



## INTER-GROUP RELATIONS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY OF NIGERIA IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES

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### Introduction:

Apparently ignorant of, or unconcerned about, the ways Africans perceived their boundaries or the importance they attached to their ethnic and economic territories, the European Powers marked their colonial boundaries with little or no regard for the territorial integrity of ethnic groups. They did this on the basis of what they felt were civilized criteria for determining and defining political divisions. By the mid-nineteenth century, Europeans and Americans had acquired a very clear and uniform conception of political boundaries. They saw these as lines visibly defined on maps, delimited by treaties and demarcated on the ground by specially appointed officials.<sup>1</sup> Having achieved this, they felt convinced that their new idea would be applicable not only to the people of the West but to all peoples. Thus, when they began to migrate to Africa, Asia and Latin and North America, they applied their concept. Unfortunately, these boundaries only defined European occupied territories in relation to each other, and not the old traditional groupings. This, in essence, was the root cause in Africa of all the resulting problems and conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

Always accidentally, heterogeneous societies, certainly victims of the scramble for, and partition by foreign princes come together with the option and desire to tilt towards nation-hood in order to birth an atmosphere that greatly enhances peace and collective security, which offers justice to all and sundry at an equal pedestal, regardless of their varying ethnic inclinations. And that is the goal of inter group relations in nation-building, to provide a collective atmosphere, either regional or global, in which states in the system wholly accept that the security of one is the security of all, unanimously agreeing to create a condition of collective response to threat and stand against the breaches of peace, either by internal or external forces. When this is done, although, perfection may not be reached, the ordinary man on the

street will see himself as belonging to a system he may feel posed to pay the supreme price for, with a smile and pride, if requested of him by circumstances; for even in the cold arms of death, he would feel protected and secured. For him, the unity of his own nation and collective security is greater than his embrace of death.

The objectives of this paper are to investigate Nigeria conflictual inter group relations, its impact on peace building, and collective security. The period under study is the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, which have been divided into the pre-colonial, colonial and the post- independence period. Although several empirical researches exist on inter-group relations by prolific scholars, nonetheless, more still needs to be done on inter group relations and collective security. The study adopted the qualitative research approach; the method of data collection was secondary sources, which were from books, journal articles, and relevant internet materials, while the content analysis was used to synthesize the data. The analysis here is not in any way exhaustive, it is just an attempt to see how conflictual inter group relations has hampered on our collective security as a nation, in the period under study, due to imperialism and our inability to redefine our identity and destiny as a people.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK**

In this section, we would be taking a cursory look at certain of the terms and concepts, upon which this study is built; ranging from the concept of inter-group relations, and collective security.

Hogg viewed inter- group relations as;

The way, in which people in groups perceive, think about, feel about, and act toward people in other groups. If you replace the word "group" in intergroup with, for example, the words "national" or "ethnic," then what is meant by intergroup relations becomes clear.<sup>3</sup>

Put differently,

Inter-group relations refer to relations between two or more groups and their respective members. Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identifications we have an instance of intergroup behavior.<sup>4</sup>

From the postulations of Hogg and Sherif, it could be extracted that inter-group relations could be conflictual or friendly, it all depends on what the groups wish to make out of it. For this discourse, we shall be viewing inter-group relations as the form of relationship (particularly conflictual) between the different ethnic groups in the Nigerian area in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and how it hampered the building collective security for members of the modern day Nigeria.

Collective security can be understood as;

A security arrangement, regional or global, in which each state in the system accepts that the security of one is the concern of all, and agrees to join in a collective response to threats to, and breaches of, the peace. Collective security is more ambitious than systems of alliance security or collective defense in that it seeks to encompass the totality of states within a region or indeed globally, and to address a wide range of possible threats. While collective security is an idea with a long history, its implementation in practice has proved problematic. Several prerequisites have to be met for it to have a chance of working.<sup>5</sup>

Put differently,

It is the concept of maintaining peace among all nations or members of a group by making the security concerns of one member important to all members.<sup>6</sup>

This requires a lot of patriotism and sheer determination. When one is down, all is down, when one falls, all stands in its defense; no person thinks highly of himself than others, and everyone see it as a responsibility to watch each other's back against external threats, and possible internal aggression, for one is secured when all is secured. If this becomes the dream of any leader, then such a leader would never sit in power and watch civil war ravage its own people, and also see to it that their political career is not worth the blood of any citizen, when this is done in its truest form, then we can boast that we are tilting towards effective nation building where the collective responsibility of all is fully guaranteed.

## **INTER GROUP RELATIONS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY**

Cordial inter group relations is a strong tool for enhancing collective security, and that can only be done when the security of a particular group, becomes the security and priority of another. This section of the paper will attempt to study the phases of conflictual inter-group relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> centuries that have hampered the level of trust, and halted collective security in the Nigerian polity. We shall view the pre-colonial era, colonial era, and the post independence era.

### **Pre-Colonial Era**

We must note here that contrary to the view of the European scholars, Africa had a well-established political system, and a well defined history. Okpeth Okpeth O, Jnr, has demonstrated clearly the level of interactions in the pre-colonial era, which was relatively peaceful, compared to when the imperialists came and sowed seeds of discords between Africans and indeed Nigerians.<sup>7</sup> Nigeria, prior to the imposition of British rule, did not exist as a nation. Rather what were in existence were tribal groups

which organized themselves within their own politics. Some of these tribal groups had highly centralized structures such as the Yoruba, Edo, Hausa, Jukun while some were highly decentralized such as the Ijaw, Urhobo, Igbo, Tiv and so on. The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria belonged to the first category of highly centralized states. Its government centred on a hereditary rule, often the descendant of the first inhabitants or settlers in that area. The Yoruba traditional ruler was never a dictator as he had to govern with a council of chiefs who represented the interest of the community in its different modes.<sup>8</sup> In most or virtually all of the African traditional societies civil and religious affairs were intertwined and no major political decisions were made without the sanction of the religious chiefs, who represented the various deities, as well as being a custodian of the spirit world, and an intermediary between the gods and humans.

Among the Urhobo, Ukwuani, Isoko, Ijo and Igbo which had a decentralized structure, there was a council of elders responsible for the governance and welfare of the people.<sup>9</sup> Alagoa also pointed out that among the ethnic groups in the Cross River and Niger Delta area, where the societies were decentralized, order was maintained by a balance of understanding among the associations, overlapping memberships, and respect for the rules of public conduct generally recognized in the community. Alagoa went further to state that in all of these politics therefore, there was no situation where the will of the ruler was allowed to threaten or endanger the interest of the ruled and the society at large and that it was only among the Hausa-Fulani did there appear to be an authoritarian system. This according to him may have been due to the accident of history and the conquest of the Hausa States by the Muslim Fulani Jihadists with its headquarters in Sokoto and Usman Dan Fodio as its leader. Even though these various groups tried to maintain their separate entities, there were some commercial and social contacts which led to a great deal of linguistic borrowing and cultural diffusion. Efforts were also made to maintain peaceful relations in order to encourage trade and reduce the degree of tension and differences in their areas.<sup>10</sup>

From the above, one can deduce the fact that the peoples making up the Nigeria area today had a peaceful inter group relations or co-existence, and if things had remained like that, those kingdoms and empires would have certainly evolved to become countries on their own. It would have been far better than forcing artificial boundaries and separating people that have stood together and united through many centuries.

In the preceding analysis, we would see how these problems imposed on us by the imperial forces have become a sword, always working against our unity and collective security of Nigeria as a nation.

### **COLONIAL ERA**

One of the basic things that have made collective security a difficult task is imperialist needs, which Africa stands at a vantage point to provide. They (Colonialists)

established structures to meet that need and that was the beginning of Africa's doom. This colonial antecedent has contributed in no little measure to make collective security to become a near impossible task. Okpeh noted that that;

During the early years of colonial rule, the British accorded very little or no priority to cultural homogeneity and ethnic kinship as criteria for the establishment of boundaries of the administrative units which they created-be they provincial, district or native court boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

This position deeply unravels their innate intention to exploit, in order to meet up with their exploitative goals. Although attempts were later made to correct this, the overall arbitrary nature with which boundary delimitations were carried out is an indication of the fact that colonialism dispossessed the people of the scope and area for autonomous action required in inter-group relations. As we observed elsewhere: The important thing to note here is that contact and relationship between groups was no longer controlled by the people themselves, but by the colonial government in line with her basic economic interest.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, boundary delimitations generated a pathological land consciousness 'in the people in a way and manner that jeopardized several centuries of long peaceful cohabitation. Although scholars in a hurry to defend colonialism would have us believe that this was an unintended consequence of British administrative reforms, we have reasons to believe that this was part and parcel of the colonial government's divide and rule strategy. In the first instance, in the creation of boundaries, the colonial authorities placed undue emphasis on land instead of such integrative variables like economic ties, inter-group consanguinity and cultural cross-cutting loyalties. Secondly, even where these variables incidentally prevailed, the colonial authorities arbitrarily created enclaves based on religious, ethnic and racial lines. It was these, together with the constitutional reforms of post- 1945 Nigeria that set the stage for the ethnic particularism and subsequently conflicts which characterized inter-group relations in the country.<sup>13</sup>

In a similar vein, Fanson also categorically noted that,

New seeds of conflict were thus implanted among peoples who traditionally had relatively no boundary problems. Few, if any, traditional African States and polities that were so divided were ready to accept or recognize the legality of such actions or to cease to consider themselves as one people. This refusal was, and has continued to be, the chief reason for frequent conflicts. The decision by our independent States to inherit and maintain colonial boundaries, rather than negotiate new ones reflecting ethnic realities, has sustained the ill-will introduced by the

European partition despite efforts to facilitate movements between States and to promote economic unions.<sup>14</sup>

In furtherance of this view, the historical legacies of colonial rule create some challenges for nation-building in Nigeria. Colonial rule divided Nigeria into North and South with different land tenure systems, local government administration, educational systems, and judicial systems. While large British colonies like India and the Sudan had a single administrative system, Nigeria had two, one for the North and one for the South. It was almost as if these were two separate countries, held together only by a shared currency and transportation system. Many members of the Nigerian elite class in the 1950s and 1960s had their education and world outlook moulded by the regional institutions. Some had little or no understanding of their neighbouring regions. Under these conditions, it was easy for prejudice and fear to thrive. During the period of the decolonization struggle, Nigerian nationalists from different regions fought each other as much as they fought the British colonialists. Nigeria never had a central rallying figure like Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana or Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Instead, each region threw up its own champions.<sup>15</sup>

Historically, regionalism has been a major challenge to nation-building in Nigeria. To their credit, however, the founding fathers of our nation tried to deal with this challenge by adopting federalism and advocating a policy of unity-in-diversity. Unfortunately, the lack of consolidation of Nigerian federalism around commonly shared values and positions means that this challenge of divisive historical legacy continues to undermine our efforts at nation-building. One current manifestation of this historical legacy is the division between 'indigenes' and 'settlers'. This division has been a source of domestic tension and undermined our efforts at creating a common nationhood. While we should learn from history so as not to repeat its mistakes, we must never see ourselves simply as victims of our history; it is our responsibility to overcome the challenges posed by our history.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, still on the issue of party politics and regionalism, it should be noted that the dawn of party politics and the struggle for independence after 1945 introduced yet another dimension in inter-group relations in colonial Nigeria. The socio-psychological climate generated by nationalist agitations of the late 1940's and the decade of the 1950's brought different ethnic groups together in form of political parties, pressure groups and cultural associations, etc. It should be added however, that this did not last long, especially under the over bearing influence of regionalism.<sup>17</sup> ...the politicization of ethnicity through regionalism and the activities of the Nigerian politicians during this period greatly undermined the peoples 'timeless relationship with themselves. This development was further compounded by the politics of resource allocation in the late 1950's which translated into majority/majority and majority/minority squabbles.<sup>18</sup>



The British upon their arrival surreptitiously established boundaries that were antithetical to the logic of nation building and this has continued to endanger collective security. This is because it was in their interest to put together structures that would make the things they needed and the fulfillment of their national interest in Africa and Nigeria a reality. Hence, they were never concerned about the hazards of artificial boundaries, the introduction of divide and rule system, which turned the people that have been living together for centuries against themselves. This pathological hatred introduced through the vestiges of imperial forces had grown to make the processes of nation building and the establishment of collective security a total mirage. Note that the social system in place defiles the supra-intellect of the best of brains we have, but regional attachment have left leaders without political will in enhancing homogeneity and systems that could enhance trust in the midst of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Robust inter-group relations enhance the trust needed for nation building, and creating an environment that makes peace building a possible task. Nonetheless, we must bear it in mind that Nigeria, is an accidental name given to people of diverse ethnic background, that accidentally saw a need to seek for accidental marriage into nation hood, without taking into consideration the fact that while it is very easy to create or construct artificial boundaries, the making and building of national consciousness is a more daunting task; that only a people, that have taken time to redefine themselves, irrespective of creed or ethnic disposition can build. We would see how this faulty foundation laid by the colonialists and the inability of our leaders to declare and redefine our manifest destiny has drawn us two steps behind, every time we try to take a step forward.

### **INDEPENDENCE AND POST INDEPENDENCE ERA**

In taking a look at the Independent and post Independence era, we would see how the foundation laid altered the course of inter group relations, which has led to a lot of suspicion, and conspiracy of one region against the other and all of these threatens the collective existence of Nigeria as a nation, as it impacts really negatively on the collective security of the country.

One of the things we would look at is a weak socio-political structure, and an unbalanced federation amongst others., Okpeh reiterated this when he said;

At independence, Nigeria had inherited a weak socio-political structure, a defective and unbalanced federation, an intensification of ethnic consciousness and rivalries, a subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture and, above all, a bankrupt and inexperienced leadership. Between 1960 and 1966, these manifested in the census controversy of 1962 - 64, The Action Group crisis of 1963, the Federal election crisis of 1964-65 and regional election crisis of 1965.<sup>19</sup> All these crisis had

serious consequences on inter-group relations in post-colonial Nigeria. In the final analysis, the military took over power from the civilians in January 15, 1966 in a bloody Military Coup d'état.<sup>20</sup>

An uneasy calm gripped the country, but was quickly altered by the ferocity and decisiveness of intra-majority ethnic group tussle for political supremacy. This continued until 1967 when the Nigerian Civil War broke out between the Igbo ethnic group and the Nigerian Federal Government. The Civil War marked a watershed in the changing nature and character of inter-group relations in post-colonial Nigeria.<sup>21</sup> As a result of these skirmishes, the Idoma and Igbo relations got sour soon after the Republic of Biafra was declared by the seceding South-easterners, Idoma frontier communities became objects of Biafra military targets and bombardments. This is in addition to the fact that borderland communities who previously had a functional and cordial relationship covering virtually all aspects of human existence turned into bitter enemies overnight.<sup>22</sup> Even long after the war ended in 1970, the two ethnic groups would appear not to trust each other: the Idoma perceived their Igbo neighbours with considerable suspicion, while the latter looks at the former as a collaborator that should and cannot be trusted.<sup>23</sup>

Another very salient issue we must take a look at is the constitution, from the history of constitutional drafting, there is no constitution that truly consulted the Nigerian citizenry, and this has led to a lot of chaos, and imbroglio. Stating this fact, Ibrahim pointed out that:

Since its independence, (Nigeria) the country has been facing the challenge of crafting a constitutional arrangement that has the backing of an overwhelming majority of Nigerians. In the 1940s and 1950s, our founding fathers battled with this problem. In the end, they arrived at the principle of federalism as a foundation for our nation. But federalism has faced stiff challenges over the years from those wanting a unitary form of government on the one hand, and from those wanting a confederal arrangement, on the other. To my mind, the worst enemies of Nigerian federalism are those who speak of federalism, but act in a unitary fashion by brushing aside all the divisions of powers between different levels of our federation. Related to the problem of federalism is the question of fiscal federalism. What is the appropriate and just basis for sharing revenue? Should the federal government have the right to deduct monies due to states without their permission? Should state governments continue to control local government allocations? These are all fundamental principles on which we have no clear consensus. While we all agree that Nigeria must be a federation, we have no clear consensus on the nature of that federation, on whether we should have territorially



defined states or ethnically defined states as some are demanding. We also do not have a consensus on the number of states or federating units we should have. While some are satisfied with the current 36 states, others are calling for more states for their own groups. On the other hand, yet others are arguing that the number of states should be reduced to six. Here again, there is little by way of consensus.<sup>24</sup>

From the above postulations, the leadership question seems to still be our greatest burden as a people, a nation whose leaders are often accidental, no template for running government, manifestoes are usually dumped when they ascend the seat of power, and that is why several Nigerians keep refuting the idea of being Nigerian, because, leaders seems to be more lost in a state of inordinate confusion, and or, lack of leadership technical know-how. Little wonder, Ojo observed that the Nigerian project remains questionable, despite years of federal practice. According to him;

Nigerians have no common vision of a nation-state called Nigeria. No sense of citizenship. The name and the football team are about the only thing that unites them. Even the footballers however brilliant individual players they are, do not work as team. It is the same with the country. The country still totters as a toddler, often pulled down by joint identity and integration crisis.<sup>25</sup>

The basic responsibility of leaders is to give their followers a sense of collective security and belonging, the cry for secession by several regions has been really alarming. Indeed, the heightened disappointment with the convoluting federalism has resulted in stringent calls in Nigeria for the Confederal option or, at best, a political structuring of the country or even worse total disintegration of Nigeria as was the experience of the former Soviet Union which came into being as far back as 1914 by Joseph Stalin.<sup>26</sup> It is this height of frustration of the members of the Nigerian state that prompted Justice Akinola Aguda to emphatically state that:

You cannot continue to tie people together by force. One day, people are bound to successfully resist it, be it at 50 years or in a 100 years' time. And when that time comes, Nigeria will destabilize.<sup>27</sup>

As earlier mentioned, people have been tied together by colonial vestiges, and at same time divided by the spirit of regionalism. However, leaders must emerge to redefine who and what they are. These things would stand as building blocs to the emergence of a mighty nation-state, rooted in diversity, but in it (diversity) is her greatest strength, good enough to build a nation with collective security.

Regionalism, as well as religious fundamentalism has assumed the status of a malignant tumor in the President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure which has been

criticized for its lopsided appointments, as all the service chiefs are from the northern part of the country and all Muslims. Fayose argued that it was wrong for President Buhari to have made 31 major appointments, with seven coming from the South, while 24 were from the North.<sup>28</sup> This clearly depicts the assumption by several well meaning Nigerians that the administration has religious undertone.<sup>29</sup> It was observed that the Boko-Haram was senselessly killing innocent Nigerians and it took a long time before any government declared them a terrorist group.<sup>30</sup>

In a similar vein, the Fulani herdsmen have been taking down villages with reckless abandon, killing men, women and children, orphaned several hundreds of people, yet they were not condemned or declared terrorist group. But when the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) resurrected their quest to succession, they were quickly declared a terrorist group.<sup>31</sup> In respect to the Fulani herdsmen killings with impunity, Niger Republic leaders are asking Buhari to declare the blood thirsty herders as terrorists.<sup>32</sup> A decision he has adamantly refused to take in spite of the huge number of innocent citizens gruesomely killed in different parts of the country. The Nigerian Senate in a bid to show that they see the tears of Nigerians in regards to the mayhem unleashed on them by the herders, have asked the Federal Government of Nigeria to declare them as terrorists.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, all of these pleas to strengthen security falls on deaf ears and on the contrary, the president Buhari led administration is demanding that states surrender large expanse of their ancestral lands for cattle colony.<sup>34</sup> Nigerians have seen the silence of the Buhari led administration as consent to the killings of innocent Nigerians, owing to the fact that he is a grand patron of the Miyetti Allah's Association, which is the Umbrella body for all Fulani herders. All of these actions by the Buhari led administration, have left certain states embittered and in tears, regretting why they voted for him, as some have vowed that they will not surrender their ancestral lands for cattle colonies.<sup>35, 36, 37.</sup>

One would ask, why is the President Buhari led administration be determined to protect the Fulanis, instead of condemning the barbaric acts, arresting and prosecuting them. This silence certainly connotes consent, and ethnic patriotism. It is therefore imperative that the administration be made to face genocide charges if necessary actions are not taken. We must know that no nation can develop or grow without bearing in mind the importance of inter group relations, taking a cursory view of Nigeria inter group relations, we are indeed far from being a united country, we have seen that the cordial relationship that existed between the different groups have been altered due to the impacts of imperial forces, as well as the actions and inactions of our leaders. People who lived together for several centuries, inter-married, took part in trade and diplomatic activities with their distinct boundaries un-tempered with, became pathological enemies due to factors such as artificial colonial boundaries, regionalism, constitutional challenges, as well as a system of governance that breeds quantum injustice, weak institutions and powerful individuals, in the realm of the economic, political and judicial terrains, as well as the insincerity of leaders, and inability to redefine the destiny of the nation.

## Conclusion

We have attempted to examine Inter Group Relations and Collective Security of Nigeria, from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. While this study has revealed that the pre-colonial period was the greatest era of peaceful inter group relations, the colonial era through the vestiges of imperialism, installed a system that destroyed the trust people who have been living together for several centuries have been able to build. Taking it further, in the post independence era, we saw the manifestation of regionalism; constitutional inadequacies, inexperienced leaders who were deficit in character and political will to redefine our destiny as a nation break into our political terrain with little or no administrative acumen or capacity, and therefore, left the country in greater trouble than they met it. From the analysis therefore, we fall back to the fact the several conflictual inter group relations which Nigeria has witnessed overtime has made peace building and collective security to be a near impossible task, because the bridge of trust is broken and so, we rarely trust each other when it comes to national issues of great importance.

Purchasing complex military hardware would not put an end to our many woes, as an attempting nation. We must begin to educate ourselves that collective security is not military hardware, though it may include it, It is not military forces, though it may involve it, collective security is not traditional military activity, though it may encompass it, Collective security is development, and without it, there can be no development. Collective security is for an Igbo man to sleep in the arms of an Hausa man, and for him not to be slaughtered in his sleep. It is for a Yoruba man to trust an Hausa man with a political office, and still get the dividends of democracy. Collective security is to accept to protect you as a member of an ethnic group different from mine, because we all belong together. It is for a northerner to see to it that a southerner is a brother. And that is the true definition of cordial inters group relations, something close to, but more than what the imperialists used their swords to divide, during the pre-colonial era.

As a people tilting towards oneness, we must face the challenges from our history, the colonialists have all gone. We must begin to redefine ourselves and the mandate of our nation. We were not the only nation colonized, other countries have since moved on, we must not continue to lick our wounds, we are already behind time. When next we talk about our inability to create a stable nation, let us not blame the colonialists anymore, but our failed leaders and institutions. We must arise to the challenges of socio-economic inequalities; enact constitutional reforms with the consent of over whelming majority, build institutions for democracy and development; and choose to face the challenges of leadership.

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