

Regionalism, Party Politics and Inter-Group Relations: A Case of the Idoma and their Neighbours, 1946-1967

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to examine the impact of regionalism and party politics on the Idoma and their neighbours during the period 1960-1967. This is important in a number of ways. Firstly, the introduction of the Richard constitution in 1946 was important to our understanding of the colonial policy of divide and rule system. Secondly, the formation of political parties since 1923 did not only encourage anti-colonial struggle, but also had tremendous impact on the Idoma and their neighbours. Taken together, therefore, with the introduction of regionalism, the formation of political parties in the Nigerian area took a regional outlook. The Idoma and some of their neighbours, however, were located territorially in the transitional zone between the North and the South. This influence the supports each of the groups gave to the various political parties on the eve of independence in 1960. The Idoma were staunch supporters of the Northern People Congress (NPC), the Tiv were staunch supporters of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), and the Igbo were staunch supporters of the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC). These historical antecedents influenced the nature of relations between the Idoma and their neighbours.

Keywords: Regionalism, Party Politics and Inter-Group Relations.

Introduction

The Idoma and their neighbours had demonstrated over time they are not static. There were evidences of inter-mixture which include intermarriages, exchange of visits, attending the same markets, among several other linkages. No human society can survive in isolation and the Idoma is not an exception. It is important for us to note that this is not to conclude that the nature of relations between the Idoma and their neighbours was completely cordial without feuds. There were pockets of conflicts which had been demonstrated between the Agila and their Ngbo neighbours since the pre-colonial times. There were also evidences of conflict between the Ette and their Enugu-Ezike neighbour. These were some of the conflicts between the Idoma and their neighbours that points to the fact that conflict is inevitable in human relations.

With the advent of British colonialism in the study area, the colonial state began to promulgate policies that led conflict between the colonized. Some of the policies introduced by the colonial state include delimitation of boundary, taxation, divide and rule and the Native Authority. These policies were important to the metropolitan state in the creation of the colonial economy. The impact of these policies influenced the nature and pattern of inter-group relations in the post-colonial era. One of such impact was regionalism which encouraged regional politics. The political parties that were established since 1922-1954 all took a regional outlook. It was as a result of this process that the Idoma, Tiv and the Igala on the eve of Nigeria's independence saw themselves in the Northern Region, while their Igbo neighbour were in the Southern Region. Taken together, therefore, 1st October 1960 saw Nigerian political elites inheriting a regional type of political arrangement, with the NPC in the North, the NCNC in the East, the AG in the West. The impact of this political arrangement is the main thrust of this current study. The paper attempted an examination on the impact of regionalism and party politics on the Idoma and their neighbours.

Conceptual Framework

Two important concepts shall be examined. These include inter-group relation and regionalism. These will enable us have a better understanding of the subject matter. At this juncture, we shall examine the concept of inter-group relations. The term "inter-group relation" is used by scholars in different aspects of human endeavours to illustrate the implications, benefits or problems emanating from relations between different people, (O. Y. Saad, 2007: 35). Inter-group relation comes in various levels. There are inter-marriages,

inter-national relations, Inter-ethnic relation, and inter-state relations, among several others. All these forms of inter-group relations came out of the need that no human group or community is entirely an island to itself, because resources are unevenly distributed. In relation to this, Sherrif conceptualises inter-group relations as a state of friendship or hostility, co-operation or competition, dominance or subordination, alliance or enmity, peace or war between two or more groups and their respective members, (O. Akinwunmi, 2008: 11).

As Andreyeva, (O. Akinwunmi, 2008: 11) aptly puts it, inter-group relations can emerge in the form of immediate interactions between members of various groups. This definition above, points to the view that each group tries to benefit from any form of linkages they shared. According to Afigbo, (A. E. Afigbo, 1972: 18), inter-group relations presuppose contact and interactions between groups each of which has an identity, to make some inputs into the relationship. Afigbo's conceptual framework of inter-group relation raises some fundamental questions, one of which is related to conflict as one of the outcomes of inter-group relations. The author failed to note that conflict is inevitable as community and group struggle for scarce resources, conflict abounds and this had been a factor that characterise societies in any part of the world and not only peculiar to Africa.

In 1939, preparation was on ground by the colonial state for the introduction of regionalism in Nigeria. The Richard Constitution of 1946 partitioned Nigeria into three regions, the north, west and east. With this therefore, Nigerians entered a new phase in their socio-economic and political history. It was as a result of this that A. Ademoyega, (A. Ademoyega, 1981: 4) argued that repatriate politics worsened Nigeria's political situation which gave the military reasons to take over power in 1966. Regionalism is a concept which was propounded in the context of Nigeria's political history as a means of dividing the Nigerian area into regions for easy administration and economic pillage of the colonized.

One of the negative impacts of regionalism in Nigeria was that, it led to regional politics which defines the nature of socio-political relations in the post-colonial era. Evidence abounds on the formation of political parties, and their relationship in Nigeria up to 1960 and beyond. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC), these political parties except the NCNC had a regional outlook. They fought and protected the interest of their regions. This was a consequence of the provisions in the Richard Constitution of 1946. It was the NCNC that was

established in 1936, which opposed colonialism with the radical Zikist Movement and its news papers such as the daily comic. The formation of NPC and AG was a reaction by the colonial state to weaken the influence of the NCNC and with the development of regionalism, all the political parties excluding the NCNC was regionally base. It is important to note that regionalism was used a basis for campaign by the regional leadership, in order to gain political control. Prominent among the premiers prior to 1966 were Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Michael Okpara. These premiers were important personalities that had direct administrative control of each region, (G. O. Olusanya, 1980:545-569)

Regionalism, Party Politics and Inter-Group Relations, 1946-1960

The introduction of 1946 Richard constitution in Nigeria was instructive in our understanding of regionalism and regional politics. The 1946 Richard constitution introduced what is called quasi-federalism into Nigerian political geography. However, as stated earlier, regionalism from 1946 created three regions which included Northern, Eastern and Western regions. And each of these regions headed by a premier, for example, Northern region was headed by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Eastern Region headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and the Western Region was headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. It was in 1964, that the Mid-western region was created with Dennis Osadebe as its premier. The problem created by regionalism in Nigeria need not to be overemphasized. Be that as it may, the focus of this section is to examine the impact of party politics on inter-group relations, with emphasis on the Idoma and their neighbours during the period 1960-1966.

It should be noted that inter-group relations during this period (1960-1960) between the Idoma and their neighbours was fairly cordial economically. The Idoma, Igbo and Igala entered into various forms of economic relations which, according to the available evidences, were fairly cordial, (Stephen Obekpa, 2016). Nevertheless, the political relations between the Idoma and their neighbours were not cordial during this period. It is against this backdrop that the present writer synthesizes the nature and pattern of the political landscape within the Benue Province (The Benue Province ceased to exist from 1966) and how it affected inter-group relations.

- The Idoma are staunch supporters of the Northern People Congress (NPC)
- The Tiv are staunch supporters of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC)

- The Igala are staunch supporters of the Northern People Congress (NPC)
- The Igbo were staunch supporters of the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), (Logams,2004: 285-345)

From the foregoing, it is clear that the political landscape between the Idoma of the Benue Province and some of their neighbours were divisive and not cordial. Each political party was agitating for support and there were series of campaigns organized by various political parties in Benue Province. According to oral information, “the NCNC organized series of campaigns in Otukpo District of Idoma Division in 1956-1963.” It was led by Michael Okpara and he promised to provide the Idoma people with what he called ‘Better Life’ thereafter. In the course of the campaign some factions of the Idoma people started throwing stones at the crowd and this shows their dissatisfaction for the party, (Stephen Obekpa, 2016)

Considering the report by Nathan A. Nwaubani, a senior officer of the Eastern Nigeria Information Service Cooperation and publishers of the ‘Nigerian Outlook’ newspaper stated that:

Our only regret is that some Northern leaders have the erroneous impression that all Easterners or all Ibo are against them. This is far from the truth. How can we be judge by the venomous utterances of a few politicians and their hungry followers whose sole ambition is to rule at the federal level, at all costs, even at the expense of Nigerian unity? I am emphatically stating here, Sir, that the utterances of these ambitious politicians do not represent the true feeling of the masses of this region, (Eastern Region), (NAK, MAKPROF, Acc No. 35, 37).

It is important for us to note that the regionalism in Nigeria up to 1960 was destructive to inter-group relations politically. All the regions in the attempt to gain support entered into propoganda that undermined group and regional relations. The NCNC as a political party was described by some of its supporters in the Eastern region as a tyrant party, especially when Michael Okpara was the leader. It was reported that people in the Eastern region were suffering because of the weak policies of the eastern regional government. They had a definite impact on the Middle Belt region, as the Tiv shifted focus to Aminu Kano

under the platform of the NEPU, (E. I. Akombo, 2012: 114). To show the level of political imbalance of the NCNC in relation with the NPC, the colonial report went further to reveal that:

In a free and fair election in the Mid-West the NCNC would not have won. Money was thrown about like ordinary sand and for the first time in the history of parliamentary election in Nigeria, thurggrey of a most violent nature was introduced by the NCNC leaders.

Large quantity of Indian hemp was supplied to thugs to madden them and acid was poured on innocent people, and many innocent lives were lost. Yet accusing fingers was pointed at the NPC and innocent Arabs were attacked, contrary to Nigeria's policy of friendship with nations. Of course, all depends on you our Prime Minister, to see whether or not such recklessness and violence would be allowed to recur in any future elections of any nature, (E. I. Akombo: 2012: 5)

The NPC became popular as a result of the policy of 'One North.' While this was spreading and making head ways in the north, the Eastern regional government were becoming unpopular. It is important for us to note that in 1965, several reports from the east were heard calling the NCNC and the Eastern Regional government an oppressive, bribery and corrupt, tyranny, nepotism, and victimization of political opponents. This factor contributed to the unpopularity of the party among some Igbo themselves and influenced their support in the Middle Belt and Northern region as well from 1963-1966.

As party politics deepened, the political rivalry within the Benue Province and between the Idoma and some of their neighbour's became tensed. As a result of the variation in the supports of political parties, the nature of inter-group relations between the various groups turned sour. The Idoma supports of the Northern People Congress (NPC) and the Tiv supported the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), these redefined and intensified their political rivalry between them till these contemporary times. This formed the basis for disunity between them as claimed by some scholars that the Tiv established a politically domineering presence over the Idoma on the eve of the creation of Benue State. Some writers

claimed that the overpopulation concentration of the Tiv people over the Idoma was the major and fundamental factor that accelerated the political domination of the Idoma in contemporary times, (P. T. Ahire, 2003: 3-32) and at this period Joseph Tarka and his political influence in the Middle Benue Region was still at its infancy stage.

With the advent of regional politics in 1946 and the formation of Northern People's Congress (NPC), the party came with the motto "One North, One People irrespective of their religion, rank or tribe." With this motto, the NCNC argued through their campaigns in Idomaland that the NPC was tribal and ethnic, working for the interest of the Hausa in the North. Despite these campaign strategies by the NCNC, the Idoma were staunch supporters of the NPC, this and among other factors were the major factor that impinges negatively on inter-group relations between the Idoma and their Igbo neighbours. According to an informant.. .with the division of the peoples through party politics, stereo-typical characterization began to manifest and took a different dimension that bicycled into the post-colonial era. The Igbo in the Southern Nigerian area during market days used to tell us that we are supporting the Hausa peoples because we are backward, (Uche Okpara, 2016).

From the above, it is clear that the informant is ignorant of Hausa as an ethnic group. He has been a victim of stereotype which had blocked his understanding of the historical antecedents of the peoples in Northern Nigeria. And he also failed to understand that the question of ethnic identity is a serious and fundamental question that cannot even be answered by indigenous scholars such as Afigbo, who was one of the Igbo scholars with outstanding merit, had not conclusively defined the Igbo identity.

The 'One North' phenomenon was one of the factors that brings that Idoma more closely related with other groups in the Northern Region. The growing number of the educated elites in Idoma society by 1946 became the proponent that encouraged the One North idea. Opposition to this came from two different angles. Firstly, from the NCNC as a political party, and the NCNC and its supporter felt that the idea of One North, One People was deceptive. They propagated that the Islamic North will use them up and dump them for their political advantages or Islamize them, (NAK, MAKPROF, Acc No. 35, 37).

The One North, One People slogan as used by the NPC was actually one of the ways in which support were gained by the party in Idoma society. The NCNC had been dominating people in the Eastern Region, even the so called Igbo people were in conflict with Michael Okpara and its policies. The Idoma gave supports to the NPC not because we in the north, but because we understand the party and their programmes, (Edoh Udeh, 2017).

The programmes of the NCNC were not the major factor why majority of the Idoma did not support the party. The Idoma and their Igbo neighbours had been in close contact prior to British conquest and imposition of colonial domination. However, the role played by Abutu Obekpa Onoja in the NPC and his close relationship with Sir Ahmadu Bello was important for us to understand that reasons for these antecedents. Onoja Abutu was made the Minister for State during the first republic. He became the symbol of the NPC in the Idoma society. He carried out campaigns, organized party rallies and symposiums for the interest of the party in Idoma society.

It was through Abutu Obekpa that the Idoma Hope Rising Union gave her support to the NPC in 1959. The 1959 general election was one of the events that defined the nature and pattern of party politics between the Idoma and their neighbours. The faction of the Idoma people that supported the NCNC were at waterlog with those that supported the NPC. It became two ways traffic in terms of the politicking in Idoma Division. In 1959, a fight broke out at Otukpo when the NCNC and the rival NPC groups collided. According to account of oral testimonies, “the NPC gathered a large crowd of people at St Francis College. They were address by Obekpa and some other members of the party when we heard that some hooligan groups came with sticks and cutlasses and chased some of the supporters away. Some of the NPC supporters fought back and it was reported that several persons were injured but no death case was recorded,” (Ogbole Onche, 2017).

The Idoma, generally speaking, saw the NCNC as one of the parties that breeds hooligans, since the Idoma and their Igbo neighbours experiences series of border conflict, it gave a negative impression that the Igbo were generally hostile people. Though, this seems not to be the case, because they are some of the Igbo communities that had co-operated with the Idoma peacefully without fueds. However, the bitter experiences over farming and hunting lands between the Agila and Ngbo were still fresh in the minds of the Idoma and their Igbo neighbours.

It is important to note also, that the NCNC used the petty Igbo traders in Idoma Division as agents of the party to campaign. Michael Okpara noted that to penetrate the majority of the Idoma in the 1959 general election will be a difficult task to achieve. He decided to use some of the petty businessmen in the division as agents of campaign for the party. (Oche Abudu, 2017). It was said that the influence of this action pays the NCNC, because some positives outcome were recorded in some of the borderland such as Ette, Ichama and Orokam. Assorted gins were given to some family heads, to enable them convinced their wards and members of the family to give their supports to the NCNC, (Oche Abudu, 2017).

On the other hand, the NPC also employed several strategies to gain more support and check the activities of the NCNC and possibly the AG. One of the strategies used by the NPC in Idoma Division through Abutu Obekpa Onoja and other party faithful embarked on campaign to bring the Idoma into the politics of the north, rather than the east. For example, in 1959, Abutu Obekpa and other members of the party through the platform of the NPC paid a courtesy visit to the Och' Idoma in Otukpo. During the visit therefore, the NPC promised the Idoma that an Idoma shall be given a place in the politics of the new government, which is beneficial to the people of Idoma Division.

The Och'Idoma on perceiving this, gave his support to the NPC and at the same time encouraged all the Idoma people to give their support to the party. Consequently, after the 1959 general election, the NPC became the party with the majority of the seats, and needed a merger with another political party in order to form a government. The politics of the NCNC through the sportsmanship of Nnamdi Azikiwe, the NCNC was made the collision party with the NPC, leaving the AG as the opposition party. With the appointment of ministers under the newly established government in 1960, Chief Abutu Obekpa Onoja was made the Minister for State, in other words, the campaign promises made by the NPC to the Och'Idoma and the Idoma people in the course of their campaign, (NAK, MAKPROF, Acc No. 35, 37).

Taken together, therefore, J. O. Lawson stated that:

The first president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was an Ibo. The first president of the Nigerian Senate was an Ibo; the man who succeeded him was an Ibo.

The first Nigerian Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and Head of the Nigerian Army was an Ibo. The first African Vice Chancellor of the Premier University of this country was an Ibo. The first judge to represent Nigeria in the International Court of Justice was an Ibo man, (J. O. Lawson, 1967).

The NCNC which began its programme as a national party since 1936, later transformed into a regional party. This was what the British wanted in order to keep the colonized divided. It became clear that in the 1959 general election, the three dominant political parties had a regional outlook, rather than national outlook. Regionalism as introduced by the Richards constitution of 1946 was an attempt by the colonial state to maintain her hegemony of political and economic control as well as factionalism among the various ethnic groups in the regions. It later became the bedrock for the regional politics in the Nigerian area, especially with the formation of the NPC and the AG respectively.

The introduction of regionalism in Nigeria triggered several reactions from the educated elites and the employees of the Native Authority in the Idoma Division. The Idoma who are considered as minority group were not represented. According to a letter written by the Resident, Benue Province, to the Secretary Northern Provinces, stated that “the main criticism is that there is insufficient pagan representation, none in the House of Chiefs, probably one or possibly two in the House of Assembly and none in Legislative Councils.” (NAK, MAKPROF, Acc No. 414/68). The colonial state categorized societies with decentralized political system as pagan. The Idoma and other groups with such characteristics were termed such, and it is important to note that the NPC and its programmes attempted to incorporate the so called pagan societies into their plan for the development of one north.

It is not completely correct to argue that the nature of political relations between the Idoma and their Tiv neighbour was fragile. There were times with which handshake of friendship were extended by both groups. For example, in 1957, the United Middle Belt Congress went for a national tour in regards the creation of the Middle Belt Region. It was headed by the party leader, Joseph Tarka and the Secretary of the party, Patrick Dokotri. They toured all the non-Muslim areas within what was later called the Middle Belt of Nigeria including the Otukpo and the Och’ Idoma palace, (P.C. Logans, 2004, *Ibid*, P. 593). It was said that they received a warm reception from the Och’ Idoma and other members of the

Idoma Council and they pledge to give their supports for the actualization of the Middle Belt Region, (Logmas, 2004, Ibid, P. 593).

The generality of the nature of party politics during the period under study, repression started to manifest within the Idoma with varying interest. For example, in the 1957 election to the Northern House of Assembly, Chief Obekpa Abutu contested along side with Chief Emmanuel Odinya Audu under the platform of the NPC and the Aliede Youth Movement. In this election, Chief Obekpa Abutu polled total votes of 1, 834 to defeat Chief Emmanuel Audu who got total votes of 872, (Ochai,1996:25). Some of the supporters of Chief Emmanuel Audu took to the street in a way of demonstration, though the demonstration was peaceful without resulting into feuds between the both factions. They demonstrated down to the Central Native Authority in Otukpo. Beside this skirmishes between Chief Abutu and Audu, the Idoma Division did not recorded much political rivalry within it. However, the skirmishes recorded were partly between the Idoma and their neighbours due to variations in the political parties they were supporting.

Nature of Inter-Group Relations, 1960-1967

It is important for us to note that population distribution had been examined in chapter two of this work. However, what is expected now is to examine the impact of the 1963 election on inter-group relations, with emphasis on the Idoma and their Tiv neighbours. After the political independence in 1960, the newly elected political elites inherited several colonial policies and structures which became the important for our understanding of the developments that followed. Some of the policies and structures inherited from the colonial state by the newly independent leaders were regionalism, provincial system, and parliamentary system on the one hand. On the other hand, the railways, currency, and the production of cash crops were retained.

It is important to note that by 1960, the Idoma Hope Rising Union had ceased to exist. It has been swallowed by the popularity of the NPC in the Idoma Division, (P. C. Logams, Op-cit, P. 365-375). Though, other factors contributed to its collapse. The census controversy of 1962 was important because it gives us an understanding of Idoma-Tiv political relations before and after the election of 1963. The Tiv and Idoma are the two largest ethnic groups in the Benue Province, and politically, there have been struggle for control. It is therefore important that census figures are crucial for political control. The 1963 census figure put the population of the Idoma and the Tiv in Benue Province as thus:

Idoma: **498, 054**

Tiv: **1, 145, 428**

(Source: The Department of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Benue State).

The census figure above angered the Idoma. They refused to accept the results claiming that the figure had been manipulated. One of the areas on the controversy was Okpokwu. The Idoma wrote a petition to the census tribunal 1963, claiming that the results for Okpokwu District was incorrect. The Idoma claimed that the Tiv in the other areas such as Wukari, Lafia, Cross River and other places had been added to the figure released. The Idoma are fully aware of the significance of an ethnic group having such large population on the Benue Province.

With the 1963 census controversy between the Idoma and their Tiv neighbour, the nature of political relations between both groups became more tensed. While the Tiv had gained more political ground since the 1953 representative in the Northern House of Assembly, the Idoma on the other hand felt marginalized and seeking for way out. In such a political setting where adequate representation is duly followed based on population distribution, the Tiv are advantageous on this.

Secondly, the formula for the distribution of resources during the first republic was based on population and resources. Going by this therefore, the Tiv were to benefit more than the Idoma. However, the reverse was the case. The Idoma benefited more in terms of infrastructure development than the Tiv during the first republic. The reason being that, the Idoma were in support of the NPC which was the ruling party and were also part of the northernization policy of the party, and also, an Idoma was also made the Minister of State, Northern Region from 1960-1966.

The 1966 Massacres

The period 1963-1967 was a difficult one as experienced in the history of Nigeria. During the period, Nigeria witnessed the census and election crises of 1962/63, military coup that claimed the lives of civilian and military leaders on 15th January, 1966, and the killings of easterners in the north in 1966, which was called the 1966 massacres as indicated above.

However, the main focus of this section is to examine the impact of the 1966 massacres on the Idoma and their neighbours.

The tensed political rivalry between the Idoma and their Tiv neighbour re-surface in the nature and manner the 1966 massacres was perceived by the Idoma and the Tiv. It was rumoured by the Igbo in the Eastern Region that over 30, 000 Igbo were murdered by some indigenes from the north. A reasonable estimate is put at 800 Igbo perishing in the round of killings in May as well as 6000 to 8000 killed in September, (J. S. Oyibo, 1971: 71-75).

The killings of the Igbo in the north alarmed the Igbo political elites. It became severe that most of the groups that are non-Igbo residing in the Eastern Region were afraid of the outcome of the killings.

On the one hand, the impact of the 1966 massacres of Igbo in the north influenced inter-group relations between the Idoma and their Igbo neighbours, and on the other hand, influenced their relations with the Federal government as was demonstrated in the declaration of Biafra by Ojukwu. However, our concern here is to examine the impact of the killings on the relationship between the Idoma and their Igbo neighbours. According to a source:

First and foremost, the rumours broke out that war was will be fought between the rest of the country and the east in which the Igbo will get military support from Israel and the USA; that the Igbo in the north had poisoned the water supplies and had prepared to blow-up important building in the north and Nigeria, (J. S. Oyibo, 1971: Ibid, Pp. 71-75).

With the killings already taken place in the north as well as the rumours going round about the Igbo retaliation, the country was plague into chaos, which the relationship between the Idoma and their Igbo neighbour was also influenced. Some of the Idoma in Igbo society on hearing this began returning back home, even before the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967. It was observed that some of the informants were consistently insisting that the Igbo by 1966 saw the Idoma and part of the northern groups that hated the Igbo and also participated in the killings of their people in the north. There were evidences of movements, inter-mixture as well as displacements of the Idoma and their Igbo neighbours during the period 1966-1967. To make matter worst was when in 1966, a rumour also broke out that:

Northern traders had been killed at Onitsha and also, that a Tiv student of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka had had their eyes gouged out and that C. J. Obande (an Idoma) had been killed at Enugu by the Igbo group, (J S. Oyibo, *Ibid*, Pp. 71-75).

The killing of J. C. Obande an Idoma in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka angered the Idoma youths and they began chasing the Igbo out of their communities. The Igbo on hearing that Idoma youths had taken the street chasing them, decided to leave willingly to the homeland. Though, some of the Igbo were seen trading in Otupko town during this time and also, after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. In other words, this is not to argue that all the Igbo left the Idoma society during the killing of Obande, some of them remained at Otukpo, (Orokpo Ameh, 2017).

Taken together, therefore, it is important for us to note that during the period 1960-1967, the relationship between the Idoma and their neighbours was not smooth politically. There were struggle for political dominance within the Benue Province which the Tiv group, with their population advantage, controlled and dominated. The Igbo on the other hand, perceived the Idoma as part of the northern agenda to relegate them from the politics of the country. This is not true owing to the fact that the Igbo since the first republic had been in better position politically than any other groups in Eastern and Western Regions up to 1967. It is against this premise that Lawson remarked that:

The first president of Nigeria was an Ibo man, the first Vice Chancellor of a Premier University in Nigeria was an Ibo man, the first Judge to represent Nigeria at the International Court of Justice in Hague was an Igbo man. Can Odumegwu Ojukwu and his rebel gang with all these and other facts justify their vicious claim that the Ibos are not wanted in Nigeria? What else could the Federal Republic of Nigeria do to show they are wanted in Nigeria? (J.O. Lawson, 1967, *Ibid*, P. 2)

From the foregoing, the Igbo had been part and persue of the Nigerian struggle for independence. They had also been part of the sorry state of Nigeria, as well as other groups in the Nigerian area. Therefore, the period 1960-1967 and its political impact on inter-group relations between the Idoma and their neighbours can be understood from the point of view

of regionalism, party politics and group relations as demonstrated above. However, on the one hand, economic differences between these various groups strengthened inter-group relations, because the political rivalry did not shut down the markets. The Idoma and their neighbours attended each other markets and as well as intermarriages. On the other hand, the political differences between them influenced their relationship negatively, especially the political elites.

To make matter worst, in 1966, there appeared the Enugu-Ezike and Ette disturbance. A boundary disputes erupt between the both communities. This compounded the already existed problems leading to the Nigerian Civil War. As the problem mounted in the far north between the Igbo and other groups, also, a problem broke out between the Enugu-Ezike and Ette people. Already, there were growing concerns that the Ette people were part of the north. A riot broke out between the other groups over the January 1966 coup. A trader from Enugu Ezike at Orié Ugbelle and an Ette person had a heated debate about the coup which eventually turned bloody between both groups. In October 1966, the both communities entered into conflict, and a reprisal attack on the Ette was carried out by the Enugu-Ezike at the Nkwó Aji market days after. This was antecedents was called today as the 1966 Enugu-Ezike and Ette Disturbance, (A. A. Apex, 2008, P. 205).

The chaos in the north that followed the July 1966 counter coup made the Igbo in the Northern Region scapegoats. They were massacred in numbers and tension grew towards the end of the year. On October, 3rd 1966, at Orié Ugbelle at Ette, an angry mob, perhaps trying to continue the carnage of the Igbo down south, stampeded and looted the wares of Igbo traders at Oyé Ugbelle market.

This may have arisen from the idea that the Igbo were 'evil' with whom no group should associate with. Or, from the idea that the Ette people that have sympathy with Northern Region and had been clamouring to join them saw a vent to exhibit their hatred for their Igbo neighbours by instigating miscreants to ferment trouble with them.

On October 5, 1966, at Nkwor Aji market, some Igbo traders began a reprisal attack on the Ette traders. The attack left many houses burnt down, eleven dead and many injured (A. A. Apex, 2008, Ibid, P. 209). As the relationship between the Ette and Enugu-Ezike turn soured, Biafran soldiers came to camp at Ette. There was attempt by the uterine kins of Ette and Enugu-Eziketo resolve the impasse. Mr. Nwee from Nkem Aji volunteered to placate

Ette people by buying a cow, yams and wine which he took to Ette for the funeral obsequies of those killed at Nkwor Aji market. His plea was granted but the trouble makers refused to back out of it. The Nigerian situation at this point in our history compounded the problem, and also, the crises were depended based on the rumour going on about the killings of the Igbo in the north. It was as a result of this and so many other factors that led to the crises in within the border communities, as in the case with the Ette and Enugu- Ezike in October, 1966.

Conclusion

What this paper has attempted to do is to examine the impact of regionalism and party politics on the Idoma and their neighbours. The year 1946 was an important in the history of Nigeria. It marked when regionalism was introduced by the Richard constitution. The impact of this policy were many. One of the impacts therefore, was divide and rule which demonstrated clearly on the nature of political relations between the various groups in the three regions. The Idoma and their Tiv and Igbo neighbours were characterized politically by conflict. This was a factor that undermined the pre-existing relations between the groups. Also, the various political parties in the Nigerian area were interested to gaining supports in the Middle Belt areas and this necessitated various political campaigns which some of the parties faithful met a hostile reception in some part of Idomaland, especially the NCNC. The NPC had always met a warm reception on the part of the Idoma and a hostile one on the side of the Igbo and some part of Tivland. It is therefore important for us to note that, the period 1946-1967 was significant to our understanding of the nature of political relations between the Idoma and their neighbours. Secondly, it is instructive to note that despite this political tension between the Idoma and their neighbours, trade relations flourished and markets was one of the areas for inter-mixture. In other words, there was a symbiotic relationship in trade, intermarriages as well as exchange of visits.

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