



THE EFFECT OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

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Abstract

This work examined the intriguing influence of ethnicity in Nigeria politics and how the various ethnic nationalities cooperatively or competitively pursue their political interests. It reasoned that the struggle to accommodate ethnic differences in politics is one of Nigeria's biggest problems. To understand the nature of ethnic politicking in Nigeria the paper employed Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism theories to explore the phenomenon. The paper traced the origin of ethnic conflict in politics to the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria. From there it interrogated how the ethnic struggle for political power has evolved over time to date with its attendant negative impacts on the polity. Formal and informal efforts made in diffusing ethnic driven political squabbles were highlighted and discussed. It contended that ethnic solidarity has been elevated over and above the broader issue of national development. A situation that has enthroned mediocracy, lack of accountability, and pervasive misuse of state resources. The paper relied on secondary sources of information for this work.

Keywords: *Ethnicity, Politics, Conflict, Primordialism, Constructivism, Instrumentalism, Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

The politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria has assumed a very dangerous dimension in recent years, so much so that government policies and political appointments are appraised from the prism of ethnicity. In fact, it has become synonymous with the country's economic and political problems. There is really nothing bad with ethnic identification, but it should not be raised over and above every other consideration. However, the contrasting and often belligerent ethnic groups are irretrievably condemned to a system of behaviour that elevates ethnicity above the wider interests of the country. Nigeria is a pluralist society consisting of multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious groups but dominated by three ethnic clusters of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. Though with the rise of Niger Delta militants in the late 1990s, the South-South region even though not mono-ethnic in configuration has gained considerable attention in the Nigerian ethnic political equation. The nature of politicking in Nigeria is a classic case of how contradictory values emanating from multicultural differences define and condition the political ecosystem.

Evidently, we can relate this to the civil war of 1967-1970, the politics of state creation, federal character principle, party politics zoning formula, and currently the agitation for restructuring. There is even agitation by some ethnic nationalities to pull out of Nigeria. Recently the security problems across the country have been ethnicized too. There are moves by various ethnic groups to organize ethnic vigilantes within their ethnic boundaries. The announcement and creation of Western Nigeria Security Network code-named "Operation Amotekun" by Yoruba speaking states governors is a reference in point here. Is this deep-seated ethnic divisiveness a happenstance or has a root cause in history? How did Nigeria become a multicultural society? Historically the entity called Nigeria is a function of British conquest. The British colonial lords amalgamated Nigeria in 1914 thereby integrating various ethnic nationalities into one country.

Prior to the British amalgamation, these ethnic nations were living independently pursuing their various varying and not converging aspirations. The amalgamation produced a divergent pluralized society and the plurality is the major cause of ethnic political conflicts in Nigeria. This opinion notwithstanding some authors has conversely argued that "from the dawn of history communities organized on putative common descent, culture, and destiny have coexisted, competed, and clashed (Esman, 1994). To these authors, multi-ethnicity may not necessarily be a recipe for ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic societies. While this statement is true in explaining intercommunity or intra-ethnic clashes relating to resource dispute over farmlands and boundaries, it may not suffice at the macro-



level political arena of who gets what, how, and when. Because its implication on politics is limited to state and local government politics, at the national level the same people warring at home will regroup under their ethnicity. On the other hand, a the-nationalist conflict is evidently a dominant form of mass political violence over the past decades (Wimmer, 2004). This is very germane in respect of dissecting ethnic driven political conflicts in Nigeria. Adding secession and civil wars dimension to the ethnic politics conflicts Scherrer (1994), argued that most civil wars in the post-World War era were fought on the ground of ethnonational autonomy, independence, or secession. This statement especially the secession angle is evidently apt when juxtaposed with the incidence of the 1967-1970 Nigeria/ Biafra war. Long before the Biafra secessionist attempt led by Ojukwu, several other Nigerian ethnic nationality leaders had at one point or the other negatively perceived Nigeria as one political entity. A northern Nigerian leader, the Sarduna of Sokoto once described Nigeria as Lord Lugard's mistake of 1914 (Ella, 1983). In a similar tone, Oba Adeniji from Western Nigeria saw Nigeria as a creation of the British, not of God (ibid, 25). Rising from this background of deep-seated ethnic chauvinism and/ or negative conception of Nigeria comes to this work "The Effect of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigerian Politics". This paper seeks to interrogate the issue of ethnic rivalry and competition in Nigerian politics. To this end, the origin of the rivalry will be traced, and the various forms of ethnicity manifest themselves in Nigerian politics will be discussed. Equally the attendant negative impacts of the ethnic rivalry on the polity will be highlighted.

2. The Concept of Ethnicity and Conflicts In Politics

The concept of ethnicity and conflicts are two sides of the Nigerian political coin. Ethnicity originated from the Greek word *ethnikos*, which means belonging to a national or foreign group (Pettigrew, 1979). The ethnic group refers to a group of people who have tied ancestrally, culturally, racially, religiously, and in language. Therefore, to be an ethnic member, there must be a given identifying and identifiable homogeneity. Being a member of the major or dominant ethnic group is usually associated with social standing and having access to power. This, therefore, explains why there are constant agitations from the minor ethnic groups in Nigeria against the overbearing tendencies of the major ethnic groups. Ethnicity in Nigeria is the employment and or mobilization of group identity or differences to gain an advantage in situations of competition, conflict, or co-operation (www.tandfonline.com).

Ethnicity is a product produced by competitive and non-cooperative relations between ethnic groups (Nnoli, 1978). To him, this sort of relational behaviour is characterized by cultural prejudice and political discrimination (Ibid: 9). The nature of the ethnic relationship is perhaps the sine qua non for ethnic conflicts in Nigerian politics. Essentially ethnicity can be described as the canopy under which ethnic groups aggregate their interests and pursue them politically competitive. On the conflict side of the political coin, conflict arises when groups involved in a political relationship adopt competitive strategy over cooperative considerations. This usually leads to collisions or disagreements between the parties involved. Conflicts are driven by the instinct of self-preservation and the desire to exert dominance. In ethnic relations, conflicts normally arise when one group feels threatened, dominated, or cheated by another, especially the dominant one. The three domineering ethnic groups of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are usually at the center of ethnic tension in Nigeria especially when it comes to politics.

It is against this backdrop that scholars like Doornbos (1991) and Suberu (1996), recognized ethnic conflicts as one of the major threats to political stability and national identity. The politicking in Nigeria is ethnically weaponized, in the sense that politics is ethnicized and ethnicity politicized simultaneously. The formation of political parties and voting patterns in Nigeria is characterized by the struggle of each ethnic group competing in a conflictual manner to achieve each other's interests. So political parties are not only organized along ethnic or parochial lines, but political coalitions are entered in the same manner. This is an express indication that access to political and economic paybacks depends on ethnicity. It is this belief that drives conflictual ethnic politics in Nigeria.



3. Explanatory Frameworks on Ethnic Conflicts

The phenomenon of ethnic conflict has attracted the interests of both political scientists and sociologists, alike. They have shown concern to understand and explain the composition of society and how social groups pursue their competing interests politically premised on the concept of social cleavages. To interpret politics in terms of social cleavages is to recognize particular social bonds, be they economic, racial, religious, cultural, or sexual, as politically important, and to treat the group concerned as a major political actor (www.books.google.com). The cleavage is a split or division and when related to ethnicity it can be described as a group's belief of being separate and unique. It gives people a sense of selfhood both individually and collectively as a member of a group sharing the same characteristics. Yet another interesting framework to interrogate ethnic conflict in politics, is the Cross-cultural theory of political conflict and violence. Cross-cultural conflict is inherent in societies where individuals and groups are separated by cultural boundaries (Olanrewaju, I., Loromeke, R., & Adekoye, R. (2017). It locates the inevitability of conflict on the pluralized nature of society. The more a society is differentiated, the more likely it may have numerous groupings competing for interests. Violent conflict is therefore seen because of both culturally learned behaviours and personality configurations typical in a society (Ross, 1986). In his contribution to ethnic conflicts, Esman (1994) argues that the understanding and explanation of ethnic conflicts are better approached from primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism theories. Most literature on identity construct comprises three main approaches namely primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism (Fenton, 2003, Joireman, 2003; Yang, 2000). In this work, I will restrict my analytical exploration to Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism theories. Thereafter extend it to combined or integrated approaches.

3.1 Primordialism Theory

Primordialism is premised on the ground that ethnicity is naturally given in society and rooted in a biological phenomenon. Primordial like Esman (1994) strongly conceive ethnicity as a collective identity deeply rooted in historical experience which should be properly treated as a given in human relations. To them, ethnic boundaries are fixed or immutable and determined by common ancestry (Yang, 2000). If ethnicity were ascribed to common ancestry, members of any given ethnic group are therefore tied by blood, race, language, geographic location, religion, and custom. This description is true with most Nigerian ethnic nationalities. Ethnicity is fundamentally a biological phenomenon, and an expression of commanding ambition to extend genetic endowments into future generations (Van den Berghe, 1981).

From the above statement, therefore, it is an instinct for self-preservation and such instincts drive competitive social relations among ethnic groups along ethnic lines to prevent domination. This competitive rather than cooperative attitude is a recipe for conflicts be it in state creations, resource allocations, and representation in government. However, this argument of conflicts based on fear of being dominated by another ethnic group does not add up to explain why people with the same ancestry background and living in the same geographic location still fight amongst themselves especially at the micro-level. Sharing of political power is still conflictual in states across Nigeria not minding that most of these states are homogeneous in nature. There are other non-political perennial conflicts in Nigeria between communities in the same state with the same genetic history. But most of such conflicts are related to farmland boundary disputes. These communities are naturally homogenous, yet they conflict within themselves.

This notwithstanding the primordial reflections were able to establish the basic and most fundamental type of group identification based on blood bond which is true with Nigerian ethnic composition irrespective of the territorial homeland. Whether the Igbos in the South East, the Hausas in the North, the Yoruba in the South West, and the Ijaws in the South-South. Those residing outside their home states tend to congregate and form associations based on common ancestry, for example like Ibo Community in Lagos, Yoruba Community in Kano, and Hausa Community in Enugu, etc. Such associations serve as a medium for interfacing with their host communities.



3.2 Instrumentalism

The instrumentalists conceive ethnicity as a weapon or a strategic instrument through which to accomplish certain goals. These goals could be social, economic, and political driven. Ethnicity like every other parochial consideration is also a medium of political mobilization for advancing group interests (Yang, 2000:46). Ethnicity is therefore regarded as a veritable resource deployed opportunistically by groups or their members to realize political and economic interests. In Nigeria, political and ethnic leaders have weaponized ethnicity as a means through which they pursue and accomplish their individual political and material gains. Even though Nigerian politics is ethnicized, there is no substantial development in these ethnic regions from politics. Essentially it is more of an individual or personal aggrandizement than for the benign benefits of the ethnic group. That is why political appointments and elections generate a lot of ethnic tensions because politicians exploit the fault lines of ethnicity. Even political coalitions are predicated on ethnic manipulations to achieve calculated political goals. If ethnic groups could form political coalitions, it, therefore, means that ethnicity dynamism is not a fixed and immutable element of social and political relationships (Parsons, 1975).

For example, during the 2015 Nigeria presidential election the then President Goodluck Jonathan an Ijaw paraded himself as an Igbo while campaigning in South-Eastern Nigeria. It was an easy sell to the Igbo voters because of the seemingly political rapprochement between the South East people and South-South people. Before then the South East and the Northern have been political allies since the birth of the fourth republic in 1999. Nigeria national elections especially the presidential are synonymous with ethnic bickering and coalition manipulations in deciding presidential candidates and their running mates. After elections, ethnicity would resurface at the national legislative assembly regarding the choice of principal officers. It is against this background that primordialism questions the integrity and fixed nature of ethnic identity thereby describing it as a manipulation of fault lines to advance a special course. This position is a true reflection of how ethnicity is deployed in Nigerian politics both during and after elections.

During the Nigerian 2019 presidential election, ethnicity was effectively deployed in the campaign between two leading parties of All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The Yoruba peoples of Western Nigeria aligned with APC because its running mate is a Yoruba man while the Igbo people of South East identifying with PDP which has an Igbo running mate. Even though there are Yoruba and Igbo presidential candidates contesting in the same election in other parties, these ethnic blocs did not identify with their own. So why did they jettison the presidential candidates from their ethnic regions and vote for the Northern presidential candidates? A scenario like this therefore expresses ethnicity on political and economic driven thought processes rather on deep-seated primordial ties. This approach is very germane with the nature of ethnic politics in Nigeria as explained above with national electoral positions.

3.3 Constructivism

This theory approached the study of ethnicity as a socially constructed character that is not permanently determined. Here ethnicity should be treated as a continuing social construction trade-off between human actions and choices. This socially constructed identity could be called Imagined Community. It is an assertion that significant aspects of international relations are not inevitable consequences of human nature rather historically and socially contingent (Jackson & Nexon, 2002). How does this relate to the manifestation of ethnicity in domestic politics? The entity called Nigeria and its ethnic makeup is historically traced to the 1914 British amalgamation. Today the idea that Nigeria has six geo-political zones of North West, North East, North Central, South West, Southeast, and South-South is a social construct. Mainstream political parties in Nigeria share party national executive positions along this line. The appointments into the board of federal government parastatals and agencies largely reflect this zoning principle.

It is important to highlight that these zones are not inhabited by people with common ancestry. These six zones have inadvertently assumed ethnic connotation life but largely an imagined one. If groups, ethnic or otherwise were artificially constructed, we cannot claim their inhabitants have common ancestral origin and aspiration. The three theories of Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism under discussion have provided us with



some interesting insight into the emergence of ethnic groups and the pattern of clashes. Yet none of these approaches by itself alone can sufficiently explain the ethnic conflict phenomenon. As we have seen from the discussion that one approach may be powerful in explaining ethnic phenomena in a certain condition and maybe inconsequential in another circumstance. No doubt that the ethnic groups in Nigeria share a collective identity based on natural evolutionary means. Yet in politics members of ethnic groups latch on to ethnicity opportunistically to advance their political and economic interests. And there are circumstances when socially constructed boundaries are treated as if they were ancestry given.

Due to the inherent limitations of these approaches to independently explain ethnic political complexities led to the idea of combined or integrated approaches. In alluding to the integrated approach, Yang (2000) described ethnicity as socially constructed partly on the basis of ancestry or presumed ancestry and more importantly by society, which the interests of ethnic groups also partly determine ethnic affiliations, and that ethnic boundaries are relatively stable but undergo changes from time to time(www.books.google.com). This approach tends to sufficiently explain the complex nature of ethnic politics in Nigeria. Ranging from political party formation and registration to presentation of candidates for elections and sharing of political appointments after the election. In analysing ethnic politics in Nigeria either from bottom-top or top-bottom perspectives there is intersections of primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism in varying scales depending on the prevailing circumstance. There are circumstances when the political decisions must be expressed in ancestry affiliation like which ethnic group will provide the presidential candidate and which one will get the running mate. Under such a situation, political decisions or choices are exclusively limited to primordial considerations. On the other hand, there are situations where ethnicity is used as an instrument of advancing political interests for example the 1999 presidential election in which the two leading political parties zoned their presidential candidate to Yoruba people of South West.

It is a political consensus decision to compensate the ethnic Yoruba people for the acrimonious annulment of June 12, 1993, presidential widely believed to have been won by MKO Abiola a Yoruba man. Instrumentalism was equally at play in the run-up to the 2003 presidential election, Niger Delta Militant groups threaten to disrupt crude exploration in the Niger Delta region if the major ethnic groups sabotage Goodluck Jonathan's presidential bid. In a similar circumstance, the 2015 presidential election was ethnicized in electing Buhari as Nigerian president. On the angle of socially constructed grouping, we can relate it to the issue of making political appointments reflect the six geo-political zones. The election of Nigeria's national assembly principal officers is usually tailored in this line even though the geo-political zones are imagined ethnicity. From these narrations, we can understand why the integrated approach best explains the nature of Nigerian ethnic politics.

4. Ethnic Politics and Political Development In Nigeria

The territory is known today as the Nigerian state has its political root in the 1914 amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates. Although the reason for the amalgamation was economic rather than political (Barkan, et. al, 2001). Prior to that unification, the two units were existing separately under British control. At that time, the Northern protectorate had annual budget deficits and got subventions from the British treasury. While the Southern province had an annual budget surplus and does not need subventions from the British authority. The need to relieve the British treasury of the subvention burden going to the Northern Province birthed the idea to integrate the budgets of two provinces hence the amalgamation. Some other central institutions were established to midwife the evolving unified structure (Barkan, 2001).

The unification formally integrated the two components under one central colonial administration. It is important to note that despite the unification each region retained a great degree of autonomy. The colonial masters' style of administration reflected this autonomy by not applying a unified system of rule across the board. From this period to the independence era, the colonial administrators were constructing Nigeria politically which culminated in the portioning of the country administratively into three regions (Northern, Western & Eastern) by Lyttelton constitution of 1954. With this development, regionalism was introduced into Nigerian politics and ethno-regionalism took center stage in the political process (Akinrinade, 2000). Political mobilisation along ethnic lines



became imperative for self-preservation and coalition building. Even though people were ethnic conscious, it was exacerbated and reinforced by the British's system of administration along ethnic lines.

Before independence, the regional polarization has entrenched deep-seated distributional conflicts with ethnic nationalities struggling for resources and power. At independence, Nigeria's political leaders were left with a regional structured state. The regions were configured to be dominated by the major ethnic group in each of the respective regions, but none of the regions would muster enough strength to dominate the center alone. Implicit in this political structure is not only that minority ethnic groups were dominated in the region, but it has also equally set up the three major ethnic groups for the acrimonious struggle for central power. This led to the formation of political parties along ethnic lines in the first republic. These parties are the Northern People's Congress (NPC- Northern Region Hausa), the National Council of Nigeria (NCN- Eastern Region Igbo), and the Action Group (Western Region Yoruba). Since then party politics in Nigeria has been characterized by an intense struggle for resource and power by the various ethnic groups whether in majority or minority. In the first republic, there are palpable apprehensions in the North that the more educated South would dominate state institutions as well as concerns in the South that the more populous North would have the upper hand in the majoritarian electoral contests (Ukiwo, 2007).

It was this mutual suspicion and the uncontrolled quest of these parties' leaders that climaxed with the events that led to the first military coup in Nigeria. Hence the claim by the military that the 1966 coup was because of the failure of the politicians to maintain law and order in-country, and the military intervened to establish a strong united nation in order to save Nigeria from the hands of politicians who seek to see the country divided permanently (Mbeke-Ekanem, 2008; Obaro, 1980; Kirk-Green, 1971). Events that followed the coup led to counter coups and eventually apexes in the civil war. The civil war became a turning point in ethnic politics because at the end of the war dimension of ethnic politics in the country changed. It defined the political hegemonic positions of the ethnic groups, with the North leading the pack, followed by the West and the East. The war succeeded in heightening deeply ethnic mistrust and division across the various ethnic nationalities.

Since then ethnic regional tensions continued to manifest themselves in complex ways at every electoral period or discussions on power-sharing. From the second republic to the current fourth republic there are ethnic driven debates on state creation, inter-governmental revenue sharing formula, marginalization on federal appointments, census figure dispute, and even agitation for outright pull out. Evidently, the two clear cut issues driving ethnic politics in Nigeria are the desire to control political power and the instruments of the state, and access to economic power and resources. The fourth republic has been bedeviled with dangerous games of ethnic politicking from its inception in 1999. For instance, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) 1998 presidential primary election in Jos, Plateau State was cobwebbed in ethnic political manoeuvring. The two frontline aspirants are Olusegun Obasanjo (Yoruba) and Dr. Alex Ekwueme (Igbo) were running neck to neck in the build-up to primary but for any of them to emerge, the person must get the endorsement of Northern political elites.

Remember I have mentioned how the civil war paved the way for the North to assume hegemony over the other ethnic groups. Northern political elites endorsed Obasanjo and he got the presidential nomination of the party. It was easier for the Northern PDP elites to endorse Obansajo because of the perceived injustice melted to Yoruba people with the annulment of MKO Abiola's election by a Northern military leader. Obasanjo went ahead to win the general election with Atiku Abubakar as his running mate. PDP equally dominated the two chambers of the national assembly. The election of principal officers of the two chambers of the national legislative assembly took ethnic dimension too. Since the Yoruba and Hausa have taken the presidential and vice-presidential positions respectively, the Senate president position was zoned to Igbo land. From 1999 to 2015 PDP was in government, political appointments and power-sharing formula reflected Nigeria's ethnic makeup.

Especially the national assembly principal officers zoning formula from 1999-2003 can be explained in primordial, instrumental, and constructivism perspectives. The senate president was zoned to Igbo states of South East (primordialism), the deputy senate president zoned to north-central states (constructivism), speaker of House of Representatives to the North West (primordialism/ instrumentalist), and the deputy speaker zoned to the South-



South (constructivism). However, the senate presidency zoned to the South East was most intriguing as between 1999-2003 the zone turned over three senate presidents. These three senate presidents came from different states, reinforcing instrumentalists' argument that ethnicity is an adaptive and malleable phenomenon. The same kind of scenario repeated itself in 2003-2007 but this time with two senate president turnovers. Ethnic political tensions were within tolerance level from 1999-2015, but the acrimonious 2015 presidential campaign between PDP and APC reversed the situation. From 2015 to date there is profound ethnic suspicion and mistrust, so much so that the Igbo ethnic people see the ruling APC party as Hausa/Fulani government enabled by Yoruba.

To them, there is nothing good that can come out of the government. Even Igbos in the APC government are regarded as "efulefu" sell-outs or unworthy to be called true Igbo people. Because ethnicity has a religious dimension in Nigeria, ethnic tension usually translates to a religious one. The farmers-herders' conflicts across the nation do not have just ethnic connotations but religious implications. This crisis has made some state governments legislate against open grazing in their states. Such legislative acts by some of these governors are meant to whip up ethnic sentiment for election purposes. It is so bad today that security challenges ravaging Nigeria are given ethnic definitions, hence the reason why regions are setting up regional security networks. Nigeria is currently at crossroads with how every aspect of society and its political institutions are ethnicized. Additionally, ethnic politics have adversely impacted Nigeria in various forms. Apart from the domination of the minority ethnic groups by the three major ones, ethnic politics has not caused any concrete to develop in the ethnic regions. Political leaders have manipulated the citizenry through the weaponization of ethnicity to achieve their personal political and economic goals.

The same strategy is used to distract the populace from asking accountability questions. It is so bad that the trial of corrupt public officials is given ethnic interpretations. Sometimes members of the ethnic group are mobilized to protest such trails with an inscription like "Our brother is not the only thief in Nigeria" or "Mr. President Start with the thieves from your place". One of the catastrophic impacts of ethnic politics is the Nigerian civil war, an avoidable war but ethnic egoism could not prevent. The civil war resulted in the deaths of millions of people and the loss of properties worth multi-millions. Its attendant psychological impact on the psychic of the Nigerian people is massive and it was the final nail on the ethnic mistrust coffin. Unless something drastic is done to arrest the situation, Nigeria may not recover from the deep-seated ethnic mistrust confronting the cooperative existence of the nation.

5. Efforts to Diffuse Ethnic Complexities

The question of ethnic conflicts in Nigerian politics remained unanswered but there were attempts made to address the contending issues exacerbating ethnic conflictual relations in politics. For instance, to prevent the civil war, a peace talk was convened in Accra, Ghana. The summit is commonly referred to as Aburi Summit. Ghana was chosen as the venue because the eastern delegation was not satisfied that the safety of their leader would be guaranteed in north or western Nigeria. Despite being a noble effort to prevent the looming crisis, it failed in preventing an avoidable war. But the Aburi accord tried to address the contentious issues associated with state power and power devolution in Nigeria. There are other attempts through national conferences, constitutional conferences, and constitutions including the amendment of electoral acts. Apart from the electoral act which has undergone amendments, nothing tangible has come out of other constitutional efforts. The constitution amendment committee at the national assembly has been dilly-dallying on the issue of the constitution amendments since 2007 without any remarkable process in amending the constitutions despite the huge resources it has gulped. Non-implementation of the reports of various national conferences organized by the government especially since this fourth republic has made Nigerians disillusioned.

However, Gen. Abacha's National Constitutional Conference (NCC) of 1994-1995 recommended rotational presidency between north-south basis, revenue derivation allocation from 5% to 15%, and the establishment of Federal Character Commission to monitor and enforce equitable inter-segmental representation in government, among others (Paul, & Young, 1997). The Abacha's NCC contributed to the political division of Nigerians into six geo-political zones of North East, North Central, North West, South-South, South East, and South West.



Perhaps the government is a military regime, making it easier to adopt some parts of the report. The reports of national conferences inaugurated by civilian regimes were adopted. Electoral reform has been significant in dealing with issues of diffusing ethnic tensions especially through restoring confidence in the electoral process. General Ibrahim Babangida's military administration adopted a kind of top-down approach in party formation to have political parties established on national orientation. To achieve this goal, he restricted the number of parties to two and went further to established two parties National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) with presidential fiat. These two parties became the only political platforms politicians can aggregate their political interests. It is believed that since these two parties were formed and registered by the national government, they will have a national outlook. In fact, the military government-supervised and funded the erection of administrative infrastructure required for the take-off of the political parties.

There is no clear distinction of ethnic inclination of any of the parties. Although after their inaugural national conventions with the election of national executive members of the parties, ethnic and regional domination crept in. The two parties fared well until the annulment of the June 12 presidential election by the same person that established the two parties. It is highly believed by many that annulment reversed the progress made by the two-party system especially when the person perceived to have won the presidential election was widely accepted in the north-east-west even though he is a Yoruba. The idea of power-sharing and zoning formula are birthed in diffusing ethnic political conflicts. Following the annulment of June 12 by Babangida and the return of democracy in 1999, all the leading political parties zoned their presidential candidates to the west. This an attempt to address the tension generated by the annulment and the imminent regional polarization. From then till today zoning has become an integral element of party politics in Nigeria. So apart from the constitutional requirement that the federal executive cabinet should reflect the federal character of Nigeria, it is accompanied by these informal arrangements by political parties to rotate presidential candidates and balanced with the choice of running mate. The above reveals efforts geared towards diffusing ethnic political tensions were a combination of both formal and informal arrangements. This hybrid model of inter-ethnic political power-sharing formula explains how complex the ethnic politics issues in Nigeria are.

6. Findings

Nigeria's ethnic fault lines are exploited by political leaders and elites in their pursuit of political ambitions. It has created a political culture that promotes ethnic sentiment over and above national development questions. The attendant implication of this is the enthronement of mediocrity in the public sector with a bureaucracy that lacks expertise. The politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria is driven by using political power to advance personal material gains. There is no concrete developmental evidence in the various ethnic regions to justify the politicization of ethnicity. There are heightened tension and a high level of distrust amongst the ethnic groups in Nigeria, so much so that political appointments and policies of the state are mirrored from an ethnic prism. This distrust is currently at a level that some ethnic nationalities are calling for the disintegration of Nigeria. Equally the recurring ethnic conflict in Nigeria is traced at the door of mutual suspicion.

The ethnic groups are conflictual competitive in the politics of who gets what, how, and when. Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are the resultant effect of various ethnic groups adopting competitive relationship strategies over cooperative considerations which usually leads to collisions. The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria are constantly threatened by the fear of one dominating another, while the minority ethnic groups constantly protest their domination by the major ethnic groups. The Niger Delta militancy evolved from the idea to fight off the domination and exploitation of the major ethnic groups. Yet the government has not made tangible efforts to create a political climate of ethnic cohesion. Hence the reason, Nigeria is witnessing a growing resurgence of ethnic militancy, youth restiveness, and political violence during elections. The apparent political culture in Nigeria is conditioned by the politicization of ethnicity in the pursuance of political power. A system that negatively impacted the country socially, economically, and politically. Also, one of the catastrophic impacts of ethnic politics is the Nigerian civil war, an avoidable war but exacerbated by ethnic egoism. The civil war resulted in the deaths of millions of people and the loss of properties worth multi-millions. Its attendant psychological impact on the psychic of the Nigerian people is massive and it was the final nail on the ethnic mistrust coffin.



7. Conclusion

Quo Vadis Nigeria? From the discussion above, it shows how ethnic nationalities in Nigeria are struggling to cooperatively accommodate each other in politics. This has remained one of the challenges impeding national development as accountability is sacrificed at alters of ethnic solidarity. The growing resurgence of ethnic militancy, youth restiveness, and political violence during elections are obvious as is not well with Nigeria. Which way Nigeria? There are fundamental issues fuelling the weaponization of ethnicity in the pursuit of economic and political interests. First and foremost is that public offices are competed and deployed to advance personal material and parochial interests. At the heart of this problem is a lack of accountability and pervasive misuse or misappropriation of state resources for personal gain (corruption, fraud, abuse). Fighting corruption has become the mantra of most Nigerian governments yet there is little to show for the anti-corruption efforts. The starting point is for the government to reorganize the public sector, especially how official businesses are conducted. The recruitment into public service should be merit driven even federal character or quota system are applied, in the sense that each quota filled must reflect meritocracy.

I strongly believe that the anthropological reality of the ethnic nationalities towards contest is won at all cost. We can see that reflected in other non-political contests like intercommunity traditional contests, the kingship successions, and farm boundary dispute. These nationalities transfer the same attitude to politics competitively rather than cooperatively. In my opinion, zero party system will help to diffuse ethnic tension associated with party politics. Such a zero-party approach will minimize the influence of political parties inflaming ethnic fault lines. This is done, would be a catalyst for Nigerian political development towards a prosperous and peaceful nation.

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