it concisely traces the historical origins of Nigerian federalism under British colonization in order to collect, synthesize and provide evidence from the past to establish facts that buttress its hypothesis. With the latter, the historical data collected are rendered descriptive to clarify how the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism created some fundamental problems of the Nigerian federation. Information provided in the paper was derived from secondary sources such as textbooks, articles, e-books and web documents. In the light of the research question raised above, the paper takes the hypothetical position that the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism ended up creating substructural problems that continue to impinge on the politics and organization of the Nigerian federation up to the present time. This hypothetical assertion is based on the argument of the theory of imperialism which is essentially that the ultimate goal of imperialism is to realize an imperial power's selfish desires for economic exploitation as well as political expansion and domination over other countries or peoples, which are necessary for wealth accumulation and hegemonic power maximization, without concern for how such desires adversely affect the exploited and dominated peoples. This would lead to misguided colonial policies that would eventually create the wrong conditions and legacies that will shape the post-colonial politics of colonized states.

Imperialism is 'the policy by a stronger nation to attempt to create an empire by dominating weaker nations economically, politically, culturally, or militarily' (Social Studies School Service, 2005, p. 2). It is the 'state policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other areas' ('The Editors', 2019). Karl Kautsky, as cited in Park (2009, p. 8), stated that 'Imperialism is a product of highly developed industrial capitalism. It consists in the striving of every industrial capitalist nation to bring under its control or to annex all large areas of agrarian territory, irrespective of what nations inhabit it.' For Lenin (1999, p. 92), 'Imperialism is capitalism in that stage of development . . . in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.'

Western European model of imperialism is the highest stage of avaricious capitalist expansion to other territories of the world, which encourages monopolistic tendencies that result in the exercise of political control over weak and overpowered nations of those territories as well as in the consequent creation of the structures of exploitation and domination intended to profit the imperial powers, not minding the fate

of the exploited and dominated people. Accordingly, the colonial act of amalgamation of the two Nigeria's (Northern and Southern Nigerian Protectorates) on 1st January 1914—an act enthusiastically championed by Lord Frederick Lugard for the economic consideration of using the wealth and budget surplus of Southern Nigeria to salvage Northern Nigeria which should no longer be supported with fund from Britain that seriously needed finance itself to prosecute WW I—was not in the interest of Nigerians. The act thus became the very origin of the course to a colonially created Nigerian federal system, which indicated a peculiar Britain's imperial pride of having a British-created Nigeria to its credit irrespective of the obvious consequential trap and problems Nigerians will have to face in their federal co-existence.

#### **4. The Socio-Political Matrix of Nigerian Federalism**

The federation of Nigeria is a political union of several nationalities each of which had largely unique socio-political structures and institutions, cultural and value systems, and independent political existence, except for conquered groups, prior to British colonial rule. While they have ceased to have independent existence because they have been united into one country by Britain's colonial making, their socio-cultural institutions and value systems still remain diverse. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and accounts for over half of West Africa's population (United States Embassy in Nigeria, 2012).

There are over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 indigenous languages in Nigeria of which three nationalities—Hausa-Fulani (29%), Yoruba (21%) and Igbo (Ibo) (18%)—are most populous, politically dominant and influential, and are geographically located in the Northern, Western and Eastern parts of Nigeria respectively. Considered apart from the Hausas, the Fulani ethnic group has about 3.9% of Nigeria's population (Findlay, 2018). Other populous ethnic groups that come behind these most populous ethnic groups include: Edo, Esan, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko and Ika—often considered a portion of Ibos—in Mid-western/South-western Nigeria; Ijaw, Ogoni, Ibibio and Efik in Southern Nigeria – Ijaw being the most populous ethnic group in this category with a population of 10.0%, followed by Ibibio with a population of 3.5%; Ekoi, Yako, Boki and Iyala in South-eastern Nigeria; Egede, Tiv, Idoma, Igala, Igbira, Arago, Basa, Dimmuk, Mada, Gwari, Bunu, Nupe, Gbari, Kamuku, Birum, Fulani, Kamberi, Busa and Borgawa in Central (North-central) Nigeria – Tiv being the most populous ethnic group in this category with a population of 2.5%; Kanuri, Kare-Kare, Shuwa Arab, Mandara, Margi, Hiji, Fali, Fulani, Seyawa, Angas, Bolewa, Bede, Batta, Mumuye, Jukun, Chamba, Kentu and Mambilla in North-eastern Nigeria – Kanuri being the most populous ethnic group in this category with a population of 4.0%; Adarawa, Aregwa, Dakakari, Dukawa, Bakkakari, Gungawa, Kadara, Kaje, Koro, Jaba, Manga and Kanuri in North-western Nigeria (Gordon, 2003; Siollun, 2009; American Historical Association, 2018).

The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups had well organized native systems of government prior to British colonization. The Hausa-Fulani ethnic group lives in Northern Nigeria and operated an emirate system in which power was absolute, and

Oligie, C. N.

power structure was centralized and concentrated in the Emirs at the centres of the emirates—the greatest of which were *Sokoto*, to the East, and *Gwandu*, to the West—with residual power delegated to ancillary authorities at levels below the centres. Legislative and executive powers were largely fused and vested in the Emir, while judicial power was separated and vested in the *Alkali* (Islamic Judge). Power relations were neatly based on a hierarchical top-bottom flow of authority, while the cultural system was redefined by the forces of Islam, and Islamic law – Shariah (Udokang, 2006).

The Yoruba ethnic group lives in South-western Nigeria. They established kingdoms, with *Oyo* (the political power of the Yoruba nation) and *Ife* (the Yorubas' religious and socio-culture cradle) kingdoms as the most powerful. While some Yoruba societies were kingdoms with centralized governments like *Oyo* and *Ife*, some others like Ibadan were republics. Over time, Yoruba kingdoms developed into dynamic semi-centralized and quasi-democratic political systems with legislative, executive and judicial powers concentrated in and exercised by the king (*Alaafin*, *Ooni*, *Oba*) and the council of chiefs (*Oyo Mesi*) albeit partially devolved to the component towns and villages headed by *Baales* or *Olojas*. The Yoruba nation evolved an intricate system of checks and balances over the powers of their kings so as to avoid absolutism or power abuse. Abuse of office by an *Oba* would warrant the *Oyo Mesi* to hand him an empty calabash signifying he must commit suicide, while a member of the *Oyo Mesi* must die with the *Oba*; this was a measure to prevent the *Oyo Mesi* from abusing the power to impose capital punishment on an *Oba* (Udokang, 2006).

The Igbo nation lives in South-eastern Nigeria. They lived in different segmented political organizations based on a patrilineal family system called *Umunna*, each of which was not bigger than a village. The government of each village (that is the village council of elders) was autonomous and comprised family heads, usually patriarchs, chosen by their families to represent their interests in government. The village council had a leader who was merely a *primus inter pares* and figurehead. Governmental powers and functions (legislative, executive and judicial) were dispersed to different institutions, including the village council/the council of elders (*Ndichie*), the village assembly (a body of all able-bodied men of the village), a system of age-grades (junior, middle and senior age-grades), the *egwugu* court and the priest (*Ezeala*). Each of these institutions had its own jurisdiction and performed governmental functions specifically on matters that fall within its jurisdiction. The *egwugu* court, whose ruling was supreme and final, held in the village assembly and heard appeals from persons dissatisfied with the verdict of the council of elders, the age-grades or the priest, as the case may be. Although general laws were made by the village council of elders on behalf of the entire village, the making of law on very serious issues usually followed a sort of referendum in which villagers' opinions were sought. The pre-colonial Igbo political system had a democratic, highly decentralized and non-hierarchical power structure. It remained an acephalous system because it was without kings.

In the final analysis, it can be said that the Hausa-Fulani nationality practised absolute monarchy and theocracy, the Yoruba nationality practised semi-absolute

monarchy and quasi-democracy, while the Igbo nationality practised democracy, egalitarianism and republicanism, with limited government. A common feature among the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo political systems is patriarchy. Given the very rich and considerably heterogeneous nature of the socio-political and cultural systems of the societies that make up Nigeria, the federal system of government was the most apposite system of political organization for the country. It was therefore not accidental that the British colonial authority and Nigerian nationalists adopted federalism for Nigeria in 1954. As Dudley (1966) put it, Nigerian nationalists adopted federalism because they saw that it was suitable for the sociological realities that confronted them. Other reasons for adopting federalism include the following: to ensure decentralization of power, create multiple centres of political deliberation, cater for the idiosyncrasies of the diverse ethnocultural groups, solve ethnic minorities' fear of marginalization, facilitate regional development, forestall identity-based political turmoil and instability, etc.

## **5. British Acquisition of Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century**

The British government's imperial ambition in the area of West Africa that is now called Nigeria began gradually in the mid-nineteenth century first with trade in material goods after over three centuries of Europe benefiting from transatlantic trade in black African slaves which Britain abolished through the 25th March 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, following popular renunciation of slave trade in many parts of Europe and the dawn of the Industrial Revolution which began in Britain in mid-eighteenth century. The imperial ambition first manifested by the annexation of Lagos as British Crown Colony on 6th August 1861 and the establishment of trade relations, trade posts and protection treaties with several communities along Nigeria's coastal waters, from Lagos in Western Nigeria (an area within the Bight of Benin) to Calabar in South-eastern Nigeria (an area within the Bight of Biafra) (Ojiakor, 2001; Cahoon, n.d.).

More importantly, the treaty of the Berlin Conference (1884-1885)—a meeting organized and chaired by the first Chancellor of the German Empire, Otto von Bismarck, to address the problems generated by the rat race and stiff competition among great European powers scrambling for trade colonies in Africa—allowed Britain the *carte blanche* to launch a serious wave of negotiations and raids, depending on which was necessary and on the behaviour of the people involved, towards the end of the nineteenth century on several societies from the Yoruba south-west to multi-ethnic south, Igbo south-east, heterogeneous middle belt and the predominantly Hausa-Fulani north of Nigeria. By this time, Britain was almost fully prepared to assume direct political control of the territories of Nigeria. On 1st January 1900, Britain successfully created two Nigeria's unilaterally (besides the Colony of Lagos); one in the mainly Christian South declared the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the other in the Muslim North named the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. This achievement was sequel to the earlier imperial efforts of British consuls—such as Benjamin Campbell, Consul of the Bight of Benin (21st July 1853 – 17th April 1859) and John Beecroft, Consul of the Bight of Biafra (30th June 1849 – 10th June 1854)—and the Royal Niger Company which received a Royal

*Oligie, C. N.*

Charter on 10th July 1886 from the British government to exploit resources and control trade in the Niger Rivers District northwards – in ‘all the territory of the basin of the Niger’ (Gale, 2006, para. 4) as well as administer it.

On the same 1st January 1900, following the advice of Joseph Chamberlain, then colonial secretary (29th June 1895 – 16th September 1903), the British government, which had revoked the Royal Charter of the Royal Niger Company on 31st December 1899 (Geary, 2013), assumed direct colonial control of the two Nigerias, with Sir (later Lord) Frederick John Dealtry Lugard (b. 1858 - d. 1945), a veteran British officer with huge colonial experience from India, appointed High Commissioner (1st January 1900 - November 1906) and later Governor (May 1912 - December 1913) of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and Sir Ralph Denham Rayment Moor (b. 1860 - d. 1909) as High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (1st January 1900 - 1st October 1903). On 28th February 1906 (some other authors give the date as 1st May 1906), the Colony of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated and bore the name the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, with Sir Walter Egerton—formerly appointed Governor of Lagos (1903 – 28th February 1906) and succeeded Sir Ralph Moor as High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (August 1904 – 28th February 1906)—as governor (28th February 1906 – September 1912), and Sir Frederick Lugard as successor (May 1912 – December 1913). Sir Lugard was therefore given a mandate to unite the two Nigerias; now the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. But even under the same British colonial rule, for fourteen years the two Nigerias were governed separately as two different political entities and there was little or no cordial relationship between the Southern and Northern Nigerian colonial officials who shared mutual disaffection. With little or no infrastructure or transport, the two Nigerias were worlds apart (Ojiakor, 2001; Almond, Powell Jr., Dalton, & Strøm, 2008, p. 663; Last, 2014; Geary, 2013; Cahoon, n.d.).

## **6. Colonial Root of Nigerian Federalism**

On 1st January 1914, however,—following Sir Lugard’s 9th May 1913 presentation of his amalgamation plan to the British Colonial Office requesting for a merger of the two Nigerias so that, becoming Northern Nigerian Provinces and Southern Nigerian Provinces, they would come under the control and authority of a strong governor-general—the British government amalgamated the two Nigerias into one country with the new name of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, with Sir Frederick Lugard appointed on the same date as governor-general (Carland, 1985), despite the genuine opposition of some Nigerian residents and colonial officials. Akpeninor (2013) stated that the Lagos Press, such as the Lagos Standard and the Nigerian Chronicle, and a section of the educated elite denounced Lugard’s amalgamation plan.

Sir Lugard also rejected the advice of E. D. Morel to split the whole of Nigeria into four provinces and that of Sir Charles Lindsay Temple, to divide up the whole country into seven provinces. These suggestions were opposed to his own idea of splitting

the country into two groups of provinces, maintaining a similar original pattern of North-South divide as it was between 1900 and 1913 (Falola, 2002; Watts, 2013; Bourne, 2015). Sir Lugard succeeded in executing this amalgamation mandate and a new country was born consequently. But it was not a creation of the deliberate efforts and mutual desire of the societies that are now called Nigerian societies. The name 'Nigeria' was forced on the peoples that now constitute it. It was coined in 1897 (appearing first in *The Times* of London, a newspaper, on 8th January of that same year) by Flora Shaw (19th December 1852 – 25th January 1929), a British journalist who later married Sir Lugard, the very architect of colonial Nigeria, as the name to represent the large geographical area under British control that the River Niger traverses as well as the peoples that inhabit the area. In the light of this, Ernest Ikoli, the late Nigerian nationalist and journalist, stated that, 'We should not forget that the Nigeria we see on the map today as one country was not always so. It was not a country but a mere geographical expression' (Last, 2014). Similarly, in speaking on the origin of the name 'Nigeria', another Nigerian journalist, Peter Enahoro, stated thus, 'Today, the conglomeration of tribes assembled compulsorily at the 1884 Berlin conference are assigned as Nigerians – for want of a substitute collective noun' (Almond et al., 2008, p. 663).

But the amalgamation notwithstanding, British colonial officials continued to rule their constituencies as virtual separate territories. The major question Britain had to face was about a suitable political system for Nigeria. Early Nigerian colonial officials such as Sir Frederick John Dealtry Lugard (1st January 1914 – 8th August 1919), Sir Hugh Charles Clifford (8th August 1919 – 13th November 1925), Sir Graeme Thomson (13th November 1925 – 17th June 1931) and Sir Donald Charles Cameron (17th June 1931 – 1st November 1935) favoured a centralized system of government while subsequent colonial officials, given the realities they faced, preferred federalism as the appropriate political system with which to weld the complex multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic groups together under one government and to guarantee their survival.

In 1914, Sir Lugard established the Nigerian Council – a consultative/advisory body on legislative matters which ' . . . met for a maximum of three days each year, mainly to hear addresses from the governor-general' (Falola, 2002, p. 78). The Nigerian Council, of its thirty-six members, comprised six Nigerians—including the Sultan of Sokoto and the Emir of Kano (both representing the vast Northern Nigeria), the *Alaafin* of Oyo (representing Western Nigeria), Chief Dore/Dogho Numa (representing Benin/Warri area), Honourable Sapara-Williams representing Lagos and Chief Henshaw representing Calabar—as unofficial members that represented their traditional areas of jurisdiction and therefore represented the whole of Nigeria (Nnamdi, 1995). Although the Council was to advise the governor-general and participate in decision making, in reality, Sir Lugard took decisions without the contribution of the Council. He only used the Council's annual session as an opportunity to inform it of British policy, and it was required to support and consent to the policy. Sir Lugard was a symbol of centralized power as he virtually ruled Nigeria alone and made laws for Northern Nigeria through proclamation.



Sir Hugh Charles Clifford (b. 1866 – d. 1941), who succeeded Sir Frederick Lugard as governor, introduced the Clifford Constitution of 1922 (created by Order in Council dated 21st November 1922 but became effective in 1923), which established the Legislative Council of Nigeria that replaced Sir Lugard's Nigerian Council and the old Lagos Legislative Council. The new Legislative Council, although included British officials of Northern Nigerian Provinces, made laws for Southern Nigerian Provinces only, while the governor continued to legislate for Northern Nigerian Provinces through proclamation. Four Africans—three from Lagos and one from Calabar—elected to the Legislative Council to represent African interests by virtue of the Elective Principle introduced by the Constitution were unofficial members (who had only to support government's decisions) in a Legislative Council of forty-six members of which forty-one were appointed (by the governor who was the Council's president) and were mainly British officials. Due to the Constitution's Elective Principle, the first general election in Nigeria was held on 20th September 1923 for the four unofficial members (a British subject or a native of Southern Nigeria) of the new Legislative Council. Three candidates of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP)—J. E. Egerton-Shyngle, Eric O. Moore and Dr. Crispin Curtis Adeniyi-Jones (all lawyers)—were elected to represent the municipal area of Lagos, while Prince Kwamina Ata-Amonu, an independent candidate, was elected to represent the municipal area of Calabar (Tamuno, 1966).

Practically, the governor reserved the power to make laws and this was in synch with the culture of a centralized system of administration. Colonial effort to unify Nigeria under a centralized government continued with Sir Donald Cameron's administration. However, his departure in 1935 marked a significant change in the administration of Nigeria when his successor, Sir Bernard Henry Bourdillon, took office and inhibited the pace of unification under a centralized government. Sir Bourdillon (b. 1883 – 1948) laid the earliest groundwork of Nigerian federalism. Given the highly heterogeneous nature of Nigeria, Governor Bourdillon (1st November 1935 – 1st July 1940) knew that the federal system of government was the most congruent political system for the country. In his memorandum on the future of Nigeria's political development submitted to the British government, he argued strongly that the federal system of government was appropriate and beneficial for Nigeria's stability. In 1939, following the approval of his proposals by the British government, he subdivided the provinces of Southern Nigeria into two smaller groups of provinces—Western Nigerian Provinces with headquarters at Ibadan and Eastern Nigerian Provinces with headquarters at Enugu—, made minor administrative re-organization and devolved additional amount of administrative power to the three provincial authorities. The new structure of administration was bequeathed to Sir Arthur Frederick Richards (b. 1885 – d. 1978) who was governor from 18th December 1943 to 14th October 1947. Two administrations of Governors Sir John Evelyn Shuckburgh (1st July 1940 – 1942) and Sir Alan Cuthbert Maxwell Burns (1942 – 18th December 1943) ruled Nigeria in-between Governors Bernard Bourdillon and Arthur Richards but had no contribution to constitutional development. With the Richards Constitution of 1946, these provinces became regions and were assigned more powers. Regarding this development,

Alli (2003, p. 74) observed that the ‘. . . Richards Constitution fully prescribed federalism, changing the units designated by Bourdillon as provinces to regions.’

However, at this stage in Nigerian political and constitutional development, federalism has not fully evolved; it was just at an embryonic stage. The Richards Constitution, a post-Second World War constitution which came into effect on 1st January 1947, created an expanded Central Legislative Council empowered to make law for the whole Nigeria for the first time ever. It also established a bicameral legislature comprising a House of Chiefs and a House of Assembly for Northern Nigerian Region and a unicameral legislature having only a House of Assembly each for Western and Eastern Nigerian Regions. It devolved deliberative authority to the regional legislatures which also had powers to consider local issues and to advise their lieutenant governors. The constitution created regionalism, which was the building block of federalism in Nigeria, as an alternative to centralism or centralized unification.

Dike (1960, p. 47) argued that the Richards Constitution of 1946 was ‘a dividing line in Nigerian constitutional development. Before it, the keynote in Nigerian politics was unification towards the development of a strong centralized state and the realization of a common nationality. . . . But with the Richards Constitution, this tendency towards unification was, on the whole, arrested.’ He criticized the constitution because it ‘carved up the country into three Regions . . . by swinging the pendulum towards regionalism it had let loose emotions and passions that under the old constitution were being gradually canalized in the interests of service to Nigeria as a whole.’ Similarly, Arikpo (1967, p. 51) observed that ‘Regionalism has always been regarded by many Nigerians as one of the worst features’ of the 1946 Constitution. Prior to this constitution, there were doubts as to whether a unified Nigeria was possible. The campaign of British colonial officials based in Northern Nigeria for the secession of that part of Nigeria as an independent country can be seen against this background. But by creating a Central Legislative Council for the whole country, unlike Sir Clifford’s Legislative Council that excluded Northern Nigeria, Sir Richards sought to unify Nigeria at the national level whereas by introducing regionalism at the same time, he also aimed to maintain Nigeria’s ethnolinguistic diversities and ultimately to guarantee stability.

The constitution further received a number of criticisms. It was criticized for being imposed on Nigeria ‘without the input of the nationalists’ (Ubani, Ehiodo, & Nwaorgu, 2013, p. 32). Accordingly, ‘Even ex-Governor Bourdillon, who agreed with the substance of the constitutional proposals, expressed regret that the people were given little or no opportunity to shape their own constitution’ (Coleman 1960, p. 276). Also, it was a mere regionalization of political structure as regional legislatures had no legislative power. Osuntokun (1979, p. 98) observed that with the 1946 Constitution, Sir Richards demonstrated ‘in constitutional form the reality of Nigerian politics of divide and rule which the British did everything to foster.’ Despite criticisms, Northern officials, Obafemi Awolowo, and Nnamdi Azikiwe—who represented the interests of Northern, Western and Eastern Nigerian Regions respectively—saluted the courage of Sir Richards and welcomed the constitutional development, especially as they were canvassing for

*Oligie, C. N.*

federalism themselves. Yet, the Richards Constitution was short-lived due to the tense political atmosphere created by heated agitations of Nigerian nationalists and other political figures who had gained much political leverage and consciousness since the end of the Second World War on 2nd September 1945. The federal vision which started remotely with Sir Bernard Bourdillon and furthered by Sir Arthur Richards continued with the latter's successor, Sir John Stuart Macpherson (b. 1898 – d. 1971), who was governor from 14th April 1948 to 1st October 1954 and governor-general between 1st October 1954 and 15th June 1955.

Sir Macpherson, having taken cognizance of the bitterness of the nationalists and announced on 17th August 1948 'to the Legislative Council that the process of drawing up a new constitution would begin' (Lynn, 2001, p. 154), swung into action enthusiastically as quickly as he settled into office to create a new and better constitution. He held wide and sufficient consultations, such as constitutional conferences, across Nigeria with all relevant parties, including Nigerian representatives and British officials between 1949 and January 1950. The consultation and constitutional reform process engendered tense political atmosphere occasioned by the divergent political views and ambitious demands of political parties such as the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), formed in 1944, and in which 'ethnic socio-political organizations wearing the garb of cultural associations determined the direction of public discourse' (Alli, 2003, p. 75). They included the Pan-Yoruba *Egbé Ọmọ Oduduwa* (Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa) formed in 1945, revived and launched in 1948 and transformed on 21st March 1951 into the Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo; the Pan-Hausa-Fulani *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa* (Arewa/Northern People's Congress) formed on 26th June 1949 and transformed on 1st October 1951 into the Northern People's Congress (NPC) led by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello; and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) formed in 1950 by a faction severed from the NPC and led by Malam Aminu Kano. Other such ethnic socio-political groups were the Pan-Igbo Federal Union and the Pan-Ibibio State Union.

In March 1949, Governor Macpherson set up a Select Committee of the Legislative Council—which ultimately became a 14-man Constitutional Drafting Committee headed by his Chief Secretary, Sir Hugh M. Foot—to examine the problems of the Richards Constitution and the prospect of creating a new constitution (Lynn, 2001; Udokang, 2006). The constitutional conferences held at village, divisional, provincial and regional levels to debate constitutional reform. The Enugu, Ibadan and Kaduna Regional Conferences as well as the Lagos Conference deliberated, among other things, on a body of resolutions from village, divisional and provincial conferences and made recommendations to the Sir Foot Constitutional Drafting Committee which subsequently prepared a statement of recommendations, based on the advice and views of the Regional and Lagos Conferences, to present to the 53-man General Constitutional Conference held in Ibadan in January (ended on 28th) 1950 under the chairmanship of the Attorney-General of Nigeria, Sir Gerard Howe (1946-1950). Also, the resolutions of the Regional and Lagos Conferences were tabled and debated in the Sir Howe General Constitutional

Conference (Lynn, 2001; Ubani et al., 2013). The process of constitutional reform that Macpherson initiated in 1948 ended at the Ibadan General Conference held to consider the report of the Constitutional Drafting Committee. Although the General Conference considerably adopted the recommendations of the Constitutional Drafting Committee, it failed to fully resolve, among other things, the controversy over the status of Lagos Municipality—whether or not it should be excised from Western Nigerian Region—and the size of regional representation in the proposed House of Representatives – about which the delegates of Northern Nigerian Region insisted on their region having a representation on a par with the representations of Eastern and Western Nigerian Regions combined or else the region would separate from the rest of Nigeria (Lynn, 2001).

In 1950, the Richards Constitution was abandoned partly to give way for the introduction of a new constitution and partly due to serious criticism against it and the intense demand for greater regional autonomy through better constitutional concessions. After the task of the Sir Hugh Foot Constitutional Drafting Committee was done and following due consideration of all the resolutions from all the constitutional conferences, a new constitution was introduced on 29th June 1951 as the Macpherson Constitution and became effective in November of that same year. Some of the crucial provisions of the new constitution included: (1) granting greater regional autonomy to the three regions (which consequently changed from being mere administrative units) in terms of devolving financial powers and legislative powers to regional legislatures to legislate on specific matters such as public health, agriculture and education, (2) expanding the membership of the single chamber Central Legislative Council to 148, enhancing its powers and renaming it the House of Representatives with the principle of African Majority retained, (3) membership of the House of Representatives would be elected by and responsible to regional legislatures, (4) creating a bicameral legislature for Western Nigerian Region by adding a House of Chiefs to the already existing House of Assembly, (5) maintenance of unitary public service and centrally controlled judiciary and marketing boards, (6) retaining Lagos Municipality in Western Nigerian Region, and (7) maintaining the Southern Cameroons as part of Eastern Nigerian Region while the Northern Cameroons remained part of Northern Nigerian Region (Coleman, 1960; Ubani et al., 2013, pp. 33-34).

The shape of the Macpherson Constitution was such that it allowed for regional autonomy and federal union. Alli (2003, p. 76) observed that ‘The constitution that was adopted reflected the goals of most of the nationalist leaders in that the center was strong but not too strong, while the regions had considerable powers but not enough to undermine the workings of the federal system of government which the McPherson constitution prescribed.’ He also stated that notwithstanding the intense arguments over the nature of Nigerian political structure and the disposition to promote ethnic identity and goals, none of the Nigerian groups involved in the constitution-making process did opt out of the emerging Nigerian nation. Instead, they welcomed the constitution because it allowed for greater participation of all member communities within the federal system. For Awolowo (1968, p. 6), it was ‘a prominent landmark in the nation’s political

development.’ In the final analysis, the Macpherson Constitution went beyond regionalism to creating quasi-federalism for Nigeria given that the central government still possessed enormous power and leverage over regional governments as it could veto regional legislations and as the lieutenant governor had to seek the approval of the governor before he could make legislations.

Like all previous constitutions that preceded it, the Macpherson Constitution—despite that it was well-advised, well-intentioned and welcomed by the majority of the people consulted during its making—had its own defects and criticism, and ended up only being well-meant. The collapse of the Macpherson Constitution was blamed on two sets of factors; inherent defects in the constitution and the political crisis witnessed at the time (Adigwe, 1974). The constitution created a leadership problem by not providing for the offices of prime minister and premier at the central and regional levels of government respectively. It failed to address the problem of the politics of rivalry along ethnoregional line, thus making Awolowo (as cited in Ubani et al., 2013, p. 35) to state that it was ‘a wretched compromise between federalism and Unitarianism.’ Outside the defects of the constitution itself, the major political crises that followed the adoption of the constitution included: (1) the Eastern Nigerian Region crises of 1953 caused by the failure of the NCNC to elect Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to the House of Representatives and the dishonour of the NCNC’s order of resignation by its appointed central ministers to whom the order was issued, (2) the disruption that trailed the NPC central legislators’ sharp rejection of the famous 31st March 1953 motion of Chief Anthony Enahoro, an AG member of the House of Representatives, requesting for self-government for Nigeria in 1956 and (3) the Kano riot of 1953 that recorded several casualties: itself being the aftermath of the Enahoro’s controversial self-government motion. Consequently, Northern Nigerian legislature passed an eight-point resolution calling for the dissolution and substitution of the federal system of government with a confederal system without which Northern Nigeria would secede from the one-Nigeria project (Alli, 2003; Ubani et al., 2013).

Given these unpleasant developments, the colonial government realized the defects of the constitution and got set for a replacement. Towards this end, the colonial authority organized two constitutional conferences attended by Nigerian leaders; one in London between 30th July and 22nd August 1953 and the other in Lagos in January and February 1954. The London Conference of 1953, chaired by Oliver Lyttelton, then colonial secretary, managed to adopt true federalism for the whole Nigeria after it reconciled the conflicting interests of the NPC delegation who demanded for a loose federation as a compromise for a confederation, and the AG and the NCNC delegations who, on their part, wanted the creation of a federation for Western and Eastern Nigeria. But to guarantee regional security and the benefits of true federalism to all the three regions, resolutions were made to grant more powers to the three regions to ensure strong federating units within the Nigerian federal system (Nwabughuogu, 1966; Kumo, 1994). Hence, some residual powers were transferred to the regions. At the same time, the conference also resolved to grant more powers to the central government, though on specified subjects, so as to be able to hold the federation together. A specified list of

concurrent subjects was also created for both the federal and regional governments. Also, contrary to the position of the leaders of Eastern and Northern Nigerian Regions, the AG, which represented Yoruba people, wanted Lagos to remain as part of Western Nigerian Region and not to be designated as Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

However, the mediation of Oliver Lyttelton helped to resolve the problem of the status of Lagos: Lagos was excised from Western Nigerian Region and made Nigeria's FCT. The quest for regional self-government was a serious issue which the conference handled diplomatically by resolving that any region which wanted independence within Nigeria could have it in 1956. The 1953 Conference established the Sir Louis Chick Fiscal Commission to review the extant fiscal policy. At home the resumed conference in Lagos (the Lagos Conference) held between January and February 1954 adopted the recommendations of the Sir Louis Chick Fiscal Commission of 1953 which include (1) derivation principle (which returned 100% of mining rents and royalties only to regions of origin) and (2) fiscal autonomy. It also decided that each region should establish and fully control its own local police force, judiciary, public/civil service and marketing board to resemble similar federal bodies (Alli, 2003; Ubani et al., 2013; Coleman, 1960).

Other key resolutions of the two conferences included: (1) provision for the offices of Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives and of regional legislatures, (2) retention of unicameral legislature with an expanded membership of 184 distributed thus: 92, 42, 42, 6, and 2 members from Northern, Eastern, Western Nigerian Regions, the Southern Cameroons, and Lagos respectively, (3) provision for the office of premier in each of the three regions which would be occupied by Nigerian heads of government and assisted by a Regional Council of Ministers comprising Nigerian ministers with actual or effective authority over their ministries, and (4) separation of the Southern Cameroons from Eastern Nigerian Region as a quasi-federal territory in Nigeria under the control of the governor-general, while the Northern Cameroons remained an integral part of Northern Nigerian Region as was the case under the 1951 Macpherson Constitution. The final culmination of these whole efforts was a new constitution known as the Sir Oliver Lyttelton Constitution—named after Colonial Secretary Sir Lyttelton, Chairman of the London Constitutional Conference—which became operational on 1st October 1954. The London and Lagos Conference resolutions were enshrined in this constitution. This constitution gave Nigeria the status of a full federation, thus marking a watershed in the country's history of political development.

However, the constitution failed to solve certain other big issues. The governor and the governor-general had final legislative powers over regional and central legislatures respectively and the powers were subordinated to the authority of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. There was no office of prime minister (Ubani et al., 2013). There remained the problem of territorial inequality of the federating regions. The grievances of minority ethnic groups and the attendant fear of marginalization were unaddressed. Hence, leaders of minority ethnic groups in the three regions demanded for creation of more regions to allow for a more representative federal system. Consequently, the minority leaders formed a number of political parties and movements such as the

*Oligie, C. N.*

United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), which demanded for a Middle Belt State from the vast Northern Nigerian Region; the Borno Youth Movement (BYM) – a Kanuri political organization which became affiliated with NEPU and sought for a Kanuri State in North-eastern Nigeria, still part of Northern Nigerian Region; the Calabar-Ogoja Rivers State Movement (COR State Movement), which wanted a COR State to be created from Eastern Nigerian Region; and the Benin and Delta Peoples Party (BDPP) and subsequently the Mid-west State Movement (MSM) both of which were affiliated with the NCNC and wanted a Mid-west State to be created from Western Nigerian Region (Alli, 2003).

These problems associated with the Oliver Lyttelton Constitution of 1954 were addressed among others in constitutional conferences held in London at Lancaster House (hence referred to as the Lancaster House Conferences) and chaired by the Rt. Hon. Alan Lennox-Boyd, then colonial secretary, between 23rd May and 26th June 1957 and from 29th September to 27th October 1958. The 1957 Conference reached a number of resolutions not limited to the following: (1) creation of the office of a federal prime minister and the office of Premier of the Southern Cameroons; (2) appointment of a Fiscal Commission (the Sir Jeremy Raisman Fiscal Commission) to review the existing revenue allocation formula and to recommend a new one; (3) agreement to grant regional self-government to Eastern and Western Nigerian Regions on 8th August 1957; (4) creation of a House of Chiefs each for Eastern Nigerian Region and the Southern Cameroons; (5) establishment of a Commission of Inquiry (which happened to be the Sir Henry Willink Minorities Commission) to enquire into the minority ethnic groups' fears of exploitation by the major ethnic groups after independence and (6) maintenance of the federal police without dividing it up into separate regional forces. Consequently, Eastern and Western Nigerian Regions attained regional self-government on the said date. Unfortunately, despite acknowledging that the fears of minority ethnic groups were real and genuine and that '... the future was regarded with real apprehension' (Willink Commission Report, 1958, p. 88), the Willink Minorities Commission appointed on 25th September 1957 recommended, in its report concluded on 30th July 1958, that no more states or regions should be created at the time. Another logical consideration could be, perhaps, because independence date was just so near.

However, the Willink Commission made the following important recommendations amongst others: (1) creation of a Special Area in the Niger Delta for minorities, (2) creation of a Mid-west Advisory Council/Council for Edo Affairs to oversee Edo Area within the Mid-west Area, (3) creation of Calabar Council to oversee the Calabar Province/Calabar Area, (4) that there should be no adjustment in the boundary between Northern and Western Nigerian Regions with respect to Ilorin and Kabba except as the result of a plebiscite which has to be generally agreed to by the conference to resume in 1958 (Willink Commission Report, 1958). It also 'recommended the establishment of a Niger Delta Development Board and a series of affirmative action programs to help allay the fears of minorities' (Agbese, 2003, p. 247). The fourth recommendation above may have been informed by the fact that the two areas are largely

dominated by Yoruba people even though they were under the control of the Northern Nigerian government.

The resumed London Constitutional Conference (29th September – 27th October 1958) considered the reports of the Willink Commission as well as other matters arising from the 1957 Conference. All the political parties' representatives in the conference adopted all the recommendations in the reports of the Commissions, albeit with fierce controversy and debate. This was likely because all attention and energy were focused on attaining the long-awaited all-important independence and no party wanted to raise issues that might make others perceive it as wanting to delay independence (Alli, 2003). Ghana's attainment of independence on 6th March 1957 may have also challenged and stampeded Nigerian nationalists into a hurry to secure Nigeria's independence in no distant future without first fully resolving major issues that are inimical to unity in diversity.

Additionally, the 1958 Constitutional Conference, which was the very last Nigerian constitutional conference held before Nigeria's independence, ended with a few other resolutions such as: (1) Nigeria would be granted independence on 1st October 1960 by Her Majesty's government if a simple majority resolution of the federal parliament in early 1960 demanded for it; (2) substantial increase in the powers and responsibilities of the Southern Cameroons still as a quasi-federal territory separate from Eastern Nigerian Region but without full internal self-government, whereas the Northern Cameroons remained part of Northern Nigerian Region; (3) agreement that before Nigeria becomes independent in 1960 the British Cameroons people would decide their own future (that is, whether to join Nigeria as a separate region when the country shall gain independence or to remain under British Trusteeship pending an ultimate decision of their future limited to joining the French Cameroons in time) through a plebiscite to be organized based on the recommendations of the United Nations; (4) approval, based on the agreement of the 1957 Conference, of 15th March 1959 as the date Northern Nigerian Region would attain regional self-government; and (5) representation in the federal legislature would be based on a population basis, rather than on the basis of equality of representation between Northern and Southern Nigeria as was obtainable prior to 1958. The resolutions of the 1957 and 1958 Constitutional Conferences were aggregated in 1960 into a new constitution known as the Independence Constitution of 1960 – a federal constitution for an independent Nigeria.

Following the 12th December 1959 general election in which the NPC won the highest number of seats in the House of Representatives, albeit failing to win a majority of seats (it won 134 of the 314 seats), Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who was the deputy leader of the NPC and thus elected Prime Minister of Nigeria, formed a coalition national government with the Nnamdi Azikiwe-led NCNC which, in alliance with NEPU, won 89 seats (NCNC 81 seats and NEPU 8 seats). The AG, winning only 73 seats, was consigned to the Opposition. Nnamdi Azikiwe was later appointed as Governor-General of Nigeria (15th November 1960 – 1st October 1963) having succeeded the last British Governor-General, Sir James Wilson Robertson, (15th June 1955 – 15th November 1960) who himself succeeded Sir John Macpherson (Alli, 2003; Sagay, 2008).



The failure of the Sir Henry Willink Minorities Commission or the 1958 London Constitutional Conference to address minority issues or recommend the creation of more regions before independence was perceived by Obasanjo (1980) as the greatest cause of the instability of the 1960s in Nigerian political evolution. Towards the end of the 1950s, Nigeria became a relatively strong federation comprising three strong component regions, a Federal Capital Territory of Lagos, and the Trust Territories of the Southern and Northern Cameroons. However, as it has been the practice under each constitution to assign Northern Nigerian Region a number of seats in the central legislature that are either on parity with or higher than the combination of the seats assigned to both Eastern and Western Nigerian Regions, the 320 seats of the House of Representatives—created based on the resolutions of the 1957 and 1958 Nigerian Constitutional Conferences held in London—were distributed as follows: 174 seats to Northern Nigerian Region; 73 seats to Eastern Nigerian Region; 62 seats to Western Nigerian Region; 8 seats to the Southern Cameroons; and 3 seats to the Federal Capital Territory, Lagos (Awa, 1964).

This arrangement, giving only Northern Nigerian Region a parity of representation with the whole of Southern Nigeria as well as an extra 28 seats above the parity level, gave a huge numeric strength and political leverage, especially on legislative matters, to the North in such a way that did not only undermine the strengths and leverage of Eastern and Western Nigerian Regions, the Southern Cameroons and Lagos combined, but also harmed them individually and collectively. This situation reflected the huge imbalance in the geopolitical structure of Nigeria which successive colonial governments since Sir Frederick Lugard deliberately decided not to solve perhaps because it counted in favour of Northern Nigerians whom the colonial officials had always regarded as loyal and easy to deal with.

The long years of colonial rule of Nigeria were markedly characterized by two periods each of which featured a peculiar form of government and all of which worked in shaping Nigerian political development. The first period was from 1914 to 1942. This period tended towards Unitarianism as it was typified by full centralization and concentration of power in the central government in Lagos. The second period was from 1943 to 1960 (before 1st October) and was typified by increased involvement of Nigerians in government and a gradual decentralization and deconcentration of power in the forms of regionalism, then quasi-federalism, and federalism eventually. Altogether, the British colonial government and Nigerian nationalists bequeathed to Nigeria a rather strong federation founded on the principles of federalism but rife with unresolved problems that are inimical to national unity and a balanced federal structure.

## **7. Reflection on the impact of colonial development of Nigerian federalism**

The account provided above indicates that the colonial process of creating Nigerian federalism had some impacts on the federal structure of Nigeria which Nigerians live with up to now. Some of the important impacts are considered below as follows:

**a) *Geographical imbalance of Nigerian federal structure***

A look at the map of Nigeria today reveals one truth: a huge geographical imbalance between Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. This order is one of the negative legacies of British colonial rule in Nigeria. Colonial authorities should have addressed the geographical imbalance between Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria before granting independence to Nigeria, especially as the former, which used to be a single region, is more than twice bigger than the latter that once comprised two regions: Western Nigerian Region and Eastern Nigerian Region. To date, this geographical imbalance—allowed by successive British colonial governments purposively to give political leverage to their loyal Northern Nigerian friends over Southern Nigerians whose Western-educated elite/nationalists were really a thorn in their flesh—remains a major problem of Nigerian federalism but a profit to Northern Nigeria.

The principle of federalism, with respect to territorial size, which states that: ‘there should not be any one state so much more powerful than the rest as to be capable of vying in strength with many of them combined. [And that] If there be such a one, and only one, it will insist on being master of the joint deliberations [just as Northern Nigeria does today]’ (Mill, 1948, pp. 367-368), was not taken into consideration by the British colonial authorities. This failure has compromised the effectiveness of functional federalism in Nigeria. Politics in a democracy like Nigeria is a function of number. The overwhelming numeric strength of Northern Nigeria grants it greater leverage in national politics, and greater economic, administrative and bureaucratic benefits to the detriment of Southern Nigeria. Accordingly, Alli (2003, p. 70) stated that ‘. . . the Independence Constitution did not differ much from the 1954 Lyttelton Constitution. The imbalance in the size of units that was very obvious to all was not addressed. It was to remain one of the major obstacles to Nigerian federalism.’

**b) *Political exploitation of the imbalance of territorial size***

In principle, territorial division of the states in a federation should be done modestly so that no one state should have a territory that is too large to enable it to threaten or marginalize other states in economics, politics, government, bureaucracy and administration. Although big territorial size does not necessarily mean big population strength, it must be emphasized that the bigger the territorial size of a state vis-à-vis other states in the same federation, the greater the threats it poses. Situation is worse for small states if a state or region with a large territorial size also has a big population strength and huge wealth. In the Nigerian situation, the overwhelmingly vast territory of Northern Nigeria is indeed a serious threat to the small portion of earth called Southern Nigeria; Northern Nigeria is more than twice bigger than Southern Nigeria which itself was further subdivided into Western, Mid-western and Eastern Nigeria. It follows logically that if the whole of Southern Nigeria could hardly confront or compete successfully with Northern Nigeria politically, standing alone as Western, Mid-western or Eastern Nigeria neither of them could afford to compete with or confront it effectively. Accordingly, Awa (1976, p. 38) stated that:

*. . . that the basic issue to be borne in mind in determining the size of the units of a federal government*

*is that no one unit should be so large that it can, by virtue of its size, compete effectively with the rest of the units or the entire union. Size here must be related to the volume of population and amount of wealth possessed by the units. If one unit in a federation happens to be too large in population compared to other units, then the unit can have a permanent majority in the popular chamber of the federal legislature where representation is usually based on population. Through its voting strength in that chamber, such a unit can exercise a dominant influence on the process of national policy-making.*

While the disappearance of regions and regionalism in Nigerian political system may persuade someone to believe that the problem of uneven territorial size has also disappeared or has been solved naturally, the fact of the matter is that the nineteen states of Northern Nigeria have not stopped defining themselves as Northern Nigeria from a regional perspective as opposed to Southern Nigeria. This old mentality is at the centre of the problem. When in conflict with the states of Southern Nigeria whether over sensitive political matters in the National Assembly, national confabulation, party politics, ethnic identity politics, census issue, the choice of a presidential candidate, presidential election, constitutional reform process and in appointment to very key positions, or in conflict over sensitive economic issues such as fiscal federalism, the old mentality of viewing Northern Nigeria as a single region irrespective of the existence of nineteen states in that part of Nigeria is awoken and utilized in creating incitement, sentiments and solidarity of Northern Nigerians towards a common stand.

In the National Assembly, for example, Northern legislators, both in the Senate and the House of Representatives, constitute a majority. All the nineteen states of Northern Nigeria have 191 Representatives (while the seventeen states of Southern Nigeria, with South-western, South-southern and South-eastern parts combined, have only 169 Representatives) out of a total number of 360 Representatives in the House of Representatives and 58 Senators out of a total number of 109 Senators in the Senate. Hence, there are times, depending on the issues for deliberation, when the old regional mentality and sentiment may be revived in which case Northern legislators will stand together putting aside party differences, state differences, and personal opinion, and tend to use or actually use their superior voting strength to turn legislative decisions in their favour or to exercise dominant influence over national policy-making process.

It is this mentality of viewing the whole of Northern Nigeria as though it were a single region that has encouraged the creation of certain Northern Nigerian associations such as the Arewa Consultative Forum, Northern Nigeria Youth Association, and the Northern Governors' Forum which is the most political of all, although Southern Nigeria has similar structures too. Hence, whether as a single region in a political sense or a territory comprising nineteen states, in times of serious national controversy or conflict, or when deliberation is to be made on issues anticipated to have an epoch-making consequences, Northern Nigerians will expectedly view themselves as a single entity and

thus act accordingly. The overwhelmingly vast size of Northern Nigeria gives Northern Nigerians a huge leverage over Southern Nigerians in all aspects of public life including politics, public administration and bureaucracy, to mention but a few.

For example, prior to the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War (July 1967- 20th January 1970), the Igbo and Yoruba nationalities occupied the most important positions in public service given their high educational backgrounds and qualifications. Northern Nigerians lagged behind. But since 1967 up to now, political power has rested on Northern Nigeria to a very great extent. Having used this opportunity immensely to reduce the educational and developmental gaps between Southern and Northern Nigeria, there is, therefore, no wonder how Northern Nigerians have risen to dominate in public affairs in Nigeria to the detriment of their Southern Nigerian counterparts. The consequence of this is unequal access of ethnic groups to state power and resources. This consequence contributes to the problem of politicized ethnicity and inter-ethnic rivalry which makes dominant Southern Nigerian ethnic groups such as the Yoruba and Igbo peoples to seek among other things to resist and wrestle power from Northern Nigerians who themselves, due to the same problem, desire to hold on to and consolidate power.

**c) *Exaltation of major ethnic groups and failure to address ethnic minority groups' concerns and fears***

British colonialists saw Nigeria as a Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo affair, concluding after all that Nature has neatly situated these dominant ethnic groups exclusively in the Northern, Western and Eastern parts of Nigeria respectively. Hence, to the British colonialists, Hausa-Fulani represents Northern Nigeria, just as Yoruba is to Western Nigeria and Igbo to Eastern Nigeria. But aside the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups, there are several other ethnic groups, both large and small, in Northern, Western and Eastern parts of Nigeria. This perception was driven into the minds of the nationalist leaders from these major ethnic groups and helped in creating in them the selfish mentality of seeking to grab power at the centre to better the lot or condition of their regions, and of course their ethnic groups, more than the whole peoples of Nigeria. Hence, ethnic minorities in Nigeria are 'dominated by the tyrannical trio of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups' (Akaruese, 1998, p. 45).

This perception of Nigeria fanned the embers of the unhealthy ethnoregional political rivalry, inter-ethnic hostility and political volatility that characterized the first half of the 1960s during Nigeria's first republican existence. It bred favouritism, nepotism, bigotry, and primordial consciousness that have remained a part of the sociology and psychology of Nigerian politics to date. This poor judgment of the political sociology and psychology of Nigeria was responsible for the failure to address ethnic minority concerns and the fear of marginalization which continue to cause problems in post-colonial Nigeria. This rancorous politics that magnified ethnoregional animosity prompted the cold-hearted military slaughter of several respectable nationalist leaders who reduced themselves, however, to playing unhealthy politics that sought to maximize ethnoregional interests. Unfortunately, these incidents truncated Nigeria's first republican existence. The failure of the 1957 and 1958 London Constitutional Conferences and the Sir Henry Willink Minorities Commission to tackle the genuine concerns raised by ethnic

*Oligie, C. N.*

minority groups was a colossal mistake that has proven too contentious and problematic to correct today.

**d) *Regions assumed the foci and loci of power***

From the 1950s onward, three major political parties—NCNC, AG and NPC—undoubtedly became big regional parties of consequence. The leaders of these parties sought to use their national political strength to promote regional interests, although the NCNC was the most nationally-oriented party despite its regional image. With independence granted to Western, Eastern and later Northern Nigerian Regions and with federalism adopted as the only political option for Nigeria, Nigerian political elite—such as Alhaji (Sir) Ahmadu Bello, Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and Malam Aminu Kano from Northern Nigeria Region; Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Ladoke Atintola from Western Nigerian Region; and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe from Eastern Nigerian Region among others—turned greater attention to developing and shaping the destinies of their regions but quite so less attention to shaping the destiny of Nigeria. Accordingly, shortly before independence and in the few years that followed it, the regions became stronger and more politically attractive than the centre just as Falola (1989, p. 50) observed that by 1958 the regions significantly transformed ‘into foci of power.’ Similarly, Okediji (2003, p. 190) argued that ‘The ineffectiveness of the federal structure to ameliorate ethnic divisions was evident in the fact that the regional governments were much stronger than the national government.’ This problem made inter-regional conflict recurrent and intense among Northern, Western and Eastern Nigerian politicians as they strove to gain and secure power at the national level and subsequently exercise it to the detriment of their political opponents from other regions. So was the politics of the first republic. The reckless ethnoregional rivalry and power struggle among these political heavyweights threatened the centripetal forces of the Nigerian federation. They shaped the despicable political behaviour and events that eventually prompted the Major Nzeogwu-led first military coup of 15th January 1966.

**e) *Federalism in Nigeria was what Britain wanted***

Before independence, some options existed that could have been exploited. The three regions which had gained self-rule by 1959 could have decided to go their separate ways as distinct independent countries just as Rhodesia and Nyasaland did on 31st December 1963. They could have also forged a confederation for themselves just as the thirteen original states of the United States of America (former British American colonies) did on 1st March 1781 towards the end of the War of Independence against Britain (19th April 1775 – 3rd September 1783) in which they were victorious. Either of these two options was exactly what the political leaders of Northern Nigerian Region insisted on in 1953 after they were severely booed and denounced for rejecting Anthony Enahoro’s 31st March 1953 motion for national independence in 1956. However, with the persuasion of Britain, the three regions decided, after all, to remain in one unified country with integrity intact. Thanks to Britain’s effort. The unity of the unified country was weak if it even existed.

But Britain decided to keep Nigeria together under a federal system of government for its own pride and interests (such as having, among other things, the glory of being the creator of the most populous country in Africa and one which could easily dominate its numerous Francophone West African neighbours in regional affairs and in other spheres) which were to go beyond independence, not minding how Nigerians would be affected.

**f) *Legacy of a relatively sound federal system of government***

Shortly before the dawn of independence, the three regions were fully-fledged autonomous regions within the Nigerian federation. Western Nigerian and Eastern Nigerian Regions gained the right to self-rule in 1957, while Northern Nigerian Region's self-government came later in 1959. Obviously, 'the Nigerian nation was increasingly being perfected, with a well-defined peculiarly Nigerian federal system of government' (Alli, 2003, p. 77). The three regions, despite their geographical imbalance, had the features that a state in a federation should have. They had a strong political power, their own constitutions, bicameral legislatures, flags, regional anthems, judicial systems, civil services and marketing boards. Importantly, they had complete fiscal autonomy over personal income tax and product sale tax, and enjoyed the derivation formula for public revenue sharing that allocated 50% of mining rents and royalties to the originating region. The federal structure reflected Wheare's classical description of federalism to a large extent. With these federal characteristics, the federating regions and the central government were both co-ordinate in their respective jurisdictions, and interdependent for the purpose of government and effective administration of Nigeria. There was a kind of balance between the central government and the regional governments, and citizens were even more active in regional politics because the regions were the fulcrum of politics. Although all was not rosy, at this point, it was hoped at home and abroad that Nigeria would emerge a great sovereign nation and giant of Africa not only due to its vast population but also because the nationalists who would succeed the British colonial government showed the prospect of taking the country to a great height of political and economic development.

**g) *Failure to utilize ample opportunities to address obvious problems***

The period between 1945 and 1960 marked a critical time in the political history of Nigeria. During this time nationalist struggle became more intense. It was a particularly chequered period characterized on the one hand by a series of constitutional conferences and reforms, more dynamic and desperate struggle for self-rule, impatience with the colonial government especially by Southern Nigerian nationalists, and on the other hand by ethnocentric political rivalry along regional lines, political tension and crisis, tense political atmosphere, pro-regional inclination and scramble for national positions of power among the nationalists as independence drew near. It was the most volatile period in the struggle for independence. Although British colonial officers and Nigerian nationalists made some laudable achievements for Nigerian federalism, the period presented ample opportunities which they could have exploited to address the serious problems raised above so as to lay a far better foundation for a better federalism in

Nigeria. Unfortunately, they let the opportunities pass and did nothing. Accordingly, Gana (2003, p. 17) remarked that:

The year 1954 remains a watershed in Nigeria's evolution into statehood . . . reference cannot but be made to the year when both the colonial state functionaries and the 'nationalists' reached a consensus that federalism was the best form of power-sharing for the nation – in the making. . . . [But] In the euphoria of the moment, little attention was paid to the dynamics of inter-ethnic competition for scarce state resources that was soon to be unleashed to undermine the process of national integration as the new republic crawled off.

## **8. Findings**

In the end of the study, findings were made as follows:

- i) Although the British colonial authority had earlier desired a unitary system of government for Nigeria, Britain's final choice and development of federalism for Nigeria was embraced by Nigerian nationalist leaders.
- ii) The great ethnocultural and socio-political heterogeneity of Nigeria was a compelling factor for Britain's choice of federalism for Nigeria.
- iii) By virtue of the Lyttelton Constitution of 1954 upon which Nigerian federalism in colonial time was fully established, Britain, in 1960, bequeathed Nigeria with a relatively sound federal system of government.
- iv) The British colonial authority, however, was less serious and determined to solve the glaring problems of Nigerian federalism than it was in handling a federal legacy to their Nigerian successors.
- v) By leaving the vast Northern Nigerian Region intact Britain often favoured Northern Nigeria to the detriment of Southern Nigeria.
- vi) The substructural problems of the geographical imbalance of Nigerian federal structure, political exploitation of the imbalance of territorial size, exaltation of major ethnic groups, and failure to address ethnic minority groups' concerns and fears resulted from British colonial creation of the Nigerian federation, and constitute destabilizing forces to federalism in post-colonial and fourth republican Nigeria.
- vii) These problems have been responsible for other problems of the Nigerian federation such as inter-ethnic rivalry, minority issue and agitation for state creation, unequal access to power and benefits from government, difficulty in achieving national integration and unity, and the problem of resource control.

## **9. Summary and Conclusion**

The paper accounts for the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism. It indicates that although the original goal of some British colonial governments was to establish a unitary system of government for Nigeria, the eventual choice of federalism by British colonial authorities and acceptance of it by Nigerian nationalist leaders from the Northern, Western and Eastern Regions of Nigeria towards the end of colonial rule as Nigeria's

suitable political system happened following consideration of the realities of the heterogeneous socio-political matrix of the complex and diverse societies that were welded on 1st January 1914 into a single country, Nigeria. Prior to colonial rule, these societies that are now Nigerian societies had their distinctive systems of socio-political organization. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups had the most outstanding socio-political systems that included theocratic/monarchical absolutism and centralism, theocratic/monarchical semi-absolutism and quasi-centralism, and democratic republicanism and decentralism respectively. The paper explains that, while British imperial interest in the territories that are now called Nigeria began remotely in at least 1861 when the British government annexed Lagos as British Crown Colony, it was colonialism that actually engendered the processes and stages of creating Nigerian federalism, which ended in at least 1954 when the Oliver Lyttelton (federal) Constitution was created, although colonialism itself continued until 1st October 1960 when Nigeria attained independence. With British imperialism and colonialism, these societies lost their political power and control over themselves and were forcefully integrated into Nigeria, a political society to which the British colonial authority bequeathed a relatively sound federal system of government which Nigerian nationalists from the Northern, Western and Eastern Nigerian Regions, most of whom were Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo people, contributed enormously in securing. It also indicates that those processes and stages of creating Nigerian federalism were markedly characterized by a unitary system of government with centralized power, partial decentralization of power and regionalism, quasi-federalism and then federalism achieved in 1954.

Despite the relatively sound condition of the Nigerian federation at independence, the sixty years and nine months of colonial rule created some substructural problems—such as a glaring geographical imbalance of the federating regions, political exploitation of the imbalance of territorial size, exaltation of major ethnic groups, and failure to address ethnic minority groups' concerns and fears—from which the federation suffers post-independence. These problems contribute to other problems of Nigerian federalism such as inter-ethnic rivalry, minority issue and agitation for state creation, unequal access to power and benefits from government, difficulty in achieving national integration and unity, and the problem of resource control. Hence, the structural and fundamental problems of Nigerian federalism as depicted in this paper are the true repercussions of Britain's colonial creation of the Nigerian federation. Even with the adoption of federalism, the colonial political leadership of Nigeria at the time failed to resolve these problems even when they were obviously inimical to the stable development of federalism in Nigeria. This, therefore, suffice to contend that the colonial origins of Nigerian federalism ended up creating substructural problems that continue to impinge on the politics and organization of the Nigerian federation up to the present time.

## **10. Recommendations**

The British colonial government is no more with Nigeria. Therefore, the problems it created or it refused to solve after it forged federalism for Nigeria can only be solved by



*Oligie, C. N.*

the Nigerian government. With regards to solutions to such problems as those stated as the findings of this paper, the paper provides the following recommendations:

*Geographical imbalance of Nigerian federal structure*

To address this inherent problem, it is suggested that, just like the regime of General Sani Abacha divided Nigeria into six geopolitical zones and this has managed to address some political tension, Northern part of Nigeria should be divided up in two to create Central Nigeria so that Nigeria will be geopolitically defined going forward as Northern, Central, Western, Southern, and Eastern Nigeria. The greatest concern here is to consider and label the Middle Belt, the southwards part of Northern Nigeria, as Central Nigeria and separate it from the geopolitical proportion, influence, and purview of Northern Nigeria as a way to create some balance between Northern Nigeria and other parts of Nigeria in terms of geopolitical power and influence.

*Political exploitation of the imbalance of territorial size*

As a way of addressing this problem, concerted efforts should be made to forge a common sense of nationalism, patriotism, accommodation, and unity among Nigerians of all identities. Nigerianization policy and programmes should be developed and implemented continually while sectionalism and zonal sentiments should be seriously suppressed and discouraged. There should be co-operation and synergy between government and various agencies of political socialization which should aim at cultivating secularism, national orientation, and detribalized attitude and tendency in Nigerians as well as requiring Nigerians, as a matter of civic obligation, to see Nigeria as Nigeria and not as a body of ethnic groups that are conscious of one another and that strive against one another. Moreover, certain legal measures should be established to punish Nigerians who promote ethnocentrism; ethnic bias, prejudice and stereotype; ethnically motivated hate speech; and xenophobic incitement. When a nationalistic mentality is developed from all these measures, the wrong practice of exploiting the leverage derived from ethnic majority and territorial superiority by some Nigerians will diminish and be discouraged.

*Exaltation of major ethnic groups and failure to address ethnic minority groups' concerns and fears*

Effort to address this problem will necessarily include solving other similar problems such as inter-ethnic rivalry, minority issues and agitation for the creation of state, and unequal access to power and benefits from government. It must be pointed out that the problems stated here are sociological issues that have assumed a political form. To address these problems, whosoever is President of Nigeria should be required by a special law to equitably execute developmental programmes and projects across Nigeria, especially in the less developed or more disadvantaged areas throughout his tenure of office, as this is in keeping with the principle of need and even development.

Additionally, successive federal governments have achieved some successes in addressing the marginalization and other disadvantages of the various ethnic minority groups in the Niger Delta. Such successes include the establishment of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) created by Decree No. 23 of July 1992, the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) set up in 1994, the Niger Delta Development

Commission (NDDC) established on 5th June 2000, and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs formed on 10th September 2008 by President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua. For other ethnic minority groups not in the Niger Delta, including those of the Niger Delta, it is advised that the National Assembly should pass a law that empowers the Federal Executive to set up an ethnic minority commission to particularly look after the concerns of ethnic minority groups. The commission should among other functions look into the affairs of state governments in relation to the treatment of ethnic minority groups in their states to ensure that they have adequate political representation in government and economic benefits from government.

For any qualified Nigerian citizen, irrespective of ethnicity, to have the opportunity to seek election to the highest political office of a state, that is the office of governor, or of the nation, that is the office of president, the ideas of zoning and rotational system/formula as were initiated in the second republic in 1979 should be encouraged, incorporated into the 1999 Constitution like the Federal Character Commission and be made a part of Nigerian political culture. This measure will address not only the problem of ethnic minority groups, but also arrest inter-ethnic rivalry among the three major ethnic groups, and promote socio-political stability. This will go a long way in addressing the problem of unequal access to power and benefits from government, as people from ethnic minority groups will have the opportunity to run for an elective position without the fear of numeric inferiority and to benefit adequately from the wealth of the nation. The federal government should also initiate affirmative action programmes in the interest of ethnic minority groups beyond what it has done for the Niger Delta region. The passing into law by the Senate of the bill for the establishment of South-East Development Commission on 12th December 2018 is laudable. Similar actions should be taken in the interest of ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minority issues will be solved in large part if these suggestions are implemented.

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Oligie, C. N.

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