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Evolution of Nigeria as a Political Unit: The Amalgamation of 1914

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ABSTRACT

The amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates dresses in a toga of unity that prizes Nigeria as the most populous Black nation on the face of the planet Earth. Thus, the combination of its resources and human capital edification makes her the giant and pride of the Negro world. It is therefore the contention of this paper that whatsoever 1914 amalgamation strands in Nigeria's contemporary discourses, it's the greatest thing that has happened to Nigeria and Africa in disguise. The paper employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection as well as content analysis to quarry the nature, context, and consequences of the amalgamation of 1914 on contemporary Nigeria. Relying on the historical approach to diagnose the 1914 amalgamation process reveals that, it's loaded with readings of amalgamation of many modern nations as part of the historical process for the construction of diverse identities. The paper however submits that Great Britain, United States of America, Germany, and many others for examples had benefited from the amalgamation constructs of diverse identities. The paper however drives that the 1914 amalgamation is critical in the historical construction of a Nigerian identity for analysis.

Keywords: Evolution of Nigeria, 1914 Amalgamation, Northern, Southern, Protectorate, Nigeria.

Introduction

Scholars of the historical profession admonished that a “purely contemporary view of any problem is necessarily a limited and even distorted view”, and that “every situation has its roots in the past... The past survives in the present; the present is indeed the past undergoing modification”.¹ The viewpoint is that we should have a clear understanding of the historical inheritances that have continued to shape and as we engage them in order to make meaning out of those events in contemporary life of our great country, for as the Nembe- Ijo expression reveals “ene fidiya bere bere”² there is no eternity to problems,

until they are resolved. In light of this oversight “1914 amalgamation” has portend a genre of thoughts in the political history of Nigeria, has been the catalyst of the altercation between forces of hegemony inspired by the historical imbalance caused by the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates, as well as the persistent contest to redress the abnormality and promote national integration through devolution of power and competitive federalism,³ is the core of contemporary cry amongst many Nigerian groups.

Significantly, the amalgamation contends daunting challenges to the very foundation of the Nigerian state with consistent clamor for constitutional remodeling for a more fashionable federation. At the core of this enduring anemic character of the problem is the generation of national integration through policy and intellectual orientation has been driven in a confluence that painted the country as a “geographical expression” or “an artificial creation of British imperialism”. This kind of thought provoking statement brings one to learn the big lessons of History for further analysis. Readings in the evolution of modern states across the globe have not been fair with the Nigerian state for such ungrateful expressions, as nations have being the constructs of diverse identities. Great Britain, Germany, United States of America, and many others are a clear indication of the construction as a historical process; in some cases, still ongoing. However and importantly, the 1914 Amalgamation is critical in the historical process of the construction of a Nigerian identity. Although the objectives of 1914 amalgamation were built on imperialistic tendency and expedient at the time, became a sour wound for postcolonial Nigeria for a cure without any medical prescription of sort negates its goals, yet amalgamation suggested the possibility of not only Nigeria but the cure as well.

The antidote to cure amalgamation were in the hands of Nigerians, especially during the negotiations that gave birth to the 1954 federal constitution,⁴ was thrown in to the dust bins of history; and therefore, took the wrong medications. This is laughable as the problem has persisted, and the constitutional and structural solutions crafted appear to have failed. It is among other things that the amalgamation project has been seriously undermined in many fronts, making the search for and enduring national integration or cohesion at best problematic. The obvious question is why has it remained unrealized? Wherein lies the enemies of amalgamation? Why is this greatest potency of the black world a quagmire to Nigerians? If Nigeria is the pride of the Negro world, amalgamation is the foundation upon which this pride is built. The fruits of amalgamation has triggered many things that are outside the confine of its political class who has refused to understand its dynamics with pretense. It is these attitudinal pretenses that have triggered the expression “a geographical expression” and the likes. This is because, there is no nation globally that have not experienced one form of colonization or the other, for the construction of its identity in the quest for nationhood. Examples are replete in historical studies.

Howbeit, the omnibus carriage 1914 amalgamation has push historians on the brinks of academic surgery for a permanent cure of one of the most misunderstood historical phenomenon in Nigeria. The civic and public utility of the profession must be engage to produce the cure through our scholarships (surgeries) that has to streamline the nature, context and consequences of the 1914 amalgamation genre to achieve scholarly surgeries for a permanent cure.⁵ This is because historians acknowledges the fact that history has “civic and public functions” to address social problems of national or global importance. The viewpoint is that the reflection of the past in order to understand the present and anticipate the future is the “storehouse of history”, and that, it’s hard to believe that there can be any new beginning for a nation that refuses to acknowledge its past heritage such as the amalgamation of 1914.

This paper brings to the fore the historical process that led to the birth of modern Nigeria. This is because a people without the knowledge of their past have no clear cause for the future. When that memory of human group experience, is forgotten or ignored robs men of their humanity, and knowledge of whom they are, they become victims of collective amnesia, groping in the dark for their own identity.⁶ Thus, learning and understanding the basic Nigerian history is sine qua non for every Nigerian citizen. Interestingly, aside those that are studying history, a large proportion of the populace are not exposed to basic Nigerian history; and the delisting of History as a subject in the primary and junior secondary school curricula (syllabus) for decades by the Nigerian Government, is a function of this mentality. The denial made History an omnibus subject for a long time, hence, many know little about the past of Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this conversation becomes important, useful and timely, especially for the teaming internet generation (digital natives or digital nomads) who are immerse in digital traditions in their daily activities. This is as they struggle to find the balance and synergy to navigate the historical process of modern Nigeria between the two worlds (traditional and digital) spaces.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis

The analysis of this paper derives largely from the Strategic Power Framework. Strategic Power Theory explains through the lenses of realism, imperialism, economic and administrative convenience as well as power maximization provides a robust framework to explain the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria. The chief interest of strategic power theory expresses that the merger was driven by strategic, rational drive to use the budget surplus of the South to augment deficit of administering the North. It however postulates the degree of British self-interest, prioritizing administrative efficiency, and using the military to enforce the merger not as a project aimed at nation-building, but rather a calculated coercive action by British colonial scavengers designed to secure strategic, economic, and administrative concerns. The major strength of the framework is that, the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria was not an isolated event but a historical process of the blending of cultures, a way forward to facilitate the development of the country’s

economic potential as well as bringing the diverse identities into a single entity called Nigeria. While the weak point of the framework engendered long-term unresolved political competition, regional inequalities and deep ethnic divisions, often referred to as “the mistake of 1914” or “forced marriage.”

On the whole, the 1914 amalgamation when analyzed through the lens of strategic power theory, portends a highly successful, albeit self-interested, and project for British imperial interests. It however created a singular geographical entity (Nigeria) while setting the stage for a long-term structural, ethnic, and regional imbroglios for the contemporary Nigerian society. As such much of the literatures digests this great historical phenomenon with blind lenses, and what it bequeaths to Nigeria and Africa in disguise are thrown into the dustbin of history. In light of this, the analysis of the framework is aggressively and clearly flowing in line with the ideal of the 1914 amalgamation drives for a united nationhood agenda, as has been highlighted here.

The Nigerian Peoples and Growing European Influence in the Hinterland

The Nigerian state did not exist before the arrival of the British colonial scavengers. Nevertheless, the Nigerian peoples had lived independently in their different domains centuries as separate kingdoms, chiefdoms, and empires before the amalgamation of these sovereigns to what is today called Nigeria. They had their different ways of conducting their affairs in securing their sovereignty whether centralize or non-centralize political entities, social values and norms, and so forth which guided their activities. However, it must be emphasized that their differences did not imply that they did not interact in certain ways among themselves. Obaro Ikime posits that “the different Nigerian peoples in the precolonial period related in the areas of trade, war, marriage, cultural affinities, and human migration and frontier settlements. The physical presence of the navigable rivers in the Niger-Benue aided human movement and transportation of trade goods ... among the different ethnic and cultural groups.”⁷ The traffic flow on the Niger-Benue Rivers and their tributaries, had galvanized human and material exchange among the various peoples of present day Nigeria before their conquest by Britain in the 19th century and opening decades of the twentieth century.

The wave of “industrial revolution” was the chief driving force in Britain brought the need to sought raw materials for her industrial concerns as well as oversea markets for her finish products. The shift to industrial economics in Great Britain promotes a paradigm shift from the Atlantic slave trade to the search for raw materials and oversea markets inevitable. The paradigm shift in attitude and mode of production accelerated the exploration activities in the Niger-Benue Rivers in the mid-19th century for the penetration into the hinterland territories for economic and commercial interests of Britain and other European trading nations.⁸ The penetration of Nigerian hinterland paved way for European Christian missionaries and traders, and the process of settlement in the interior of Nigeria was guaranteed. This singular effort

opened a new chapter of the relationships between the two world (Nigerian middlemen and European merchants) as well as the spread of missionary evangelism not only on the coastal region but also had its historical change effects on different Nigerian peoples and their culturally lived experiences.⁹

The significant outcome of this new relationship was the political hold Britain had on the Nigerian peoples after the Berlin agreement formalized the partition of African territories as colonies to European powers.¹⁰ One major decision that is of interest was the principle of “Effective Occupation”. This principle had in mind that all European nation claiming to have secured a territory in Africa should back it up with effective boundaries, indicating its possession and the establishment of an administration over the claimed territory. It was the Berlin Conference resolution of “Effective Occupation” that pushed the European scavengers to effectively carve out colonies all over the African continent.¹¹ Thus, the political factor of colonial administration and image making of the European nations became an additional factor to the reasons for the conquest of colonies across the globe.

A major fallout of the Niger-Benue Rivers exploration activities was the mass movement of European businesses and Christian missionaries into the Nigerian hinterland. This was followed by signing of treaties with indigenous rulers who actually did not understand the terms of those trade and anti-slavery treaties. The British Anti-Slave Trade Squadron was stationed along the West African Coast to suppress the continuance of slave trade and secure Britain’s commercial interest on the coast. While several of the Nigerian peoples were busy signing treaties, which were formulated in Europe, the Germans, the French and the British were all involved in carving out territories for themselves. These treaties were designed to reserve for European powers the rights to trade and, in some cases to exercise monopoly over trading activities. Thus, until the mid-19th century, British trading interest were concentrated in the Bights of Benin and Biafra, especially in Lagos which was the gateway to the rich forest resources of the Yoruba land and the Delta ports which served as the outlets for the trade of the Igbo and Benin hinterlands that earned the region “Oil Rivers”.¹²

As aforementioned, once the hinterland of Nigerian peoples had been penetrated and explored by Europeans, the foreigners soon realized that there were enormous profit from the new trade with the hinterland dwellers. As the mass movement and social upheavals arising from the cut-throat competition and trade rivalries between European merchants on one side and Nigerian merchants on the other provoked a sense of instability in the region. Among other things, British traders pressured they could only derive the maximum advantages from trade, if the home government exercise total control over Nigeria. This push factor resulted to the appointment of Consul-state agent living in foreign territories to their country’s to promote trade and impose several commercial and political terms on Nigerian peoples,

was birthed. This birth of consular relationship between the Nigerian peoples and European traders, was the beginning of the show of force by British officials in the Bights of Benin and Biafra.

In 1849, John Beecroft was the first Consul. He was appointed as Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra. His mission was to advance British commercial interests in the regions. However, he used military force to achieve the interest where indigenous rulers could not be persuaded to do British bidding, it was an era of British “gunboat diplomacy”¹³ to achieve its goals. Many coastal powers were militarily raided during his six years consulship under cover of stopping slave trading merchants. As a follow up, in 1854, Court of Equity was established in Grand Bonny. The court was to settle trade disputes between European traders on one hand and between European and Nigerian traders on the other. Other such courts were subsequently established in Calabar, Nembe, Kalabari, and Opobo etc. By 1865, Britain had established trading stations in the Delta hinterland at Aboh, Onitsha, Oguta, Osomari, and Asaba, etc. in the trading empire of Nembe.¹⁴ It is important to emphasize that the chief trigger of British and other European traders into the hinterlands of Delta after the suppression of the coastal slave trade was the “Oil Palm” trade. The desperation of these foreign elements was to break the Delta middleman in Nigeria,¹⁵ brings to the fore the real interests of these foreign scavengers.

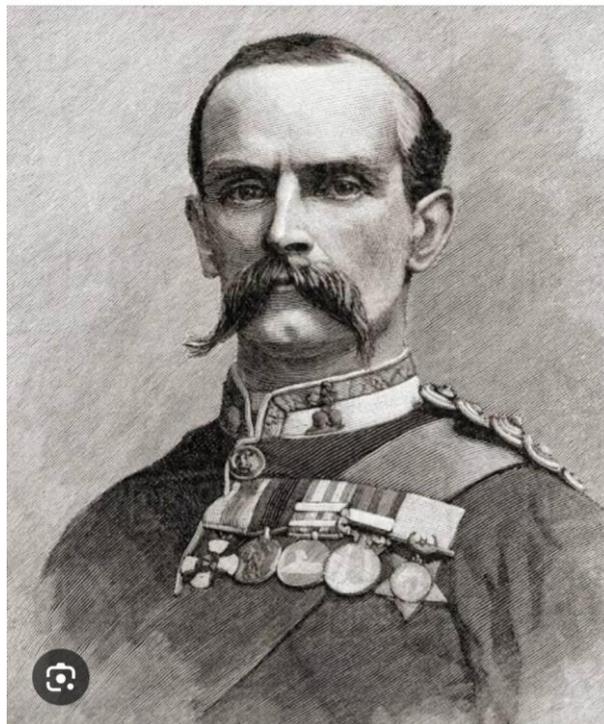
Owing to these successes achieved by some of the European trading firms, having by-passed their Delta middlemen, began to transfer to the hinterland for more trading opportunities due to relatively cheaper price of oil palm in the Nigerian interior. Because of the substantial profit from the trade, Europeans usually competed with each other for the control of Nigerian trade. The competition for trade caused bitterness among the established trading houses, the small and new ones, and other African merchants,¹⁶ and the stage was set for “commercial wars” for the control of the hinterland trade. There were also frequent price wars between the British traders and other European traders particularly the French, for the control of trade in Nigeria’s hinterland.

The Role of the Royal Niger Company

One company which made tremendous contribution to the making of Nigeria was the Royal Niger Company (RNC). The architect of the Company was Sir George Taubman Goldie. A successful British businessman, Goldie played a significant role in the colonization of Nigeria and contributed immensely to British colonial administrative policies. He used the RNC’s platform to establish an empire on the Niger, an empire that was the prototype of most other chartered companies in colonial history. In 1868, the four British trading firms were merged by George Goldie as United African Company (UAC) and, in 1879, secured about one hundred trading organizations manned by gunboats. In 1882, it was incorporated as the National African Company (NAC) and by the end of 1884 it had concluded about thirty seven treaties with most Nigerian authorities.¹⁷ In 1886, the trading company was granted a Royal Charter by the

Queen of England to administer these Nigerian territories; changed its name to the Royal Niger Company. In furtherance of British commercial interest's hinterland, the company's headquarters was moved from Asaba to Lokoja. By the late 1880s the Delta city states had lost their frontier influence, prestige and control of the hinterland trade and were increasingly losing their sovereignty to the British.¹⁸

British advance into what later became Northern Nigeria followed similar antics after the expeditions sponsored by Macgregor Laird and subsequent appointment of a consul at Lokoja. Although the consulate was withdrawn in 1869, British interests along the Niger-Benue Rivers were firmly established. After concluding the Nikki Treaty on 10 November 1894 that placed Borgu under the British. The French deeply resented its loss of Borgu, brought the RNC face to face with French authorities. Helpless in dealing with the French and German challenges, in 1897, the company invaded and conquered Nupe and Ilorin. With the conquest of these emirates, the company got set for the eventual occupation of northern Nigeria. This was a herculean task for a commercial company coupled with continuous crisis between the French and the RNC in Nigeria led Britain to accepting direct responsibility for the company's territories. The first attempt towards this swing came in 1898.¹⁹ In April 1898, a military force financed by the British Government and officered by the British Navy was set up under Lugard to hold the position of RNC. The force which had its headquarters at Jebba was called the West African Frontier Force. On 1 January 1900, the government, on the revocation of the company's charter, assumed direct control of the company's territories.²⁰



Lord Fredrick Lugard

Another dimension of the penetration of Nigeria's hinterland were humanitarian and Christian missionaries from Europe. The Christian missions had become successful in making a foothold in some parts of Nigeria from the 1860s, especially in Lagos, Abeokuta, Ijebu, Badagry, Bonny, Nembe, Kalabari, Asaba, and Onitsha. The Church Missionary Society, Roman Catholic Mission, Holy Ghost Fathers, Baptist Mission, etc. had found a number of stations before the close of 1890s.²¹ The fact remains that the civilizing mission of the European Christian missionaries in Nigerian communities they operated cannot be isolated from their commercial and political interests, particularly Britain, in these communities. Thus, Western education became parameters of the missionaries to "civilize" indigenous peoples as the way out to arrest the cultural lives of the Nigerian peoples for British colonization antics.

The British Conquest and Amalgamation of Nigeria

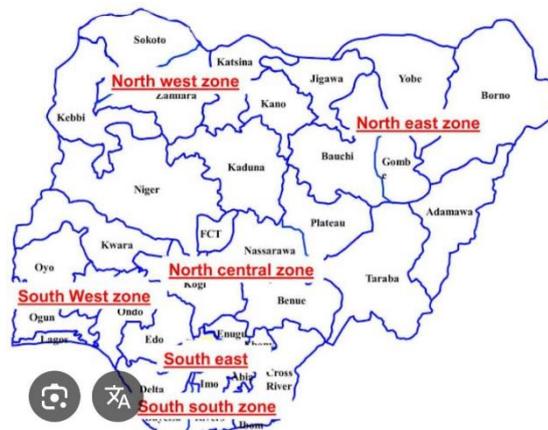
The British conquest of Nigeria was accomplished in two distinct phases. The first saw the occupation of Lagos in 1851, the Yoruba land up to Ijebu in 1892. Also during the first phase, the British accelerated up their encroachment on the sovereign right of the rulers and peoples of the Bights of Benin and Biafra. Opobo under Jaja, was dealt with in this phase. In 1891 Jaja was banished because he resisted the penetration of the British. Similarly, in 1894, Nana of Itsekiri was banished after a vigorous British military attack. After the Akassa War of 1895, Koko of Nembe was dethroned and in 1897, Oba Ovoramwen was banished to Calabar. This provides examples of British colonial interests to impose its rule by threat of force or by force itself.

The second phase of the British conquest of Nigeria took place in the last decade of the 19th century until 1914. This was occasioned by the withdrawal in 1899 of the royal charter which had been granted to the RNC to dominate the affairs of Northern Nigeria. The most significant events during this phase were the occupations of the Sokoto Caliphate, Borno, Tiv land, Kano and Northern Nigeria's central belt. By 1905, there was no single emirate in the North that had been conquered, all the territories in the North had fully submitted to formal British administration of Northern Protectorate under Lord Lugard. It was during this phase that groups of "stubborn" individual parts of Southern Nigeria were attacked, conquered and brought under British rule. The Aro's and Igbo land were defeated at this time. With the British conquest of Nigerian territories completed, the stage was set for the fusion of different Nigerian peoples into a single administrative political unit.²²

By 1900 the name "Nigeria" was applied to two out of the three territories administered by Britain. The administrations were still separated and not united. The first step towards amalgamation was taken in 1906 when the Niger Coast Protectorate was merged with the Colony of Lagos became the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with Sir Ralph Moore as High Commissioner while the Northern Nigerian Protectorate, proclaimed in 1900, had Sir Lord Lugard as High Commissioner, thus reducing the three administrations

to two. To reduce the stress of governance, Lugard has had the laudable intention of bringing the Northern and Southern Protectorates since 1908 and did not make pretensions about it against the disapproval of Ralph Moore, E.D. Morel and Charles Temple, among others, for the amalgamation of the two protectorates. The argument of Lugard was that the rich resources of the South could complement the financial shortages of the North in a marriage that would further satisfy the British economic interests. Lord Lugard being influential in Britain and its colonial circles was able to push through his amalgamation plan.²³

In October 1913, Britain’s Secretary for Colonies, Lewis Harcourt, presented Lugard’s amalgamation proposal to the House of Commons in London. Notwithstanding Ralph Moore’s disapproval to the amalgamation plan, the British Parliament approved the proposal. On 1 January, 1914, the Southern and Northern Protectorates were formally amalgamated as one political entity under British protection with the name Nigeria, and Sir Lord Lugard was appointed to serve as Governor-General.



A Map of Nigeria showing the various regions

Constitutional Development and the Emergence of the Nigerian State

A cursory look at the colonial history of Nigeria would reveal a deliberate attempt on the part of the colonial administrations to create divisive tendencies in the country. Despite Lugard’s amalgamation of 1914, the colony and protectorate of Northern and Southern Nigeria continued to be administered separately. Each protectorate had a distinct colonial bureaucracies which fought zealously to retain its autonomy. The officials of the two bureaucracies spoke different official languages. In 1939, however, the country was divided into the Colony of Lagos and three groups of provinces- North, East and West were established, each having a Lieutenant Governor who was responsible to the Governor-General in Lagos.²⁴ There was substantial devolution of power and function to the headquarters of the groups of provinces.

Thus, by the close of the Second World War, the degree of administrative devolution had been of such magnitude that it almost reached the crescendo of complete autonomy.²⁵

The Arthur Richard Constitution of 1946 strengthened and formalized the administrative devolution and gave each political unit fairly broad powers. Although the constitution was expected to be functional for nine years, subject to limited review after the third and sixth year of operation, but owing to strong criticism against it by nationalists, it gave way for a number of reasons. Aside the criticisms levelled against the constitution, the replacement of Sir Richard with Governor Macpherson spelt doom for the constitution and was subsequently replaced with the Macpherson Constitution. The Macpherson Constitution like others before had its strengths and weaknesses. The constitution ascribed legislative power to the regional houses of assemblies, established an executive council for the central government and also created a concurrent list of items over which the central and regional houses could legislate.

Worrisome as it came to be, despite the robust provisions, the Macpherson Constitution also collapsed. The Macpherson Constitution collapsed not only because of its inherent defects but also because of the political imbroglio at the time. Majorly, the Macpherson Constitution introduced the principle of collective responsibility without creating room for ministerial responsibility, thus ministers could not make and execute policies. Also as each region was dominated by a political party made the operation of the constitution cumbersome. On the political front, two significant political crises such as the Eastern Regional crisis of 1953 and the crisis over the motion for self-government in 1956,²⁶ gave the constitution a strategic deadly blow. Thus, the aforementioned crises, among other dynamics, propelled change of constitution that gave birth to the Lyttleton Constitution. The Lyttleton Constitution replaced the Macpherson Constitution. This constitution essentially provided for separate governors, separate premiers and cabinet, separate legislatures, separate judiciaries, separate public civil commissions, civil services, marketing boards and development plans,²⁷ and so forth.

The period between 1954 and 1960 witnessed the process of decolonization in which the emergent nationalist movements tended to identify with and crystallize around the regions and the major ethnic groups. At the dawn of independence in 1960, the apparently united fronts which the major ethnic groups projected through nationalist slogans had been transformed into unhealthy competition for state power, utilizing ethno-religious drivers. These triggers or drivers seriously undermined the solid foundations upon which the 1914 Amalgamation rested on, the forces of fear, greed and nepotism etc. have ruptured the two pillars (Southern and Northern Protectorates) that carry Nigeria's dignified identity into the doldrums of history. Thus, Nigeria has nearly almost loosed all her potency and pride of the "Black Race". The indomitableness of the "giant of Africa", a sobriquet for mightiness, strength and size crumbles in the face of global politics for the lack of making the resourcefulness of the 1914

Amalgamation that bequeathed Nigeria and Nigerians as the “gift of amalgamation”, is the greatest wisdom of the colonial power’s desperation. This manifest destiny of the first amongst equal’s position is not positively utilized by the Nigerian state is the bane, and not the amalgamation itself. It is the truth. If not so the drumming for federalism would have been dead on arrival in the 1954 constitution by Nigerians.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has so far calibrated the important historical landmarks that have shaped the Nigerian state. The evolution of Nigeria passed through different stages in her history as a nation. It’s out of Britain’s economic and commercial interests conquered the Nigerian peoples and took over the political control of their territories. The outcome was the amalgamation of different nationalities into a single political unit called Nigeria. Britain, thenceforth, ruled and decided the fate and wealth of Nigeria from 1914-1960. Thus, in many scholarly circles Nigeria is regarded as a product of British imperialism, the amalgamation of Nigeria cannot be said to be totally out of place. History has shown that there were strong feelings of commonality among the diverse peoples of the country that qualified them amalgamation as the single blessing bequeathed to Nigeria and Nigerians by the British. The Nigerian peoples have interacted amongst themselves in various ways such as marriage, wars of expansion, migration, trade and cultural exchanges before their amalgamation.

These instances of robust intergroup relations possibly made the tenets of amalgamation of the Nigerian peoples in 1914 a more suitable venture in disguise. The viewpoint is that the amalgamation was never a mistake but rather a blessing particularly for Nigeria and the “Black Race” in general. This is especially if Nigerians actually wanted to detonate the amalgamation bomb, they should have done so during the debate for the 1954 constitution that provided ample opportunities for them to do so. Thus, Nigerians had every opportunity to renege and go their separate ways, but they stayed together for over a century, and, are still calling the “1914 Amalgamation” a “geographical expression or product of British imperialism”; is just mere name calling exercise or spree of sorts. These attitudinal jamborees are expressively toxic to historical scholarship. Nigerian peoples should see the amalgamation as a workable framework for national integration of the diverse ethnic nationalities in the Nigerian state, as well as the only natural collateral coefficient of being the “Giant of Africa” must be prized honorably. This is the dream of its founding fathers that must be kept sacred, indivisible, and freedom for all.

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