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*Review*

# Democratization and nation-building in Nigeria, from 1914 to 2004: An appraisal

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**Nigeria came into being in 1914 following the British colonial authority's amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates during which various ethnicities were living independently of each other. However, the activities leading up to the 1914 amalgamation predates this date. It would therefore not be out of place to say that the most enduring legacy of British colonialism is the geo-political entity known as Nigeria. Notwithstanding, from 1914-1960 when the British colonial authorities administered the colonial state of Nigeria the principle of democratization was not really employed in the affairs of the state. This negligence did not augur well for the goal of state building during the period thereby leaving the problem of integration unresolved by the departing colonial administration. Unfortunately, this trend has not been addressed since Nigeria gained her independence in 1960; hence, a monumental problem for the goal of Nation-Building in Nigeria. Consequently, this has seriously stifled nation-building efforts in Nigeria. It is the desire of this paper to examine this negative trend since 1914 and suggest the way forward. This paper adopts the historical descriptive design, employs the orthodox historical descriptive narrative and analytical method. Primary and secondary sources have been used. The primary sources include archival materials, government documents and reports. The secondary sources were books and journal articles. The thematic and chronological tools have also been used.**

**Key words:** Democratization, nation-building, appraisal.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses democratization and nation-building. Democratization is deeply rooted in democracy and would enhance nation-building. It would be shown that both were neglected in the colonial period thereby accounting for the vexed problematic of nation-building in post-Colonial Nigeria.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: DEMOCRATIZATION

Democratization is a process through which the political system becomes democratic. It is the way democratic norms; institutions and practices evolve and disseminated both within and across national and cultural boundaries. It involves the creation of people centered institutions, politics and programs in order to promote liberty, social justice, peace and security to enhance self and collective actualization of the individual and society. It connotes the practical application of democracy but not as rhetoric which is taken and used by most of its adherents.

Democratization therefore presupposes the existence

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of an enlightened, free, economically viable citizenry and a society with a culture of accountability, responsibility, understanding, accommodation, negotiation and compromise, a de-politicized military, as well as the provision of social infrastructure such as roads, railways and a good communication system (Johari, 1989:429-533; Walter et al., 1984:87-105; Rummel, nd:1-4).

Democratization thus is obviously allied to democracy, which may be defined, by its inherent nature and empirical conditions. As to its nature, democracy is considered as a rule by the people (Greek democratia: demos, people plus cratia, - cracy). The reaffirmation of this view in modern times accounted for Abraham Lincoln's declaration in 1863 that it was "a government of the people by the people and for the people (Johari 1989:430). This idea that in some way, the people govern themselves is still the core spirit behind democracy.

Hence, Rumel believes it is important that the people govern themselves by organizing regular elections through which the peoples highest leaders are periodically determined or policies governing them are chosen; the acceptance of the so-called democratic rights to have one's vote counted equally, the right to run for political offices through open competition on the basis of a multi - party system; the existence of newspapers and other communication media which are free to criticize government policies and leaders; the existence of public debate of issues and voting by democratically elected representatives; promotion of religious tolerance and freedom and the right to hold and express unpopular ideas; protection of minority rights; economic empower-ment of the people and the existence of the rule of law embodied in a fundamental document which structures the government, elaborate the reciprocal rights and duties of government and the people, and which all government officials and their policies must obey and be subjected to - Constitution.

From the foregoing it is clear that there is a deep relationship between democratization and democracy. This is because each of them is capable of promoting the other. To this extent therefore it is odd to argue that:

*Rather than define a process of democratization many have tried to define the empirical conditions necessary for the creation and success of democracy. (*Rummel, nd:3).

One is tempted to ask: can there be democracy without democratization or vice versa? Can the existence of either of them endure the test of time or can both be imposed in their practical application?

Democracy without democratization is rhetoric and bound to encounter push to strains, crises and instability as found in Nigeria, African states in general and most developing countries worldwide. On the other hand democratization cannot exist in isolation from democracy. Where there is relative degree of democratization as found in Western Europe - Britain, France, Germany and

North America, democracy does not only exist but thrives with various social vibrations and demands - for example the desire to improve, and keep on improving in order to refine democracy. To this extent therefore it can be argued that all democracies are subject to strains and all sorts of pressures.

Democracy and democratization can be imposed in three ways namely, through a bottom up process; top down process and foreign imposition. The bottom up process is the method through which the governed apply pressure on the governance to democratize e.g. American Revolution of 1776, French revolution of 1789, Chinese revolution of 1912 and the Russian revolution of 1917. The top down process involves the process whereby democratization and democratic changes come from above. Democratization and democracy can also be imposed by foreign powers through their colonial or imperial activities

## NATION-BUILDING

At this juncture it is pertinent to ask: is there a relationship between nation-building and democratization? We cannot comprehend the above question without first under-standing the concept of nation and nation-building.

Scholars like (Davidson, 1977; Pflanze, 1966 and Rotberg, 1960) have viewed the term nation from various perspectives as psychological, ethnological, among others.

The term nation is derived from a latin word 'natio' which denotes the idea of common birth or descent. There is no problem in understanding nation in its ethnological or rudimentary form. Hence, Nigerian groups like the Tiv, Yoruba, Igbo and the Hausa can be accepted as nations. Similarly, the Ashante in modern Ghana and the Zulu in South Africa qualify as nations just as there were such nations in Europe. However, beyond this classical understanding contemporary usage and application has made nations one of the most complex and difficult concepts to define. This difficulty arises from the modern development of the term and hence perceptions of scholars of it.

To Mill:
*A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a nationality if they are united among themselves by common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others –which make them cooperate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government by themselves or a portion of themselves exclusively. This feeling of identity may be generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of the identity of race and descent; community of language, and community of religion, greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of its causes. But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedent; the*

possession of a national history, and consequent community of relocation; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past. None of these circumstances, however, are either indispensable or necessarily sufficient by themselves.

On this part, Stalin submits that:

*A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture (Stalin, 1942:16).*

The distinguishing feature of definitions such as these like a multitude of similar one is that the nation is portrayed as a close-knit community of people whose like-mindedness derives from a common historical heritage and characteristically finds expression through a common language.

But as Emerson (1971) observes:

*The heart of the difference between the pre-and post-world war II situations is that in the earlier phase there were nations, definable in the kind of terms …which sought to take over (as in the case of Germany) 'states' which would constitute the political embodiment of the nation for both domestic and international purposes.*

And as he continues:

*In the Woodrow Wilsonian years of national self-determination, the bedrock assumption was that nations existed, deserved their place as nation-states in the world order…. In the new dispensation after World War II, marked by the clamorous demands of Asia and Africa, the situation often seemed to be reversed. In many instances there were no national souls wandering at large, but rather, a large array of political bodies, the states emerging from colonial rule in search of independence. In a few words the contrast might be summed up in the proposition that while in the older view and circumstance it was the nation which legitimized the state, in many of the post-World War II situations, and most notably in Africa, there were as yet no nations to play such a role, but rather states in search of nations.*

President Nyerere is likely to have been influenced by this assumption when he opined that, "Nations in any real sense do not at present exist in Africa". The debate on the concept of nation is much more than this. However, considering the fact that this work is not a direct submission on this subject, it is important to note that for now, Carl J. Friedrich's submission is taken here.

He holds that:

*…a nation is any cohesive group possessing 'independence' with the confines of the international*

order as provided by the united nations, which provides that a constituency for a government effective ruling such a group and receiving from the group the acclamation which legitimizes the government as part of the world order. Neither fold tradition, religion, nor any other basis will do; through these many contribute their ordering share in particular instances.

Accordingly, the application of the derivatives of nation such as nationalist and nationalism complicate the issue. Europeans faced with demands for decolonization termed those who challenged them 'nationalists' instead of 'independence seekers' within the context of states created by colonialism. The territories for which they claimed independence and the people living within them were termed 'nations' instead of state nations. It is in this sense that when Nigeria got her 'independence', joined the 'United Nations' as a member nation instead of a member state nation. By this application it would be correct to assert that modern usage of the word nation is at variance with the classical understanding.

However, it is appropriate to use it on African countries including Nigeria. Obviously, modern states such as Nigeria, Algeria, Kenya, Angola *etc* do not fit into the above analysis. However for present purposes, we may extend the application of the concept of nation to include those modern states whose constituent ethnic groups have transferred their allegiance from their immediate nationalities to the larger entity and have therefore attained high degree of relative unity or feeling of oneness such as Britain, United States of America and Canada, among others. It is therefore only when such integration is achieved, and within this context that the concept of nation-building in post-colonial Nigeria becomes not only useful but also meaningful. To this extent therefore, the application of the term is not psychological and illusive but practical and achievable.

Nigeria is therefore a nation in the making and will only meet the qualification when it would have reduced substantially the centrifugal forces to the barest minimum, and attain a relative degree of togetherness. Did Nigerians have this feeling of oneness in the colonial state of Nigeria? Do we in post-colonial Nigeria of today have this feeling of oneness? Was there any genuine attempt by the British colonial administration to democratize the Nigerian state thereby fostering the goal of nation-building?

## BRITISH COLONIALISM AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA FROM 1914-1960

These problems may be appreciated from two perspectives. Firstly from the perspective of how the British conceived and what they wanted to do with Nigeria on the one hand and secondly the response of Nigerians to this British initiative on the Other hand. The British conceived Nigeria as her own appendage and

introduced political, economic and social policies that would serve her imperial interest notwithstanding the damaging repercussions of those policies on Nigeria.

To start with, the amalgamation of 1914, even though, created the Nigerian state nation was not a genuine attempt at integration. It is in support of this that Ajayi maintains that:

*The amalgamation curried out in 1914 had a limited objective. It was not unification of Nigerian peoples but an amalgamation of the different administrations of the British in Nigeria* (Ajayi, 1980:28).

In a similar manner, commenting on the limitation of the amalgamation, Mazrui observes:

*"The real objective of unification may not have been a paramount wish in the British administrative strategy, but to try as far as possible to unite the Nigerian people specifically in the interest of limited expenditure and British administrative staff"* (Mazrui, 1984:375).

Moreover, indirect rule system, the cardinal principle of British administration in Nigeria was not only divisive but also retrogressive in nature. Contributing on this Okonjo notes:

*The principle of indirect rule certainly served to preserve something of the indigenous political and social organization as well as what the colonial power judged to be best in indigenous laws and custom. But there can hardly be any doubt now that those principles also promoted greater loyally to tribe than to the nation. To that extent, therefore, indirect ride undoubtedly helped to sow and nurture the seed of tribal dissension, mistrust and strife in Nigeria. That these seeds bore bitter truth in the period immediately before and after independence is a point on which there is little room for controversy (Okonjo, 1974:336).*

Indirect rule promoted traditional institutions above modern ones. It separated and protected the North form the South and encouraged segregation between the people of Nigeria. It promoted totalitarian chiefly rule against the participation of western educated elite. To this extent therefore it was backward looking and authoritarian, instead of reforming those traditional institutions to conform to modern democratic administrative aspirations. It is in the light of the above that the educated elites who sought participation in the political process were hated, strongly opposed, given names and sometimes arrested and detained by the colonial administration. Consequently, the formation of political parties with mass following or appeal was hampered (Carowder, 1966:253-272).

Colonial constitutional engineering was flawed in the sense that it emphasized parochial separatist particularism and subjected the interest of the ethnic minorities to those of the majorities (Carowder 1966:273-288). By encouraging regionalism, the colonial administration deliberately subjected the ethnic minorities in Nigeria who constitute about half of the population of the country) to the hegemonic ethnic dynamics of the majorities in their respective regions. This led to the suspicion and fears of the ethnic minorities against the majorities. It was to allay such fears that the colonial administration appointed the Willinks' Commission in 1958 (Willink Commission, 1958). Notwithstanding, the Commission proved ineffective in resolving the fundamental problem. Rather it recom-mended the inclusion of fundamental human rights in the constitution. However, minorities' rights have continued to be trampled upon, times without number.

The colonial government did not provide an electoral system that was beneficial to Nigeria in the sense that it was limited to only the coastal areas and later the south. Also the right to vote and be voted for was restrictive. After all, the colonial administration continued to legislate for the North well after 1947 (Crowder, 1966: 253). Ethnic and regional consciousness was aroused and political parties and local feelings assumed such sentiments. When the colonial administration therefore attempted to create a unitary system of government from the late 1940s it encountered negative reactions especially from the Northern Region (Crowder, 1966: 253-272). Consequently, the administration settled for a structurally lopsided federation which is today one of the issues militating against national unity and nation-building.

Socio-economically the British promoted the cultivation of cash crops and exploitation of mineral resources. They thus constructed roads, railways and Tele-communication system to link up only those areas of their economic interest for the evacuation of the resources they had exploited (Ake, 1981). To this extent it is clear, that the colonial transportation and communication system were not aimed at promoting mobility and social interaction among the Nigerian people. Moreover, the infrastructure was very scanty. The provision of healthcare and educational services were left at the whims and caprices of the Christian missionaries. Education was not meant to take away Nigerians from their roots in order not to produce people that will challenge the colonial administration. However, this is exactly what later happened - it was the few educated elements that became instrumental to the demise of British colonialism in Nigeria (Ake, 1981).

Nigerian reaction to colonial administration was not apprehensive. Rather they sought to be acquiesced in it. To this extent they were more reconciliatory to their colonial masters and did not demand total takeover but mere participation in the colonial administrative framework or structure.

Their participation was meant to enhance 'and promote their personal interest or at best, the interest  of their

ethnic groups or regions rather than the interest of the Nigerian people as evidenced in the activities of Alhaji Ahmadu Bello (Okonjo, 1974: 109), Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Azikiwe, 1979: 4-5) and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Yongo, 2016:98).

The weaknesses inherent in the attitude of these Nigerians helped the colonial administration in creating what became 'independent Nigeria'.

From the foregoing it be can argued that the colonial policies, though not aimed at consciously enhancing nation-building, they inadvertently laid the foundations for post-colonial nation-building on the one hand; on the other hand, the policies did not promote democratization and democracy but rather compounded the nation-building project in post-colonial Nigeria.

## NATION-BUILDING IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA

Nation-building implies the making of people who view themselves as belonging to different nationalities think of themselves as, and feel that they are one. This would mean the transfer of allegiance by these constituent nationalities from the local nationalities to the larges geopolitical entity. This is the movement from the stage of amalgamation to that of integration - from reluctant compliance to wholehearted support and unsupervised compliance, the stage where the citizens feel that "...this is my country. I am a Nigerian" (Eleazu, 1971:26). The feeling of oneness among Nigerians is illusive. Nigerian nation-building would therefore mean finding permanent solution to the problems of revenue allocation, population census, nature and practice of Nigerian federalism, religious intolerance, ethnicity,' minority question, indigene ship, the North/South dichotomy and neo-colonial pre-ssures through the activities of international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and intervention by powerful foreign nations in order to assuage national feeling and prevent disunity.

Unfortunately however, post-colonial leadership in Nigeria has proved incapable of democratizing the polity and building the Nigerian nation. In this paper it is believed that a democratized polity would naturally solve the Nigerian problem thereby enhancing national unity.

Ironically the Nigerian leadership since independence has constituted a stumbling block in the way of democratization and nation-building by its activities. The blatant abuse and manipulation of the constitution, the erosion of the principle of separation of powers, lack of an open political system, suppression of the opposition, corruption, religious intolerance, abuse of minority rights, negative educational policies are not reflective of the democratization principle thereby endangering democracy in Nigeria and rendering the goal of nation-building unachievable.

At this juncture one would ask what has been the role of the masses or follower ship. The greater number of the follower ship has remained docile and inactive preferring to resign to fate. But it should be warned in the warned in the words of Frantz Fanon that, "Every onlooker is either a traitor or a coward" (Fanon, 1961: 161). Moreover, history will judge them harshly for this docile passivity. Others have collaborated with the leadership obviously for selfish interest, while the few that are critical of the leadership are suppressed and sometimes killed.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion the paper takes a critical examination of the term democratization and its relationship to democracy and nation-building. It has been established that the colonial administration did not take serious measures to democratize the polity. Myriads of conflicting issues were left unresolved by the colonial administration .These conflicting issues have become a legacy which post-colonial leadership has been grappling with.

As suggested in the paper the only way forward is by democratizing the Nigeria state. This would create political and socio-economic atmosphere for peace, unity and stability.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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