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## The Awolowo – Akintola Leadership Tussle: A Reinterpretation

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### **ABSTRACT**

The underlying causes and consequences of the Awolowo–Akintola leadership tussle which began in the defunct Western Region and spilled to other parts of Nigeria have attracted quite a great deal of deliberate and inadvertent misinterpretations and falsehoods. While the principal actors and their disciples struggled to swing the pendulum of justification and ‘truth’ to their respective sides; most of the inferences, references, rebuttals and conclusions of scholars on the underlying causes of the rift are not consistent with facts. Ostensibly, the rift was the outcome of Chief Obafemi Awolowo’s reluctance to hand over to Ladoke Akintola as Premier of Western Nigeria following the former’s resolve to contest the 1959 federal elections into the Central Legislature; Akintola’s desire to be the *de jure* Premier of Western Nigeria; his pointed opposition to the Action Group’s adoption of a socialist ideology on the eve of independence, the so called ‘Coca-Cola War’ between the wives of the duo as well as Akintola’s interface with the Northern People’s Congress, NPC. The last was Akintola’s supposed gravest offence. While scholars have almost over-flogged the other causes of the Akintola–Awolowo leadership tussle, there is paucity of literature, or at best parried accounts, on the epicentre of the crisis – Akintola’s political interface with Northern Nigeria political leaders. This paper intends to fill this gap by attempting a reinterpretation of some of the factors that may have influenced the political rapport between Akintola and NPC leaders. The historical method of data analysis was employed in the analysis of the primary and secondary classes of data obtained for the study.

**Keywords:** Awolowo, Akintola, election, leadership, Nigeria, political parties, tussle.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to show that the widespread description of Ladoke Akintola as 'Afonja' in Nigerian political historiography is a misnomer. In effect, the paper attempts a reinterpretation of the factors and the circumstances that earned Akintola the sobriquet 'Afonja'. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, an Ijebu-Yoruba, was the first and only Federal President of the Action Group [(launched in 1951)<sup>2</sup> and the Premier of the defunct Western Region between 1954 and 1959. Chief Ladoke Akintola, Yoruba-Ogbomoso, a foundation member of the Action Group, became the Deputy Leader of the Party in 1954 and succeeded Awolowo as Premier of Western Nigeria in 1959. Except the few days of a devastating premiership tussle between Akintola and Alhaji Dauda Adegbenro<sup>3</sup> and the six month stint of Emergency Administration in Western Nigeria (June – December 1962), Akintola held office until 15 January 1966, when pervasive political crisis which was kick-started in the Western Region snowballed to a coup d'état in which he was killed. Since 1962, when the internal schism that rent the Action Group asunder broke out, various schools of thought have described and painted the two *dramatis personae* in various shades and colours. Thus, while some describe Chief Awolowo as 'heady', 'stingy', 'miserly' and 'vindictive';<sup>4</sup> others depict Chief Akintola as 'treacherous', 'Afonja', and 'Judas'<sup>5</sup> – a sell out or betrayer. As E.A. Ayandele pointed out in his foreword to Osuntokun's *Chief S. Ladoke Akintola: His Life and Times*, at the time of Akintola's murder in 1966, "he had been labelled...a twentieth-century Afonja. So unpopular and execrable had...Samuel Ladoke Akintola become...that a few of those donning his surname felt that it had become leprous and so gave it up publicly for new names".<sup>6</sup> Obviously, Akintola is often dismissed as a betrayer because of his political interface with NPC leaders to which Chief Awolowo stood stoutly opposed. Thus, as far as many commentators on and scholars of Nigerian political history are concerned, just as Afonja, a maternal prince of Oyo connived with Alimi, an itinerant Fulani Muslim preacher, to wrest power from *Alaafin* Aole and Ilorin from Oyo–Yoruba and as Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus;<sup>7</sup> so did Akintola betray Awolowo. Making this analogy, Adio Mosanya submits that "Judasi dalé Jesu...Absalomu sọtè si Dafidi bàbà rè" (Judas betrayed Jesus; Absalom rebelled against David his father).<sup>8</sup> While this paper may make brief references and allusions to the other causes of the Action Group's rupture, its main

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<sup>2</sup> At its inaugural conference of 28-29 April 1951 at Owo, Ondo State, South-West Nigeria, Hon. Gaius Obaseki, Chief N.F. Mowarin, Chief M.A. Ajasin and Chief Arthur Prest were elected Vice Presidents; Bode Thomas became the General Secretary; Anthony Enahoro and S.O. Sonibare were elected Assistant Secretaries while S.O. Ighodaro became Treasurer; S.T. Oredein Administrative Secretary and S.L. Akintola and M.E.R. Okorodudu became Legal Advisers. *Daily Service* 31 March 1951.

<sup>3</sup> This followed the allegation of gross misconduct levied against Akintola and his subsequent 'removal' from the premiership by the Awolowo faction of the Action Group in 1962. The faction subsequently 'appointed' Alhaji Adegbenro as premier. Thus, while Adegbenro insisted that Akintola stood deposed; the latter insisted that he remained Premier thereby creating a scenario of two rival claimants to the office of the premier of Western Nigeria. This state of confusion prevailed until the Alhaji Tafawa Balewa-led Federal Government declared a state of emergency in the defunct Western Region in May 1962

<sup>4</sup> *West African Pilot*, 8 June 1962 and *Daily Express*, 30 May 1962. Afonja was a maternal prince of Oyo. He was installed the *Aare Ona Kakanfo* (War Field Marshal) in 1817 during the reign of *Alaafin* Aole (King of Oyo Empire) who disliked him. Aole therefore planned to have Afonja killed by sending him to fight against Iwere, a well-fortified town which the Oyo Empire most probably did not have the military superiority to conquer. Yet, in the unwritten constitution of the Old Oyo Empire, a *Kakanfo* must not lose any battle. If he did, he must either commit suicide or go into exile. However, with the connivance of some Oyo chiefs and alliance with Mallam Alimi, a Fulani itinerant preacher, Afonja rebelled against Aole who eventually committed suicide but not before he cursed Afonja. Afonja's ally, Alimi, thereafter turned against him and took over Ilorin. This is generally regarded as the story of how the Yoruba lost Ilorin to the Muslim North. See Bayo Omolola, "Culturally, Historically Communicating the Yorubas Traditional Concept of Military Heroism: Aare Ona Kakanfo", *International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2013, p. 81. See also Gabriel Sosanya "State of Emergency in Western Nigeria: Recounting the Experiences", *Historical Flashback*, 11 February – 3 March 2015, p. 9. him and took over Ilorin. This is generally regarded as the story of the Yoruba loss of Ilorin to the Muslim North. See Bayo Omolola, "Culturally, Historically Communicating the Yorubas Traditional Concept of Military Heroism: Aare Ona Kakanfo", *International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 1, Issue 2013, p. 81. See also Gabriel Sosanya "State of Emergency in Western Nigeria: Recounting the Experiences", *Historical Flashback*, 11 February – 3 March 2015, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Akinjide Osuntokun, *Chief S. Ladoke Akintola His Life and Times* (Ibadan: Mosuro Publishers, 2010), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 26: 17-21; Mark 14:10 and John 6:71 (King James Version). See also V.A. Adesuyi, *Awo: Immortal Eulogy for Awo the Titan* (Ibadan: Shalom Publications, 2009), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Adio Mosanya, *Oloye Obafemi Awolowo* (n.p; n.d.), p. 2. This author found a few copies of this 25-page pamphlet (written in Yoruba) at Sopolu Library, Awolowo Residence, Ikenne-Remo, Ogun State on 12 February, 2015.

purpose is to attempt a re-interpretation of the factors that shaped and influenced Akintola's political friendship with Northern Nigerian politicians. The fundamental factors that pitched Chief Awolowo against his erstwhile deputy and ardent supporter will become evident in the process. It is however important to note that contrary to the view expressed by Adegbite Tinubu that Chiefs Awolowo and Akintola were already politically estranged before 1959;<sup>9</sup> Yomi Akintola described the duo as 'political twins and alloys' up till March 1959.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the eulogy delivered by Chief Akintola on the occasion of Chief Awolowo's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary in March 1959 may never be surpassed in the political history of Nigeria. Akintola said, *inter-alia*:

To Chief Awolowo, passivity is a bane and inaction an anathema. How could it be otherwise to a life which thrives on industry and to a man with fanatical faith in hard work? That was why he made himself a terror to the demagogues and Mountebanks who, with neither a chart nor a rudder believed that they could steer the Nigerian ship of state to its destination....No pilot has a clearer vision and none a keener sense of mission than Chief Awolowo...In the political changes which took place in Nigeria from 1947 onwards, Dr. Azikiwe has been spasmodic and casual; Sir Ahmadu Bello has been leisurely and care-free; but Awolowo has been constant and calculating...To know Chief Awolowo as a man is to respect him. It has been my pride and pleasure to know him. He is by every standard a genius. His unimpeachable character, his faith in God, his confidence in his fellowmen, his personal devotion to duty and his loyalty...have conspired together to make him a great pillar of strength. He never lets a friend down...As a political leader, Chief Awolowo is miles ahead of his colleagues. His sincerity of purpose, his democratic leadership and inspiring example are yet to be equaled by any of the leaders of other major political parties in the country...Awolowo is the nearest approximation to Mahatma Gandhi. He is a good blend of Gandhi's philosophy and Nehru's dynamism and the only hope for democracy in Africa.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Chief Awolowo described Akintola as "an able lawyer...a breezy, affable character who cannot be ruffled easily, if at all. His peculiar gifts consist in his capability to argue and defend two opposing points of view with equal competence and plausibility. This quality, backed by his sense of humor and his capacity for nuances made him an insoluble puzzle to our opponents"<sup>12</sup>

From the above quotations, it is evident that Chief Awolowo and Ladoke Akintola had no (serious?) axes to grind until about 1959 when the former initially felt that the latter should not succeed him as Premier of Western Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> Awolowo would have probably preferred Chief Bode Thomas<sup>14</sup> but the latter had died on 20 November 1953 following a clash with the *Alaafin* of Oyo, Alhaji Adediran Aderemi II in a power struggle over the Oyo Divisional Council or either of Chief Akin Deko of Idanre or Alhaji Soroye Adegbenro. Rationalizing the factors that may have informed Chief Awolowo's reluctance to being succeeded by Akintola as Western Nigeria Premier, Osuntokun makes the following submission:

Chief Awolowo seemed to detest Chief Akintola's virtue of being able to work and get along with political opponents and adversaries...He seems [sic] to have resented the acceptance of ministerial positions by Ayotunde Rosiji and Chief Akintola in the 'National Government'

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Adegbite Tinubu, *Akintola and the Eclipse of the First Republic*, pp. 74-80. On the whole, *Akintola and the Eclipse of the First Republic* is a thoroughly biased book. Throughout the text, the author depicts Akintola as hero and Awolowo as a deviant and villain. This is not surprising given the fact that Tinubu was one of the twenty-six members of the Action Group who were expelled from that party on 7 July 1962 for what the AG described as "disloyal and subversive activities against the party". The others were Chief S.L. Durosaro, Chief O. Tobun, Chief E.O. Okunowo, Chief F.O. Awosika, A.F. Odulana, Oba C.D. Akran, Chief Abiodun Akerere, J.O. Adigun, A.O. Adedeji, S.O. Ogundipe, Chief A.O. Adeyi, Chief A.M.A. Akinloye, S.O. Fajimi, Duro Ogundiran, E.A. Lagunju, S. Hunponu Wusu, S.A. Sanni, Lasisi Ajimobi, L.O. Aniyi, D.O. Arowolo, N.A. Adibi, E.O. Oke, R.A. Lana, S.A. Adeniyi and J.L. Tifase. See *Historical Flashback*, 11 February 2015, p. 7. Indeed, even in a normally obvious and incontrovertible issue like age, Tinubu claims that Akintola, born on 6 July 1910 was older than Awolowo, born on 6 March 1909. p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Abayomi Akintola, 76, No. 1, Akintola Street, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, 13/04/2015. Abayomi is Ladoke Akintola's eldest son. His submission was corroborated by Ibrahim Adelaja, 71, interviewed by this author on 22 October 2014 at his residence, No. 7, Ajena Street, Ikenne, Ogun State. Ibrahim served as Personal Secretary to the General Manager of *Daily Times* between 1970 and 1977.

<sup>11</sup> Ladoke Akintola, "Awo: The Path-Finder", *Daily Service*, 6 March 1959.

<sup>12</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, *Awo, the Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 259.

<sup>13</sup> Akinjide Osuntokun, *op. cit.*, also shares this view, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> Bode Thomas was Deputy Leader of the Action Group until 1953. He also served as Central Minister of Works. Akinjide Osuntokun describes Bode Thomas as "a brilliant but haughty lawyer, extremely self-confident and intolerant of other people's views" who "was well-respected in party circles, but greatly disliked by British officials because of his arrogance". *Chief S. Ladoke Akintola His Life and Times*, p. 51.

that came into being in 1957...Awolowo apparently wanted to be succeeded in the West by someone who did not have, like Akintola, a separate independent following as a leader. It is not unlikely that, as an Ijebu, he would have had an innate distrust of an Oyo-Yoruba like Akintola and also a premonition that it might be difficult to teleguide Akintola, while he, Awolowo, was in Lagos...Akintola's qualifications were so obvious that if Awolowo had chosen another person in 1959 to replace him, the Action Group as a party would have collapsed like a house of cards<sup>15</sup>

Although, the above quoted submission is largely subjective and one-sided, it is not outrightly bereft of facts – Chief Awolowo did not initially detest Rosiji's and Akintola's participation in the National Government, he detested it only when it turned out to be what he did not want it to be – a political bridge between Akintola and the NPC. Osuntokun's submission could however be buttressed by the expulsion of Akintola and Rosiji from the Action Group in May 1962 which may not have been a mere coincidence. But, to claim that "Akintola's qualifications were so obvious that if Awolowo had chosen another person in 1959 to replace him, the Action Group as a party would have collapsed like a house of cards" amounts to overdramatizing the importance of Akintola, who was probably not even a *primus- inter-pares*. The likes of Chief Rotimi Williams, Chief Akin Deko, Oba C.D. Akran, Chief Anthony Enahoro, Chief J.A.O. Odebiyi, Chief J.O. Osuntokun and Chief A.O. Adeyi were equally eminently qualified for any appointive or elective positions in the Action Group. At any rate, whatever reasons were responsible for Chief Awolowo's hesitation in appointing Akintola as his successor, the fact remains that as at the time under reference, the succession dispute had not occurred and elections were still about nine months away. Indeed, to underline the cordiality and unassailability of Awolowo-Akintola relationship at this point, Adegoke Adelabu of the Ibadan *Mabolaje*-NCNC Grand Alliance contemptuously referred to Akintola, A.M.A. Akinloye and other Oyo-Yoruba in the Action Group as "Ijebu slaves" apparently in reference to their 'sheepish' acceptance of and submission to the authority of Chief Awolowo, an Ijebu.<sup>16</sup> Akintola retorted that he was a slave to Awolowo much as Adelabu was to Nnamdi Azikiwe, the leader of the NCNC.<sup>17</sup> Adegoke Adelabu, popularly known as 'Lion of the West' was an inveterate foe of Chief Awolowo. Indeed, he described the latter as "the upstart, the ascetic, the robot, the confusionist, the capitalist, the villager".<sup>18</sup>

## 2.0 Akintola's political interface with the Northern People's Congress: A Discourse

There are no mono-causal historical events. The Awolowo–Akintola feud was the outcome of a number of factors the most prominent of which was the latter's supposed pro-Northern Nigeria political posture to which Chief Awolowo and his faction stood opposed. With neither consideration for objectivity nor regard to the geo-cultural environment that produced Akintola and the birth place where he was reared, many scholars and commentators have dismissed him as 'Afonja', 'Judas' or 'Absalom'. The refrain and stereotyped argument is that Akintola allied with NPC leaders to take over Western Nigeria, emasculated the Action Group and temporarily liquidated Chief Awolowo politically. This is part of the parried accounts on the Awolowo–Akintola leadership tussle that informed the reinterpretation attempted in this paper. To start with, after the 1959 federal elections and the formation of the NPC/NCNC coalition government, the Action Group insisted that it had it on good authority that the NPC/NCNC Federal Government would liquidate the Action Group and a few of its leaders once independence was achieved.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, on 29 November 1960, F.C. Oghalu (NCNC Akwa North) made the following submission on the floor of the Federal House of Representatives:

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted from *ibid*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>16</sup> Akinjide Osuntokun, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Quoted from K.W.J. Post & George Jenkins, *The Price of Liberty: Personality and Politics in Colonial Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> This was why the Action Group advocated the destruction of the NPC before the attainment of independence in 1960. The party said "it would be a tragedy [for the AG] should the NPC control the Federal Government". *Daily Times*, 2 May, 1958

I wish to raise a very important question which is of vital interest to the nation...I should like to have an authoritative statement as to the possibility of the Federal Government dissolving a regional house if they proved recalcitrant or if they proved dangerous to the interests of the Federation. I should also like to know if the Federal Government has the power to set up a caretaker committee should such a Regional government become obsolete<sup>20</sup>

Making copious references to the constitution of India, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, T.O. Elias, submitted that the Federal Government could dissolve or sack a regional government.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, these veiled and veneer references were to the Western Region since the NPC and the NCNC formed the Federal Government and, of course, neither of them contemplated or envisaged the dissolution of their respective regional governments. Indeed, the fear of the NPC/NCNC Federal Government's sack of the Western Regional government was so palpable that long before the debate referred to above, Akintola had had to roughen the NPC-led federal government and rebutted the Attorney General's submission by insisting that "the Federal Government cannot dismiss a regional government. All the governments in the Federation are co-ordinate and not in any way subordinate to each other...It will be a misinterpretation, an unfortunate misinterpretation, for anyone to say the Constitution provided for the Federal Government to interfere in the affairs of any particular region".<sup>22</sup> The point being stressed here is that the NPC/NCNC Federal Government had made up its mind to liquidate the Action Group and a few of its leaders long before Chiefs Awolowo and Akintola parted ways. As this author has argued elsewhere, 'the hostilities and the hatred both parties [NPC and AG] exhibited towards each other were deadly. The AG knew that it would be practically impossible for it to exist as an independent, effective and coercive party in an independent Nigeria ruled by the NPC. On the other hand, the NPC knew too well that the North would be the first recipient of any political sledge hammer falling from an AG-controlled federal government'.<sup>23</sup>

Chiefs Awolowo and Akintola may have collided and parted ways politically for quite a number of reasons but, as pointed out earlier, the 'gravest' offence Chief Akintola committed against Chief Awolowo was his political interface with NPC leaders. There seems to be no doubt that Chief Akintola interfaced with Northern Nigerian political leaders more than any southern political office holder. Since history is a study of causes and effects and since every human action or inaction is always conditioned by a number of factors, let us attempt a brief analysis of some of the factors that may have influenced Akintola's political interface with Northern Nigerian politicians. First and foremost is his birthplace, Ogbomoso which is more or less a Northern Nigerian town situated in Western Nigeria. Apart from its vegetation and geography which bear closer semblance to that of Northern Nigeria than that of the South;<sup>24</sup> two of the three waves of its earliest settlers migrated from the northern part of the country. Aale, the leader of the first wave of settlers was a Nupe.<sup>25</sup> A hunter of high pedigree who specialized in killing elephants with wooden staffs and versed in concocting powerful charms, Aale was popularly known as 'omo ogun' (son of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron).<sup>26</sup> The second and third waves of settlers were led by Ohunsi, an Egba and Orisatolu, a Borgu (Bariba) respectively.<sup>27</sup>

From the above, it is obvious that Akintola's birthplace was founded by migrants from Northern Nigeria. This may have influenced his political affinity with Northern leaders. It is indeed instructive to note that Akintola spoke both Hausa and Nupe languages fluently. As a matter of fact, the Action

<sup>20</sup> Federal House of Representatives Debates, Tuesday, 29 November 1960.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Quoted from *Daily Times*, 13 October 1960.

<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel O. Ojo, "The Nigerian Democratic Process: Ethnicity and Alliances of Political Parties, 1951-1983", Ph.D. Thesis, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, 2012, p. 123.

<sup>24</sup> This may have influenced Osuntokun's description of Ogbomoso as a town "located in the drier part of the rain forest belt and...a city in a transitional zone between the rain forest and savannah. Akinjide Osuntokun, *Chief S. Ladoke Akintola His Life and Times*, p. xv.

<sup>25</sup> N.D. Oyerinde, *History of Ogbomoso* (n.p, n.d.), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* See also Jide Osuntokun and Tunde Oduwobi, *The Merchant Prince and the Monarch, Oba Oladunni Oyewumi, the Soun of Ogbomosoland* (Ibadan: Bookbuilders, n.d.), p. 3 and 'Brief History of Ogbomoso', *Coronation Anniversary Celebration Brochure*, January 2004, p. 12.

Group party recognized Akintola's affinity with Northern Nigeria hence his choice as the leader of the party's delegation to the North in April 1953 following the crisis that trailed the self-government motion in Lagos. Although, it must be admitted that, at this point, political collaboration between NPC leaders and Akintola was almost exactly nil. Of course, both the Action Group and the NPC became full-blown political parties only two years earlier and Akintola-NPC political interface had probably not begun although Akintola "was always very friendly on a personal level with Ahmadu Bello, the Sultan and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. He also knew the Sultan of Sokoto very well".<sup>28</sup> However, as years rolled by, political contingents drew them nearer.

Quite a lot of studies have been done on migrant settlers in Yorubaland, particularly on the Hausa.<sup>29</sup> One recurring feature of the inter-ethnic contact between the Yoruba hosts and their Hausa tenants is violent conflicts. But, as Abdulwahab Tijani has shown, unlike the violent conflicts that characterized the establishment of Hausa communities elsewhere (for example Ibadan), "the establishment of Hausa Community in Ogbomoso did not experience violent inter ethnic conflicts. This was due to the peculiar nature of the inter-ethnic relations between the two groups as well as longer period of contact"<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Hausa elements in Ogbomoso solidly backed Akintola by identifying with, supporting and voting for the Action Group. According to Tijani, "In Ogbomoso, many of the Hausa cattle dealers also joined the Action Group party... the presence of Ladoke Akintola in the Leadership [sic] of the Action Group attracted many Hausa people to the party in Ogbomoso, his place of birth. He had grown up in the North and he spoke fluent Hausa. He... brought many Hausa people into the party in Ogbomoso"<sup>31</sup> To demonstrate and underline their political affinity with Akintola, Hausa elements in Ogbomoso switched over to Akintola's parties, the United People's Party (UPP) and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) following the 1962 schism in the Action Group.<sup>32</sup> A section of Hausa elements in Ogbomoso described Akintola as 'na mu ne', meaning 'one of us'. It is therefore not surprising that the death of Akintola in the "January 1966 coup brought a sense of mutual lost [sic] to both the Yoruba people of Ogbomoso and the Hausa Community in Sabo, Ogbomoso".<sup>33</sup> Both in life and death, Northern leaders stood with Akintola, who they probably saw as one of their own. For instance, only recently, the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial Lecture in honour of Akintola was held in Ogbomoso. Despite the fact that the venue of the lecture was virtually empty with neither the Soun nor his representative in attendance; two Emirs from Northern Nigeria were in attendance.<sup>34</sup>

Another factor that may have considerably influenced Akintola's political interface with Northern Nigerian leaders was the Lagos factor. The first seven or eight years of his political career were spent in Lagos, Nigeria's political melting pot. The point is that Akintola was Western Nigeria's Ambassador to the centre just as Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was that of Northern Nigeria. As the deputy leader of the AG party, Akintola did not serve in the Western Region Government headed by Awolowo. The MacPherson Constitution became operational in 1951 following which Akintola became Federal Minister of Labour as well as Action Group Parliamentary Leader in the House of Representatives in 1952. He also served as Federal Minister of Health during which period the first teaching hospital complex in West Africa, the University College, Ibadan, was built and opened.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Akinjide Osuntokun, *Chief S. Ladoke Akintola His Life and Times*, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Some of these are I.O. Albert, *Urban Migrant Settlements in Nigeria: A Historical Comparison of 'Sabon Garis' in Kano and Ibadan 1893 – 1991*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1994; A. Cohen, *Customs and Politics in Urban Africa. A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (London: Routledge & Kogan Paul, 1969); P.K. Makinwa, *Internal Migration and Rural Development in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1981); Adamu Mandi, *The Hausa Factor in West African History* (Zaria/Ibadan: OUP, 1978). A. Tijani, "Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: A Case Study of Sagamu/Kano Riots", *ELA Journal of African Studies*, Nos. 5 and 6 May & October, 1999; A. Tijani, "A Historical Study of Nupe Migrants in Yorubaland", in Dele Afolabi (ed.), *Readings in the Humanities* (Ilesha: Jola Publishers, 2002) and A. Tijani, *Sabo Communities in Yorubaland, Nigeria (1916 – 1967)*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ilorin, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Abdulwahab Tijani, "Ethnic Relations: A Study of Hausa Community in Ogbomoso, Nigeria (1924-1967)", *Journal of Social Science*, 17(3), 2008, p. 253.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 258.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 259.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> Olu Obafemi, 'Memories from Ladoke Akintola Memorial Lecture 1', *The Sun*, 24 January 2015.

<sup>35</sup> *Daly Service*, 22 November 1954.

However, because of the vagaries of party politics, Akintola could not continue as Health Minister. It would be recalled that in April 1953, the Action Group decided to levy a capitation tax of ten shillings on every adult male in Western Nigeria to be able to fund some of its extensive social welfare, health and education schemes. The NCNC opposition in the West, led by Nnamdi Azikiwe (who represented Lagos) portrayed the tax as an unnecessary burde. The reaction of the general populace was widespread resentment against the Action Group party. Consequently, the NCNC defeated the AG in the federal election of November 1954 – while the former had twenty-two seats, the latter had nineteen in the Western House of Assembly. The NCNC thus nominated federal ministers from Western Nigeria. Consequently, Akintola became the Leader of the Opposition in the federal parliament, a position Awolowo occupied about five years later. Thus, unlike Chief Awolowo who had no intimate political interactions with the leaders of the NPC and who in fact held no federal portfolio until 1960; Chief Akintola had consistently interacted with NPC leaders who had the fortune of heading the federal government since 1954. The point being stressed here is that many years of political interactions between Chief Akintola and Northern Nigerian political leaders drew them closer than they would have otherwise had been.

The formation of an all-party national government in September 1957 marked a watershed in NPC-Akintola political interface. Following his assumption of office as Prime Minister in that year, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Deputy Leader of the NPC, appointed Akintola as Federal Minister of Aviation and Communications. This drew the two men nearer than ever before and almost completely changed their views about each other. Indeed, as Akinjide has pointed out “Abubakar Tafawa Balewa impressed Akintola so much that he began to impress on Chief Awolowo that the NPC meant well towards the Action Group and that Chief Awolowo should not shut the door against cooperation with the NPC”.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, Chief Awolowo dismissed the leaders of the NPC as “uneducated” with who he could neither cooperate nor operate on the same political wavelength.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Alhaji Balewa appealed to Chief Awolowo not to “take politics as a personal battle with him and other NPC leaders” and accused him of “taking politics too far to a point that the Chief would not respond to ordinary personal greetings wherever they met”.<sup>38</sup> Although, as pointed out in note 7 (*infra*), Tinubu’s book is thoroughly biased in favour of Chief Akintola as Chief Awolowo’s resentment of NPC leaders might not have been to the altitude described in the above quotation. At any rate, Awolowo’s vilification of NPC leaders and his ‘no political rapport’ stance is well-known. The point being stressed here is that the federal parliament served as the fertile political soil from whence the seed of Akintola-NPC interface germinated and the springboard that solidified and sustained it. Thus, while Akintola’s conciliation to the leaders of the NPC had significant centripetal impact; Chief Awolowo’s opprobrium produced centrifugal pulls.

After his defeat in the December 1959 federal elections, Awolowo made a number of what Robert Collis calls “fundamental mistakes founded on false hypotheses”.<sup>39</sup> One such ‘fundamental mistake’ was Awolowo’s hypothesis that the Yoruba could and should never work with an Hausa dominated party like the NPC. Akintola argued that it was foolhardy for the Yoruba to continue to dismiss the Northerners as unfit to head any government in which the Yoruba could participate and dismissed such a notion as an Awolowo frame of mind which he argued, should be rejected by the rank and file of the Yoruba. Akintola pointed out that since democracy was a game of numbers, it was senseless for the Yoruba to continue to treat the Northerners as political lepers while the Igbo continued to dominate the socio-political and economic landscape of Nigeria. He argued that the Hausa-Fulani might not be on the same educational, political and social pedestal as the Yoruba; yet they held the trump card to the governance of Nigeria since, according to virtually all national census figures, well over fifty percent of

<sup>36</sup> Akinjide Osuntokun, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> *Morning Post*, 5 February 1962

<sup>38</sup> Quoted from Adegbite Tinubu, *op. cit.* p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Collis, *Nigeria in Conflict* (Lagos: John West Publications Ltd., n.d.p), p. 129.

Nigeria's population was in the Northern Region.<sup>40</sup> Therefore the Yoruba must reach out to them otherwise they would continue to be excluded from the structural frame and the system of reward. Akintola reasoned that as long as the Yoruba continued to be excluded from the federal government, the 'national cake' would continue to be the exclusive preserve of the Hausa-Fulani and the Igbo but particularly of the latter being far ahead of the former in the acquisition of western education and possession of trained and qualified administrative and technical personnel. Akintola concluded that the continuation of the marginalization of the Yoruba in the Federation of Nigeria would not be the fault of the other ethnic groups but that of Chief Awolowo and those who felt that Hausa/Fulani– Yoruba political partnership was a forbidden act. The NPC/NCNC alliance after the 1959 elections ensured that both the North and East shared the federal cabinet almost equally with the Yoruba in the opposition and lacking in visibility at the federal level so soon after independence. Thus, the thrust of Akintola's argument was that the Yoruba were losing their pre-eminence in business, university administration and other socio-economic and political spheres to the Igbo and appealed to all well meaning Yoruba to discard Chief Awolowo's 'false hypothesis' and join the federal government. The point Akintola tried to underline was that he was out to safeguard and protect the integrity and interest of the Yoruba and that the Yoruba should see him in that light and support him.

In 1964, Akintola's government published a pamphlet entitled 'Unganism' in which it sought to demonstrate that the Igbo monopolised everything in Nigeria including employment opportunities, appointments into government boards and corporations, shops, market stalls, etc. Indeed, the most cursory glance at Akintola's electioneering campaign for the 1964 federal election reveals that it centred on the liberation of the Yoruba from Igbo domination and impressed it on the Yoruba of Western Nigeria that any vote cast for the United Progressive Grand Alliance, UPGA, was a vote for slavery and Igbo domination.<sup>41</sup> Also, the Northern Region-controlled *Nigerian Citizen* condemned what it called the greed and over-ambition of the Igbo. In a White Paper in 1964, the government of the Western Region asserted that

The Federal Republic is, in a sense, a Commonwealth. Its resources must be accessible to all its citizens, regardless of creed, clan or tribe. It is a matter for regret that there are among leaders of a certain part of the federation...who do not share this view, and who appear to regard the Federal Government as a limited liability company of which only their kith and kin should be sole shareholders<sup>42</sup>

The above reference, obviously to the Igbo, was not baseless. Available statistics shows that the top echelons of many federal establishments were virtually the exclusive preserve of the Igbo. A few instances would suffice. First, let us take the Nigerian Railway Corporation where an Igbo, Dr. Ikejiani, was Chairman. Of 431 members of staff, 270 were Igbo.<sup>43</sup> In the Nigerian Ports Authority, because an Igbo was Minister of Transport, 21 of the topmost offices were occupied by Igbo. Furthermore, out of a total of 104 other top positions, 73 were occupied by Igbo, 23 by Yoruba and only 8 by other ethnic groups.<sup>44</sup> Turning to the Yaba Technical Institute, one confronts the same picture: 21 of the 29 indigenous senior staff were Igbo. The same uneven statistics were alleged to hold for the Nigerian Airways and other federal institutions and establishments headed by Igbos. At the time of the publication of the White Paper referred to above, there were 9 Igbo ambassadors while the figures for the Western, Northern and Mid-Western Regions were 3, 4 and 2 respectively.<sup>45</sup> In a committee of

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<sup>40</sup> For example, the 1962 census figures which were later annulled because of widespread disagreement over them were: Northern Region 30.2m; Eastern Region 12.5m; Western Region 10m. The figures of the re-run census were: Northern Region 29,777,986; Eastern Region 12,388,646; Western Region 10,278,500; Mid-Western Region 2,533,337 and Lagos: 675,352. Both sets of figures indicate that the population of the North was more than that of the rest of the Federation combined. See *West African Pilot*, 7 and 21 February, 1963 & *Daily Times and West African Pilot*, 24 February, 1964

<sup>41</sup> *Morning Post*, 22 September, 1965.

<sup>42</sup> *Western Nigeria White Paper* (1964), p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Eghosa Osaghae "Federal Society and Federal Character: The Politics of Plural Accommodation in Nigeria Since Independence" in Uma Eleazu (ed.) *Nigeria: The First 25 Years* (Lagos & Ibadan: Infodata Ltd. & Heinemann Educational Books, 1988), p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*.

regions (which was what Nigerian federalism was as at the time of the White Paper), the above statistics were enough to engender disquietness and ill-feelings. Hence the popular outburst of Akintola thus:

eni kan kii je ki ile o fe; bi o de ibiyi, Okechukwu, bi o de ohun, Mbaḍiwe, se awon Ibo nikan lo wa ni?<sup>46</sup> (when only one person eats, others go hungry; getting here, it is Okechukwu, getting to the other place, it is Mbaḍiwe, is it only the Ibos that exist [make up Nigeria]?)

Consequently, Akintola thought that if the Yoruba continued to practise regional politics as canvassed by Chief Awolowo, they would be “consumed by the ever ambitious and selfish Ibos”.<sup>47</sup> However, Dr. Azikiwe did not see anything inherently wrong with the above imbalance. Thus, in his October 1964 National Day Celebration Address, he bluntly accused Akintola of using his NNDP to stir anti-Igbo hatred.<sup>48</sup>

In a newspaper article on the causes of the Awolowo–Akintola feud, Wumi Akintide opined that

the only sin Laḍoke Akintola...committed in his political life is having to openly disagree with his Party leader, Obafemi Awolowo on whether or not it was time for the Yorubas to make peace and to join forces with the North. There could be some other explanations or rationalizations, the central issue is the point I have just mentioned<sup>49</sup>

There is no paucity of literature on the causes of the Awolowo–Akintola tussle and, as pointed out earlier, the purpose of this paper is to correct the erroneous, conventional and traditional reference to Akintola as ‘Afonja’ or ‘Judas’ because of his insistence on the possibility and workability of a Hausa/Fulani–Yoruba alliance so as to put paid to Yoruba’s marginalization and Igbo domination. Already, we have briefly outlined the reasons for Akintola’s call for Yoruba’s participation in the federal government. As Akintide opines in the above quotation and as pointed out in this paper, this was the ‘gravest’ sin Akintola committed against Chief Awolowo and a faction of the Action Group. Although, the purpose of this paper is to examine the reasons that may have influenced Akintola’s political interface with the NPC and the reasons he felt should compel his party, the Action Group, to do same; a brief comment on the ‘other explanations or rationalizations’ of the Awolowo–Akintola standoff may be necessary.

Obviously, Chief Awolowo, by not wanting Akintola to succeed him as Western Nigeria Premier, had passed a vote of ‘no confidence’ in him even before his assumption of office as Premier. Thus, throughout his tenure, Akintola probably felt that Awolowo did not wish him well while the latter saw the former as a thoroughly evasive individual in whom he had no confidence. Having assumed office on 15 December 1959 in the circumstance described above, it was obvious that Akintola would want to flex muscle to show that he was the *de jure* leader of the Western Region. Indeed, most of the ‘misdeeds’ of Akintola while in office were probably predicated on this factor. For example, in an attempt to entrench his authority and lessen Chief Awolowo’s influence in Western Nigerian government, Akintola embarked on an administrative purge and dismissed those he perceived as Chief Awolowo’s loyalists. Thus, Julius Odeku was sacked from the Regional Marketing Board and Alfred Ruwane from his chairmanship of Western Nigeria Development Corporation among several others.<sup>50</sup> To further incapacitate Chief Awolowo and erode the financial base of the Action Group, Akintola persuaded all regional and federal legislators from his (Oshun) Division to stop the payment of 10% of their salaries to

<sup>46</sup> Bayo Omolola, “Culturally, Historically Communicating the Yorubas Traditional Concept of Military Heroism: Aare Ona Kakanfo”, *International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry*, op. cit. p. 85.

<sup>47</sup> Bayo Omolola, p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> *West African Pilot*, 15 October, 1964.

<sup>49</sup> Wumi Akintide, “Samuel Laḍoke Akintola”, *The Recorder*, 12 October 2003.

<sup>50</sup> See *West African Pilot*, 11 May 1962; *Daily Express*, 26 May 1962 and *West Africa*, 10 February 1962.

the Action Group.<sup>51</sup> When the first Western Nigeria Economic Mission to Europe was to be despatched, Chief Awolowo requested Akintola to modify the composition of the delegation but the latter stoutly and successfully opposed the idea. A scenario that contrasted sharply with that of 1959 when, on assumption of office as Premier, Akintola made no major changes to the previous Cabinet and as such most of his ministers were hold-overs from Awolowo's administration.<sup>52</sup>

In all spheres, Akintola wanted to be seen as the 'executive premier' of Western Nigeria as against the 'ceremonial or puppet premier' he probably thought he would be under Chief Awolowo's scrutiny and tutelage. Indeed, this consuming passion drove him not only to virtually place himself above the Action Group on whose ticket he became Premier<sup>53</sup> but also to taking several ill-conceived decisions that had debilitating socio-economic repercussions for Western Nigeria. The most grievous of these decisions was probably the January 1961 mid-season reduction in the prices of cocoa by the Akintola government. Cocoa formed the basis of the finances of the Western Region and the fortunes of millions of its people depended on the fate of cocoa. One would therefore have expected that wide consultations were held before major policy decisions were announced. But Akintola cut cocoa prices without consultation with his party and re-organized the tax collection system in a way that made tax administration very inefficient and cumbersome. As a result of these ill-conceived policies, Western Nigeria lost £5 million in two years. According to the Action Group, the Western Region lost another £1 million through subsidies to local councils and about £1.6 million due to improper amendments to the Finance Law of Western Nigeria.<sup>54</sup> In its editorial of 13 May 1966, entitled "Which is Supreme?" the *Sunday Express* catalogued some of Akintola's major decisions without reference to his party and sometimes without recourse to his cabinet. In addition to all of the above, the paper listed the appointment of the Deputy Governor as "a policy that started and ended with Akintola". This was quite apart from the fact that Akintola single-handedly decided to abolish women taxes in three divisions of the Western Region. As pointed out above, Akintola probably did all these because of the vote of no confidence that preceded his ascension to power. It must be stressed that Akintola became unmanageable because of an apparent contradiction in the Action Group – for the first time in the history of the Party, the Federal President and Leader no longer combined party leadership with the office of the premier and members therefore had to look beyond the Leader of the Party for patronage.

Many of my informants at Ikenne, Chief Awolowo's birthplace; Ogbomoso, Akintola hometown and Ibadan, the headquarters of the defunct Western Region described Akintola as "completely loyal and obedient to Chief Awolowo".<sup>55</sup> Indeed, one of them described Akintola as "Awolowo's political errand boy"<sup>56</sup> while Odubela, whose house is a stone throw from Chief Awolowo's compound, insisted that "there was probably no single person in the Action Group who respected and submitted to Chief Awolowo more than Chief Akintola". Odubela argued that the split that occurred between the duo was a fulfillment of the Yoruba proverb that "*ba ba l'ewure kan ogiri, o maa n buni je*" (meaning roughly "when one chases a goat to unbearable limits, it turns and charges at its pursuer").<sup>57</sup> To Chief Isaac Adelola Olabiran, who, in company of his late wife, Felicia, visited Chief Awolowo at Lekki during the latter's restriction, "Chief Akintola was neither an Afonja nor a Judas but a loyal disciple of Chief Awolowo before the latter's unbridled quest for power and failure to listen to wise counsel ran him

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<sup>51</sup> *West Africa*, 19 May 1962.

<sup>52</sup> Akinjide Osuntokun, *Chief S. Ladoko Akintola His Life and Times*, pp. 76, 90-91.

<sup>53</sup> This was one of the 24 charges that were levelled against Chief Akintola. See *West African Pilot*, 21 May 1962. The Action Group accused him of 'squandermania and self-aggrandizement'. Other offences were that Chief Akintola pressed for a Premier's Lodge to be built for him at the cost £180,000 and the maintenance of a fleet of five luxury cars – 2 Cardillacs, 1 Do Soto, 2 Mercedes Benz 300 – with a sixth, a Rolls-Royce, on order. See *ibid*, 15 May 1962.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 25 May 1962.

<sup>55</sup> Some of these are J.B. Odubela, c.70 years, No. 44, Maberu Street, Ikenne, Ogun State: 22/10/2014; Taiwo Oregun, 72, No. 19, Maberu Street, Ikenne; Chief Isaac Adelola Olabiran, 93, No. 1, Adetola Olabiran Street, Ikenne; Chief Francis Oluseyi Adelesi, 76, No. 22, Mapada Street, Ikenne; Ibrahim Mufthau Adelaja, 71, No. 7, Ajena Street, Ikenne; Aderogba Babatunde Busari, 78, No. 7, Saja, Ogbomoso, Oyo State: 13/04/2015; Elder Olayinka George 73, Okun Akinola Compound, Isale Laka, Ogbomoso; Chief Arogbg Julius, 70, No. 15, Sakari, Ogbomoso; Adeeko Janet, 77, No. 10, Bilala, Ogbomoso; Alhaji Agboola Kadri, 72, No. 6, Oke-Ado, Ibadan, Oyo State: 26/4/2015; Chief Araoye Olape Gilbert, 77, No. 12, Bodija, Ibadan and Agbede Ilesanmi Samuel, 71, No. 22, Oke-Ado, Ibadan.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Agbede Ilesanmi Samuel, *op. cit*.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with J.B. Odubela, *op. cit*.

[Akintola] amuck”.<sup>58</sup> Given the scale and intensity of the enmity that later characterized Awolowo-Akintola relations, it would appear that Akintola’s ‘rebellion’ against Awolowo was as total and unwavering as his obedience and loyalty before the stand-off.

For all intents and purposes, Akintola probably meant well for the Yoruba as he did not want them to be pawns in Nigerian politics or sidelined in the distribution of her resources and wealth. The results of the 1959 federal elections had convinced Akintola that except the Yoruba quickly joined the NPC-led federal government, they would be completely obliterated politically and in other critical spheres. It would be recalled that despite the fact that it mounted the most sophisticated and impressive campaign ever seen in Black Africa during the 1959 electioneering campaign, the Action Group obtained the least of the parliamentary seats at stake in the election – the Party obtained 75 seats against the NCNC’s 89 and the NPC’s 148. The hope of their party to form the federal government having been irredeemably shattered and the Igbo now well ahead of the Yoruba in terms of political patronage and rewards; Akintola felt it was time for the Yoruba to stop squandering tax payers’ money on electioneering campaigns in other regions; close ranks with Northern political leaders and stop seeing them as implacable and inveterate foes. On the other hand, Awolowo maintained a ‘no compromise’ stance with the “uneducated, uncivilized and aristocratic leaders of the NPC”.<sup>59</sup>

Having failed to persuade Chief Awolowo, described by one of my informants as ‘a man of iron heart and unbendable will’,<sup>60</sup> with no faintest stroke of hope or possibility of ever being able to persuade him, Akintola probably made up his mind to join forces with NPC leaders to curtail Igbo’s growing influence in Nigerian politics. Thus, Akintola earned the sobriquet of “an agent of the NPC in the fold of the Action Group”.<sup>61</sup> The AG cited the behaviour of Akintola at its Jos Congress when the latter abandoned his Party’s Congress and flew to Ibadan to honour Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Northern Region and Leader of the NPC. The Action Group wondered why a sitting Premier and Deputy Leader could denigrate the party that brought him to power “in order to curry favour from the Northern Premier”.<sup>62</sup> Alhaji Ahmadu Bello was in Ibadan for the official opening ceremony of the Sultan Bello Hall, named after his great grandfather at the University College, Ibadan. Akintola retorted that he left the Action Group’s Congress to receive the Northern Premier because, whenever he visited Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello always accorded him courtesy and respect.<sup>63</sup> At this point, Akintola had probably ‘crossed the Rubicon’ in Akintola by the NPC– his decision to part ways with the Action Group and his determination to champion an Hausa/Fulani–Yoruba alliance if that would bolster the tottering socio-economic and political fortunes of the Yoruba against the Igbo whose trade marks were “selfishness, self-centeredness, greediness, aggressiveness and double dealings”.<sup>64</sup> The NPC–NNDP Alliance succeeded in reversing the dwindling political fortunes of the Yoruba at the central even if only minimally. It will be recalled that the so-called ‘broad-based’ federal cabinet formed after the 1964 pervasive political crisis was made up of 54 ministers, double the number in the previous government. The NPC had 22 (15 cabinet ranks); NCNC had 16 (11 cabinet ranks) while the NNDP had 14 (7 cabinet ranks).<sup>65</sup> But for the NPC–NNDP Alliance, the Yoruba would have most probably once more faded away at the federal level.

Whenever reference is made to Akintola as ‘Afonja’ or ‘Judas’, two major incidents are always cited. One, that Akintola allied with Northern Nigerian political leaders to emasculate the Action Group, dissolve the government controlled by it and liquidate Chief Awolowo politically for a season. Apart from the contrasting trajectories of hard and soft landing given to Chiefs Awolowo and Akintola by the NPC–led Federal Government in obviously biased and lopsided restriction orders; when the Emergency

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Chief Isaac Adelola Olabiran, *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> See this author’s M.A. Thesis, “The 1959 Federal Elections, Party Politics and the Fall of the Nigerian First Republic”, University of Ibadan, 2002, *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Olugbade Isola Eso, 75, No. 22, Elewure, Ibadan, Oyo State: 26/4/2015

<sup>61</sup> *West African Pilot*, 24 May 1962.

<sup>62</sup> *Morning Post*, 5 February 1962.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 6 February 1962.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Yomi Akintola, *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> For details, see Emmanuel O. Ojo “The Nigerian Democratic Process: Ethnicity and Alliances of Political Parties, 1951-1983”, *op. cit.* Particularly chapter four: ‘Disintegration and Reconstitution of Alliances, 1964-65’, pp. 162– 214.

Administration in Western Nigeria wound up in December 1962, the NPC-led Federal Government merely reinstated Akintola as Premier instead of conducting fresh elections. The second incident of 'Akintola's betrayal' of his kith and kin concerned the large scale violence that attended the 1965 parliamentary elections into the Western Nigeria House of Assembly. The election was no doubt a litmus test for Akintola who had never properly faced the electorate since his ascension to power in December 1959. Understandably, he was bent on winning the election as a 'confirmation' of his popularity and acceptance by the people of Western Nigeria. Also, the NPC might have felt that Akintola's victory was desirable for the continuation of its hegemony. The outcome was a bitterly fought election and outbreak of unprecedented political violence in Western Nigeria.

As a result of the large scale violence and the atmosphere of insecurity that enveloped the Western Region, S.A. Shitta-Bey (MP, Lagos Centre), moved a motion in the Federal House of Representatives calling for the declaration of a state of emergency in Western Nigeria since "law and order have broken down in the Region" but the Prime Minister declined.<sup>66</sup> The UPGA and the *West African Pilot* subsequently mounted a sustained press attack against the Prime Minister for "failure to grasp the nettle of the Western Region and of permitting a policy of drift"<sup>67</sup> In a publication, the Eastern Nigeria Government criticised the Federal Government "in whom lay the last hope of the people" for refusing to "discharge its responsibility".<sup>68</sup> Ironically, an NCNC leader and Minister of State for Commonwealth Relations in the Federal Ministry of External Affairs, Daniel Ibekwe, rose in defence of the Prime Minister. Ibekwe argued that those who advocated the declaration of a State of Emergency in the Western Region and who blamed the Prime Minister for not declaring one were either ignorant of the Constitution or careless about its provisions. On his part, the Prime Minister insisted that the 1965 anarchy in Western Nigeria was incomparable with the 1962 situation in the Region and that the Federal Government could not declare a state of emergency in a region with a legally and validly constituted government.<sup>69</sup>

Many scholars have described the crisis in the defunct Western House of Assembly as a crisis that occurred within the four walls of the Assembly. For example, corroborating the view expressed by Ben Ghulie and Alexander Madiebo, Oyeweso contends that there was hardly any justification for the declaration of the state of emergency in Western Nigeria since only the mace was broken and the "confusion did not extend beyond the precincts of the Regional House".<sup>70</sup> It could be argued however that since the membership of the Assembly was region-wide, the crisis, by implication, was also region-wide. Moreover, it was not just the mace that was broken; heads, arms and limbs were also broken. In fact, a minister, Kessington Momoh, was so badly injured that he was taken to hospital.<sup>71</sup> However, in terms of magnitude and impact, the 1962 crisis was completely insignificant when compared with that of 1965.

Law and order broke down in many parts of the Western Region to the extent that the Nigeria Police virtually admitted that the task of maintaining law and order was beyond it<sup>72</sup> However, on 14 January, the Prime Minister said he was already mediating in the crisis and that the AG had already accepted his mediation while the NNDP asked for more time. He said he did not want to use 'real force' because it could not bring peace to people's heart and that in any case, he had no power to impose a solution on the Western Region.<sup>73</sup> The refusal of the Prime Minister to declare a state of Emergency as he did in the

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<sup>66</sup> *Daily Express & Daily Times*, 12 January 1966.

<sup>67</sup> D.J.M. Muffett, *Let the Truth Be Told. The Coups D'Etat of 1966* (Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1982), p. 11. The United Progressive Grand Alliance, UPGA, was formed by the NCNC and the faction of the Action Group that opposed Akintola following the collapse of the NPC-NCNC alliance at the central.

<sup>68</sup> National Archives, Ibadan: "NAI: CWC2/1/1: Nigerian Crisis, 1966", p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Daily Times and Morning Post*, 17 November, 1965.

<sup>70</sup> Siyan Oyeweso, "Causal Factors in the Nigerian Civil War: A Critical and Comparative Analysis of Some Nigerian Accounts", M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Ife, Ile Ife, 1986, 55.

<sup>71</sup> See *The First 10 Years: Independent Nigeria* (Lagos: Daily Times of Nigeria Limited, 1970), p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Remi Anifowose, *Violence and Politics in Nigeria. The Tiv and Yoruba Experience* (New York & Enugu: Nok Publishers International, 1982), p. 65.

<sup>73</sup> *Nigerian Citizen & Nigerian Tribune*, 15 January, 1966.

Region in 1962 may have been because of his party's alliance with the NNDP. Those who share this view may therefore argue that the NPC-led Federal Government declared a state of emergency in the Western Region in 1962 so as to cripple the Action Group and liquidate Chief Awolowo politically. It should be noted however that the declaration of a state of emergency is an important constitutional provision (with profound consequences) which should not be invoked too frequently. Alhaji Balewa may have felt that since 1962 to 1965 was just a space of about three years, the declaration of another state of emergency in Western Nigeria would not be in the interest of the people of that Region. However, the outcome of the 1965 Western Nigeria crisis, in terms of loss of lives and properties, far exceeded what might have been the consequences of a state of emergency in the region.

### 3.0 Conclusion

Since 1962, in most quarters, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola had been dubbed 'Afonja' or 'Judas'. This paper attempted to show that this is a misnomer and wrong catalogue. Up to 15 December 1959 when Akintola assumed office as Western Nigeria Premier, he and Chief Obafemi Awolowo were political allies. Indeed, up till that date, the former was the latter's 'political errand boy and slave'. Although, following his election to the Central Legislature in Lagos in 1951 and emergence as Leader of the Opposition in the Federal House of Representatives in 1952 as well as his participation in the National Government (formed in 1957), Akintola became the 'Western Nigerian Ambassador' to Lagos. His more than eight years of political interaction with the 'Northern Nigerian Ambassador' to Lagos, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and other NPC leaders, led to the establishment of a corridor of political conciliation between him and NPC leaders. As a matter of fact, for as long as his political sojourn in Lagos lasted, Akintola was closer to Tafawa Balewa than Awolowo. Balewa probably impressed Akintola so much that the latter had the impression that the NPC meant well for the Action Group. Consequently, he began to impress it on Chief Awolowo that the leaders of the NPC were not as evil as a faction of the Action Group thought them to be and that Chief Awolowo should not shut the door of political interaction or reconciliation with the NPC. However, as far as Chief Awolowo was concerned, he and the leaders of the NPC were "two parallel lines that could not meet".<sup>74</sup> Thus, Chief Awolowo stood stoutly opposed to any form of political conciliation or interaction between the Action Group and the NPC.

Unfortunately, except for its participation in the National Government, from 1954, when Nigeria became a federation and 1962, when the Action Group crisis broke out, the Yoruba-led Action Group almost completely disappeared from the federal level. Consequently, prominent appointments and sundry socio-economic benefits virtually became the exclusive preserve of the Igbo-dominated NCNC – although, the NPC was the senior partner in the Federal Government, the Igbo had far more technocrats than the NPC. The virtual disappearance of the Yoruba and the prominence of the Igbo at the federal level thus became a very good political stick with which Akintola beat Chief Awolowo having failed in all his efforts to convince the Action Group Leader that the Yoruba would continue to be drawers of water and hewers of wood in the Commonwealth of Nigeria except they closed ranks with the NPC. Thus, Chief Awolowo dismissed Akintola as "an agent of the NPC within the fold of the Action Group"<sup>75</sup> and "Afonja incarnate".<sup>76</sup> Apparently, the NPC-led Federal Government gave tacit support to Akintola hence the declaration of a State of Emergency in Western Nigeria in May 1962 and Balewa's refusal to do same following unprecedented political violence in the Region in 1965. Although, outsiders who prefer one faction to another or empower one faction over another will always mean harm; Akintola's political interface with Northern Nigeria leaders was a bold attempt at reversing Igbo's socio-economic and political preponderance in the Federation of Nigeria which began with the formation of the NPC/NCNC Federal Government in 1954 and climaxed with the formation of the independence government by the two parties in 1959. This line of argument may have informed the view that:

<sup>74</sup> *Daily Service*, 2 December 1959.

<sup>75</sup> *West African Pilot*, 24 May 1962.

<sup>76</sup> *Daily Express*, 30 May 1962.

...the only Nigerian politician who made a serious attempt to change the status quo [Igbo domination] was Samuel Ladoke Akintola but he did it in a way that made him look like a Judas Iscariot. But what he did was the right thing to do in hindsight. He drastically changed the calculus of Nigerian politics by rejecting Awolowo's intransigence never to consider going into a coalition with the NPC. He immediately formed his Democratic Party in the Western Region which went into a coalition with the NPC/NCNC coalition at the federal level thereby creating a counter-force to the Igbos.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Wumi Akintide, *op. cit.*

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