Internal boundary and religious conflicts: the problems of national integration in post-colonial Nigeria

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Abstract
We investigated Nigerian's post-colonial resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts that have bedeviled the country since independence based on the problems of national integration in post-colonial Nigeria. It argued that resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts in the country since liberation in 1960 are crops of expansionism in the sense that colonialism, while the post-colonial state could not avert the ills of colonial rule but rather re-invented the foreign strategy of division and law. It also argues that the scuffles for control of the naturally found resources in the localities are a result of "oppression, marginalization and government influence, uneven distribution of wealth and resources, nepotism and socio-religious bigotry," which have over the years led religious groups, communities, local governments and States to a long-drawn-out deadly boundary and religious conflicts. The objective of this research is not only aim at highlighting the impact of internal boundary and religious conflicts on the Nigerian federation but also to draw the attention of Nigerian policymakers and researchers to the "neglect" of these issues, which have pitted groups between and even within states in the country, with deadly consequences, thereby questioning the principle of national integration and its essence in Nigeria. The methodology used in this research is the secondary source that has to do with published and unpublished works on the internal boundary, religious conflicts, and national integration. The paper submits that the existence of different natural resources found within the country should not always lead to the internal boundary and religious conflicts but cooperation amongst the people.

Keywords:
Internal boundary; religious conflicts; national integration; Nigeria.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is evident and historical that Nigeria since independence on 1st October 1960 is still one of the most African independent states "plagued with a multiplicity of both religious groups and conflicts" (Abdulrasheed, 2006). The conflicts are on issues, such as agrarian or boundary, ethnic, religious, ethnoreligious, economic or resource control, political or electoral, labour, domestic and media to mention a few that "undermine the unity" and integration process of the country (Odigie, 2006). According to experts of conflict studies, there are several reasons for the constant resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts in Nigeria. One of such reasons is the constant "attempts by groups of persons or communities, local governments or states to increase, monopolize or consolidate another group's control over scarce resources of farmlands, fishing waters, trade routes and lately oil-rich communities" (Ogen, 2005). Inadequate and proper use of spatial data in boundary management with failure or ineffectiveness of the traditional, colonial and post-colonial structures and policies relevant to proper boundary delineation is another reason Omojola (2005) advanced. Other remote causes are a proliferation of states, hunger, violence, and unemployment (Akinyele, 1995), insecurity from farmers' herders' clashes where farmlands and farm produce are destroyed by herders cattle's, population increase, and fixation of land where farmers both urban and rural agricultural communities make their living. "Oppression, marginalization and government influence, uneven distribution of wealth and resources, division in government, nepotism, and socio-religious bigotry" (Best *et al*., 1999). It also accounts for the causes of boundary and religious conflicts in post-colonial Nigeria. The impact of this botch of arrangements and strategies on the country's integration process are many, one of them is the continuous outbreak of boundary and religious conflicts or relations, which constitutes one of the greatest challenges to national security and developmental aspirations, altering or negating in a way, the very essence of achieving true federalism and national integration.

Furthermore, Imbua (2006) posits that resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts in Nigeria have over the years "eroded the country's resources, fractured its economy, becloud the people's vision and benumbed their confidence. They constitute a serious threat to local government, state, and national security, a scenario that reflects the absence or lack of integration process in the country and well-defined internal/religious boundaries essentially. More so, resurgences of boundary and religious conflicts in Nigeria have become of great concern because they often result in loss of lives and properties, fear, insecurity, distrust, and economic dislocations. They as well create large streams of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Ikpe, 2005). It is evident that the continued re-emergence of internal boundary and religious conflicts in Nigeria have adversely affected the level of development in the country since independence as observed carefully by some scholars of developmental studies that; "absence of integration in Nigeria is the major problem typically confronting the developmental efforts of the country" (Egbe, 2018). Weiner (1965) argues that one of "the central problems of developing nations of Africa and that of the world that is often more pressing than even economic development is the achievement of integration". Nigeria is not left off the hook as various internal boundaries and religious conflicts or crises have characterized her post-colonial integration process since 1960.

Integration on the other hand, whether vertical or horizontal has to do with, interdependence, "contacts and interactions between a heterogeneous people striving to achieve their material well-being" (Irom, 2012). Also, it aims to integrate numerous humanoid actions which overlap all sections of society by making it a complex occurrence encircling all facets of social existence (Irom, 2012). In other words, this suggests that for effective implementation and achievement of the

integrative process in Nigeria, contact, interactions, and interdependence amongst communities and ethnic groups must be maximally respected and cordially considered because each community and ethnic group "has its own unique identity and as well occupies a distinct but contiguous territory" (Irom, 2012).

Land and religion generally are basic features of societies. That is, every society occupies an identifiable homeland, with religion defining their way of worship. That is to say, religion is crucial to the unity and stability of the country as it defines what constitutes ideal social behavior. While land, on the other hand, as Cynthia Enloe quoted in Akinyele (1995) succinctly observed, every community or group of people are prone to identify their survival with a physical territory. Since the issue of survival is closely tied to land ownership, where the boundary lies between one group and another becomes very important. This, however, Akinyele (1995), elucidates why frontiers like Lord Curzon have argued vehemently that boundaries have become the razor's edge on which "hang suspended the modern issues of war and peace, life or death to nations".

Post-colonial Nigeria examined in this paper according to Odey (1981), "is an amalgam of several peoples, cultures, kingdoms, empires, clans, village – groups of pre-colonial states and past civilizations", "that were in various stages of development" (Barkindo, 1999). It was one of the African countries that, from the 1940s, embarked on a serious campaign for self-determination, decolonization, and independence that was later achieved on 1st October 1960, after nearly a hundred years of British colonial rule (Ejitu, 2018). The country came into existence in 1914, following the amalgamation of the two British protectorates of the North and South by Sir Frederick Lugard, the first Governor-General of Nigeria (Crowder, 1962). Although the name Nigeria was coined after River Niger by Flora Shaw in London Times of 8 January 1897 by suggesting that "the several British protectorates in the Niger be known collectively as Nigeria", it did not have British government official approval until July 1899 (Otite, 1999; Crowder, 1962).

Nigeria is located between latitude 40 20l and 140 30 East, (Otite, 1999). It is bordered on the north by Sahara Desert, south by the Gulf of Guinea, an arm of the Atlantic Ocean (Udo, 1980). It has a geographical space of 923,768 square kilometers, a coastline of over 700 kilometers with 1,040 kilometers straight from the coast to the northern limits, consisting of great diversities of vegetation, ecologies, and economies, and occupations (Otite, 1999). The swampy mangrove on the coastal areas changes to evergreen rain equatorial forest and thins off into savannah grassland, desert-like conditions at the northern limits. Outside the Niger Delta and the coastal swamps and creeks, the post-colonial Nigerian landmass consists essentially of a low plateau of about 600 meters (2,000 feet) above sea level (Udo, 1980). Except in the rugged range of hills along the Nigerian – Cameroun borders, where there is no major physical barrier to the easy movement of people (Udo, 1980).

According to the 2006 Population Census, Nigeria's population is currently estimated to be about three hundred million (300, 000,000) people (2006 Population Census). The country Nigeria is a plural society defipeople'scultural – institutional diversities of ethnic groups of various populations, and with people practicing three main religions – Christianity, mainly in the South and Middle Belt; Islam, mainly in the north, and traditional religion in every part of the country (Otite, 1999). Admittedly, Nigeria is a very complex country with the behavior and relationships of individuals and groups determined by the imperatives of cultural symbols and strategic social institutions.

2 BACKGROUND TO NIGERIA'S CREATION AS SOVEREIGN STATE

Until the 19th century, when the British began to make their political in-roads to this part of the world, the geographical expanse today called Nigeria consisted of different kingdoms, empires, nationalities, and states (both mini and mega) with well-organized political systems, identities and symbols existing independently (Eteng, 2012; Ozumba, 2012). The 'mega' states consisted of extensive empires and kingdoms established by Hausa and Kanuri speaking people of Northern Nigeria, the Sokoto Caliphate that ruled Northern Savannah, the kingdoms of Ife and Benin with the most recognized and accomplished art in the world, the Yoruba Empire of Oyo with a well-organized system of checks and balances; and the city-states of Niger Delta grown partly in response to European demands for slaves and later palm oil (Crowder, 1962; Ozumba, 2012; Eteng, 2012).

On the other hand, the mini-states consisted of the largely politically decentralized Igbo-speaking peoples of the southeast that provided the famous Igbo–Ukwu bronze and terracotta, the small ethnic groups of Plateau, and the descendants of those that created the famous Nok terracotta (Crowder, 1962). However, the mini and mega states were relatively stable with sound socio-political settings until the amalgamation in January 1914 to create Nigeria (Eteng, 2012).

The idea of amalgamating the different ethnic groups under one political-administrative unit (Nigeria), dates back to the Niger or Selborne Committee's decision of 1898 (Erim, 1981), which recommended that the Colony of Lagos with its Yoruba hinterland under the Colonial Office should by 1900 formally become the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos. Secondly, the Niger Coast Protectorate comprising the Bights of Benin and Biafra with their hinterland under the foreign office should by 1900 become the protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and thirdly, that what later became Northern Nigeria under the Royal Niger Company should become a protectorate also by 1900. Meanwhile, the Royal Niger Company, empowered by the British Crown, had made its debut in 1886 to the ethnic nations of Nigeria. Their major mission was to trade in all the territories of the Niger basin (Ozumba, 2012). Other reasons that informed the British expansionist adventure included mere curiosity search for markets and raw materials and the mission to civilize and Christianize the people. The coming of the Royal Niger Company with their explorations and trading paved the way for the British control of the hitherto disparate nations that now make up Nigeria.

With Sir Frederick Lugard's coming as the first British High Commissioner for the Northern Protectorate in 1900, the British took control of the Niger Basin area. In comparison, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, administered by Ralph

Moore with its headquarters in Calabar (Unya, 2019) was originally enacted in 1893 as Niger Coast Protectorate. It became amalgamated with Lagos Colony in 1906, administered by Sir Walter Egerton under the title "Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria" (Ozumba, 2012). Thus, the historical journey of Nigeria as a single geo-political entity began in 1914 with the amalgamation of the North and Southern Protectorates by Frederick Lord Lugard (Otite, 1999; Olasupo, 2005).

3 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

It is expedient that a conceptual clarification of the major concept used in this paper be made to help in a proper understanding of the topic.

3.1 Boundary

To start with the concept of boundary, it is important to note that according to Asiwaju and Adeniyi (1989), the meaning of boundary transcends the more familiar spatial dimension. The boundary refers to lines of demarcation between territorially defined areas of jurisdiction or ascertainable authority to the functional or symbolic category, which is exemplified by perceived limits of social and organizational entities such as race, ethnicity, culture, religion, church, mosque, industry, business, corporations including multinationals, gender, age grades or generations, families, class, occupations, and professions.

The Longman Dictionary defines a boundary as a "dividing line" that marks the limit of an area of jurisdiction. This, however, suggests that boundaries generally are thin lines of separation or lines separating one territory from another. Imobighe (1988) defines a boundary as a "line of demarcation that delimits the scope of two or more administrative jurisdictions". In other words, boundaries or boundaries are contact points between two objects or contact zones of different political jurisdictions that are either imaginary or represented on the ground in the form of pathways, fence, hedgerows, motes, and erected markers at regular intervals. Griggs (1997) sees boundaries as the "interface we create or perceive between two phenomena". He further states that boundaries can assume mental categorization such as us and them or the physical demarcation between two administrative units. However, he warned that boundaries are not dead immobile lines in the dirt separating administrative areas but the fulcrum around which people's political, social, and economic activities revolve (Akinyele, 1995).

3.2 Religion

Definitively, there is generally no acceptable definition of the concept "Religion" because avalanche literature or scholars defined it differently according to their understanding and perspective. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, religion is defined as the belief in the existence of God or gods and all the activities connected with their worship of them. It is also one of the systems of faith based on the belief in a particular God or gods. Religion is an important and major aspect of the National Question in Nigeria today. According to Odigie (2006), religion has undermined the country's unity in that religious conflicts have always been between the Christians and the Muslims that form the largest percentage of ardent followers or worshipers in the country. It plays a crucial role to the unity and stability of the country in that "it defines what constitutes the ideal social behavior and when this definition is at crossroads with one another especially where there is more than one religion, normal relations become difficult. This is because religion makes a distinction between believers and non-believers thereby discouraging cordial interaction between members of different religions (Odigie, 2006). It should be noted that, in Nigeria, there are three major religious groups: namely Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR), but religious conflicts have always occurred between the Christians and the Muslims.

3.3 Conflict

Generally, the term conflict as the name implies has been defined differently by scholars with different interpretations in different contexts. One of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict, according to Otite (1999). He defined conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the opponents aim to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals" (Otite, 1999). From Coser's definition, Otite avers that conflict is conceptualized as a way of settling problems originating from opposing interests and from the continuity of society. Harvard Program on Negotiation Glossary "Conflict" 2013 defined conflict as some practice of resistance, differences, or disharmony ascending within a collection when the principles or activities of one or more group followers are either fought by or intolerable one or more adherents of another group. According to Otite (1999), conflict arises between individuals and, or groups in defined social and physical environments from their pursuit of divergent interests, goals, and aspirations.

3.4 Integration

Generally, the concept of integration has been differently defined by different scholars. According to Soyombo (2005), "integration in its ordinary sense means to unite or put together into a whole". It is a term that originates from contacts and interactions between different groups of people as they strive to achieve their material well-being (Irom, 2012). According to Ellis and Lipetz (cited in Irom, 2012) the term interaction means a responsive behavior and reactions of societies or groups of people towards one another. In the context of the nation, which has to do with both vertical and horizontal integration, integration, according to Soyombo (2005), implies the "cooperative existence of groups of people with diverse interest". In other words, his national integration requires the removal of all barriers to national unity by emphasizing the need for coexistence which presumes the existence of a multi-cultural society like Nigeria.

According to Weiner (cited by Zolberg) in Akinyele (1995), national integration is similarly explained as bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and establishing a national identity in the context of some sort of plural society. According to Akinyele (1995), this explanation presupposes that the concept of

national integration could imply the establishment of central authority over subordinate political units, or the growth of minimal value consensus assumed to be required to maintain a system. While Coleman and Rosenberg (2021), on the contrary, touched on the peace component of national integration by stating that it involves the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tension. In essence, national integration involves the orientation of the masses towards the nation in a way that micro-loyalties are not allowed to jeopardize the existence of the country or the national goals and objectives (Akinyele, 1995).

4 IMPACT OF INTERNAL BOUNDARIES AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS ON NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Historically, rampant resurgences or continued outbreak of internal boundary and religious conflicts have contributed largely to the negatively increasing high level of "insecurity in the country, thereby complicating the achievement of integration in Nigeria (Akinyele, 1995). This is because, "any country whose sizeable percentage of its population lives in constant fear cannot be said to be properly integrated", because occurrence of these conflicts in our component states "often result to loss of lives and properties, create fear, insecurity, distrust and economic dislocations. They also result in large streams of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Ikpe, 2005). Some recorded instances of internal boundary conflicts in all the six geo-political zones of the country include the "Tiv – Jukun boundary conflicts" (Akinyele, 1995) in Taraba State, the "Tingo and Waduku boundary conflicts" (Amango, 2006), the "Zangon – Kataf boundary Crisis" (Akinteye *et al,* 1999) in Kaduna State, the "Oma and Awe, the Fier – Mwanghavul, Ron – Mwoquadul, Pyem – Mwanghanval boundary Conflicts" (Abdulrasheed, 2006) in Jos, "Agrarian Boundary Conflicts in the Jos Plateau Area of Central Nigeria" (Lohor, 2006), "Ethno Demography of Yakurr Conflict: A Study of Ugep – Idomi War of 1992" (Oka, 1999) in Cross River State of South – Southern Nigeria, "Conflict between Pastoralists and Agriculturalists in North – Eastern Nigeria" (Williams *et al.,* 1999), "Ife – Modakeke Crisis" (Albert, 1999) in South – West Nigeria, "Intra – Ethnic Conflicts among the Yoruba: A Study of Ora" (Akinteye, 1999) in South – West Nigeria to mention a few. While some of these boundary and religious conflicts took decades to be resolved, some have not been resolved rather they are still under the processes of management, arbitration, and resolution. Thus, the cumulative scorecards of these resurgences of boundary and religious conflicts on the nation are perhaps best imagined.

Resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts in Nigeria have contributed to "delaying the progress of the warm relationship between nearby states in some parts of the country" (Akinyele, 1995). This is because; the process of national integration first requires a harmonious relationship between the component states of the federation and the different levels of government. Again, internal boundary and religious conflicts in Nigeria have contributed to increasing "regional tensions and discontinuities" in the country, thereby making it more difficult to achieve national integration.

National integration as it were in general principles involve the freedom of people to participate in the political and public life of the nation (Elaigwu, 1994 quoted in Akinyele, 1995) but the constant reoccurrence of internal boundary and religious conflicts have rather "complement the negative influence of ethnicity on the political scene". This is practically elucidated in Obono's work; 'The Ethnodemography of Yakurr Conflict: A Case Study of the Ugep – Idomi War of 1992" that,

> *Politically, Idomi the smallest Yakurr settlement was cut off from her kith and kin and political friends. That, during electioneering campaigns, politicians from Ugep the largest settlement in Yakurr did not go to Idomi for their campaigns for fear of either being molested or killed. Politicians from other areas also were afraid to go down to Idomi for campaigns. This resulted in Idomi being politically alienated from other parts of the state in particular and the country in general. But for the cancellation of the result the impact of the boundary conflict in political terms could have been resonating even now (1999, p. 78).*

Resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts have negatively inhibited national integration, the hallmark of nation-building (Nwabughuogu, 2009). They have also created permanent distrust amongst communities, local government and states thereby making it uneasy for groups of distrusting communities to come together to embrace a nation with a common destiny. This is so because resurgences of boundary and religious disputes hinder the mobility of persons, goods, services and ideas that make achieving national integration difficult (Nwabughuogu, 2009). High costs of setting up boundary commissions and arbitration committees have become a common feature in Nigeria. These commissions and committees consume enormous resources that could have been invested in productive sectors of the economy to create jobs, provide infrastructure, and improve the economic and social standard of living, which facilitate nation-building.

Boundary and religious conflicts have also negatively affected cooperation amongst component states of Nigeria, especially at the political and economic levels (Nwabughuogu, 2009). That is, as the conflicting component states close their borders against each other's citizen, the flow of goods and services is hindered, and the already small markets of Nigeria get smaller (Nwabughuogu, 2009). Internal boundaries and religious conflicts in Nigeria have divided people from homogeneous culture, placing them on either side of the divide. As a result, permanent disgruntled groups exist within the components states of Nigeria whose loyalties do not lie in the states they are placed in but rather in that which is denied them (Imobighe, 1993). Thus, a society like Nigeria that is prone to frequent internal boundary disputes must be called amongst others, the society's pattern of resource management and the question of the level of intra and inter-community relationship and integration, as well as its cohesion (Imobighe, 1993).

Resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts have affected the process of nation building in Nigeria. They dissipate the country's resources by claiming more lives and valuable property than those boundary conflicts along the borders with the limited trope countries (Aikhomu, 1989). Thus, the cost of such conflicts usually runs in million dollars, money that could have been used to develop the communities and states involved. The cost of maintaining border communities is usually staggering, especially when the conflicts drag for too long. These communities of necessity

become dependent on the state for their food and sustenance since the military forces usually occupy their farmlands. The greatest victims of these conflicts are usually the young men, the productive population of the community, and the state who are the future hope of its development (Nwabughuogu, 2009).

5 CONCLUSION

It is obvious and crystal clear that resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts or disputes in Nigeria arise from a number of causes that inadvertently affect all sectors of the country. Nigeria has witnessed many boundary and religious conflicts either internally or internationally since it attained independence on 1st October, 1960 thereby making integration and nation-building difficult. Resurgences of inter-community, local government and states boundary and religious disputes or skirmishes witnessed today in Nigeria are all direct consequences of lack of proper demarcation of the boundaries, which have led to various conflicts resulting in loss of lives and property, disruption of peace, and lack of orderliness in the affected areas. Peace along Nigeria's internal boundaries is essential to its progress and meaningful development. Since of late, resurgences of internal boundary or religious conflicts or disputes have assumed such a sensitive and violent form that, if not handled with care, they could create serious unending security threats and developmental problems for the nation. We have the alternative to either go the nativist, atavistic route, opting for nationalism based on ethnic or linguistic uniformity or multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation-state. If we do not prefer peace, stability, and tranquility in our communities, local government, and states, then we should be prepared to re-draw our boundaries on a de-facto basis by war as succinctly captured again by Ekoko (2003). The cumulative report card for resurgences of internal boundary and religious conflicts have created more security problems, claimed more lives and property than international boundaries but strangely, international boundaries have attracted the attention of more scholars like himself than internal boundaries, a trend that should be reversed.

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