

FAULT LINES IN NIGERIA'S POLITICAL CULTURE: THE POLITICISATION OF ETHNICITY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

By

Mohammed Kwaire, Ph.D.

Department of Political Science
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
University Village, Jabi, Abuja
08065550424

Introduction

Scholarly works on politics in Nigeria unduly exaggerate ethnic factor in explaining political behaviour despite the ambiguity of the concept. Since ethnicity lacks a precise meaning, the social scientists that use it to analyze African Politics use it merely distort rather than expound reality. For instance, the ancient Greeks who were its earliest exponents defined it restrictively as a tribe or a nation, which suggests tribal homogeneity and a status of nation hood, despite the heterogeneity that characterises urban centers and most nations outside the Greek world. Herodotus the Greek historian explained its basic features as: shared descend;

language, religion and customs (Wikipedia), which constitutes its contemporary definition. Thus, the *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*¹ (2003:177), stated that “the only working general definition of ethnicity is that it involves the common consciousness of shared origins and traditions whether these are factual or invented’. But in Nigeria where inter-ethnic marriages and even ethnic assimilation have over the years blurred most of its basic features the use of such ethnic categories as Hausa, Yoruba, Fulani, Tiv in a restrictive and exclusivist sense is not only ahistorical but also a mystification of reality.

With regard to common descent for example, Usman² (1979:41-51) had explained that neither the Hausa nor the Fulani originated from a common ancestor, and with regard to the latter, one faction of the Fulani claimed descent from a common ancestor Uqba, whose four children gave rise to the Fulani clans, while the Bororo nomadic Fulani, claimed ancestry from water spirits. Similarly, the Yoruba did not descend from a common ancestor, Oduduwa because the Yoruba land was already populated by a number of chiefdoms headed by Kutukutu, Osangangan, Enewe, Opereti, Awurebe etc before his arrival to assert control over Obatala and his subjects living at Ile-Ife. Obayemi (1979:210). Akinjogbin and Ayandele (1980:123). The Igbo too lacked a common ancestry. Afigbo (1987:31-33) has pointed out that the Igbo not only originated from the Niger-Benue confluence but the peopling of the Igboland was a heterogeneous phenomenon involving other members of the Kwa group: the the Bini, the Efik, the

Igala, the Idoma etc. Therefore, it is more appropriate to see the ethnic labelling in territorial rather than in biological sense, and to explain pre-colonial political developments and modern politics in Nigeria historically and not anthropologically.

On language factor however, whatever utility it carries has been weakened by the existence of bilingual and multi-lingual ethnic groups. The Hausa-Fulani terminology is suggestive of that duality in which two linguistic groups compete for social space simultaneously, although the assimilative power of Hausa has caused Fulfulde to recede. Thus, whereas the Bororo Fulani are predominantly Fulfulde speaking, their settled counterparts have been bilingual: Hausa-Fulani. Similarly, there are many Yoruba and Igbo residents in Northern Nigeria who are bilingual yet there has not been the invention of hyphenated terminologies of “Hausa - Yoruba” or “Hausa – Igbo” because the politicians and the mass-media are not interested in such combinations which

run counter to the ethno-regional politics that has been entrenched for political manipulation. In the Niger-Benue Confluence and among border communities in Southern Nigeria, Afigbo (1987:85) had explained multilingualism among the Igala, Nupe, Ijo, and Efik, who the British colonial government recruited as warrant chiefs in Igboland. Moreover, in the Benue Valley trade ties between Hausa and Jukun dating back to the 15th century had resulted in to the immigration and settlement of Hausa traders, craftsmen and scholars (*Malams*), and inter-ethnic marriages that produced a bi-lingual Abakwariga offsprings who spoke more Jukun language than Hausa, but adopted Hausa dress and identity (Adamu:39). Similarly, Lugard, having observed how the incidence of inter-racial marriage and concubinage by the aristocratic Fulani blurred their purity compared to their pastoral Bororo counter parts, discredited the racial classification of Africans in favour of social organisation. Accordingly, he classified Nigerians into

three: primitive tribes mainly the peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria, and Central Nigeria; the advanced communities which consisted of Yoruba and Edo in Western Nigeria, and Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and Arabs in Northern Nigeria; and Europeanised Africans made up of descendents of liberated slaves in Lagos and Abeokuta. (Burns, 1978: 26-64)

Moreover, Temple (1965:399), (Lugard's Lieutenant-Governor for the Northern Provinces between 1914-1917), discovered in Sokoto, that the various Fulani clans had not only mixed up with all kinds of other natives, but that even a particular ethnic group had to be hyphenated with its geographical location to express its identity such as Fulani of Katsina or Hausa of Katsina,. Therefore, as Ade Ajayi (1984:6) warned, it is wrong to talk of the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri as tribes or ethnic groups since language being dynamic expands and integrates others in a common culture. In the same vein Ikime (1985) and Usman (1993) have plausibly argued that the Nigeria's

ethnic groups as paraded under British colonialism were 20th century inventions, despite Uzoigwe's (1996) counter assertion. With this etymological confusion therefore, how relevant is the concept of ethnicity in the study and understanding of the Nigerian political culture?

From the issues raised and discussed above, there is no ethnic politics in Nigeria but the politicisation of ethnicity. Scholars and journalists who interpret Nigeria's politics in ethnic purview failed to see the distinction between ethnic politics, and politicization of ethnicity. In the former, it refers to a situation in which an ethnic entity perceives itself as intrinsically and distinctively exclusive social group different from its neighbours. Although such distinctiveness had prevailed in the remote past, but over time urbanisation, trade, migrations, inter-ethnic marriages and the rise of multi-ethnic kingdoms and empires have continuously eroded the distinctiveness among Nigerians. In the latter case however, it refers to a

situation in which ethnic sentiment is extrinsically imposed on the electorate by the political elite to make them assume a distinctive ethnic identity. Having explained the distinction between the two expressions the other sections of the chapter will examine the anthropological genesis of ethnicity in Nigeria and how it served the British interests under colonialism, and how the nationalists and post-colonial politicians politicised it for their own interests.

Anthropology, Colonialism, and Ethnicity

As a direct consequence of Darwinian evolutionary biology and its taxonomic scheme, social anthropology grew up in order to classify humanity and then place them in rank order. The Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain was set up in 1843 with focus on physical anthropology which combined the knowledge of archaeology and linguistics in its classification of humanity into races based narrowly on physical features. Mair (1980:5-6)

The other branch of the social anthropology was pioneered in 1920's by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown with focus on primitive culture with a view to understanding how pre-industrial societies satisfied their needs through indigenous institutions. Kuper (1973:20). It was these social anthropologists who traded the idea that anthropology is a useful discipline in colonial administration and advised that those who work in the colonies should know something about the primitive peoples with whom they work. Kuper (1973:125).

Despite initial hesitation, the British government saw wisdom in the use of anthropological knowledge in colonial administration, Tamuno (1980:399). Since anthropological knowledge is not historical and focuses on primitive tribes without a "state" as Hegel had explained, and without "history" as Hugh Trevor roper had asserted, there was no need to scout for the historical knowledge of the colonized from within since it could be abstracted

from anthropology and spiced with corroborative oral traditions from the natives. To the colonial administrator, the most important value of such knowledge was not to understand the natives assumed to be a state of barbarity, but to maintain law and order against the onslaught of anti-colonial riots and revolts that could impede economic exploitation.

Unmindful of the conceptual ambiguity of "ethnicity", the British anthropologists popularized it through their works and provided the scientific basis for the existence of pure ethnic groups in Nigeria. And it was in order to preserve them that Indirect Rule, Sabon-Gari system, and ethno-regionalism were adopted which however promoted divisiveness that fitted in to the colonial divide and rule policy, but detrimental to national unity. Indirect Rule placed emphasis on the preservation and use of indigenous institutions in local administration. Consequently, the Iio, Efik, I gala and Nupe hitherto employed as warrant chiefs in Igbo land were

repatriated. Afigbo (1987:85). Similarly, Southern Nigeria was administratively separated from Northern Nigeria despite the 1914 Lugardian amalgamation, and the Richards constitutional unification in 1947. The idea was to separate Christian South from the Muslim North, and the 1939 split of the South into Eastern and Western regions was to provide for separate identities between the Igbo and Yoruba.

The Sabon-Gari residential policy credited to Lt. Governor, Temple (1914-1917) aimed at ensuring that native foreigners from Southern Nigeria are separated from indigenous folk in Northern Nigeria. Olusanya (1973:11), did not achieve the intended objective, because it disregarded pre-colonial inter-ethnic ties of trade, diplomacy, migrations etc. In the case of Sabon-Gari of Kano for instance, Bako (2006:6-7) had argued that it was heterogeneously composed of Nupe, Yoruba, Kanuri, Ghanians, native Kanawa, Muslims, and Christians. In fact, pre-colonial urbanization in Nigeria reflected

assemblages of heterogeneous ethnicities. In pre-colonial Kano city the ethnic and racial composition consisted of Hausa, Tuareg, Kanuri, Nupe, Arabs, etc collectively referred to as Kanawa as inter-ethnic marriages had eroded the earlier distinctiveness. Bako (2006:21-22) Also, the racial and ethnic groups were accommodated in the city unlike the colonial situation which encouraged native foreigners to reside within the Sabon-Gari, Bako (2006:22) where it was assumed their security could be guaranteed. In fact, ethnic residential separation in Africa preceded colonial urbanisation because in pre-colonial towns ethnic and occupational groups traditionally clustered together for different reasons. In the 11th century ancient Ghana, the king separated his court from the quarter where Muslim traders in gold were accommodated to pursue their religion freely in the mosques provided by the state. (Levtzion, 1971:120) Similarly, when Oduduwa and his companions arrived Ile-Ife they were lodged in strangers'

quarters of the town. (Akinjogbin and Ayandele, 1980:123). Moreover, when Usmanu Danfodiyo relocated to Sokoto from Sifawa in 1815, a separate quarter, the Sabon-Birni was built for him outside the old city. (Main, 1982:24) Thus what mattered in pre-colonial urban settlement was not physical segregation since inter-dependence usually unites the different ethnic groups socially which colonialism tried in vain to shatter. Perhaps it was in view of this that in Gwandu and Katsina, the Emirs resisted the colonial policy of ethnic segregation. (Nnoli, 1978:4)

Under colonial urbanisation traditional towns and cities expanded rapidly either due to administration or commerce, while new ones were established. The massive influx of immigrants into various towns to exploit the new opportunities triggered by colonial economy created severe competition for opportunities: wage labour, commerce, crime, prostitution etc which motivated ethnic cleavages. The competition for jobs or market share heightened ethnic cleavages such that the

full force of an ethnic group could be mobilized to surmount competition from rivals. Thus, in the Ibadan cattle market which the Hausa dealers and butches dominated, inter-ethnic conflicts between the Hausa and Yoruba broke out only when the latter entered as competitors in the 1930s. Nnoli (1978:72). Similarly, when the colonial government encouraged kola nut cultivation in Yoruba land many Hausa kolanut traders spread to Kolanut trading towns of Ibadan, Abeokuta, Shagamu, Ijebu, Lagos etc and formed the Kolanut Dealers Association of Nigeria with membership open to all ethnic groups. Conflict between the Hausa and the Yoruba producers did not break out until in 1930s when some Yoruba decided to participate in the business. Lovejoy (1980:116); Onakomaiya (1970:24-6); and Nnoli (1980:71)

Colonialism, Regionalism, and Ethnicity

The colonial regionalism is a direct product of ethnic segregationist policies

of the colonial state in Nigeria. The Richards Constitution of 1947 which sought to promote unity, and to provide for the diverse elements which make up the country established a Regional House of Assembly in each of the three regions in to which the country was divided, and a Council of Chiefs for the Northern and Western regions (Burns, 1978:251). From the provisions of the subsequent constitutions, it is quite clear that the Richards Constitution provided the territorial frame work on which they were all pivoted on a federalist trajectory. The 1951 Macpherson Constitution consolidated the inherited structure, but only changed the Central Legislative Council to House of Representatives to be filled by 136 elected members from the federation 38 members from North including chiefs; 34 from the West including three from the House of Chiefs; and 34 from the East. (Burns, 1978: 251) The Lyttelton Constitution 1954 provided for the greater regional autonomy in a federal arrangement, confirmed Lagos as the

federal capital and separated southern Cameroons from the Eastern Region. (Burns, 1978:252-3). According to Ekeh (2004:20-22) the 1954 constitutional change not only ended the ethnic autonomy hitherto enjoyed by the minorities, but ushered in the ethnic ascendancy of Hausa-Fulani in the North, Igbo in the East, and Yoruba in the West. Also, it provided the model on which the 1960 Constitution was structured, since it upheld the federation of Nigeria made up three units: Northern Region, Western Region, and Eastern Region. It provided for a Federal Senate consisting of 12 senators from each region and 4 from Lagos. Each region was made autonomous with an Executive Council, a House of Assembly and a House of chiefs. (Burns, 258-60)

The colonial state's propagation of ethnic differences found expression in party formation. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) formed in August 1944 was the first national front that shifted politics out of Lagos and assumed a national outlook. But as

Olusanya (1973:140) argued the, NCNC at its inception was not a political party but an amalgamation of divergent bodies (including the Igbo State Union formed in December 1948) aimed at maintaining a united front against British imperialism. But with The adoption of the 1951 Constitution based on regional autonomy, and the formation of Action Group (AG) as a political party in Western Region it gradually shrunk to a regional party championing the interests of its pan Igbo members.

With regard to AG, the movement for its creation began in 1945 when a group of Yoruba students (including Awolowo) who were studying in London formed a Yoruba organisation, which the Yoruba historian Biobaku named *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* to embrace all the Yoruba since Oduduwa was the progenitor of Yoruba. (Orugbani, 2005:168) In June 1948 it held its first inaugural conference at Ile-Ife. (Akinjogbin and Ayandele, 1980: 121); and (Coleman, 1963:344-6). At Owo in April 1951 the cultural association

transformed in to a political party as Action Group (AG), which according to Awolowo, was not a Yoruba party, but a Western Regional party formed in order to win Western Region elections. (Olusanya, 1973:142).

In the Northern Region, the implications of the 1948-51 political climate, led the Western educated elites and merchants in the region to inaugurate the *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa* in Kano in December 1949. In October 1951, the association transformed in to the Northern peoples' Congress (NPC) as a political party to win regional autonomy for the North. Unlike AG and NCNC which transformed in to political parties from ethnic bases the NPC relied on regional factor based on the parameters of religion and Sokoto Caliphate using its motto as "one North, one people, irrespective of religion, rank or tribe." (Olusanya, 1973:152). Also unlike the AG and NCNC which developed partly from Yoruba-Igbo ethnic antagonisms, the NPC nursed its antagonism against the Southern Nigerians collectively who

generally looked down upon the Northern Region's aristocracy as backward, conservative, and stooges of British imperialism, as Awolowo maintained. (Crowder, 1978:233)

However, not only the Southerners, but also Mallam Aminu Kano condemned the Northern Region's aristocracy as conservative, including the NPC which he left in 1950 to help in the development of Northern Elements Progressive Association (NEPA) which had been formed in Kano in December 1946. On Tuesday, 8th August, 1950, NEPA transformed in to a political party called Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). It provided a flat form in the North for class based radicalism, and a thorn to the NPC's hegemonic designs. It encouraged the Nigerians in the Middle Belt to rise against despotism, which partly unleashed ethnic nationalism among the Tiv and Igala. Abba (1993:13).

The colonial propagation of ethnic exclusiveness provided the Nigerian political elite with a powerful

tool to engage one another in competition for power either as an end in itself or as a means to self-enrichment which found expression in the formation of political associations and parties. In Kanem-Bornu, Waziri Ibrahim formed Bornu Youth Movement (BYM) to protect the interests of the Kanuri, and in Ilorin Talaka Parapo (ITP) sprang up to defend the interests of the Yoruba in Kabba and Ilorin. (Ngou, 1989:95); (Masajuwa, 2003:174). Alvan Ikoku formed the United National Party (UNIP) in 1951, while in 1953 Dr.Eyo Ita, Udo Udoma and Jaja Wachukwu formed the democratic party of Nigeria (DPN) etc

Although party formation drew upon ethnicity especially with regard to AG, and NCNC, there was no ethnic politics in the colonial period, but the politicisation of ethnicity. The 1941 Akinsanya – Ekoli conflict in the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) cited in defence of ethnic politics hypothesis (Aina, 2004:88) lacks confirmative evidence because Awolowo supported Ekoli who was an Ijo from the East

instead of Akinsanya who was a fellow Ijebu. It was only Azikiwe and Akinsanya who interpreted it as an ethnic gang up of the other Yoruba against an Ijebu fellow. (Orugbani, 2005:164) But how can Yoruba gang up against a fellow Yoruba of Ijebu be regarded as ethnic politics?

Similarly, Azikiwe's inability to win the premiership of the Western Region House of Assembly in 1951 was not due to the cross-carpeting of five NCNC members to AG (Orugbani,2005:183) or ethnic politics,(Ogbonnia,2003:92), but the prevailing circumstances. It could be recalled that the sway which NCNC enjoyed in the West was due to the absence of an alternative party until the formation of the AG in 1951 eroded its monopoly. Therefore, it was not the much popularised 'cross-carpeting' that stymied Azikiwe's bid for the premiership of Western Region, but the decision of Akinloye and his Ibadan Peoples party (IPP) to team up with AG instead of NCNC despite Azikiwe's

gesture to Akinloye. (*New watch*, 1995:17). In fact no ethnic group in Nigeria was as cohesive as the colonial anthropologists and ethnologists had envisaged. When the British arrived to Nigeria they met intra- ethnic and inter-ethnic nation building wars which were labelled as slave raiding to legitimise its imperial conquest. Commenting on lack of unity among the Yoruba, Crowder (1978:94) argued, if the three powerful rulers of Ikoyi, Gbogun, and Ago-Oja had united they would have stemmed the menace of the Sokoto Jihad forces, 'but they chose to make alliances where they saw the greatest opportunity of personal aggrandisement'. Accordingly, Azikiwe's gesture was perhaps not as palatable as that of Awolowo who successfully wooed Akinloye not on ethnic lure but material consideration. Yet, Achebe (1998:6), popularized the myth that it was Awolowo who prevented Azikiwe from leading the Western House of Assembly which the Igbo adults bequeath to later generations. (*The News*,2013:19).

Also, the outcome of the 1951 Western Region House of Assembly election did not support ethnic politics because despite the predominance of Yoruba in the region the NCNC captured 31 of the 80 seats or (39%) even after the cross-carpeting had caused the AG's seats to appreciate to 49 or (61%). Without the cross-carpeting AG's seats would have been 44 or (55%) compared to NCNC's 36 seats or (45%). Similarly, the in 1954 Federal Elections, ethnic factor did not count because whereas NPC and its allies captured 84 of the 90 seats in the North, the NCNC emerged victorious in the Eastern and Western regions having won 23 seats, compared to AG's 18. (Usman and Abba, 2013:44). Although the NCNC got most of its votes in the Midwest, the polls, argued Crowder (1978:237) showed that politics in Nigeria was not entirely ethnic based.

The voting behaviour in the 1959 elections also lacked ethnic considerations. A study by Bolaji Akinyemi quoted in Usman and Abba (2013:46) showed that in Northern

Region which had 174 federal constituencies the NPC had majority votes in only 57 constituencies. Similarly, Crowder (1978:265) had dismissed ethnic factor in the 1959 federal election because NCNC/NEPU alliance won 58 seats in the East, and 21 seats in the West compared to AG's 33 seats in the West and 14 seats in the East.

The Post-Colonial State and Ethnicity

The restructuring of Nigeria from three regions to 36 states by the military, and the dominance of oil in the national economy encouraged further propagation of ethnicity by the political elite. Nwokike (2003:123-4) drawing from works of B.J Dudley, S.K. Sklar, K.W.J. Post and Michael Vickers asserted that the 1979 political parties were not only reincarnation of the First Republic political parties (NPN from NPC; GNPP from BYM; NPP from NCNC; PRP from NEPU; and UPN from AG) but that the voting behaviours during elections were dictated ethnic considerations. Since it is not possible to delve in the arduous task

of analysing the ethnic composition of the parties, it suffices to use voting statistics to debunk the ethnic interpretation. According to Usman and Abba (2013:42-43) the fact that Shagari's victory in the 1979 Presidential election was consequent upon votes from Benue which gave him 76.38% of the votes; Niger, 74.88%; Rivers, 72.66 rather than his home base Sokoto which gave him 66.58% ruled out ethnic based voting as he won largely from votes of other ethnic groups. Similarly, Ollawa (1989:148) debunked the ethnic factor in the 1979 elections because voters changed parties during the elections and that a Kanuri party, the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) of Waziri Ibrahim captured 33% of the senatorial votes in Sokoto.

Although most of the first generation politicians who had politicised ethnicity had been silenced by death or old age when democracy was restored in 1999, retired Generals and surviving Second Republic politicians filled the vacuum in the continued

propagation of ethnicity. The three dominant political parties that contested 1999 elections are said to be ethnically formed. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) grew out of Group 34 formed by Alex Ekwueme, an Igbo and was supported by the Igbo; All People's Party (APP) is Hausa- Fulani; and Alliance for Democracy (AD) is Yoruba.(Masajuwa, 2003). But how can ethnic factor explain the PDP membership of Obasanjo, Shehu Shagari, Babangida and Danjuma who were from non-Igbo ethnic groups? Is it not more plausible to see PDP as the reincarnation of the former NPN as reflected in the coming together of Alex Ekwueme, Obasanjo, and Shehu Shagari, and the adoption of zoning principle in the sharing of political offices which emanated from NPN?. Moreover why did the PDP field Obasanjo, (Yoruba) as its Presidential candidate, and AD/APP coalition field Olu Falae as their Presidential candidate? Although Fwatshak (2009:18) posited that the parties fielded Yoruba candidates in order to compensate the Yoruba for the

injustice of June 12 in which Abiola's victory was squashed, the argument is not only ethnically tinged, but implausible as well. As Mohammed plausibly argued (1997:84-95), the June 12 election was neither democratic nor free and fair because Abiola, being a friend of General Babangida was an imposed candidate; that Abiola bribed the election officials and security personnel to ensure his victory over Tofa; that voter turnout was only 13.6 million compared to 16.8 million in the 1979 presidential election; and that there were no petitions because the results were annulled.

Why Ethnicity Matters in Nigerian Political Culture

To the British imperialists the justification for ethnicity lies in two motivations: first, to 'civilise' the barbaric natives through Westernisation; and secondly, to keep the colonised divided in order to stymie united resistance against colonial exploitation of land and labour. Undoubtedly, both had

been successfully achieved because Britain was able to anglicize Nigerians which entrenched the consumption of British goods and services in a secured and protected market with a guaranteed supply of cheap raw materials for her industries. Thus it was in order to achieve these motives that ethnicity was effectively propagated and utilized to segregate Nigerians and instil animosity between them as Oyovbaire (1983:248), argued that the colonial state's re-ordering of the pre-colonial arrangements around a strategy of mutual hostility to each other yet co-existing under British protection sowed the seed of ethnicity. But the persistence and tenacity of ethnicity in post-colonial Nigerian political culture stemmed from two factors: lack of ideology, and materialism.

The Absence of a National Ideology

Neither the colonial state, nor the post-colonial state came up with an ideology or a unifying idea that could serve as a melting pot for the heterogeneous peoples that make up Nigeria. Since the

motivation for the British colonialism was economic rather than nation building the cultivation of a unifying force other than that of the colonial state was not only undesirable but suicidal. A national ideology, whether foreign or indigenous, is very vital in nation building because it provides a rallying point for the convergence of the heterogeneous elements on one hand, and the state and society on the other hand. According to Graf (1979:43) a national ideology means:

“Ideas and principles that spell out the rationale for human existence, and form the basis of the organization of a nation in political, social, cultural and economic spheres.”

Whichever ideology a country adopts, the truth is that both capitalism and socialism could work and none is perfect. In the pre-capitalist United States for instance, the principles of religious freedom and equality provided the unifying ideology for heterogeneous Americans, but with entrenchment of

industrial capitalism a new ideology of individualism, competitive, and acquisitive spirit provided the unifying force.(Max Lerner,1957:624-5) Sadly, in Nigeria none of the constitutional and national conferences paid any attention to the importance of a national ideology to unify the country because the agendas that preoccupied the political and military elites have been true federalism, resource control, devolution of powers, ethnic marginalisation etc. The absence of a clearly articulated rallying point, not only entrenched the use of ethnicity, religion, and region or state in Nigeria’s political culture, but hindered the smooth working of federalism as the system is characterised by endless clamour for restructuring and secessionist threats among others.

On devolution of powers for instance, professor Akin Oyeboode is quoted to have suggested a conference of all ethnic groups to produce a legitimate constitution because of too much concentration of power in Abuja.(*Tell*, 2010:31). And on minorities, Dr.

Michael Vickers recent book *A Nation Betrayed*,(2010) posited that the Nigerian's minorities have been betrayed since Willinks Commission.(*New African*, 2010:15-17). In fact, Vickers is one of the Western intellectuals who worked in Nigeria and propagated the myth of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts among Nigerians. For example, in *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria: 1960-1966* (1973) which he co-authored with Post, the study focused on 'tribe' as the main conceptual framework on which the theme of ethnic conflict was discussed to explain how ethno-political tensions between the Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani derailed in to the civil war even though it was an elite conflict over the control of oil resources wrapped in ethnic cloth. But for Vickers:

Party rivalry between the Igbo... and Hausa-Fulaniproduced escalating tensions which grew to present... threat to the Nigerian political system. (1973:4)

Even the concept of 'minorities' has been disfigured from what it was in the time of Willinks in 1950s. According

to Adegbulu (2003:117) the populations of minorities had not only undergone some metamorphosis which had decreased their demography, but that they had more military heads of state than the dominant ethnic groups: Gowon (Angas), Babangida (Nupe), Abdulsalam Abubbakar (Nupe). For instance the Hausa culture has over time generated a social metamorphosis through which several non-Hausa ethnic groups have been Hausanised. In an answer to the question: who are the Hausa? Adamu (1978:2) answered:

Throughout history, the Hausa ethnic unit has shown itself as an assimilating ... entity and the ... language a colonising one to the extent that many people who were not originally Hausa and did not use the... language as their first language became Hausa through assimilation.

It is possible that over time the imperatives of commerce, migration and inter-ethnic marriage will lead to the Hausanisation of the Igbo, because according to UNESCO's prediction the Igbo language might be extinct in the

next 50 years. (*Nigerian Compass*, 2010:31)

Moreover, states creation has given some succour to many minorities, despite its politicisation to multiply opportunities for jobs and contracts to the political elite and their clients, since after each state creation the marginalised elite would induce their ethnic groups to yell out ethnic marginalisation and plea for a separate state or local government. Minorities problem is not peculiar to Nigeria because even in the United States there exist minorities: Jews, Chinese, Negroes, Mexicans etc who feel marginalized by the dominant whites, but instead of agitating for separate identity or creation of ethnic units, they adapted themselves and exploited the possibilities provided by individualism and competitive capitalism, one of which is voting in “blocks” to better their lots. (Max Lerner, 1957:501-514)

The Problem of Materialism

As the absence of a national ideology made the resort to ethnicity (supplemented with religion and region)

inevitable in political mobilisation, it also provided the means to political power for elite materialism in the sense of aggressive pursuit of wealth. According to Nduka (1979:99) “materialism” is the greatest legacy which the British colonial administration bequeathed to Nigeria because under colonial rule, the minority British officials being the epitome of Western materialism lived in segregated residential areas with higher salaries, domestic servants and luxurious standard of living, which majority of Nigerian educated elites envied and resented. According to Hopkins (1982:291) the discontent of the nationalists was not poverty but relative deprivation due to the mismatch between their Western consumption habits and their incomes. Therefore, the common denominator that united the nationalists was not the desire to build a nation-state but to agitate against exclusion which the adoption of Indirect Rule and white racism had entrenched. Moreover the external orientation of the Nigerian economy and

its domination by Western firms barred the emergent ruling elite from the direct ownership of the means of production so that the only vent for wealth accumulation lies in the state. The absence of national principles and ideas made ethnicity, regionalism and religion the only viable, but superficial substitutes to rally political solidarity in the struggle for independence. Through the propagation of ethnicity, region and religion some political sentiments were ignited among the urbanite as surrogates for the disconnected and politically dormant rural peasantry. The colonial masters having groomed and entrenched the political elites that they had tailored in British image handed over political power without bloodshed as Balewa, the Prime Minister acknowledged in October 1960: 'the great country...emerged without bitterness or bloodshed...' (Burns, 1978:340)

With independence achieved, the pursuit of wealth followed through corruption and exorbitant salaries and allowances. The first recorded incidence

of corruption was triggered by NCNC led administration in which Justice Forster-Sutton discovered the diversion of money from the coffers of Eastern Region Marketing Board to the African Continental Bank (ACB) in which Azikiwe, and his family had substantial shares. Similarly the Justice Coker Commission which probed the finances of AG in 1962 uncovered how public funds had been diverted to AG's accounts for use by party officials. Other First Republic politicians implicated in corruption charges included Joseph Tarka, Ibrahim Imam, Bisi Onabanjo, chief Osadebey, and Festus Okotie Eboh. But due to politicisation of ethnicity, the AG and NCNC politicians discredited the corruption charges against Awolowo and Azikiwe respectively without protest from their ethnic groups. Even Balewa absolved Okotie Eboh, his finance minister. *African Concord* (1986:13-14); and Clark (1993:659&817)

Failure to use greater part of public wealth in the empowerment of workers and peasantry for true nation building led

to the marginalisation of the electorate. There was gross social inequality as the lives of the rural dwellers and the urban poor deteriorated. (Hatch,1971:237). Imoudu, the labour leader, not only queried salary increases for the parliamentarians without regard to the plight of workers despite the marriage between the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and Balewa administration, but organised a general strike in 1964 to force Balewa to honour the Morgan's salary review for workers.(*News Watch*,1998:24). In fact, corruption by most of the politicians provided Major Nzeogwu and his colleagues with what to justify the 1966 coup to rid Nigeria of swindlers.

With return to democracy in 1979, the public were made to believe that the poor performance of the First Republic politicians was due to the British Westminster parliamentary system, and not poor governance. With the availability of oil money the ruling elites imposed the costly presidential system of the United States not for nation building

and development but more importantly to siphon more money from the public coffers. Under the guise of stamping out ethnic domination the military oligarchy embarked on new states creation which by the time General Abdulsalam Abubakar handed over to President Obasanjo totalled 36 states and 774 local governments, far beyond the capacity of the depressed oil economy to shoulder.

The Second Republic politicians like their First Republic counter parts maintained the status quo in high remunerations, and corruption made possible by the euphoria of oil boom. The ruling party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was scandalized over the disappearance of ₦2.8 billion in the accounts of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) which the Justice Irikife Tribunal set up by President Shagari was unable to uncover. Also contract, and import license policies were introduced to siphon money and reward NPN stalwarts and supporters. By the time General Buhari ousted the Second Republic in December 1983,

most of the politicians were implicated in corruption which included governors Jim Nwobodo, Abubakar Barde, Garba Nadama, Aper Aku etc. Other governors such as Bisi Onabanjo of Ogun State is said to have collected ₦2.8 million being his 10% kick back from Bouygues Ltd. (*News Watch*, 1988:13 & 19). Similarly, Sam Mbakwe, of Imo State invested ₦160 million in the Aba International Glass Industries with nothing to show on the ground. (*African Concord*, 1986:21), and (*News watch*, 1988:17).

The global clamour for democracy and the cancellation of a large chunk of Nigeria's foreign debt enabled the return to civil rule in 1999. Lamentably, the magnanimity benefitted the ruling political elites at the expense of electorate. Instead, as Obasanjo argued the Senators, and members of House of Representatives have been corruptly enriching themselves through padding federal budgets and collecting billions of Naira in unjustifiable allowances. (*News watch*, 2010:57). In this regard,

several Nigerian news papers are awash with condemnation of both the executives and the law makers: "Gready federal law makers", (*The News*, 2010); "Legislathieves: How federal law makers squandered ₦700 billion". (*News watch*, 2010); "Our politicians: Between leaders and locusts." (*Tell*, 2011).

Paradoxically, however, Obasanjo was not only implicated in the Halliburton bribery scandal, but even the two institutions he set up to fight corruption: Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) failed awfully. (*Tell*, 2010:44). Laxity in the fight against corruption enabled many public servants to milk their offices like minefields. Governor Ikedi Ohakin, of Imo State constructed a 15 kilometre road at ₦ 1.3 billion; Governor Bukola Saraki, of kwara State mis-managed ₦65 billion between 2003 to 2008; and Governor Ibrahim Shekarau of kano State wasted ₦ 4 billion in hotel

bills in 8 years. (*News watch*,2011:16-18) Moreover, Governor Ibori of Delta State wasted the ₦ 9.2 billion he looted in the purchase of a personal aircraft, luxury jewellery, cars and houses in London. (*Tell*, 2010:23); (*Leadership*, 2013:47). Angered by the magnitude of the loot, a gang of his Urhobo kinsmen looted his house at Asokoro, Abuja and carted away expensive clothes, jewellery, shoes, and the sum of ₦180 million which they claimed was their share in the loot. (*Tell*,2010:45) Moreover, in Sokoto State, Governor Bafarawa looted ₦ 15 billion (which included ₦88 million from the accounts of Education Resuscitation Committee); ₦52 million from the accounts of Sultan Maccido Institute; and ₦349 million from the accounts of

Sokoto Universal Basic Education out of which ₦280 million was recovered by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of ICPC. (*Tell*,2010:19)

Conclusion

In this chapter the anthropological origin of ethnicity and why British colonial masters used it to justify colonialism for maximum exploitation of land and labour in Nigeria have been explained. It has also demonstrated why the post-colonial political elites anchored politics on the pivot of ethnicity to mobilize the predominantly illiterate electorate. Because the political elites employ ethnic and regional parameters to form political parties, they politicised ethnicity to draw support from the electorate often unsuccessfully as voting behaviour does not reflect ethnic tinge. The paper therefore concludes that there is no ethnic politics among Nigerians but the politicisation of ethnicity by the political elites for material gain.

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