
Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology

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Abstract: *Are these heady days for Nigerian political parties? This is the main question, which this paper addresses with emphasis on political ideology, being the first and most important vehicle of a political party. It is argued that despite all pretences to the contrary through their manifestoes, as much as the superficial classifications as the “left” and “right”, “progressive” and “conservative”, Nigerian parties seem to be bereft of clear ideological commitments. This conclusion is predicated upon the relegation of politics of issues to the background across the various republics, and in its place the ascendancy of identity and money politics. Other factors include the rising magnitude of political vagrancy on the basis of selfish and parochial interests, the high level of party indiscipline, absence/weakness of party cohesion and internal democracy, and the high mortality and turnover of party leadership. Finally, the paper discusses the implications of this for Nigeria’s democratization and democratic consolidation, before concluding with some recommendations.*

1. Introduction

Are these heady days for Nigerian political parties? It does not seem so. Although, the decade of the 1990s witnessed the massive spread of what Huntington (1991) referred to as the “third wave” of democratization to Africa, including Nigeria, leading to an unprecedented resurgence of multiparty politics, there is no controversy about the fact that the mere adoption of party pluralism will not automatically advance the cause of democracy without the institutionalization of certain institutional parameters to promote and sustain due process in theory and practice (See, Bratton and Van de Walle, 1992; 1997; Sorensen,

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1993). One of the most complex and critical institutions of democracy is political party. Political parties, as “makers” of democracy, have been so romanticized that scholars have claimed that neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable without them. They not only perform functions that are government related, such as making government accountable and exercising control over government administration; and electorate related functions such as political representation, expression of people’s demand through interest articulation and aggregation as well as structuring of electoral choices; but also linkage related functions, playing an intermediary and mediatory role between the government and the electorate (see, Moore, 2002; Lapalombara and Anderson, 2001; Simon, 1962).

Following Omotola (2005a) and Egwu (2005), Saliu and Omotola (2006) have pointed out that political parties can only cope effectively with these responsibilities to the extent of their political institutionalization in terms of structure, internal democracy, cohesion and discipline, as much as their autonomy. The element of party autonomy is very crucial. For, as Alli Mari Tripp has argued, and rightly so, those organizations that have asserted the greatest autonomy have generally been able to “select their own leaders, push for far-reaching agendas, and involve themselves in politics to a greater extent than organizations that have been tied to the regime/or dominant party, either formally or through informal patronage networks” (Tripp, 2001:101). A note of caution is necessary here to avoid confusion. The relationship between political parties and the state is a complex one. This is because it is the party that forms the government, the latter being the institution of the state. To now talk of a hard-line demarcation between the two may be unrealistic. Yet, the relationship should be well defined such that political parties, especially the one in power, as a critical segment of both the state and society, can enjoy some reasonable degree of “societal autonomy”, the absence of which poses serious threats to “political liberalization, democratization and democratic consolidation” (Tripp, 2001:105). In such a situation, multiparty democracy can be adapted for the “politicization of ethnicity and further

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elite enrichment encouraging a confrontational and divisive system” (cf Dicklitch, 2002:205).

The import of the foregoing discussion, to take a cue from Saliu and Omotola (2006:2), is that the level of political institutionalization of political parties and their institutional strengths are directly correlated to their ability to discharge their ascribed responsibilities, and by extension, the strengths of democracy. When well institutionalized, political parties can serve as a set of mediating institutions through which differences in ideas, interests and perception of political problems at a given time can be managed (Olagunju, 2000; Omotola, 2005a). However, when the reverse is the case, the democracy project and the general system stand the risk of perversion and eventual breakdown.

Whatever the case, it is important to note that at the very heart of the success or otherwise of political party is the important question of political ideology. The issue of ideology has been so central to the activities of political parties across time and space that Anson D. Morse (1896:76) has argued that ideology, being the durable convictions held in common by party members in respect to the most desirable form, institutions, spirit and course of action of the state, determines the natural attitude of a party towards every public question (cf. Iyare, 2004:81). In an incisive piece on “political party convention”, Richard Davies and Vincent J. Strickler (1996:1025) similarly argue that “ideology functions as planks”, that is, single issue statements within the platform, the exact ideological orientation of which is often used as a bargaining chip in seeking party unity. Here, the platform connotes a statement of the official party position on a variety of issues. Okudiba Nnoli (2003:177-82) also concludes that ideology is a very crucial aspect of politics, not only by serving as a cognitive structure for looking at society generally and providing a prescriptive formula, that is, a guide to individual action and judgement, but also as a powerful instrument of conflict management, self-identification, popular mobilization and legitimization. It may, therefore, be correct to assert that the first and most important vehicle of a political party, under an ideal situation, should be its ideological stance.

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In reality, however, this is seldom the case. Perhaps, due to the shallowness of democratic roots especially in the developing countries, other forces of identity particularly ethnicity and religion would appear to have taken the place of ideology. The rising influence of money politics represents another crucial limiting dimension (see, Nugent, 2001a: 2001b; 2001c; 1999; 1995; Gros, 1998; Omotola, 2004). What is the situation with Nigerian parties? Put differently, do Nigerian parties have ideology? How has its ideological condition shaped and influenced the course of party politics in the country? The main thrust of this chapter is to critically engage these questions with a view to suggesting ways of reviving and raising the consciousness of Nigerian parties with regard to the centrality of ideology to party activities and effectiveness.

The paper is organized into a number of sections. Firstly, it will analyze the place of ideology in political theory. The second substantive section situates Nigerian parties in historical perspectives, tracing briefly their origin and growth as a precursor to the analysis of the place of ideology in Nigerian parties across different epochs. The last substantive part of the paper, drawing on its immediate preceding section, engages the central question of whether Nigerian parties have ideology or not. It is argued that despite all pretences to the contrary through their manifestoes, as much as the superficial classifications as the “left” and “right”, “progressive” and “conservative” parties, Nigerian parties seem to be bereft of clear ideological commitments. This conclusion is predicated upon the relegation of politics of issues to the background across the various republics, and in its place the ascendancy of identity and money politics. Other factors include the rising magnitude of political vagrancy on the basis of selfish and parochial interests, the high level of party indiscipline, absence/weakness of party cohesion and internal democracy, and the high mortality and turnover of party leadership. Finally, the paper discusses the implications of this for Nigeria’s democratization and democratic consolidation, before concluding.

2. Ideology and Political Theory

Ideology represents a typically crucial element of political parties and their activities. It is a set of ideas about politics, all of which are related to one another and that modify and support each other. Though relatively enduring, it is yet a dynamic phenomenon, capable of being modified by new issues. It was in this light that Philips W. Shively (1997) defines an ideology as “a continually developing, organized set of ideas about politics that helps us to make sense of the myriad of political questions that face use”. For Okudiba Nnoli, ideology typifies “a systematized and interconnected set of ideas about the socio-economic and political organization of society as a whole” (Nnoli, 2003: 178).

The concept of ideology, is, historically, deeply rooted in political theory. As a concept, it was coined by the late eighteenth century French philosopher, Destutt de Tracy (1754 – 1836). According to Nnoli (2003:177), Destutt de Tracy used it to describe a new scientific discipline that systematically studies ideas, emotions and sensations – the science of ideas. This conception has since changed and ideology has come to embody the ideas themselves. As a result of the changes, ideology has come to be presented as a subject representing two contradictory realities – the good and the bad, the former depicting ideology as “a system of thought that animates social or political action”, and the latter as a “misleading, illusory or one-sided criticism or condemnation” (cf Nnoli, 2003:178-79). This was the kind of debate that dominated political discourse in the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, in their: *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1960) took a swipe at Hegel and his-co-travelers, describing them as ideologists of the bourgeois system, not articulate about the material conditions of social and political life. Yet, they went ahead to articulate another conception of ideology based on class analysis as a device for articulating the conflicting interests of different social classes (Nnoli, 2003:178).

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From whatever perspective one looks as it, the reality of political life across political systems, developed or developing, is the fact of multiple political options from which inevitably, choice(s) must be made. At such critical crossroads, ideology provides a ready guide for appropriate action. Philips W. Shively posits that ideology is useful to people, both for their own personal ease and satisfaction and for their public political activities. At the individual level, ideology helps to make sense reasonably easily and quickly of the varied political questions that come to one's attention. In terms of its public utilities, it helps people to make persuasive arguments convincingly to enlist popular support for a given public policy (Shively, 1997:46 – 47). On the whole, therefore, ideology is an indispensable element of politics. It does not only serve as a major instrument of state power, playing major role in the acquisition, use and consolidation of power, but also functions as political life-line for the animation of politics, forcing individuals and groups alike to make political judgment, especially in the face of competing and conflicting divides, as between capitalism and socialism, during the Cold War. On these notes, Nnoli (2003:181-83) summarizes the functions of ideology as that of providing:

- A cognitive structure for looking at society generally, be serving as an explanatory and justificatory category for societal realities;
- A prescriptive formula – a guide to individual action and judgment as a basis for the legitimization of public politics when in conformity with popular belief;
- An instrument of conflict management and the integration of society by limiting the basic values and issues over which societal members and disagree;
- A means of self-identification for the satisfaction of specific personality needs, a means of self-evaluation and social solidarity;
- A dynamic force in both individual and collective commitment action for or against the ruling class or decision. That is, it provides a powerful basis for mobilization;

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- Enhancement of the political appeals of a political party, by differentiating one party from another; and
- Negatively, may serve not only as a serious impediment to national integration and suppress the underprivileged, but also to disguise authoritarian rule. This is because, it tends to provide individuals with “imaginary avenues of escape from the harsh realities of social life” (Nnoli, 2003:183).

It is important to note that ideologies do have certain defining attributes. Most notable among these include the fact that they are not simply the creation of those who hold them. Rather, they tend to take on a life of their own and guide the political views of their holders in unanticipated ways (see, Price and Sullivan, 1980; Freedman, 1996). In most cases, ideologies originate from seemingly irreconcilable antagonistic settings, tend to be exclusive, absolute and universal in character; and can be personalized and turned into a sacred belief similar to religious beliefs. While it is not entirely permanent, it is, however, resistant to fundamental changes (see, Sibley, 1970; Nnoli, 2003; Enemuo, 1999).

Some illustrations suffice. Across time and space, various forms of ideologies have emerged at different times, Marxism and not in the least, African socialism. For space constraints, we can not examine each of these here. It is however important to note that most of these ideologies do fit correctly to the aforementioned attributes. For instance, almost all such ideologies such as conservatism and socialism emerged in situation of acute social strain, in response to liberalism and capitalism respectively. While liberalism emphasizes individualism (freedom, liberty), conservatism harps on collectivism characteristic of welfarist states. Despite their long history, attacks and counter-attacks against each other, both liberalism and conservatism still remain prominent ideologies in western democracies particularly the United States of America and Great Britain (see, Rudolph, Jr., 1996; Kay, 1976).

Today, the emphasis in political theory is predominantly on democratic ideology. David Howarth

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defines a democratic ideology as one involving the classification and analysis of different types of democratic ideologies, as they are articulated and function in concrete societies. It includes various democratic forms and institutions as capitalist/liberal democracy and radical democracy. It also reflects on the differences within a given type such as direct and indirect variants of liberal democracy (Howarth, 2001: 191-94). Essentially, democratic ideology centers on the way in which the language and rhetoric of democracy function as a tool of ideological justification and legitimization by political elites and ruling classes. It also focuses on cultural and ethnical conditions for the proper functioning of liberal democratic states and societies, requiring in the least, a belief in or at least an acceptance of democracy (see, Putnam, 1993; 1995; 1996). Above all, democratic ideology typifies the use of democracy by social groups and political forces to constitute their identities and advance their interests. Here, according to Howarth (2001:193), "democracy is itself a key ideological element in political mobilization and struggle, and is used to create political frontiers between differently located social groups and agencies. Democratic ideology therefore captures the whole essence of our theoretical postulations on the centrality of ideology to the exploits of political parties. What needs to be added is that an umbrella party (Catch-All Party) that seeks to appeal to diverse interests, usually by adopting a general or vague platform, may not necessarily stick to only one ideology and vice versa. This is the case in the United States where in the two dominant parties – Democrats and Republican – there are Liberals, Moderates and Conservatives. The reverse is the case in Great Britain where the Labour and Conservative parties are each highly centralized and less catch-all in nature than American parties (see, Rudolph, Jr., 1996: 1021). Yet, in either case, the parties are known for their well-defined and distinct ideologies.

3. Origin and Growth of Nigerian Parties

Philips, W. Shively (1997:200) observed that although political party had turned to be useful for a variety of tasks that require control or communication, it was first invented for more limited and self serving purposes. This observation aptly captures the Nigerian reality. At its inception in 1923, precisely 24 June, 1923, following the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford constitution, Nigerian parties had very limited and self-serving objectives. The main objective was perhaps, that of buying legitimacy for the colonial government through very limited franchise restricted to Lagos and Calabar. Richard Sklar, in his seminal work – *Nigerian Political Parties* – demonstrates articulately how the emergence of political associations such as the People's Union, was only in response to the prevailing realities of colonial administration (Sklar, 1963; Coleman, 1958). Little wonder, when the first political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) emerged in 1923, under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay, its activities were restricted to contesting elections into the Lagos city council.

For years, the UNDP was hegemonic in its dominance in electoral politics in the country. This was to be challenged by the Lagos Youth Movement - latter Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM)- formed in 1934 and defeated the NNDP for the three seats allocated to Lagos that year. By 1944, the increasing tempo of nationalist agitation had resulted in the formation of another political party – the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (CNCN), under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay and later Nnamdi Azikwe (see, Sklar, 1968: 46-50). This was followed, in quick succession, by the transformation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a Yoruba socio-cultural organization, into a political party, the Action Group (AG) in 1950 under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Northern People Congress (NPC) in 1959 with dominance in the northern region. By 1951, a breakaway faction of the NPC consisting mainly of radical youths based in Kano formed the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). These parties dominated the political landscape of the country particularly in their respective regions in the

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march towards independence and in the First Republic (see, Dudley, 1973; Sklar, 1963).

Although the Second Republic (1979 – 1983) witnessed the emergence of more political parties, there was no much difference with what obtained under the First Republic. Rather, what happened was the reincarnation of parties of the First Republic under different nomenclatures with some additional parties. The parties included the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) replacing the NPC, AG and NCNC, respectively. Others were the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), and later Nigerian Advance Party (NAP), which was registered in 1982, after failing the first round in 1978 (Osaghae, 1998). These parties constituted major actors in the Second Republic.

Under the aborted Third Republic, there was a fundamental change in the mode of party formation in Nigeria. This pertains to the official formation of parties by the state after a series of experiments with different political associations (see, Oyediran and Agbaje, 1991). The parties were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC), the former being a little to the left and the latter a little to the right (see, Olagunju, et al, 1993:216; Omoruyi, 2002). This development, executed after the dissolution of the thirteen associations that applied for registration has been as part of the grand design to execute a “hidden agenda” to perpetuate the military regime in power (Osaghae, 1998:220). The eventual annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election by the military regime of general Babangida lends some credence to this claim.

The country once again returned to multi-party democracy in 1999 following the transition inaugurated and successfully completed by General Abdulsalm Abubakar. Initially, three political parties – Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP), later All Nigerian People Party (ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). By December 2002, the number of registered parties rose to thirty (30), while additional three

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political parties were registered in January/February 2006 (see, Simbine, 2005; Onu and Momoh, 2005). This presupposes the opening up of the political space for democratic opportunities and development. But in reality, the opportunities associated with such openings are yet to be positively exploited for the political development of the country. This may not be unconnected with the poverty of ideology that characterizes Nigerian parties, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

4. Nigerian Parties and Ideological Dispositions

Let us begin with parties of the First Republic, that is, the NPC, NCNC and AG. Ideologically, the NPC was an essentially conservative and elitist party, while the AG and NCNC appeared to be progressive and welfarist, predicated upon socialist ideology. Even at that, it may be difficult to delineate the very ideological orientation of these parties. They, however, share a common feature of ethno-regional ideology, seeking to capture and consolidate power in their respective spheres of influence/region. They were also driven by a commitment to the nationalist struggle, though in varying degrees, against colonialism. The ambiguity as regards their ideological disposition can further be gleaned from the pattern of alignment between/among the parties. For example, the resolve of the NPC and NCNC, two ideologically incompatible parties, the former to the right and the latter to the left, to enter into the alliance that formed the government during the First republic attests to this. Scholars have pointed out that the alliance was a “marriage of inconvenience”, and would have been better between the AG and NCNC. Because the alliance was not informed by a commitment to a belief system and principles espoused by party ideology, it crumbled, sooner than expected, like a pack of cards (see, Dudley, 1993; Post and Vickers, 1973; Olaniyi, 1997:87).

In terms of ideological orientations, parties of the Second Republic would appear, save for the GNPP, to be the reincarnations of the parties of the moribund First Republic.

For this and related reasons, there were no fundamental differences in party politics and activities, as the country was “once again mired in a vituperative and vicious politics” (Yaqub, 2002; 125). This was graphically captured by the unprecedented pace of intra and inter-party factionalization and conflicts. Political vagrancy permeates the political landscape, leaving in its wake major realignments and coalitions among the parties (see, Osaghae, 1998:139 – 44). Notably, the formation of the so-called forum of the “progressive” governors consisting of PRP, GNPP, NPP and UPN was unable to survive long, as the ruling NPN used its federal might and patronage to attract decampers from other parties. Eventually, it succeeded in wooing the NPP of the East, in a manner reminiscent of the First Republic into an alliance, which like the earlier one, collapsed sooner than expected. The eventual breakdown of the alliance marked the beginning of internal crisis for the NPP, following the refusal of some of its top leaders particularly Mathew Mbu and Professor Ishaya Audu to resign their appointments in government (Osaghae, 1998:140).

Logically, it may be argued that if the parties had been guided by a clear commitment to a particular belief system and principles, much of the crisis and contradictions that characterized party politics under the Second Republic could have been averted. But, since the parties were motivated largely by ethnic competition for power through their respective ethnic champions, nothing more could have been expected. As Osaghae has argued, while the instrumentalist”, to the attainment of this feat (1998:144). The degeneration of party politics through political vagrancy, elite factionalization and weak institutionalization led to the military coup of December 31, 1983 that brought the Second Republic into an abrupt end. Yet, the NPP and GNPP appeared to be liberal in ideology with a strong belief in mixed economy; the NPN conservative with emphasis on free market system and respect for traditional institutions. The PRP, a leftist and most radical party had a populist, anti-neocolonial agenda and advocates social revolution and income redistribution; and the UPN; the most disciplined, socialist/welfarist in orientation was based on the

philosophy of free education and health care delivery (see, Ujo, 2000:91-102; Osaghae, 1998:118-122).

The aborted Third Republic witnessed a new experiment in party formation, when for the first time in the history of party politics in Nigeria; the government created and imposed two political parties on the system. Ordinarily, the existence of two political parties should represent two different ideological camps, as has been the case between the Labour and Conservative parties in Britain and Democrats and Republican parties in the USA. This was not the case with respect to the SDP and NRC in Nigeria. Although, while one was a little to the left and other a little to the right, nothing much differentiates the parties, at least not in ideological dispositions (see, Jinadu, 1995; Lewis, 1994; Oyediran and Agbaje, 1991; Adejumobi, 1997). Yaqub (2002:128) had written about party politics under the Third Republic that:

The way incompatibility had been manifested in the two parties ... was not fundamentally due to serious ideological divisions (in any case, the manifestoes of the parties, despite phrase – mongering of “a little to the left”, and “a little to the right”, did not articulate much programme differences), but to assert, that even if we are to borrow Babangida’s words, the “old lines of cleavages and primordial loyalties” once again simply asserted themselves.

If parties of previous republics were found wanting on ideological stance and commitment, those of the Fourth Republic are obviously worse. Omoruyi (2002:8) has noted that the manner of origin of the parties does not fit into what we know from literature, their composition fluid and unstable, and can be viewed as mere instruments of transition from military to civil rule. And for the future and with the prospect for more parties, “they raise more questions than answers to the lingering political problems for Nigeria”. According to him, the PDP, for example, draws its founders from “all and sundry political persuasions: conservatives, radicals and progressives” (Ghali – Na’bba,

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2001: cf Omoruyi, 2002:8), most of whom supported the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election and flirted with the military during the annulment and in the post-annulment period; including some serving as ministers or members of the ING or as member of the Abacha undemocratic constitutional conference or as leaders of some of the five political parties set up and managed by General Abacha's aides that finally endorsed him as the sole presidential candidate in April 1998 (Omoruyi, 2002:8-9). The APP did not differ in any respect as its founders also served as ministers or as aides in different parts of the country under Abacha. The AD that looks different was, however, affected by its inability to meet the federal character clause in the constitution and up till today remains essentially a Yoruba party.

It was perhaps the foregoing faulty origin and precarious foundations of these parties that have been largely responsible for their seeming ideological barrenness. Although, the PDP and APP (ANPP) were status quo parties, given their capitalist and conservative dispositions; and the AD progressive and radical in appearance, none of them seems to have clear policy positions as a basis of popular mobilization and legitimacy of their actions. Judging by their activities, it has been observed that "there's almost nothing to chose, between PDP and other parties in terms of ideological learning" (Iyare, 2004:92). Simbine (2002:2005:23) has also observed that the manifestoes of the first three political parties were "essentially the same in content", as they were not crafted differently, and the strategies for achieving objectives did not differentiate parties from each other. In a seeming self-indictment passage, Jerry Gana, a former Minister of Information and PDP stalwart observes:

In terms of cohesion and firm ideological learning, there is a problem but PDP will be transformed, PDP will be strong, PDP will be strengthened ideologically, PDP will be more organized, PDP will be in power for 30 years (quoted in Iyare, 2004:94).

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Given the obvious poverty of ideology that characterizes the first three political parties of the Fourth Republic, - PDP, APP and AD, it should not be surprising that almost all the other parties that sprang up or broke away from them did not do so because of ideological disagreements. Neither was it that they have articulated alternative views of governance for sustainable democracy and development as a viable basis of popular mobilization to wrestle power from the incumbent party. Rather, they were products of adversarial elite behaviour taken to the points of irreconcilability. Little wonder, these parties also have no ideological stance on major national questions other than the transformation and manipulation of forces of identity particularly ethnicity and religion (see, Simbine, 2005). The implication is that the "so-called political parties are not in competition with one another. They are in factions; these factions are more in competition within themselves than with another party" (Omoruyi, 2002:17). An informed observer and consistent scholar of Nigerian politics captures the scenario thus:

Unfortunately, the succeeding generations of party leaders, despite having their forbearers' legacies to draw from and better educational background into the bargain, have not demonstrated this perspicacity. This sorry development has had the effect of turning political parties from the Second Republic (1979) to date into organs not for organizing the broad masses of the country to form the building blocks of a dynamic nation-state, nor for articulating programmes to remove the citizenry aggrandizement and undeserved advantages (Yaqub, 2001:8).

Given the foregoing, what can we say about Nigerian parties particularly under the Fourth republic as regards ideology? In other words, do Nigerian parties have political ideology? We now turn our searchlight to this seemingly, contradictory question.

5. Do Nigerian Parties have Ideology?

Having devoted the immediate preceding session to an analysis of the ideological dispositions of Nigerian parties under successive republics, this poser may sound contradictory. Yet, it is pertinent because the answer given to it will be central to the understanding of the form and character of party politics in Nigeria.

For us to be able to answer this central question correctly, we need to recall, though at the risk of repetition, some basic functions of ideology. As earlier noted, ideology functions as a means of self-identification, as an instrument of conflict management, as a prescriptive formula and as a mobilizational and unifying force. Assessed against these currencies, it will seem that Nigerian parties, despite their pretence through party manifestoes, do not have clear cut political ideologies. For one, while party manifestoes and objectives could be a road-map to the ideological stance of a party, it is not inherently self-sufficient. Much of it depends on the extent to which such manifestoes differentiate the parties from another. This is rarely the case in Nigeria particularly beginning from the Second Republic. Simbine (2005:24) notes that:

An overview of the manifestoes of political parties in Nigeria shows that their objectives and strategies are not radically different from one another in their planks and are all virtually addressed to the same issue... the APP and AD manifestoes are almost a carbon copy of each other with the only difference discernible in them being the emphasis that they give to the programmes articulated or in few cases, the strategies for carrying out the objectives.

Consequently, the parties have found it extremely difficult to emphasize politics of issues. Rather, their mobilization of popular forces have been largely driven by ethnicity and religion, as much as the influence of money

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politics. These forces, more than anything else, also determine the pattern of electoral victory of the parties. In the circumstance, parties have suddenly descended to the level of being used to promote personal and sectional interests at the expense of the collective good especially national integration and development. Quite a number of issues abound to illustrate this. In the build up to the 2003 presidential election, for example, General Mohammed Buhari, the ANPP presidential candidate, reportedly made a public declaration calling on northerners and Muslims to vote for Muslim candidate, apparently referring to himself. At the end of the poll, the result indicates that he actually garnered most of his votes in the Islamic dominated northern state. Other presidential candidates, including PDP's Obasanjo, also maintained this pattern in their respective bases (see, Omotola, 2004).

Moreover, Nigerian parties have not been able to attain a reasonable degree of institutionalization especially in the areas of internal cohesion and discipline. This deficiency has also contributed to the decline of the conflict management capacity of the parties at both intra and inter-party relations levels. The level of crisis at both levels of party relations is worrisome. It is such that none of the parties have been able to hold itself together without conflict that most times threaten the very heart of the parties. The most notable illustrations can be located in the morality of leadership in all the parties, as well as the unprecedented rate of political vagrancy. For example, between 1999 and 2005, the PDP has been led by Chief Solomon Lar, Bernabas Germade, Audu Ogbe, Ahmadu Ali and now Vincent Ogbulafor. One obvious fact is that in none of these changes was succession orderly, open, free, independent and reflective of the actual wishes of the party faithful. Rather, each was predicated upon the whims and caprices of a given section of the party elite led by the president (see, Adejumobi, 200; Iyare, 2005). The ANPP has also been led by Mahmood Waziri, Yusuf Ali and Don Etibet in quick succession, while the AD has had four leadership change and yet in deep crisis of leadership .

The issue of conflict management, an important function of ideology, is much more worrisome. A typical

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example relates to the 13 August 2002 impeachment threats against president Obasanjo by the House of Representatives. Despite the fact that the PDP has majority in the House, it could not bring the matter under control in good time. In fact, it took the intervention of third parties outside the party, both in Nigeria and outside, to douse the tension (see, Omotola, 2003; 2005b; 2006). The crisis that hit the presidency over the Petroleum technology Development Funds (PTDF), where the President and his Vice, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, were deeply engaged in irreconcilable disagreements, remains another prominent example. Matters came to its height when Atiku Abubakar eventually jettisoned the PDP, spearheaded the formation of the Action Congress (AC) by a breakaway faction of the PDP, including Audu Ogbe, an ex-PDP national chairman, where he sort to actualize his presidential ambition. The inability of the PDP to resolve these and other accumulated internal crisis, leading to the formation of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) by a breakaway faction of the party, also attests to this. The effect is that Nigerian parties, rather than serve as a unifying force, now tend to promote disunity. Omoruyi (2002:21) has observed this trend in the National Assembly when he notes that “members of the National Assembly are not able to work with the president in his agenda – setting function”. The situation couldn't have been different because the two parties are not necessarily motivated by a commitment to party agenda, if at all they have any, but by different personal and sectional interests.

In the final analysis, the poverty of political ideology that has come to envelop Nigerian parties over the years, coupled with its attendant crisis and contradictions, has been of dramatic effect not only on the parties, but also on the entire project of national rebirth, integration and sustainable democracy and development. Instead of parties contributing to the building of state structures and the consolidation of development, they have been reduced to tools for promoting sectionalism and opportunism. The dominant themes in Nigerian parties seem to be ethnicity, religion and money at the expense of a steadfast dedication to well-defined beliefs and principles of action. In the short

and long run, it is the accompanying politics that suffers, crippling as it does, to midwife sustainable democracy. What we have encountered so far is the resort to the politics of “trial and error”, based on the manipulation of ethnicity and religion and the dominance of money politics. Having proved to be very effective in mobilization and legitimization, the place of political ideology has been relegated to the background. This was well captured by the observation that:

Right from independence, the country has had political parties with ill-defined ideological base, if any at all. It appears that rather than improving on the structure of our established political parties, they have continued to diminish in terms of philosophy, content and objectives (quoted in Simbine, 2005:24).

6. Conclusion

We opened our discussion with a poser: Are these heady days for Nigerian parties? And closed with another one: Do Nigerian parties have ideology? The two related questions constitute the mainstay of our analysis in this paper. In it, we have argued that Nigerian parties do not seem to be having it really good: despite the fact that we are in an era of multiparty democracy. This may not be unconnected with their low degree of institutionalization, internal cohesion and discipline, resulting in their underperformance. These contradictions can easily be traced to the poverty of ideology that characterizes the parties. We therefore contend that Nigerian parties present a contradiction in terms with respect to ideological dispositions. This contradiction is manifested by the fact that while the parties parade their manifestoes and objectives, they are hardly different in any concrete way except may be in degree and modality of implementation. Second, such manifestoes have never been exploited as a basis of popular mobilization, legitimization, conflict management and other notable roles of ideology. As such, the enviable roles of political ideology in party politics have

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been hijacked and perverted by the forces of identity notably ethnicity and religion as well as the influence of money politics. The implication has been that politics in Nigeria has become a dominantly an elitist affair for the disempowerment of not only the masses, but also the state. This manifests in the forms of rising poverty, inequality and the persistent crisis of national integration and development, with heavy tolls on the consolidation of democracy (see, Anifowese and Seteolu, 2004; Nwokoma, 2004; Nwomeh, 2005; Omotola, 2005a; Saliu and Omotola, 2006).

Give the above situation; it is crucially important to devise a means of averting this trend so as to avoid the intriguing experiences of the collapse of previous republics in Nigeria. The starting point would be to revisit the ideological foundations of Nigerian parties. But then, this raises more questions than answers. For example, who do we entrust with such a Herculean task, the party elites who are the chief, if not only beneficiaries of the perverted system? There must therefore first be an aggressive and sustained system of social mobilization at all levels of party organization and society, socializing and educating people of the ills of ideological barrenness to party politics, emphasizing the need for change. It should however be noted that political party reform cannot be done in isolation. It must be a part of a larger reform programme that addresses very decisively the crisis and contradictions of Nigeria's political economy. This task certainly transcends the borderline of party activities. It is one that should embrace every segment of the Nigerian state and society. The civil society in particular has a responsibility for the socialization, education, conscientization and mobilization of the masses for the required reform. Then some ideological sanity can be returned to political party and party politics for sustainable democracy and development.

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