

THE POLITICAL CLASS AND THE MANIPULATION OF ETHNICITY: NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The paper attempts to explore the evolution of ethnic and primordial consciousness in Nigeria and how over time the political elites, manipulated the phenomenon for their narrow gains. Ethnicity as a phenomenon is an undeniable reality in African and indeed world over. But in Africa, it was pervasively distorted by the Europeans in their interpretations of everyday life to the point that it has become a marker with which groups and group relations are constructed. The British exploited the in-group differences in their bid to keep the peoples apart and perpetually polarized and disunited. The material and ideological impacts of colonialism served as a springboard for the consequent emergence of ethnicity/tribalism in the political centre-stage of Nigeria. The elites saw the powers inherent in the divide-and-rule mechanism of ethnicity as implored by the colonialists in dealing with the indigenous groups in Nigeria, and quickly had recourse to same in the aftermath of colonial rule. As the inheritors of the post-colonial state, in their bid to sustain their positions and privileges began to manipulate ethnicity thereby undermining national unity and cohesion. From the emergence of party-politics in Nigeria, especially after 1940, the various political leaders exploited to their benefits ethnic/primordial sentiments. The British colonial rulers, after forcefully amalgamating the disparate groups to create what became Nigeria, did not teach Nigerians the powers inherent in unity in diversity, but rather thought them disunity in diversity based on the policies they enunciated up to independence. Thus the political leaders emerging from the disarticulated colonial order, continued to fan the embers of ethnicity which ultimately bedeviled the possibility of nation-building, unity and progress of Nigeria. The paper posits that the Nigerian political class in order to enjoy the perquisites of power, over time manipulated ethnicity to the detriment of national unity and inter-ethnic cohesion.

Keywords: Nigeria, political, manipulation, ethnicity, historical

1. Introduction

The history of Nigeria as we have it today is attributable to 'Her Britannic Majesty' and the doggedness of her soldiers, sailors, merchants and company, all consciously worked together to secure her imperial footing in Nigeria. As a 'mere geographic expression',¹ and prior to British contact, Nigeria had more than three hundred ethnic groups of sometimes widely differing languages and systems of internal rule. Although its constituents had traded and often lived among each other for centuries, and the people had different cultures and stood at very unequal levels of development.² The desire of the British Crown to establish and maintain a colonial state fought series of battles and won the local peoples. To consolidate its policy of exploitation, the colonial regime felt the need to weld together the two separate administrations it had created in the southern part that is the Colony of Lagos and Protectorate was amalgamated with the protectorate of Southern Nigeria, to form a new Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.³ This was done without recourse to the wishes of the indigenous peoples, but as a way to maximize the economic resources available in the area. After this first amalgamation, a second one was carried out clearly to create a centralized political entity for economic and not really administrative reasons and for

¹ Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 47-48.

² . Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*, (London: The Penguin Press, 2000), 7-8.

³ T. N. Tamuno, "British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century", in Obaro Ikime, (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Ltd, 1980), 393.

firmer exploitation of resources. Thus 1914 marked the beginning of what we have today as Nigeria, and sealed the fate of the diverse groups forcibly brought together under one incongruous entity without their consent. The British colonial regime did not consider the consequences of this fusion in the aftermath of their departure; neither did they create structures that would have engendered harmony and peace amongst the varied cultures and peoples so lumped together into a modern state system.

The result of the amalgamation of 1914 was that no uniform style of administration developed and between 1914 and 1939, Nigeria resembled a federation of two groups of provinces as amalgamation of such departments as education, police and prisons, developed gradually between the 1920s and 1930s, and in April 1, 1939, the colonial government split the former Southern Provinces into Eastern and Western Provinces, and the Governor-General Bernard Bourdillon, refused to split the Northern Provinces, and this remained so till 1967.⁴ The colonial policies as implemented did not make for the stability of Nigeria. These included the non-participation of Northern people in the then Nigerian Council from 1914 until the time it was abolished by Governor Clifford in 1919. Even the idea of insulating the North from the rest of Nigeria, originated from British colonial officials, who saw them as too subservient to colonial policies and very supportive in terms of implementing colonial directives. L. C. Temple⁵ who envisioned the idea of a segregated quarters for Southerners and other visitors alike, wanted to preserve the traditional hegemonic culture operational in the North, so as to enable the elites survive and continue with the domination of the peoples. Thus the *Sabon-Gari* which emerged was/is technically a creature of colonialism. The subsequent creation of the Legislative Council for the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, did not have Northern representatives in it, rather, British Resident Officers represented the North in the Council until 1946⁶ when the Richards Constitution which regionalized Nigeria came into force. Nigeria's political space from 1914 to 1946 was a constricted one, because of the nature of political representation and participation of Nigerians in it. The so-called Legislative Council was a pseudo-Legislative Council as the Governor had the powers to initiate legislation as well as the powers to reserve certain bills like salaries, divorce and currency for the Crown's approval in England, and the Crown from thousands of miles, had the powers to exclusively allow or disallow colonial ordinances.⁷ This narrow political space spurred Nigeria's urban elites at the time to begin to protest for their inclusion and participation in the central institutions of colonial governance especially in the decision-making process through representation in the Legislative and Executive Councils.⁸

The result of the agitation of the educated elites produced a narrow accommodation granted to them by the British colonial administration into the political process via limited franchise that enabled electoral participation of this privileged class in Lagos Town Council and later Calabar elections and administration. It was indeed the Township Ordinance of 1919,⁹ that created the provision for the elective principles in Nigerian politics, and from that time, the character of political agitation and participation continued to change and expand till 1946. The political class gradually emerged from this period, though in the urban centres of Lagos and Calabar, but with the passage of time and the aggregation of population in the regional centres of power, a comprador but yet assertive bourgeoisie whose hegemony impeded the progress of the state,¹⁰ emerged. The contestation for political power and economic opportunities led to serious kinship identification and elite rivalry for power and privileges, with the consequence that as the political spaces widened and parties emerged, ethnic competition and disharmony deepened. What exacerbated the situation was the 1946 constitution that split Nigeria into three unequal regions, and depositing power into the hands of narrow elites and dominant ethnic group within the regions, thus creating

⁴ T. N. Tamuno, "British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century", in Obaro Ikime, (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, 395.

⁵ G. O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939-1953*, (Lagos: Evans Brother Ltd, 1973), 12.

⁶ See for a detailed reading, Ayodeji Olukoj, "Nigeria: A Historical Review", in F.U. Okafor, (ed.), *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co, 1997), 24-25, and G. O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939-1953*, (Lagos: Evans Brothers, 1973), 17.

⁷ T. N. Tamuno, "The Role of the Legislative Council in the Administration of Lagos, 1886-1913", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, IV, No. (4), 1969, 555-570.

⁸ T. N. Tamuno, *Nigeria and Elective Representation: 1923-1947*, (London: Heinemann Books, 1966), 12-32.

⁹ T. N. Tamuno, *Nigeria and Elective Representation: 1923-1947*, 18-55.

¹⁰ N.C. Ihediwa, "The Nigerian State, Petro-politics, the Niger Delta and the Challenge of Insurgency", in Joseph Mangut, and Dawood O. Egbefo, (eds.), *The Fourth Republic and National Integration in Nigeria, 1999-2009*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2010), 54.

regional lords in its wake who controlled the paraphernalia of state power and privileges. It was this class that exploited the forces of ethnicity to feather their political, material and economic nests. To survive, they manipulated the predominantly poor and ignorant followers, distorting their views about the political realities of the day, and building into their minds the 'we-and-they' mentality that usually fuel ethnic hatred and bigotry. The objective of the paper therefore, will be to examine critically and through a historical perspective, the issue of ethnicity and how the political class in Nigeria over time manipulated it to their narrow advantages thereby bedeviling the harmonious and progressive political development of Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

Ethnicity as a phenomenon, has posed serious concern to researchers in varied fields of scholarship. The debate on the concept seems to have been fuelled by the high visibility of mobilized and politicized ethnic groups in multi-ethnic states of Africa and Asian countries and the high incidence of cultural pluralism and its "pervasive" popularity has made it an "unwieldy concept."¹¹ The fact that ethnicity is a social construct¹² avails the reason for several connotations given to it in the fields of political science, sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, race-relations etc. This section will discuss some of the theories of ethnicity, and thereafter adopt the theory that best explains the manipulative nature of the phenomenon in relation to its use and abuse by the elite political class in Nigeria. With respect to the etiology and sustainability of ethnicity in Africa and indeed Nigeria, the instrumentalist, primordial and modernist theories call to mind.

The instrumentalist theory of ethnicity argues that ethnicity as a phenomenon has over time been shaped by actors who occupy a position of leadership and control of power in a given political and social space, and therefore have the potentials to mobilize people within their culture to gain, consolidate, or expand their power and influence. As Smith observed, leaders make use of "their cultural group as sites of mass mobilization, and as constituencies in their competition for power and resources. This is because they see in them as being more effective than social classes."¹³ Therefore ethnic identities are instrumental in the sense that they manifest and serve as a means to an end. Thus for the instrumentalists, the prime concern rests on the "role of ethnicity in the mediation of social relations and the negotiation of access to resources, primarily economic and political resources."¹⁴ This leads us into further inquiry on the next fundamental theory of ethnicity, which is the primordial theory.

The theory of primordialism posits that African countries have a pre-destination to crises stemming from their primordial features; that is that African communities are structured along natural and tribal differences and each tribe is ensconced in a kind of shell within which there is an impeccable harmony of interests. For them, ethnicity is seen as immediate contiguity and kin connections but also as being burn into a particular community, culture, language, and sharing the same social practices. They see ethnic identity from the point of ancestry rules of group membership typified by cultural traits and common historical mythologies.¹⁵ Here the community is seen as individuals united through common ancestry or fate. Thus the primordialist regards ethnicity as a kind of social structuring, having powerful and immutable characteristics of the human condition exuding meanings that transcend the immediate social contexts.¹⁶ To them, since the primordial features of the different groups are endemically incompatible, wars and crises become a character trait of inter-ethnic relations in such communities. The basic assumption stemming from this school of thought, is that perpetual conflict will continue to overshadow relations across board in such communities and that no amount of artificial response will extinguish

¹¹ E. D. Green, "Redefining Ethnicity", paper presented at the 47th Annual International Studies Association Convention, San Diego California, March 2006, available at <http://personal.ise.ac.uk/green/ISA> Pdf, p. 1, (accessed on 2/1/2020).

¹² L. D. King, "Nations without Nationalism: Ethno-Political Theory and the Demise of nation-State", *Journal of Developing Societies*, Vol. 18, (2002), 354-364.

¹³ Smith A. A, *Nationalism, Theory, Ideology, History*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2001), 54.

¹⁴ Jones, S. *The Archeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identity in the Past and Present*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), 72.

¹⁵ Fearon J. D. and Laitin, D. D. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 4, (2000), 845-877.

¹⁶ See Seol, B. S. "A Critical Review of Approaches to Ethnicity", *International Area Review*, Vol. 11, No. 12, (2008), 333-364.

ethnicity in Africa.¹⁷ However it has been argued that ethnic groups are rational interest groups lacking primordial significance and that they assert and maintain their identity because of socio-political and economic reasons rather than psychological primordial attachments, hence the categorization of ethnicity as an element of socio-political and economic action.¹⁸ So-to-say, ethnic groups are purposeful groups, being arbitrarily created and sustained to achieve pragmatic utility.¹⁹ The theory is criticized on the grounds that it does not seem to recognize people's creative abilities and efforts to change their world to a better one.

The modernist theory posits that African communities have natural cleavages that impede national integration and cohesion. The apologists of this theory do not however subscribe to the fact that these features are resistant to change. They opined that the way out of the menace of ethnicity is to keep the various ethnic groups as separate as possible, and if at all they must be amalgamated, care must be taken to preserve for each group its separate identity, and that this must be so until such a time the elites within the groups are sufficiently acquainted with modern values. Their proposition is that ethnic problems in Africa will fade away with time on certain preconditions, which include the gradual discountenance of primitive cultures and values, which must all be replaced with modern western values.²⁰ This modernist theory has been challenged by scholars on account of its insufficiency in empirical evidences and lack of clarity. For the objectionist school, modernization and industrialization with the attendant development in western education, science and technology, the tide of ethnic hate and crisis rather than abating, has been enlivened and given impetus in many dimensions.²¹ Ethnicity is a natural phenomenon not attributable to backwardness in culture and therefore will not cease with the infusion of modern trappings and mores.

The Conspiracy theory appears to be one of the most dominant and popular perspective in the analysis of ethnicity in Africa. The exponents of the theory posit that ethnicity is fully and wholly the brainchild of western colonialism in Africa. For this group, ethnicity was invented and exacerbated by the Europeans to split Africa and exploit its resources, while blaming Africans for their woes.²² This theory has some plausible attributes, but does not seem to be the sole answer for ethnicity and ethnic crisis. Another important theory of ethnicity stems from the instrumentalist group. The instrumentalist theory sees ethnicity as a dependable variable, controlled according to its strategic utility for achieving more secular goods.²³ They hinge ethnicity on the affiliation of individuals to the community to which they derive economic and political benefits. In this regard, it is based on rational awareness and not on closeness as with the primordial school. The need for socio-political and economic protection is what constitutes the core elements of ethnicity. What drives and shapes ethnicity for the instrumentalists could be economic or political interests vis-à-vis one particular ethnic group and others. It also believes that ethnicity is circumstantially constructed in a given society, and if so, it means that ethnicity is susceptible to manipulation and a tool for mobilization. The instrumentalist have been criticized for harbouring narrow views that underpin ethnicity to only socio-political and economic ends, and for neglecting peoples struggle over ideal interests. The constructivist theory is another theory of ethnicity; here the constructivists posit that ethnicity is a figment of the human imagination and supported by how ethnic identities wax and wane, how ethnic boundaries are porous, shifting and unsustainable. How ethnic workings are arbitrary and how the common past and traditional values on which members of ethnic group anchor their identity have very little to do with

¹⁷ See Schaapara I., *Married Life in an African Tribe*, (London: Frank Cass and Co, 1940), see also the arguments of Green M.M. *Igbo Village Affairs*, (London: Frank Cass and Co, 1964).

¹⁸ T. Cotties and A. Rahim, "Between ethnicity, Nationality and Development in Nigeria", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (2012), 664.

¹⁹ See Seol, B. S. "A Critical Review of Approaches to Ethnicity", *International Area Review*, Vol. 11, No. 12, (2008), 347.

²⁰ H. D. Dlakwa, "Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics: Formation of Political Organizations and parties", F.U. Okafor, (ed.), *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, 101.

²¹ C. Otite, *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Shaneson Co. Ltd, 1993), 5-55.

²² Y.R. Borongo, "Ethnic Pluralism and Democratic Stability: The Basis for Conflict and Consensus", in Sam O. Oyovbaire, (ed.), *Democratic Experiment in Nigeria: Interpretative Essays*, (Benin City: Omega Publishers Ltd, 1987), 65-75.

²³ Conversie D. "Mapping the Fields: Theories of Nationalism and the Ethno-symbolic Approach", in Leoussi, A. S, and Gosby S., (eds.), *Nationalism and Ethno-Symbolism: History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 15-28.

historical realities.²⁴ Ethnicity for Owolabi, a constructivist, is not primordial, but invented and sustained by the elites in the society to keep the people divided for the sake of easy manipulation and dominance.²⁵

a similar vein, the class theorists aver that looking at ethnicity alone as the problem of society is an attempt to mystify, obscure and oversimplify the real problem of society, for behind the smoke-screen of ethnicity is an ingrafted class interest, and that the only way to obliterate ethnicity and the concomitant effects on the political integration and stability of a state, is to develop class consciousness. The essence of the formation of class consciousness for them would be to demystify ethnicity and consequently expose the rabid hypocrisy of the elites and the comprador bourgeoisie elements who manipulate ethnicity and religion to create societal disorder for their own benefits. The position of this paper is that ethnicity has a pervasive effect on the political development of Nigeria, all the theories in one way or the other, correspond with the realities on ground in Nigeria. For the sake of fixity therefore, we adopt the instrumentalist theory to explain the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria, showing in that process, how over time the political class, as the elite and bourgeoisie elements of society, have manipulated the concept for their survival and perpetuation in power. The instrumentalist conceptualization of ethnicity not only fits in the Nigerian situation, but offers rich insights into the analysis of the salient and divisive role of ethnicity in Nigeria's political history.

3. The Nigeria's political space, the political class and the manipulation of ethnicity to 1966

From 1914 to 1919, when Lord Lugard was the Governor of Nigeria, no real steps were taken by him towards constitutional reforms that would eventually encourage the political advancement of Nigeria on the basis of representative government through the franchise or even the development of political parties. The Lagos Town Council and its successor Nigerian Council, which was ridiculed to be as 'useless as the fifth wheel of a coach',²⁶ were never representative platforms, and so did not go down well with the masses. The replacement of Lord Lugard with Sir Hugh Clifford, paved the way for some political reforms arising from the introduction of a new constitution in 1922. By this time, the political temperament of Lagos was high as the few educated elites and traditional chiefs whose positions were threatened by the policies of the colonial government, had been protesting and creating awareness within the township people. It was at this time that political consciousness markedly improved with the participation of township people in political activities, beginning first as clubs and pressure groups. The emergence of the first political party in Nigeria was in 1923, and named Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), which was controlled by Herbert Macaulay.²⁷ Though there had been political associations as early as 1908, in Lagos, organizing protest against tax and land policies of the colonial government. Such associations included The People's Union and the Lagos Auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, formed in 1911.²⁸ The Nigerian Legislative Council politics in Lagos was dominated by NNDP for about fifteen years, but their dominance came to an end with the formation of the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934, which was later renamed the Nigerian Youth Movement in 1936. Those who founded the movement were among the privileged ones in colonial Nigeria, whose parents could afford to train in the prestigious Kings College Lagos.²⁹ It was from this elite circle that a firebrand political movement emerged to spread beyond Lagos and to have broader membership than the one before it. The founding members were Dr. J. C. Vaughan, Ernest Ikoli, H.O. Davies, and Samuel Akinsanya, and was strengthened by the return to Nigeria from the United States of Nnamdi Azikiwe. In 1937.³⁰ The Nigerian Youth Movement can indeed be said to be the first political movement that had branches all over Nigerian cities and one that had inter-tribal unity in its charter and insisted that such

²⁴ C. Ake, *Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*, (Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2000), 95.

²⁵ Owolabi K. A, "Fictional Tribes and Tribal Fictions: Ethnicity, Ethnocentrism and the Problem of the "Other" in African Identity, Culture, and Politics", *An Afro-Asian Dialogue*, 4, (1), (2003), 85-98.

²⁶ *The Lagos Weekly Record*, 14 June 1919, quoted in T. N. Tamuno, *Nigeria and Elective Representation: 1923-1947*, 21.

²⁷ N.C. Ighediwa, "Ideological Flux, Ethnicity and Corruption: Correlates in Explaining Leadership Failure of Nigeria's Founding Fathers", in Tony Edo, and Terhema Wuam, (eds.), *Democracy, Leadership and Accountability in Post-Colonial Africa*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2009), 504.

²⁸ R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, (New York: Nok Publishers International, 1963), 41-42.

²⁹ H. D. Dlakwa, "Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics: Formation of Political Organizations and parties", F.U. Okafor, (ed.), *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, 106.

³⁰ R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, 49.

was the only basis for national unity. The Youth Charter and Constitution of 1938, was a formidable document that proclaimed the principal aim of the movement as the development of a united nation out of the conglomeration of peoples who inhabit Nigeria. The charter could be said to be three charters in one, as it embodied four core areas of need of the colonial people-political, economic, cultural and social.³¹ These four areas were explicated in detail in the charter for understanding by Nigerians of its mission in the country.

The popularity enjoyed by the NYM and the declaration in its charter waned in the light of developments in the party. As a movement that had won the hearts of Lagosians by its activities, and one which had enjoyed the support of the electorates as demonstrated in the Legislative Council elections in which it defeated the dominant NNDP, the internal crisis that fractured it was shameful. The journalistic competition that ensued in the movement, helped to pave the way for its subsequent split and disintegration. Azikiwe, a leading member of the NYM and a newspaper proprietor was unhappy with the intrusion of Ernest Ikoli into the tabloid business which had a narrow patronage base; more so the advertisement of the Daily Star as “the official journal of the Nigerian Youth Movement”, as against those of Azikiwe, miffed him, and his enthusiasm for the movement immediately began to wane. The movement was split in ethnic and primordial lines leading to Azikiwe resigning his membership of the executive committee, though he later retracted his resignation, but he ceased to be an effective member of the movement. This putative conflict of economic and professional interest helped to set the stage for events which propelled the country irretrievably into the politicisation of ethnicity.³² The final blow to the movement was the resignation of Dr. Abayomi from the Legislative Council, and Ikoli the president of the NYM sought to replace him. He was opposed by Samuel Akinsanya, who also wanted to be in the Council. Obafemi Awolowo supported the candidature of Ikoli an Ijaw, while Azikiwe supported Akinsanya an Ijebu Yoruba. The later lost and Azikiwe and Akinsanya attributed it to anti-Ijebu prejudice which was the underlying motive at work and both resigned from the movement.³³ The exit of the two individuals from the party caused serious fracture in the party followership, as each on leaving the movement, was followed by his supporters usually his kinsmen. The Igbo served as a major support base for the NYM, and when Azikiwe left the party, they also followed him; likewise the Ijebu elements in the party. Awolowo’s fissiparous attempts to reconcile the dissenting members could not yield any meaningful result, and the party’s fortune began to decline. This issue of Ikoli and Azikiwe has been viewed as the root cause of ethnic and primordial sentiments in Nigeria’s politics, because when Azikiwe left the NYM, all the Igbo members felt that he was not properly treated and therefore supported his cause and moved out with him to NNDP.

The crises in NYM led to the formation of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons in 1944 after series of meeting between diverse interest groups in Lagos. Initially members of the NYM remained aloof, and viewed the NCNC as a stratagem by Azikiwe and Macaulay to seize control of the nationalist movement. The next year 1945, marked a turning point in the political firmament of Nigeria, as the new Governor of Nigeria, Sir. Arthur Richards submitted constitutional proposals, which fell short of the Nationalists interests and aspirations to the Legislative Council. The constitution was a reflection of the level of colonial dilemma and mistakes of the British in Nigeria going by its provisions.³⁴ The new constitution divided Nigeria into three regions with regional parliaments, thus introducing regionalism into the body politic of Nigeria. Progressively parties began to emerge on regional and ethnic lines. In 1948, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, (Society for the descendants of Oduduwa), a pan-Yoruba movement was formed, which later transmuted into the Action Group (AG) as its political wing in 1951, and in October 1951, the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), was also formed as a political party. The introduction of Regionalism by the constitution changed the content of politics in Nigeria. In each of the three Regions a particular ethnic group dominated numerically, thus giving vent to the emergence of a distinction between a majority ethnic group and a minority ethnic group.³⁵

³¹ The Charter was reproduced for a detailed in, Obafemi Awolowo, *Awo: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 121-123.

³² Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978), 142.

³³ R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, 53-54.

³⁴ See J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 271-284.

³⁵ Ekeh, P.P. “Nigeria’s Emergent Political Culture”, in Peter P. Ekeh, Patrick Dele-Cole, and Gabriel O. Olusanya, (eds.), *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty Five years*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Ltd, 1989), 6.

One common feature that cut across the later-day parties in Nigeria at this time was their covert ethnocentric inclinations. None at the time of its formation was pan-Nigerian in outlook and character, none had a wide-spread coverage across Nigeria, nor did any accommodate people from other ethnic groups at the time of inception. This can be explained from the fact that the colonial origin of the Nigerian state ensured that power was the defining attribute of statehood, and those who seek it, ignore all other non-coercive elements such as morality, norms and values³⁶ that hold society together. Thus the elite political class exploited the colonial circumstances that placed them on the line of power to the detriment of national interest and unity. Of all these parties, it was only NCNC that managed at the on-set to spread its coverage and maintain multi-ethnic character, though Southerners were fully in charge of the party, and to lesser extent northerners of Middle Belt origin. Notwithstanding that branches of the party were located in more than a dozen urban centres in Northern Nigeria, virtually all the active members in those branches were southerners temporarily resident in the north.³⁷ However, with the rabid ethnic consciousness that overshadowed the Nigerian political space from the time Action Group and Northern People's Congress were formed and regionalized as ethnic parties, the NCNC began to lose some of her ubiquitous character and receded more into the bosom of its logical progenitor Azikiwe. These party leaders, Azikiwe, Awolowo, and Ahmadu Bello, built strong regional bases from where they rooted their powers and plotted to hijack power at the centre. The constitution of Action Group and Northern People's Congress for example did not hide the fact that they were ethnic/regional parties. For the Action Group, its sole purpose was to advance the cause of Yoruba ethnic group and to capture power in the Western Region.³⁸ The NPC was an out-right Northern party, and its manifesto/constitution expressly stated who should be a member of the party—a Northerner *simpliciter*. The leadership of the party did not border to extend its membership to non-Northerners; neither did they have branches outside their traditional power base. The slogan of the party 'one North, one people, irrespective of religion, tribe or rank'³⁹ tells one what it believes in. It was a party that sought to hegemonize the North, re-colonize it for the Caliphate and keep opposition and non-Muslims out of the way. This could be seen from its conscious programmes of eliminating non-Muslims of Northern origin from recruitment into New Nigerian Development Corporation as well as the Bank of the North.

To understand the harrowing effect of regionalisation of political power in Nigerian, one would need to point at instances where regional political lords exploited ethnic and primordial sentiments to their own advantage thereby causing greater harm to inter-ethnic harmony and peace in Nigeria. Let us look at the scenario after 1951 Macpherson's Constitution which did not provide for direct election into the federal legislature, but instead, central legislators as well as ministers were to be selected from within the representatives elected to the regional legislatures. Azikiwe who had been elected into the western regional legislature from the Lagos constituency, then a part of the western region, anticipated victory and to emerge as the leader of western region in the Federal House of Representatives. The Action Group controlled House was to elect two of the five NCNC Lagos representatives to the national House of Representative. Instead, the AG, used its majority to prevent Azikiwe from being elected, thereby confining him to the Western regional House as leader of opposition and scuttling his ambition of becoming the leader of western region. This development did not go down well with Azikiwe as well as with his Igbo supporters. His absence from the centre meant that he was unable to control the activities of his members in the centre. This situation occasioned the Eastern Regional political crisis of 1952/53 which culminated in the dissolution of the House, and Azikiwe resigned from the Western House to scamper across the Niger to clinch power in the Eastern Regional House and became the leader of Government.⁴⁰ Azikiwe no doubt was able to do this because he was from the dominant ethnic group in East—the Igbo, and because he had been frustrated by the ethnic conspiracy of the Yoruba, the only way to recoup his losses was to come down to his own ethnic enclave and frustrate Eyo Ita and those who were with him in disobeying him Azikiwe out of the NCNC, thus engendering animosity between the Igbo and other minorities in the Eastern Region.

Eyo Ita and his Efik group and their Ibibio counterparts, in sympathy, moved out of NCNC and formed a new

³⁶ Okwudiba Nnoli, *The Struggle for Democracy in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Nigeria Ltd, 2011), 30.

³⁷ J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 265-266.

³⁸ N.C. Ihediwa, 'Ideological Flux, Ethnicity and Corruption: Correlates in Explaining Leadership Failure of Nigeria's Founding Fathers', in Tony Edo, and Terhamba Wuam, (eds.), *Democracy, Leadership and Accountability in Post-Colonial Africa*, 509.

³⁹ Paden J. N. *Ahmadu Bello: Sardana of Sokoto*, (Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Co, 1986), 156.

⁴⁰ O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 155-156.

political party-the National Independent Party, thus marking the rise of minority agitation in Eastern Region.⁴¹ Intra-class conflict and ethnic manipulation was rife during this period in all the three regions. Manipulation of ethnicity to defend personal interest worked as a tool for the political elites. The refusal of Eyo Ita to lodge government money in a bank Azikiwe had interest and his subsequent sack from the party, showed that Azikiwe placed his personal financial interest first and the interest of the NCNC second.⁴² At the time of the crisis, Eyo Ita was the Leader of Government Business in Enugu; he saw no reason to vacate his post at the heat of the moment, as did most of his cabinet which in sheer brilliance surpassed by far anything Enugu had seen, and the brutally unfair treatment offered him in Enugu did not go unmarked in Calabar. It contributed in no small measure to the suspicion of the Igbo by their minority neighbours in the Eastern region- a suspicion which far-less attractive politicians than Eyo Ita fanned to red-hot virulence and for which the Igbo have continued to reap enmity to this day.⁴³

Azikiwe's political career in the Eastern Region was not without challenges, and some of these could have been managed and contained without allowing it go out of hand, like the Eyo Ita's case. It was after these crises that series of contestations within the NCNC arose leading to the formation of another political party within the East by Azikiwe's opponents. With the plot to remove Azikiwe from the NCNC failing, Mbadiwe and a few of his supporters left the party and founded a new political party the Democratic Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons (DPNC), though the party did not make any head way, Mbadiwe later was pardoned and he returned back to NCNC in 1959.⁴⁴ The gradual loss of pan-Nigeria posture of the NCNC and its close identification with the Igbo State Union as a vanguard of NCNC promoted ethnic chauvinism and elicited suspicion from non-Igbo members. His acceptance speech as the president of the Igbo Union in Aba, where he alluded that the God of Africa specially created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from bondage of the ages,⁴⁵ became a reference point to members by other ethnic group and continued to heighten their fears of Igbo tendency towards domination. Awolowo did not hide his own fear about this utterance; he responded by saying that 'it had become clear to him that Azikiwe's policy was to corrode the self-respect of the Yoruba people as a group to build up the Ibo (sic) as a master race'.⁴⁶ Though Azikiwe should be moderately criticized with respect to ethnic parochialism than the rest of the other nationalists, when assessed objectively.

Political contestations heightened ethnic and primordial sentiments as we noted before, but the root cause is linked to the nature of the Nigerian colonial state, where scarcity and deprivation created disharmony, unhealthy competition and mutual suspicion among the constituting groups, predisposing the elites to economic and social insecurity which combined to foster primordial solidarity as a way to protect their interest. Thus the regional leaders saw the preservation of their interest as a way to survive and hegemonize the system. The position of Obafemi Awolowo was not in doubt from the on-set over ethnicity. He was a core primordialist, long before gaining political prominence. Unlike Azikiwe, he did not pretend to be a detribalized nationalist. His own political association the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, was a cultural association for the descendants of Oduduwa, and he did not attempt to operate outside his region as Azikiwe did prior to 1953. The AG's ability to mobilize rural mass support for the party rested on the virtual inseparability of cultural and political matters in the eyes of the rural folk.⁴⁷ Not only this, the regionalisation of politics did not leave the regionalisation of the economy behind. The political class controlled regional Marketing Boards, awarded contracts and dolled favour to loyal supporters without regard to due process. Action Group influence was felt in the Federation of Civil Engineering Building Contractors of Yaba, the African Contractors Union, the Nigerian Produce Buyers Union, and the Nigerian Motor Transport Union.⁴⁸ Using economic bait, the political elites, controlled the political behaviour of the citizens, charged their attitude towards the out-culture, and commanded their obedience through material inducements and the award of contracts. The Western Regional Tenders Board awarded building contracts

⁴¹ O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 168-169.

⁴² H. D. Dlakwa, "Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics: Formation of Political Organizations and parties", F.U. Okafor, (ed.), *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, 110.

⁴³ C. Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, (Enugu; Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1983), 58-59.

⁴⁴ S. O. Mbakwe, "Regional Premiership: A Test of Political Leadership, in M. S. Olisa and O. M. Ikejiani-Clark, (eds.), *Azikiwe and the African Revolution*, (Lagos: Africana Fep Publishers Limited, 1989), 234-237.

⁴⁵ J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 347.

⁴⁶ See Obafemi Awolowo, *Awo*, (Cambridge University Press, 1960).

⁴⁷ O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 166.

⁴⁸ O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 178.

exceeding 5 million naira each to twelve African contracting firms, all of which were owned by members and supporters of the Action Group.⁴⁹ Government patronage such as loans, licensing and contracting was controlled through public agencies that had political protection. With the resources at their disposal, the political class was able to brainwash their supporters against joining other political parties that were not their own party and profess their traditional and cultural sentiments of their region.

The Northern People's Congress from the start was a regional and ethnic party, and its leadership manipulated the people more than anywhere in the country. The leaders promoted ethnic animosity through unguarded utterances, and used economic influence to direct their actions. The official attitude of the political class in the region was that the South wanted to dominate them, and that accounted for why they insulated themselves from southern penetration and free interaction. Their leaders exploited religious symbolisms and sentiments to promote their political interests. The socio-economic and political structures of the region enabled the easy manipulation of the masses, and through cheap and subtle means, the Northern political elites achieved the complete domination and of their people. For example, the political elites there feared that the close interaction of the southerners with their people would expose their hypocrisy and arouse opposition to their manipulative tendencies. Consequently they began to present a southerner as Christian who should not be rated better than infidels *Kafiri*. One of their political leaders openly stated that they had to tell people to hate the Southerners, to look at them as people depriving them of their right in order to win them over.⁵⁰ Those Northerners who dared deal with the Southern politician were seen as outcasts and marked for punishment. The South was an identifiable enemy, and the ruling class had little problem in mobilizing its people against them.⁵¹ In the North, the class stratification of the society is one that made it possible for easy control by the political elites. This is so because nobody could question what the leaders say especially the man who had the political power. Couple with the force of religion, which binds the society together to a slavish-like kind of obedience. But in all, the most portent instrument with which the Northern political leaders manipulated ethnicity has been religion. That was why any person who left the NPC and its political manifesto, was accused of departing from God, for it had been an article of faith in the Caliphate that "The hand of God is on the community and he who sets himself apart from it will be apart in hellfire. He who departs from the community by a handspan ceases to be a Muslim".⁵²

The political leaders of the North adopted 'Northernization' as an official policy to keep the South away from the public service in the region and to ensure that their non-Northerners were frustrated from getting jobs or contracts. The policy applied not only to the civil service of the region, but also to the informal economic sphere. In the wake of Northernization, some indigenous businessmen there formed various pressure groups which were affiliated to the NPC. The policy was a kind of political patronage rather than a policy of political emancipation from the domination of Southern Nigerians.⁵³ The elites in the North devised every means to ensure that the people were kept blind. Every form of identity mobilization was used

The regionalisation of political power laid the foundation for the emergence of regional lords and their petty bourgeoisie, whom they collaborated with in undermining the larger interests of the society. In the three regions, various mediums were used in manipulating ethnicity. In the East, the elites and politicians used Igbo domination and hatred by other groups to draw the desired following. Demagoguery was also used. Mokwugo Okoye, captured the situation very aptly, when he said that the politics of the elite political class was corrupted not only by hope of financial gain, but by apathy, arrogance, intolerance, anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism and parochialism, by the pursuit of sectional rather than national interest.⁵⁴ The political elites, to remain in power, mystified politics as though they were the only ones who could survive the trouble, and at the national level, the manipulation of ethnicity was seen in the alliances that parties formed.

The devolution of powers to the regions especially by the 1954 constitution set the stage for the three leading

⁴⁹ R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, 450-452.

⁵⁰ M. Dent, "Tarker and the Tiv: A Perspective on Nigerian Federation", in R. Melson, and H. Wolpe, (eds.), *Nigeria: Modernisation and the Politics of Communalism*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971), 452.

⁵¹ M. H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1993), 14.

⁵² Quoted in B. J. Dudley, *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria*, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1968), 143.

⁵³ A. Olawale, "Federalism, Inter-ethnic Conflicts and the Northernization Policy of the 1950s and 1960s., in Kunle Amuwo, Rotimi Suberu, Adigun Agbaje and George Herault, (eds.), *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 2000), 61

⁵⁴ M. Okoye, *A Letter to Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979), X.

nationalist figures Ahmadu Bello, in the Northern Region, Azikiwe in the Eastern Region and Awolowo in the Western Region, to opt for power in their region instead of remaining in the central government which was still under British control.⁵⁵ This was to ensure consolidation of regional influence and creation of personality cult within their respective regions. Having secured their regions, the next plan was to find a way of making in-road into other regions – this was the challenge before AG and NPC because they did not achieve national or inter-regional character from the beginning like the NCNC. So to mobilize support from other regions for instance, the AG under Chief Awolowo planned to re-orient its support to a broader constituency, comprising individuals and classes from all regions (including the upper North) that felt excluded from the distribution of patronage and positions, and who might be attracted by the programme of egalitarian socialism. This plan came after he had campaigned for the creation of states in the minority areas in the North and East during the 1950s,⁵⁶ as a means to incite the minorities of the regions against the dominant NPC and NCNC. Each of the three major political parties played leading roles in mobilizing the socio-economic elite; once this elite mustered a majority in the regional parliament, it was able to control the dispensation of a wide range of political favours and economic sanctions to retain its position and power and keep the under privileged classes as subordinates. Positions and employment in government services and public corporations, licenses for market stalls, permits for agricultural export production and land rights, were allocated by the governing elite. Each major party was supported by a bank.⁵⁷ No wonder the elite of each region preferred to close ranks, so as to share the fruits of office and to prevent any challenge or opposition to their position.

This distressful situation of disunity within the power elites and the regions had led to the meeting of the representatives of rival factions of the Nigerian nationalist movement in 1951, under the auspices of an ad hoc committee of National Rebirth, whose purpose for convening the meeting was to unify the divided nationalists; which though failed to achieve its mission. A prominent member of the AG Chief Bode Thomas, who attended the meeting, had trenchantly criticized the move, forcefully accusing the NCNC of bad faith, and favouring the organization of regional political parties.⁵⁸ The move to achieve unity of the regions and the nationalist before the 1959 Federal election was lost during this period, as the dominant view within the AG and NPC was not for unity of interest. Awolowo's contention then was that cultural nationality irrespective of size was entitled to separate statehood within the Nigerian Federation.⁵⁹ The results of the 1954 and 1956 regional elections show that each of the major political parties was seriously entrenched in its region and won majority of the seats there. Only NCNC had won a good number of seat in the West as well as winning in the East. The NPC did not make impact in other regions then.⁶⁰

Political contestations and manipulation became deepened with the emergence of other parties in the North like the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), of Mallam Aminu Kano, and United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led later by Joseph Tarker. These parties threatened the asphyxiating grip of the NPC on Northern Regional politics, exposing the fallacious and pretentious underpinnings of the elite leadership of the party in there. In all the elections both regional and federal from 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956 and 1957,⁶¹ the three main political parties in the Western, Eastern and Northern Regions, won overwhelming majority seats against any rival parties, showing the extent of which ethnic mobilization. The struggle for political and constituency control in the regions had begun as independence drew nearer by the day. All the three political gladiators-Azikiwe, Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello, knew before hand that controlling their regional platforms was very critical not only for the control of votes and men, but also for the control of resources with which to fight political battles and maintain the obedience of their followership. To this end, Awolowo in 1955, through the AG controlled Western House of

⁵⁵ C. Ake, *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*, 99.

⁵⁶ W. Nafziger, "The Political Economy of Disintegration in Nigeria", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, (1973), 510.

⁵⁷ W. Nafziger, "The Political Economy of Disintegration in Nigeria", 509.

⁵⁸ R. L. Sklar, "Contradictions in the Nigerian Political System" in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2; (1965), 202.

⁵⁹ R. L. Sklar, "Contradictions in the Nigerian Political System", 203.

⁶⁰ See for an in-depth understanding of election and party politics in the regions during the 1950s, R. L. Sklar, and C. S. Whitaker, "The Federal Republic of Nigeria", in Gwandolen M. Carter, (ed.), *National Unity and Regionalism in Eight African States*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 33-95.

⁶¹ R. L. Sklar, and C. S. Whitaker, "The Federal Republic of Nigeria", in Gwandolen M. Carter, (ed.), *National Unity and Regionalism in Eight African States*, 53-56.

Assembly, passed a resolution supporting the creation of the state renamed the Midwest State. At the same time too, similar demands were made for the creation of the Middle Belt State in the North and the Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) state in the East.⁶² With these positive calls, the Ag was able to sensitize the minorities on their ethnicities thereby using that to make political gains into the regions. In response, the minorities saw in Awolowo, a true reflection of what they needed, and voted for AG in the regional elections in the East. The result of all the ethnic sensitization prior to the 1959 federal election was that all the parties had worked very hard in their respective regions, mobilizing the electorate on ethnic lines.

Thus after the 1959 general election, each party had won in its region, but the Federal coalition was formed between NCNC and NPC based on the numerical preponderance of the NPC and their shared antipathy to their regional rivals the AG. The NPC resented the interference of AG in the north, and the NCNC hoped to use the romance it was having with the NPC to end AG control in the west and to establish a separate mid-west region. The AG had sent emissaries to both the NPC and NCNC in search of a winning coalition, and none admired her as a coalition partner; thus the NCNC entered into coalition with NPC for personal and regional gains.⁶³ The newly formed independence government emerged with the contradiction of mutual suspicion and ethnic intolerance and biases. The place of AG as the opposition party was to cause more problems for democracy and ethnic tolerance in the newly independent state. The coalition government under the headship of the NPC surreptitiously incited and fuelled the disagreement between Akintola the premier of Western Region and Awolowo the leader of the AG. This conflict between Awolowo and Akintola, which was tacitly supported by the ruling coalition, degenerated into disorder and violence, leading to the declaration of state of emergency in the Western region and the arrest of Awolowo and his supporters on treason grounds. Amidst this confusion, the NPC and NCNC took advantage of their political honeymoon and created the Mid-West Region in 1963.⁶⁴ The essence of this move was to constrict the powers of AG and eventually destroy it as a potent opposition political party to the NPC dominated and controlled government. The NCNC and NPC alliance was to end after 1964 and with the crisis in the West, and the Census controversy, coupled with the disputed Federal election of 1964 which had been massively rigged by the NPC, all contributed in forming the underbelly of the violence in Nigeria, making the newly independent state ripe for chaos. Nigeria's first Republic was tottering on the brink of anarchy, which the political class had created as a result of selfishness.

The election crises in western region as well as the collapse of NCNC/NPC coalition were all as a result of the mobilization of ethnicity as a political tool and instrument of domination which polarized the polity and from which Nigeria has not recovered till today. Even the Nigerian National Alliance formed between the NPC and Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), after the former's romance with the NCNC had collapsed, was intended to fracture the AG in the West and polarize Yoruba interests at the same time. That alliance also involved the Mid-West Democratic Front, a minority party propped up in response to the domineering powers of the AG in western region. In response to this, the AG entered into an alliance with the UMBC in the North to agitate the minorities in the Middle Belt against the domination of the Fulani oligarchy. Even the NCNC, had entered into an alliance with the NEPU, a rival Fulani *Talakawa* party in the North, opposed to the NPC. All these alliances were created to exploit ethnic sentiments as well as divisions in the country and for access to privileges and party patronage, such as appointments to boards and parastatals in the regions.⁶⁵ The results of the election showed that ethnicity invoked by the major parties in their bid to shore up in the regions they had alliance with. This is clearly evident in the votes secured by the NPC alliance with the NNDP in the West, NCNC alliance with NEPU in the North and AG's alliance in the East.⁶⁶ With the anarchy that engulfed the polity as a result of the inability of the political class to maintain unity and stability of the country, the military on January 15, 1966, staged a bloody coup that ended the nascent democracy, leading eventually to a Civil War.

From the narrative so far, it would not be trait to submit that the political class in Nigeria did manipulate ethnicity

⁶² O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 170.

⁶³ B. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria*, 61-63.

⁶⁴ H. D. Dlakwa, "Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics: Formation of Political Organizations and parties", F.U. Okafor, (ed.), *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, 117.

⁶⁵ D. Abubakar, "The Rise and Fall of the First and Second Republics of Nigeria", in F.U. Okafor, (ed.), *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, 76.

⁶⁶ O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 170-171.

to their selfish ends which ultimately created the problems from which Nigeria is yet to recover. The elite who were privileged to hold power in Nigeria, regarded their position as permanent, or more or less as self-recruiting for as Chief Fani Kayode, would say, “whether you vote for use or not, we will remain in power”.⁶⁷ While Ahmadu Bello would refer to the opposition members of NEPU in the North, as “prodigal children who would return to the fold once they realized how misguided they had been,” showed the level of intolerance these father-figure elites showed to dissent.⁶⁸ Political support was bought through the use of money; offer of jobs or through policies that are immoral. Okpara when addressing the electorate in dissident areas of Eastern Region informed that: “If you want light and water, you will first have to vote for me”.⁶⁹ Rather than champion causes that would advance peace and unity, the political class, because of the perquisite of office, reclined to ethnic appeal, incitement or mobilization. For instance, in Western Region in 1964 and 1959, Chief Akintola urged his fellow Yoruba to unite against the Ibo (sic) ‘menace’ in a desperate attempt to bolster his own lagging legitimacy – with such encouragement, it is no wonder that ethnic projection came to be such a common feature of Nigerian life.⁷⁰ In summation, the presentation has shown to what extent the political class manipulated ethnicity to score political gains for themselves and in doing so, they never considered the aftermath. No wonder Appollos observed that “Ethnicity is often manipulated by those who are in control of state power or aspiring to control it in order to further their political objectives”.⁷¹

4. Conclusion

Colonialism distorted intergroup relations in Nigeria, and its wake laid the foundation for discord and mutual suspicion. The inability of the diverse groups to understand the essence of unity was exacerbated by the social distance created by colonial policy of separate development which existed from the time of amalgamation till the Richards Constitution in 1946. Though after regionalism was put in place by the constitution of 1946, the various political leaders failed to use the opportunity offered to them by virtue of being the peoples’ representatives to foster unity and inter-ethnic harmony. The political elites for selfish reasons did not utilize the opportunity provided by diversity to the benefit of the polity. The discourse so far shows clearly the evolution of ethnic consciousness in the political process of Nigeria and how that badly affected the possibility of proper political development and sustainability of democracy. The use and manipulation of the forces of ethnicity caused Nigeria gravely and that has continued till today. The political class prior to independence and after independence in Nigeria, distorted the political terrain using ethnicity and primordial mobilizations which occasioned deep-seated disharmony in the country, leading to we and they syndrome and mutual discontent among various ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria.

⁶⁷ B. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria*, 42.

⁶⁸ B. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria*, 43.

⁶⁹ B. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria*, 43.

⁷⁰ M. Peil, *Nigerian Politics: The Peoples View*, (London: Cassell and Company, 1976), 74.

⁷¹ M. Appollos, “Ethnicity, Violence and Democracy”, in *Africa Development*, Vol. XXVI, Nos. 1 & 2, (2001), 116.

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