The East Power Game and Nigeria's Political Development

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Chapter 9
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Abstract
This study attempts to critically look at the place of the east in the power game in Nigeria. The federal structure of Nigeria since 1946 has not only served as the theatre or arena for the political power game between regions but has given character to it, inspite of all subsequent political development in the country. The political game in Nigeria has become and remained horizontal in character, a tripartite bloc game. From the above, the major submission which this paper canvasses is that because of the horizontal character of Nigerian politics and its internal politics, the performances of the East in the Nigeria power game have not been positively impressive. A house divided against itself, so the old adage goes, cannot stand or farewell.

Introduction
Within the context of Nigeria, whenever mention is made of the East, it is intended to refer to that portion of Nigeria that lies east of the River Niger and covers, geographically and politically, Abia; Awka-Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa and Cross-River States. Others are Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers States. The political history of Nigeria is a public property. It is a matter of common knowledge and would be boring to try to rehearse it in detail now. Suffice it to say that the East was created by or under the governorship of Sir Benard
Bourdillon in 1939 when the Southern Province of Nigeria was divided into the eastern and western provinces.

As it was rationalized, this action was taken, theoretically, for administrative convenience. Ibadan, Enugu, and Kaduna were chosen as the administrative seats of the sections where they were located. The Richards Constitution imposed on Nigeria by promulgation on August 2, 1946 consolidated the division into regions. It gave the country three regions, namely; northern, eastern and western regions with the cities earlier mentioned serving as regional capitals (Minorities, 1967:1).

Thus, the country was cut into three regions at the whims of colonialism. This structure has since served not only as the theatre or arena for the political power game between the regions, but it has also given character to it, in spite of all subsequent political developments in the country. The political game in Nigeria has become and remained horizontal in character, a tripartite bloc game. For the above topic, the view that this submission canvasses is that because of the horizontal character of its internal politics, the performance of the East in the Nigerian power game has not been positively impressive. A house divided against itself, so the adage goes, cannot stand or fare well.

This paper has seven segments. The first is introduction, the second is theoretical road map to the paper, the third examines the horizontal character of Nigeria politics. Domestic horizontalism in the politics of East is discussed in the fourth segment. The fifth segment looks at the cockfighting among the easterners. The sixth assesses the performances of the easterner while the final segments are the prospect and conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this academic endeavour is the game theory while there are numerous shades of opinion on rational decision and strategies in a situation of conflict and competition when each player or participant seeks to maximize gain and minimize losses. We shall commence by drawing from
Thomas Schelling (1966) in all games' there are elements of conflict, decision making and cooperation; played by two or more players, where decisions of each players, are contingent upon the decisions of the others. There is therefore a high level of inter-dependence among the decisions of the different players participating in the game. In a situation of this kind, each player is interested in winning the game and two or more individuals have to make choices and have preferences regarding the outcomes of these choices. It is necessary that they have some knowledge of the choices available to, and made by each other and of the preferences the other players have in heir choices. The crux of the power game is that it is not possible for any one player to make a choice; whatever choice he makes depends inextricably on the choice or the choices made by the other players.

Each player in the game has to decide his choice after taking the points of view of other players. He has to make an effort to look into the problem from another person point of view without which he is not in a position to take a decision for himself. Each player has to base his decision on his expectations of what the other players are likely to do. These are the characteristics of the power games that may be played by two or more players. But these conditions can be applied to the real political life – for example where a decision involving others has to be taken in the case of games, in battles, diplomats involved in bargaining and negotiations, politicians trying to influence the voters, legislators making efforts to organize groups or coalitions. What differentiates games in a game situation from games theory in real political life is that in the games condition, the game is usually well-defined, it has an explicit and efficient set of rules, the information available to the players is specified at every point and the scoring system is complete. In real political situation, the rules and other conditions of the game are not so specified.

Therefore, the North strategies and conditions are cooperation and unity as a strength, the West depends or apply
diplomacy and deceptive intrigues while the East strategy depends largely on lack of unity and distrust that make her not fare well hence the east is divided against itself in the power struggle in Nigeria.

The Horizontal Character of Nigerian Politics

One of the early indicators of horizontal politics or power play in Nigeria was the 1940 disagreement between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Both men were prominent members of the Nigerian Youth Movement in which no northern, except one, was a member. Even that single member was chased out of the North. He fled to Lagos where, in his refuge, he was employed as an under-secretary for the movement, he having lost his employment as a teacher in the North. Chief Awolowo alleged in 1940 that Dr. Azikiwe pursued policies designed “to corrode the self-respect of the Yoruba People as a group; to build the Ibos as a master race” (Awolowo, 1965:62). This led to an unmended split between the two leaders after Chief Awolowo tried unsuccessfully to have Dr. Azikiwe expelled from the Nigerian Youth Movement which became the precursor of organized struggle for Nigerian independence (Umoh, 1975:30 – 31).

Apart from the clash between the two political giants, it needs to be noted that the refusal of the northerners to identify with the Nigerian Youth Movement was an expression of horizontalism. By the late 1940’s and early 1950’s this attitude had become widespread and matured into centrifugalism. Ethnic unions metamorphosed into state unions. They asked that states be created for their ethnic groups, perhaps a facsimile of the regions (Kohn and Walace, 1965:49).

When, in 1951, the Macpherson Constitution was promulgated, the power situation did not improve. It became clearer and more agonizing than hitherto. Admittedly, the people got their existing three regions, but the trauma came at the central level. The constitution created a national executive comprising six official and twelve unofficial African members. Three of these
members of the national executive were chosen from each of the three regions.

Adjudging that the northern region was more than or about half of the whole country, the constitution gave sixty-eight seats in a 136 member National Legislature or House of representatives to the Northern Region and divided the other half thirty-four each to the western and eastern regions. Thus, the Northern Region, a late and reluctant arrival at the scene of the political struggle, walked gingerly up to occupy the power podium invincibly and have remained there undamnable. That brought the trauma.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, with his all-embracing Nigerian outlook, tried to occupy a prominent position in the Western Nigeria using the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C) as an instrument but failed. The explanation for the failure lay in the horizontal politics. He was considered a non-citizen in that section of his country. A rational message deducible from the political atmosphere in the country was “every man to his own region”. Nigerian politics at the national level became a struggle between the regions for the control of power. The North was sure to win with case at all times.

That also explains why Nigeria’s first republic was burdened with a weak centre and powerful or strong regions. Regional political elites wanted to locate political power where it was accessible to them. All of these enthroned horizontalism in the Nigerian power game. The legislatures ushered into the regions by the Macpherson Constitution were controlled, in the cases of northern and western regions, by political parties based in each of those regions (Udoma, 1987:273).

**Domestic Horizontalism in the Politics of the East**

The N.C.N.C did not contest the election in Eastern Nigeria. There was, therefore, no leader of a majority party to be called upon to lead the government. The lieutenant governor of the eastern region of Nigeria, Commander G.J. Pkyenott RN (retired) called Professor Eyo Ita of Calabar Province and designated him
“Leader of Government Business” in the Eastern House of Assembly and Minister of Natural Resources (Udoma, 1987:273 – 274). On realizing that members in the Northern House of Assembly declared for the Northern People’s Congress (N.P.C) and those of the Western Region for the Action Group (A.G), the parties having their bases, each, in the relevant region, the Leader of Government Business and Minister of Natural Resources in Eastern Nigeria, Professor Eyo Ita, organized and had members of his legislature declare for the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C) (Udoma, 1987).

Thenafter, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the N.C.N.C leader, “who was not even a member of the Eastern House of Assembly came over to the East (Udoma, 1987:308). He formented and hatched against the Eyo Ita government what the Honourable Sir E. Udo Udoma, himself a member of the said legislature, referred to as a “civilian coup d’etat in the history of Nigeria” (Udoma, 1987:307). He got the Eyo Ita government toppled from power. After the election that followed the crisis, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe found himself on the political seat that Professor Eyo Ita occupied. In that position, he combined in himself the leadership of the government of eastern Nigeria and that of the N.C.N.C as a political party.

Thenceforth, the N.C.N.C government of Eastern Nigeria adopted and applied the worst type of the spoils system in a mixture with a divide-and-rule policy to administer the region. The approach palpably discriminated against the so-called minority ethnic groups in the region, particularly those of the then Calabar Province. Peoples of the minority ethnic groups became apprehensive of local imperialism in the form of the domination of the minorities by the majority ethnic group. They started to militate for the creation of their own states. So fierce was the demand for states that in 1958 the Willink Commission was appointed by Her Majesty’s Government in London to enquire into the fears of the minorities. The commission could not find a solution to the problem.
A most devastating effect of all this was that the government of the region lost the good-will of the masses in the minority ethnic areas. With the good-will of the masses in the minority, ethnic areas gone, even an overdose of the spoils system, divide-and-rule policy, or elimination of minority leaders could not save the eastern government the image of an intruder in those areas. Mutual understanding among and between the peoples of the east had diminished desperately. Again, horizontal politics became the pattern naturally with a sag in the region’s domestic solidarity. The minority ethnic groups lost a sense of belonging in the east, which then, became a hose divide against itself.

Cockfighting Among Easterners

Particularly so during periods of military rule, the eastern problem has increasingly manifested itself among political office holders and bureaucrats in federal establishments. Their dexterity in observing the rules and ethos of the service, in issuing queries and ensuring compliance, in proving someone incapable of performing are usually practiced with and among themselves. They tend to specialize in invoking rules against their fellow easterners who may be pursuing one project or the other in their departments or at best, appear to be helping but at the end exhaust one’s patience and perseverance with fruitless trips, endless procedures, delayed decision or no decisions at all. Whether they are men or women, secretary or director, the impact of their bureaucratic authority is usually directed against, and so felt negatively by their fellow easterners (Anam-Ndu, 1998:27).

An understanding of this phenomenon could be sought in the psychology of frustration. A child for instance, is restrained by the mother from pursuing a goal which could be play or whatever. The child, in reaction against the restraint, pours water into the fire place where cooking is done. They, along with other family members suffer hunger as the meal is delayed or not prepared at all so long as the fire place remains wet. Could it be
that the in-fighting among easterners is a reflection of some alternative goal response to collective frustration? Whatever it is, the term "cockfight" is used here to describe this unfortunate behaviour which usually leaves them either too distant from their peers and others, or too exhausted to be useful to themselves and to those who culturally must look up to them for help.

This behaviour is not common only among federal bureaucrats of eastern origin. Among political office holders, their behaviour borders on puritanical caution; they rarely make to themselves friends of the "mammon of unrighteousness" so that when they no longer matter, they could be salvaged. For both bureaucrats and political office holders, the outcome of their behaviour is the same: when they retire, they expire. Again, whether or not this curious phenomenon is a reflection of normal bureaucratic behaviour, or their political culture as we see in the Nigeria political system, or a confirmation of their subordinate status in the federal scheme of things is for the reader to determine (Anam-Ndu, 1998:28).

However, this behaviour pattern is to be contrasted with that of their counterparts of northern origin who usually constitute a fadama, a fertile haven for their primordial constituencies. When they retire, they are usually still in circulation. Are they in circulation because they are northerners or because of cordial relationship with their peers or primordial constituencies or all of these combined? This again is for the reader to decide.

What these add up to, however, is that while northerners build up their bureaucratic strength cumulatively through mutual accommodation, easterners decimate theirs through cockfighting and mutual exhaustion. I should not be read there as extolling implicitly or explicitly, the behaviour of public office holders of northern origin, rather I am analyzing the collective behaviour of categoric groups and the effect of such behaviour on the pursuit and maximization of their collective interest in a federal setting.
If therefore, there is northern domination as alleged, it is in response to the perennial confusion and disunity among easterners. The solution to asymmetrical power relations which characterize domination does not lie in more confusion, disunity or collective self effacement. Easterners must set their home in order. This prerequisite for positive involvement in the building of a new Nigeria is imperative and urgent (Anam-Ndu, 1998:29).

This leads us to the issue of disguised ethnic homogeneity in the North, an issue which has been a source of serious misconceptions and faulty conclusions among observes. Is the North ethnically or even politically homogenous as it appears? Is the North geographical label ‘northerner’ synonymous with the sociological category – ‘Hausa/Fulani’ believed to be the task masters of Nigeria? What political and sociological factors make ‘Hausa/Fulani’ an attractive ethnic label for non Hausa or Fulani elements to claim? We cannot explore these question here in detail for northern is one who uses Hausa a the main language of social and commercial interaction; has his primordial home in the geographical area identified as the North and uses Hausa/Fulani cultural artefacts like dress, house forms and behavioural codes as his existential structure. He may or may not be a Moslem by faith.

These commonly shared cultural symbols and the predominance of the Moslem religion, which admits little or no protestant orientation, weaken the force of ethnic segmentation in the North and creates a common ‘we’ or hegemonic consciousness among northerners. Sociologically, the North is as ethnically segmented as the East. But unlike in the East, people from relatively smaller ethnic groups tend to submerge their ethnic identity in a ‘regional’ Hausa Fulani culture because the use of micro ethnic labels not only betrays their social inclusiveness, but deprives them of a more socially acceptable tag and limits their mobility opportunities.

Usually, it is the behaviour and utterances of non Hausa-Fulani elements that invite the perception of political things in
terms of northern domination. During the deliberation in the National Constitutional Conference, for instance, such elements were always identified with hard-line positions against any proposals for change. Their over-appropriation of the Hausa-Fulani leadership status and culture is a familiar strategy usually employed to integrate them into and move them up the leadership cadre.

Of recent, the phenomenon of outright ethnic identity change or dubious ethnic credentials and the problem of northern domination generally understood as meaning Hausa-Fulani domination is increasingly creating an awareness among Hausa-Fulani influential of the need to redefine their social boundary. The structural innovation of the Abacha administration which acknowledges the political presence and voice of non Hausa/Fulani groups in the North, and the growing awareness among the educated middle class in such groups either with Moslem faith or otherwise, that they need not appropriate Hausa-Fulani identity in order to actualize their existence may, over time, weaken the 'we' or hegemonic consciousness among northerners. Such a development will go a long way to obfuscate the contention of northern domination (Anam-Ndu, 1998:30).

**An Assessment of the Performance of the East**

1966 introduced the soldiers into the power game in Nigeria. An assessment of this nature should, therefore be two-pronged, i.e. the East in the civil rule and in the military rule. From the foregoing, it is needless to say that the East was ushered into the Nigerian national politics with a constitutionally created disability.

Constituting one quarter of a three region country which the size of one region was presumed to double the other two in population and land mass, the East lacked the magic to produce the numerical strength that could enable it to come out tops in the Nigerian kind of politics here characterized. Moreover, the shadow of the 1940 split between Chief Awolowo and Dr.
Azikiwe still haunted the two leaders. Both could not easily agree to take one line of action. After the 1959 federal election, for instance, Dr. Azikiwe would not agree to coalesce with Chief Awolowo to form a federal government as leaders of two parties whose combined victory at the polls gave the majority in the House of Representatives (Akpan, 1983:17). If they had, perhaps the progressive stalemate which ensued as the country became arrested at the level of differentiation and equality would have been averted, or, it would not have climaxed in a civil war as it did. Furthermore, the lack of mutual cohesion within the regions made it easily penetrable by political parties based in the other regions and robbed it of successes at the polls. The Action Group party won many seats in the minority areas. This further weakened the East politically.

Accordingly, the political climates of the East were relegated or satisfied to play a second fiddle at the central or federal level. The East under the aegis of the N.C.N.C, formed a secondary partner in the N.P.C – N.C.N.C. coalition government after the 1959 federal elections. This was short-lived and of no particular advantage to the East. Equally of no appreciable positive consequence was the 1964 Federal Election boycott. It, rather, handed over political power to the N.P.C/N.N.D.P combined as it were, in a platter of gold.

That alliance claimed victory with an overwhelming majority of the total votes cast, though "with little or no participation of most voters in many of the southern constituencies under the control of the N.C.N.C. and the A.G. (Akpan, 1983:20). Although the president hesitated to call on the leader of the presumably, victorious alliance to form a government and pressured for a broad-based outfit, the compromise that emerged failed to solve the basic problem of horizontalism in the politics of Nigeria. It became crystallly clear to every person of average intelligence, within the prevailing political culture and context, that the northern region never contemplated easing her stultifying stranglehold on the politics of the nation. The ruling elites from
the majority areas of the East experienced the like of what they had been ministering to the minority peoples of the region since the overthrow of the Professor Eyo Ita government. They had reached a cul-de-sac in their political ambition nationally.

The Nigerian military forces are a microcosm of the Nigerian society. They were infected by the germ or virus of horizontalism of the larger society. W.F. Cutteridge reasons this way. He opines that the “Nigerian Military Coup of 15 January 1966 did not derive solely from tensions within the army itself”. The coup, he says, “was about the distribution of power in Nigeria which appeared opposite group”. The leader, Nzeogwu, “was undoubtedly a Militant Ibo nationalist”. Guttridge affirms, then, that the “army intervention in politics was only an assertion of Ibo aspirations and Ibo faction emerged on top following that coup”.

To buttress his position, Guttridge says, further, that an Ibo, General Ironsi, was installed as the army leader and head of state. Even in that position, Ironsi was known to have had special connections with eastern regional politicians who were fellow Ibos. He favoured policies corresponding with those advocated by Ibo politicians before and after the coup (Gutteridge, 1969:70-93).

General Ironsi was later overthrown and killed in a counter-coup staged in July of the same year by Hausa-Fulani soldiers of the North whose ethnic people were overthrown by the earlier coup. The leaders of the overthrown, then, took over the leadership of the country. They appended openly to the Hausa-Fulani masses for support and reminded them that the national power had once again return to their ethnic group. With this coup, political horizontalism had gone full circle in Nigeria.

Furthermore, at the eve of the civil war following the deterioration of relations between eastern Nigeria and the federal government, the West region through notice of its leader Chief Awolowo served the federal government withdrawal from the federation if it allowed eastern region to secede. In his words: “if the eastern region is allowed by acts of omission or commission
to secede from Nigeria, then the western region and Lagos must also stay out of the federation" (Awolowo, 1967). Referring to a would-be-break-away eastern region as a "foreign state", he stress the illegality and unjustifiability of a war against it should it secede. According to him, "...if the COR State is created by decree after the eastern region shall have made its severance from Nigeria effective, we shall be waging an unjust war against a foreign state..." Apparently encouraged by this scenario, eastern Nigeria seceded. Western Nigeria remained in the federation. What followed is now history the details of which are sordid tale of blackmail, opportunism and zero sum manipulations. Relations between the two regions have hardly improved ever since. An insight into why their relations have not improved is suggested by Nordlinger (1972:9) as he states:

...conflict is intense when the issues at stake are though to be of the greatest importance, involving the segments’ social identity, its most sought after material rewards, its most cherished cultural values or its perceived inalienable rights. An intense conflict is also present when at least one segment views another according to highly unflattering stereotypes, invidious beliefs, log standing jealousies and deep seated prejudices, which taken singly or together, produce strongly felt and emotionally charged antagonisms.

Aspects of these prejudices and antagonisms have freely found expression in the phenomenon of cock-fighting analysed above. Taken as an eastern act which is Gutteridge’s view, the military approach in the power game was less than satisfactory. The East lost out before anyone could spell Shokolokobangoshay and was worse off than before. Subsequent developments cumulatively plunged the region into a civil war which she was ill-capable of handling and was subjected to a total defeat in spite of the valour of her fighting forces.
Internal political horizontalism subscribes to this kind of military performance. The leadership did not carry along the people of the minority areas who had all along been disenthused by the pattern of human management in the region. They saw the federal troops as emancipators and readily gave them any needed support. It was, therefore easy for the federal troops to penetrate the East from the minority areas. From the times of the early Egyptians to the present, wrong management of human relations by the political leaders has always led to the doom of nations in times of external invasion or domestic uprising. The situation in the East was not a surprise to analysts. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

For now, the North/South or North/East syndrome is still here. That was what the June 12 annulment camouflaged. The army has become the instrument for its preservation. One can make bold to say that the East is not even playing a second fiddle for now.

The Prospect

The claim of exclusive right to rule Nigeria by any people or region, as it devined, is comparable to the apartheid that once was in South Africa. It is dialectically destined to self-destruction. The claim is planted on a decaying foundation. First was the colossal size of the North among other regions with the acclaimed preponderance of its population. The creation of states has taken care of this. It is not likely that there is going to emerge a superman that will mesmerically lump together many states and exercise such influence as typified the gigantic North.

To use Josiah Royce’s concept, each state has its own soul which is a product of its physical environment, immediate local problems, the people’s culture and the people’s total cosmological aspirations Royce, 1886:5). Each state involuntarily pursues this end as will to live or in order to sustain its ‘raison d’etre’. A synthesis or compromise of such souls from all the states is the Nigerian soul or “geist” or true personality. No single
people or region can produce this. To attempt to do it is to precipitate and perpetuate crisis and instability.

The second component of the foundation is the army. Because it is the army that now sustains political horizontalism in Nigeria, it is also the hope of those who entertain the idea of exclusive right to rule. If the army is a facsimile of the Nigerian society as earlier proposed, it stands to reason that when the states pick their cosmology; restructure Nigerian politics as indicated above, the army will be affected in a similar pattern. Its perception will accord with the truly Nigerian personality. Then and only then will the Nigerian army be, like other truly patriotic institutions, in the country, the real defenders of the nation’s constitutions. That leaves no room for patronizing any claimants of exclusive right to rule.

Furthermore, the army cannot rule this country forever. Here in Nigeria and across the world, military rule is very unpopular. The army cannot combine governance with it professional and constitutional duty and perform both effectively. This is unarguable. To say all this is also to propose that before too long, the army will realize that she is not the institution to determine the anthropological chemistry or component of those who are to rule. At that point, the hope of those depending on it to rule will flop.

The third prop for the exclusive right to rule group is finance. From the way Nigerians use money in politics, wealth becomes a significant determinant of those who rule. Campaign strategies defy all ethics and science of politics and create a craze for money among the power hungry folks whose means cannot support them. What many of them do usually is to run to Abuja and look for patronage.

This is very common among the people of the minority areas, who suffered divers deprivations in the years antedating the creation of states. Not infrequently, advances are also made to these people with money bags by those who consider themselves as the political overlords of this country. If they succeed, the
people become mere surrogates of their out-of-state masters. As the saying goes, he who pays the piper dictates the tune. With all the changes perceived in the discussion so far, this phase, too is short-lived.

All that this analyses portrays is that horizontalism is in its passing phase. The East needs to aid it to collapse. She has to make haste to establish internal mutual understanding and sense of belonging or oneness. This is vertical as opposed to horizontal relationship. Any candidate or candidates selected should be such that would be accepted and easily sellable. The East should be willing to back this candidate or these candidates with campaign materials and manpower. A well-thought-out plank or manifesto should be presented by a thorough and effective machinery to the nation. All sections of the nation should see themselves catered for in the plank. In other words, the approach should be truly vertical and cut across ethnic and state boundaries. This is possible. The June 12 feat can also be performed by the East, this time without annulment.

Conclusion

This contribution opens with an identification of the East as used here. A brief genesis of the administrative structures and the effects on the politics of the country is outlined. The presentation is of the view that the East had failed to perform satisfactorily in the Nigerian power game because of the horizontal character of its internal politics. It sees horizontalism as a passing phase in Nigerian politics and the prospect for the improvement in the performance of the East as possible.

References


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Biographical Note

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