A GLANCE AT ETHNICITY IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity is one of the two most obtrusive elements in African politics. (The other element is religion). Highly ethnicised, African politics is generally a ruthless struggle among the ethnic groups for political dominance. Ethnicity has been implicated in the majority of the continent's political crises, for example the Nigerian civil war, the Rwandan genocide and the South Sudan civil war. Africans have a stunted sense of shared citizenship; and, incontrovertibly, they have nurtured the tree of ethnic politics planted by their colonial rulers. Nigeria is one of the countries where ethnicity has predominated in the national scheme of things. This paper glances at certain aspects of this element in that country's politics. Firstly, it glances at its creation by the British. Secondly, it glances at its manipulation by the political elite. Finally, it glances at its gradual recession. Data came from the copious literature that exists on the phenomenon of ethnicity in African politics.

Keywords: Ethnicity, African politics, Nigeria, Nigerian politics

INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity is one of the obtrusive features of state organisation in Africa. In that continent, ethnicity does not only influence governance, but also influences private interactions among compatriots from different ethnic groups. Its influence in the society is so pervasive that a romance, for example, which was morphing into marriage could be scuttled just because the couple do not share ethnicity. In many countries the ethnic groups, behaving like internecine rivals and incompatible entities, perceive each other as out-groups who must be contained, subjugated or even eliminated. Due to high ethnic identity salience, political power has been the monopoly of the ethnic majorities in countries like Nigeria and Kenya. In those countries, the majorities always win the presidential election. In many multiethnic countries elections are not a test of popularity but a test of might and capacity for violence among the ethnic groups. In countries like Kenya post-election violence has been largely due to the predetermined resolve to reject election results by losing candidates from the ethnic minorities. Among most ethnic groups, the sense of shared ethnicity is higher than the sense of shared citizenship.

Most African countries are made up of numerous ethnic groups (Dowden, 2009); and while some ethnic groups are easily differentiable, others are not. The Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda and Burundi exemplify the latter scenario. (In those two countries, the physical differences between the Hutus and Tutsis were essentially a factoid invented to further the ends of European colonialism). The other major problem with ethnicity on the continent is that the number of ethnic groups has not yet been conclusively determined in most countries. For example, in Nigeria this problem exists because new ethnic groups are still being discovered (Anugwon, 2000). According to Mustapha (2003), new groups are still being discovered because of a "common myth" created by "problems of classification and data gathering as well as the tendency for ethnic segments to coalesce or differentiate in the face of economic or political developments." Due to ethnic politics, the size of the ethnic groups is also contested. It is also one of the major reasons for census rigging. As citizens vie to control the common wealth, they are apt to mobilize those factors that fragmentize them into distinct groups. For example, they may instrumentalize their ethnic heterogeneity, forming ethnic associations and sub-ethnic associations such as hometown associations (HTAs). (In Nigeria, the Igbos of Enugu and Ebonyi states espouse Wawaism, to protect themselves against the predominance of the Igbos of Anambra State). They may also restrict electoral support to only those from their own ethnic group (the so-called "sons of the soil") or to "outsiders" who have manifest readiness to gratify the parochial interests they are pursuing. This paper probes African politics, focusing on ethnicity in Nigerian politics.

PERVASIVENESS OF ETHNICITY

Ethnicity has been a feature of state organization in Nigeria since colonial rule created the arena for antagonistically competitive contact among the ethnic groups who hitherto were barely aware

of each other's existence. Achebe (1983) considers it as the country's major obstacle to national integration. Ethnic rivalry has been dominated by the three largest groups, the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani. Ethnicity is a problem that permeates the whole gamut of national existence: politics is ethnicised; the economy is ethnicised; justice is ethnicised; personal relationships are ethnicised. In the scramble to dominate the political space, the ethnic groups haul their differences to the front row of the scramble. Even conflicts that were given a decent burial many decades ago are exhumed and assigned a role in the scramble.

The criticality of ethnicity to the realization of parochial goals in the Nigerian scheme of things is one of the factors incentivizing Nigerians to politicize ethnicity. As noted by Agbu (2011), "ethnicity only becomes relevant as a result of the politicization of ethnic identity in the struggle for power or political competition." Nigerians may disregard ethnicity when they plan to rob the common vault; but they will recruit it if their contest straddles the ethnic fault line. As noted by Achebe (1983), "*Tribe* [ethnicity] has been accepted at one time as a friend, rejected as an enemy at another, and finally smuggled in through the back-door as an accomplice."

ORIGIN OF ETHNICITY

The debate over the extent to which colonialism should be blamed for the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria is an endless one. But of particular interest in the debate is the vehemence of the contention that colonialism made Nigerians to become acutely aware of their ethnic diversity through the arena for conflictive contact it created, namely the urban centre. To this contention, ethnic conflict began as an urban phenomenon. Those who contend thus contend that ethnic identity only became a salient issue in intergroup contact after Nigerians were forcibly brought together under colonial rule and made to become acutely aware of their belonging to significantly different ethnic groups.

Nnoli, one of those who have probed the deepest recesses of African ethnic politics, has trenchantly accused colonialism of politicizing ethnicity in the country. As he has argued (2008),

> The British colonial administration encouraged communal sentiments among Nigerians…The encouragement was reflected structurally by the administrative system of indirect rule. It started out as an instrument for overcoming the pervasive, financial, personnel, and communications problems of the colonial administration in Northern Nigeria and ended up as a means for reinforcing communal identity among Nigerians, creating a new sense of communal identity where none existed, and providing a new symbolic and ethnocentric focus for the urban population.

Colonial rulers made ethnicity a sociocultural phenomenon in interethnic relationship. Their policy of divide and rule frustrated cross-ethnic solidarity against colonial rule (2008). It also schemed to keep contact between the northern and southern parts of the country to a minimum. As Coleman has noted (1958), "[B]y far the most important single feature of British policy [of divide and rule] was the effort made to preserve the Muslim North in its pristine Islamic purity by excluding Christian missionaries and limiting Western education, by denying northern leaders representation in the central Nigerian Legislative Council during the period 1923-1947, and by minimizing the contact between the northern peoples and the more sophisticated and nationally-minded southerners temporarily resident in the north."

Of course, there were ethnic conflicts in the pre-colonial period, but they were mostly those engendered by territorial ambitions or occasional inefficacy of diplomacy in conflict resolution. That is to say that, despite the assertion to the contrary, conflict and insecurity were not the predominant phenomena in the country before the British arrived to subdue and rule the people. Eurocentric, racist scholars like David Hume, Georg Hegel and Hugh Trevor-Roper have fetishized inertness in pre-colonial Africa. Those scholars were geniuses who, tragically, indulged their imagination, allowing it to be polluted by their fallacy of inertia about the continent prior to

colonial intrusion. The depravity of their assumption has certainly detracted from their contribution to historiography. If the continent was inert and saturated with violence as these victims of false memory have claimed, how could Africans, for example, have successfully engaged in long-distance trade or conducted marriage between clans and ethnicities? Or how could they have built wonders like the pyramids of Egypt? The truth is that the continent's architecture of law and order began to crumble only after Arabs and Europeans made Africans a fungible commodity in international trade. Slave trade, without doubt, retarded the progress of African development.

Of course, Africans did fight wars; and like Smith (1989) has noted, "among most West African peoples the regulation of peaceful contact with outsiders was accompanied by some regulation of their warfare, often constituting a mitigation of that warfare." (In modern times, the West has fought wars with the savagery of the Assyrians and Chaldeans). With the availability of European arms, making war almost became a pastime in the continent. As Smith (1989) puts it, "It must … be remembered that much of the unrest which characterizes the history of pre-colonial West Africa was stimulated by the export trade in firearms, behind which was the foreign demand for slave labour." This was one of the truths Basden (1982) omitted to acknowledge when he said that war was a pastime in pre-colonial Igbo land. But even if war in pre-colonial Igbo land was a pastime, European firearms infused the profit motive into it when people began to use them for export slave trade.

European arms exacerbated Africa's insecurity by increasing the efficacy, allure and scope of violence. They also further brutalized the natives, making them become less amenable to dialogue.

Before the introduction of European guns, war was not the primary option in conflict resolution in most African societies. The point can be exemplified with the Igbos. In pre-colonial Igbo land, war was not absent, but it was a trace element in the sociopolitical organisation. There were three kinds of war. In *ogu okpiri*, "the understanding is that no bodily harm involving loss of blood should be allowed. Contestants club their opponents down until they surrender or run away" (Ogbalu, 2006). In *ogu mma*, "Instruments like spears (*opi*), bows and arrows (*uta na aku*), slings (ebe) and stones might be used but the important thing is [that] nobody should be killed" (Ogbalu, 2006). In contrast, in *ogu egbe*, "the use of guns was prominent and other lethal weapons might be used [and] Contestants are free to kill their opponents or take them prisoners" (Ogbalu, 2006). The clear inference from *ogu egbe* is that European guns gave war in pre-colonial Igbo land a new face.

Attributing ethnic rivalry in Africa to colonialism, Nnoli (2008) has contended that colonialism sowed the seed of ethnic politics when it created the urban areas to which people from different ethnic groups flocked in search of opportunity. Anthropologists who were recruited to study the native culture 'discovered' and/or invented differences between the ethnic groups. Those differences even where they really existed had been mostly latent, passive and anodyne. But to achieve their goal of imperial subjugation, the anthropologists invented special meanings for them. As noted by Nnoli (2008), "Conflict does not arise naturally because groups of people are different, but because special meanings are attached to these differences that make them appear irreducible and incompatible. The Hutu and Tutsi lived together for centuries without resorting to violence, but in colonial and neo-colonial societies their reconstructed identities have turned into focal points of violent conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi." Falola (2016) agrees with Nnoli that ethnic animosity is a legacy of colonialism: "Nigerians inherited those assumptions regarding the divisions of

people into races, places, ethnicities, and states. The idea of the "ethnic nation" and the Nigerian nation emerged simultaneously."

The ethnic rivalry that ensued in the urban area involved two fronts: between the 'sons of the soil' (the indigenes) and the migrants and among the migrants themselves. (Both the indigenes and the migrants unwittingly aided the establishment of colonial rule in their country). The indigene-migrant dichotomy that ensued in the colonial urban centres is one of the factors emasculating the efforts at peaceful ethnic coexistence in the country. Jos, for example, has been grappling with the problem of long-lasting animosity between the indigenes (who are predominantly Christian) and Hausa-Fulani settlers (who are predominantly Muslim). The rural-urban migration instigated by colonialism had its psychological price tags. One of the tags was the feeling of vulnerability and insecurity. One of the ways through which the migrants tried to overcome the feeling was to form ethnic associations (Nnoli, 2008). Some of such associations were the Igbo State Union and Egbe Omo Oduduwa. The associations were formed to pursue these two predetermined self-interested objects: to promote members' interests and to mobilize political support for kinsmen. They played a major role in entrenching ethnic chauvinism in Nigerian politics. For example, the "apparently close alliance between the Pan-Ibo movement [the Ibo Federal Union] and the NCNC Pan-Nigerian movement …alarmed the leaders of other nationalities, who saw what they suspected to be a growing threat of Ibo domination" (Coleman, 1958).

In the North, the colonial rulers encouraged the development of separate ethnic identity with its deliberate policy of isolating strangers in the new residential quarters called *sabon gari* (visitors' quarters). *Sabon gari* wrecked whatever potential there might have been for northern urban centres like Kano and Kaduna to become melting pots of ethnicities after the fashion of Lagos. They also

bifurcated the administration of the two regions even after they were amalgamated in 1914. For example, the Central Legislature which was established in 1923 only legislated for the Colony and Southern Provinces of the country (Okafor, 1981). It legislated for the south until 1947 when it began to receive members from the three regional legislatures. Those twenty-four years of separation must have played a role in creating the problem of hemispheric identity for the country. What was the motive for cramping contact between the two parts? Did the British initially want to break the colony into two countries on the eve of its independence like they did with India which they broke into India and Pakistan? It was possible they had contemplated a forced divorce of the eve of independence.

In the Igbo urban centre of Enugu, suspicion of strangers was mild, probably because of the Pan-Nigerian philosophy of Nnamdi Azikiwe. In May, 1953 Umar Altine, a Fulani cattle trader from Sokoto, was "elected President of the Enugu branch of the NCNC with the support of Ibo middle class" (Sklar, 2004). The following year, he was elected chairman of Enugu Urban District Council. In 1956 when Enugu was elevated to the status of municipality, he was elected its first mayor. He was a militant supporter of Azikiwe, and was supported by the middle class most of whom were affluent "strangers" opposed to the attempts by the "indigenes" to hijack the municipal politics. But he was also a pawn in the struggle between the Igbos and strangers for the control of Enugu politics and economy. He was particularly used against Eyo Ita (the non-Igbo Leader of Government Business in Eastern Region) when he fell out with Azikiwe. In April, 1957, Altine lost out as mayor in the indigene-stranger power struggle; however, in 1958, he was re-elected, this time on the platform of newly-formed Association for One Nigeria, a splinter party of NCNC. Altine, Baba Sule (another northern resident) and most non-indigene residents who ironically

included a number of migrant Igbos were forced to form the Association for One Nigeria by the exclusionary politics of the "sons of the soil". The Stranger Elements Association which morphed into the Association for One Nigeria so as to qualify to stand for the 1958 mayoral election were responses to the clannish politics of those who claimed ownership of Enugu.

In the West, the Igbo-dominated NCNC was able to closely rival the Yoruba-dominated Action Group. Because of Lagos's sizable migrant population, it was very difficult for the Yoruba, the 'original owners' of Lagos, to achieve absolute control in its municipal politics. Lagos, the seat of colonial administration, could not effectively shut "strangers" out of its politics. However, the Yoruba gained the upper hand in the municipal politics after independence, forcing

Igbo stalwarts like Azikiwe to ultimately fall back on the East from where they came. In Lagos, the hub of nationalist politics, the Yoruba who were the 'sons of the soil' formed the Egbe Omo Oduduwa to checkmate 'migrant invasion' by the Igbo. As Oluwole Alakija, a founding member of the association, lamented,

> We were bunched together by the British who named us Nigeria. We never knew the Ibos, but since we since we came to know them we have tried to be friendly and neighbourly. Then came the Arch Devil [Azikiwe] to sow the seed of distrust and hatred…. We have tolerated enough from a class of Ibos and addle-brained Yorubas who have mortgaged their thinking caps to Azikiwe and his hirelings (1948).

The association morphed into the Action Group in 1951 and was allegedly used in the same year by Awolowo to abort Azikiwe's dream of becoming the first premier of the Western Region. Achebe (1983) describes Awolowo's action as "the death of a dream-Nigeria in which a citizen could live and work in a place of his choice anywhere, and pursue any legitimate goals open to his fellows; a Nigeria in which an Easterner might aspire to be premier in the West and a Northerner become Mayor of Enugu." Awolowo's action served only to aggravate Igbo clannishness.

According to Nnoli (2008), the AG was "the first party of the Nigerian petty bourgeoisie to be inspired by, found on, and nourished by ethnic chauvinism and regional parochialism." (Despite the resentment towards the resurgence of Igbo influence in Lagos politics, Lagos is, arguably, the only non-Igbo state where the Igbos have become an indispensable part of politics).

Ethnic politics undermined nationalism in the country and might have delayed its independence. North's objection to Anthony Enahoro's 31 March 1953 motion in the House of Representatives for "the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956," independence might have prolonged colonial rule by four years---from 1956 to 1960. Northern legislators, led by Ahmad Bello, had demanded the replacement of the phrase "in 1956" with the phrase "as soon as practicable". Their objection forced NCNC and AG members to stage a walkout (Coleman, 1958).

MANIPULATION OF ETHNICITY

Clever people know how to harness differences. For example, in the Bible Paul contrived to frustrate his trial in Jerusalem before the Roman tribune Claudius Lysias by dividing his accusers---the Sadducees and the Pharisees---who had submerged their doctrinal differences in order to frustrate the Gospel. According to Acts 23:6-9 (ESV),

> Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?

Ethnicity is one of the factors that abet politicians' manipulation of the electorate. Nigerian politicians manipulate ethnic differences in two major ways. Firstly, they may form ethnically-based political parties. The politics of the First Republic (1960-1966) was dominated by three

ethnically-based parties, namely the NCNC dominated by the Igbos, the AG dominated by the Yoruba and the NPC dominated by the Hausa-Fulani. Two incidents enlarged the footprint of ethnicity in Nigerian politics in 1951, namely the formation of AG and NPC and Azikiwe's failure to become the first premier of the Western region. Awolowo had in 1948 called Nigeria "a mere geographical expression" (Coleman, 1956). As its name indicated, the NPC (the Northern People's Congress) was a regional project that catered to the interests of the northerners (Nnoli, 2008). It ensconced itself in the north and made no recognizable effort to outgrow its regional dashiki. As noted by Olusanya (1980), it "was purely a northern party and it made sure that this fact was well advertised." Its leaders who were so enamoured of feudal privileges schemed to insulate the region against the rival parties. To evince their parochialism, they never canvassed votes in the other regions, preferring instead to support splinter parties such as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) led by Samuel Akintola and the National Independence Party led by Eyo Ita, which they used to checkmate Awolowo in the West and Azikiwe in the East respectively. So parochial were they that they even made every effort to prevent AG and NCNC campaigning in their region. Only the NCNC evidently endeavoured to outgrow regionalism and ethnicity. As Falola et al. (1991) put it, "[W]hereas the NCNC tended to encourage pan-Nigerian nationalism, most educated elite in western and northern Nigeria stressed upon regionalism." For most of its existence, the AG was conflicted between ethnic insularity-cum- regionalism and Pan-Nigerianism.

Three events in 1951, namely the formation of AG and NPC, the foiling of Azikiwe's plan to become Premier of the Western Region and the implementation of the Macpherson Constitution impacted the Pan-Nigerian character of the nationalist struggle. For example, as Coleman (1958) has noted, "The victory of the Action Group over the NCNC by a sizable margin in the 1951

elections in the Western Region was the triumph of regional nationalism." As to the Constitution,

he has also noted,

> There can be little doubt that the implementation of the Constitution of 1951 accelerated the drift toward subgroup nationalism and tribalism. Educated Nigerians who aspired to fill the new positions of power and status opened up to Nigerians by that constitution realized that their most secure base of support would be the people of their own groups…In the struggle that ensued, tribalism was the dominant note; but when appealing to the people for support, the competing parties strove to outdo each other in the use of nationalist slogans (1958).

The Second Republic (1979 -1983) was also vulgarized by ethnicity. Awolowo and Azikiwe had

roused themselves from the political quiescence of the thirteen years of military rule (1966-1979)

to dominate the politics of that Republic. Their two arch-rivals from the north, Ahmadu Bello and

Tafawa-Balewa, had been killed in the 1966 coup. The Gowon regime (1966-1975) projected

Awolowo into the top echelon of political leadership by making him de facto vice-head of state.

The ethnically based political parties they formed afforded them the platforms to contest the

presidential election in 1979 and 1983. Awolowo's party, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), which

was popular in the Yoruba area did not win even one single governorship in the other regions.

Azikiwe's party, the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), which was popular in the Igbo area managed

to scrape the governorship of the north central state of Plateau. Northerners who this time round

did not have Bello and Tafawa-Balewa to lead them managed to safeguard their region from

"invasion" by Awolowo and Azikiwe. Unlike NPC, the north-dominated National Party of Nigeria

(NPN) ran candidates, and even won elections, in the other regions. Its desperate attempt to gain a

foothold in Awolowo's stronghold was one of the instabilities that invited the December 1983

coup.

RECESSION OF ETHNICITY

Three factors have slowly eroded the influence of ethnicity in Nigerian politics. The first is the Constitution. The Constitution (Sections 222 and 223) requires that the political parties' membership and activities reflect the country's federal character. The major implication of this requirement is that regionally-based parties like the All-Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) which has ruled Anambra since 2006 are unlikely to win the presidency. It was that requirement that almost choked the Alliance for Democracy (AD). To become a national party, AD after transmuting into the Action Congress (AC) and then the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) merged with the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All-Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and a splinter of APGA to form the All-Progressives Congress (APC), the ruling party. APGA's protracted infancy could fling it into extinction if it loses the 2022 governorship election in Anambra State. The Constitution (Sections 133 and 134) also requires the president-elect to have broad national acceptance, which means that he or she must have, in addition to winning the most votes in the election, carried two-thirds of the states and Abuja. The major implication of this requirement is that presidential candidates are obliged to canvass cross-ethnic and regional support. The Constitution (Section 14) further requires that the president should apply "the Federal Character" principle (inclusive government), which means that he should distribute federal offices in a manner that benefits all regions and ethnicities.

Political parties use diverse ways to satisfy the second requirement. One such way is to pick their presidential and vice-presidential candidates from different ethnic groups. The following table shows the ethnic mix:

Period	President	Vice-President	Remark
1979-1983	Hausa-Fulani	Igbo	
1999-2007	Yoruba	Hausa-Fulani	
2007-2010	Hausa-Fulani	Ijaw	President died
2010-2015	Ijaw	Hausa-Fulani	
2015-2023	Hausa-Fulani	Yoruba	

One of the virtues of the presidential system of government is that it has forced seekers of political offices to seek broad-based ethnic, religious and regional support. The system has certainly cramped ethnicity. According to Lergo (2011), the presidential system "helps to discourage political party formations on strict religious, regional, or ethnic lines, and encourages political discourse and participation on ideology. This development has had an empowering effect on minority ethnic groups as can be seen in election reforms and results since 1979." In fact, the country since 1979 has been spared the kind of ethnic politics that undermined the First Republic. The second virtue is that, by demanding national acceptability of parties, the system has increased the bargaining power of the ethnic minorities. This is true, even though the politics is still dominated by the three ethnic majorities, namely the Igbo, the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani.

The second factor is state creation. State creation which started off as a war effort (a gambit to undermine Biafra among ethnic minorities like the Efik and Ibibio) has enhanced both the bargaining power of the ethnic minorities and the imperative of broad-based politics. According to Lergo (2011), "subdividing Nigeria into states is a positive development, not only for minorities, but also for the country as a whole. It reduces the power of the central government. It helps to

demystify the political invisibility of regional ethnic majorities and encourages cross-regional coalitions, not only between minorities but also between majority and minority ethnic groups… The creation of states has also helped to prevent the emergence of tribal or ethnic heroes. Instead, politicians are forced to transcend ethnicity and region, religion, and be national heroes. It is a positive outcome of state development that Nigeria can no longer produce tribal leaders such as Sarduna [Sardauna] of Sokoto, Obafemi Awolowo, and Nnamdi Azikiwe.**"** State creation has largely assuaged the minorities. Ironically, it has aggravated the country's problem of disunity. As the ICG (2012) has noted, "Nigerians who live in states other than their states of ancestral origin are referred to as non-indigenes, no matter how long they and their parents have lived in the state. This is important, because non-indigenes are often prevented from exercising the full citizenship rights enjoyed by indigenes...In a bid to prevent the domination of some groups by others, the Nigerian Constitution inadvertently made provisions that undermine effective national citizenship and loyalty to the nation. State creation is politicized, which is the reason why, for example, the Igbo-dominated southeast region has fewer states than the other regions."

The third factor is the civil war. For the Igbos, the civil war has not only de-coupled the minorities such as the Efiks and the Ibibios, it also has re-energized centrifugal sub-ethnic consciousness among the Igbo of the Niger Delta. Such consciousness of separate identity has divided the Igbos into "core Igbos" and "peripheral Igbos". The latter now self-identify as "Ika" (in Delta State) or Ikwerre (in Rivers State), an identification has made them distinct sub-ethnic groups. It is interesting to note that the Ikwerre played a role in the confiscation of Igbo properties in Port Harcourt after the civil war. In the Second Republic (1979-1983), they joined the minorities in Rivers and Cross River States (which were part of the defunct Eastern Region) in supporting the

north-dominated NPN. Governors Clement Isong and Melford Okilo were elected on that party's ticket. The Mid-Western region which has a sizeable Igbo population was controlled by the NCNC in the First Republic. However, in the Second Republic the region supported the north-controlled NPN. The North has experienced defection too. Its monolithic clout has been unravelling with the agitation by the minorities, particularly those in the North Central states of Plateau and Benue, for a divorce. In 1979 and 1983, the Igbo-dominated NPP won a landslide victory in the Christian-dominated Plateau State. It also closely trailed NPN in neighbouring Benue State. According to Magstadt (1994), the resentment of the minorities against the majorities was one of the sources of tension during the 1950s, when the country's independence was being negotiated.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is one of the countries that are still taking baby steps towards sustainable nationhood. Its efforts at self-governance have been mostly unsuccessful with the result that six decades after independence it is still a collection of fractious ethnic groups. One of the first things Nigerians did after becoming independent in 1960 was to fight a civil war (1967-1970). That war appears to have demolished all prospects of modus vivendi among its ethnic groups. Dowden (2008) once said that he was surprised the country had not imploded: "By any law of political or social science it should have collapsed or disintegrated years ago." Ethnicity, which can enrich cultural diversity, is the major obstacle to the efforts at national integration. It is also evidently a major reason for the country's protracted infancy. It has caused a civil war. It has also caused many political instabilities that have equally menaced the country's continuing existence. Because the ethnic groups do not share sense of nationhood, they scramble to corner the political space for the largest piece of the "National Cake".

Both Nigerians and the British who colonized them are complicit in the problem of ethnic rivalry. The latter created it, while the former have embraced it as a destiny of nation. As has been noted by Falola (2016), "As the pattern ensued in all colonies, European policies created the divisions, and African leadership manipulated them." The former have so nurtured it that it has become a verity of contact among the ethnicities. As Cunningham (2014) has noted, "In African politics, ethnicity is a salient cleavage within the political spheres of nations."

The influence of ethnicity will decrease with the resetting of the coordinates of relationship among the regions and ethnicities. In Nigeria's political parlance, this phenomenon is called 'restructuring'. Restructuring evokes memories of the civil war, for it was the politics and economics of that war that paved the way for power grabbing by the centre. Since that war, the federal government has been augmenting its powers at the expense of the sub-national governments. The current federal structure fosters rivalry among the ethnic groups, as the centre is considered to be an arena for brutal test of strength by the groups. A return to the pre-war federal structure will definitely deglamourize the centre, thereby making governance a contest of development visions rather than a contest of ethnicities.

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