

PERSPECTIVES ON NIGERIA'S CHALLENGES IN NATION-BUILDING

Volume II



Edited by
Abdullahi M. Ashafa
Gaius Jatau
Ayemga Tor

Department of History
Kaduna State University, Kaduna
P.M.B. 2339, Kaduna, Kaduna State

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19. Ethnicity and the Challenge of National Integration: An Appraisal of the 1965 Vice-Chancellorship Crisis in the University of Lagos

Uwem Jonah Akpan

Introduction

It is undeniable that ethnicity and problems associated with, and arising from it constitutes a major obstacle to national integration, vitiating efforts at even development and make the emergence of true and loyal national citizenry difficult. Ethnicity is both a fact and a factor of our history. It should be noted that viable modern and independent states require a certain minimum degree of cohesion and consensus. The achievement of minimum degree of cohesion and consensus implies the controlled dismantling, across the national board, of all special statuses and privileges which militate against the march to the desired goal (Ikime, 2006).

The 1965 Vice-Chancellor crisis in the University of Lagos, otherwise known as “the Njoku Crisis”, was a typical example of how ethnic rivalry impinged on national integration. The initial tenure of the Vice-Chancellor was fixed to expire on the 31st of May, 1965. Academic conventions require that in the process of the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor, representatives of the academic staff should be fully consulted. The University of Lagos Act itself stipulated that the Provincial Council should appoint a Vice-Chancellor being eligible for re-appointment. The Senate, as a representative body of the academic staff, in accordance with the law, made a report to the Council recommending the re-appointment of the first and serving Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Njoku. The Council, acting in response to political-tribal pressure, rejected the recommendation and proceeded to appoint its own nominee without recourse to the Senate (Berrie *et al*, 1965, Nduka, 1971).

The Provincial Council refused to offer any reason for ignoring the recommendation of the Senate, but rather insisted that as a statutory body, it had legal power to do what it did and was acting within its powers and what it did could not be validly challenged. The crisis reached its climax on the 14th of June when the Provincial Council dismissed the six-non-medical Deans of the University. On the following day, 43 members of the academic staff resigned or requested recall by their sponsors. Only about one quarter of the teaching staff remained and the University was at the brink of collapse (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

This chapter examines the impact of ethnicity on national integration by appraising the crisis in the University of Lagos which erupted in March 1965, following the refusal of the University Provincial Council to renew the tenure of the pioneer Vice-Chancellor Dr. Eni Njoku, an Igbo man, for a second term, but rather, through the influence of the Premier of the Western Region, Chief Samuel Akintola and his political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), imposed a Yoruba candidate Dr. Saburi Biobaku as the Vice-Chancellor. The appointment was seen as being politically and ethnically motivated as well as a negation of meritocracy. Also, in a bid to accomplish the plan, the Provincial Council circumvented due process by sidelining the University Senate in the exercise. Due to the collaboration of the Yoruba majority in Provincial Council, the Senate, the Academic Union and the Students' Union, considered the removal of a the young university's chief academic and executive officer who enjoyed the confidence of all his staff and the respect of the academic world as unethical. The reaction of these stakeholders led to the closure of the University, the dismissal and mass resignation of about 49 academic staff. Indeed, the episode was viewed as a breach of accepted academic conventions in the pre-Nigerian Civil War era. It created bad blood and mistrust between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic nationality, sent a wrong signal to the outside world, and undermined the process of integration of the newly independent nation.

Clarification of Concepts

Definition of concepts in studies is always vital to the understanding of the subject matter of the study. This reason makes the definition of the concepts of ethnicity and national integration very crucial. This will involve the views of scholars on the subject matter.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a social phenomenon associated with the contact among ethnic groups that exist within the same political system. It is characterised by cultural prejudice and social discrimination. Underlying these characteristics are feelings of pride in the in-group, common consciousness and identity of members of the group and the exclusiveness of membership of the group. It is a phenomenon linked directly or indirectly to forms of affiliation and identification built around ties of real putative kinship. However, the factor of common consciousness, more than any other, defines the boundary of the group than is relevant for understanding ethnicity at any historical point in time (Nnoli, 1978).

Nnoli (2007) opines that in reality, ethnicity is a very complex phenomenon. Like all social phenomenon, it is subject to change. Its form, place and role in society may alter. Its links with other phenomena such as politics, religion and class may change as circumstances change. In fact, ethnicity hardly ever exists in a pure form. It is always closely associated with political, economic, social, religious and other social views and interactions. Hence, ethnicity sometimes finds expression in political domination, economic exploitation, psychological oppression and class manipulation. The nature, intensity and forms of expression of ethnicity are determined by various factors. These include the size of the various ethnic groups within the state, the strength and cohesion of their leadership; the courage and determination of the underprivileged classes; the nature, persuasiveness and power of the dominant ideology; the prevailing customs tradition and culture of the various ethnic groups; the form of government of the state and the degree of foreign influence in the society. Other factors include: historical patterns of relations among different ethnic

groups, their levels of development, the socio-economic context in which they make contact and the pattern of their migration to the place of contact.

Ethnicity varies from place to place depending on variations in their factors and combinations of them. It is found in both developed and underdeveloped countries with differing ideologies and in societies with different historical and cultural backgrounds. Depending on variations in these factors, its intensity varies from one society to another. In some, it may find expression in hostility and violence while in others, it may be expressed in cooperative endeavours. In the political sense, ethnicity depicts both negative and positive attributes. On the positive side it involves the appreciation of one's social roots in a community and cultural group without necessarily disparaging other groups. In this way it acts as a reference phenomenon that provides material and emotional support networks for individuals in society. This function is particularly important as the society becomes more and more complex, bureaucratised, impersonal and alienating. It fosters a sense of belonging as part of an intermediate level of social relations between the individual and society. On the negative aspect, its manifestation makes social harmony in multi-ethnic societies problematic. It embodies passionate symbolic aspects that promote violent conflict and rivalry.

National Integration

John Finkel and Gable (1966), opine that the term "integration" is applied to entail an extraordinary large range of political phenomenon. In this respect, they view integration as referring to "minimum value of consensus necessary to maintain a social order". They add that this may be end values concerning justice and equity, the desirability of economic development as a goal, the sharing of common history, heroes and symbols and in general an agreement as to what constitutes desirable and undesirable political ends.

Coleman (1964) views integration as the "progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities...in the process of creating a homogenous political society.

Integration according to Schermerhon (1970) is a process whereby units or elements of a society are brought into active and co-ordinated compliance with the on-going activities and objectives of the dominant group and on that basis there is consensus as regards the places of various ethnic groups. The system remains stable and co-operation takes place in a smooth manner. When this occurs, social systems seem to come into being, develop, intermingle and become transformed overtime. This definition of political integration refers directly to a plural society and includes ability to achieve consensus, stability and co-operation on all issues.

Political integration can therefore be defined as the bringing together, people of diverse origins, culture and ideologies into a common territorial enclave for mutual benefits and co-operation under a recognised system of authority.

Ethnicity and Nigeria's Political Landscape

According to Ayandele (1974), it was upon the rock of tribalism that the First Republic was founded. He adds that the platform of political parties became the theatre of activities for the educated elite who also constituted the class that was interested in the plums of office. The plums became larger and greater in number as universities and corporations were established at the Regional and Federal levels. Within the Regions, the civil servants became infected with the contagion of "tribalism" or ethnicity, wishing to see men in their localities appointed or promoted; at the Federal level and in corporations, the same process clearly manifested. Even the Federal universities were not insulated: the two big "tribes" - the Yoruba and Igbo, fought overtly on "tribal" balancing. It was on matters like these that the masses succumb to the chauvinistic feelings stirred up by the politicians and the so-called intellectuals. The Igbo, the Yoruba and the Northerners began to look upon representation in the Federal Civil Service and institutions on ethnic basis. When a Yoruba man held a key post at the Federal level, the ordinary Yoruba man felt that this meant a credit to his ethnic group. When the Igbo predominated in the Federal corporation, the Yoruba felt pained, feeling that the pride of his ethnic group had been

wounded. In the South, the Action Group (AG), predominantly a party of the Yoruba and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), predominantly a party of the Igbo, became the watch dogs of "tribal" interests in all "national cake" matters.

Ayandele (1974) also recalls that for decades, scores of Nigerians of different ethnic labels had been living in harmony in the big cities all over the country. They had town or ethnic organisations, but these were not performing functions as such. Invariably, people of different ethnic groups lived together under the same roof, successfully, behaving to one another as good neighbours, hardly ever parading their "tribal" labels in any offensive manner. For instance, from its inception in 1948, the University College, Ibadan, a large number of ethnic groups from all over Nigeria were represented and many life-long friendships forged among students without any attention being given to ethnic differences. It was not until 1959/60 Session that "tribalism" entered student unionism in Ibadan. This unhealthy development was linked to alleged instructions by a politically-oriented organisation to students of that "tribe" to devise "tribal" strategy to capture some key Union posts. The dissemination of "tribal" or clan, or regional, sectionalism inflamed relations to very dangerous proportions in the years following independence, in proportions not achieved by religious propaganda since the middle of the 19th century.

Some observers, who watched with interest the establishment of the University of Nigeria in 1960, at a time, According to Ayandele (1974) "the Igbo would not require the services of graduates of such a university, began to suspect that it was a masterly-designed strategy to provide backward areas in Northern Nigeria with Igbo personnel. This measure led their Yoruba rivals – who also needed no university – to found the University of Ife". He adds that:

On the platform of ethnic chauvinism the faction of the Action Group (AG) led by Chief S.L. Akintola succeeded in persuading a section of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) to see the writing on the wall that the Igbo were seeking to dominate the country against the interest of the Yoruba...the way in which Dr. Michael Okpara, the Premier of the Eastern Region had been

made to succeed to the leadership of the party, thus superseding Chief J.O. Fadahunsi, a National Vice-President (a Yoruba man), and the way the Igbo went on throwing their dominance in the face of the Yoruba in the Federal universities and corporations (Airways, Railways, Nigerian Port Authority etc.) made many local Yoruba NCNC to demand an end to the "Igbolization" of the party (Ayandele, 1974: 123-124).

The Establishment of University of Lagos

The Ashby Commission Report of 1960, entitled "Investment in Education", recommended that a university should be established in Lagos and the Federal Government of Nigeria accepted this recommendation. The government sought the aid of United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in this direction. In June, 1961, UNESCO Advisory Committee for the Establishment of the University of Lagos was appointed (Fafunwa, 1971).

The Ashby Commission consisted of nine members – three British, three Americans and three Nigerians. The three Nigerians were chosen from the Northern, the Eastern and the Western Regions. Britain provided the Chairman of the Commission, Eric Ashby, then Master of Clare College, Cambridge. The American representation was probably an acknowledgement of strong American presence in the proposed University of Nigeria Nsukka, being strongly promoted by the Government of the Eastern Nigeria under the Premiership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. It should be added that one of the Nigerian members of the Commission was DR. Eni Njoku who was then Dean of Faculty of Sciences at the University College, Ibadan (Nduka, 1971 and Yoloye, 1989).

The Report of the UNESCO Committee was submitted in September 1961, and in April 1962, the University of Lagos Law was passed by the Federal parliament, and both the Provincial Council and the Medical School were inaugurated. The first academic year of the University commenced in October 1962 in temporary premises in Surulere with day courses in the Faculty of Business and Social Studies, the Faculty of Law and the Medical School. In January 1963, evening

Vice-Chancellor shall be eligible for re-appointment under this subsection" (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

By the end of 1964, two and a half years after it was established, the University of Lagos made an exceptionally promising start and a permanent constitution unanimously agreed by both the Council and Senate had been written. According to a source:

In Dr. Njoku, the university had an outstandingly able Vice-Chancellor in whom all the staff had complete confidence. A remarkably good body of teachers – Nigerians and expatriate – had been recruited and relations between them could not have been more harmonious. An enviable international reputation had been speedily established and generous financial and other assistance was being received from overseas universities, and from organisations such as: the Ford Foundation, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) the United Nations Special Fund, and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). An imaginative building programme was nearing completion. The first set of students were approaching graduation and everything seemed to be going better than anyone had expected (Berrie *et al*, 1965: 7).

The Influence of Ethnicity and Regional Politics in the University of Lagos

During the Federal Elections in December 1964, one of the political parties the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) (which had an alliance with Northern People's Congress, NPC), had adopted as part of its election manifesto, the removal of people of the tribal group from posts and responsibility in the Federal Government institutions and their replacement by their own people. The spokesmen of this party made statements to the effect that the Vice-Chancellor of the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan (both of which were institutions sponsored by the Federal Government) would be removed in accordance with this policy. Shortly after the elections, statements were circulating in university circles to the effect that a defeated candidate of this party was its favoured nominee for the University of

Lagos Vice-Chancellorship. This candidate, Professor Dosekun, was later nominated for the post by a member of Council (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

According to Berrie *et al* (1965), on the 28th of January 1965, the Vice-Chancellor received a letter from the Registrar, Chief A.Y. Eke, stating that he was directed to ask the Vice-Chancellor to convene a meeting of Senate for the purpose of submitting to the Council on or before 19th of February, a report recommending three or more names for appointments as Vice-Chancellor. Knowing that the council, of which he was a member, had not met for some weeks, the Vice-Chancellor asked the Registrar on whose instructions the letter had been written. The Registrar stated that it was on the instructions of the Chairman of the Provincial Council, Dr. E.N.O. Sodeinde, who had in January 1965, been appointed an Electoral Commissioner in replacement of Canon B.A. Adeleja, who resigned from the Commission in protest against the way in which the elections were being handled. The Vice-Chancellor then instructed the Registrar to send out notices convening a meeting of the Senate for the purpose of reporting on the appointment of Vice-Chancellor (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

On the receipt of this notice, many Senate members assumed that this report was a mere formality designed to ensure compliance with the terms of the existing Act on the re-appointment of Dr. Njoku, since the new Act had not yet been passed. They assumed that had there been any serious intention of selecting a new Vice-Chancellor, the procedure which had, only two months earlier, been agreed as appropriate would have been followed. A few, however, remembering the political statements made during the elections, took the matter more seriously, especially when they heard of the terms of the Registrar's letter and its source. They were even more disturbed when it became known that a circular letter dated 10th February had also been sent by the Registrar to the Council members asking them to send nominations which "will be considered along with those made by the Senate". This is the background against which, prior to the Senate meeting of the 12th of February, some Senate members prepared a short report for submission to the Senate. The report stated

that (1) that senate had interpreted the recommendations in the report on the new constitution as a decision by the Provincial Council on the recommendation of the Senate to re-appoint the present Vice-Chancellor; (2) that, it was convinced that a failure to re-appoint the present Vice-Chancellor would be a grave and possibly fatal blow to the continued successful build up of the university; (3) that accordingly Senate recommended the re-appointment of Dr. Njoku until normal retiring age (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

At the Senate meeting on the 12th of February, the Dean of Faculty of Law, Professor Gower, introduced this report after the Vice-Chancellor had withdrawn from the meeting and the chair had been taken by Professor Dosekun, the Vice-Dean of the Medical School. In introducing the report Professor Gower explained that three or more names were not recommended, (1) because under the Act it was for the Senate to decide the nature of its report and no one had a right to dictate the form it should take, (2) because if, as he believed, they would "all feel very upset, and even rebellious, if there were to be a change in Vice-Chancellorship, it would obviously be very ill-advised to put forward other names as this would preclude the Senate from objecting if one of these names were to be appointed in place of Dr. Njoku, and (3) because it was impracticable to come up with appropriate nominations for a new Vice-Chancellor at such notice (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

The Registrar presented a report which contained six names, including those of Dr. Biobaku and Dr. T.O. Elias, the Federal Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, though the Registrar later publicly stated that Dr. Elias had never been approached or agreed to allow his name to go forward. In the course of the subsequent discussion, the Registrar stated that the object of asking for three or more names was because: "they want two distinguished academics within the university to feel that they received consideration". Berrie *et al* (1965) adds that he implied, and subsequently stated, that all other names were intended as window-dressing. The two distinguished academics were obviously Professors Thomas and Dosekun, respectively the Dean and Vice-Dean of the Medical School.

The Registrar, being just the Secretary to the Senate and not a member of it, was not entitled to introduce the working paper that he had prepared. However, Dr. T.M. Yesufu, one of the Council's nominees to the Senate, later prepared a draft report which contained a similar list of names with the addition of two others and this was circulated with a statement that he had proposed to move it at the adjourned meeting. At the meeting, however, all that transpired was that the Vice-Chancellor, having made an appeal for dignity and restraint, was asked to ascertain whether, the Chairman insisted upon the Senate's report containing more than one name. At the final meeting of the Senate on the 18th of February a statement from the Vice-Chancellor was read indicating that the Chairman had agreed to leave it to Senate to decide on the nature of its report. Thereupon both the Registrar's paper and that of Dr. Yesufu were formally withdrawn. The contentious minutes of the first meeting were also withdrawn as a result of protest against their accuracy. In the interest of harmony, Professor Gower and the seconder of the motion, having consulted those on whose behalf their motion had been moved, agreed to amend their suggested report by deleting the reference to the new proposed constitution – for some reason particular exception had been to that reference. The amended motion was then adopted by the Senate. (15 for, 6 against and 2 abstentions).

It had been suggested that by declining to report on three or more candidates, but only on Dr. Njoku, the Senate did harm to its cause. However, the facts, as some members of Senate already suspected, were that the Council was desperately anxious that Senate should give some backing, however lukewarm, to the Council's proposed appointee. Had that been done, Council would have been able to say:

We appointed someone recommended by you. True he was not your first choice but he was one of your choices, so what are you complaining about? Every attempt was therefore made to entice or bully the Senate into that trap. But Senate avoided it. It considered that Dr. Njoku was doing an outstanding job; it thought that it would be a fatal mistake to replace him; and said so. It objected to the attempt by the Chairman to dictate to it what form its report should take. It

refused to think up some other names at short notice to supplement that of Dr. Njoku. But Senate never attempted to dictate to Council. It realised that the ultimate choice was that of Council. It never denied that Council was legally entitled to reject Senate's recommendation. But in that event, Council should have asked Senate to make another recommendation or asked it to report on a name suggested by Council (Berrie *et al*, 1965: 9-10).

Following the final Senate meeting an extraordinary series of manoeuvres took place. Although a meeting of Council had been convened for the 26th of February, an attempt was made to change the date to the 19th of February – at less than 24 hours' notice to some members and no choice at all to the Vice-Chancellor. The agenda paper stated that the object of the meeting was to decide between Dr. Njoku "nominated by Senate", Professor Dosekun, "nominated by a member of the Council" and Dr. Biobaku also "nominated by a member of Council. All three were said to be "interested in the post and are free and willing to accept an offer". The profile of Professor Dosekun and Dr. Biobaku were circulated but that of Dr. Njoku was not. The Vice-Chancellor happened by chance to learn of the meeting and attended it. As a result of his vigorous protest it was adjourned to the original date.

The adjourned meeting of Council was attended by all members except the Vice-Chancellor who sent a letter stating that he thought it proper to absent himself but that he would be available at his near-by house if wanted for any purpose, for example, to answer any criticism of his administration. Professor Dosekun handed in a letter in which he stated that he would wish to withdraw his candidature for the time being. There was then a prolonged discussion about Dr. Njoku's qualities and alleged defects. No notice of the allegations was at any time given to Dr. Njoku but in fact they were so easily answered that Council has understandably refused to repeat them in public. There was no discussion at all about Dr. Biobaku. The Chairman then declared that there had better be a vote between the two candidates by secret ballot. One member queried the desirability of a secret ballot but the

Registrar hastily distributed already-prepared ballot papers and voting took place. There was never any suspension of standing orders, which specifically provide for voting by show of hands. In this way the Council decided to appoint Dr. Biobaku by a majority vote.

The actions of the Chairman and members of the Provisional Council generated a question such as why the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor done in a hurry and if it had been the intention of the Council to throw the Vice-Chancellorship open to competition, the procedure should have started early enough to allow adequate time for consideration of references and reports on candidates as this has been the usual procedure for filling posts at such a high level as that of Vice-Chancellor. The inability of the Council to provide an answer to this poser confirmed the view of the Senate that until January 1965, the Council did not envisage a change in Vice-Chancellorship. The decision was mooted after the 1964 General Elections.

Ethnic Dimension in the Njoku Crisis

As noted earlier the NNNDP campaigned for the Federal Elections by championing the interest of one "tribal" group. The majority of the Council members were of Yoruba extraction (seven in number). So was Dr. Biobaku. The vote for Dr. Biobaku was seven to three. The three were a Northern Nigerian, an Eastern Nigerian and an expatriate. The implication, presumably, was that one or both of the Nigerians was a sympathiser of Dr. Biobaku's Western Nigerian ethnic group. It is said that the Chairman denied that members of the Council were actuated by ethnic or political consideration. But some Council members had admitted this in private discussion and many Nigerian knew the truth which was frankly admitted by many of the politicians concerned. Some, indeed, had openly hailed the appointment as the fulfillment of election pledges. The Premier of the Western Region and NNNDP leader, Chief Akintola, speaking on the 25th of June at the Ake Palace Square at Abeokuta, Dr. Biobaku's hometown, said that the appointment of Dr. Biobaku "is a fore-runner of many good things that await the Yoruba at the Federal Government level". (Daily Times 26/5/65)

criticised the Senate for recommending that Dr. Njoku be re-appointed "until normal retiring age". This, act was considered as *ultra vires*. However, the Senate considered the allegation as untenable. Citing Section 6 (4) of the Act establishing the University of Lagos, which states that: "a Vice-Chancellor shall for such term as (the Council) thinks fit be appointed by the Provisional Council after consideration of a report of the Senate", the Senate explained that its report can, and should, deal with the term of office as well as with the person to be appointed.

On the question of whether the Senate was right to recommend an appointment to retiring age, the Senate argued that a few members of Senate abstained from the vote on that account. But the majority took the view that a long-term appointment was advisable to ensure a period of stability. They also believed that Dr. Njoku alone of the Nigerians of professional status was without tenure. When, at the subsequent Council meeting, it was stated that the Council considered that Dr. Njoku had a permanent appointment as Professor of Biology, the representative of the Faculties on the Council indicated that in that event Senate would certainly acquiesce in a re-appointment for a term of years. It had always been envisaged that Council might come to a different decision on this point: Council, after considering the Senate's recommendation, was clearly entitled to do so.

It was also alleged that Senate contemptuously rejected the opportunity offered it to report on Dr. Biobaku among others. The Senate denied that and rather explained that Dr. Biobaku's name was not formally submitted to Senate which never had before it any other name other than Dr. Njoku. It was explained further that had the Senate considered other names, Dr. Biobaku's would certainly not have been among them, because by this time he had announced his acceptance of the Vice-Chancellorship of the University of Zambia. Senate therefore never thought that Dr. Biobaku could be a candidate for the University of Lagos post.

Reactions of the Change of Vice-Chancellorship

When five of the seven Deans of Faculties at the University learnt of the proposed change of Vice-Chancellorship, they called on the Chairman of the Council on the 27th of February and delivered a letter of protest against the failure to re-appoint Dr. Njoku which they said, as no reasons were given, amounted to "dismissal completely without cause". They also pointed out that the University Senate had, by an overwhelming majority, recommended to the Council the re-appointment of Dr. Njoku as Vice-Chancellor. They asked the Chairman to bring their protest to the notice of the Council as he promised to do so. Instead of doing this, however, he on the next day wrote summoning them to his residence at 8 a.m., on Monday, the 1st of March. When they went to see him, he read and handed to each of them a letter which they regarded as an attempt to intimidate them.

The Council's decision to appoint Dr. Biobaku was announced in the press on the 1st of March 1965. On the evening of that day, the students of the University barricaded themselves in the university. Their representatives later had an audience with the Prime Minister at which they protested against the action of the Provincial Council. The Students' Union met and unanimously adopted a resolution declaring implicit confidence in Dr. Njoku, demanding his reinstatement and stating that until this was done they would regard the university as closed.

The Senior Staff, other than the Deans and staff of the Medical School, also met on Monday 1st of March, and passed a resolution protesting against the replacement of the Vice-Chancellor. Forty-one voted for the resolution, four against and six abstained. The staff met again on the 2nd of March when 12 more associated themselves with the motion, making a total of 53. The number voting against increased to six, and the total abstaining remained at six. Up till this point the senior staff had acted together as one group. But later, two of them, Dr. Olakanpo and Mr. Adeyomo, issued a statement disassociating themselves from the resolution, pretending that they were speaking on behalf of themselves and 43 others who were not named. The

group accused their counterparts who were barricading the University of "being motivated by tribal sentiments engineered and actively supported by a political party" (Nduka, 1971).

It was immediately clear that even if the matter was not originally politico-tribal, it had become so, the Yoruba supporting Dr. Biobaku and the Igbo supporting Dr. Njoku. Nduka (1971) states that, on the 1st of March when the change of Vice-Chancellorship was announced, *The West African Pilot*, an organ of the NCNC headed the news with "Another Shock for the Igbo: Njoku Forced out of Varsity Job". Similarly the AG, a predominantly Yoruba party, sent a lengthy message of congratulations to Dr. Biobaku.

At the University of Ibadan, the Association of University Teachers expressed distress at the conflict over the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor for the University of Lagos and asserted that:

The standards by which competence for office are assessed must be exclusively those of academic and administrative ability and personal character; political and tribal considerations should not enter...the teaching and administrative staff of the country's universities (should) renew their solidarity in the pursuit of learning in order to maintain their high name and reputation before the nation and before the academic community of the world at large (Cited Nduka, 1971: 142).

The next day, a counter statement was issued purporting that the previous day's announcement did not represent the views of the entire academic staff of the University of Ibadan. They wrote thus:

In so far as the statement of the Ibadan University AUT imputes tribal and political motives to the recent happenings in the University of Lagos, without being in full possession of the facts, as they themselves admit, we wish to completely disassociate ourselves from this view (Cited Nduka, 1971: 142).

The statement was signed by three lecturers on behalf of 46 others. Again the split was on ethnic lines. At the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), where Dr. Biobaku was the Pro-Chancellor, the Association of University Teachers announced full

the U.N. and a Tropical Agricultural Research Institute which would cost 5 million and to be maintained for a 15 year period by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations of America (Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Information, 1966: 10).

The Igbo dominated Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Information document also recalled that:

When the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was established in 1948, the Branch at Enugu in Eastern Nigeria was the least favoured. The Zaria Branch in the North received by far the largest capital investment, including a well-developed Faculty of Engineering offering courses in all the main departments: civil, mechanical and electrical. The branch at Ibadan housed the science departments and the Department of Pharmacy, all of which, like Engineering, are expensive both in establishment and maintenance. The Enugu Branch, on the other hand, was restricted to the teaching of some Arts courses and other disciplines which are not high on the priorities list of a developing country and are, in any event, the least expensive in establishment and maintenance...The Ashby Commission on Higher Education recommended that the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology be abolished and the three branches handed over to the Governments of the respective regions in which they were established. In the North the Zaria Branch was easily converted into Ahmadu Bello University and its Ibadan counterpart similarly became the University of Ife...the Government of Eastern Nigeria founded the University of Nigeria Nsukka, entirely from its own funds, with the result that the handing-over to the East of the Enugu Branch of the Nigerian College conferred no advantage but rather became a liability (Eastern Regional Ministry of Information, 1966: 10-11).

It was also stated in the said document that the headquarters of the Federal Department of Agricultural Research, the Nigerian Institute of Economic Research, the Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria, the Nigerian Institute of Stored Products Research, the headquarters of the Federal Department of Forestry Research, the Nigerian Institute of Industrial Research were all in Western Nigeria, while the

headquarters of the Federal Department of Veterinary Research and the former Federal Agricultural Research Institute and the Institute of Trypanosomiasis Research were in Northern Nigeria, while the Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research was in the Mid-Western Nigeria. No national research institute of a size and standard comparable to those established in Western, Northern and Mid-Western Nigeria existed in the East. The document also noted that former Federal Agricultural Research Station near Umuahia was by far the least developed of all the agricultural research establishments in the country before the introduction of regionalization and that the improvement of the research station was entirely due to the efforts of the Government of Eastern Nigeria.

The students' blockade of the university continued on the 2nd March. The Vice-Chancellor made an appeal to the students to return to their studies and this was broadcast, and circulated to the students in written form. The Deans also signed a joint notice appealing to the students to return to their studies. But students wrote a letter of protest to the Chairman of the Provincial Council, and printed and distributed handbills in which they maintained that they were fighting, not for Dr. Njoku personally, but for justice and academic freedom, and to keep "tribalism" and politics out of the university. They also said that they objected the coming of Dr. Biobaku whose declared partisanship would deprive the university of its most cherished academic freedom, taking into cognisance, the vicissitudes of sectional politics which at that time enveloped the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University).

It is stated that in 1963, Dr. Biobaku, as the Pro-Chancellor of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), while addressing a special congregation of the University declared thus:

I wish to say most categorically...that the authorities of the University have only one policy and that is to support the government of the day to which the university looks for sustenance...This is the credo of the university and if anyone disagrees with this fundamental policy, the remedy is entirely in his hands – to resign (Berrie *et al*, 1965: 14).

On the 3rd of March a minority faction developed among the students believed to have been led by a certain dissident members of staff, supported by political party thugs and encouraged in person by a prominent NNDP politician, and an attempt was made to force entry through the students' barricade. Every appeal made by the Vice-Chancellor to return to normalcy was to no-avail. On the 4th of March, the Council invited the Police to eject the students out of the campus. In addition, the Council announced that all the students apart from the Medical Students had been suspended.

On the 9th of March, the University of Lagos Branch of the Association of University Teachers met and, after reviewing the events related to the crisis, passed an overwhelming majority (52 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions), a resolution deploring the rejection of the Senate's recommendation by the Provincial Council without giving any reason, calling upon the Council to review its decision, and reaffirming the principles which should be followed in university matters. Also, the Igbo State Union soon joined the controversy by calling on the Prime Minister to "use his good offices to rescind the discriminatory decision of the Lagos University Provincial Council and reinstate Dr. Njoku as the Vice-Chancellor in the interest of peace and unity (Nduka, 1971).

An "Organisation for Nigerian Unity", with a Yoruba membership, asked, in congratulating Dr. Biobaku, "does the appointment of a man from a particular tribe detract from merit of the appointment....? There are two Federal Government sponsored universities in Nigeria: the Universities of Ibadan and Lagos; must both by all means be headed by one tribe? (Dr. Dike, an Igbo, was head of Ibadan at the time). Appeals from several quarters for the Prime Minister's intervention did not soon materialise. Government statements were made by the Minister of Education, Chief Richard Akinjide (a Yoruba and active member of the NNDP). On the first occasion, 9th April, he attacked "one expatriate individual, headstrong, tactless and cankerous, (who) has fouled the foundation of our institution of higher learning, and spread the spirit of rebellion not only among the expatriates but also among a section of the students (Nduka, 1971).

The Conflict Between the Council and Senate

Until the 31st of May 1965, when the tenure of Dr. Njoku expired, the university did not re-open. Indeed, the effect on the students and the nation of keeping the university closed for three whole months was unprecedented in the history of university disturbance in Nigeria. The Senate therefore directed its effort towards finding some procedure which might lead to the resolution of the deadlock and the re-opening of the university. The Council and its supporters attempted to brand the Senate as irresponsible, neo-imperialist expatriates working against the true interests of Nigeria. The Dean of Law was described as the "evil genius" and the brain behind the crisis. The Senate responded with a public statement on the 5th of April and explained that:

The Senate is a legally constituted organ of the university. Its members are responsible persons with long experience of university administration in Africa, Asia, Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, United States of America and the West Indies. That the majority of them are expatriates is a necessary consequence of present circumstances in Nigeria. They have no axe to grind or tribal or political cause to serve. All of them are here to help Nigeria to build up a university of which they and Nigerians may be proud. Many of them have renounced important posts with life tenure in order to assist in this task. None has ever faced an experience similar to this throughout his academic career, for none has ever previously been faced with a Council which has refused to behave reasonably and decently. It would have been easier and more comfortable for them to have abdicated their responsibilities by absenting themselves from Senate meetings or walking out before decisions were taken; but is not they who have taken this course (Berrie *et al*, 1965: 20)

The Senate later met and adopted a statement deploring the continued deadlock, the intemperate attack on its members and the attempts to divide it on racial ground and passed the following resolution:

Senate's sole objective in this crisis is to ensure that the university returns to normal at the earliest possible moment. Recognising the

completeness of the deadlock between Council and itself, Senate believes that external adjudication alone can now prevent the total collapse of the university. Senate, being convinced of the justice of its cause, has no hesitation in submitting it to independent scrutiny; Senate assumes that the Council has equal confidence in its case and will agree to do likewise. Since the present University of Lagos Act does not provide for a Visitor to whom disputes of this sort can be submitted, it is necessary for such adjudication to be undertaken by *ad hoc* Commission. It is obviously desirable; if possible, that such a Commission should be appointed by agreement of Senate and Council rather than imposed by outside body (Berrie *et al*, 1965: 20).

The Council rejected the suggestion by Senate. The Senate also informed the world that the name of Dr. Biobaku was not forwarded to the Senate and the Senate had not at any time considered his qualifications for the post of Vice-Chancellor as required by the University of Lagos Act, 1962.

Because of the fact that the crisis was seen as having been masterminded by the expatriate academics, particularly the Dean of Law, Professor Gower, the firm stance of the Dean was defended and it was explained that the crisis sparked off due to "ethnic particularism" which was at variance with the principle of university autonomy and international best practices, which the Dean, as an international teacher represented. It was stated that:

Professor Gower was the Casel Professor of Commercial Law in the University of London, from 1948 to 1962 and later head of Department at its College – the London School of Economics. He was much in demand by other countries as a lecturer and adviser on problems of legal education and, among many other assignments, was Visiting Professor at the Harvard Law School in 1954-55. His services were sought as a member of commissions and committees; he served, for example, on the Jenkins Committee on Company Law Amendment. In 1958, he was appointed as Sole Commissioner to advise on Company Law of Ghana and he was also a member of the International Commission which advised on

the new scheme of Legal Training in Ghana. The numerous visits which he paid to West Africa in connection with these projects instilled in him an abiding love for Africa and a deep interest in its problems. The interest was enhanced by his membership of the Denning Committee on Legal Education for African Students. In 1962, he volunteered to throw up his position at London and to go for three years or more to any newly-independent African state which could utilize his services in connection with its new scheme of legal training. In order that the country concerned could enjoy his aid without cost and without strings, the Gulbenkian Foundation agreed to provide the needed finance. He was appointed Adviser on legal Education in Africa to the British Institute of International and Comparative Law which offered his services to the Nigerian Government. They later appointed him Adviser to the Council of Legal Education. Later he was persuaded also to become Dean of Faculty of Law at the newly-established University. During his three years in Nigeria, his advice was sought by the Law Faculties of other Nigerian universities and by universities in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Basutoland and Sierra Leone. In the early part of 1965, he was invited to deliver the Holmes Lectures at Harvard University and was also appointed as one of the Commissioners on the newly-established Law Commission which was charged with long-term programme of reform of English law (Berrie *et al*, 1965: 21-22).

As noted earlier, as a result of the crisis, many academic staff were dismissed while others resigned. A breakdown of the list shows that in the Faculty of Arts one expatriate was dismissed, while nine resigned. Among those that resigned included a Historian, Professor S.J.S. Cookey, In the Faculty of Business and Social Studies, three expatriates were dismissed, three asked for recall, while three Nigerians resigned. In the Faculty of Education, one expatriate academic was dismissed, two asked for recall while two Nigerian lecturers resigned. In the Faculty of Engineering, one was dismissed and five Nigerian academic resigned. In the Faculty of Law, one expatriate was dismissed, and one asked for recall, 12 Nigerian lecturers resigned out of these eight were Igbo Law lecturers including Professor Ben Nwabueze. In

the Faculty of Science (Biological Sciences), two expatriates resigned, one asked for recall, and two Nigerian lecturers resigned. In the Mathematical and Physical Sciences, five expatriates and two Nigerian academic resigned. In the University Library the expatriate Librarian resigned as well as seven Nigerian staff (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

The notable expatriate academic that were affected in the purge were: Professors G.K. Berrie, Dean of Science, K.A. Everard, Dean of Engineering, C. Fielstra, Dean of Education, L.C.B. Gower, Dean of Law and J.P. Haughton, Dean of Arts (Berrie *et al*, 1965).

However, it must be pointed out that even though the entire episode was rooted in ethnic intolerance, and was a clear battle between the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups with the support of the NCNC/NDP Federal Government, some Yoruba academic staff also protested against the sage by resigning, some of them included a Nigerian Historian, Professor A.B. Aderibigbe and M.I. Jegede (later Professor M.I. Jegede, the Administrator of the Nigerian Law School).

The Violent Dimension of the Episode

Despite the tense situation in the University Campus, the Federal Government notified Dr. Biobaku that he had no cause to fear that the security agencies were there to give him adequate protection. Relying on the assurances of protection given to him by the Government, he made his way straight to the Vice-Chancellor's Lodge and dropped his belongings. He was received by the principal officers of the university and thereafter formally assumed duty at the Vice-Chancellor's Office (Ezenwa, 2018).

On assumption of office in June 1965, it was customary for him, like any other new Vice-Chancellor, to address the students and other members of the academic community. He needed to extend hands of fellowship to them and acquaint himself with the environment. He mounted the podium of the university's auditorium in the presence of a large crowd of the students and members of the university community awaiting his inaugural speech. Indeed, he least expected that a radical student activist identified as Kayode Adams would surge forward from the crowd and stab him at the back ostensibly in protest

against Dr. Njoku's removal. Dr. Biobaku fell and Adams was immediately arrested by the Police (Ezenwa, 2018).

Kayode Adams was arraigned, and he pleaded mental incompetence and was confined to Yaba Mental Home. The University Senate met under the chairmanship of Professor Haration Oritshejolomi Thomas, provost of the College of Medicine and agreed to rusticate him from the University. Later he would be released from Yaba Mental Home. The court found Adams guilty of wounding with intent to kill Dr. Biabaku. The court however, held that he was not liable for the offence as a result of his defence of insanity under Section 28 of the Criminal Code. Adams regained freedom afterwards. He committed suicide by drowning in the Tarkwa bay Beach in Lagos in October 1969 (Ezenwa, 2018).

Conclusion

Ethnicity and the problems associated with it constitute a major hindrance to national integration since independence in 1960. A classical example of its manifestation was the "Njoku Crisis" in the University of Lagos in 1965. As the work has shown, Dr. Njoku, a Nigerian of Igbo extraction, was the pioneer Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos (a Federal University) situated in Yoruba land. At the expiration of his tenure, he was due for re-appointment, based on the extant statue of the University and the records of his superlative performance. However, through a dangerous ethnic inter-play, another Nigerian of Yoruba extraction, Dr. Biobaku was imposed as the new Vice-Chancellor.

The emergence of Dr. Biobaku was influenced by the then Minister of Education, Chief Akinjide, a Yoruba man, on the pretext that the Vice-Chancellors of the two Federal Universities in Yoruba land (the University College Ibadan and the University of Lagos) were headed by Igbo men. The action received the support of the Federal Government that was formed through an alliance between the NPC and the NNDP (a Yoruba political party). During the election, the Yoruba members of the University Council, who formed the majority, overwhelmingly voted for their fellow Yoruba candidate.

The reaction that followed also shortly took ethnic dimensions. However, the expatriate academic, who were assembled from various parts of the world, and who had served in universities in many parts of the world quickly observed that merit was being sacrificed at the altar of “ethnicity”. They openly rejected the unfolding scenario. As members of the University Senate, they vehemently protested the fact that the input of the Senate in the selection of the new Vice-Chancellor was not sought. The expatriates resigned, some asked for recall while the University management dismissed some of them including four pioneer Deans.

As the discourse has clearly shown, during the period of the crisis, there was a sharp division between the Yoruba and Igbo elite. The mass media was also used to vent the ethnic course. For instance, the *Daily Sketch*, owned by the Western Nigerian government defended the interest of Dr. Biobaku in particular and the Yoruba in general. *The West African Pilot*, owned by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo, sided with Dr. Njoku and defended the Igbo interest.

Taking cognisance of the fact that university autonomy and academic freedom are essential for the successful functioning of universities, the expatriates insisted that the conventions that govern universities elsewhere must be respected in Nigeria. In fact, they rejected that impunity associated with the exercise. As the work has shown, the entire episode affected national integration which has been described earlier as the “progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities... in the process of creating a homogenous political society. The process involves the bringing together, people of diverse origins, culture and ideologies into a common territorial enclave for mutual benefits and co-operation under a recognised system of authority.

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