

**‘LET MY PEOPLE GO’-A GLIMPSE INTO CHIEF ANTHONY ENAHORO’S 1953  
MOTION FOR INDEPENDENCE AND IMPLICATION FOR ALIEN RULE IN  
NIGERIA**

**<sup>1</sup>Rotimi Olajide Opeyeoluwa and <sup>2</sup>Adebola Adeniyi-Agbaje, PhD**

<sup>1</sup>Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State

<sup>2</sup>Department of Media and Communications Studies, Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State

---

**Abstract**

This paper studied the impact of the 1953 independence motion as moved by Anthony Enahoro, a veteran champion of nationalism, independence struggle, and inter-regional politics between the North and South and its implication on alien rule. The main thrust of this piece is that it focused on major issues which constituted the basis for the agitations for self-determination in Nigeria mainly because of perceived marginalization, narrow economic and political marginalization which the nationalists opposed. For the purpose of this study, historical and analytical methods of inquiry were patronized given that historical events were studied and the outcome of such events analysed. It submits that, even though the 1953 independence motion did not lead to immediate independence as envisaged by Enahoro, it rallied nationalists in the South and in some measure in the North to realise that independence was inevitable but rather a matter of time. In the final analysis, the motion was a path demanding for an end to alien rule, dialogue from across both regions and within many political parties and insistence for inclusive leadership. The motion is historic in all dimensions, hence this study. The paper recommended that the speech should be studied to continue to draw inspiration and insistence for good governance.

**Keywords:** Alien rule, Independence, Self-Determination, Motion, Nigeria.

---

**Introduction**

*“Mr. President, sir, I rise to move the motion standing in my name, “that this House accepts as a primary political objective the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956. And I say to the British: Let my people go. Sir, I beg to move”- Anthony Enahoro<sup>1</sup>, 1953.*

It is a well-established and a historical fact that Nigeria is a colonial contraption. The story of the country is that of acquisitions

and merger<sup>2</sup>. This process began with a series of collusion and interfaces with colonialists which was further extended with the annexation of Lagos in 1861, followed by a spate of ‘state and throne capture’ such as the 1885 declaration of a protectorate over Oil Rivers<sup>3</sup> under the banner of gun-diplomacy that brought the entire country under British political control and dominance. Other steps such as the fusion of

---

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Enahoro, Independence Motion. Debate in House of Representatives, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Oalniyan, Azeez and Asuelime, L. “Boko Haram insurgency and the widening of cleavages in Nigeria”, *African Security*, 7(2): 1-19, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Obaro Ikime, “The Colonial Experience in Nigeria: Administrative and Political Changes” in *Can Anything Good Come Out of History* (ed), Ibadan, Bookcraft, 2018, p. 123.

the three main units with varied historical origins had emerged: the Colony of Lagos acquired following the Treaty of Cession of Lagos of 1861; the Northern Protectorate; and the Southern Protectorate was consolidated<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, these variegated colonies were later subjected to two waves of amalgamation in 1914 into what is now known as Nigeria.

A definite masterstroke in the colonialization process was in 1906, when the Colony of Lagos was merged with the Southern Protectorate under one administration and the second (albeit the grander) was in 1914 when the Northern and Southern Protectorates were conjoined to form Nigeria<sup>5</sup>. Hence, the Nigerian state is mainly a creation of European imperial powers with the boundary, composition and nomenclature shaped by three personalities: Otto Von Bismarck, the German Chancellor, who presided over the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 that partitioned Africa for the European powers to possess; Sir Frederick John Dealtry Lugard (Governor-General of Nigeria) and Flora Shaw. The baking and diverse chain reactions that eventual led to the emergence of Nigeria as a political entity was devoid of a shred of input from within<sup>6</sup>.

This interplay of event served as a background to the quotation above which is an extraction from the independence motion moved by Anthony Enahoro, member of the Action Group, and Federal House of

Representative member in 1953. Even though the motion failed to achieve its ultimate objective of leading the country to independence as intended for 1956, its historic importance cannot be discountenanced as well as the fact that it set in motion a chain of reaction which eventually culminated in the independence of the country on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960, but with some mixed experiences such as reshaping the desire of politicians from the southern and northern parts of the country which birthed both intended and unintended consequences for politics as well as the nation as a whole. The motion generated massive awareness, huge excitement and opprobrium depending on which side of the political divide one stood. In the South, it was hailed as an idea whose time has come but, in the North, they massively opposed it on the premise that the country was not ripe for independence, a stance their political leaders took to avert possible political dominance by the southern part of the country because in the estimation of its political leaders the time was not auspicious for them to contend for power against their southern counterparts who were clearly ahead because of education. Southerners had embraced western education with much enthusiasm in part because of early contact with Christian missionaries. Bako asserted that “since early colonial era also village improvement unions supported children of the poor by providing scholarships to attend schools”<sup>7</sup>.

Their insistence was for the independence to be shifted to 1960, a development that earned their resentment in the south that tagged with derogatory epitaphs. As much as Enahoro declared that “Our minds are irrevocably made up in favour of self-

<sup>4</sup> Onabamiro, S. *Glimpses into Nigerian History*, Lagos: Macmillan, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Olaniyan, Azeez, “Nigeria and the Undying Spirit of Separatism” 11<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture Series, 2023, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Olaniyan, Azeez. “Hanging in the balance: interplay of forces and the resilience of Nigerian state”, in Lucky Asuelimeh and Suzzane Francis (eds) *Selected Themes in African Development Studies, Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development*, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Bako, Ahmed. “The Igbo Factor in the History of Intergroup Relations and Commerce in Kano: Opportunities and Challenges Revisited” 50<sup>th</sup> Professorial Inaugural Lecture, 2024, p. 14.

government in 1956”<sup>8</sup>, it became obvious that it was not a motion which enjoyed total acceptability across the political divide or even across both the North and South coupled with the divide and rule tactics of the colonialists. Rather than rally the entire nation, it became a divisive tool across the both geo-political zone but in the South, it gained traction and the momentum was sustained thinking that the North would capitulate under sustained pressure. However, the dynamics and the main thrust of the motion is the subject of this article. In response, to the perceived divisiveness which the motion elicited between the North and South, the leader of the Action Group, Obafemi Awolowo stated that, “our quarrel is with British sovereignty in this country, whereby our political and economic affairs are determined without consultations with us”.<sup>9</sup> As much as he shared the conviction of Enahoro and tried to deflect antagonism which the motion fostered between the North and the South, Awolowo’s intervention did not do much to allay fears of intended domination over the North.

The initial confidence which Enahoro had anticipated faded away very quickly. He had drawn inspiration from a speech delivered by Mr. Fenner Brockway, a socialist Member of Parliament;

I should like to urge upon this House and particularly upon the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that if we are to secure the confidence, trust and cooperation of peoples in the Colonial Territories, the best way to do it would be in discussion,

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Enahoro, Independence Motion, Debate in House of Representatives, 1953.

<sup>9</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, “On a Motion for Self-Government” A Speech given in the House of Representatives” in Voice of Reason: Selected Speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Vol. 1, Akure, Fagbamigbe Publishers, 1981, p. 134.

consultation and agreement with them to fix a target date when in each respective Colony, the goal of self-government should be secured. And I believe that if it were possible to pursue such a policy, we would change the psychology of the colonial peoples.<sup>10</sup>

Such external though remote view might have encouraged the purveyors of such sentiments, it did not do much in shifting the views of the colonial masters and many of their allies within Nigeria and on both sides of the political divide. Regardless, the Action Group and particularly Enahoro went ahead to move the motion in the thinking that perhaps because of its popularity in the South, it would compel the North to accept the motion as an idea which must be accepted. In the speech in an attempt to douse the simmering division which the motion had endangered between both regions, the leader of the Action Group stated his shock at the actions of members from the Northern region. He stated:

It has been suggested that by many Northern friends and I am very sorry that they have fallen victims to the evil propaganda of the British that they are not fit to govern themselves. It shows the extent to which this evil propaganda has gone in this country, and we all ought really to weep, that people who are so advanced and are as civilized as the Northern people can come here and say: ‘we are not fit for self-government’. The bones of the great and illustrious Uthman Dan Fodio would shake in their graves if it

<sup>10</sup> Fenner Brockway. “Speech at the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, 1952.

were possible for him to listen to one of his descendants. Well, Mr. President, Sir, I would like to wind up now. This motion has come before this House to be debated. We are all Nigerians, and we are all in one accord about wanting self-government and wanting freedom from British rule. The only issue in dispute as I see it now, is one of the question of time, as between North and South. But that as always had been the issue between Britain and every one of her colonial territories. At division time we know by the look of things that we will beat. But we are not afraid.<sup>11</sup>

Awolowo went on to state that history will absolve himself, Enahoro and other progressives within his party for choosing country over other considerations which could prolong the quest for independence and that the North will be allowed to continue with the business of the day, hence, he walked out on the debate along with all members of his party. The motion was subsequently defeated but the motion continues to echo through the ages. The importance of the motion regardless of its defeat at the House of Representatives nonetheless.

Of course, any extensive study on how Nigeria attained independence cannot be complete without an adequate look at some fundamental speeches made by nationalists, parliamentarians, journalists, student leaders and particularly the 1953 speech made by

Anthony Enahoro pre-eminently. The first segment of the paper is devoted to interrogating the motive/purpose for the speech, how the nationalists rallied the populace under the banner against continued alien rule, inferring that the system was no longer fashionable and subsequently issues such as the impact the speech had on the north-south dichotomy, the politics relations between both regions and finally, how it impacted on the march to end colonialism and the enthronement of native rule in 1960. Evidently and from a historical point of view, the motion didn't galvanize the entire country to ensure an immediate end of colonialism but it didn't fail to either maintain the momentum and fast-tracking the nationalists especially in the south to articulate a roadmap to ending colonialism and even ensured the politicization of the process by building political consciousness between the diverse blocks in the country. In the North, leaders of the regions began to seriously re-consider their future and place in a future united Nigeria, hence preparation to take control of both the political control of an independent Nigeria and the need to take seriously their fate in their own hands. In the south, many regarded the North as a feudal region that ought to be "conquered" through progressive means because of their estimation that the political leaders were essentially reactionaries and tools in the hands of the colonial overlords.

Though the country had collided' much earlier with the British in their determined effort to bring the country under its suzerainty, the amalgamation was the final phase in a series of steps that tighten the grip of colonialism on the neck of Nigeria. This same effort accounted for while sixteen years before the consummation of the effort, Flora Shaw in an article for The Times had articulated the need for the several British protectorates on the Niger to be known

---

<sup>11</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, "On a Motion for Self-Government" A Speech given in the House of Representatives" in Voice of Reason: Selected Speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Vol. 1, Akure, Fagbamigbe Publishers, 1981, p. 134.

collectively as Nigeria<sup>12</sup>. This consolidation and several other steps taken by the British strengthen their political control of the country through administrative policies and governance even as some scholars have articulated that the justification for colonialism was not far from the imperative for administrative purpose alone but for exploitative purpose of the mineral resources<sup>13</sup>. This latter reason was attributed to multi-dimensional social problems which enabled nationalists to insist with time for the end of alien rule. Thus, this discontent continued to fuel agitation for colonialism to end, hence certain individuals and segments of the society continued to insist for colonialism to end.

In the view of these nationalists they considered colonialism the ultimate sin, a cancer that must be erased as quickly as possible and began a steady stirring across the length and breadth of the country and even formed a nexus with such revolutionary figures beyond Nigeria for inspiration. The colonial government naturally responded by a clamp down on leading figures such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Florence Ita-Giwa, Mokwugo Okoye, Raji Abdullahi, Oged Macaulay, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, and Anthony Enahoro, amongst a host of others. The reaction of the colonial masters was predictable and insistence by the nationalists for a dismantling of what was regarded as a flagrant violation of their right to self-rule made a collusion inevitable. This incredible situation was a catalyst for historical speeches such as the one made by Enahoro in 1953.

Anthony Enahoro's reputation as a frontline nationalist and politician was further reinforced partly because he practiced journalism and was indeed a highly respected editor under colonial rule with progressive credentials. He used media practice to stand against continued colonial rule and ensured that his campaign was consistent with the mood of the country for a reversal as quickly as possible. He was unmistakably committed for enthronement of native administration and was ready to pay any price in its pursuit. He was focused, determined, visionary and highly principled and happen to understand that the country's potential for greatness cannot be achieved until native rule held sway. Even though the idea was widespread, it was however, fraught with potential dangers of arrest and harsh punishment. Of course, the speech was made in 1953, independence did not happen until 1960 but it was unmistakably that such highly fiery speeches and other auxiliary factors tilted the balance in favour for independence. To fellow nationalists and Nigerians in general, Anthony Enahoro was hailed as astute thinker and influential figure worthy of emulation. This paper discusses the inspirational speech that, 'Let My People Go' and its impact on the march to independence. In this light, Enahoro's leadership and political philosophy style are examined and the overall impact which it had in the push for native governance. Ultimately, it is hoped that his speech will inspire the present generation of Nigerians who are oblivious of this history with pride and essential nationalism capable of strengthening the nation and steering it from the trouble waters where tribal sentiments and other divisive tendencies appears to be fouling the water of stability. From the resistance to colonialism to the days of self-rule, from the extreme regional consciousness of party politics in the 60s to the civil war days and the challenge of

<sup>12</sup> A.H.M. Kirk-Greene. "Who Coined the name Nigeria?" West African, 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1956.

<sup>13</sup> Moga Ezekiel, Maimuna Abullahi Dantsho and Abashi John Abede. "A Historical Debate on the Restructuring of Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" in Jalingo Journal of African Studies, Vol. 12, No.7.

reconstruction under military rule, to the return to party politics Enahoro's robust contributions to the challenges of nationhood are best analysed and contextualised against the background of his speech at the House of Representatives calling for independence as early as 1953<sup>14</sup>.

### **Enahoro: A Patriot and Visionary Leader**

Anthony Enahoro was a unique freedom fighter, pan-nationalist and visionary leader whose actions, especially speeches, writings and mobilization efforts help in no small measure in dismantling alien rule in Nigeria. He was pragmatic, controversial and visionary and was highly regarded by fellow Nigerian politicians and even the colonial masters. He was born in Uromi, present-day Edo State, Nigeria on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1922 and was educated in Kings College Lagos for his secondary school education and immediately enlisted to work as a journalist, perhaps this decision was fueled by a desire to participate in the agitation for independence and his avowed love for politics. His father's preference was for him to read Law or choosing to become a civil servant. These choices are quite understandable in precolonial Nigeria where opportunities were limited and highly sought after by young secondary school leavers. His father wanted a stable and quiet life for his son but Anthony would have nothing of sort as it was a time of growing simmering nationalist politics<sup>15</sup> and he was enamored by it. He fraternized with tribe of nationalists of his time and two of them, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo affected him in most profound measures both in the march toward independence and even in post-colonial Nigeria. Enahoro was a wordsmith, a progressive and radical of some sort and his

skills came in handy in the evolving fight against colonial rule. A read through the gamut of the motion under review here reveal that he was not only a patriot par excellence but quiet visionary who it appears to be in a rush to ensure that alien rule was dismantled and native political control enthroned. The aftermath validates this assertion. Some political actors accused him that not much widespread consultation occurred before moving the motion and this was revealed in the vehement opposition which Northern politicians put forward in its wake, however, the question to be asked what time was most suitable for all both regions of the country to agree given the fissiparous nature of politics in the country at that time or even afterwards.

For Enahoro, one of the key factors that enabled him become what he became in life, was his attendance of King's College. It was there he became fully cosmopolitan and his world view bloated. He could interrogate the social issues of his time with clarity of thought, stating that colonialism was a political crime which has to be removed through political means. He had teachers from both within and beyond Nigeria in Kings College that were simply inspiration and ultimately met with students from a broad spectrum of the society and these factors helped him in no small measures. It awakened in his impersonable mind, a burning desire to ensure that his society changed for the better, where equality was relatively speaking was not discriminatory. He may not have totally appreciated the huge task that was stirring in his mind; however, it was a pull too strong for him to ignore. It was while he was at King's College that he met two nationalists that were already quite popular for the agitations, these were H.O. Davies and Nnamdi Azikiwe. His interactions with these crusaders and his expansive appetite for news re-circled constantly in his mind in a

<sup>14</sup> Lanre Idowu, Master of His Age: The Story of Anthony Enahoro,

<sup>15</sup> The Guardian Newspaper, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2024.

manner that affected him into adulthood. It was clear to him that as he wrote that, “I know only that long before my joyful schooldays ended, I felt irresistibly drawn to public life”<sup>16</sup>. He took to public life almost immediately after secondary school as he felt no need for higher education. In that era, education at secondary school was robust enough to prepare the mind for life.

Additionally, Enahoro was fairly rated as a super nationalist with showers of superlatives, well respected and dared in equal measure. Many agree that he was a forceful, determined, focused, veteran political thinker, social democrat, pre-eminent member of his generation of the Nigerian political class, dialectician in political tactics and marathon runner in the quest for a greater Nigeria. He never flicked. Ever ready to defend his position even in the face of repression whether under colonial rule or much later during the dark and repressive military government(s) in post-colonial Nigeria<sup>17</sup>. At the advent of his career, he attached himself in 1944 to Nigeria's pre-eminent politician-journalist, Nnamdi Azikiwe, who sent the 21-year-old Enahoro to edit the Southern Nigerian Defender in Warri. He became editor of the Daily Comet in Lagos (1945-49) and associate editor of West African Pilot (1950-52). In those roles, his position was used in a huge manner to fight and prepare the ground for the end of alien rule. He was most intolerable of colonialism and ensure that the momentum to end it was sustained all through his journalistic and political career. Commentators have significantly pointed to the fact that Enahoro was prominent in

politics at a time of rapid change mainly because of his insistence for the end of alien rule. It became the defining mantra of his politics. He was twice jailed for sedition by the colonial government, for an article mocking a former governor, and then for a speech allegedly inciting Nigerian troops serving in the British army. The British marked him as a firebrand, but even as he was jailed for a third time, he was beginning to reassess his position.

After having established his own short-lived newspaper, the Daily Star, in Sapele in 1951, he moved into the orbit of the Action Group (AG), the newly formed political party of Obafemi Awolowo. Enahoro was attracted by Awolowo's rationality and coherent political programme and became within a short time a confidant of the leadership of the party and especially Awolowo, who grew fond of him on account of his brilliance, visionary traits and commitments to both the party and democratic ideals. Their shared values were a critical factor in their bonding and that relationship was crucial in the march towards independence. However, that relationship didn't endure in perpetuity as it ruptured in the aftermath of the first republic. It ruptured in the immediate aftermath of the first republic and by the dawn of the second republic, Enahoro, said goodbye to Awolowo and the Unity Party of Nigeria. Writing about the split between Enahoro and Awolowo, veteran journalist, Dan Agbese, wrote, “a most colourful politician and powerful politician in the First Republic, Enahoro was Gowon's commissioner for information. He was a staunch member of the Action Group and its leader in the Mid-Western State (now Bendle State). But in 1979, he chose to tango with the NPN”<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Enahoro. *Fugitive Offender: The Story of a Political Prisoner*, London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1965, p.61.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Olakunle Aparo. *Foreword to Liberate and Democratize Nigeria: Seventy Key Speeches of Anthony Enahoro*, Lagos: Macmillan Nigerian Publishers Limited, 2006, xiv.

<sup>18</sup> Dan Agbese, “No Permanent Friends: Awolowo Failed to Keep all His Political Associates Under an

Before their split, he reined, enjoyed and suffered with Awolowo. Enahoro faced treasonable felony charges with Awolowo in 1962 and was jailed. Before the 1962 trials, he had become a trusted ally of the leader of the AG, becoming a member of the Federal House of Assembly. It was there, in February 1953, that he moved the historic motion for self-rule by 1956. Although it now appears a modest move, and was rejected because of the majority vote of northern members, it pressurized the British into political advance, and shook the north into accepting a faster pace towards independence. He was elected a member of the Western House of Assembly, and in 1954 became minister of home affairs in Awolowo's government. In this period Enahoro travelled frequently, especially to London as a member of the delegation to the series of constitutional conferences, which brought Nigeria to independence in 1960. By then, with Awolowo now leader of opposition to the ruling coalition of the northern leaders and Azikiwe, Enahoro was back in the Federal House as a key player. By 1962 the AG was in crisis, with a split within the party, and a state of emergency was declared by the Federal Government in the West. Party leaders found themselves accused of a coup plot, and, threatened with detention, Enahoro escaped via Ghana to London, from where, he consistently denied the charges. Nigeria requested Enahoro's extradition under the 1881 Fugitive Offenders Act, preventing his application for political asylum. Early in 1963, the new leader of the Labour party, Harold Wilson, detected the embarrassment caused by Enahoro's arrest and imprisonment. Labour went on the attack in the Commons, with support from some Tories, backed by a media furore. "The Enahoro affair" became an issue of human rights versus the

government's pusillanimous wish not to offend Nigeria, and put the Tory prime minister, Harold Macmillan, and his home secretary, Henry Brooke, in a difficult position. Enahoro was extradited, tried for treasonable felony and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, reduced on appeal. In his autobiography, *Fugitive Offender* (1965), he claimed that the trial was based on slender and doubtful evidence, and in the long run added to his political reputation.

After his release in 1966, he played an important part in the ensuing constitutional discussions ushered by General Yakubu Gowon. At the ad-hoc conference, his image bolstered as during the civil war as he led series of Federal Government delegations around the world articulating the position of government to foreign governments in his appointed position as commissioner for information and labour in the administration of General Yakubu Gowon. This made him a key part in the international public relations of the federal government during the civil war, calling on his quietly effective style of reasoning and his skills as a communicator. After the war, he held down wage increases in the oil boom and balanced media freedom with security needs. He lost his job in the coup of July 1975<sup>19</sup>. He was later involved with the ruling party in the ill-fated Second Republic government (1979-83). He became chairman of the National Democratic Coalition that rallied the groups opposing General Sani Abacha's dictatorship in the 90s. At that time, Enahoro once again escaped to London from where he continued to coordinate activities to undermine continued military rule in Nigeria. He gave series of conference talks and speeches calling for imposition of tough sanctions on Nigeria. His voice against military rule was sustained and helped re-shaped discourse on

Umbrella", *News Watch*, Special Publication, 1987, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Umar Ardo, Murtala Muhammed: *The Architect of Modern Nigeria*, New Jersey: Sungai Book, 2003.

the prospects to end military rule not only in Nigeria but in Africa as a whole. He maintained his towering opposition and figure in ensuring that as the 1990s was fading the world was compelled to demand that Nigeria as a matter of urgency deal with the issues of military rule, flagrant violations of human rights and cases of state abductions and killings which characterized the regime of General Sanni Abacha. He was chair of his own party, the Movement for National Reformation, and of the Pro-National Conference Organisation, but his real role had become one of a revered national icon.

### **The Political Activism and Philosophy of Anthony Enahoro**

In discussing the activism and philosophy of Enahoro, it is obvious that he was iconic, visionary and earned the respect and admiration of his country men and women because of his fearlessness and commitment to the idea of native independence. He was most intolerable of alien rule and in post-colonial era, his avowed opposition to military dictatorship helped in no small measure to end it and didn't not for a moment flinch in his determination to ensure its timely end. His outstanding speech under analysis bears an eloquent testimony to his standing as a prominent historical figure whose radicalism was not in doubt. He saw opportunity where the majority in Nigeria at that time didn't see such, hence moving the historical motion for independence in 1953. Idahosa Osagie Ojo maintained that when, "thinking over historical events, the question always arises as to the role of historical personalities and to what extent and in what manner they influence the course of history<sup>20</sup>," cannot be glossed over.

<sup>20</sup> Idahosa Osagie Ojo. "The Role of Individual in History" A Seminar Paper Presented in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna, 2019.

He married his media practice with his political activity seeing it as an imperative enterprise for the liberation of his country. By 1950, he collaborated with his friend, Arthur Prest to float the Mid-West Party, and a paper which ran until it was rested in 1953. His stature continued to rise and was subsequently a member of the constitutional conference in the United Kingdom where deliberated on the constitutional shape of the country. In the immediate aftermath of the 1966 which trailed the 1966 coups, Enahoro was elected leader of the then Mid-West delegation to the General Yakubu Gowon inaugurated Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference in Lagos, saddled with the task of finding a durable solution to the multiple challenges which confronted the nation. And when the civil war broke out, he was appointed the Federal Commissioner (Minister) for Information and Labour, 1967–74; Federal Commissioner for Special Duties, 1975. He continued to engage the political process in both the pre-and-post-colonial era with clarity of thoughts, purpose and ultimately in the believe that the country was worthy of his services. In the second republic, he later became a member of the National Party of Nigeria, NPN, 1978–83. He was the president, World Festival of Negro Arts and Culture, 1972–75.

When Nigeria relapsed back to military rule, he kept both his silence and distance, only attending to public functions and spoke clearly that the ship of state was adrift and the military was a bad idea that had to quit the political arena given that by nature and convention, the military was potentially ill-trained for governance. He however, returned to the trenches when the General Sanni Abacha became too repressive. He became the chairman of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), a pro-democracy group that fought for the restoration and enthrone of democracy. Enahoro was conferred with the national

honour of Commander, Order of the Federal Republic, CFR, in 1982, and was the chairman of the Movement for National Reformation, MNR, as well as the Pro-National Conference Organisation (PRONACO). He was awarded honorary DSC by the University of Benin in 1972. His publications include the treatise *Fugitive Offender and Liberate and Democratise Nigeria: Seventy Key Speeches*.

His brilliance and exploits as a remarkable journalist were made possible by his sense of mission and providence which enabled the gadfly of Nigerian nationalism, Nnamdi Azikiwe to float his mead groups of newspapers around that time and provided his skills with an avenue to exhibit his talents. Zik's his first newspaper, *West African Pilot* and chose Dante Alighieri's immortal lines as its motto: 'show the light, and the people will find the way'<sup>21</sup>. The newspaper sought for nothing short of absolute reversal of alien rule and naturally a lot of young adults flocked to it to join the task of enthroning native rule. Enahoro was one of them and he later became the editor of *Zik's Comet*, Kano, 1945-49, also associate editor *West African Pilot*, Lagos, editor-in-chief *Morning Star*, 1950-53.

When his motion was rejected by Parliament and the northern Members of Parliament actually staged a walkout as a consequence of the attempt, it did not deter his subsequent actions as a committed democrat and progressive member of the parliament. The successful movement of the motion for Nigeria's independence did not take place until 1958. After Enahoro's initial attempt in 1953, Chief S.L. Akintola attempted to move the second motion for Nigeria's independence in 1957 and though his motion was passed by Parliament it was not acquiesced to by the British colonial

authorities and it therefore failed as the first move by Enahoro. The successful moving of the motion for Nigeria's independence did not take place until August 1958 and this was done by Chief Remi Fani-Kayode. Fani-Kayode's motion was not only passed by Parliament but it was also acquiesced to by the British. His motion had called for independence to be granted to Nigeria on April 2nd 1960 and though it was passed by Parliament and acquiesced to by the British a slight amendment proposing that the month of independence should be moved from April 2nd to October 1st was proposed by a fourth motion to Parliament by Sir Tafawa Balewa in 1959 and it was passed. As a consequence of that Nigeria gained her independence in 1960. The least and most dignifying thing that can be done is to record the role which Enahoro and his fellow patriots played during the agitation to reverse alien rule as an act of appreciation by successive generation of Nigerians to their act of service.

### **The Impact of Enahoro's Activism on the Nationalist Movement**

Unlike attempts by some commentators to blind-side the historic motion which Anthony Enahoro pushed in 1953 because it failed to lead to independence, however, upon further readings and research, one will realise that the motion actually helped in no small way in leading the country unto the path of independence. It helped the country reached the finish line for independence with far-reaching implications for even Africa. At this point, a detailed look at the motion under discourse for more analysis is necessary. After the end of the Second World War (WWII) in 1945, a lot of territories under colonial began the race for independence partly because of some international factors. Fueled by both local and international factors, such colonies including Nigeria demanded for independence, some resorted to violence

<sup>21</sup> Nnamdi Azikiwe. *My Odyssey: An Autobiography*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1999, p. 290.

while others opted for negotiated independence. For Enahoro, his stance and the accompanying strain which his motion caused were not surprising since for him, independence was for him the ultimate goal. He could sacrifice anything including his personal liberty, comfort, and even his life to see that Nigeria was free from continued alien rule. His idea was nothing but independence, absolutely and nothing else. Typically, Enahoro stated that:

Many years ago, sir, when I was a young man and I entered public-life, the popular slogan was “self-government in our life-time”. But as the country advanced, this slogan went out of vague and the new catchphrase became “self-government as soon as practicable”<sup>22</sup>.

All cross the entire gamut of the motion as in many of his other speeches and motions, it was an appeal, a rallying cry that the time was no other but then to ensure that independence became a reality. Beyond the motion, Enahoro, absolutely went a great length to convince political party leaders and members about the imperativeness of the cause. The motion is predicated on the premise that the day for independence was now without equivocation. Perhaps events in Ghana, next door to Nigeria and a rival in the era was as much a factor as well in the quest for the reversal from alien rule. The narrative that Nigeria was the pre-eminent leader and could not loose such an enviable pride of place to Ghana, an assumed continental leadership, which Ghana was baying to usurp.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the motion was intended to make Nigeria the about the

first black-nation to attain political independence, a move that could have consolidated her position as the acknowledged leader of independent Africa. A ranking that will have established the country in both continental and global politics. The motion succinctly portrayed Nigeria as a progressive nation that needed to rid itself of alien rule as a matter of national expediency.<sup>24</sup>

The media and even politicians of that era believed that the 1953 motion of independence was powerful and unanimously agreed that though it didn't fly then, it however, remains a very important reference point in the annals of Nigeria. The motion was a bold statement felt in Nigeria, London and around the world that the country was indeed prepared to take up the task of governance and nothing was going to stop such an occurrence. The motion stated that beyond freedom for the country, it insisted that it was a nagging role for the country can only be realized in the aftermath of alien rule. For Nigeria to fulfill her manifest destiny, then alien rule was not sustainable. The motion pointed to the unendurable pain of continuing in that path and insisted that the best option for Nigeria was to take the route of liberation and nothing else will be suitable for its citizenry. Some might be quick to point out that the motion was opposed in the North, hence, it could not be said that it was acceptable on a grand national scale, but it can be argued that it never left the north wholesomely against the motion, it was for the north about timing. The north was not in the strictest sense of the word against liberation or as the case maybe the end of alien rule. The

<sup>22</sup> 1953 Motion of Independence.

<sup>23</sup> Usman, Y. B. *For the Liberation of Nigeria*, New Beacon, London, 1989, p. 105.

<sup>24</sup> Wasiu Iliyasu, ‘Africa Has Come of Age’: A Fleeting Glimpse of General Murtala’s Addis Ababa Speech and Foreign Policy Thrust, A Paper Presented at the Department of History and Security Studies, Umaru Musa Yar’ Adua University, Kastina, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2011.

enduring legacy of that motion was that in the final analysis independence came to the country.

At the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many colonial territories began agitations for self-rule, including Nigeria and this was made possible due to a combination of factors such as the end of the second world war, the return of troops of colonial origins who fought in the second world war, the birth of United Nations and the enactment of the Atlantic Charter. In the case of Nigeria, activists such as Enahoro help kept the flame of resistance burning demanded an end to colonialism under the basis that equality of man and the right to choose under what form and kind of government was inalienable and fundamental to human dignity. It was a momentous period which was at odds with the colonial overlords wish to tighten the colonial grip. At any rate, Enahoro's motion had acute effect on the turn of event in the final analysis. While the specific date of his choice wasn't met, it can be argued that his speech fired the imagination of not only fellow nationalists but the entire populace. His rabid opposition and consistency in firm opposition even in the face of danger except Nigeria became free became a rallying point for all. Enahoro made a hard choice and profoundly articulated his vision regardless of the outcome. Significantly, as a result of his effort even beyond the country, some nationalist figures drew inspiration from him and insisted on native governance. One place in particular when events in Nigeria was keenly watched and vice-versa was Ghana. Enahoro's independence motion here in Nigeria resonated well with the anti-colonial struggle in African and helped in no small measure in sustaining the continuation of the struggle.

The response from the colonial masters was not palatable. The colonial government

responded through diverse means such as harassments, intimidation, arrestment and other divisive measures to register their displeasure. They encouraged the North to back-peddle the motion by pointing out that the region was not matured enough for self-government. They fed tales such that were absolutely in tandem with the growing restiveness in the North. When arrests were made and it didn't put a lid on the growing demand for an end to colonial governance, they conceded to self-governance in the various regions as well as constitutional talks leading to the independence. All of these steps were half-measures in 1956. In any event, Enahoro continued to canvass his position without fear. He joined mobilization efforts by his party leadership to make in-road into the North with the desire to break the feudal and conservative grip on power in the region. Besides this, Enahoro devised other strategies by travelling to the United Kingdom with his message standing that the time for an end of colonialism as it was crumbling in India was also ripe in Africa and particularly in Nigeria.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Enahoro's Speech**

A significant review of the anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria cannot be complete without a thorough review of the 1953 independence motion as well as the role of Anthony Enahoro and many other nationalists. The struggle was made possible through an unexpected but sustained agitation for an end to alien rule and its replacement with independence by Enahoro and his cohorts of patriots. Highly talented, Enahoro used his platforms, writing skills, media and political networks to collaborate towards his ideals, which was simple and end to colonial rule in Nigeria. The need for a detailed review of his posturing, position and ultimately the independence motion for 1953 will help present crop of leaders to know that it is better to stand alone on

principle than to bootlick or compromise at the expense of one's own people. Enahoro was an outstanding, visionary and highly principled leader. Of course, he as a human may not have attained the status of a super-human but when juxtaposed against the then prevailing reality, his passion, patriotism, devotion, selflessness and determination for the supreme interest of the nation cannot be denied. Such a leader is a rare breed. The contemporary challenge of nation-building calls for deeper reflection of how the nationalists such as Anthony Enahoro envisioned a greater nation. This is a uniquely compelling moment for the country where bad governance, bad politics, tribalism, underdevelopment with devastating consequences for the country makes some commentators reflect on the past. For the moment, the tribe of political leaders are mainly concerned about their interest, endemic corruption, indiscipline, lack of political ideology and moral decadency.

The bottom line is that a peep into the both the life of such figures as Anthony Enahoro elicits hope and an awakening for deep political consciousness, passionate nationalism, demand for patriotism to revamp the country from the path of tragedies in which the country has been plunged in post-colonial Nigeria. The present-day socio-economic hardships, dashed hopes and unacceptable insecurity in the country has left the country prostrate and there is a crying need for prepared leadership. In the past, there appears a deliberate and definitive purpose to governance. Those who stepped into the political arena are deliberate in their agenda. The nationalists were conscious in their desire for good governance. They struck a rhythm of hope, promise and reasonable purposefulness. In more precise terms, such historical figures as Enahoro and many others were bold, determined, courageous and fierce in wanting only the best for

Nigeria and as such could be a source of inspiration and instructional lesson for the young generation.

In looking towards a glorious future, we need to draw inspiration from the past, thus a re-appraisal of the life, works and actions of Anthony Enahoro, most especially the 1953 historic motion, how it shaped and re-shaped political activism in the build-up to Nigeria's independence. It is a total imperative to look backwards as we strive to build a strong, dynamic and prosperous country. Nothing can be more challenging, if not disadvantageous if we fail to draw on such lessons. His legacy of services to Nigeria should be further interrogated and his writings and speeches can help inflame the passion for greater service by present-day political actors.

### Conclusion

This paper examined Anthony Enahoro's inspirational 1953 independence motion 'let my people go' and its impact on the nation and even Africa in some measure. His life time of service which commenced almost immediately after secondary school is a telling fact that his life was garnished by patriotism, selfless devotion and readiness to face whatever fate that was thrust on him. He was daring and paid dearly for his political beliefs. He was harassed and incarcerated yet unbowed. Therefore, that the 1953 historic motion didn't receive immediate traction by leading the country to independence in 1956 doesn't mean the motion was less historic. Politically speaking, Enahoro's action set in motion a chain reaction that caused ripples in both Nigeria and Africa. His essence and ultimate significance of the motion was that it for a cry for a just society, where native governance will displace alien rule, where the preference of the people for what style and kind of political structure must be respected. His motion was a stab at the heart

of colonialism. The motion was a positive energy that sapped energy from the scripted believe that colonialism was the best type of government for the people. Unfortunately, the incipient tribal politics reared its head in aftermath but overall, the motion was a huge wake-up call for independence and it happened within less than a decade. His greatly enriched life and career can be a vista and fountain of inspiration for all, irrespective of professional career. It would be a tragedy to continue to ignore the essential lessons which a peep into the role, life and service of such a hugely transformative leadership under review.

In conclusion, the 1953 motion by Anthony Enahoro and many of such by his peers and contemporaries is commended to Nigerians and Africans at home and abroad, as well as lovers of both the country and the continent, as it will facilitate and inflame them with deeper understanding and passion/patriotism in the quest for socio-economic development that will drive decision-making to lift the both entities to enviable position within the comity of nations. It will also serve to inculcate a sense of history in the younger generation of Nigerians and Africans and heightens the consciousness of their identity.

### References

A.H.M. Kirk-Greene. "Who Coined the name Nigeria?" West African, 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1956.

Albert Olakunle Aparo. Foreword to Liberate and Democratize Nigeria: Seventy Key Speeches of Anthony Enahoro, Lagos: Macmillan Nigerian Publishers Limited, 2006, xiv.

Anthony Enahoro, Independence Motion, Debate in House of Representatives, 1953.

Anthony Enahoro, Independence Motion. Debate in House of Representatives, 1953.

Anthony Enahoro. Fugitive Offender: The Story of a Political Prisoner, London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1965, p.61.

Bako, Ahmed. "The Igbo Factor in the History of Intergroup Relations and Commerce in Kano: Opportunities and Challenges Revisited" 50<sup>th</sup> Professorial Inaugural Lecture, 2024, p. 14.

Dan Agbese, "No Permanent Friends: Awolowo Failed to Keep all His Political Associates Under an Umbrella", News Watch, Special Publication, 1987, p. 20.

Fenner Brockway. "Speech at the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, 1952.

Idahose Osagie Ojo. "The Role of Individual in History" A Seminar Paper Presented in the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna, 2019.

Lanre Idowu, Master of His Age: The Story of Anthony Enahoro,

Michael Crowther. The Story of Nigeria, London: Faber and Faber, 1962, 1.

Moga Ezekiel, Maimuna Abullahi Dantsho and Abashi John Abede. "A Historical Debate on the Restructuring of Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" in Jalingo Journal of African Studies.

Olaniyan, Azeez and Asuelime, L. "Boko Haram insurgency and the widening

- of cleavages in Nigeria”, African Security, 7(2): 1-19, 2014.
- Obafemi Awolowo, “On a Motion for Self-Government” A Speech given in the House of Representatives” in Voice of Reason: Selected Speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Vol. 1, Akure, Fagbamigbe Publishers, 1981, p. 134.
- Obaro Ikime, “The Colonial Experience in Nigeria: Administrative and Political Changes” in Can Anything Good Come Out of History (ed), Ibadan, Bookcraft, 2018.
- Olaniyan, Azeez, “Nigeria and the Undying Spirit of Separatism” 11<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture Series, 2023, p. 15.
- Olaniyan, Azeez. “Hanging in the balance: interplay of forces and the resilience of Nigerian state”, in Lucky Asuelimeh and Suzzane Francis (eds) Selected Themes in African Development Studies, Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2014.
- Onabamiro, S. Glimpses into Nigerian History, Lagos: Macmillan, 1993.
- The Guardian Newspaper, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2024.
- Umar Ardo, Murtala Muhammed: The Architect of Modern Nigeria, New Jersey: Sungai Book, 2003.
- Umar Ardo, Murtala Muhammed: The Architect of Modern Nigeria, New Jersey: Sungai Book, 2003.