

Political Parties and Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics: A historical appraisal

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Abstract

Beginning from the colonial period the Nigerian state has been strewn with ethnic conflicts; majorly, between the Hausa-Fulani in the north against the Yoruba in the west, and the Ibo (the third arm of the dominant ethnic triumvirate). Unfortunately, the bulk of the conflicts were held through the agency of the political parties. These developments would inevitably lead to the creation of political parties that were devoted solely to an ethnic group. The escalation of ethnic conflicts in the post-colonial period led to the breakdown of the First Republic and the subsequent entry of the military into politics. The military in order to subdue the pathology of ethnicity rife within the party structure implemented a series of regimentative party reforms. Nonetheless despite these reforms by the military the germ of ethnicity within the body politic continues to escalate. It is thus in the light of the foregoing that this paper appraises the rise of ethnic politics in Nigeria and its implication for national political and economic safety.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflicts, political parties

Introduction

Edmund Burke in what is today commonly ascribed to as one of the oldest definitions of political parties saw a political party as a ‘body of men, united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principles (or ideology) in which they are all agreed’ (Ojo, 2006: 65). Although this definition is defective, in that it fails to address the main objective of a political party i.e. the capturing of political power, it nonetheless highlights the other attributes of a political party such as interest aggregation and a shared ideology (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008: 130). In recent times, political parties have been variously defined as; ‘an organisation concerned with the expression of popular preferences and contesting control of the policy making officers of

government' (Rose, 1978); and as an organisation whose goal is to capture public office in electoral competition. For MacIver, a political party 'is an association organized in support of some principle or policy which by constitutional means it endeavours to make the determinant of government' (MacIver, 1964: 396).

Political parties are a fairly recent development. Indeed, the political party as we know it today surfaced only in the 18th century, but rapidly gathered pace with the electoral reforms in England in 1832 (Lapalombara and Weiner, 1972: 71). However, before they came to be fully accepted as an indispensable part of the political system, political parties or their semblances had once been maligned and highly suspected for the perceived factionalism inherent in them, which they invariably fostered on the polity:

Let me warn you in the most solemn manner against the spirit of party. There is an opinion that parties in free countries are useful checks and serve to keep alive the spirit of liberty. This within certain limits is probably true. But in a government purely elective it is a spirit not to be encouraged [George Washington's farewell address in 1796] (Sartori, 1976).

For Washington, the proliferation of political parties could also lead to the 'unjust dominion' of the polity by 'unprincipled men' (History Today, 2012: 42). Nevertheless, despite the trepidation, cynicism and pessimism that heralded the advent of the political party, the fad of condensing into differing ideology by party membership had caught on. The party persisted, and in fact bloomed and flourished, even at the very period when the wary George Washington was issuing his final warnings against it as shown in the preceding remarks. Thus by the 1790s political parties, although not in the form we presently know them, but with substantial following and structure, were already making their presence felt. Noteworthy were the Federalist 'party' led by Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, and the Republican party of Jefferson and Madison (Ojo, 2006: 65).

Today, the political party has been accepted as an indispensable part of the political system. There are three theories pertaining to their origin; the Institutional theory which focuses on the interrelationship between early parliaments and the rise of political parties; the Historical situation theories which analyse the problems the systems may have encountered during its development, and finally the Developmental theories that link the parties to modernization (Ojo, 2006: 65).

It is the modernisation objective of the political party which interests us because traditionally, political parties have spearheaded developmental initiatives either in democratic or authoritarian polities. They have embodied the aspirations of the mass of people in that they possess that ability

to detect and channel the energies of some of the soundest and energetic minds of a state. The Communist Party of the defunct Soviet Union which took Russia from semi feudal status into Space in less than a generation is the pungent example of the aggregative power of political parties. Yet political parties have also existed as pathogens within the physiognomy and physiological fibre and fabric of nation-states. A good example is the Nazi party in *ante-bellum* and wartime Germany. In Nigeria, political parties are almost as old as the country as we presently know it but rather than be the orchestrators of social change, economic prosperity, human index development they are the harbingers of strife, dissension and anarchy engendered in the main through ardent adherence to ethnicism as a tool of statecraft and more importantly as a veritable tool of ethnic mobilization toward the attainment of state power. This paper is set to review the activities of political parties in this regard since independence.

Historical overview: early political party development in Nigeria

The early development of political parties in Africa nay Nigeria began with organization or congresses that were more or less devoted to fighting for the rights of the African in all British colonies. The People's Union (PU) for instance, formed by Obasa and Randle was at the vanguard of this struggle. It was formed to protest water rates and only lost political salience when it failed to achieve this aim (Olusanya, 2004: 553). There were also the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) which had been founded in 1897 in the Gold Coast to advocate for the rights of Africans to land. The Lagos Ancillary of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society was peopled with important personalities of the day like: Bishop James Johnson and J.P Jackson the editor of *Lagos Weekly Record* (Olusanya, 2004: 553). However, upon the resolution of the mundane issues that had brought these associations to life, emergent associations began to turn to other problems of society such as politics (Tordoff, 1984: 62).

A major party of that era in this mould was the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA). Founded in 1918 by Joseph Casely Hayford and Akinwande Savage, it actively agitated for constitutional reform in the Anglo West-African territories in order to allow for more African representation in the legislative councils (Oliver and Fage, 1962: 240). The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) formed in 1920 in Lagos by W.B Euba was also a vibrant party. However, it did not endure for long owing to the hostility of the local political class and the British colonists even its journal, the *Negro World*, was proscribed for its radicalism. Nevertheless,

despite its brief stay it succeeded in inspiring men like Ernest Sessi Ikoli, its first secretary and Nnamdi Azikiwe. On Garveyism, Azikiwe had noted that the slogan: ‘One God, One Aim, One Destiny’ made him to orientate his life’s pursuit towards ‘Universal Fatherhood, Universal Brotherhood and Universal Happiness’. This may account for one of the reasons why Azikiwe’s politics was geared towards national unity at its initial stages (Olusanya, 2004: 554). A major feature that distinguished these associations from the post 2nd World War political parties was that they did their utmost not to annoy the British in their political activities. In this regard, Casely Hayford took great pains to state, for the benefit of the colonial masters, that: ‘our interests as a people are identical with those of the empire’ (Tordoff, 1984: 63).

After many years of resisting the demands for the implementation of the elective principle due to what the colonialists termed as the political immaturity of the colonies, it was finally introduced for the first time in the Clifford’s Constitution of 1922 with Nigeria being the first country to have the elective principle in West Africa (Olusanya, 2004: 519). For election into the Nigerian Legislative Council, the constitution extended voting franchise only to Lagos and Calabar (Ojo, 2006: 65). Prior to this events however, a Legislative Council had been established in Lagos purely in an advisory capacity and solely for the Southern part of Nigeria. Two years later, in 1916 the Nigerian Council was set up to legislate for the whole country, however that was more of an intention than reality for, save for the Lieutenant-Governor and a sprinkling of Northern residents, the North lacked any kind of real representation in this Council. The 1922 Legislative Council merely returned the country to *status quo* as it was forbidden from discussing any bills on the North without the authorization of the Governor. Thus isolated politically, the North was kept removed from all those influences which shaped the political attitudes of Southern politicians (Dudley, 1968: 18). Under this colonial ideological cordon deliberately thrown around it, the North inevitably grew:

More conservative, suspicious, and resistant to western forms of education as well as to other forms of universalistic religions...thus the British were responsible for the South/North dichotomy that led to differential modernization (Otite, 1990: 10,96).

This geographical anomaly orchestrated by the British was to have a profound effect on political party formation several years later

The Advent of Modern Political Parties in Nigeria

The development of modern political parties in Nigeria really took off in the early 1920s with the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923 to take advantage of the elective principle introduced by the Clifford Constitution of 1922. The NNPD's achievements were largely due to the political stature of Herbert Macaulay, a grandson of Bishop Ajayi Crowther, and a truly great nationalist leader:

Indeed, no other Nigerian leader had attained his stature in the Nigerian society. People came on pilgrimage to his home from all parts of the country... for instance, the Royal House of Buguma in their letter to him addressed him as "Moses of our Age", while Prince Adeniga, the Osemawe elect of Ondo declared: "your interest in the whole of Nigeria irrespective of dialect-and your ability to express the views of the natives to the government at all times is well known to all Nigerians" (Olusanya, 1980:558).

Though Macaulay was truly a nationalist committed to the political welfare of the whole country, by the turn of the decade the political momentum passed from him. In 1934, the glorious political reign of the NNDP was brought to an end by the National Youth Movement (NYM). The radical National Youth Movement (NYM) had metamorphosed from the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) and had young dynamic and resourceful men like H.O Davis, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Vaughan, Kofo Abayomi and Obafemi Awolowo, who had all newly arrived from overseas, at its vanguard. The LYM had first emerged as a pressure group to challenge the educational policies and prejudices of the colonial government (Ojo, 2006: 65), and was largely led by the Lagos intelligentsia who had been indignant about the 'diversion of talent from liberal arts to vocational studies' (Nnoli, 1995: 20). Despite the popularity that attended its emergence the NYM did not, like its erstwhile illustrious rival, the NNDP, extend its influence beyond Lagos and Ibadan. But this shortcoming has been attributed by Olusanya (1980: 559) to the bitter antagonisms shown it by the British and the Emirs acting under the influence of their British handlers. This hostility notwithstanding, he notes however, that an active branch of the party sprung up in Jos with active members like Jumare who was later relieved from his post for joining the NYM. The appearance of the NYM brought Nigeria to the threshold of a new era, the arrival of what Ujo (2000) has termed the second generation political parties.

This era began effectively in August 1944 with the formation of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), an Association or Congress of groups – over 180 in 1945 – which included tribal unions, professional associations, social and literary clubs (Tordoff, 1984: 63; Olusanya, 2004:560). It was formed on the initiative of the King's college branch of the National

Union of Nigerian Students with Herbert Macaulay as President and Azikiwe as Secretary. It was later renamed the National Council of Nigerian Citizens after the Cameroons broke away in 1959 (Olusanya, 2004). The NNDP joined it but the NYM, a consequence of the political quarrel between Ikoli and Azikiwe, which had forced the latter to withdraw from the party with his supporters who were mainly Igbo in 1944, had remained aloof (A.A Ujo, 2000). Little was it known then that, with that withdrawal, the first seeds of ethnicity had been consecrated and sown in Nigerian politics.

In brief; the imbroglio had started when Kofo Abayomi, a representative in the legislative council, resigned and went to the U.K for further studies. Two members were nominated for the seats; Ernest Ikoli and Samuel Akinsanya. The one supported by Awolowo, the other by Azikiwe. Ikoli finally emerged victorious and Azikiwe and all the Igbo members of the organization withdrew in consternation from the party. Olusanya (2004) posits that this mass withdrawal provided serious food for thought to other ethnic groups who reasoned that if the Igbos kept closing ranks on major political issues it would not be long before they dominated politics and thus the rest of the country. The consequent failure of the NYM left a gaping political void which checkmated the nationalist drive everywhere in the country and deeply disturbed the political observers of the day (Olusanya, 2004: 562).

Herein according to Olusanya, lay one of the factors that led to the formation of the Action Group in 1950 and thus the early infantile steps taken by ethnicity in Nigeria. We will now begin a study of the debilitating spread of ethnicity in Nigerian politics, but first we must turn to the varying academic postulations on ethnicity itself.

Ethnicity: Conceptual Analysis

Analysts and writers on the subject of ethnicity are divided into varying schools of thought on the subject: essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and institutionalism (Varshney, 2002). The one, which is the earliest of the four, refers to the thesis of primordialism, i.e. that ethnic identities are unchanging. It also posits that ethnic identities date back into the past. The other postulates that ethnic differences are manipulated by ambitious individuals for the appeasement of their self interests. The third seeks to explore the origins of ethnic groups and has linked this identity 'construction' or 'invention' to the activities of colonialists, missionaries, etc. It also restates the historicity and fluidity of ethnic identities. Finally, the institutionalist notes the pivotal role of

political institutions and policies in the shaping of ethnic relations. Almost all definitions on ethnicity fall into one or the other of these approaches and some scholars may even combine more than one in their analysis.

The modernization theory, for instance, following essentialist philosophy, suggests that conflicts in developing societies were caused by the simple reason that the peoples who formed these societies were from varying cultures that had dwelled in mutual antagonism for ages before the advent of colonialism. Thus, modernization theorists advocated concepts such as charismatic leadership and western education as instruments that could enhance integration, however, unfortunately rather than reducing the salience of ethnicity they seemed to have heightened it (Ukiwo, 2005:12). For instance, the vast improvement in education has not been able to stem the tendencies of ethnicity for it seems as K.O Dike, first Vice-Chancellor of University of Lagos and a respected historian, had pungently noted that ‘the higher the level of western education, the greater the sophistry or even crudeness in the practice of ethnicity’ and concluded that ‘the educated Nigerian is the worst peddler of tribalism’ (Horowitz, 1985:225).

Otite (1990: 17-19) defined ethnic groups as categories of people characterized by cultural criteria of symbols including language, value systems and normative behaviour whose members’ are anchored in a particular part of the new state territory’. In addition, Otite sees ethnic groups as containing an element of core-territoriality, culture, interaction with other social groups and exclusiveness sustained by myths, common historical experience and most essentially, symbolism. Symbols are particularly important to ethnic groups because they are susceptible to manipulation and ‘evoke sentiments and emotions, and impel men to action’ (Cohen, 1974: ix). Otite (1990:19) has averred that because symbols are shared and often highly charged they constitute a viable resource in the struggle over scarce political and economic benefits in the state system. Thus:

symbolism is effective in ethnic conflict, because it clothes ethnic claims in ideas and associations that have acknowledged moral force beyond the particular conflict, thereby masking something that would otherwise be controversial (Horowitz, 1985: 218).

In the struggle for power during the First Republic, the political parties ‘overtly used emotive ethnic symbols and played on the purported ethnic antagonisms in their appeals for mass support’ in the process fanning embers of ethnic discord (Orji, 2009: 22). In the same vein, Leo Kuper and M.G Smith who developed the ethnic pluralism model – in contrast to that of cultural pluralism

(which is more aligned to issues of race) notes that conflict among African ethnic groups is as a result of the jostle for limited scarce resources (Kuper and Smith, 1969).

Ethnic pluralism or cultural diversity is not peculiar to Nigeria and is in itself of little or no sociological consequences especially if the distinguishing characteristics in an ethnically plural state are left un-mobilized, which is very rare, either because of lack of incentives to do so or the presence of an external threat which automatically unites all the contending factions. When in this state of inertia, such a group is only in hibernation to be awoken when conditions are right (Otite, 1990: 66); that is, when the properties of pluralism have been manipulated by an elite in the struggle for resources or power. When this occurs we are faced with the social phenomenon called ethnicity (Otite 1983). In examining the crises in the Niger-Delta it was observed by two researchers that:

In virtually all the conflicts, the role of ethnic entrepreneurs who mobilize ethnic grievances in pursuit of their material interests has been decisive. Politicians, businessmen and youth leaders have been implicated in virtually all the conflicts. And usually the aim has been to mobilize ethnic grievances to achieve personal individual objects, which are sometimes even subversive of collective communal interests (Isumonah and Gaskia 2001: 74).

Thus, it is evident according to Ukiwo (2005: 8) that were it not for the socially disruptive activities of these ethnic entrepreneurs, ordinary Nigerians do not really set much store by each other's origins.

Studies on the First Republic have corroborated the instrumentalist viewpoint that, 'ethnicity was a weapon adopted and perfected by regionally based elites in their struggle to acquire state power and the wealth it guarantees'(Ukiwo, 2005 :8). Indeed, the potency of the elite in arousing the political fervour of the masses can be seen in the ability of Bornu's political and traditional elite to stem the anti-Igbo riots from spreading to the Bornu area by openly speaking out against it. The main criticism against this approach is that it is a top down approach which is built on the assumption that the public acts largely on the prodding of the elite. It conveniently ignores the 'convergence of elite-mass interests for political action neither does it acknowledge the possibility of the masses manipulating the elite' itself (Ukiwo, 2005:8). Indeed, Dent's (1971) revealing study of the immediate period leading up to the civil war in Nigeria showed that the Northern rank and file practically forced their superior officers to prosecute the counter-coup. Thus, it would appear

that elites only respond to the wishes of the masses through ethnic politics which was made even more necessary when moderate politicians continually lose out to ethnic politicians, entrepreneurs and extremists (Horowitz, 1998: 9).

Otite's (1990: 60) view of ethnicity takes some points into cognizance such as; the manipulation indulged in by actors either internal or external over the contest for resources; the unstable relationships between ethnic groups and loyalty to ethnic groups. Thus, he defined ethnicity as 'the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated systems of cultural symbols'. Anugwom, on her part, defined ethnicity as having arisen when a group distinct from its neighbours realizes these differences and carefully manipulates these distinctions for group cohesion. For her:

In other words, Scio-cultural consciousness of oneness develops and forms the basis of interaction with and participation in other socio-cultural processes, especially in power and resource allocation, within a larger social group or state (Anugwom, 2000: 64).

Chazan *et al* (1999: 108) sees ethnicity as a:

subjective perception of common origins, historical memories, ties and aspiration; ethnic group pertains to organized activities by persons linked by a consciousness of a special identity, who jointly seek to maximize their corporate political, economic and social interests'...which involves the 'combined remembrances of past experience.

Sometimes, ethnic identity may be inadvertently created through a series of unwitting actions; as for instance when the Belgian colonists lumped together two distinct tribes in the Belgian Congo and referred to it as Ngala or in Rwanda where the Tutsi engineered- repressions of 1972, motivated an otherwise organizationally distinct Hutu to begin to forge common ties. This process is referred to as 'enforced ethnicity' (Chazan, 1999:109), and would fall under the Constructivism approach discussed earlier. Many writers are agreed that ethnicity is a fairly recent social phenomenon in Africa (Otite 1990; Nnoli 1978, 1995). Nnoli (1995) largely inspired by the Marxian class dependency movement, posits that ethnicity was orchestrated largely by the antics of colonialism and had noted in '*Ethnic Politics in Nigeria (1978)*', the first detailed attempt to try and understand the dynamics of ethnicity in all spheres of Nigerian social life. For Nnoli, colonialism has had severe social implications for African societies. In the days preceding colonialism each of the subunits of an ethnic group had been a political system on its own,

consequently relations between any two constituted international relations. However, with the appearance of a colonial power, the disparate groups were condensed under a single political authority such as *Pax Britannica*.

The convergence of political parties and ethnicity in Nigeria

Using the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) as his veritable vehicle, aided by his fluency in the languages of the dominant ethnic groups of Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba and ably abetted by his journalistic enterprises, Azikiwe had been everywhere successful in his political mobilization ambitions. Between 1944 and 1951, Azikiwe and the NCNC would go on to dominate the politics of Nigeria with membership cutting across all groups even including the articulate section of the Yoruba population (Olusanya, 2004: 566; Akinola 2012). Its total national acceptance was the reason why it was able to organize a financially, successful country-wide tour to fund a delegation to protest the Arthur Richard's Constitution in 1947 (Olusanya, 2004: 528). One of the three major Second generation parties, others are the Action Group and the Northern Peoples Congress, the NCNC was formed on August 1944 resulting from the coalesce of over 180 associations like tribal unions, professional associations and social and literary clubs (Ujo, 2000: 21 ; Dudley, 1968: 63). Initially referred to as the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, it was later renamed the National Council of Nigerian Citizens when the Cameroons broke away several years later in 1959. By 1951 when the Council began to admit members on individual basis, it transformed itself from a congress to a political party (Dudley, 1968: 63). Although it was at first nationalist in political temperament and won support in the Middle-Belt, it was unable to fully penetrate the core North 'and when Azikiwe became premier [of the Eastern Region] it sealed its fate as a regional party' (Dudley, 1968: 64).

However, regionalism had been forced on the NCNC by the political antics of its rivals especially the Action Group (Olusanya, 2004). Confronted by the sharp ethnic practices of the A.G in the West, the NCNC withdrew from its vaunted ideals and soon became an ethnic party as competitive election developed and there was a need for the party to have a strong base. Thus, from the national party it was purported to be it gradually became an Igbo dominated party (Ujo, 2000: 21). Thus 'While the A.G and the N.P.C were born with ethno-regionalist philosophy, the NCNC moved from its initial nationalist ideological position to full ethno-regionalist stance' (Orji 2009: 22).

Thus, Azikiwe's overwhelming political success especially among the Igbos, in confirmation of the earlier assertion that ethnicity affords a sure way of mobilization, confounded his political rivals from other ethnic groups and caused them to launch their own ethnic mobilization drive (Ukiwo, 2005: 6). By the late 1940s the NCNC was being bogged down by the fact that it was more of an unwieldy 'national front' than a cohesive and efficiently managed political party (Olusanya, 2004: 566). Thus, it was due to the NCNC's political dormancy (Olusanya, 2004: 566), but more importantly it was to torpedo the likelihood of the NCNC becoming a pan-ethnic party that the Yorubas to the West converted the hitherto cultural organization 'Egbe Omo Oduduwa' (Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa) – a pan Yoruba cultural group which was formed in 1949 – into the Action Group (AG) a political party dedicated solely to Yoruba nationalism:

Thus, the AG became the first party of Nigerian nationalism to be inspired by, founded on and nourished by ethnicity. For the first time, a nationalist group, desirous of wresting power from the colonialists, explicitly associated itself with the destiny of one ethnic group, considering itself to be merely the political wing of that ethnic group's cultural association (Nnoli, 1995: 67).

It based its appeal for mass support explicitly and implicitly on ethnic sentiments and interests. According to Awolowo, the AG had been formed primarily to meet the political needs of the Yorubas first before attending to the rest of the country (Olusanya, 2004: 566). This is highlighted by a statement at the founding meeting of the AG: 'We should ensure that the Yorubas were first strongly organized then the Benins and other non-Yorubas could be drawn in later' (Sklar, 1963: 104). In other words this was a call for the consolidation of the 'base' in the Western Region. It had developed this plank at the 1950 Constitutional Conference where out of the three major groups, the Yoruba seemed to be the only one lacking cohesion:

Awolowo considered that the performance of the Yoruba at the Regional and General conferences to review the Richards Constitution had shown that they were unorganized and lacked both a concerted programme and effective leadership. The primary function of the AG was, therefore, to provide that much-needed leadership (Anifowose, 1982: 176).

Although by 1953 the NCNC still held a bridgehead in Yoruba land largely attributable to the traditional factious nature of Yoruba politics, the political initiative as had most of its strongholds of political support in Yoruba land, had passed from it to the AG. Seeking to strangle its nationally, politically illustrious but ethnically naive rivals, the AG now wilfully deployed all

manner of extremist ethnic tool; such as its clarion call for political vigilance in the West so that the region would not be excluded in the post-colonial scheme of things (Nnoli, 1995: 67).

The big tomorrow (for the Yoruba) is the future of our children...how they will hold their own among other tribes of Nigeria...How the Yorubas will not be relegated to the background in the future (Anifowose, 1982: 37).

In seeking to attain this end:

the AG made no secret of the fact that it was a regional party...and its unrelenting advocacy of a federal form of government for the country helped to label it as a Yoruba party and it has often accused of ushering into Nigerian politics an era of ethnic nationalism (Olusanya, 2004: 566).

It was in summarizing these primordial intrigues and posturing of the AG that the eminent Caribbean sociologist, Patrick Wilmot (2007: 4) fully laid the blame for the ethnicization of politics in Nigeria firmly at the door steps of Obafemi Awolowo.

Fortunately, though for Awolowo, the political developments of the age had run *parri passu* with his grand scheme for wresting the Western region from his great political foe – Nnamdi Azikiwe. For one, the regionalization of the country in 1947 and 1951 by Arthur Richards and John Macpherson respectively was a boom to the AG, which had correctly deduced that the only way to power was *via* a regional party (Otite, 1990: 11; 1980: 534). Thus, the main plank in its electioneering was opposition to Azikiwe who appeared to be the AG's most formidable opponent. He was vilified by the AG as being intent on appropriating the West's cocoa wealth for the benefit of the 'poor naked savages' of his home origin, the Eastern Region (Nnoli, 1995:69). It was such ethnic antics and extremist propaganda that prevented the NCNC leader, Azikiwe, from being elected to the central legislature from the Western region where he was representing a constituency. The AG had achieved this through the wilful manipulation of the 1951 Macpherson Constitution which had called for the selection of federal legislators and ministers from the regional Houses, a clause that had allowed the AG the opportunity to deploy its majority in the Western House to prevent the election of Azikiwe to the central legislature (Olusanya, 2004: 534). Correctly, surmising the depth of ethnic ill-feeling against him in the Western region and the evident concentration of his main political rivals on the mobilization of their own ethnic groups, the erstwhile nationalist quickly did a rapid political *volte-face*. The NCNC renounced its congress status and began to admit on individual basis shortly after the formation of the AG (Olusanya,

2004: 566), while Azikiwe resigned his mandate in the Western House of Assembly and retreated, under severe ethnic fire, to his home region (Nnoli, 1995: 69). However, it must be noted that for all Azikiwe's nationalist posturing, he never fully disassociated himself from the Igbo;

during this same period, the Ibo Union (Lagos) was one of the most active member organisations supporting the NCNC; and the provincial branches of the Ibo federal Union often took the initiative in organizing the reception of the NCNC delegation during its famous tour of the country in 1946. It was this apparently close alliance between the Pan-Ibo movement and the NCNC Pan-Nigerian movement which alarmed the leaders of other nationalities, who saw what they suspected to be a growing threat of Ibo domination (Coleman, 1958: 341)

To worsen matters, he persisted in annoying other nationalist leaders with the reports in his newspaper (West African Pilot). In December 1949 at the Ibo State conference, Dr. Azikiwe burnt his boats forever when he openly declared that:

...it would appear that the God of Africa has specifically created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages...The martial prowess of the Ibo nation at all stages of human history has enabled them not only to conquer others but also to adapt themselves to the role of preserver...The Ibo nation cannot shirk its responsibility (Coleman, 1958: 347).

Thus even though it had been said of Azikiwe by his friends and supporters that he was not a conscious tribalist "yet his objectives, his methods, and his ambitions" acted contrarily to his nationalistic inclination (Coleman, 1958: 343).

Meanwhile, at about the same time in Northern Nigeria in 1951, a little known cultural organization the 'Jamiya Mutanen Arewa' (Northern People's Congress) had quietly transformed itself in like manner from a cultural group created in 1949 to a political party called the Northern People's Congress (NPC) (Nnoli, 1995: 67). According to Dudley (1968), it was the advent of the Macpherson Constitution with its full regionalization of the country that speeded up the formation of a region wide party in the North. He further averred that the NCNC tour of the Northern region from April 23 to June 5 1946, to sensitize the North on the political dangers of, and mobilize forces against the, Richards' Constitution had awoken a relatively, politically dour North to the political realities of the age. Things had however begun to change in the North in the 1920s with the appearance of a major college which drew students from all parts of the Northern protectorate. The 'ethno-regionalist orientation of the AG and the NCNC' (Orji, 2008: 184), coupled with the

constitutional development of the 50s, which called for the rise of political parties, only gave added impetus and urgency to this change (Abubarkar, 1980: 479).

With the slogan of “One North, One People, One Destiny irrespective of religion, rank or tribe” the NPC ‘was formed for Northerners and by Northerners for the pursuit of objectives limited to the North’ (Nnoli, 1995: 67). It has been written, and said of the NPC, that unlike the parties of the South ‘it is merely a political expression for an existing system of administration dyed in religion and innate traditions’ (Dudley, 1968: 116). The propaganda it spewed was so far reaching and successful that for many years afterwards it was believed by the South that the North, which is ethnically more heterogenous than the South, was all Hausa in outlook or a homogenous unit. Thus, in its drive to recruit Northerners behind its banner, the NPC made robust and unpretentious use of the fear of domination which it unashamedly propagated in the minds of the people (Nnoli, 1995: 68).

The NPC was formed to ensure that the inevitable movement for self-government in the North would be led by moderate Northerners rather than radical Southerners, who were feared by the traditional and educated elites of the North as a potentially oppressive alien power (Anifowose, 1982: 47).

In the Middle Belt area, growth of parties was inspired mainly by the common resentment against the Hausa-Fulani (Dudley, 1968: 9). The Middle Zone League (MZL) was formed in 1951 to counter the expansion of Islam in the middle belt. By 1953, much to the consternation of the progressives within the party, it went into an alliance with the old enemy – the conservative NPC. However, this alliance was justified by its proponents on two grounds; to minimize NPC tyranny towards non-NPC members in the North and to garner the experience necessary to run its own state when it eventually came to fruition (Dudley, 1968:94). Groups alienated by this merger like the Tiv Progressive Union (TPU) departed to form the Middle Belt Peoples Party in July 1953. Beginning with the 1954 federal elections, plans were already afoot to merge the MBPP and the MZL. However, it was not until June 1955 in Kafanchan that both parties finally merged to become the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). There and then it was agreed that the UMBC should not be affiliated to any other party and that those who were members of other political parties were to resign their membership of such associations at once (Dudley, 1968: 95). The UMBC would subsequently go on to clinch overwhelming victory in the 1959 federal elections, principally in all the 7 constituencies of Tiv-Land (Otite, 1990: 83). The birth of the UMBC, however, had arisen

great indignation in the mind of the NPC which saw in its formation, the steady and stealthily hand of ‘an ideology infused by the Christian missionaries against the expansion of the Muslims in Northern Nigeria’ (Dudley, 1968: 91), and derisively described them as ‘the pagan peoples with a pagan culture’ (Otite, 1990: 88). When the UMBC teamed up with the North’s mortal enemy to the South – Obafemi Awolowo – their worst fears were all but confirmed. Thus they (the UMBC-AG supporters in the Tiv division):

Were considered subversive because they had ‘sold themselves’ to an outsider- Chief Awolowo- an intruder into Northern life, who had no sympathetic understanding of the North and who wished to see its disintegration (Anifowose, 1982: 284).

Now we see that the politicization of ethnicity, which had raced apace with the appearance of the ethnic party – and the regionalization of politics and given a firm footing with the promulgation of the Macpherson constitution – was now all but complete. Thus,

With the formation of the AG and the NPC, ethnic nationalism and regional divisions triumphed over the forces of unity in Nigerian politics. From 1951 onwards the history of the nationalist movement was not a particularly edifying one. The cohesion of the nationalist front was gradually undermined as Igbo and Yoruba leaders manoeuvred for dominant positions within the organization ... eventually, rivalry between ethnic blocs in the South was politically submerged by the more profound clash of Southern interest with those of the emergent North (Olusanya, 2004: 568).

Effective by 1953, the three major political parties of the three major ethnic groups were entrenched in the three principal geographical regions of the country (Nnoli, 1995: 69), and;

the alignments that were to characterize Nigerian politics after independence had already solidified: The North against the South, East against West, and the minority groups in each region against their respective dominant communities. These splits have shaped the history of modern Nigeria (Rabushka and Sheple, 1972: 192).

It was the solidity of these alignments that allowed an NNDP Member of Parliament from the Western Region to boldly proclaim, amidst the political turbulence generated by the internecine struggle between the AG and the NNDP in the run up to the 1965 regional election, that:

If we must face the fact in this country, we must admit that if there is a regional election today in the North, it is the NPC that MUST win, in the Mid-West Region, it is the NCNC that MUST win. The NNDP is a legitimate and democratic Party...and it HAS to win the Regional election (Anifowose, 1982: 205).

Figure 1 Ethnic distribution of leaders of the First Republic parties (percentage of total)

Party	Igbo	Other Eastern Groups	Yoruba	Other Western Group	Hausa Fulani	Other Northern Group	Others
NPC			6.8		51.3	32.4	9.4
NCNC	49.3	9.9	26.7	5.6	2.8		5.6
AG	4.5	15.2	68.2	7.6	3.0		1.5

Sources: Sklar and Whitaker (1966: 612)

The Aftermath – the Race to the Bottom

The regionalists in the three major ethnic groups had successfully created the impressions that they were champions of their people and carefully linked the struggles and travails of their respective parties to the ambitions and future of the ethnic groups (Nnoli, 1995:84). The strategy adopted by the parties for electoral purposes included: mobilization of the ethnic homeland, reaching out to minority groups, elimination of opposition within their region and encouraging minority ethnic group agitation in rival regions and use of the apparatus of the federal government to siphon resources to the constitutionally ascendant regions for the war of attrition with other regions. Four reasons have been adduced for the emergence of the ethnic party. They are the growing intercourse among the ethnic units, the response of these ethnic units to external political stimuli, scarce national resources and the fact that the ethnic party lent itself to being the easiest form of political mobilization (Oтите, 1990: 89).

The first competitive elections among these ethnic parties in 1951 provided the first real opportunity for them to concretize their political support in their respective political bases. In their well-researched work on ethnicity '*Politics in Plural Societies (1972)*' Rabushka and Sheple has detailed the series of ethnically motivated actions that sunk the First Republic. Uwazurike in summarizing the First Republic parties noted that the:

Nigerian pattern (of party politics) has exhibited virtually the worst forms of an unstable democracy; most parties were narrowly based, tied to some 'great and unassailable' leader who tended to stamp the organization not with any grand ideological vision but his personal biases. Besides, each was ethnically based, mass-mobilizing, and confrontational in orientation (Uwazurike 1990: 65).

Government Intervention in Party Formation

All through the constitutional conferences held between 1940 and 1960, no attempt was made by the colonialists to remedy the debilitating effects of rabid ethnicity besmirching Nigerian politics especially through the political parties (Price, 1967; Nwabueze, 1982). The parties of that era were also neither formed nor funded by government and had little or no regulations guiding their formation and operations, so they felt themselves free to canvass for support through whatever mechanism they wished (Ujo, 2000: 22). However on the eve of the transition to the Second Republic, the military government gave serious thought to political party engineering. There were real feelings within the military hierarchy that ethnization of the political parties had caused the failure of the First Republic (Dudley, 1982). These feelings occasioned the passionate plea of General Murtala Mohammed to the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) members to apply themselves fully, and work out a formula on how Nigeria could evolve 'genuine and truly national political parties' (Oyovbaire, 1983: 22; 1987: 6). Thus it was clear to both the CDC and the military government that having played an ignoble role in the First Republic, the parties must be reined in, in the Second Republic (Ujo, 2000: 46).

The first attempt toward streamlining the parties was more of intent than reality. The proposed Nine-Point Programme of the Gowon administration had called for the establishment of 'genuinely national political parties' (Panter-Brick, 1978: 15). However, by 1977 this intention became reality through Decree No. 73 which gave the then electoral agency, FEDECO, power to register political parties and determine the eligibility of candidates (Ujo, 2000: 46). Political parties ever since have followed strict guidelines such as; name and emblem of political parties being devoid of ethnic connotation and party headquarters in the federal capital and branch offices in at least 2/3 of the states (Ujo, 2000: 46). Broadly, attempts to curtail the emergence of ethnic parties can be categorized into three approaches regulation of political parties, changes in the electoral system and the top down approach to party formation (Orji, 2008). The one involved curtailment of the ethno-regionalist party through legislation (Philips, 1980; Whitaker, 1981; Sklar, 1981; Diamond, 1982). The other involved strategies such as the distribution requirement which mandates candidates to garner specified support threshold at the state and local government level and the attempt by fiat to restrict the political space to just two parties (Orji, 2008). Thus Orji (2008: 43) and Ujo (2000: 43) were right when they noted that the various attempts to regulate the operation of political parties led to their 'nationalization' which made them to become 'quasi-formal institutions of government' respectively.

Political Party Activities in the Second Republic

In the Second Republic, out of the fifty-nine associations which contested for registration in the 1979 elections, only five were accredited by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO): NPN, NPP, GNPP, UPN and PRP (Oyediran, 1981). Despite the constitutional manipulations, all the parties had ethnic configurations (Joseph, 1981: 17). In short, they were re-modelled versions of the first republic parties (Otite 1990: 94). The NPN was an offshoot of the NPC and attracted its majority support from the Hausa-Fulani. The NPP drew its support from the Igbo, the UPN drew support from the Yoruba while the PRP and the GNPP were offshoot of the radical NEPU with a base in Kano state, and among the Kanuri ethnic group (Joseph, 1981: 92, 93; Otite, 1990: 97). Yet, despite this institutional failure, there was an infusion of national character in ‘them and the reduction of the dominance of 3 major tribes of Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba’ (Diamond, 1982).

The most nationally oriented of the parties was the NPN. Peopled by Southern and Northern conservatives and political heavy weights who were insistent on an equitable division of the ‘national cake’, the NPN manifesto avoided rhetoric such as social conflict but rather dwelt on development through national unity (Joseph 1978: 82). The profusion of so many political notables in one party had its draw back as party was often engaged in supremacy tussle. It was partly to mitigate the crises that engulfed the party in its early years, occasioned by the struggle among the ranking multi-ethnic brass, and also to further its nationalist plank that the zoning principle was introduced (Ujo, 2000: 27).

This was to achieve national integration and widen territorial spread.
This Socio-Political concept took into account the ethnic variables
that control the Nigerian social circumstances (Agboola, 1984: 49).

The country was broken into three zones for the purpose of sharing elective and party posts:

Figure 2 Distribution of National Offices in the NPN during the Second Republic

Zone	OFFICE
Old Northern Region	Presidential Candidate
Old Western Region	Chairman of the Party
Old Eastern Region	Vice-Presidential Candidate
Southern Minorities	Senate Presidency
Northern Minorities	Speaker of the House

In seeking the coalesce of the diverse ethno-regional interests of the country, the NPN had correctly judged that it would be difficult to garner the nationwide support necessary to rule Nigeria, without giving elites from various ethnic groups the opportunity to participate in the party's leadership. The NPN leadership further justified zoning as being in consonance with the constitution (Orji, 2008: 196; Joseph, 1991: 138).

Thus, the zoning principle adopted by the NPN called for the rotation of geo-ethnic occupiers of the party's national positions and flag bearers from one election to the next. Following this principle, all nominees for the 1979 presidential primaries were from the North; Shehu Shagari, Adamu Ciroma, Olusola Saraki, Maitama Sule, Iya Abubakar, Ibrahim Tahir and Joseph Tarka (Orji, 2009: 26). Had the second republic not being truncated, the South would have had its turn in 1987. By deploying the zoning principle, though informal and unconstitutional, the NPN was 'the only party to achieve a truly *national character* in the Second Republic' (Suberu, 1993: 47), which became a 'crucial factor in the electoral success of the NPN in the Second Republic' (Suberu and Diamond, 2002: 420).

After the untimely end of the Second Republic, attributable more to corruption than ethnic rivalry, the federal military government set up the Political Bureau to collate the views of Nigerians on the political future of the country. In its tour around the country to access these views, some prominent Nigerians had advocated the urgent adoption of zoning as a panacea to ethnic rivalry (Suberu, 1991). The Bureau rejected this position by noting as in 1979 that 'a constitutional provision for rotation...amounts to an acceptance of our inability to grow beyond ethnic or state loyalty' (FRN, 1987: 23). The Babangida regime agreed with this line of thought and preferred to tinker with the political party system.

As an advocate of the Top Down approach, the regime created two political parties; the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) which it hailed as having the 'potential for establishing a solid foundation for a stable and durable political system' (Nwosu, 1989). Even though these parties were able to force membership across ethnic lines in Nigeria's volatile political climate, these fourth generation parties were unnatural and highly regimented by government- as they were 'a product of a rigorous and careful analysis' (Ujo, 2000: 38, 53). Moreover there were serious misgivings about their ability to foist democracy from 'above'. As a noted scholar was to comment:

Extreme political engineering in Nigeria by a military junta is beginning to raise doubts about whether it can eventually lead to the creation of a stable and democratic political system (Joseph, 1990: 18).

During Babangida's elaborate transition, the setup of the parties consisted of a step-wise progression starting from the ward to the national level (Oyediran and Agbaje, 1991: 227). Anxious to muscle out ethnicity, the government provided funds and manifestoes and regulated their activities closely (Ujo, 2000: 41). Nonetheless, ethnicity and regionalism made a bold appearance and indeed assumed a starring role; the federal government's proscription of ethno-regional groupings notwithstanding (Suberu, 1993: 47). Unlike in 1979 when the NPN out of the five parties had deciphered the abilities of zoning in the country's ethnic conundrum, the situation was quite different now:

The two parties of the unfulfilled third Republic adopted even more elaborate zoning procedures. In the SDP, the presidential candidacy went to the southwest, the vice-president to the north-east, the national chairmanship of the party and the deputy senate president to the south-south, the senate presidency and the post of party publicity secretary to the north-central zone, the offices of the speaker of the House of Representatives and party treasure to the south-east and the posts of party secretary and deputy-speaker of the House of Representatives to the north-west. The rival NRC, for its part, zoned its presidential nomination to the far north, the vice-presidential candidacy to the former eastern region, the party chairmanship to the old western region and the post of party secretary to the north-central zone (Suberu and Diamond, 2002: 421).

The overwhelming though aborted victory of the SDP would appear to be a *prima facie* proof that its elaborate zoning mechanism was well received by a well ethnically tainted and ethnically immersed populace. Yet amidst this pyrrhic victory of SDP, the scourge of ethnicity reared up as viciously as ever. For the first time in Nigeria's history, a Southerner was poised for electoral victory in a general election made all the more impressive by the cross-cutting support 'across the ethnic, regional and religious boundaries that traditionally divided Nigeria' (Meredith, 2006: 396). Yet within days, that election was annulled for ethnic reasons which led to a tragic ethnic re-alignment of forces within the country as southerners fell for the southerner and northerners for the northerner (Mimiko 1995).

Under the dubious Abacha, transition guide lines regarding party registration was not only retained but broadened and made more stringent with the inclusion of novel regulations and the constitutionalization of the zoning principle (Suberu and Diamond, 2002). The Abdusalami

Abubakar regime promulgated a new guideline of his own requiring parties seeking registration to win 5 per cent of the votes in 24 states in the local elections (Ojo, 2000: 57). Despite this, and the inexplicable abrogation of the zoning principle from the constitution, ethnicity remained a key factor in political parties' ideological theorem and thus staged an informal powerful resurgence:

Rotational zoning resurfaced as an autonomous convention of party politics, rather than an explicit principle of constitutional stipulation with the emergence of the PDP, the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) because of the demand for power shift...all three parties zoned their presidential nomination and party chairmanship to the south and north respectively (Suberu and Diamond, 2002: 422).

Thus the two candidates for President in the February 1999 election were both Yorubas from the South-West, Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP and Olu Falae of the ANPP/AD alliance, who paired with vice-presidential candidates Abubakar Atiku (North-East) and Umaru Shinkafi (North-West) respectively. The return to democracy in 1999 or the advent of the Fourth Republic more or less took the country back to the Second Republic era.

Political Parties since the Advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999

In 1999 the PDP zoned the senate presidency to the South-East, the post of Speaker of House of Representatives to the North-West, the Deputy Senate Presidency to the North-East and the posts of Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives and Secretary to the Government to the South-South.

During the President's second term campaign, the South meanwhile, seeing an opportunity to rule for eight straight years rallied to the President's banner even from across party lines thus revealing the deep ethnic colouration of the parties. The AD which had disowned Obasanjo in 1999 now adopted him despite his past prodigality, remembering that as a Yoruba man he was 'using the South-West slot in Nigeria's rotational presidency' scheme (Tell, August 12 2002 p.18). In this regard, Bola Tinubu, the governor in Lagos, South-West Nigeria and a leading light in the AD, promised to deliver 5 million votes to the PDP president even as he also promised to simultaneously rout the PDP in the gubernatorial election in Lagos (Tell Jan. 20 2003 p.19). Eventually the PDP zoned the presidency to the South, and the primary became a straight fight between two Southerners, Obasanjo and Ekwueme with two Northern 'outsiders' (Tell, Jan. 13 2003 p.17). With the Northern elite largely keeping faith with him, Obasanjo handily won re-election and the PDP retained its old zoning formula. Thus, in the run up to the 2007 elections,

there was little or no rancour about which zone was to produce the president, the earlier gesture of the North towards power shift was sportily reciprocated by the South and all the major political parties dutifully fielded Northerners; the PDP was represented by Umaru Musa Yar'adua while the AC was represented by the erstwhile V.P Atiku Abubakar and Muhammudu Buhari represented the ANPP (Orji, 2008: 179).

The illness suffered by the late President Umaru Yar'adua, mid-way into his administration on November 2009 put not only the zoning principle, but the intensity of ethnicity within the political party structure into the dock of not only local but international scrutiny. The entire country almost grinded to standstill economically and politically as the elites of the various ethnic groups, split into the famous North/South dichotomy, differed vigorously over the right of succession of his Southern deputy, Goodluck Jonathan, to the presidency (The News, May 17; Nov. 15 2010). This split was exemplified majorly within the ruling PDP. Its Northern constituents, both in the executive and in the legislative, in which it held the majority arms of government rather very anxious that its term or in Nigerian lingo 'their turn' in office should not be usurped, rallied and railed vigorously against the succession of his deputy to the presidency. Even though political partisanship implies a sacred duty willingly assumed by its members on trust by the members of the polity, to maintain the happiness of the commonwealth, the individuals involved carelessly turned aside from this spiritual unction and chose instead to pursue parochial interest.

Thus, in the absence of a President and without enabling powers to the Vice-President, a motley group, made up of mainly Northerners, usurped power and the country began to drift dangerously (The News, Jan. 18 2010). The unwillingness of this cabal, led by the wife of the President, Hajia Turai, to orchestrate the transfer of power has been attributed mainly to the convention of rotation of power between North and South docked within the PDP (The News, Jan. 18 2000 p.21). Balarabe Musa, a former Governor of Kaduna state had been concerned that any crises in the PDP over the president's ambition could inspire a national upheaval as 'the balance of power in the country is in the PDP' (The News, Sept. 20 2010 p.22). It was to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. When the Boko Haram insurgency began in 2011, the late National Security Adviser Patrick Aziza attributed the crisis to the power struggle in the ruling PDP between the South and the North. Even before Jonathan declared his candidature for the presidential seat in the 2011 general polls, which had originally been zoned to the North, the North almost over-reached itself in offering up

eloquent arguments why his candidacy was damned and an anathema because of its conflict with the ‘gentleman’s agreement’ reached in 1999. The tragedy for Nigeria was that party men within the ruling party rather than espousing the national ideal relapsed into primordialism thus sinking themselves and the nation to new lows. For Adamu Ciroma, former minister and Central Bank Governor, zoning was beyond ‘a gentlemanly agreement as its spirit was captured in Article 6 Section 2(3) of the PDP constitution’.

There was a meeting of the National caucus of the PDP in 2002 where it was decided that zoning should continue. Till today, the national caucus of the party has not met to review the decision on zoning of public offices within the party. Even if they have met, nobody can change the decision because it is in the party’s constitution (The News, Sept. 20 2010 p. 22).

The PDP itself had not helped matters as it decided to stick to an ambiguous policy of retaining ‘zoning as contained in its constitution, at the same time it gave room for Jonathan to contest’ (The News, Sept. 20 2010 p. 20). The fact that his major opponent was a northern Muslim, Muhammudu Buhari, also exacerbated an already volatile situation. Thus ably backed by his ethnic base both within and outside the party and abetted, albeit surreptitiously, by the party, Jonathan contested the elections. The intensity of the hate campaign and inflammatory speeches made by and on behalf of the candidates saw in the event of his eventual election victory the Northern section of Nigeria roil angrily for several days (The News, May 02 2011).

The 2015 general elections were attended by even more alarming level of ethnic jingoism more so that the candidates originated from the country’s traditional fault line – cultural, ethnic, religious, social. Given this equation, issues were bound to take the backseat while the candidates and their handlers concentrated on vile personal attacks and spurious allegations which heightened the political temperature within the polity. On the one side, Muhammudu Buhari was cast by the People’s Democratic Party as an ethnic warlord, a religious bigot and an unrepentant hater of southern culture and lifestyle. On the other side, the sitting president was characterised as having turned himself into a leader of the Ijaws and marginalised the north and other sections of the country. The ethnic diatribe by the opposing parties wound its way gradually into the press and electronic media (for instance PDP produced an advert in several newspapers in which they called the electoral body chairman Attahiru Jega ‘General Buhari Jega’ signalling ethnic connotations, Guardian Wednesday Feb. 18 2015). In these channels of communication, they produced severe

hate speech which worried the Human Rights Commission enough in the post-election period to call for an investigation and possible prosecutions. In the North, the severe ethnic mobilisations by the All Progressive Congress, (the rainbow coalition), was so great and total that the President was unable to peaceably campaign in that area. His convoy was attacked, his person abused, his campaign ground bombed (Guardian Thursday 12 2015).

Mercifully, despite the outcome of the elections the two individuals involved conducted themselves in statesmanlike fashion thus heartily confounding worldwide predictions of anarchy given the history of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The severe crisis Nigeria has suffered before and since independence has often originated from ethnic antagonisms from within the political party system. In the chase for power the politicians have often jettisoned all semblances of stately behaviour in preference for ethnic mobilisation which appears to offer easier access to state power; this nationally unavailing though electorally rewarding attitude has driven the country time and again to social precipice. The recent election saw ethnicism being expressed fully and robustly in electioneering. For many observers, it was as if the First Republic had come again. Despite its debilitating effect on national cohesion, the present and indeed past governments have appeared unruffled. This is because they have and continue to be beneficiaries of the rewards accruable from ethnic politics. Bereft of political parties, it is arguable if Nigeria would have ever faced any social crisis since most of these crisis appeared to be engineered within the party as part of a larger electoral gambit.

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