

Ethno-Political Conflicts and the One Nigeria Project: Issues and Lessons from The First Republic, 1960-66

Dr. Ubongabasi Ebenezer Israel¹, Patrick Chukwudike Okpalaeke²

¹*Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, PMB 1017, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.*

²*Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, PMB 1017, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.*

Corresponding Author: Patrick Chukwudike Okpalaeke2

Abstract: One major challenge post-colonial Nigeria, since the first republic till date faces is the question of ethnic rivalry in her socio-political landscape which have made the actualization of the “One Nigeria” project a tall order. Thus, the study explores the effect of ethnic politics and the subsequent rupturing of conflicts during Nigeria’s first republic and what lessons the fourth democratic dispensation can draw from the past in order to avert similar issues that severely bedeviled the socio-economic and political landscape of Nigeria during the period under survey through a critical evaluation of the crowded events that characterized that period. Data obtained via primary and secondary sources were employed to conduct a critical study with an analytical and narrative historical methodology. Consequently, findings from the research revealed that Nigerian elites during the era of the first republic paid more allegiance to their various ethnic enclaves rather than to the One Nigeria project, a situation that has best been described as prebendalism by Richard Joseph. Again, ethnic politics has remained a cancerous substance militating against Nigeria’s growth and development till date and it is regrettable that this sinister approach (ethnicity) to politics is still very much within the milieu of today’s Nigeria’s political landscape. In conclusion, the study, upon outlining certain essential lessons from the past, asserts strongly that if Nigeria must achieve the ‘unity in diversity’ creed, ethnicity must be relegated to the background and the consciousness of absolute patriotism must be embraced by all and sundry, irrespective of religious, political or ethnic background as this will ensure that Nigerians avert a repetition of what transpired during the Nigeria’s first republic.

Keywords: Conflict, Ethnicity, First Republic, Politics, Nigeria and Unity.

Date of Submission: 02-02-2018

Date of acceptance: 19-02-2018

1. INTRODUCTION

“Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.¹ (George Santayana, 1905)

Right after the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates, the question of ethnic politics and ethnic rivalry (ethno-political conflicts) became a predominant theme on the myriad of issues bordering the One Nigeria Project. This became a recurring decimal among the political elites from several ethnic groups as they practically engaged in what could best be described as ethno-political rivalry as they contended for political superiority rather than key into the one Nigeria project. Thus, the challenges affecting the unity of Nigeria have without doubt been a historical and persistent one as before colonial era, conflicts were more of tribal [ethnic] groups, struggling to take over territories. But, since the colonial era and even after independence, most conflicts in Nigeria has degenerated into ethno-religious, socio-political, and even economic (resource war) dimensions.

As a matter of fact, the issue of ethnic rivalry would later go on to characterize the entire Nigerian political landscape which gradually but ferociously trickled down into Nigeria’s first republic, where the interplay of ethnic rivalry (politics) played out the most. Describing what the situation was like then, Richard Joseph, in his classic, entitled *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* avers thus:

...individuals seek to advance materially and socially by establishing ties of a dependent nature with well-placed members of their ethnic or regional group... Nigerian political parties, whether of the pre-1966 Or post-1978 periods, are basically similar in structure. Individuals do not belong to parties in any random fashion. Clientage networks, either of a traditional nature or those created in preparation for electoral competition, linked individuals who usually share or can claim to share an ethno-linguistic identity...²

The narratives of Joseph portrays the fact that the Nigerian political class during the first republic attached so much sentiment to their various ethnic enclaves based on the believe that whatever support required of them to plunged themselves into electoral offices was more assured when they attach to the group of people

with whom they share ethnic affinity with. Since it would appear that they have more to lose when they rely on other ethnic groups outside their own than when they do align with their own ethnic enclave.

It is against this background that the Nigerian first republic has come to be described as having been brought to an abrupt end by the high level of ethnicity that bedeviled it. This was as a result of various ethnic enclaves were forcefully brought together in contest for power and available resources which unfortunately have gone on to greatly affect Nigeria's political processes; and in most cases posing a huge threat to the country's continuous existence right after the British handed over power to indigenous political elites.³

It is no surprise that right from the constitutional conferences organized during the colonial era down to the post-colonial ones, the question of an acceptable system of co-existence has been contentious-from political contentment to economic competition which are all embedded in ethnic politics. Thus, Keen observers have noticed that the recent global trends such as globalization have not, however, significantly, diminished these differences. It is against this backdrop that ethnic rivalries still manifest itself in Nigeria till date, which arise principally from the hostility that stems from competitions between ethnically diverse peoples for power and wealth.³

Thus, five decades after Nigeria gained political independence (devoid of economic independence), the Nigerian diverse social structure in terms of her heterogeneity has not changed significantly. The diversified nature of the society has made identification with the 'One Nigeria' project a tall order. In contemporary Nigerian society, identification is very much easier and indeed obvious at family, ethnic, and regional levels that central level. One of the dire consequences of this unfortunate scenario is that many of the citizens may never construct, psychologically, a more appropriate concept of a nation.⁴ This kind of ethnic relations, to a large extent was so much predominant during the first republic.

Given the foregone background, a study of this nature becomes even more imperative and highly desirable at this point in time, when both the elites and the masses are collectively repeating the conduct of politics base on ethnic chauvinism, and this is gradually, but effectively pulling the country backwards to the decades of the first republic, which failures climaxed with the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970. Also, it becomes more necessary given the vociferation of political marginalization coming from different minority ethnic groups within the federation, as it was in the first republic, when the factors of ethnic politics reflected in every political activities such as voting, distribution of political appointments and offices, employment and general patronage of the citizens.

For the purpose of clarity, the term "first republic" as used in this study simply refers to the period between 1963-1966 when Nigeria in the real sense of the word, constitutionally became a republic, and when the republic was brought to an abrupt end through the instrumentality of the January 15, 1966 Revolutionary coup d'état. But, in the course of this research, the term is used to incorporate the first three years of the country as an independent state (1960-63), as well as from 1963 to 1966 when it eventually came to an end.

II. UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC POLITICS IN NIGERIA THROUGH A HISTORIOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Ethnic politics in Nigeria has over the years been discoursed by different scholars in many ways than one. However, in spite of their varying definitions, they all seem to agree on at least two critical points. The first is that ethnic politics has over the years formed the bases upon which the Nigerian political class operate on; second is that it has remain a bane in the growth and development of Nigeria's socio-political and economic progress. Thus, it is in a bid to critically underscore the effects of ethnic politics in Nigeria that numerous scholars conducted a plentitude of studies in order to bring its many implications to bear.

Accordingly, Okwudiba Nnoli⁵ in his masterpiece, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, divulged that under conditions of politicization of ethnicity and the use of governmental powers for interethnic socioeconomic competition, ethnic hostility is inevitable. Thus, it is clear that during periods of stress, ethnic hostility and aggression are the outgrowths of the rational motive of competition. Going further, Nnoli revealed that:

Among the Africans themselves, the higher up the ladder of inequality one was, the greater was one's financial and political power...Nigerians sought ways and means of preventing one another from ascending this ladder to their own detriment while ensuring their own success in the ascent.⁶

Therefore, the rippling effect was that ethnic group alignment which was increasingly useful as a device for competition, ultimately led to the collapse of the First republic. Moreover, Richard Joseph, in his classic entitled *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*²² posits that Nigerian politics is primarily ethnic politics and certain primordial identities inevitably determine political affiliations and inter group relations. There has therefore, been inter-ethnic rivalry to secure the domination of government by one ethnic group or combination of ethnic groups to the exclusion of others. Although, it must be pointed out that the study neglected the fact that the Second Republic's fall was more or less centered on rapacious corruption and electoral misconduct.

Further, E. Osaghae⁷, in his study, *Nigeria Since Independence: Crippled Giant*, observed that there is in a fundamental sense, the fractionalization of political elites along ethnic, religious and regional lines weakened attachment and absolute commitment to the national project. During the First republic, each of the leaders were deeply engrossed in the enterprise of modernizing his region as a means of consolidating power base in a competitive multi-ethnic developing federation. The thesis of Osaghae portrays how deeply rooted the question of ethnic politics was and how devastating it was in terms of achieving absolute national cohesion.

In relation to the context of this study, A. Bamishaiye⁸ is of the view that Nigeria's problems at independence, apart from poverty, stem from unequal distribution of political powers on a regional and ethnic basis. Bamishaiye added that there were constant frictions between and among the major ethnic groups on the one hand, and the various minority ethnic groups on the other hand. Thus, pondering on Bamishaiye's argument, it is only logical to espouse that the Nigeria's First republic was a period in which parties based on ethnic lines are a danger to ethnic groups who are not adequately represented in the government of the day. However, it should be noted that the influence of neo-colonialism might have equally contributed to Nigeria's socio-economic underdevelopment. This was omitted in this study.

Ademola Azeez⁹, in his study of the *Dynamics of Ethnic Politics and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Prognosis*, stresses the fact that the scourge of ethnicity had been a common feature in Nigeria's drive toward her achieving lasting democracy. He suggested that in pre-independence Nigeria, political parties assumed an ethnic complexion. In his words:

The Action Group developed from the political wing of the cultural association of the *Yoruba* educated elites, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*; the NCNC was closely allied with the *Ibo* State Union and played significant role in the party, while the NNPP was founded by the *Fulani* aristocracy.¹⁰

It should therefore be noted that ethnic politics started even from their various grassroots, going onward to shape and fully characterized how the elites conducted their political intercourse at the Federal level during the First republic.

Again, Godwin Vasseh and M. Ehinmore¹¹ in their study of *Ethnic Politics and Conflict in Nigeria's First republic*, points to the fact that the division of the country into 'minorities' and 'majorities' ethnic groups encouraged sentiment sowing the seed of conflict which was exploited by the emergent political leaders at the detriment of the centre. Therefore, one can deduce that the zealous support of Nigerians to their various ethnic groups had often led to violence which ultimately is inimical to the national project. Although, the study laid greater emphasis on the Tiv Riot, it equally serves as a pointer to ethnic politics in Nigeria. Whereas Max Siollun¹² reported in his book entitled *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)* that party politics (and political parties) took on the identity and ideology of each of the three geo-political zones. Consequently, without doubt, these regional based parties assured two things: first, that none of the parties could govern Nigeria on its own, and second, that ethnic conflict was only a matter of time away.

In addition, Chinua Achebe¹³ in his book entitled *The Trouble With Nigeria*, pointed out that tribalism (ethnicity) has constituted a major cause of Nigeria's long standing trouble. Achebe asserted that nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the chequered fortune of the word *tribe* in her vocabulary. However, it should be noted herein that tribalism as used in his work simply denotes ethnicity. Achebe espouse the view that the socio-political and economic spheres of Nigeria have greatly been affected negatively owing to the fact that ethnicity has been placed as a top priority in her every dealings. Collaborating the foregone views, Kelechi Asuzu¹⁴, while studying the dynamics of *The Struggle for Nigerian Unity, 1960-1970*, pointed out that formation of parties along ethnic lines did not only bring in ethnicity but also brought distrust among the various ethnic groups. Thus, the pressure mounted on Nigerian politics by ethnic jingoists portrayed the fact that Nigeria was heading for collapse.

While discussing the issue of national unity in Nigeria, Batcheson C. Mgbachi and Chris Obiukwu¹⁵ in *Fundamental Issues and Principles of Citizenship Education in Nigeria*, posits that despite the commitment of some national leaders towards instilling a sense of national unity, the allegiance of a large proportion of Nigeria to their ethnic groups still surpasses their loyalty to the nation. It is therefore proven beyond reasonable doubts with the foregone submission that Nigerians have long upheld regionalism as against nationalism. And have therefore disregarded their very existence as one united entity.

Finally on this note, Jane O. Agu¹⁶, in her research study on *Ethnicity and Politics in Nigeria Since 1960 to Present*, reports that the Nigerian First republic was marred by politicians who embarked on dirty ethnic politics by way of suppressing political opponents from a different region. Agu went further to exemplify the nature of ethnic politics in the first republic by stating issues of character assassination which occurred among leaders such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Samuel Ladoke Akintola amongst others. However, the study omitted other factors such as external influence as a contributing factor to the collapse of the First republic.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF ETHNIC RELATIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA

Ethnic relations in Nigeria is no new phenomenon or colonial invention as evidences abound suggesting that the various ethnic groups that presently make up what is today know as Nigeria were in very close contact with one another. Their interactions among and between other groups became a necessity owing to numerous reason, chiefly being that of economic. Economic relations, which no doubt was hinged on agricultural factor, became the most viable means for the various ethnic groups in pre-colonial times to come into close interaction with one another as it remains a truism that no group of people or region can claim absolute self-sufficiency. Substantiating the foregone position, Afigbo, espouse the view that most inter-group relations in pre-colonial times, to a very large extent, than has so far been realized, hinged on agricultural activities, which was the matrix upon which economic activities revolved.¹⁷

Evidences obtained through different historical means have shown as well as proven beyond reasonable doubt that pre-colonial Nigerians never existed in absolute isolation from one another as claimed by Eurocentric scholars. Pointedly, pre-colonial Nigerian also interacted with one another via migratory processes. For example, studies have shown that before the British contraption of the various peopling which makes up today Nigeria, the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria and their closest neighbours which include the Annang, Ibibio, Igala, as well as the Efik have all shared some sort of migratory traditions.¹⁸ Afigbo classified the migration factor into primary, secondary and lastly, a class he referred to as slave labour.¹⁹ Collaborating Afigbo's view on migratory contacts among various ethnic groups in pre-colonial times, Udo, as captured in his classic, *Who Are the Ibibio?* posits that present distribution of the Ibibio tribe [ethnic] suggest a much earlier scattering of the Ibibio over an area extending from Arochukwu (an area presently occupied by a group of Igbo people) in the North, Ika in West, and Oron in the South...thus pointing to the fact that dispersion is clearly preserved in tribal and migratory traditions.²⁰ Uya also espouses this view when he asserts that pre-colonial Nigerian peopling did had a robust inter-group relations in aspects such as intermarriage, settlement even when temporary, mutual cultural borrowings, short and long distance trade, among others tended to blur substantially the exclusive identity of the various groupings.²¹

It is however, intrusive to note that prior to the coming of the Europeans, some of the agents of these ancient contacts were reported to have been Hamitic invaders and culture carriers who were believed to have ranged freely throughout Nigeria between circa A.D 700 and A. D 1400; whose later day descendant has been identify as the Jukun, The Aro, and the ruling aristocracies of the states of Bornu, Hausa, Nupe, Idah, Yoruba and Benin, among others.²² However, a more critical examination of available evidences suggest that during the period under survey, there exist a very high degree of tolerance, mutual accommodation, borrowing and lending among the various ethnic groups. Though, there were cases of warfare and reconciliation across the length and breadth of pre-colonial Nigeria.²³ In light of the forgone, Uya succinctly asserts thus:

In many significant ways, the institutions and cultures which eventually developed in the Nigerian region in pre-colonial period were the end products of long processed of accommodation and fusion of different strands brought in by different migratory groups.²⁴

From this perspective, it is apt to submit that before the coming of European, the various peopling of present day Nigeria have been in very close contacts with one another. Also, it is safe to say that the question of ethnic politics was a British invention as the various ethnic group, with the advent of colonial rule began to pitch their tent against one another in a bid to maximize the spoils of politics at the central level for which they were connived that such a feat could only be attained should they rely on their various ethnic enclaves for political support.

IV. REGIONAL DIVIDES AND ETHNO-POLITICAL RIVALRIES AMIDST INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

The quest for Nigeria's independence from the clutches of colonial rule was not totally devoid of ethnic rivalry as depicted by the Nigerian political class. Elites from the various regions did all within their power to see that their regions, particularly their ethnic group benefited more from the struggle for independence as their belief was centered on the ideology that when British colonial rule comes to an end, it is only the region, or as the case may be, the ethnic group that wields political relevance during the struggle for independence would take the lion share in post-colonial governance. Substantiating the foregone position, Larry Diamond, avers thus: The decades preceding Nigerian Independence had featured conflict within the nationalist movement far more intense than anything it had waged against British colonial rule. The artificial nature of the country, the absence of any colonial effort to inculcate a sense of nationhood, in fact the deliberate encouragement of regional identities and separation, further worked against the development of a sense of national unity and identity. By Independence, the challenge of integrating Nigeria around a common, overarching sense of nationhood still remained. So also did many of the major issues of the previous decade: minority demands for new states, the AG's [Action Group] determination to break the monolithic power of the North, and the North's endeavour to redress its socioeconomic disadvantage, which was beginning to produce 'a considerable number of

Northernrecruits' in the upper ranks of the Federal Civil Service was beginning to produce 'a considerable number of Northernrecruits' in the upper ranks of the Federal Civil Service 'who would not qualify by normal standards'.²⁵

Moreover, the struggle for Nigerian independence by her nationalists garner more popularity and support in and the Second World War (1939-1945). A period when colonial Nigeria came under severe, excruciating and unfavourable political and economic conditions.²⁶ Consequently, the return of Nigerian who had fought for the British crown in the Second World War in far flung Middle East, Morocco, and Burma equally gave a boost to Nigerian nationalist drive. Theo Ayeola, a veteran of the Second World War echoes the minds of other returnees when he stated that "we all overseas soldiers are coming home with new idea... we have been told what we fought for is freedom,"²⁷ but unfortunately, this freedom was to be further delay by the intricacies of ethnic chauvinism and regionalism exhibited by the same Nigerian political class would presumably were struggling for Nigeria's independence from colonial rule consciously or unconsciously extended this independence struggle through ethnic politicking.

One of the earliest events in Nigeria's political history that clearly depicts ethnic or regional divides during the twilight of colonial rule was to be seen during the early 1950s to 1953. From their respective bases, the emergent dominate classes from each of the three regions (North, South and East), fiercely struggled with one another for the much available resources and opportunities. Specifically, both the Eastern and Western Regions swiftly indigenize their respective public services in order to favour their ethnic enclave.

Thus, the issue of regional struggle among the three major ethnic groups became more visible during the 1950 Constitutional Conference as delegates present, proposed and opposed a bill seeking to integrate Lagos into the Western Region. Nnoli captures details of that event thus:

Regional rivalry was apparent as early as the 1950 Constitutional Conference, where the NCNC opposed a proposal to incorporate Lagos into the Western Region and leaders of each region contested the formula for revenue allocation. The former issue was finally settled in 1953, when the Secretary of State for the Colonies decided in favour of a federalized capital separated from the West, but not before the Action Group had threatened 'to lead the West in a secession out of the federation' over the issue.²⁸

More so, the three ethnic groups would again be at each other's' jugulars in the contending issues on resource allocation. While the North pleaded for a per capital basis in order to meet the needs of a territory whose population exceeds her resource, the West strongly favoured a formula based on derivation.²⁹ This disagreement posed a huge challenge to Nigeria's quest towards actualizing her independence from colonial authority. A sort of compromise in the 1950 brought about a great concern on derivation after 1953 that favoured the West, but this, however, further deepen the already political rivalry between the West and the poorer East and North.³⁰

Another classic example of ethnicity and regional divides in the struggle for independence for Nigeria's independence could best be seen within the milieu of events that characterized the year 1953. These events depicts sectional conflicts and class structure within the close interaction of the various ethnically divided regions. At the turn of 1953, a memorable political event occurred in the Central House of Representatives when Anthony Enahoro, a member of the Action Group, set a motion calling for self-government for Nigeria in 1956. The date as proposed by Enahoro, was strongly opposed by Northern Representatives as they fear such a close date, if allowed to stand may simply mean a government by the South, since they the North is less advanced in terms of education, technical training, political expertise, and would want to free itself from the Southern control of all bureaucracy, commerce and transportation system.³¹ Hence, the Northern elites disagreed, suggesting that the date be postponed till a more suitable time. The implication of this was a further delay in Nigeria's socio-economic and political advancement.

Further, James Cole, through his narratives as vividly captured in his classic, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* posits strongly that there was a visible shift in the mode of struggle for Nigerian independence by 1948 due in part to the introduction of what he termed "regionalization of nationalism". And prior to 1948, nationalism was temporarily eclipsed by the dramatic activities of Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe and the NCNC during the period of 1945 to 1947. Whereas, the NCNC had hitherto emphasized Pan-Nigerian nationalism, the new elements, such as the Yoruba leaders in the West and the Fulani-Hausa leaders in the North, placed greater emphasis upon regionalism as the primacy and channel for nationalist development for independence struggle.³² Again, regional divides and ethnic rivalry was made manifest in the formation of political party system. Illustratively, party formation amidst independence struggle went thus: Northern People's Congress for the Hausa-Fulani or the North on a general terms, Action Group was primarily for the Yoruba or the West on a larger scale, and the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon for the Igbo, or broadly the East.³³ Henceforward, more parties would be formed also on the pretext of ethnic enclaves, and this no doubt, increased significantly the tension already created by the colonial administrators through the instrumentality of 'divide and rule'.

More so, regional divides and ethnic chauvinism could be seen playing out clearly in the January 7, 1952 Western Region House of Representatives imbroglio, which had to do with the tussle for the leadership of the House. This singular political event have been described by many as the root of ethnic politics in the chequered history of Nigeria; and Awolowo and Azikiwe, the architects of this cancerous (ethnic politics) substance. During the 1952 election, Azikiwe's NCNC had won a majority vote, but severe difficulty in leading the Western Region House as some House Members from the Ibadan People's Party (IPP) cross-carpeted into the Action Group on the premise that Chief Obafemi Awolowo cajoled them into believing that Azikiwe, who was from the Igbo extraction cannot promote and protect the Yoruba interest should Azikiwe be made the leader of the House.³⁴ Consequently, Azikiwe lost out to Awolowo and rather than staying back in the West, Azikiwe who felt marginalized by the Yoruba, abandoned his "One Nigeria" philosophy, head back to the East, where he thought, he had more advantages. Thus, this even had dire implications on the struggle for Nigerian independence. However, there have been contrary views on the January 7, 1952 incidence. Nwankwo avers thus:

Azikiwe never wanted to assume the position of the Head of Government Business in Western Region in 1952 as had been alleged in many quarters. His Azikiwe's intention was to install an NCNC government in the Western Region and then proceed to the Central Legislative in Lagos...rather it was the Ibadan People's Party member that dealt the final blow by cross-carpeting based on Awolowo ethnic campaigns³⁵

Be that as it may, one of the most fiery consequences of the Western Region House imbroglio would later been seen in the Eastern House where Azikiwe's return to the East had been attributed as a compelling factor that led to the unmerited sack of Professor EyoIta, whom prior to Azikiwe's return, was the head of government business in the Eastern Region House, Enugu. While Azikiwe had abandoned his 'One Nigeria' philosophy and returned to the East, one would not have expected a quick maneuvering as he did that led to Ita's dismissal. However, that was the reality of things and this did not go down well with the other minority ethnic groups within the Eastern region as they felt heavily marginalized by the Igbo ethnic group. Nwankwo succinctly captures the Eastern incidence thus:

After the upheavals in the Western House of Assembly, "Zik" began to rally his party men to the achievement of National Independence. Eventually, however, the NCNC resolved and called its central ministers to resign in order to actualize the aforementioned goal. These Ministers were now enjoying their new stations in life. Some of them did not; therefore want to give up these positions. In doing so, they were undoubtedly sabotaging and delaying the independence struggles that had already brought them to where they were. Three NCNC Central Ministers were the first culprits and were summarily dismissed from the party. They were A.C Nwapa (Igbo), Eni Njoku (Igbo), and OkoiArikpo (Ogoja)... only Dr. Endely (Cameroon) was supportive of the tactics.³⁶

In addition, Chinua Achebe, in describing the event of January 7, 1952, writes:

I was an eye-witness to that momentous occasion when Chief Obafemi Awolowo "stole" the leadership of Western Nigeria from Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe in broad daylight on the floor of the Western House of Assembly and sent the great Zik scampering back to the Niger whence he came... A true nationalist who championed the noble cause of "one Nigeria" to the extent that he contested and won the first general election to the Western House of Assembly. But when Chief Awolowo "stole" the government from him in broad daylight he abandoned his principles which dictated that he should stay in the Western House as Leader of the opposition and give battle to Awolowo. Instead, he conceded victory to reaction by ethnic politics, fled to the East where he compounded his betrayal of principle by precipitating a major crisis which was unnecessary, selfish and severely damaging in its consequences.³⁷

Moreover, Azikiwe employed the services of his newspaper and political muscles to maligned and forced EyoIta and members of his team out of office. It would be recalled that Professor EyoIta was of Efik extraction, and the brutally unfair treatment melted out to him in Enugu did not go unremarked in Calabar. Consequently, "it contributed in no small measure to the suspicion of the majority Igbo by their minority neighbours in eastern Nigeria- a suspicion which far less politicians than EyoIta fanned to red-hot virulence, and from which the Igbo have continued to reap enmity to this day".³⁸

In sum, then, it would be apt to state herein that the struggle for Nigerian independence was not devoid of ethnic rivalry and sabotages. Such rivalries constituted a cog in the wheel of the Nigerian nationalism. Due to the myriads of challenges the Nigerian elites faced till the year of independence (1960), it was not difficult to predict that the Post-independence era, particularly the first republic was bound to fail since Nigerians in their quest for independence from colonial rule was severely faced with a myriad of ethnic and regional divides, which went on to further prolong the actualization of independence later than had earlier anticipated.

V. ETHNO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND THE ONE NIGERIA PROJECT: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

The period, 1960 to 1966 was so much immersed in an ocean of multiple political and social crises which left cracks on the one Nigeria project and ultimately led to the collapse of the first republic. The truth of the matter is that, most of the myriad of problems Nigeria was confronted with during the twilight of her colonial experience were left unresolved and as such, these issues such as ethnic rivalry among others became formed the bases upon which the very foundations of the Nigeria's first republic crumbled. Put differently, by the dawn of the first republic, democratic order collapsed due in part to the historic competing nationalisms of Nigeria's three largest tribal nations that were never successfully reconciled and united into an overarching Nigerian identity.³⁹

Pointedly, after Nigeria secured her independence from the British colonial government, the major ethnic groups would be seen again countering each other's socio-economic and political advances. The effect of ethnic chauvinism came to have an undeniable spillover effect on the party system set up right after independence to an extent that it inadvertently led to some sort of ethnic agitation by the Tiv ethnic group who could no longer bear the suppression and ill treatments meted out to them by the Hausa-Fulani overlords. Therefore, in a bid to achieve the primary goal of this study, this section shall examine the following issues during Nigeria's first republic: Party System and the nature of divides in the coalition government of NPC and NCNC; Tiv Riots of 1960 and 1964; the Republican Constitution of 1963; the January 12, 1966 coup and its aftermath, among other pertinent issues that bedeviled the first republic.

Thus, during the general election of 1959, political parties won majority seats in their regions, but none emerged powerful enough to form a national government. Therefore, a coalition government was formed by the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and NCNC, the former having been greatly favoured by the erstwhile colonial authority.⁴⁰ Following certain compromises between both political parties, Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC) became the Governor-General (and President after the country became a republic in 1963), while Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (NPC) was named the Prime Minister, and Obafemi Awolowo (AG) had to settle for leader of the opposition. The regional Premiers were Ahmadu Bello (Northern Region, NPC), Samuel Ladoke Akintola (Western Region, AG), Michael Okpara (Eastern Nigeria, NCNC), and Denis Osadebey (Mid-Western Region, NCNC).⁴¹ Based on the foregone arrangement, one would have expected that the Federal Parliament would have served as a platform to project the 'One Nigeria project' beyond regional divides and ethnic chauvinism. However, it was rather used for outright inter-ethnic battles by the various political elites in securing the interest of their ethnic groups.

Another factor of division in the NPC/NCNC coalition government was the 'new state movement'. While the NCNC espoused self-determination for ethnic minorities but only in accordance with its advocacy of a unitary state, the Action Group also supported such movement, but with an addition of the restoration of the northern Yoruba area (Ilorin) to the Western Region, but as a part of multi state, federal Nigeria. Expectedly, the NPC steadfastly opposed separatism in the Northern Region and attempted with some success to win over disaffected minorities in the Middle Belt.⁴² The NPC refusal, no doubt, led to series of violent agitations which one of them was the Tiv Riots of 1960 to 1964.

Another element that constituted itself a divisive force within the coalition government was the census controversy of 1962-63. Since seats in the House of Representatives were apportioned on the basis of population, the constitutionally mandated decennial census had important political implications. The Northern political strength, marshaled by the NPC, had risen in large measure from the result of the 1962-53 censuses, which identified 54 percent of the country's population in that area; a national campaign in 1962 addressed the significance of the 1962 census exercise.⁴³ Therefore, judging from the figures of the census as announced in July of 1962, both the AG and NCNC were both hopeful that it was going to change representation patterns. However, the results were outrightly rejected by the NPC. When the census was conducted again in 1963, and gave the North a higher population figure, the Federal Government (NPC dominated) quickly accepted the results.⁴⁴ This goes to show that ethnicity was a key force in the conduct of politics during the Nigerian first republic. Controversy over the 1962/63 census was indeed a rift that left a crack in the coalition government. The NCNC leaders publicly charged the Northern Region Government (NPC, Fulani-Hausa) with fraud, a claim that was vehemently denied by both Tafawa Balewa and Ahmadu Bello.

Reacting to the census exercises of 1962/63 on the one hand, a source asserts that during the census exercise of 1963, he witnessed the degree at which those Northern enumerators manipulated the whole exercise in order to favour the Northern Region.⁴⁵ Whereas, on the other hand, another source posits that, even though he does not have substantial proofs to debunk the accusations of the North having manipulated the 1963 census exercise, he can state, categorically, that the Southerners did rig the 1962 census head count exercise.⁴⁶ From the views above, it becomes clear that ethnicity still has a strong grip on the various peopling of Nigeria.

In a different dimension, the problem of ethnicity would again be made manifest in the area of Nigeria's foreign policy. It was indeed, a more difficult issue which divided the coalition government further. While analyzing the foreign policy of Nigeria during the First Republic, Ade Adefuye states categorically thus:

AG was pro – west but opposed the United State of Africa. AG supported Nigeria membership of the Commonwealth...it declared opposition against cooperation with Arab-Africa because of the accepted discrimination against Africa by the Arab...NCNC rejected anti-communism as a basis for Nigeria foreign policy. It advocated a policy of peaceful co-existence with the Communist state and an intimate and approved Pan-Africanism...NPC advocated membership of Commonwealth, closer tie with the United Kingdom and Arab World. It also wanted increase ties with the US and friendly relations with all African States.⁴⁷

From this perspective, therefore, the foreign policy of Nigeria was indeed a tapestry of ideologies blended along ethnic or socio-religious lines. However, the foreign policy stand of the NPC came out to be the more prominent and formidable one since she was the senior partner in the coalition government. Yet, it appears every step she took was for the Northern Region alone, since the other regions, and their political parties were unable to see anything good in the coalition government. In a nutshell, the argument that is being put forward is that, both at the domestic and foreign fronts, the experiences of the Nigeria first republic revealed that power rested essentially on the level of regional governments. Thus, the region's tail, in short, successfully wagged the national dog.

Still, during the first republic, TheTivriots would again prove that the 'One Nigeria' project was a total sham. The Tiv, being the largest single ethnic group in the Middle Benue Basin in central Nigeria was confronted with the problem of ethnic domination by the Hausa-Fulani group and were bound at repelling such ethnic domination. At present, the Tiv are the majority ethnic group in Benue, where there are found in fourteen local government areas. The rest of them are found in considerable number in southern Taraba state, parts of Nassarawa, plateau and Cross River states.⁴⁸The Tiv have a very popular adage- *Bemhembatahav* – meaning "peace is greater than power". Yet, the Tiv division in 1960(same year Nigeria got her independence) and 1964 was an indication that certain issues were not satisfactorily resolved prior to independence- ethnic politics. Though, it is generally believed that trouble would have been averted on both occasions if the regional government in Kaduna had appealed to the Tiv Division NPC to stop maltreating its opponents (based on ethnic jingoism) and allow free party competition; the expressed grievance of the Tiv majority had been investigated and considered by the regional government; the Kaduna authority had agreed to the dissolution and democratization of the Tiv Native Authority (NA).⁴⁹

Regrettably, the Northern Government appeared unmindful of the potential explosive situation. Thus, in the words of Joseph Tarka, President-General of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) –AG alliance:

There was persistent refusal on the part of the NPC local and regional authorities to listen to the grievances and petitions of the people individually and collectively. In the face of this powerlessness, the people rightly developed the feeling that they would never be heard or get justice anywhere. Thus, this persistent feeling of alienation and felt injustice bred frustration and the natural resort to retaliation against NPC member and their property.⁵⁰

In view of the foregone quotation, the 1960 and 1964 riots in Tiv land could be said to have ethnic and political undertones. Ethnic in the sense that the NPC government was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group and the party did all within their disposal to suppress other ethnic groups with the Northern region so that the Hausa-Fulani class would remain unchallenged. Politically, NPC wanted to continually dictate the pace and tune of Northern politics specifically, and Nigerian political atmosphere in general.

Remi Anifowose attempts an explanation of the Tiv Riots ,by proposing the frustration-aggression theory, and since the Tiv felt that Hausa-Fulani ethnic group through the NPC controlled government was responsible for all their woes, hence the need to fight back.⁵¹

OkwudibaNnoli is in consonance with the above submission when he espouses thus:

By 1959 federal elections, two major political parties vied for Tiv support, the NPC and the UMBC led by Joseph Tarka and linked in an alliance with the AG. Tarka's support was based essentially on appeals to Tiv ethnic chauvinism and hostility against the Hausa-Fulani. His major campaign promise was a Middle Belt in which the Tiv would be free from the Hausa-Fulani control. He pointed to the lower status of the chief of the Tiv, the Tor Tiv, relative to the Hausa-Fulani emirs and blamed the Northern rulers for the comparative absence of the Tiv in public service of the region.⁵²

Notably, the most serious incidents of the Tiv Riots occurred between August and November 1960. These myriad of arsons, attacks, ambushes, among others, were followed by a three-year period of peace among the contending political parties. However, in 1964, new riots broke out in which about 2,000 people died, much property was destroyed and thousands of people were imprisoned. ⁵³ Again, as in the 1960 riot, the 1964 riot was preceded by general election, which was won by United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), and consequent unleashing of oppressive rule through the Native Authority (NA) system.

Solomon Gyar, a native of Tiv land, confirmed the positions above by stating thus:

The Tiv riots of both 1960 and 1964 were an outgrowth of the persistent oppression on the Tiv people by the jingoistic Hausa-Fulani ethnic group which was skeptical of the Tiv emergence in the Nigerian political arena. Thus the leaders of Tiv deemed it a great urgent necessity to do all within their powers, if necessary, use violence, in order to lose free from the stronghold of the domineering Hausa-Fulani.⁵⁴

In sum, then, going by the preceding analysis, it should be noted, that the issue of ethnic superiority by the Hausa-Fulani over the people of the Middle Belt, particularly the Tiv during Nigeria's first republic led to the outburst of two very virulent riots conducted by the Tiv people as a means to resist the imposition of the values and cosmology of the Hausa-Fulani.

The question of ethnic politics would again be seen in the 1963 Republican Constitution. By 1963, a new constitution was introduced to replace that of the 1960 constitution in a bid to eliminate the remaining influence of the colonialists on Nigeria's political culture. This constitution which was nicknamed name Republican Constitution indicates that Nigeria's independence was finally complete, since under the provisions of the constitution, the Governor-General ceased to be the Representative of the Queen and became the president. The Supreme Court replaced the Privy Council of Britain as the highest courts in Nigeria.⁵⁵ There were many other things provided by the Republican Constitution of 1963. But none of the items was sufficient enough to eradicate ethnic sentiment within the structure of Nigerian political atmosphere so that the country could truly be unified in both words and practice.

Based on the provisions of the 1963 Republican Constitution, it is only logical to aver that what the colonial administrators started in 1960 in the name of granting independence was only complete in 1963. Thus, the partial umpire was no more; no one was left to adjudicate in the conflicting political affairs which Nigeria was left to face. Without gainsaying, things really got worst from 1963. One key event that plagued the 'One Nigeria' project after the introduction of the 1963 Republican Constitution was the 1964 general elections. The election came with an unprecedented dimension and Nigeria became highly polarized in political ideology, ethnic politicking, political parties, and even voting strategy. The existing political parties then were divided into two major alliances which was informed by ethnic sentiment, among other factors. United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) was formed by National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Action Group (AG), Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), and United Middle-Belt Congress (UMBC), while Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) was formed by Northern People's Congress (NPC), Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), Mid-West Democratic Front (MDF), NDC and DP.⁵⁶ The nature of this division which was termed 'alliance for political pursuit' revealed that the division in Nigeria cuts across ethnic groups, otherwise referred to as ethnic politicking. It came to a point where the minor ethnic groups within each region formed their own party only to become allies of other major ethnic group in a different region as long as their interest would be protected. Thus, revealing the fear of domination of the minor ethnic groups by the majority ethnic groups.

Again, the greed for political power on ethnic grounds was evident in the 1964 election. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe having accused the NNA of election rigging refused to invite the leader of the majority party to form the government. In the end, Azikiwe was left with no choice than to invite Alhaji Tafawa Balewa to form the new government.⁵⁷ Since the election was boycotted in many areas, it was only nice to conduct another after the Prime Minister had assumed office.⁵⁸

The system remained corrupt and ethnically divided so much so that the elections that were later conducted in the Western Region in 1965 went on to earn the sobriquet-"wild west" as it further created divides not just in the West alone, but across the country at large.⁵⁹ The western regional election of 1965 caused so much crisis which led to loss of lives, yet the federal government never took any step towards ending the crisis there, since it was in a region which voted massively against her.⁶⁰ There was great consternation that the federal government (which in 1962 had declared a state of emergency due to the fight in the regional legislature in May 1962) refused to declare another state of emergency as it did not want to threaten the rule of its ally Chief Akintola.⁶¹

The incident in the West shows that the federal government was highly insensitive to the plight of the West (predominantly Yoruba) as supposing it was to be in the North, drastic steps would have been taken. Regrettably, even in the face of the myriad of conflicts that faced the One Nigeria project, the Nigerian government invited Commonwealth Prime Ministers to a meeting in Lagos to discuss Rhodesian problems.⁶² Such attitude could only make Nigeria good in the eyes of the international community, while within, it was very much obvious that she stinks of ethnic chauvinism, corruption, and many other factors detrimental to national growth and development.

More so, the nonchalant attitude of the federal government seems to have ended the patience of the military. Disgusted by the political mess the country was in after only six years of independence and by the corruption, avarice, ethnic jingoism and selfishness of politicians; a group of politically radical army officers took the bait.⁶³ Madiebo made a case for the interventionist when he argued thus:

Only few African governments have been removed through democratic elections, the rest have found their way out of office through military intervention. And this has made coup a part of African political system.⁶⁴

To conclude this discourse on the 1963 constitution, it would be apt to state that, the constitution which signifies Nigeria's total independence from the grips of colonialism was not adequately utilized, rather the political leaders became loosed tyrants who pursued only the interest of their ethnic groups. Their outright ethnic jingoism made the One Nigeria Project a herculean task to achieve during the first republic. Rather than join forces together to move the country forward, political elites from the various major ethnic groups were making plans in politics that would prevent them from being marginalized or dominated by other competing regions. In pursuing this, Nigeria was left for nobody, since the colonial master who invented the One Nigeria Project was totally cut off (at least politically) consequent on the introduction of the 1963 Constitution.

During the first republic, the question of ethnicity would again be brought into the military intervention and governance. As in the early hours of January 15, 1966, citing a laundry list of complaints against the political class, there was a military intervention in Nigeria against the much deteriorated first republic. The coup was led by a group of Majors who were predominantly of eastern origin. The Prime Minister, a Federal Minister, two regional Premiers, along with top Army officers were brutally assassinated; and some civilians were also killed.⁶⁵ By implication, the coup brought to an abrupt end of a government that was heavily draped in ethnic chauvinism, divisions and nonchalant attitude.

At the initial stage, the new military government was welcomed with massive outpouring of jubilation and high hope for the real actualization of the One Nigeria project. Since it would appear that the army was the only national institution that was actually devoid of corruption and anarchy in post-independence years.⁶⁶ Contrary to that position, Nnoligave a divergent view of the Army being devoid of ethnic sentiment when he espouses that:

With the end of colonial rule, a programme of indigenization of the armed forces was embarked upon. The politicians who formulated and implemented the programme were, of course, steeped in ethnicity and ethnic politics. If the composition of the institution was not ethnically favorable to the politicians, they would lose power in the event that the army proved unreliable.⁶⁷

At a closer examination of the January 15, 1966 coup, the casualty pointed more to the North, seconded by the West; no easterner lost his life. Again, rather than approve the appointment of Zana Bukar Dipcharima, a politician of northern origin, as acting Prime Minister, the acting President, Nwafor Orizu, himself of eastern origin, handed over to Major J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi who is of eastern origin also. It was popularly alleged that Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was tipped off by his cousin, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, one of the masterminds of the coup that a revolutionary coup was brewing, so Azikiwe left the shores of Nigeria under the guise of Medical trip.⁶⁸ This assertion was backed up by the fact that Azikiwe never condemned the coup but only sympathized with the victims when he stated that:

Violence has never been an instrument used by us, as founding fathers of the Nigerian Republic to solve political problems...as far as I am concerned; I regard the killing of our political and military leaders as a national calamity...⁶⁹

Thereafter, ethnic chauvinism was depicted by Gen. Ironsi in his early military appointments, and these included the following: Chief of Staff (NAF), Lt.Col. George Kurubo (East, non-Igbo); Commanding Officer, 2 Bde, Lt. Col. H.Njoku (East, Igbo); Commanding Officer, 2Bn, Major H. Igboba (Mid-West, Igbo); Commanding Officer, Abeokuta Garrison G. Okinueze (Mid-West, Igbo); Commanding Officer, 4Bn, Major Nzefili (Mid-West, Igbo); Commanding Officer, Federal Guards, Major Ochei (Mid-West, Igbo); Commanding Officer, 1bn, Major D. Oguneve (East, Igbo); Commanding Officer, 1Bde, Lt. Col W. Basse (East, non-Igbo); Commanding Officer, 3Bn, Major Okoro (East, Igbo); Commanding Officer, Depot, Major F. Akagha (East, Igbo); Commanding Officer, 5Bn, Major F. Shuwa (North).⁷⁰

Going through the list, it would not be illogical to suggest that ethnic sentiment guided the appointment process which further exacerbated the fear of the Northerners that the Igbo sought to enthrone an Igbo hegemony, particularly among the military officers. In short, the structure of Gen. Ironsi's advisory team also did not help matters. Individuals such as Francis Nwokodi (Igbo), Pius Okigbo (Igbo), and Col. Patrick Anwunah (Igbo), among others, held key positions in Ironsi's government. Consequently, the most common complaint then was that, although highly qualified and distinguished in their professions, they were all Igbo or Igbo speaking individuals.⁷¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that the military coup of January 15, 1966 had been described in many quarters as an ethnic based and instigated coup. Though, many arguments had been made on both sides about the ethnic or nationalistic motives of the plotters of the January coup. One must look beyond what the actors say they are doing to the objective facts of the situation. When this is done, the coup presents itself as ethnic in character.⁷²

Again, Decree 34 of 1966 equally heightens the fear of ethnic domination of the Igbo against the other major groups. The Decree established a unitary system and abolished the regional governments. Hausa-Fulani

ethnic group saw it as an attack on their existence in Nigeria.⁷³ These all led the country to a brink of collapse; as violence and killing started and intensified, Ironsi did nothing as he continued to treat the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group with kid gloves.⁷⁴

As confirmation to the above, Adewale Ademoyega posits thus:

Ironsi favoured the North at the expense of the entire country and even himself in a bid to pacify them for their lost. While Ironsi detained all those who participated in the coup, he never detained even a single officer from the North.⁷⁵

Sequel to the Jan 15, 1966 Revolutionary Coup, on July 29, 1966, the government of Gen. J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi was overthrown and Ironsi himself along with Faguyi and others were all brutally murdered. This ugly incidence was followed by “3 dark days” in which there was no Federal Government.⁷⁶ It is indeed, worthy of note to emphasize that the July Counter Coup (best described by Max Siollun as a mutiny) had an ethnic colouration. In fact, many observers had termed it an “ethnic cleansing”.⁷⁷ The rate and manner in which most easterners (military and civilians) were brutally murdered, depicts the deep suppressed rage of Northerners, which had been a time bomb since 15 January, 1966. Concomitantly, plans to secede by the Northerners were on, before the British advised them otherwise. The British which had always favoured the north asked Gowon not to secede since the major resources for national survival and development were in the South.⁷⁸ Thus, the North which hitherto was on the verge of seceding (*araba*), began to plan how to establish a long term reign. What an irony! Howbeit, this change in plan did not assuage Nigerians of the trauma they had undergone for the past six years (1960-66) filled with ethnic conflict.

From every indication, it can be deductively argued that both coups had their ugly sides, no doubt, but that of July was far more disastrous. While the first coup (January 15) had a surface picture of a revolution, the second was more of a genocidal action, or simply a mutiny as Siollun called it.⁷⁹ In the course of the killing, maiming, burning, and assault on the Igbo by the Northerners, Gowon found himself as the new Head of state. Unfortunately, Ojukwu did not buy into that idea, since Gowon was not the most senior officer.⁸⁰ By this time, the whole issue took a new dimension when the problem became a power tussle between Gowon and Ojukwu. To settle this dispute, the most prominent effort was made in January, 1967 when the Nigerian Supreme Military Council in Aburi, Ghana, reached an agreement. This agreement became problematic later on as both the federal government and the eastern government came to interpret the agreement differently rather than implement it.⁸¹ This already bad situation got worse by the day until the center could no longer hold.

Another aftermath of the January 15, 1966 coup was that it also led to the creation of twelve states. Prior to the thirty months Nigerian Civil War, Gowon, in an attempt to disorganize and weaken Ojukwu and the Igbo, restructured the four regions (Northern, Western, Eastern and Mid-West) into twelve states. This he did on the basis of the earlier agitation by the minorities within the Eastern region, which had always feared the Igbo will dominate them both politically and in other ways. Nevertheless, Ojukwu openly disagreed with the state structure, knowing full well the implication it will have on the Eastern Unity and strength by way of population. Thus, on 30 May, 1967, Ojukwu declared the old Eastern region as the Republic of Biafra.⁸²

In addition to state creation, Gowon declared a state of emergency to calm tension, but that further aggravated the whole thing. Minority groups within the Eastern Region welcomed with wide jubilation the state creation.⁸³ For the minority groups, what the Willink Minorities Commission denied them in 1958, Gowon has given them in 1967. This goes to show again, that even within the then Eastern Region, there were a lot of ethnic jingoism and hatred pitched against the plentitude of ethnic groups within the region. Thus, Gowon capitalized on that to bring about discord within them; which to a large extent yielded fruits.

Okwudiba Nnoli, arguing on states creation espouses thus:

Far from solving the nation's socioeconomic and political problems, the creation of states is likely to reinforce and aggravate them...⁸⁴

Further, Odumegwu Ojukwu, discussing on state creation remarked thus:

The real problem with state creation issue is our inability to decide as a nation what states are really for. In attempt to allay certain ethnic apprehensions, states were created, but somewhere along the line we have converted the whole idea from a political into an economic concept. Here lies our confusion.⁸⁵

At this juncture, it becomes obvious that the creation of state by Gowon was not to further the cause of One Nigeria project which would have aided national growth and development but was rather strategy applied to create disunity among the several ethnic groups in the eastern region to the advantage of the North. We can simply posit that all that was orchestrated by the Nigerian political class during the first republic was predominantly guided by a sense of ethnicity. Every leader given the opportunity to serve in the One Nigeria project paid more allegiance to his or her ethnic groups than the Pan-Nigeria ideology.

VI. LESSONS FROM THE FIRST REPUBLIC FOR THE FOURTH DEMOCRATIC DISPENSATION AND EVEN BEYOND

It is already general knowledge that History acts among its many functions as a reminder of past events in order to correct the present, and properly shape the future. However, contemporary events in Nigeria suggest that the Nigerian political class, as well as its citizenry are yet to draw any lessons from their past. Hence, this study highlights certain key lessons drawn from the myriad of crowded events that plagued and led to the collapse of Nigeria's first republic in order for the present democratic dispensation and future ones to learn from, if Nigeria must make any meaningful step towards actualizing the One Nigeria project.

The first and most important lesson is that of ethno-religious tolerance. Taking into consideration that Nigeria is an amalgam of various ethnic groups with diverse religions, the elites as well as the citizenry must learn to inculcate a very high level of tolerance for other ethnic groups and religion outside their own as this will help reduce the incessant ethno-religious conflicts that have ravaged the country since inception. Moreover, the question of ethnicity in our political landscape is still on the high side. Just like our first republic politician employed the strategy of ethnic card, our present day political class are still using such strategy even when they are very much aware of its implication. The resultant effect of this is that it often more than not breeds mediocrity and retrogression as individuals get into public offices not based on what they can be able to accomplish, but based on ethnic sentiments.

Also, it would be recalled that during the Nigeria's first republic, there was also the question of minority agitation for liberation from the shadows of a much dominant ethnic group as evident in the case of the Tiv Riots of 1960 to 1964 which was haphazardly managed by the central government. The lesson to draw out from that incident would be the lesson of round table negotiation in terms of any section of the country having a disagreement with the federal government. The mistake made by the NPC led government was the use of the military in an attempt to quell a people so much determined to make a difference for themselves, as the protracted issue became one among the various reasons why the military had to intervene through the coup d'état in January 1966. Fast forward to the fourth republic, we have seen the federal government attending to similar issues with highhandedness, which ought not to be the case. The Odi massacre of 1999, among others are indicative of the fact that the fourth democratic dispensation have not drawn any lesson from the past. History has shown that employing military in issues of internal dissents or skirmishes would only escalate the problem at hand, a situation Otoabasi Akpan described as the "Mad Man Theory".⁸⁶

Again, the One Nigeria project has been bastardized owing to the pattern that the federal government applies in making political appointments with clearly contradicts the federal character principle. A clear example of this was the sort of appointments carried out by Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi in 1966 which send a chill down the spine of other ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa-Fulani people of a possible enthronement of Igbo hegemon by Ironsi. This act was a major reason why the north, out of curiosity and fear swiftly eliminated Ironsi simply because his cabinet was made up of individuals of eastern extraction. Regrettably, the pattern of appointments made by the federal government is not so much different from that of Ironsi as it would appear that one particular ethnic group gets the lion share leaving other ethnic groups to ponder on issues of marginalization and suppression.

Further, taking a panoramic view on Nigeria's corruption index of today, one would easily agree that corruption has indeed eaten deep into the fabric of our very existence. In short, it has become a systemic cancer that has found its way through the length and breadth of the country. Considering that this was one of the major reasons given by the revolutionary coup plotter during the January 15, 1966 coup,⁸⁷ it would appear that the issue of corruption is almost being a thing of acceptable standard, especially when looked at through the prism of ethnicity. What this implies is that, when President A, happens to have originated from region C, any member from region C that may be accused and indicted of corrupt practices would be treated with kid gloves since such an individual shares ethnic affinity with the President. Whereas, the reverse is the case, when someone outside the region C only accused, but not yet indicted, such an individual, so far he is not from the same region as the President will be treated harshly. This makes total nonsense of the One Nigeria project as it makes the citizenry feel that they are not a part and parcel of the entity called Nigeria.

Lastly, the political class must note that allegiance to their individual regions as against the central negates the spirit of 'Nigerianization'. As during the first republic, the then political class was very conscious of protecting the interest of their regions over the interest of One Nigeria. The same could be said of our present day leaders as indices abound which illustrates their absolute allegiance to their respective regions that ultimately frustrates the One Nigeria project. Larry Diamond makes note of the effect of ethnic politics or ethno-political conflicts in Nigeria's political landscape when he avers thus:

... the Second Republic failed because the underlying cause of the First Republic's failure were never fully and clearly discerned... to understand why democratic government has repeatedly failed in Nigeria, despite a broad and deeply felt aspiration for it in the country, we must go back to its origins in the waning period of British colonial rule, and its first, ill-fated experience in the 1960s.⁸⁷

Regrettably, the position as postulated by Diamond in the quotation above is a true reflection of what transpired in the past and is still very much with us even in this fourth democratic dispensation. From 1999 up till 2015, Nigeria has continued to be faced with one problem or the other as it had faced during the first republic. The issue of Boko Haram which gradually started in 2009 what later given some of political dimensions , later it was the case of Biafra struggle under the auspices of Independent People of Biafra, and also is the issue of Niger Delta military though this time around , it was spearheaded by a new group called the Niger Delta Avengers. And later on the issue of herdsmen and cattle colony imbroglio would come to bedevil the administration of President Mohammed Buhari which have claimed several lives. In a nutshell, all these problems only subsist because lessons were ignorantly refused to be learnt from our past.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the discourse so far, it is clear that ethno-Political conflicts have constituted itself a bane to the actualization of the One Nigeria project as evidences abound, particularly within the milieu of Nigeria's first republic, that political class from the various regions pitched their tents against one another in the struggle for political and economic superiority. This is even more troubling as the issue of ethnic politicking and chauvinism have continued to reflect unabatedly throughout Nigeria's chequered history even up to the fourth democratic dispensation. Placing emphasis on the first republic, the study maintained the position that ethnic politics was a critical and fundamental factor that bedeviled the republic and consequently led to it collapse. Hence, the same ethnic card is still being played out by the present political class without recalling to mind that this same ethnic politics or politics of ethnicity wrecked the golden years (1960-66) of Nigeria political development.

In sum then, the present study, therefore holds the view that ethno-Political rivalry is inimical to the One Nigeria project. That is to say that if Nigeria must make any meaningful progress, her political class as well as her citizenry must look beyond playing the 'ethnicity card'; as this study has shown beyond reasonable doubt that prior to the coming of colonial rule, the various ethnic groups had interacted among themselves and there is the urgent need for the various peopling to bring back that spirit of ethno-religious tolerance for the collective growth and development of Nigeria. As it is the only country for Nigerians to occupy as their own and prosper in it if they so will it.

NOTES

- [1]. George Santayana, *Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress*, Vol. 1, (New York: Dover Publication 1905), n.p
- [2]. Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 61-63.
- [3]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978),
- [4]. B Salawu & A.O Hassan, "Ethnic Politics and its Implication for the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria," *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, Vol. 3 (2), 2011, 28-29.
- [5]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 215-216
- [6]. *ibid*, 216.
- [7]. E. Osaghae, *Nigeria Since Independence: Crippled Giant*, (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, 2011), 58.
- [8]. A. Bamishaiye, "Ethnic Politics as an Instrument of Unequal Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria's First republic," In A. O. Sanda (ed.), *Ethnic Relations in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: The Caxton Press, 1976), 90-91.
- [9]. Ademola Azeez, "The Dynamics of Ethnic Politics and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Prognosis," In Duro Oni et al, (eds.), *Nigeria and Globalization: Discourse on Identity Politics and Social Conflict*, (Lagos: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd., 2004), 321-324.
- [10]. *ibid*.
- [11]. A. G. Vasseh and O.M. Ehinmore, "Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria's First republic: The Misuse of Native Administrative Police Force (NAPFS) and the Tiv Riots of Central Nigeria, 1960-1964," *Journal of Canadian Social Science*, Vol. 7, No.3, 2011, 214-222.
- [12]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 12.
- [13]. Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984), 5.
- [14]. Kelechi Asuzu, "The Struggle for Nigerian Unity, 1967-1970," *B.A Long Essay*, Department of History and International Relations, Abia State University, Uturu, 2009, 32.
- [15]. Batcheson G. Mgbachi and Chris Obiukwu, *Fundamental Issues and Principles of Citizenship Education in Nigeria*, (Owerri: Hudson-Jude Nigeria Publishers, 1998), 159.
- [16]. Jane O. Agu, "Ethnicity and Politics in Nigeria Since 1960 to Present," *B.A Long Essay*, Department of History and International Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, 2007, 15.

- [17]. Adiele E. Afigbo, "The Age of Innocence: The Igbo and their Neighbours in Pre-Colonial Times," Available @ <http://ahiajoku.igbonet.com/1981/>. Accessed 2/1/2018.
- [18]. Adiele E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours: Inter-Group Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953*, (Ibadan: University Press, 1987), 34.
- [19]. *ibid*, 37-38.
- [20]. A. E. Udo, *Who are the Ibibio?*, (Onitsha: Africans Publishers Limited, 1983), 34.
- [21]. Okon E. Uya, "Nigeria: The Land and the People," In Okon .E. Uya (ed.), *Contemporary Nigeria: Essays in Society, Politics and Economy*, (Buenos Aires: EDIPUBLI S.A, 1992), 16.
- [22]. *ibid*, 14.
- [23]. G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, (Lagos: Academic Press Limited, 1983), 202.
- [24]. Okon E. Uya, "Nigeria: The Land and the People," 12-13.
- [25]. Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First republic*, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1988), 74-75.
- [26]. For more details, see, H.S Gruntram and David H. Kaplan, *Nations and Nationalists: A Global Historical Overtime*, (California: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2008), 1181; Kelechi C. Ubaku, Chikezie A. Emeh, and Chinenye N. Anyikwa, "Impact of Nationalist Movement on the Actualization of Nigerian Independence, 1914-1960," *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2014, 54-67.
- [27]. ²⁷James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, (California: University of California Press, 1958) 352.
- [28]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 106.
- [29]. For further details, See: OkwudibaNnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 203 & James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 375-376.
- [30]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 106-107.
- [31]. See the following for further details, Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First republic*, 48-49; OkwudibaNnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978), 110-112.
- [32]. James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 320-322.
- [33]. Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), 5.
- [34]. *ibid*.
- [35]. Nowa Omoigui, Operation 'Aure': "The Northern Military Counter-Rebellion of July 1966," Available @ www.nigeria-africamasterweb.com. Accessed January 03, 2018.
- [36]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 69.
- [37]. Nowa Omoigui, Operation 'Aure': "The Northern Military Counter-Rebellion of July 1966,"
- [38]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 241.
- [39]. Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic*, 15.
- [40]. ⁴⁰Kelechi Asuzu, "The Struggle for Nigerian Unity, 1967-1970," 31.
- [41]. ⁴¹Patrick C. Okpalaeke, "Ethnic Politics in Nigeria: Issues and Lessons from the First Republic, *B.A Long Essay*, Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, 2016, 54.
- [42]. ⁴²Segun T. Dawodu, *Politics and Crisis in Nigeria: Socio-Economic and Political Issues*, (Gettysburg: Dawudo Publishers, 1998), 24.
- [43]. *ibid*.
- [44]. Kelechi Asuzu, "The Struggle for Nigerian Unity, 1967-1970," 34.
- [45]. Sabastine Ozoemena, Interview, c.70, Retired Teacher, Via Telephone, 15/03/2016.
- [46]. Yahaya Bello, Oral Interview, c.60, Trader, Lagos, 16/04/2016.
- [47]. Ade Adefuye, *Cultures and Foreign Policy: The Nigerian Example*, (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of Foreign Affairs, 1992), 31-32.
- [48]. A.G. Vasseh and O. M. Ehinmore, "Ethnic Politics and Conflicts in the Nigeria's First Republic: The Misuse of Native Administrative Police Force (NAPFS) and the Tiv Riots of Central Nigeria, 1960-1964," 214-222.
- [49]. Gabriel Sosanya, "The Tiv Riot of 1960," in *Historical Flashback: The Nigerian National Memoir*, Vol. 4, No.11, 32.
- [50]. *ibid*.
- [51]. Remi Anifowose, *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience*, (Enugu: Nok Publishers, 1978), 77.
- [52]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 237-238.
- [53]. *ibid*, 239.

- [54]. Samuel Gyar, Oral Interview, c.50, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, 25/7/2016.
- [55]. Mfon Udokang, *Foundations to the Study of Government and Politics*, (Lagos: Neutex Publishers Limited, 2006), 367.
- [56]. *ibid*, 442.
- [57]. Williams A. Afibola, *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1978), 26.
- [58]. Mfon Udokan, *Foundations to the Study of Government and Politics*, 398-399.
- [59]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, 19.
- [60]. Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, 8.
- [61]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, 19.
- [62]. Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, 385.
- [63]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, 31.
- [64]. Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, 385.
- [65]. Nowa Omoigui, "Operation 'Aura': The Northern Military Counter-Rebellion of July 1966," Available @ <https://www.nigeria-africamasterweb.com> Accessed August 25, 2016.
- [66]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, 69.
- [67]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 240.
- [68]. *ibid*, 235.
- [69]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, 71.
- [70]. Nowa Omoigui, "Operation 'Aure': The Northern Military Counter-Rebellion of July 1966," p.45.
- [71]. *ibid*. p.43.
- [72]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, p.241.
- [73]. L.M Okafor, *History of Nigeria*, (Onitsha: Jet Publishers Limited, 1989) p.448.
- [74]. Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, 44.
- [75]. Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigeria Coup*, (Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Ltd., 1981), 108.
- [76]. Williams A. Ajibola, *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1978) p.29.
- [77]. *Ibid*. p.22.
- [78]. Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*, p.121.
- [79]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, 41-45.
- [80]. Williams A. Ajibola, *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion*, 29.
- [81]. Arthur A. Nwankwo, *Nigeria: The Challenge of Biafra*, (London: Rex Collins, 1972), 12.
- [82]. Williams A. Ajibola, *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion*, 31.
- [83]. Toyin Falola et al, *History of Nigeria: Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century*, Vol.3 (Ikeja: Longman Nigeria Plc, 1991), 125.
- [84]. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 256-257.
- [85]. Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I Am Involved*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Book Limited, 1989), 184.
- [86]. Otoabasi Akpan, "Introduction to International Studies," Unpublished *Mss Note*, 2013.
- [87]. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, 31.
- [88]. Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic*, 24-32.

Dr. Ubongabasi Ebenezer Israel & Patrick Chukwudike Okpalaeké "Ethno-Political Conflicts And The One Nigeria Project: Issues And Lessons From The First Republic, 1960-66." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 23 no. 2, 2018, pp. 64-78