

Review

## States creation since 1967: An imperative of the military contribution to nation-building in Nigeria

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**The structural defects in the creation of the Nigerian state by the colonialists which suited their interest of continued subjugation and exploitation of Nigeria were inherited by the civilian leadership. This class that appropriated state power to further their economic interest played down the prospects of nation-building. It is against this background that this work assesses the role of the military in tackling the problem of nation-building in Nigeria through state creation as an imperative.**

**Key words:** State creation, nation-building, colonial, Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

To say Nigeria was, before 1960, a colonial property or principality of the British Empire is simply stating an obvious aspect of Nigerian history that is presumably well known by all Nigerians. However, by that year, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October Nigeria gained her political independence from the erstwhile British colonial master. At independence, the geo-political entity (Nigeria) handed over to or inherited by the post-colonial leadership contained three regions with provinces and districts as respective sub units which were created and used by the former colonial masters for the administration of the former colonial state.

The history of the creation of those regions is dated back to the very decade of the proclamation of protection status or protectorate over the area that was later to be christened Nigeria by the British crown on the first of January, 1900. It should be noted that before this date,

most of this area had been, following the British bombardment and subjugation of Lagos in 1860, administered indirectly by the Royal Niger Company on behalf of the crown through a charter granted the company by the crown. This period is known in Nigerian colonial history as that of company rule. However, the Crown later decided to assume direct administration of the area after revoking, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 1899, the charter earlier granted the Company to govern the area on its behalf. Hence, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1900 the British Crown had assumed the direct mantle of leadership of the colonial state of Nigeria. Therefore, throughout this period, 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1900-30<sup>th</sup> September, 1960, British colonial administrators took charge of administration in Nigeria under the charge of a Governor General who was answerable, not to Nigerians in Nigeria but to the Colonial Office headed by the Colonial Secretary in London. It is the intention of this work to

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show that British colonialism did not set out to ensure Nigerian integration and unity in spite of the noise made about the so-called amalgamation of 1914. Also to be seen is the lack of interest on the part of post-colonial Nigerian leadership to reverse the trend and the military's attempt at reversing it through the process of state creations.

## **NIGERIA UNDER COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION**

Consequent upon the 1900 proclamation Nigeria was divided into three territories, these were known as the Colony of Lagos, the Southern Protectorate and the Northern Protectorate. Each of these territories was administered by an administrator that was answerable to the colonial authority. In 1904, the administrations of the Colony of Lagos and the Southern Protectorate were brought together under one governor. By 1906 the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria came into existence under a united colonial bureaucracy. During the next six years Northern and Southern Nigeria were administered as separate territories with frontier control. In 1914, the colony and the two protectorates were amalgamated into a single political unit known as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria with its headquarters in Lagos and with Sir, Fredrick Lugard as the new Governor General.

In spite of the 1914 amalgamation, the former separate territories still maintained their administrative individuality. The Colony of Lagos preserved its legal status as Lagos and its environs had been annexed and made a colony, so the people became British subjects and British law was imposed on African law. The colony's separate status continued until the inauguration of the 1951 constitution. The amalgamated protectorate of 1914 was divided into two groups of provinces, each administered by a separate Lieutenant Governor reporting directly to the Governor. Although the broad principles of the Native Administration were slowly extended from the north to the south, the different policies and conceptions of colonial administration which have evolved in each of the two protectorates during the fourteen years of their separate existence continued to dominate official thought and action.

Due to this, we can observe that it was not even all the British colonial administrators that supported the amalgamation project. Some of the British colonial administrators that had served in the northern region for instance, strongly objected the amalgamation of the regions of Nigeria. Among such people, Sir Herbert Richmond Palmer and C.L. Temple were, indeed, very powerful colonial administrators. On account of their disagreement with amalgamation project they went ahead and continue to frustrate the amalgamation even long after 1914.

Consequently, though officially and theoretically, by 1914 Nigeria was amalgamated but in reality it was not. Decrying the frustration of the amalgamation arising from the attitude of the non-conforming British colonial administrators in the northern region, J.E.W. Flood, head of the Nigeria department in the Colonial Office complained in 1928 that:

Ever since amalgamation there had been a school of thought in the Northern Provinces which worked to preserve as absolute a separation of the two halves of Nigeria as possible and to resist what they regarded as "government from Lagos". The head of that school, he declared, was unfortunately Palmer, who, he pointedly observed, was "getting very difficult" (Okonjo, 1974:145).

The outbreak of World War II saw Nigeria being divided into four artificial administrative units namely, the Colony, the Western Provinces, the Northern Provinces and the Eastern Provinces. The acute shortage of administrative personnel occasioned by the war and the growing congestion of Lagos necessitated substantial delegation of some powers and functions from Lagos to the headquarters of the other three provinces. By the end of the war therefore, the three main areas were operated with some kind of individuality. This was strengthened by the Richard's constitution of 1946 which gave each unit some additional powers. Moreover, the 1951 constitution changed their designation from provinces to regions and they formally became constituent units in the federal system. The colony was equally obliterated by its amalgamation with western region. In 1954 the revised constitution gave the regions ever greater autonomy in the federation of Nigeria and made Lagos the federal capital.

The above should not suggest that such disunity in British colonial administrative official policy, among other things, existed only between or among regions. Even within regions such disharmony existed. In the southern region, for instance, this has been aptly captured thus:

When the Southern Protectorate was created in 1900, it was administratively organized into three groups of provinces, each headed by a Resident who reported to the Lieutenant Governor. These were subsequently amalgamated into one united administration with a free-circulating bureaucracy and with headquarters first in Lagos and subsequently in Enugu. Throughout this period of southern unity, administrative policies were essentially uniform, with adaptations for obvious sectional or ethnic peculiarities. In 1939 the awkwardness of Enugu as a headquarters, together with other factors, brought a division of the south into two group of provinces (western and eastern), with the Niger River

as the boundary (Coleman, 1986:47).

Careful observation of the above would reveal that the so much talked about amalgamation of Nigeria was after all not real or genuine amalgamation that is often currently thought and talked about. It was indeed a deceitful ploy to permanently ensure or guarantee apathy among the people of Nigeria with a view to ensuring or maintaining continued colonization and exploitation. It should be noted that the objective of British colonialism in Africa was never to foster genuine unity or create the spirit of oneness and integration of African peoples in their respective colonies. Moreover, it was antithetical to the divisive philosophy inherent in colonialism as this would logically unite colonized against colonizers with the obvious consequences never wished or intended by any colonizing power. This explains why the British made sure that anywhere they embarked on colonization such African people in the respective colonies were deliberately played off among or between themselves. The cases of the Buganda/Bunyoro people of present day Uganda in East Africa and the Ashante/Fante people of modern Ghana in West Africa are but few examples that can be multiplied. Therefore, the case in Nigeria was not any different or to be expected differently. Thus, the sham called amalgamation was a mere amalgamation of government departments within the colonial entity and administration to minimize expenditure and to further enhance effective administration but certainly not the peoples of Nigeria.

As for the people of Nigeria, the superficial amalgamation *abinitio* never intended to integrate them. That was why the colonial minimal provision of infrastructure such as roads, railways were constructed to aid colonial exploitation but not to enhance social interaction among Nigerian people. This is because such roads or ways merely provided channels to, or linked areas of raw materials that were in dire need in Europe, to the port for onward movement to Europe. Hence, while claiming to amalgamate Nigeria the colonial administration worked assiduously to maintain permanent division among the people of Nigeria. Therefore, the colonial administrative policies and internal geo-political structures upon which the administration was based inherently contained this British colonial ploy. The regionalization of the colonial estate along major ethnic groups' line and subjecting the minority ethnic groups found in their respective regions to the hegemony of such majority groups in the respective regions was in bad spirit. It created and nurtured the minority/majority hatred and tension culminating in the 'vexed problematic' generally known in Nigerian history as 'Minority Question'. Moreover, it created generally the phenomenon of ethnicity that has so much bedeviled the Nigerian socio-political culture thereby creating a huge stumbling block on Nigeria's tortuous way towards nation-

building and attainment of 'nationhood'. This is so because, even among the majority ethnic group as the struggle for who assumed control or power and control at the federal level and the introduction of party politics with a view to heralding a Nigerian leadership, especially at the closing years of colonial administration further created the condition for strong ethnic and regional antipathy. It is in the light of this that Okonjo's submission makes meaning:

The manner of settling the nature of Nigeria's amalgamation constitution and machinery of administration thus set the stage for a continuing power struggle between Northern and Southern Nigeria—a struggle which still rumbles on even now. A spirit of inordinate and sometimes irreconcilable regional rivalries was therefore part of Nigeria's heritage under the scheme of amalgamation adopted in 1914. It will be noted that throughout our period and for many years thereafter, the major political question became how to reconcile the conflicting political aspirations of each half of the country; the north sought to preserve the important political and institutional gains which it made in 1914 when its system of government was selected as better for the country as a whole while the south struggled to free itself from the choking hold which the 1914 arrangements exercised over its path to political progress (Okonjo, 1974:108-109).

Similarly, Coleman wrote:

Thus, accidents of historical acquisition together with the changing imperatives of administrative convenience were among the determinants of the present division of Nigeria into three regions....They were also factors in the "regionalization" of nationalism... (Coleman, 1986: 48).

It was under this federal system or framework that colonial Nigeria matched towards independence. And due to the ethno-regionalization of colonial policies and activities, the socio-political activities and the process of negotiation of constitutional independence between the so-called nationalist leaders and the colonial administration also took this pattern. In other words, just as the regionalist policies and ethnic proclivities created by the colonial administration affected national unity and integration, so did it also affect negatively party politics and the process wresting power from the colonial administration generally.

Here too, three major political parties competing for power emerged in the three different regions of colonial Nigeria also representing the respective majority ethnic groups in the regions, coinciding perfectly identically with the colonial divisive desire or creation. Therefore, the so-

called nationalist activities heralding the transfer of power to independent Nigerian leadership was dominated by the majority ethnic groups. This party was the National Conference for Nigeria and Cameroons later known as National Conference for Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.). It was led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo. This party became an Igbo dominated party. Consequently, the party emerged strongest in the Igbo dominated region of eastern Nigeria. Conversely, the National Conference for Nigeria and Cameroons later known as National Conference for Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.) became very unpopular in the other two regions. Also, there was the Action Group (A.G.) party which was not only led by a foremost son of the major ethnic dominant group of the western region, the Yoruba, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, but similarly dominated by the same group. This party too became unpopular in the other two regions of the federation. Then too, there was the Northern People's Congress (N.P.C.) party led by the Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. In the case of this party, the nomenclature alone offered a perfect explanation of what has been stated here. Without pretence, it was a party for the Hausa/Fulani muslim north. Against this background the minority ethnic groups were to be relegated to the background under colonial Nigeria or at best try to key into the agenda or framework of the majority ethnic groups in their respective regions as they had already been fragmented among the regions or along such lines.

Obviously, this situation created tension and disunity among the three colonial Nigeria's majority ethnic groups as the competition for which of the parties would seize power at the centre at independence heightened. Moreover, this situation created a lot of the persistent agitations for the creation of states for the minorities in those regions by the minority groups, as they (minority groups) had insisted that, "they were not prepared to exchange one master for the other". In spite of the fact that the call for the creation of states just and at that time very popular, the majority ethnic groups, for their personal interest would not allow this to take place as they (majority ethnic groups) had preferred the subjection of the minority ethnic groups to their hegemony. The colonial administration that had created this condition, expectedly sided with the majority ethnic groups as it had always been the order. Therefore, at the Nigerian constitutional conference in London in 1957, in spite of the fact that it was generally acknowledged that:

The breaking up of the three Regions of Nigeria and the creation of more States has become the most popular slogan of the day (Daily Times, 1957: 9).

Notwithstanding, the Conference which was not committed to this cause decided to refer the matter to a commission. Hence, a Commission was instituted, known

after the name of its Chairman, Henry Willink as 'Willink Commission', to 'enquire into the fears of Minorities and the means of allaying them'. The other members were, Gordon Hadow, Philip Mason and J.B. Shearer. The terms of reference and name of the commission shows clearly that it was not even mandated to look into or consider the case made by the minorities for the creation of states. For instance, the issue of creation of states was a fore-closed matter-the administration was not prepared to create states as reflected in the name of the Commission. This is further buttressed by the terms of reference which states that:

1. To ascertain the facts about the fears of minorities in any part of Nigeria and to propose means of allaying those fears whether well or ill founded.
2. To advise what safeguards should be included for this purpose in the Constitution of Nigeria.
3. If, but only if, no other solution seems to the Commission to meet the case, then as a last resort to make detailed recommendations for the creation of one or more new states, and in that case:-

- (a) to specify the precise area to be included in such State or States;
- (b) to recommend the Government and administrative structure most appropriate for it;
- (c) to assess whether any State recommended would be viable from an economic and administrative point of view and what the effect of its creation would be on the Region or Regions from which it would be created and on the Federation.

4. To report its findings and recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. (Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the fears of Minorities and the means of allaying them, p.iii).

As can be seen, this was indeed a confusion and unnecessary digression aimed at frustrating this genuine call for the creation of more states by the minorities. The minorities were not simply expressing fears of domination in their respective regions but wanted their self determination in their own geo-political state which was more in line with the spirit of genuine federation against the fraudulent one that was being imposed. Even in 1957 our thinking was succinctly captured when a commentator on the issue wrote:

The most important issue before the Conference was not the question of national independence but the question of more states. It is sad to think that this vital problem of more states was badly handled by the Conference. The contention that the creation of more states "is based on the fears of the minority" is false. The sober truth is that

on the question of more states hang the important issues of Nigerian national unity and national leadership hangs the political stability of the Federal Government. The Conference, having built its case for more states on wrong premises, naturally came to a wrong conclusion (Daily Times, 1957: 5).

Expectedly, the ethnic minorities were therefore, not ready to allow this, preferring to ruthlessly confront this unacceptable position throughout the period of colonial administration and even beyond as would be seen below. This has been captured with respect to Tiv-land thus, "The last months of dependency were marred by riots and burning in Tiv country...(Clark, 1991:446). This situation was so tense as to prevent Her Royal Highness from visiting Makurdi during her visit to Nigeria and tour of Northern Region. Hence:

Riots in Tiv country prevented H.R.H. from visiting Makurdi during her less than comfortable subsidiary tour of the north (Clark, 1991: 355).

#### **POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA UP TO THE FIRST MILITARY INTERVENTION 1960-1966**

At independence, just as it has been correctly observed, independence cannot be used as a historical dividing line as this colonial situation continued. The immediate post-independence Nigerian leadership that emerged at independence came from the two major ethnic groups of Igbo from the eastern region and the Hausa/Fulani from the northern region. This had to be so because the 1959 federal election made it possible for the groups to form political alliance and form government at the centre, having obtained an electoral victory permitting such, by their political parties. This leadership was not interested in altering the status quo. Rather, to worsen the situation, in the course of struggling to take over leadership from the former colonial administration at the federal level the A.G. had aligned with the minority ethnic groups in the northern region so as to make inroad into the region with a view to winning the 1959 federal election and form government. During this period the A.G. had worked closely with the United Middle Belt Congress (U.M.B.C.), a minority ethnic group political party, led by the Tiv group, which had remained persistent and unrepentant in its agitation for the creation of a Middle Belt State for the minority groups of central Nigeria of the northern region. At this point too, the A.G. had supported the cause of the U.M.B.C. and for this won the wrath of the Hausa/Fulani leadership of the north for supporting what it termed, "...dismemberment of the North..." (Aliyu, 2004:404) which this leadership and its party, N.P.C. had vowed not to allow. For the N.P.C. philosophy of "One North, One

People, irrespective of religion, tribe or rank, (Paden: 1986), one would understand the "sin" of the A.G. party. Therefore, when this northern Hausa/Fulani cum Igbo post-independence leadership assumed the mantle of leadership decided to spite the A.G. and its leadership. Consequently, the post-colonial Nigerian leadership went ahead and created a Mid-West region out of the former Western Region leaving the Eastern and Northern Regions, places where the leadership came from, intact, despite continued violent uprisings in Tiv-land over the refusal of the creation of a Middle Belt State. But rather than responding positively to the genuine call for the creation of states by the ethnic minority groups, the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa felt that the answer lies in being ruthless as he had said in response, "We must be firm and ruthless" (Clark, 1991:447). But this strategy could not deter the ethnic minority groups' agitation for the creation of more states. Rather, this strategy culminated in much more resentment and hatred that had existed between minority majority relations, thereby accounting for more disunity and frustration of the goal of nation-building in the country. This situation as reflected in Tiv-land was strongly captured by Ademoyega thus:

The political situation in the North was becoming worse for the Sardauna Government. Soon after independence, the Tiv of Benue Province who were the backbone of the U.M.B.C., became more articulate in demanding for their political rights, which were denied them by the Sardauna Government. Agitation and rioting became the order of the day. Rather than make concessions to them, the Sardauna simply used force to suppress them the more. Early in 1963, when moves were made to create the Mid-West Region, the Tiv accordingly intensified their political war against the Northern Region. But the same N.P.C. government which gladly excised the Mid-West out of the West did not deem it fit to attend to the agitation of the Tiv for their own region. Instead, having failed to subjugate them by the use of anti-riot police, the Sardauna started sending troops of the Nigerian Army to quell the agitation in February 1964. This double standard showed clearly to independent observers, such as the soldiers of the Nigerian Army, that the Governments of the Sardauna and Balewa of the N.P.C. did not intend to govern Nigeria peacefully and progressively, but sought to cut down their political opponents (Ademoyega, 1981:16-17).

Elsewhere, it was reported that:

The year 1965 witnessed the worsening of the political situation in Nigeria. The Tiv war against the oppressive Sardauna government warmed up and showed no sign of abating. It careered on, until the coup of January 15, 1966 (Adenoyega, 1981:20).

Beyond the continuation of this volatile situation as the government remained intransigent in maintaining the unpopular status quo, the situation partly accounting for the first military intervention in January, 1966. For, this has been articulated in the intention and reasons accounting for the intervention:

Politically, we believed that our immediate step would be to correct the worst anomaly of the 1957 constitution, by breaking down the country into smaller units or states. In order words, the four Regions which existed till January 15, 1966, were to die instantly and on their dead bodies were to emerge fourteen states... (Ademoyega, 1981:33).

Moreover,

...the Sardauna's secretary Ali Akilu, (was) blamed by Nzeogwu for encouraging unnecessary killings of Tiv in the Benue troubles (Clark, 1991:785).

Eskor Toyo has well captured the ill in the regional arrangement or framework created by the erstwhile colonial administration in Nigeria in favour of ethnic majority groups against the minority ethnic groups, which tended to create disunity with justification of ethnic minority reaction against the status quo thus:

As for justice, what was the justice in non-patriots continuing so-called one Nigeria not as a unitary state but as three empires, one for Yoruba chauvinists, one for Ibo chauvinists, and one for Hausa-Fulani chauvinists? Those big-tribe cake-sharing chauvinists who think that the Balewa system was very 'stable' simply ignore the minority movements, the actual multi-ethnic character of each of Arthur Richards' regions, and the significance of the Tiv and Rivers revolts under Joseph Tarka and Isaac Boro respectively. After the creation of the Mid-West State in 1963 to spite the Action Group, what was the justice in the Ibo and the Hausa-Fulani chauvinists stoutly refusing to have states created in Arthur Richards' Eastern and Northern Regions (Toyo, 2001:6-7)?

Therefore, as bad as the situation was under the unpopular colonial regional framework that tended to create ethnic tension and disunity among Nigerian groups the situation had to endure through the early post-colonial period culminating, in part, in the first military intervention in the country in 1966. But it is important to note that before the coup, evidence of deteriorating political situation had led to the arrest, trial and conviction of the former Premier of Western Region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and some of his allies on charges of treasonable felony. Therefore, on January 15, 1966 some

military officers under the leadership of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu staged the first military coup in the country, killing the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of Northern Region, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. Both men were from the Hausa/Fulani group of the Northern Region. Apart from these, other prominent sons of this region both in the military and civil structure were eliminated. The selective elimination of the January 15 coup d'etat attracted serious outcry from the northern region. And considering the composition of the coup plotters, who were mainly from the Igbo group of the Eastern Region with a few from the Western Region, the outcry seemed justified rather than coincidental. But be it as it may, the coup did not prove successful. The mantle of leadership then fell on the most senior military officer to take charge of the leadership of the country. The man was Major General, Johnson T.U. Aguyi Ironsi. He too was an Igbo, and his lack of exhibition of sincerity led to the staging of a counter coup by northern military officers in July 1967 to avenge the brutal killings of their brothers.

### **The Military and State Creations in Nigeria 1967-1990**

Many people have put their thoughts on paper regarding the issue of military intervention in this country. Therefore, the intention here is not to provoke a further debate on the subject. The objective is to show that in the course of military leadership in this country, states that were in dire need by some Nigerians with a view to enhancing their self determination permissible within such federal framework or system was continued to be denied by civil administration since colonial Nigeria had been created by the military administration. Furthermore, that with this followed the strengthening of the Nigerian federation and the reduction of ethnic cleavages paving the way for national unity much needed ingredient or element for the desired nation-building project. To that extent it can be submitted that the military in Nigeria has contributed so much to nation-building in Nigeria through the creation of states in the country.

The persistent refusal of state creation by the dominant ethnic majority in post-colonial Nigeria against the minorities' insistence on the issue; the arraignment of some of the leaders of the minorities, like J.S. Tarka alongside Chief Obafemi Awolowo for treasonable felony and the subsequent convicting and jailing of Awolowo with some of the people so accused for the charges proved dangerous indicators that the country was in a terrible state of disunity and on the verge of collapse. This was the state of the country when the military intervened on January 15, 1966. This too had ethnic/regional connotation. For instance, the leader of the coup, Nzeogwu said that they were unhappy with the northernization policy of the late Premier of Northern

Region. Also, Nzeogwu lamented that the continued killing of the Tiv people was unjust and therefore a source of worry. Though the coup was not successful however, the most senior military officer, Major J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi who assumed the mantle of leadership after the killing of the Prime Minister, Balewa was himself an Igbo. And from all indications he pursued policies to favour his Igbo group. For instance, his introduction of a unitary system of government; handling coup plotters like Nzeogwu & co who were mainly from the Igbo group with kid gloves can attest to this claim. This is more appreciated when one views the gravity of coup plotting in military law or practice. It has even been alleged that he (Ironsi) was part and parcel of the failed coup as everything had been done with his consent and approval (Paden, 1986).

The later counter coup of July 1967 staged by the Northern military officers was also a product of the same ethno-regionalism. However, states were created by the Col. Yakubu Gowon led military administration in 1967 which was good for the federation and promoted national integration and unity necessary for nation-building. The states so created were twelve and may not be perfect but they represented more what was needed and demanded by the Nigerian people than the previous four regions that were being forcefully imposed and sustained. In 1975, Brigadier Murtala Muhammed who became the country's new military Head of State after successfully ousting the Gowon's administration added six more new states to the previous ones created by the defunct Gowon's administration bringing the total to nineteen states. States were further created by the military in 1991 by the self styled military President, Ibrahim Babangida. However, after that, further pressure of agitation for more states forced him to create more states. Hence, he, in 1993 added nine more bringing the total number of states during his government to thirty and a Federal Capital Territory. Gen. Sani Abacha who also emerged as a Nigerian military Head of State in 1996 also added six states to the wave of state creations by the military in Nigeria. Altogether, this has accounted for the present thirty six states that Nigeria has at the present.

Therefore, as noted earlier although these creations may not be perfect they helped to strengthen the Nigerian federation and helped greatly in ensuring Nigerian unity and it is helping in the area of building the nation rather than the ethnic acrimony, regional disaffection and disunity which were engendered by the previous regional arrangement. The cynics that think otherwise are free to do so but others may find Toyo's submission quite appropriate here:

It is not true that the creation of more states by either General Gowon in 1967 or by subsequent military regimes was simply the arbitrary or self-serving act of soldiers from 'Northern Nigeria'. What is true is that there was an over-whelming and persistent demand for the

creation of states for them in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. This demand was ignored by the chauvinistic 'leaders of the big ethnic groups. Some people do not know, but it is a fact, that the creation of more states by Gowon was not just a matter of justice. Without it Nigeria sooner or later would have disintegrated amid flames of ethnic wars. Later events have shown how easily this could have happened. It was not possible to 'go on with one Nigeria' either with three or four regions or with a unitary state that after 1960 could only have been imposed by a military dictatorship....

After Gowon's creation of twelve states, the subsequent creations of states were also in response to the 'national question' as raised by various ethnic groups. There is no state created by any military regime that was not a response to demands by agitators who were usually former or would-be civilian politicians. The agitators were realistic in taking advantage of military rule to demand for states and local governments. Experience under civilian rule had shown that the bourgeois-minded civilian politicians from larger groups were not ready to entertain any self-determination for smaller groups. Nigerian civilian politicians are by and large a very mediocre and selfish crowd. This is much more so after 1960 when politicians had no more national independence struggle to wage but had only a national or geographical cake to grab (Toyo, 2001:6-7).

## Conclusion

As can be seen above the problem of lack of genuine interest in Nigerian unity and nation-building was bequeathed by the colonial administration which was subsequently overlooked by the early independent Nigerian political leadership. The problem culminated in the Nigerian civil war that was fought from 1967-1970 which almost tore Nigeria apart. However, it was the military that has attempted to address the issue of nation-building through its integrationist measures like the creation of states by successive military regimes started in 1967 by Generals, Yakubu Gowon, through Murtala Muhammed and Ibrahim Babangida to Sani Abacha.

## Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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