# Partisan Politics in Multi-Ethnic Nigeria: Democracy for National Disintegration

Emefiena EZEANI, PhD,[1]     Moses O. AGUDIEGWU, M Sc[2]
Political Science Department, Federal University in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

**Abstract**
Recent literature acknowledges the problem of ethnic pluralism and ethnic conflicts in African societies. Rarely do a good number of writers make a connection between ethnic pluralism, ethnic conflicts and partisan politics and their relationship to national cohesion and development of the nation-state. The existence of myriad ethnic groups differentiated by geography, culture and language, and separated further by divergent religious beliefs – for example, Christianity and Islam - is, in itself, a major dynamic in the question of national integration. - The development of an effective political paradigm or model that is able to galvanise these diverse ethnic and religious communities and make them patriotic, *state-wise*, more productive than destructive, exhibit mutual love and tolerance, depends on a degree of relevant analysis of prevailing social and political structures and associated social behaviour. Partisan politics, a *competitive* and *divisive* democratic model, is not .likely to advance national cohesion or integration, neither is it a pathway to the country's political advancement and economic prosperity in view of its vicious tendencies. - This paper is not only theoretical in approach, it is also prescriptive; it propounds an inclusive and feasible alternative political structure and process which are underscored by the principles of democratic *justice, fairness* and *equity;* a political solution that best reflects the interests of the country's component ethnic groups and effectively responds to its *national questions* – for example, how can the various groups (*majorities and minorities*) be equitably accommodated and guaranteed equal access to power? This new political idea is called *Cooperative Collegial Democracy*, and it has been developed as a result of the study of *Consociational Democracy,* a variation of cooperative democracy developed by Arend Lijphart and practised in some states like the Netherlands, and *Competitive Democracy* (the Western liberal party democracy) and its impact on Nigeria and other multi-ethnic states of Africa.
**Keywords**: *Cooperative Collegial Democracy, Development, Multi-ethnic, National Integration, Partisan or Competitive Politics,*

## Introduction

Studies have shown that ethnic pluralism will continue to remain a fundamental characteristic of African nation-states. Most of these nation-states operate ethnically-oriented party system. As Horowitz (1985) has hypothesised, party systems in the form of multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties 'are unlikely in Asia and Africa' (:303) because of either deep ethnic and/or religious cleavages. What is prevalent in these continents, it follows, are ethnically based party systems. Authors like Berman, *et al* (2004) have, therefore, raised questions as to how democracy can develop, and national integration ensured in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. "Ethnic conflict continues to be the major source of violence ripping apart African states, and the peaceful accommodation of ethnic differences remains key to successful democratic development" (:xiii). These authors contend that successful democracies in Africa "will probably neither look like, nor function as facsimiles of, familiar forms of Western liberal democracy, but rather produce distinctive African variants …" (:xiv). Achermann (1994) holds the same view. These writers, no doubt, are aware that liberal democracy functions perhaps relatively well in most countries in the western world. If, in an African context, they have no confidence in it as a suitable democratic model to address the ethnic question, which other institutional models can offer ways of ameliorating the challenges which ethnicity and political party system pose to *national cohesion* and *nation-building*? Berman *et al,* Achermann, and some other authors have raised this question without attempting to tackle it. As Horowitz (1985) has noted, "There is still, for example, no general treatment of … the relationship of ethnicity to party politics in severely divided societies" (: xv). This is, for this present writer, a major epistemological and philosophical gap which requires filling up and this is one principal purpose of this paper.

The paper has four main sections. Section one is a discussion on Nigeria as the world's most culturally and linguistically diversified country. Being a deeply segmented society, section two discusses the existence of *political parties* in the polity in the light of creating more divisions in an already much divided society. Despite the ideal or persuasive definitions of political parties, their claimed idyllic functions and plausible theoretical arguments for their existence, section three presents another side of the *story*: *How partisan or competitive politics hinders national integration and development.* Section four is a discussion on a novel political model, *Cooperative Model of Democracy,* which, the author strongly argues, is imbued with the capacity to give birth to a *New Nigeria,* if only it can be embraced and practised by its people.

## Nigeria,the Most Diversified State in the World

Gordon (*ed*., 2005) lists 521 Nigerian languages. Out of these, 510 are living languages; two are second languages without mother-tongue speakers while nine are presently extinct. Of these languages, *Yoruba*, *Igbo* and *Hausa* are the three dominant ones. This makes Nigeria the most unique and complex country in the globe in terms of ethnic composition. Rarely do people who talk about '*the problem of democracy in Nigeria'* take the above-mentioned phenomenological characteristic of the country into consideration. Would have Britain or France as a country, for instance, fared better in the *practice of party democracy* if either were composed of England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Monaco, Slovenia, Croatia, Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey?

Sometimes human minds tend to forget that "social homogeneity is associated with political stability, whereas social heterogeneity is associated with political instability" (Hering, 1998:4). Kingsolver (1998) has in her work highlighted one of the major obstacles - lack of homogeneity - to fruitful implementation of democracy in an African pluralistic state. There is a nexus between the country's heterogeneity and politics. The regional and ethnic diversity of Nigeria and the huge impact of this reality on the people's social relations and political behaviour manifest most during elections in the country, right from 1959 to date (2015). The nature of these elections is briefly treated below.

The first national election in Nigeria took place in 1959 as a forerunner for independence in 1960. It was meant to institute the *First Republic* and it had as its major contestants the *Northern People's Congress* (NPC) led by Ahmadu Bello (Hausa-Fulani), the *National Convention of Nigerian Citizens* (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe (Igbo), and the *Action Group* (AG) led by Obafemi Awolowo (Yoruba). *Table 1* (below) presents the regional distribution of seats won by the three major political parties and their positions in the election.

*Table 1*

Regional Distribution of Seats won by Major Political Parties in the 1959 and First Elections in Nigeria

| Party | North | West | East | Lagos | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NPC | 134 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 134 |
| NCNC/NEPU | 8 | 21 | 58 | 2 | 89 |
| AG | 25 | 33 | 14 | 1 | 73 |
| Others | 7 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 16 |
| Total | 174 | 62 | 73 | 3 | 312 |

*Source*: Osaghae (1998: 33)

One thing is very outstanding in the election results: each of the three major parties won the highest number of seats in the region its leader hailed from – the NPC, whose leader was the Sadauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, secured 134 seats in the North and none in any of the other three regions, the NCNC led by NnamdiAzikiwe won the highest number of seats in the East and a number of seats across other regions. In the same vein, the AG led by Obafemi Awolowo got the highest number of seats in the West and a number of seats across other regions.

The election of 1964 was between the different parties-of-alliance. The alliance was between the three major parties who competed in the 1959 election and other parties. The two major political alliances were (i) **UPGA** (*United Progressive Grand Alliance*led by Michael Okpara) which was composed of Awolowo's AG (*Action Group*), NCNC (*National Council of Nigerian Citizens*), UMBC (*United Middle Belt Congress)* and the DP (*Dynamic Party*) and (ii) **NNA** (*Nigerian National Alliance*led by Ahmadu Bello) which comprised NPC (*Northern People's Congress*), NNDP (*Nigerian National Democratic Party*of Akintola), MDF (*Mid-West Democratic Front*), and the NDC (*Niger Delta Congress*).The political battle line was drawn between UPGA and NNA similar to the 1959 general elections; along regional/ethnic and religious lines. The political turbulence generated by that election (1964) which eventually led to the collapse of the First Republic culminated in the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970. After the war, Nigeria had its first election in 1979 in readiness to usher in a democratic government. It can be argued that the election of 1979 in Nigeria was crisis-free. The only major problem one can associate with it was the court case Obafemi Awolowoof the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) instituted against the result of the election which proclaimed Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) the winner. Summary of the result of the three major political parties is in *Table 2* (below).

**Table 2:**
**1979 Presidential Elections in Nigeria –Major Candidates from Three Different Ethnic Groups**

| State | ShehuShagari (NPN)          % | NnamdiAzikiwe (NPP)          % | ObafemiAwolowo (UPN)          % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anambra | 13.50 | **82.58** | 0.75 |
| Bauchi | **62.48** | 4.72 | 3.00 |
| Bendel | 36.19 | 8.60 | 53.23 |
| Benue | **76.39** | 11.71 | 2.57 |
| Borno | 34.71 | 1.35 | 3.35 |
| Cross River | 64.40 | 7.66 | 11.76 |
| Gongola | **35.52** | 4.35 | 21.67 |
| Imo | 8.80 | **86.67** | 0.64 |
| Kaduna | **43.12** | 4.72 | 6.68 |
| Kano | **19.94** | 0.91 | 1.23 |
| Kwara | **53.62** | 0.52 | 39.48 |
| Lagos | 7.18 | 9.57 | **82.30** |
| Niger | **74.88** | 1.11 | 3.69 |
| Ogun | 6.23 | 0.32 | **92.11** |
| Ondo | 4.19 | 0.86 | **94.51** |
| Oyo | 12.75 | 0.55 | **85.78** |
| Plateau | **34.73** | 49.17 | 5.29 |
| Rivers | 72.65 | 14.35 | 10.33 |
| Sokoto | **66.58** | 0.92 | 2.52 |
| **Total** | 33.80 | 16.70 | 29.20 |

Campaign and Election, 1978-9," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 11, 1/2 (1981)
Adapted from Joseph, Richard A. (1981) "The Ethnic Trap: Notes on the Nigerian

From Table *2*, one can see that the 1979 election also followed ethnic pattern; while Shehu Shagari got his highest number of votes in the *Hausa-North*, Nnamdi Azikiwe got his in the *Igbo-East* and Obafemi Awolowo got his highest number of votes in the *Yoruba-West*. The 1983 elections followed the same ethnic pattern. Shagari won the highest votes in all the nine states in the North. He also won the highest votes in the two minority states in the East; Cross River and Rivers states which was indicative of unhealthy multi polar relations between the Igbo, the major ethnic group and the minorities in the East. Azikiwe gained the highest votes in the two main Igbo states of Anambra and Imo. Similarly, Awolowo scored his highest votes in the four states in his home region. Despite this manifest ethnic-coloured election, some political analysts, like McCulloch (2009) and Diamond (2001), hold that federalism in the Second Republic did well. For example, Diamond points out, the multistate system succeeded in dispersing conflict. It fragmented the solidarity of the three major ethnic groups – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and generated cross-cutting, state-based cleavages.

Osaghae (2002), a great advocate of federalism, does not seem to see much good from the election. Though he sees federalism as a good political arrangement which can respond meaningfully well to the national question of marginalisation and political domination, he states that it has failed in Nigeria because of over-centralisation of power at the centre with states lacking "the fiscal and legislative capacity to function as autonomous centres of power" (:236)and when states are devoid of autonomy and become instead "mere agents of the federal government … the system can hardly be regarded as federal" (:234). With the military intervention in 1983, democratic elections were once again suspended until 1999. It is important to note that the major reason advanced by the military for their intrusion into the country's politics has to do with political crisis and violence, often linked to activities of members of different political parties.

The 1999 presidential election results by states serve little or no purpose in determining the influence of ethnicity. This is because the two principal candidates who featured in the two major political parties were both Yoruba. Nigerians felt that, with the annulment of June 12, 1993 election, the Yoruba were unfairly treated and the presidential election of 1999 was the time for redress. While certain scholars could see the cancellation of the election widely held to be the best in Nigeria as a crime against the people of Nigeria, some other Nigerians saw it from an ethnic perspective. Sen (2002) consents, "The June 12, 1993 annulment of the Presidential election which started out as a national problem (later) degenerated to an ethnic contest between the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani …" Obasanjo, a Yoruba, succeeded in winning in the election.

The 2003 and 2007 elections in Nigeria were particularly significant in the country's political history because they were the only two elections that took place under civilian government. They acted as a litmus test for democratic establishment and consolidation. The April 2003 elections were also unique in the sense that the

top three presidential candidates of the major political powers were either former Heads of State or ex-military generals. These were President Olusegun Obasanjo of the *People's Democratic Party* (PDP), Mahammadu Buhari of *All Nigeria's People's Party* (ANPP) and Emeka Ojukwu of *All Progressive Grand Alliance* (APGA). For Orogum (2005), "The return of the generals and their ever looming presence in the current democratic dispensation strongly suggests that Nigeria's democratic development still exhibits strong deconsolidating characteristics" (: 7). The 2003 and 2007 elections were viewed as events which did not inspire hope in the country's political process. These elections also toed regional and ethnic lines as the Nigerian electorate voted in accord with the ethnic origin of the three political parties' presidential candidates. Moreover, these two elections were crisis-ridden, and that of 2007 was marred by incredible acts of violence, a phenomenon aptly captioned by a Nigerian newspaper, Sunday *Guardian* of April 15, 2007: '*Large Turn-out, Bloodshed at Polls* – Violence in Edo, Oyo, Enugu, Anambra, Lagos, Delta, Osun, Others – Voters protest in Parts of the Country' (:1). The country's ethnic and religious diversity does impact on the citizens' political behaviour which is informed by the dominant political culture in each locality. Political parties which are additions to already existing human groups exacerbate rather than attenuate the political situation of the state.

## Political Parties: Creating More Divisions in an Already Very Divided Society

Every human society has various categories of groups of people. Some of these groups of people are *natural*(organic)*,* for example, towns, villages, kindred, families, and others are *artificial* (inorganic) like State, Constituencies, *Local Government Areas,* Wards, religious groups, trade unions and professional organisations. Political parties belong to the artificial category of human groups. Though some Political Science scholars have advanced the benefits of political parties in instituting a democratic government, they do not seem to have equally advanced satisfactory argument in respect to political parties being a *desideratum* in the process of establishing a democratic government. Does a country, especially, a segmented one, need *political parties* before it can form its government?

Most writers on Political Science often outline the positive functions of political parties in a democracy. Explaining that the ancient Greek City States did not require political parties in order to operate democracy because of the minuscule size of their population, Ujo (2001) maintains that "political parties are a prerequisite for modern elections" (:37). The need for political parties in modern democracies hinges on the fact that in a modern society where the population of one electoral constituency runs into hundreds of thousands, "it is necessary to have an institution which is to mobilise the electorate. Political parties perform this function" (:37). There is no doubt that political parties help to mobilise the electorate, though other organs can also do the same, the claim that they are "a prerequisite for modern elections" seems to undermine the capacity of human reason and creativity. Countries which authors,like Ujo,base their judgement and assessment of political parties are often countries of Western Europe and America. One often loses sight of the fact that political parties in Europe and Africa/Nigeria function differently and that these functions political parties allegedly perform in European countries can also be performed by other bodies in a non-party system society, thus, rendering political parties irrelevant. For instance, some advance the argument that political parties *articulate the wishes and desires* of the people. Other bodies in Nigerian society such as Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Media, and some other professional bodies can perform the same duty and even better. Moreover, do the people need political parties to let them know that they need good roads, reliable electric power supply and oil refineries in Nigeria?

Political parties are said to be vital for democracy because, it is claimed, they are responsible for creating (alternative) competitive ideologies in line with the yearnings of the people. This is one of the high-sounding theoretical justifications for the existence of political parties in a polity that is full of sounds which signify nothing that is substantially relevant. States do not need political parties in order to have different competitive ideologies. Even members of a nuclear family possess competitive ideologies. Another argument advanced which seem to make political parties an intrinsic part of democracy is that they provide framework for representation. The natural and artificial human groups mentioned above, it is important to state, can also provide such framework for political representation. These human groups render political parties redundant and a *reject* in a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria where they seem to be (a) *clubs* of reprobates whose major goal is to amass fortune by skinning their country of its wealth, and (b) instruments of violence.

In Nigerian context, do politicians actually represent the people? In theory (academic books and articles) 'representatives' from different political parties are *representatives of and for the people,* but in reality, they represent themselves first and then their political parties, a situation which contradicts Edmund Burke's and other scholars' understanding of political party as 'a body of men (and women) united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed' (Edmund Burke in Sartori, 2005:8). In political nuance *the people* means the entire citizens of a country. It can be seen that when a particular party secures an electoral victory, it is mainly the party members and their supporters who constitute the primary *constituency* of beneficiaries of the government in power. *Persuasive definitions*of political parties conceal their divisive and profligate features, and elicit positive attitude of people towards the

political party system. In Nigeria as well as other African states, there seems to be no difference between *patrimonialism* or *prebendalism* and party democracy as people who desire to be rich quick get into the *business of politics* and not into the business of economics. The *All Progressive Congress* (APC), like the *People's Democratic Party* (PDP) selected Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives and people to occupy other important governmental positions. Expectedly, these positions have been filled up mostly by the APC party members and their political allies, pushing aside members of other political parties and the rest of Nigerians who do not belong to any party. How then is a government based on *partisan politics* government *of* the people, *for* the people and *by* the people? Political parties, especially the ones in power, constitute a major barrier between the government and the people.

That political party is a key to the development of modern political system is a truism acknowledged by authors like Balewa who also recognises that the development of party system in Nigeria has been destructive to the society, noting that "…this should not come as a surprise because it has been so elsewhere in the world" (Balewa, 1994:307). He further states,

> In a society where democratic behaviour is not fully
> developed and the role of political institutions not fully
> understood, to insist on having parties as we know them
> in Europe and America, is to intensify inter-ethnic feuds.
> This, as we have observed in Nigeria's development
> since independence, has frustrated development efforts
> (Balewa, 1994:308).

Evidence abounds which points to the polarisation of the country through formation of political parties, increase in bitterness and acrimony of party competition and the increased use of physical violence to achieve political goals. One also realises that the existing system of political competition is counter-productive as it is self-destructive. Most politicians, in their bid for power, are not only determined to defeat their opponents but to eliminate them and they have no regard for the rules of the business of politics. Four major characteristics can be deciphered from Nigerian politics and these are: *rigging, corruption, deception* and *violence*. Being ethnic-oriented, political parties in Nigeria do not meet the international standard or classification of parties into "parties of individual representation" or "parties of social integration" (Blitz, 1965:165). They are thus essentially parties of ethnic solidarity and so have little or no time for long-term national policy. It is likely that political parties in Nigeria will continue to follow lines of natural socio-cultural divisions for an unforeseeable future. For this reason, Matua (1994-1995) has noted, "Some writers have questioned whether African states are nation-states. Ethnicity and sub-nationalism have been correctly identified as some of the most inflammatory elements in nation-building" (:1144f).

Formation of government using the medium of political parties seems to be one of the most human fooleries which majority of humanity has been indoctrinated to accept as the most intelligible method of instituting a democratic government. In a party-driven democracy, ill-informed masses are mobilised to ignorantly elect their political leaders. How can a rational choice be made, and the most suitable political candidates to pilot the *state-ship* chosen under the veil of ignorance? During the 2015 elections in Nigeria, this writer interviewed some voters in the countryside as regards who they voted for. Their answers were eye-opening: *'I voted cockerel.' 'I voted broom.' 'I voted umbrella'* (English translations). These objects were respectively *All Progressive Grand Alliance* (APGA), *All Progressive Congress* (APC), and *People's Democratic Party* (PDP) party symbols. When they were further asked who the political candidates behind the symbols were, most of them did not know. While many stated that they were given N500 to vote for a particular candidate/party, some others also said they were 'helped' by the INEC officials to thumbprint their ballot papers.

In terms of election cost, the ancient African and Greek 'inventors' of democracy would tremble seeing the way democracy is being practised in contemporary society, and would be compelled to ask such questions as: 'How can rational beings spend N93 billion in electing their leaders and not on provision of necessary amenities for the citizens of the state? Nigeria officially spent N93 billion on the 2015 elections, a country without reliable power supply. This amount does not include what each party and individual candidates spent on posters, handbills, vehicles, thugs, jingles etc. across the federation. One can therefore bear with the ancient *democrats* when they ask: *Are your people insane? Is there no other way, other than the wastrel and violence-prone method, you can select your political leaders?* A third year student in a Nigerian university bemoaned the level of unemployment in the country 'as thousands of people graduate every year' without the prospect of having something to do in order to earn a living, 'yet trillions of naira which are supposed to be used for investing on the future of the youths are blindly directed into election of another tyrant (*sic*) who has little or no concern for the citizens.' Often, the results of the voting exercise of the electorate are discarded through rigging, thus invalidating the election results, making further mockery of the whole exercise and stupendous amount of money invested into it.

Many arguments have been put forward as to why 'the already existing electoral mechanism' in Nigeria

is to be rejected as a democratic anathema. In addition to being violence-prone, it has also failed to protect and advance the interests of ethnic minorities. A fundamental reconfiguration of the electoral system is imperative if Nigeria is to avoid political violence, kidnapping and disappearance of political opponents, and avoid the political process which makes it possible to enthrone, as the people's leaders, persons schooled in the art of gangsterism (Njoku, 2007; Balewa, 1994; Ejobowah, 2001); social misfits who are opulent in moral turpitude. Such a political reconfiguration has to delete political parties as virus which corrupts democracy in Nigeria and other culturally and religiously segmented societies. It is time Nigerians, and indeed, Africans understood that political parties are simply competitive social Clubs with *political* label legitimatised by the state Constitution, the members of which are called politicians, whose primary objective is to promote and protect their individual interests and the interest of their *Club*members, a definition different from Edmund Burke's.

### How Partisan or Competitive Politics Hinders National Integration and Development

Recent literature acknowledges the problem of ethnic pluralism and ethnic conflicts in African societies. In respect to what can be done about ethnic conflict emanating from ethnic-based politics in a plural society, some African scholars, including Wiredu (2005) have proposed a model of *non-party consensual democracy*. Wiredu sees the *consensual* element as an important feature of the 'traditional' African democracies, which has to be re-introduced in African contemporary democracy. This is because "consensus characterises political decision making in Africa, it is a manifestation of an immanent approach to social interaction" (:2). Nwachukwu (2009) agrees, "Despite the fact that political parties were largely responsible for shaping political developments, in Nigeria between the 1940s and 1960s, the negative impact of their ethnicization and measures to solve the problem were hardly discussed at the various constitutional conferences held during the period (:7). African nationalists justified one-party states on the logic that multi-party democracy is divisive and so would lead to *ghettonisation* of ethnic communities and consequently jeopardise the project of nation-building. The headache of some Military Heads of Stateof Nigeria was how to engineer 'genuine and truly national parties' which would "promote inter-elite accommodation and political stability" (Nwachukwu, 2009: 7). The government of Ibrahim Babangida tried and nearly succeeded in achieving this objective with his government's introduction of a two-party system (the National Republican Convention, NRC, and the Social Democratic Party, SDP) which helped to minimise, to a great extent, ethnic and religious cleavages.

Babangida's ideological political child did not last long. "Civil society pressures for expanded political space led to the abrogation of the two-party system and the adoption of a multi-party system in 1999" (Nwachukwu, 2009: 14). The quest for wider political space gave rise to mushrooming of political parties; "over fifty political parties have been registered" (:14) since 1999. There was some improvement from what obtained in the 1960s in terms of "party reform in Nigeria (which) has forced the political parties to broaden the scope of their leadership and membership to accommodate elites from different parts of the country" (Nwachukwu, 2009: 15). The reversal in political experimentation, however, meant a reincarnation of the ethnic elements of the 1960s, especially the way Nigerians voted in alignment with their ethnic origin and that of the leader of a party. Since its coming into being, Nigeria has been having a thorny democratisation process.

Nigeria's unmitigated tendency to practise ethnic/religious party system is one major explanation for its notorious phenomena of electoral violence, mutual hatred and dysfunctionality of the state. Its first regional parliamentary election in 1951 did not go without some electoral sabotage and acrimony as a result of ethnic consideration. Many lives were lost during the 1962 elections, as well as in the 1965, 2003, 2007 elections, and during the post-election crisis of 2011. It can be argued that even free and fair election in the country would not guarantee security and peace of mind, as was demonstrated by the April 2011 post-election crisis in the country. Though the presidential election of that year was hailed as 'the best run,' and 'the fairest in Nigeria's history,' reacting to the violence in the North, following the election which, as BBC reported, claimed more than 500 lives, the then Nigerian President, GoodluckEbele Jonathan, reminded Nigerians, "'these acts of mayhem are sad reminders of the events which plunged our country into 30 months of an unfortunate civil war,' … referring to the Biafran war in which more than one million people died" (*SeeNigeria Unrest 'Recalls Lead-up to 1967 Biafra War'* http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13156508,) and the 1966 pogrom in the North.

The 2015 elections which saw the emergence of Mohammadu Buhari as the country's President were also not *sans*-violence – 'No fewer than 16 persons were killed at different areas in Taraba and Kaduna states … in Kebbi 4 were killed in electoral violence … AkwaIbom: No fewer than six people were killed … Plateau: Party supporter shot dead … Lagos: Two corpses linked to polls found in Oshodi … Bauchi: PDP Councillor beaten to death by irate youths …' (Ugulu, 2015: 12ff). The carnage would have been worse if Goodluck Jonathan had won, for, as reported by Bishop Hassan Kukah (in Oginyi, 2015), young northerners told 'Christians that they are lucky because had the election gone the other way (i.e. if Buhari, a fellow Muslim and Northerner, had lost), they would all be dead' (:24), a threat which in Nigerian context ought to be taken seriously. The elections also re-enforced the ethnic bias of the country's politics.

Since ethnic party system seems to be intrinsic in the political configuration of Nigeria, and since they

(ethnic party systems) are incompatible with, and inimical to liberal democracy, as Horowitz vividly states, what would an expert political scientist suggest to a country like Nigeria? If the conventional political competition is to be avoided in the politics of deeply segmented societies because of its destructive tendencies, the logical end, one may argue, is a discontinuity with a party system. The place or role of party politics in democracies, therefore, cannot be assumed to be a foregone matter but rather as a major recurrent debate issue in academic circles and among politicians, especially in countries where democratic consolidation has, hitherto, seemed a political illusion.

Schumpeter and Bolingbroke make a subtle distinction between party and faction and both denounce a party system, arguing: 'Government by party … must always end in the government of a faction … Party is a political evil, and faction is the worst of all parties' (Bolingbroke in Sartori, 2005: 5). Bolingbroke's view seems to capture the political realities of Nigeria, and a number of countries, especially in Africa. In fact, in deeply divided societies, whether in Africa or elsewhere, the party systems' propensity to aggravate ethnic problems instead of constraining them calls into question its usefulness in such societies. In spite of all the benefits of party pluralism which aid in establishing democracy and fostering democratic culture in some societies, in many African, Asian and Latin American countries, party system functions differently and tends to subvert democracy in a number of ways. For one thing, and as has been pointed out by Schumpeter, in multiparty democracies opposition parties are oftentimes seen more as enemies of the incumbent party than interest groups, especially in states where political parties function as instruments of violence. As this author has argued somewhere else, it is what happens within a political contextthat is more important in understanding the political party systemthan a scholarly justification based mainly on theoretical enumeration of the advantages and functions of political parties in society. The value of inter-party competition, therefore, is not to be predicated on plausible theoretical arguments but on its empirical reality; what are the outcomes of political competition in a given society, especially in a deeply divided polity such as Nigeria? Anarchy, violence, politically motivated murder etc., a Nigerian observer would notice.For Nigeria and other African states which find themselves in similar political predicament, it is time they tried a different political modelfor as Achermann (1994)and Berman, et al, (2004) contend, successful democracies in Africa "will probably neither look like, nor function as facsimiles of, familiar forms of Western liberal democracy, but rather produce distinctive African variants …" (Berman, et al, 2004:xiv).Cooperative Collegial Democracy is a response to this challenge posed by Achermann, Berman, et al, and other Nigerian and African scholars.

## Cooperative Model of Democracy and the Birth of a New Nigeria

In October 4, 1975 General Murtala Muhammed inaugurated a 50-member *Constitution Drafting Committee* and enjoined them to engineer a constitution that would ensure, among other things, political and democratic stability, "maximum participation, consensus and orderly succession to power." He conjectured that a democratic system which would guarantee these goals must be imbued with the following attributes:

- elimination of 'cut-throat' political competition based on a system of winner-takes-all;
- discouragement of institutionalised opposition to the government in power, and encouragement of consensus politics and government based on a community of interests;
- decentralisation of power.

Worried about the harmful effects of **party system**, he asked the committee to see if they could find some other **'means by which government could be organised without the involvement of political parties …'** (Osaghae, 1998:87*emphasis added*). The then Nigerian Head of State realised that traditionally, "political parties in Nigeria have existed more like private militia, whose activities in the electoral arena, are one of 'warfare' with attendant anomic consequences" (Momoh and Adejumobi, 1999: 114). While Murtala Mohammed was aware of the deleterious effects of political parties in the country, the 50 'wise men' in the committee did not seem to foresee what the army General was able to see.

Some people, the *optimists*, continue to argue that things would be better, that democracy and politics in Nigeria would improve and consolidate better when the country continues to hold tenaciously to the Western liberal party democracy. This *political utopianism* propagated by both Western and African scholars ought to be placed vis-à-vis Peter Ustinov's argument that, "The point of living, and of being an optimist, is to be foolish enough to believe that the best is yet to come" even when nothing is changed by people living in the society which needs certain things to be changed. A period of fifty five years seems too long for Nigerians to wait for the time to begin reaping the dividends of democracy. An important conclusion that can be drawn from research findings is that most of the African political processes, especially Nigeria's are comatose. In light of this, the significance of the following question by Orogun stands out:

> what are some of the requisite structural, institutional and
> normative reforms that should be implemented in order
> to enhance the prospects for political stability, economic
> development, democratic consolidation, and social

justice in the modern … political system? (Orogun, 2005:10).

In their response to the aforementioned question asked by Orogun, authors have proposed a number of possibilities. B.A.T. Balewa, for instance, advocates for an African state, what he calls 'authoritarian populist model' without 'political parties as the sole basis of representation in government' (Balewa, 1994:307).Responding to the wisdom embodied in Murtala Muhammed's political advice to the 50-member *Constitution Drafting Committee,* some other countries, owing to their uniqueness and contextual factors, have, for instance, adapted *consociational* political model developed by ArendLijphart, to suit them. For example, as McCulloch (2009) has noted,

> In Lebanon, Maronite Christians were guaranteed the position of president while a Sunni Muslim would hold the position of prime minister, a Shia Muslim would fill the position of president of the national assembly and a member of the Greek Orthodox community would serve as deputy speaker (:34).

Consociationalism was founded on the assumption that centrifugal tendencies in segmented societies which can easily give rise to conflict can be enormously curtailed by the cooperation of the elite, that is, representatives of the various segments of the given society. These representatives from different parties make a grand coalition that forms a cabinet in a parliamentary system which Lijphart prefers to presidential model because of the former's collegial character.Consociational democracy was developed to correct the perceived inequity inherent in the majoritarian principle of liberal democracy and to counter the negative effects resulting from unhealthy political competition.

Nigeria's 'federal character' principle embeds, and was designed to ensure some degree of segmental autonomy to its constitute parts, a political philosophy akin to consociation. This is not suggestive that Nigeria operates consociational democracy like in Switzerland whose Federal Council is by consociational arrangement. The Council is composed of representatives from different linguistic groups. If Nigeria were to operate the Six-zone arrangement advocated by its one time Vice President, Alex Ekwueme, a similar structure may be considered under, albeit quasi consociational option in view of the country's unique ethnic or linguistic composition. As has been noted, Nigeria has about 500 ethnic or language groups.

Political theorists (e.g. Lijphart) who advocate consociation for plural societies seem to recognise group differences as a starting point for building a state or instituting democracy. Their counterparts (e.g. Horowitz, 1991) who, on the other hand, recommend the liberal model or centripetalism seem to suggest that differences ought to be eradicated in the process of state-building or democratic institution. This is sometimes done in pursuit of 'national identity' which glosses over group difference. This paper is, among other things, an answer to Murtala Mohammed's expectation and indeed the expectation of most Nigerians and anyone "who is interested in a fair society where the aspirations of all citizens are taken into account" (Michael Gould in Ezeani, 2013: v).An effective political answer to the socio-political problems suffered by multi-cultural societies like Nigeria is *CooperativeCollegial Democracy* (CCD).

*Cooperative Collegial Democracy* or simply *Cooperative Collegialism* aptly addresses the serious concerns raised by a number of scholars like Osaghae, Berman*et al* and Achermann, two of which are summarised as follows:

> Ethnic conflict continues to be the major source of violence ripping apart African states, and the peaceful accommodation of ethnic differences remains key to successful democratic development (Berman*et al*, 2004:xiii).
>
> Until now, African politicians have been swearing by the single-party system. Lately, influenced by happenings in Eastern Europe, some are calling for a multi-party system. However, if my reflections are correct, such government reforms will not function much better (Achermann, 1994:235).

The operative mechanism and details of *Cooperative Collegial Democracy* model is in the work *Cooperative Collegial Democracy for Africa and Multi-ethnic Societies - Democracy withoutTears* (2013) by Emefiena Ezeani, and published by Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, Oxford, United Kingdom. Suffice it to note that in *Cooperative Collegial Democracy* which is a peaceful, fair and non-party political model, founded mainly for segmented societies which aims to address *national questions*, different tiers of government officials are produced *step-by-step*, with *democratic filterism*, from basic political units, using smaller bodies of people (*College*) in the lower units to elect higher government officials from among

themselves, after the people have initially elected or selected them from below.

The question as to why the *democratic seed* planted in different African countries has not germinated or, where it germinated, has not grown to a tree after 50 years is enough to trigger off fundamental philosophical questions and intense academic debates. Francis Fukuyama's democratic *finalism*, which believes that Western liberal democracy is 'the final form of human government' ignores this important point. This is because liberal democracy, with its character of competition and elements of political *partyism* has not proved to be a good instrument for institutionalising democracy in every country of the world. Accepting Fukuyama's hypothesis as a categorical imperative may, therefore, mislead and prevent leaders of different countries and nascent political scientists from engaging in the reflective duty of fashioning a *context-relevant* democratic model for their societies. Lijphart's development of consociational democracy practised today in some countries demonstrates that there is room for creative innovation in democratic theory and praxis.

For democracy to take off properly in Nigeria, a model that is sensitive to the people's historical circumstances, culture, and strong ethnic cleavage is a desideratum. This model of democracy has to be an exact antithesis of what Nigeria has, hitherto, being trying to practise. It has to be, at least, competition and 'opposition'-free in its practice. In effect, Nigeria needs a cooperative instead of a competitive model of democracy bequeathed to it by the coloniser. This is a logical necessity, which is re-echoed in the following citation:

> Should (African) leaders and politicians continue to hold on to
> the inherited colonial political contrivances and suffer perennial
> ethnic and religious violence and the risk of possible secessions
> or even civil wars, or should they boldly re-visit the basis and
> structure of the federation with a view to re-designing the polity
> through popular participation? It appears that the tensions and
> conflicts will remain as long as this question remains un-
> addressed (Agbu, 2004:7).

The democratic splendour and significance of *Cooperative Collegial Democracy* hinges on its robust capacity to address the following socio-political concerns which have since been the major problems in the country's body politics:

1)     How can the people create a cohesive, united, stable and loved political state, which is capable of satisfying the legitimate aspirations of different nations, or ethnic groups that make up the state?

2)     How can the democratisation process be made more participatory than 'appropriatory' in view of inter-ethnic political distrust, conflicts and ethnic political cleavages?

3)     What type of democratic model will help the people to obtain as their leaders individuals 'who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of society' (Cunningham, 2002:80).

4)     How can the criminal-minded, bad men and women or mediocrities, be prevented from taking over the rein of power in society?

5)     What political structure would ensure the election of people who have uppermost in their minds the general good of the people, who spend most of their time thinking not of the next election but the next generation?

How can Nigeria get at least a modicum of democratic dividends and relative peace after 55 years of political independence? How can Nigeria attain political development – which means the attainment of a workable political structure that promotes a stable and peaceful environment for political and economic activities to thrive without let or hindrance? It is by the acquisition of a political climate which is favourable for economic and social development to take place simultaneously and this is the goal of *Cooperative Collegial Democracy*. Scholars generally agree that many African societies are segmented but they take different directions as to which political model is best suited to them. McGarry and O'Leary hold that segmented societies

> are not real societies … They are, in extreme cases,
> divided into parallel societies with endogamous
> marriage … (and) as opposed to homogeneous societies
> are more likely to experience civil war because their
> divisions are not conducive to consensus (McGarry and
> O'Leary, 2004:97 and 98).

*Cooperation* or *Consensus* is a major distinguishing characteristic of the *cooperative collegial* model of democracy which is advocated for Nigeria and any other segmented society as an effective political solution to their democratic illness, economic stagnation and social backwardness.

## Conclusion

Some major lessons one can learn from the study of Nigerian government and politics is that Nigerian politics can be a dangerous exercise, and political leaders seem to spend the first two years of their tenure devising stratagems to amass wealth for themselves and spend the last two years planning the next move to subdue their opponents and rig elections, with no time left to execute their primary duty of keeping to the *social contract,* which is service to the people for which purpose they assumed power.

Democracy, a political ideal cherished and valued highly in relatively healthy polities, is perceived in Nigeria as a *do or die* struggle, athing of scorn and repulsion because the political processes employed to institute it are often smeared with violence and other forms of malicious and nefarious acts. This repulsion is often expressed in statements like: '*Politics is a dirty game.*' Nothing is wrong with politics or democracy as an ideal political model vis-à-vis *monarchy* or *oligarchy* or *feudalism*. The problem is with the political model which African states adopted from Europe without adaptation.

On African scholars and political scientists, who are ardent advocates of the political party system, is the onus to address the following politically contextual questions: (i) *How can a political structure – the political party system – which fertilises the ground for politics of bitterness, rancour and violence bring about national integration and economic development?* (ii) Is there no other "means by which government could be organised without the involvement of political parties"? (Murtala Mohammed in Osaghae, 1998:87, *emphasis added*). Until these questions are satisfactorily answered, the urgency for the adoption of a *cooperative* model of politics advocated by this paper cannot be overstressed.

## References

Achermann, Eduard (1994) *Cry Beloved Africa: A Continent Needs Help*, Munich – Kinshasa: African University Studies

Agbu, Osita (2004) *Ethnic Militias and the Threat to Democracy in Post-Transition Nigeria*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Balewa, B.A.T. (1994) *Governing Nigeria – History, Problems and Prospects*, Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.

Berman, Bruce; Eyoh, Dickson; Kymlicka, Will (2004) *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey.

Diamond, Larry (2001) "Foreword," in *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*, Rotimi T. Suberu, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001.

Ejobowah, John Boye (2001) *Competing Claims to Recognition in the Nigerian Public Sphere, A Liberal Argument about Justice in Plural Societies,* USA: Lexington Books.

Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (*ed*. 2005) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Fifteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International.

Hering, Martin: *Consociational Democracy in Canada*. In: Ahornblätter. Marburger BeiträgezurKanada-Forschung. 11. Marburg 1998.(Schriften der Universitätsbibliothek Marburg ; 84) http://archiv.ub.uni-marburg.de/sum/84/sum84-6.html, Accessed: 11/10/06.

Horowitz, Donald L. (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kingsolver, Barbara (1998) *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Lijphart, Arend (1969) *Consociational Democracy World Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 2 January 1969.

Matua, waMakau (1994-1995) *Why Redraw the Map of Africa: A Moral and Legal Inquiry* in *Michigan Journal of International Law* [vol. 16:1113] pp 1113-1175.

McCulloch, Allison (2009)*Seeking Stability amid Deep Division: Consociationalism and Centripetalism In Comparative Perspective* - A thesis submitted to the Department of Political Studies In conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Queen's University Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

McGarry, John & O'Leary, Brendan (2004) *The Northern Ireland Conflict* OXFORD SCHOLARSHIP ONLINE, Oxford University Press, 2003-2010, http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/politicalscience/9780199266579//p034_print.html Accessed 1/10/10.

Momoh, Abubakar and Adejumobi, Said (1999) *The Nigerian Military and the Crisis of Democratic Transition, A Study in the Monopoly of Power*, Lagos: Civil Liberties Organisation.

Njoku, Uzochukwu (2007) *Echiche, Struggles of a Mind*, Enugwu: Snap Press Ltd.

Nwachukwu, Orji (2009) *Ethnicity, Power-sharing and Party Politics: Political Party Reforms in Nigeria, 1979 – 1999*, essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/graduateconference/barcelona/papers/413.pdf Accessed: 4/3/09

Orogun, Paul (2005) *Religion, Regionalism, Oil Resources and Revenue Control: Ethnic Mobilization, Sectarian Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/4/1/8/8/pages41881/p41881-1.php 13/10/10.

Osaghae, Eghosa E. (2002) *The Federal Solution and the National Question in Nigeria* in Momoh,Abubakar and Adejumobi, Said (*eds.* 2002) *The National Question in Nigeria, Comparative Perspectives*, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Sartori, Giovanni, (2005) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework For Analysis*, Colchester: ECPR.

Schumpeter, Joseph A. (1976) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, London: George Allen &UnwinLtd.

Sen, Yima (2002) *The Minority Question in Northern Nigeria* in Momoh, Abubakar and Adejumobi, Said (*eds.* 2002) *The National Question in Nigeria, Comparative Perspectives*, England: AshgatePublishing Ltd.

Ugulu, Nkem Matthew (May 10, 2015) *Electoral Violence, The Evil of Ignorance*! Citizens' Advocate Newspaper, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

Ujo, A.A. (2001) *Understanding Party Politics in Benue State, Nigeria,* Kaduna: Anyaotu Enterprises and Publishers Nigeria Ltd.

Wiredu, Kwasi (2005)*Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective,* Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.