

**Political Conflict and Violence in Nigeria
1960-2010: A SYNOPSIS**

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Abstract

By its very nature, politics is conflictual. This is because the essential ingredient of politics is struggle and pursuit of interest. Hence a commentator defined politics as the struggle for the acquisition of state power, the consolidation of state power and the use of state for the advancement of group interest. Though the above commentator failed to realize that politics transcends the state to include all other arenas of group interaction over commonly held resources-the church, family, social/communal groups, even ethnicities; that the central issue of struggle and pursuit of interest is highlighted makes it acceptable nonetheless. In Nigeria, as elsewhere, political interactions between and among the various groups and interest have always tended to conflicts, even violence. Need this be so? While we acknowledge the centrality, even inevitability of conflicts in Politics we are persuaded that political conflicts can, and should be resolved without recourse to violence. In this synopsis, attempt is made to highlight some of the major political conflicts that have attended independent Nigeria-1965 Western Regional Elections, coup and counter coup of 1966, the civil war, the annulment of 1992 presidential elections, the ill-health of president Umaru Musa Yar'adua etc with a view to determining alternative approaches to their resolution, short of violence. A panoramic presentation, this paper hopes to proffer workable solution to the recurrent Political conflicts and violence in Nigeria since independence.

Key words: Politics, Conflict, Violence, Synopsis, Nigeria.

Introduction

It is often said, and indeed assumed that conflict is inevitable in human relations. It is in this sense that the Realists make themselves relevant in theoretical social science. In situations where individuals or groups of individuals find it difficult to maintain or sustain harmony in their various levels of interaction or relationship in society, conflict would be said to have set in. When this disharmony manifests in the political realm, the situation is then simply referred to as political conflict. The trouble however is how to determine what precisely constitutes or lies in the political realm as a casual factor in conflict accession and exacerbation. Much as we do not intend to delve much into the conceptual in the present exercise, as much appear to have- been done already in that regard recently ⁽¹⁾, we must state that for us in this present exercise the political will encompass activities, relations and interactions engaged in as part of the art and science of directing and administering a state or other political units within the state. ⁽²⁾This is by no means restricting politics or the political to the state and its ancillaries, as we do recognize the political in virtually every arena of

group interaction over a commonly held resources or interest. Political conflicts are therefore seen here as those situations of disagreement that do arise as groups struggle or aspire to maintain or advance perceived interests in the process of the routine administration of political units within which they find themselves. Most times, these conflicts and disagreements take violent tunes especially in developing or underdeveloped political entities of the South.

In this country, political conflicts/disagreements do inexorably tend to lead to violence before any form of resolution is attempted. Using the episodic analysis, this paper seeks to present alternative perspectives to violence in dealing with political conflicts. Attempt is made to present the underlying background developments that gave rise to the conflicts, and then possible alternative scenario to prevent, stymie or frustrate their escalation. Our intension is to contribute to the growing literature on conflict resolution mechanisms, though our emphasis is on conflict prevention rather than resolution, and more importantly, ensuring that political conflicts are not allowed to degenerate into violence. The few episodes or events we have decided to use here include the 1965 Western Regional Elections, the coup and counter coup of 1966, the civil war, the annulment of June 1993 presidential elections, the ill-health of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua amongst other episodes.

The 1965 Western Regional Elections

Following independence in 1960, political contest in Nigeria began to manifest a cut-throat competition for political power, especially at the Federal level. The political parties that emerged as instruments for political competition by local elites in the immediate post-independent era had demonstrated and acquired clear ethnic character and orientation. Indeed, the contest for political power was thus primarily a contest for economic survival as a group, and the struggle developed into a naked confrontation in which the rival groups werenot willing to respect democratic norms and values. Infact, Nigeria came to be ruled by a cabal totally incapable of solving the country's basic economic and social problems.

Hence these groups addressed their strength mainly to the task of sharing out the meager 'national cake'. It was against this background that the out-throat struggle for power manifested itself in political conflicts and violence beginning with 1962 Action Group feud. Additionally, there were other structural imbalances that later led to major political upheavals. Prominent among them were the unsolved social and economic problems, widespread nepotism and corruption in the political sphere, political rivalry e.t.c. All these were elements that made for a potentially explosive situation. ⁽³⁾

The first sign of trouble appeared early in 1962, and took the form of a bitter rift in the Action Group (A.G.), which was then in power in the Western Region. The federal government was controlled at the time of Nigeria's accession to independence by a coalition of two major political parties - The Eastern dominated N.C.N.C and the Northern dominated NPC, with the Action Group playing the role of the opposition. However, following a rift in the Action Group between Chief Awolowo (the leader of Action Group) and Chief S. L. Akintola (Premier of Western Region) crisis became inevitable. And so at the party's convention held in Jos in February 1963, Awolowo and his supporters ousted Akintola's men from the party's key posts and replaced them with their own nominees. Efforts to reconcile

the two groups failed and Akintola was asked to resign his position as Premier of Western Region. Akintola refused and the subsequent event created an uproar and fighting in the Western Regional House of Assembly. Consequently, the federal government declared a state of emergency in the West and replaced the Action Group government by a temporary administrator appointed by itself.

Simultaneously, a commission of inquiry was set up to investigate mismanagement of public funds by the Action Group. In the process of the investigation, Awolowo and some A. G. leaders were alleged, arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the Federal government. They were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. The volatile political scene leading up to elections in 1964 was ominous. The Action Group virtually disappeared from the Federal parliament as a result of the Awolowo affair, thereby fundamentally altering political alignments at the national level. Before, the federal elections scheduled to be held in December 1964, the N.P.C./NCNC coalition had completely fallen apart. ⁴The federal parliament no longer had a recognized opposition. The federal government nominally consisted of a consensus of the ruling parties of all four regions, but it was a fragile alliance at best and had emerged as a result of heavy-handed tactics.

Admittedly, political realignment was deceptive, because the basic divisions within the country remained unaltered. The N. P. C. was reasonably secured in the Northern Region, despite the presence of minority parties, but it could not govern Nigeria alone, and alliances with any of the Southern parties remained ephemeral, as they were ideologically incompatible. The N.P.C. however continued its dominance because of the inability of the other parties to find common ground among themselves, or with northern progressives. The federal parliamentary elections in December 1964—the first since independence were however contested by two political alliances incorporating all the major parties. The Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) was composed of NPC, Akintola's Western- Nigeria based Nigerian National Democratic Party, (NNDP) and opposition parties representing ethnic minorities in the Midwestern and Eastern Regions. It was opposed by the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), which joined the N.C. N.C. and the remnants of the Action Group with two minority-based northern allies, the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). In the prevailing atmosphere of tense, cut-throat competition, regional and ethnic chauvinism developed apace. Indeed, in the struggle for control of the federal government the opposing leadership groups made intensive use of ethnic rivalry and did every thing possible to whip up xenophobic sentiments among the various ethnic groups in the country ⁵.

Regional elections in the Western Region in 1965 were accompanied by a wave of violence and arson. The N.N.D.P. under the leadership of Akintola, and actively supported by the N. P. C., succeeded in maintaining its hold on the Western Region by naked use of violence and electoral fraud. It was in this atmosphere of chaos and near-collapse of the country's political institutions that a section of the Nigerian Army seized power in January 1966. We shall return to consequent developments later.

The Protected and Inclusive Presidential Election 1992-1993

In the hey-days of the post-civil war oil boom, the Nigerian state embarked on many projects in the fields of communication, transportation, education, industrialization, and the establishment of health institutions. These were aimed at national integration and

development. In spite of this however, political developments ever since had tended to heighten political tension in the country's multi-ethnic federal system. During the transition programme of the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, 38 political associations had been formed to contest the elections which were to return Nigeria to civilian rule. However, of the 38 political parties formed, only 13 applied for registration by July 19, 1989, the deadline fixed for the submission of application. But following subsequent events, the military dissolved the political associations. In a broadcast to the nation on October 8, 1989, General Ibrahim Babangida announced that: The thirteen political associations are dissolved with immediate effect. ⁽⁶⁾

Not only were these parties banned, they were also forced to close their offices and stop all activities, or risk having their members arrested and detained by the military junta. The military regime then created two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), and directed all those who were interested in politics to join either of the two. Thus the SDP and the NRC were imposed on the people of Nigeria by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. The primaries to elect the presidential candidates of the two parties initially scheduled to be in six stages, took place amidst complaints of electoral malpractices by virtually all the aspirants. The ruling cabal subsequently cancelled the results. Another date was scheduled, September 12, 1992. This time it was to be in three zones to prevent any anomalies. The first phase was held without much complaints on September 5, but as the results were being collated 9 out of 11 aspirants of the SDP demanded for its cancellation. However, both the party and National Electoral Commission (NEC) refused to accede to their demands. At the end of the three-stage exercise General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (rtd) emerged winner.

On the NRC platform, a clear winner could not emerge. A run-off was scheduled for Saturday October 10, 1992. But two days before the scheduled run-off the ruling junta announced the suspension of the results of the primaries. ⁽⁷⁾ It also stopped the NRC run-off election. The Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), having deliberated on the NEC report on the conduct of the primaries disqualified all the 28 aspirants and cancelled the result of the primaries already ⁽⁸⁾ conducted. The government also dissolved the executives of both parties at the Local, State and Federal levels. Besides, all the presidential candidates were banned from contesting in future presidential elections ⁽⁹⁾. Consequently, the presidential election was rescheduled to take place on June 12, 1993.

The June 12 Presidential Election and its Annulment

The national convention of both the SDP and the NRC for the presidential election was organized between 27 and 30 March, 1993 in Jos and Port Harcourt respectively. Two presidential candidates; Chief Moshood Abiola of SDP and Bashir Tofa of NRC subsequently emerged. With the relevant Decree (the presidential election decree of 1993)⁽¹⁰⁾, the presidential election was finally fixed for June 12, 1993.

On Saturday June 12, 1993 Nigerians went to the polls to elect a new president. By June 14, election results from 14 States had been announced by NEC in which the SDP was seen to be leading in most of the states. By June 15, an Abuja High Court ordered NEC to stop announcing the election results from the remaining 16 states. Subsequently, on June 22, the election was annulled by Decree 39 of the Federal Military Government. The annulment was first made public by the Chief Press Secretary to the Vice-President, Mr. Nduka Ibrabor. ⁽¹¹⁾

On June 26, President Babangida announced that a new presidential election would be conducted before August 27, and that the handover date was on course. But this was never actualized before he was forced to leave office.

The annulment of the election plunged Nigeria into one of its greatest political crises in its life as an independent nation. Never before, except during the political upheaval of 1966-1970, had the survival of Nigeria as one political entity been in more serious danger. The June 12, political conflict, turned Nigeria to an unprecedented political and economic turmoil.⁽¹²⁾ The annulment created such an intense ethnic conflict and violence that the country nearly disintegrated. At the heart of the conflict was the belief, particularly in the South- West, that the North was unfairly monopolizing political power at the federal level, and was unwilling to allow power "shift" to other parts of the country. ⁽¹³⁾Although the agitation for the actualization of the verdict of the annulled June 12 election has since become a subject of history, it had no doubt left a scar on Nigerian politics that would be difficult to erase..

Coup & Counter Coup D' Etat Of 1966

To most enlightened and competent observers, all did not appear to have been well with the Federation of Nigeria since the attainment of independence on October 1, 1960. The Western Nigeria crisis ⁽¹⁴⁾, Which we considered earlier, would appear to have been the elixir to the conundrum that was set to engulf the young nation. Since an outline of that crisis has already been given, it remains for us to reiterate that the state of emergency declared within that region as a way of arresting the crisis situation by the Federal Authorities, was immediately followed by an equally controversial population census exercise in 1962. The regional Premiers tried to out do one another in their vocal criticisms of the returns of the exercise. Despite these criticisms however, the Federal Government accepted the official figures of the population census.

It must be noted that at this period, ethnic or what was then popularly referred to as "tribal" fears, tensions and conflicts between the various culture groups in Nigeria had become rife. ⁽¹⁵⁾ The ethnic tensions would appear to have been accentuated by problems arising from "regionalization" of the Federation as the country was divided into regions which weighed heavily in favour of ethnic groupings ⁽¹⁶⁾ - North, East, West, and later Mid-West. Following this concept of regionalization, political parties that were seen as powerful instruments of agitation against colonial rule, became instruments of regional or ethnic hegemony. The political parties included the NCNC - National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons ⁽¹⁷⁾, the Action Group (AG), an off-shoot of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa cultural organization, and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), which at inception was a purely cultural organization. As indicated earlier, despite their lofty aims as instruments of Nigerian Nationalism, the political parties became "tribally" oriented as each had affiliations to ethnic or cultural unions⁽¹⁸⁾. Though the NCNC at its inception embraced practically all ethnicities in Nigeria, unified in the campaign for Nigeria independence, it later came to be dominated by the Igbo in the 1960's and so came to be regarded by the rest of the country as an Igbo cultural organization meant for Igbo domination of the country.

Dominated wholly by the Yoruba, the A.G. on its own, not only came to be seen as, but indeed imposed on itself the task of forestalling the threat of Igbo domination of the country. As we have argued elsewhere, it was in this regard that a Colonial Officer, Sir John

Macpherson expressed concern at the rise of tension and ill-feeling between the Igbo and the Yoruba in 1948, in the following words:

I am very concerned about the growth of ill-feeling between the Yoruba and the Ibos and I am inclined to think that the (Egbe Omo Oduduwa) Society is mainly concerned with resistance to Zik and the Ibos rather than with any constructive programme.⁽¹⁹⁾

The NPC on its own part was dominated by the Hausa, and so like the other parties, used the spring - board of ethnic loyalty and allegiance to gain a foothold in the power politics of the immediate post - colonial Nigeria. It is trite to say that the insinuation of tribalism/ethnicity into power politics under the ethnic oriented political parties gave rise to serious ethnic animosities between and among the major ethnicities and indeed within the so-called minorities. This ethnicisation of politics not only ushered in a period of unhealthy rivalry among the various major groupings, but caused a cut-throat competition for national political offices to ensue as each group saw it as its responsibility to frustrate or forestall the domination of one ethnic group or the other on the nation. But, as will be seen shortly, this tendency appeared to weigh more heavily against the Igbo from the other ethnicities, than otherwise. Additionally, the ethnicisation of politics ensured the spread and proliferation of diverse forms of nepotism and other corrupting tendencies as national patrimony were dispensed to ethnic compatriot, irrespective of, and in utter disregard for merit, qualification or competence. It became increasingly common-knowledge that school leavers could not obtain jobs in government services unless their kinsmen were at the helm in such organizations or they can give financial gratifications, amongst other such vices. It was in the midst of this social malady that the 1964 General Election was set to take place. As indicated earlier, these elections resulted to the rigged 1965 western regional elections which inexorably resulted to a break-down of law and order in that region and prompted the military to intervene in Nigerians political trajectory. A pointed constitutional crisis could be said to have set in by January 1965. This was sequel to the controversial Federal Elections of December 1964 as indicated earlier. Following this controversy, the President, Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC refused to invite Prime Minister Balewa of the NPC to form a government. Instead, he is believed to have issued orders mobilizing the Army to enforce his authority to suspend the government, annul the elections and appoint a temporary interim administrator to conduct elections.⁽²¹⁾

Due however to constitutional guarantees which ensured that oath of allegiance by the officer corps of the Army was not only to the Commander-in-Chief but also to the government of the federation - Army Act No 26 of 1960, Navy Act No 9 of 1960; the President could not have his way. As we have seen in the preceding analysis on the Western Regional crisis, and in conformity with a recently released US Diplomatic Archives, entitled Nigeria 1964-1968, the situation was characterized as "a very complicated African politics in which tribes, religions and economics all play a part". In apparent indication of the above scenario, there was a subsequent alleged plan to bring the situation in the Western Region under control by the NPC - controlled Federal government in support of its regional ally, Chief Akintola, using the army as was done in 1962. This alleged plan is believed to have brought forward the coup date to January 15. It was thus ostensibly to preempt the anticipated political decisions that may have involved the use of the Army to forcefully restore order in

the Akintola - led Western Region and crum as it were, the results of the October 1965 elections down the throats of voters, that the coup was finally launched on January 15, 1966⁽²²⁾.

The coup was said to have been organized by predominantly Eastern officers sympathetic to the UPGA alliance of Political Parties that lost, (boycotted) the 1964 Federal elections and the October 1965 Regional Elections in the West. As if to lay credence to the above perception, majority of the casualties were Northern politicians and senior military officers from the same region who were deemed to represent the NPC or its interests. Others included politicians and officers from the Western Region viewed as being in alliance with the NPC leadership. Though the "Young Turks" who led the coup failed to ascend to power sequel to a complex and controversial series of events, it threw up Aguiyi Ironsi, a Major-General and Supreme Commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces as Head of State. Being an Igbo, Ironsi was assumed to have sympathies to the NCNC, and to his Igbo ethnic group. It is equally assumed that the president, Nnamdi Azikiwe was aware of the coup of January 15, 1966. In the words of Omoigui: Captain Emmanuel Nwobosi (rtd) who led operations in the West during the coup, holds the opinion that President Nnamdi Azikiwe was briefed about the coup plot by Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna in Lagos.⁽²³⁾

In the midst of these assumptions and presumptions, and the general state of confusion that reigned following the coup and the abduction of the Prime Minister on January 15, 1966, Nwafor Orizu, President of the senate, and an Easterner from the NCNC, who also was the Acting President, was said to have refused to accept the appointment by the NPC - dominated cabinet of an interim Prime Minister; Dipcharima, a Northerner. In the circumstances, the option of inviting British troops, with or without a Defence Pact (Such moves having been thwarted in 1962) became imperative. But without any constitutional backing for such a move, Orizu and the rump Cabinet had no other option than to hand over to the Army Chief, Major-General Ironsi who incidentally was an Igbo Easterner as earlier indicated, to "avoid disaster". This turn of events, along with what has been described as "brutal and regionally asymmetric murders", that accompanied the coup set the tone for the counter coup of July 29, 1966.

The Counter Coup

If there is any single event that led Nigeria to a fratricidal 30 months civil war, it was the counter coup of July 29, 1966. As we have seen, it was largely the presumptions and assumptions of the possible motivations of the January 1966 coup that fed upon one another to produce the paroxysm of the July counter coup. It will be recalled that the Ironsi regime which commenced on January 15, 1966 was faced primarily with the task of maintaining law and order, and building trust across the length and breadth of the nation. Apart from these however, General Ironsi also sought to address several agricultural, economic and constitutional questions made paramount by the events of the recent past.

Pursuant to these, several committees were appointed to look into certain questions - the National Agricultural Advisory Committee, the National Planning Advisory Group, and a nine-member Constitutional Review Committee.²⁴ Of these committees, it was the constitutional committee that generated explosive reactions. Pointedly, when the Ironsi regime announced the Francis Nwokedi commission on 13 February 1966, to examine the feasibility of a military government in Nigeria; although it was welcomed in several

quarters, the North saw it as a move towards southern domination of the country. It was however the promulgation of the infamous and ill-fated Decree No 34 or the constitution (suspension and modification) (No 5) Decree 1966 on 24 May, 1966 that appeared to be the last straw that broke the "Norths" back. This Decree jettisoned the Federal Structure agreed upon by the

All Nigeria Constitutional Conferences of the 1950's for a Unitary structure of governance for Nigeria.²⁶ Though these were interim measures adopted by an interim military administration to deal with perceived hiccups noticed in the polity as a result of regionalization and its attendant centrifugal tendencies, they met with very strong suspicion and antagonism in the North. It was against this background that the counter coup of July 29, 1966 took place.

General Ironsi had embarked on a nation-wide familiarization tour planned to enable him meet with Traditional Rulers and other opinion leaders in the four regions, to explain government policy objectives. While in Ibadan, Western Nigeria on July 28, 1966, a mutiny broke out at Abeokuta Army Barracks. Officers of Eastern Nigeria origin were massacred while their families suffered different degrees of horrendous atrocities at the hands of Northern soldiers. Oblivious of these happenings, Ironsi is reported to have finished his assignment before dusk, and would have left Ibadan for Lagos on July 29, but was persuaded by Lt Col. Fajuyi his host to stay the night in Government House Ibadan. That proved to be the last request Ironsi will ever oblige his friend and compatriot. Unknown to them the counter coup of July 29, 1966 was already afloat. During the morning hours of July 29, 1966, the mutineers under their leader Theophilus Danjuma had surrounded Government House, and demanded that Col Fajuyi hands over Gen. Ironsi. But Fajuyi would have none of that. Deserted by friends and body guards, and left to their own fate, Col Fajuyi is reported to have said, "I make bold to declare to you that I am with you soul, spirit and body. So will I humbly yet proudly remain". In accepting his friend's solidarity Ironsi is documented to have responded: "Yes! Francis. In you I retain my absolute confidence".²⁷ That was the last Nigerians would hear from or see their supreme commander and his host alive. Their gruesome murder was followed by an even more gruesome, if macabre massacre of Igbo Easterners in military barracks across the country and in major northern towns and cities. This was the setting for the outbreak of the 30 months civil war that pitted the Igbo Easterners against the rest of Nigeria.

The Civil War (1967-1970)

It is not our intension to go into a rehearse of factors and issues responsible for the outbreak, escalation or prolongation of the civil war. Our intension is simply to determine background issues of political conflict, and how those issues were allowed to degenerate into violence and war. A major impetus to the inexorable descent to Civil War was the continued massacre of Igbo civilians and soldiers resident in Northern cities following the counter coup of July 29, 1966. In fact the killings soon turned to a pogrom directed against the Igbo nationality in Nigeria. As the Federal Authorities tried to convene a constituent assembly for a constitutional revision to enable an early return to civilian rule during the remainder of 1966 to 1967, the pogrom against the Igbo simply increased. The Army subsequently became divided along regional lines as reports circulated to the effect that troops of Northern Nigerian origin had participated in the killings.²⁸

All these incongruous action had, no doubt, been inflamed by human perceptions borne out of wit or folly regarding motivations and aspirations of the sponsors of the coup d'etat of January 15, 1966. In the midst of the abhorrent behaviour by sections of the country, Military Commanders and Regional Governors, including Lt. Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu of the Eastern Region continued to meet in Lagos to consider possible solutions to the strife. But they failed to reach a consensus despite what may be said to constitute "concessions" offered by the North. This was because it began to prove increasingly impossible to guarantee the security of Igbo lives outside the Eastern Region. For fear of his own very life, Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Military Governor stopped further parleys in Lagos.

This was the setting until January 1967, when military leaders and senior police officers met at Aburi, Ghana at the instance of the then Ghanaian Military Government. At this moment, the Eastern Region was already at the point of secession. But a last ditch effort was made at Aburi to keep Nigeria together. This involved an accord that provided for a loose confederal structure of regions. But this was not to be, as federal civil servants advised Lt. Col. Gowon who had become Head of State following the counter coup of July 29, 1966, to reject the so-called Aburi Accord. Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Ojukwu rejected all overtures made to him from the Federal Authorities for a reconciliation with the Eastern Region, and proceeded to announce his intention to retain all revenues collected in the region as a reparation for the cost of settling returning Igbo refugees.

In anticipation of the Eastern Region's secessionist predilection, the Federal Government under Yakubu Gowon, a Middle Belt Northerner, announced the creation of 12 states out of the hitherto four regions in Nigeria. This was a strategic move to weaken Ojukwu's support base, as the so-called Eastern minority areas of Rivers and Cross River now had states of their own. In an apparent reaction to this, and at the behest of the Eastern Region consultative Assembly, Ojukwu announced the secession of the Eastern Region from the rest of Nigeria on May 30, 1967 following a vote to that effect by the Consultative Assembly on May 26. The secessionist enclave to be known as the Republic of Biafra took no cognizance of the so-called creation of states as the Republic encompassed all the areas hitherto designated the Eastern Region of Nigeria. The police action announced by Gowon as a response to the perceived rebellion of Ojukwu soon degenerated into a 30 month civil war that tasked the energies of both the secessionists and the Federal authorities.

The Ill-health of Late President Umaru Musa Ya'Adua

At about 3.00pm, Friday November 20, 2009, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, President Commander-in-Chief, Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria returned from the Abuja Central Mosque where he just performed Muslim prayers and complained of a severe pain on the left side of his chest. Three days later, November 23, 2009, President Umaru Yar'Adua was flown out of Nigeria for medical treatment in an undisclosed Saudi hospital.

According to a BBC report, Segun Adeniyi, Presidential Spokesman, said the President has what he called "acute pericarditis" or inflammation of the lining around the heart.²⁹ Continuing Mr. Adeniyi informed the world, including Nigerians that medical reviews and tests undertaken at the (Saudi) hospital have confirmed the initial diagnosis that the President is indeed suffering from acute pericarditis". He further stated that the president was receiving treatment for the illness and that he was responding "remarkably"

well. Before this incident, it was known within official circles, that the President has had a chronic kidney condition for at least ten years and has been unable to perform official duties a number of times because of recurring health conditions. Besides, since assuming office, President Yar'Adua had twice been flown to Germany for emergency treatment, and the trip under review was indeed his second to a Saudi hospital.

Pursuant to the preceding situation, Olusegun Adeniyi informed Nigerians that the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan was to be "acting on behalf of the president in his absence, as he was not sure when the president was to be able to return to Nigeria. But this was a clear breach of the 1999 constitution which the president had sworn to oaths of allegiance and of office to observe, protect and defend. Section 145 of the afore-mentioned 1999 constitution states:

whenever the president transmits to the president of the senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives a written declaration that (sic) he is proceeding on vacation or that he is otherwise unable to discharge the functions of his office, until he transmits to them a written declaration to the contrary such functions shall be discharged by the vice-president as Acting President.³¹

The constitution did not anticipate, nor did it empower a presidential spokesman to declare a vice-president Acting President in the absence of the president. It is observed that the president never caused such written declaration to be issued to either the president of the senate or the speaker, House of Representatives as provided for by the constitution 1999. The reason for this reckless disregard for the constitution, though inexplicable, may be inferred from the fact of Nigeria's geo-political divide. In deference to this and in accordance with the ruling People's Democratic Party's own formula for sharing power among Nigeria's geo-political regions, the President within the period 2007-2011, (and one dare say, up to 2015), must be a northerner. But in accordance with the constitution, 1999, if the President was to step down or die, he will be replaced by Vice-president Jonathan, a son of the country's southern Niger Delta region.

In precise terms, section 146 (1), 1999 constitution states:

The Vice-President shall hold the office of President if the office of President becomes vacant by reason of death or resignation, impeachment, permanent incapacity or the removal of the President from office for any other reason in accordance with section 143 or 144 of this constitution.³²

Herein lies the conflict. The North will not want to concede the Presidency to the South under any circumstances whatsoever. This is more so given that that section of the country felt greatly disadvantaged and angry during the eight year reign, and further provocative subterranean moves of President Obasanjo, a Southerner, to remain in office for life. It was the concerted and unequivocal opposition of the North, coupled with the agitations of civil society and other democratic forces in the country that ensured the triumph of constitutionalism, in the face of Obasanjo's abhorrent and obnoxious designs. Sections of the North's political establishment, especially those that were directly involved with the Yar'Adua Presidency were determined never to concede the Presidency to the south, even if it meant breaching the constitution. It was in pursuit of this agenda that reports of pressure being brought on Vice-President Jonathan to resign were heard.³³This was to enable a fresh

election to be held in the event of the death of President Yar'Adua, which would have ensured the emergence of another northerner as president.

However trenchant the above agitations, perception or wish may appear, majority in the south and indeed all democratic and progressives forces in the country and even beyond were determined that constitutional safeguards must be followed in resolving whatever conflicts of opinion and of facts that attended President Yar'Adua's sickness, and eventual death. How and why the impasse was eventually resolved without recourse to violence lies at fulcrum of this analysis.

Alternatives Perspectives to Political Conflicts and Violence In Nigeira.

From the preceding analysis, it would appear that political conflict in Nigeria are somewhat ordained, and that they must necessarily accede to violence. This is certainly not the case. Conflicts as we indicated, may be inevitable in human relations, but they are essentially human creations. Most times, they are contrived. In Nigeria, experience has shown that most political conflicts issue from suppositions and assumptions regarding the intensions of groups and individuals. Actions and comments made pursuant to these assumptions tend to trigger conflicts and even violence. The incidents, events and developments discussed in this paper tend to bear out the above assertions. Taking the issues one after the other, we begin with the Western Nigeria Crisis 1962-65. We observe that the crisis under reference issued essentially as a result of the assumption of mainstream Action Group membership including the leadership that Chief S. L. Akintola had decided to align with the NPC in order to barter Yoruba interest for personal political aggrandizement. Subsequent action in response to the situation was rather high-handed, as we saw in the Jos A.G. Convention episode highlighted earlier.

Perhaps, had appropriate dialogue been adopted, the lie in the assumption would have been exposed and Nigeria may have been spared the consequent agonies incident upon that crisis. Likewise, the coup and counter coup of 1966 were fueled by assumptions and suppositions by one group against another, coupled with comments credited to one political leader or the other. Based largely on the ethnic origin of those who carried out the putsch, and equally the ethnic origin of most of the victims, the coup, d'etat of Jan. 15 1966 was dubbed Igbo coup ... carried out essentially to advance Igbo Interest and not national interest. Other circumstantial evidences, and nationalistic pedigree and rhetorics of the dramatic personae were hurriedly and promptly ignored.

The counter coup of July 29, 1966 was also instigated by the continuing assumptions and subsequent recriminations. Sinister meanings were read to ordinarily innocuous decisions and comments-setting up of the Nwokedi commission on the appropriateness of military rule, promotions in the Army etc. All these acted in concert to set the stage for the conflict and violence of July 29, 1966; and beyond.

The civil war (1967-70) became the ultimate culmination of these series of events that called up human intellect to act either in wit or in folly. Unfortunately Nigerians chose the latter rather than the former as their course of action. The annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential. Election also continued the general trend. Reasons given for the annulment, ranging from excessive use of money in the electoral process to the compromise of the judicial system following injunctions and counter injunction's by the courts concerning the elections³⁴ were, and have remained clearly jejune; leaving observers with no other option

than to believe that the real truth for the annulment lay in the realm of assumptions and prejudices.

Perhaps, the clearest indication that political conflicts in Nigeria are mostly contrived, and that if the laws of the land the constitution, is relied upon, violence will be avoided, is the ill-health of late President Musa Yar'Adua. As we argued earlier, had the constitutional provisions that anticipated the scenario that arose been adhered, to there would not have been any conflict whatever. The Federal Executive Council would not have seen any need to be divided against itself. Groups and Geo-Political regions, conservative and progressive elements of society would have had no reasons to be fitted one against the other. The polity would not have been heated up the way it eventually was. Above all, violence or the threat of it will remain a non-option, as it managed to -thank Goodness.

Conclusion

As this study has shown, political conflict may always manifest in the process of political and other social interactions in society, but they can be prevented, avoided or contained. If we refrain from imputing sinister motives and presumptions into political actions even before they play themselves out, we would be on the way to preventing conflicts. Besides; we must ensure that political utterances are guided, and are always made to advance national, and not sectional interest. For instances, it is reported that Nnamdi Azikiwe's West African Pilot newspaper was used to project the image of the Igbo people as the greatest and strongest ethnic group in Nigeria. This, it is reported, angered other ethnic groups. Especially upset was Chief S. L. Akintola, a Yoruba leader, who 'when he became Editor of the Nigerian Daily service, seized every opportunity to write opposing editorials and personal attacks on Nnamdi Azikiwe, on account of the above comments. It could be inferred that Akintola decided to align with the NPC in order to challenge Zik's position as President in the NPC/NCNC coalition government in furtherance of the personal animosity between the two personages. The consequences of that animosity, borne out essentially by the unguarded comments referred to above; are rather too obvious to require any further emphasis. Additionally, that the Yar'Adua episode did not degenerate to violence was simply because the rule of law was eventually allowed to prevail. Short of that, all indicators were already pointing to that -hardening of stance, a clear divide between protagonists and antagonists, even the threat and actual use of the military in an unconstitutional manner to advance group opinion. But that constitutional provisions were eventually relied upon ensured that the contrived conflict did not lead to violence. Nigeria may perhaps learn from this incident that a globalized 21st century international system would serve the nation better if we adhere to the rule of law, and de-emphasize personal and group interest, especially when they run counter to national or collective interest.

Notes/Reference

1. In Olayemi Akinwumi, Sati U. Fwatshak, Okpoh O. Okpoh Jnr. (eds), *Historical Perspectives on Nigeria's Post Colonial Conflicts*, Lagos, Unimak Ltd, 2007, the term, and many other related ones have been more than appropriately conceptualized.
2. See Lincoln Allison "Politics", in Iain McLean (ed), *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*, Oxford, OUP, 1996, pp.388-389.
3. O Balogun, *The Tragic Years: Nigeria in Crisis 1966-1970* Benin City, Ethiope publ., 1973, p. 16.
4. Balogun, p.19
5. Balogun, The Tragic Years.....cited, p.20
6. A. S Mohammed, '*The June 12 Presidential election was neither free nor fair*' Director Centre for Democratic Development Research and Training, Zaria, p.4.
7. Oma F. Ibrahim, "Elections in Transition", in T. Adeniran (ed) *Seven years of 1BB, The Transition vol. 7.*, Lagos, Daily Times of Nigeria, 1993, p. 70.
8. Ibrahim.
9. P.Omeje, *Nigeria Under Military Rule 1984-1993*, MA Thesis, Dept. of History, UNN, 1996, p.105
10. B.O.Nwabueze, *Nigeria '93: The Political Crisis and Solution* Ibadan, Spectrum Bks, 1994, p.32
11. Nwabueze, p.38
12. Ray Ekpu, Sparks of Revolt, *News watch Magazine*, 11 July 1994, p.6
13. C. Agoha, "Managing Ethnic Conflicts for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria"; *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.29, No 1 & 2, 2003, p.43
14. For an account of this episode on Nigeria's political history, See O. I. Odumosu, *Nigerian Constitution*, pp 276-305, in Okey Achike, *Groundwork of Military Law and Military Rule in Nigeria*, Enugu, Fourth Dimension, 1978, p. '93.
15. In his 1973 *Sunset, in Biafra*, Elechi Amadi, recognized the dominance, of what he calls "tribal instinct" in the Nigerian society, and he says that it operates subconsciously and persistently", See also B. A. Williams, "Constitutions and National Unity in Nigeria: A Historical and Analytical Survey", in *Journal of Business and Economic Studies*, vol. 1 no 1 Sept, 1968, pp 51 -71, H. D. Seibel, "Some Aspects of later-Ethnic Relations in Nigeria", in *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* vol. 9 No 2, July 1967, pp.217-28, in Okey Achike, cited.
16. Major criticisms had attended this new concept of regionalization, introduced for the first time in West Africa by the Richard's constitution of 1949, see N. C. N. C. Memorandum of the New Constitution of Nigeria, March 27, 1945, Lagos H. O. Davies Nigeria's New Constitution", *West Africa Review* vol. 16 No 212, p. 15, for Kalu Ezera, the new concept was "the beginning stages in the process of fragmentation in the country see his *Constitutional Development in Nigeria*, 1960, p.18.
17. The N. C. N. C. changed its name to National Council of Nigerian Citizens when Cameroon ceased to be part of Nigeria.
18. See Okoi Arikpo, "Self-Government and the Tribal Outlook", in *West Africa*, 23/06/51, p. 556; R C. Sklar, "The Contribution on Tribalism to Nationalism in Western Nigeria", *Journal of Human Relations*, vol. VIII, Spring Summer 1960, pp.407-418.
19. See S. I. Okoro, "The Evolution and Trajectory of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: 1945-2003", in Olayemi Akinwumi Sati U. Fwatshak & Okpoh O. Okpoh Jnr. (eds), *Nigeria's Post-Colonial Conflicts*, cited, pp., 103-10.
20. Exhaustive account of this crisis can be found in Schwarz, *Nigeria* (1966); Mackintosh, *Nigerian Government and Politics* (1967), and Nwankwo & Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation: Biafra* (1970), in Okey Achike, cited, p.96.
21. See Nowa Omoigui", The prelude: bloody coup of January 1966" in www.omoigui.com , August, 2010, p.3.
22. Omoigui, cited, p.10.
23. Omoigui, cited, p.11.
24. Okey Achike, *Groundwork of Military Law and Military Rule in Nigeria*, cited, p.131
25. See Ola Balogun, *The Tragic Years; Nigeria in Crisis 1966-79*, PP.25-38, in Okey Achike, cited.

26. Amongst the provisions of the Decree were a renaming of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Republic of Nigeria, Federal Military Government, as National Military Government, the Regions were formally abolished while a centralized Civil Service structure was established.
27. See, "Sometime in June, 1966", in www.brandberiyonline.com, August 2010, p. 2.
28. See Oliver Ifeanyi Anyabolu, *Nigeria: Past to Present* Enugu, Classic Publ. 2000, p. 119.
29. See www.elobah.com. 26 Nov, 09, p. 1
30. Seventh Scheduled: OATHS: Oath of Allegiance and oath of office, *1999 Constitution Federal Republic of Nigeria*.
31. Section 145, *Constitution Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999*
32. Section 146, *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999*
33. See Ada Ike, in www.newstamg.com Sunday 29 Nov. 2009.
34. Efochor Festus, in "why do Nigerians want him dead?", in Ada Ike, www.newstam.q.com , 29 Nov. 09, p. 3
35. See www.citizensformigeria.com "The June 12, 1993 Election Annulment Speech of General Ibrahim Babangida June 26, 1993", Saturday 20 May 2010.
36. O.I. Anyabolu, *Nigeria: Past to Present*, cited, p. 72.
37. Anyabolu.