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Igbo nation, modern statecraft and the geopolitics of national survival in a multiethnic Nigeria

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The central argument of the paper is that the Nigerian state has consistently failed in its efforts to address the structurally-defective pattern of governance characterized largely by imbalance and lopsidedness, particularly in the allocation and distribution of human and material (public) resources. A situation where a country of this nature is being monopolized largely by one section or reign for the past four decades is a source of concern to many especially those from the other geo-political zones.

Keywords: Ethnic identity, modern statecraft, Igbo Nation.

INTRODUCTION

The body (ethnic-constituents) is ravaged and the edifice (Nigeria) is crumbling. Even the quality surveyor (the British colonialists) lied to us. It is time we re-designed the interior relations (inter-ethnic relations) of the house-hold (the Nigerian Union) (Soyinka, 1998: 30-32).

What is important is that different peoples should agree to live together or agree to separate along clearly defined lines. Nigeria can be made to harbour all the linquistic groups which form its multinational structure by broa-dening the base upon which our union is founded (Azi-kiwe, 1969).

This paper seeks to critically examine the implications of the unwholesome Nigerian situation particularly as it affects or impacts on the citizenship, identity and con-sciousness of Igbo nation. In this wise, some salient questions need to be addressed and these include: where does the Igbo society fit in the context of contem-porary Nigerian state? What are the possibilities open to them (Igbo) in their continued socio-economic and political intercourse with the other constituent parts of the Nigerian polity?

It has been argued that the most challenging issue con-fronting developing nations today has to do with the establishment of institutional or structural arrangements that can effectively address the problem of ethnic diver-sity or seek to unify heterogeneous populations by limit-ing expressions of group differences and allowing popu-lation groups to co-exist peacefully (Mbaku et al., 2001; Ayittery, 1992). Though problems related to ethnic diver-sity are not limited to the Third World as it is also preva-lent in most advanced nations such as the United States, Canada and the Western European countries, the issue tends to be more contentious in Third World countries.

Nigeria, to be sure, is a multi-religious, ethnic and cultu-ral society with enormous potentials for economic, social and democratic development. But unlike other pluralistic societies across the globe such as the United States that duly utilized its political complexity to advance its society in all levels of human endeavour, Nigeria is yet to appre-ciate the ethnic differences for the purposes of attaining a greater development. The fundamental question is why has the Nigerian modern state not taken advantage of its complexity to advance itself just like other societies (India, United States) do? This probably finds explanation in Nigeria's historical background.

Historical background

As Arthur Nwankwo (1972: 10) remarked, 'there is no doubt that the Nigerian state is at a crossroad. The Nigerian modern state is a product of colonial contraption and complications. The artificiality of Nigeria's boundaries and the sharp cultural differences among its people, point out the fact that Nigeria is a British creation (Afigbo, 1989). The amalgamation in 1914 of the British colonies and the Protectorate of southern and northern Nigeria to form the modern nation state of Nigeria was in the opi-nion of some 'a mistake'. Several factors informed this opinion: first was the ethno-religious differences between the Hausa-Fulani dominated North and the motley ethnic groups of Southern

Nigeria. Northern Nigeria was predo-minantly Muslim and was politically organised into emi-rates whereas the South was composed largely of Chris-tians with varying forms of socio-political and cultural structures. Second, the South embraced western civiliza-tion earlier than the north did. The third and more funda-mental factor was that Nigeria emerged from an arrange-ment made by the British for its own selfish interest, the few indigenous nationalists saw the exercise as a 'colo-nial masters' unification, not really for the benefit of the people.

In reacting to one may term interest driven political exercise carried out by Frederick Lord Lugard, the Nige-rian nationalist Obafemi Awolowo (1947) argued:

'Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical expres-sion. There are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are English, Welsh or France, the word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not'.

Similarly, independent Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1947) asserted that:

Since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern pro-vince in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper… it is still far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country.

Buttressing both views, Sir Arthur Richard submitted that, 'it is only the accident of British Suzerainty which as made Nigeria one country. It is still far from being one country or one nation socially or even economically… Socially and politically there are deep differences bet-ween the major tribal groups. For instance, they do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life, and they represent different stages of culture' (Osuntokun, 1979: 99).

To aggravate the situation, Arthur Richard between 1946 and 1947, laid a solid foundation for regionalism and tribalism in Nigerian politics as he established three regions in the country, representing the North, West and the East. Since there was no provision made for the other ethnic groups, ethnic minorities strongly felt that such a political structure was inimical to their interest.

This idea of regionalism generated a lot of criticisms particularly from those who believed in the unity of Nige-ria as one strong and viable political entity. They argued that although the idea was intended to allow each one of the three regions to develop at its own pace and in keeping with its own cultural and social desires and aspirations, it also very unfortunately laid strong foun-dation for injustice and emphasized regional and tribal loyalties to the detriment of national unity. Perhaps be-cause of these reasons, the Nigerian state at indepen-dence in 1960, inherited a weak socio/political structure, defective and unbalanced federation, an intensification of ethnic consciousness and rivalries, a subverted indige-

nous ethos of government and culture and indeed an inexperienced leadership (Nigeria, 1987: 31). All these, therefore, elicited and brought to bear the projection and promotion of ethnicity as one of the many instruments of national survival, the ethnic group struggle for recognition and inclusion, for separate development and paradoxi-cally for the control of the centre since such is crucial to what form future association would take.

Conceptual clarifications: Igbo nation

We could begin by asking, who are the Igbos, who and who does this Igboness encompass, and where are they found? Certainly, the Igbos are those who have as their natural home the Igbo-land which is located formerly in the East Central region of the Southern Nigeria, but of today located in the South East geopolitical zone com-prising five core Igbo speaking states – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. It also extends to some parts of Delta state (Agbor, Ika, Issel-Uku, Anioma) and parts of Rivers State (Obigbo, Ikwerre, Egbema, Elle, Omoku). Typically, the Igbo nation is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the others are, Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba (Nwala, 1985; Ifemesia, 1979; Imoagene, 1990).

The search for a scientific understanding of the Igbo nation is not recent; it has its historical roots in the early twentieth century, at a time when Igbo political conscious-ness and interest were aroused by the women's demon-stration against the warrant chiefs system in 1929. The Igbo as a people have a great historical and cultural pedi-gree as widely acknowledged, recognized and attested by some world class anthropologists, colonial administra-tors and foreign missionaries who have always recog-nized their great human qualities, their strive and dyna-mism, their versatility and creativity. For instance, Forde and Jones (1950: 25) contend that Igbo people are gene-rally held to be tolerant, ultra-democratic and highly individualistic. They have a strongly developed com-mercial sense and a pragmatic approach to life. Corrobo-rating this, Nwabara (1977) opined that the people exhibit a tendency of materialism resulting in a highly compete-tive and economically stratified society.

To give full vent to their extraordinary business acu-men, the Igbo often migrate in search of greener pastures elsewhere, creating in this process a vibrant Igbo diaspo-ra population and culture. As Smock (1971) put it, 'they are found in every part of Nigeria and even beyond parti-cularly in cosmopolitan centers engaging in gigantic business'. Migration of the Igbo to other parts of Nigeria is essentially a British creation. When the British govern-ment took over the formal control of Nigeria and with the construction of the Eastern District of the Nigerian Railway, Igbo people took of in waves of migration criss-crossing the length and breadth of Nigeria. Some of these movements started with skilled or semi- skilled labourers. It is argued that around Igbo the majority of the workers in Northern Nigeria were mostly Igbo and this

inflow of the Igbo northwards has been explained in terms of their early interest in Western education (Mgbeafulu, 2003).

Statecraft

Students of International Relations hold that Nation-State remains the most primary actor in the global political system. In other words, the state is currently the most significant institution through which humankind organizes itself and also through which it seeks to provide solutions to common problems, including that of protection from harm and injustice (Terriff et al., 1999). It follows also that the development of any democratic culture is largely dependent on the existence of a modern state that can protect the rights of its citizens and extract duties from them. Hence, modern states are characterized by the practice of equity, the rule of law and the search for legitimacy.

In political theory, the concept of state role has been subjected to varying interpretations and explanations. For instance, the way and manner the Marxists, anarchists and fascists conception of state role and function is quite different from the way Aristotle, Plato, Locke and Thomas Hobbes view it. The Marxist for instance, argues that the state cannot be understood separately from the economic-structure of society, and they see the state as a mechanism through which class conflict is ameliorated to ensure the long- term survival of the capitalist system. They thus regard it as an instrument of class oppression and suppression which emerges out of, and in a sense reflects the class system (Heywood, 1997; Gamble, 1981).

Supporting this argument, Max Weber contends that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. The phenomenon is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence. Hence, 'politics' denotes striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state (Adrain and Apter, 1995: 138). The fascists in a related sense conceive the state as an omnipotent, hierarchical organization can be made to overwhelm and consume all particularistic interests of individuals or groups of individuals. In this sense, there is 'nothing against the state, nothing over it and nothing beyond it' (Johari, 1982).

In contrast, Aristotle and John Locke stress that the state exists to advance the common good which suggests securing universal care and welfare for the people and making provisions for equal conditions and opportunities for all citizens of the state. It also signifies the collection of objective interests or expectable rewards, direct or indirect, that all participants may have in common (Putnam, 1993; Deutsche, 1980). Plato, in the same line of thought expresses that the state exist to promote justice in society. Justice here implies that people should

accept their positions and contribute their quota to the functioning of the society. In essence, Plato sees the state as a neutral arbiter among competing groups and individuals in society. The neutrality also demonstrates the fact that it acts in the interests of all citizens and therefore, represents the common good or public interest (Rader, 1980).

Significantly, the crisis of the post- colonial nation-state project derived essentially from the construction of the project on the basis of European models rather than on the basis of Africa's own rich and varied history and experience of socio-political organization (Davidson, 1992; Laasko and Olukoshi, 1996: 9). Diamond and Plattner (1994: XVI) presented the nature and character of the modern African state in thus manner:

The new states of Africa are historically disaggregative, institutionally shallow, internationally dependent and ethnically riven. The result is not only chronic-political stability and repression (carried out by leaders desperate to hang on to power and by dominant groups anxious to preserve their hegemony) but also failure in both state-building and nation-building.

The question arises: what is the Nigerian modern state like, what is it up to, is it really neutral, impartial, unbiased when it comes to issues of distributive politics and justice, does it promote the principle of proportionality and equitable allocation of other resources in the polity? Specifically, the Nigerian state has so far not been able to build an appreciable degree of confidence among many Nigerians and groups, ensure some discipline within the ranks of the elite, manage the economy in the interest of the citizenry or construct the much needed platforms of inclusion, tolerance and participation (Ihonvbere, 1999). Interestingly, the common perception reflected in popular parlance in Nigeria is that, the state is a national cake to be divided and distributed (Forest, 1995: 252).

Since independence, successive Nigerian governments (both military and civilian) have failed to properly manage the nation's diversity. Instead, many of the country's governments have pursued shortsighted and opportunistic public policies that have actually exacerbated intergroup conflict and encouraged violent mobilization by groups to either protect their existing political and economic advantages or resist further marginalization. The question, is, how does this kind of method or approach reflect or represent the federal system of government Nigeria claims to practice? Does federalism promotes centralization of power? As Nwankwo (1997) argues part of the problems of the modern Nigerian state, and indeed, an essential element of its present predilection towards disaster, stems from the denial of the multiethnic, multicultural and multilinguistic structure of the federation. This has seriously led to the domination of one or more ethnic configurations over others; and a strategy whereby a handful of individuals hiding under the cloak and cover of 'one Nigeria' have tended to waste the nation's resources and potentials in the pursuit of their personal

ambitions and interests. Put differently, the Nigerian state has remained just like its colonial progenitor, an instrument of exploitation and subjugation of the popular classes and a tool for primitive accumulation and class consolidation for the hegemonic groups. The few who control state resources have access to all imaginable perks while the excluded majorities are victims of all forms of abuse. For these reasons, the struggle to attain and retain power has become titanic, a veritable war fought without restraint and with total disregard for the ethos, norms and conventions of democracy (Enemuo and Momoh, 1999: 74).

Nationalism

The term 'nationalism' conveys a number of different meanings. Often, it denotes a state of mind, a consciousness manifested by members of a group that they belong to a particular nation or nationality, an awareness of sharing a common culture or identity, a sense of fellowship towards those recognized as co-nationals. For Alter (1999), nationalism is both an ideology and a political movement that holds the nation and the sovereign nation-state as crucial indwelling values, and which manages to mobilize the political will of a people or a large section of a population. It also implies the sense of a special unity which marks off those who share in it from the rest of mankind (Connor, 1994; Smith, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Kohn, 1939).

Meanwhile, the thought of embarking on ethnic nationalism or self-determination evolves whenever it appears that state nationalism is failing in its duties to give due recognition to all nationalities that comprise such a nation-state. Ethnic nationalism in this context presupposes a politicized consciousness centered upon an ethnic identity borne out of shared commonalities, seeking to achieve unity, autonomy, recognition and group interest by mobilizing ethnic based constituencies. It, indeed, confronts a highly-centralized, scientifically-nationalised and coercively empowered state structure with an impressive mandate of the dominant ethnic groups who constitute in most cases the overwhelming numerical majority (Norbu, 1992: 185).

Certainly, groups that feel partially or totally submerged and alienated in a state that they too feel belonged can be tempted to demand for a separate nationhood. However, the demand for 'representation of rights' by disadvantaged groups is a demand for inclusion. Kymlicka (1999) and Young (1989) emphasize that group representation rights implies institutional mechanisms and public resources supporting two activities: the first is the self-organization of group members so that they acquire the power of asserting a positive meaning for their own identity, and the second, is the voicing of policy positions on those matters that affect them and the generating of their own policy proposals which decision-makers will have to take into consideration. Young puts the whole idea in thus manner:

In a society where some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, insisting that as citizens persons should leave behind their particular affiliations and experiences to adopt a general point of view serves only to reinforce the privileged; for the perspective and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate this unified public, marginalizing or silencing those of other groups (Young, 1989: 261-62).

For this reason, the 19th and 20th centuries were markedly an age of separatist/ethnic/cultural nationalism. For example, there were cases, where French speakers in Quebec felt that their nationality was different from English speaking Canadians, Tibetans sought to rescue itself from Chinese colonization, the Scottish nationalist party argued for a separate Scottish nationality within Britain; and the state of Bosnia was torn apart in 1992 when Serbs living in Bosnia declared that they were of a different nationality from Muslims and Croatians. The trend was the same in many post-colonial states in Africa where several civil wars and ethnic conflicts have resulted from attempts by one part of the state to secede and form a new state. Some of these countries include Nigeria and Zaire (Heraclides, 1991; Young, 1993).

Students of Nigerian history and politics have argued that ethnic nationalism crept into Nigerian politics around 1951 when ethnic concerns were elevated above national unity by representatives of the three dominant political parties – National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Action Group (AG) and Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). Each of these parties had its roots, strong affinity and connection with one of the three major ethnic groups – Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani respectively.

Today, in spite of any nostalgic effusions about one in brotherhood and deeply binding affinities, various ethnic units in Nigeria do consider themselves autonomous and to a large extent, want to maintain that identity. Strong ethnic identifications frequently result not only in the exclusion and marginalization of some groups from the mainstream of national politics and the economy but also give rise to ethnic competition. By ethnic competition, we mean the striving by ethnic groups for valued goods that are scarce in comparison for the demand for them (Bates, 1974; Hameso, 1995).

This development may continue to be case in the near future until the emergence of a truly modern Nigerian states in which every Nigerian, whatever his ethnic origin, would feel a complete sense of belonging irrespective of the ethnic or religious background of the political leadership. Until then, the average Nigerian would continue to rely on his ethnic or sectional group for the protection of his interests and general well being (Irukwu, 2007).

The Igbo question in Nigeria's political configuration

Following the end of the Nigerian civil war (1967 - 1970), many had thought that the question of Nigeria's unity and

territorial integrity had been laid to rest once and for all.

Though the war ended in 1970, it appears the same war is still on albeit by other means against the Igbo which some have tagged: '*the Igbo question* in Nigeria'. To Uwalaka (2003: 19), it is a 'war' against the people's psyche, against the people's self-consciousness, against the people's economic, welfare, but symbolized in the now widely used word 'marginalization'. This consists in the official and calculated attempts by the powers that be to keep the Igbo poor, deprived and psychologically defeated.

Tony Momoh, a one time Nigerian minister of information captured the situation thus:

The trauma of the civil war would have led many to insanity. But the Igbo people came into Nigeria after the war with a bang. They started from below and climbed out of the pit of utter despair … but something seemed to have been retained – memories of a war that saw the stark reality between saving your life and dying in saving the life of others. Self-preservation is built into the psyche of man and you cannot blame our brothers across the Niger for choosing themselves before others … If nothing else, this attitude and the belief in self before any other has remained with our brothers across the Niger (Vanguard, February 16, 2003: 9).

Uwalaka's (2003: 59) opines that fear has driven many Igbos to the most self-depreciating meekness, in which they project an image of a mild-mannered ethnic group, an image which other Nigerian ethnic groups see as evidence of cowardice or meekness which could in part explain the incessant attacks on Igbos and their property.

In fact the whole issue of Igbo question in Nigeria can be reduced to three major spheres, namely:

The economic sphere

The general assumption is that the Igbo are in control when it comes to the Nigeria's economy. This probably may be predicated upon their aggressive, competitive and enterprising spirit. Without a doubt, the Igbo prior to Nigeria's independence were once a force to reckon with, as far as commerce and industry in Nigeria were concerned. In the colonial era, the Igbo had great men such as Sir Louis Phillip Odumegwu Ojukwu, one of Africa's most successful entrepreneurs at a time when the business environment was highly disciplined to the extent that integrity and hard work were the only key factors for success in business.

The economic strangulation of the Igbo aspiration started in the first Republic when the Northern dominated federal government located all the important projects earmarked for implementation in the first national development plan (1962 - 1968) in the northern Nigeria. Some of such projects include, the £150 million Bornu Railway extension project, £50 million defence and administration factory and the £7 million Kainji-Dam, Sokoto Road project. Meanwhile, the Iron and Steel Industry originally for Eastern Nigeria was subverted. The claim was that it would mean using Iron-Ore mined in the North to run an industry in the East (Nnoli, 1995: 116; Dudley, 1973: 69) despite the obvious fact that oil from Eastern Nigeria and Niger Delta locations was routinely piped north to feed the Kaduna oil refinery.

This pattern of denying the Igbo area federally owned projects and industries has continued unabated, and thus, made Achebe (1983: 49) to comment that 'many have tried to ask but nobody has quite succeeded in explaining away the sitting of five steel mills worth 4.5 billion naira on final completion with estimated employment capacity of 100,000 by 1990, only in the North and West of the country'.

As finance minister of Nigeria during the civil war, Obafemi Awolowo put a ceiling of 20 pounds on all bank accounts that had been operated in Biafra during the hostilities, a calculated attempt to neutralize the savings and therefore the economic capacity of the Igbo people to rehabilitate themselves and to re-enter the Nigerian economy. Other strangulatory policies that have operated to marginalize the Igbo include the manipulation of the revenue sharing arrangements and minimal allocation of federally funded economic projects (Ikpeze, 2000: 96).

It could be recalled in respect of revenue- sharing that between the Phillipson Commission Report (1946) and the Dina Committee Report (1968) the principle of derivation had always enjoyed pride of place among the criteria for revenue allocation in Nigeria. During this period, agricultural produce was the major source of revenue. Hence the west and the north whose cocoa and groundnuts were respectively bigger revenue earners than the east's palm produce enjoyed higher revenue allocation based on the principle of derivation. But when it was clear by the late 1960s that petroleum, located mainly in the east, was going to replace agriculture as the major revenue source, the west and the north through the government in power, to the embarrassment of the east, ensured the amendment of the principle of derivation to the point, where today it is no longer a criterion for reve -nue- sharing. This 'death-blow' using Ikpeze's expression was executed through Decree No. 13, 1970 which only recognized two equally weighed principles – population and equality of states (Ibid: 97).

Again, shortly after the war, the need to establish state owned firms (the indigenization) was brought to bear. The federal government consequently invested in manufacturing industries particularly in the areas of cement, chemicals, sugar, textile, wood paper mill, palm products, salt. It also ventured into service industries such as, banking and insurance. Thus, refineries were sited in Port Harcourt, Warri and Kaduna and none in the east. Instead, what the Igbo got for their clamour for the sitting of a petrochemical industry in their land was the ceding of Ndoni/Egbema and Obigbo/Afam oil fields to neighbour-

ing states in the 1976 boundary adjustment exercise (Udenwa, 2003).

Today, Nigeria has about four international airports and two seaports. The former are located in Abuja (North-Central), Kano (North West), Lagos (South West) and Port Harcourt (South-South) while the latter is well located in Lagos (South-West) and Port Harcourt (South-South). Interestingly, neither international airport nor seaport is located in the South East. The question is, why is it so, in spite of the fact that Aba (Ariaria market) and Onitsha main market are two of the largest market in Nigeria if not in West Africa? The assumption is that since these markets attract a lot of foreign traders into the country, there should be as a matter of necessity an international airport and a seaport in the South east.

The effect of all these has led many Igbo people especially those who have inclination for commerce to rely mainly on 'informal' sector of the economy. The major function of the 'informal sector' according to Herrle (1982) has understandably been informally to distribute 'survival chances for all those who are denied access to the formal sector'. Activities that make the least demands in terms of capital, skills and technology, such as street-trading, hawking, casual labour and petty services, lock-up shops, have formed the easiest ports of entry.

The political strand

Except in the recent times (during Olusegun Obasanjo's regime), the Igbo have always been short-changed in the mainstream Nigeria politics. A close observation of the pattern of appointments in Nigeria suggests that the federal government may have resolved that no Igbo should be trusted with a key sensitive command position. This situation perhaps prompted Omo Omoruyi to remark thus: What about the Igbo, a major ethnic nationality in the South that dominated the officer group before the civil war? It is a fact that since the civil war, the Igbo one of the three major ethnic nationalities has now become a glorified ethnic minority in the military and in the polity. Do you know that by the unwritten rules governing succession within the armed forces, no Igbo officer would ever be trusted by the military leadership to become a service chief for the army (TELL, April 5, 1999: 25).

Alli (2001: 65) observed, the ex-Biafran officers … were condescendingly referred to as re-absorbed officers, and therefore, had a boundary, and their horizon hardly exceed the rank of brigadier-general, only a few were fortunate to squeeze through the rank of major-general in the three services, serving or retired, living or dead … For instance, the appointment of Rear Admiral Allison Madueke as the Chief of Naval Staff from November 1993 to August 1994 was characterized as an accidental breakthrough for the Igbo in the military service where everything was done to repress the Igbo officers (Alli, 2001: 64). The glorious rise using Albert's (2002) phrase, of Major-General Ike Nwachukwu in the army was also

not ordinary given his Igbo ethnic origin.

Lending credence to this, Igbokwe (1995: 24) added that those who managed to get there are either disgraced or retired with ignominy. Important military facilities such as mechanized division and armories are sited in the north and the west and are also commanded by northerners and westerners. Igboland is virtually bereft of such military facilities. But they are remembered when it comes to high-level assignments mainly in non-combatant positions (usually in the navy and the Air Force). The under-representation of the Igbo in the military, complemented by a similar situation in the police, state security service, directorate of military intelligence is using Ikpeze's words, a clear case of the deliberate violation of the post-war principles of 'federal character' and 'quota system' by the victorious coalition.

To be sure, the lowly presence of the Igbo in the military has been brought about over the past quarter of a century through the re-absorption of only a negligible number of the Nigerian army officers of Igbo origin who had fought on the Biafran side; a post-war recruitment policy that was aimed against Igbo presence in the military; a promotion policy that ensured both a slow rate of upward mobility for Igbo officers and the virtual exclusion of Igbo officers from the highest military positions; and a recruitment policy calculated to ensure that the few Igbo officers who get anywhere near the top do not stay there for any reasonable length of time (Ikpeze, 2000: 100).

In the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), an Igbo is yet to become Inspector-General of Police. The question is, why has the leadership of this force consciously or deliberately eluded them when Igbos constitute one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria? as Gani Fawehinmi (2007: 13) argues, the exclusion of Igbo from the leadership of the police is unfair, unjust and unconstitutional … The next person to Sunday Ehindero who retired on June 1, 2007 is Ogbonnaya Onovo, who is an Igbo from Enugu state. He is a Deputy Inspector General of Police. If he were qualified to be a D.I.G., why should he not be qualified to be an Inspector General of Police?

In an attempt to correct the situation, the delegates of *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* in the last National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) (2005) held in Abuja, made a desperate effort to ensure that the concept of equality of states in all zones was adopted to remove the patent injustice evident in a situation in which the south eastern is the only region that has five states. In the end, it was resolved by NPRC that in the interest of justice and fairness, the southeast zone should be given an additional state to bring the number of states in the zone to at least six as is the case in other zones. This suggested compromise is yet to be implemented.

Out of the fourteen heads of state of Nigeria since 1960 ten came from the north, one from the Middle-Belt, two from the west (Shonekan ruled for only 82 days) and Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo who ruled for six month following the failure of the January 1966 coup attempt. Is the headship or leadership of Nigeria only meant to be occupied by one

or two ethnic groups? What about other ethnic groups that have not produced any since the forty-seven years of independence? It should be recalled that the issue of rotational presidency was resolved in the 1994 constitutional conference (constituted by the Abacha government) where Dr. Alex Ekwueme on behalf of the southern delegates recommended that the presidency be rotated among six geopolitical zones namely, Northeast, North west, North central, South east, South west and South-South (The NEWS, April 10, 1995: 13-16; TELL, October 10, 1994: 16-19).

It is in the face of this that *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* (the apex Igbo socio-cultural organization) in its petition submitted to the Justice Oputa Human Rights Investigation Commission in Enugu and Abuja 25 April 2001 and 25 - 26 July 2001 respectively argued thus:

Ours is a case of deliberate exclusion … from common resources by a combination of ethnic groups which control the centre. Indeed, the observed consistent pattern of discriminatory and exclusionary responses of the Nigerian system to Ndigbo in the commanding heights of the polity suggests that our exclusion is not only deliberate but also malicious (Albert, 2002: 311).

Social strand

Social discrimination against Ndigbo by other ethnic groups has continued unabated. The blood-chilling discrimination to which Igbo citizens living outside Igboland have always been subjected to, even at the slightest provocation cannot be quantified.

It is in the face of this that they are always griped by fear, the fear of being punished, the fear of being killed, the fear of not being accepted. All these create in them a spirit of subservience, a spirit of easy surrender, a spirit of trying to please the 'others' even at a great loss to themselves.

As Chuks Iloegbunam (2005) remarks: 'The Igbo man in the country is always on the run – 'Ogba Oso'. If a problem erupts between him and the Yoruba, he is on the run; if it is between the Yoruba and the Yoruba, he is on the run; if it is between him and the Hausa or between Hausa and Hausa or Hausa and Yoruba, he is on the run. Why does he always run? He runs because in virtually every case of the above instances, his business is not only usually attacked and looted, but his physical safety is often threatened'.

The point however, is that the Igbo are today not more than 'second class citizens' in Nigeria. The claim of Gowon that the Igbo could live wherever they wanted in Nigeria was also a dream that never came true. In spite of the fact that they travelled out of their homeland after the war to different parts of Nigeria, they are often targets of aggression from their hosts especially in the northern parts of the country (Ifoh, 2000: 40).

Geo -politics of National Survival: *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* and MASSOB factor in Igbo struggle

In the circumstances, it can be argued that it is as a result of the poor structural and institutional balance in Nigeria that triggered multifarious ethnic social movements and/or ethnic socio-political organizations. The aim of these group formations is not only to assist their ethnic groups to capture political power, but also to serve as social pressure groups that seek to influence the structure of power in the country, and call attention to the deteriorating material conditions or political deprivation and perceived marginalization of their group or social environment (Adejumobi, 2002).

In other words, the background to the formation of the groups is tied not only to the nature and character of the Nigerian state, the failure of political leadership, the structure of power and economic relations amongst groups, but also, the perceived domination of some ethnic groups by the others, the heavy lopsidedness in centre-state relations which according to Wole Soyinka is highly 'unbalanced exploitative and acquisitive' (The Guardian, Nov. 3, 1999). The ethnic movements include, Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Arewa Peoples Congress (APC), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* Socio-cultural group.

As a matter of fact both *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* and MASSOB groups were formed to essentially protect and promote the Igbo collective interest. In terms of approach or mode of operation, *Ohanaeze* is perceived to be non-radical while the latter (MASSOB) adopts a radical approach. As an ethnic platform for the Igbo, *Ohanaeze* aims to reintegrate Ndigbo into the Nigerian state, to present an organized opposition to the relegation of the Igbo to the background.

Nwabueze (2001) put it succinctly thus: 'to lift ourselves from our present marginalized position and realize our group interests in the fierce competition and struggle among the antagonistic ethnic nationalities comprised in Nigeria imperatively, requires an effective, credible organisation and without which, we will remain rudderless. In such an organisation lies our only hope of salvaging ourselves from the abyss into which we have sunk'.

In particular, *Ohanaeze* has in various fora argued for the need for a national conference where all ethnic nationalities are to discuss and agree (if possible) on the control by each zone of the mineral resources located in its territory, the entrenchment of the religious neutrality of the state on a clearer and more secure basis, the restructuring of the Nigerian federal system based on the six geo-political zones as the appropriate federating units, the devolution of more powers from the center to the zones, the re-organisation of the security forces (the armed forces and the police); and an equitable formula for the sharing of common revenue.

In a related manner, MASSOB was created in reaction to the perceived economic exclusion, and marginalization of Igbos in Nigeria. It sees itself as the chief defender of Igbo interests. According to the group, the explicit disenfranchisement and methodical exclusion of the Igbo often manifest itself through the failure to fully rebuild the East after the civil war, even in spite of the institution of the 3Rs (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) schemes to effect comprehensive development in the South east (Adekson, 2004: 159-60).

In the words of Ralph Uwazuruike, the founder and leader of MASSOB:

Biafra is a fight and symbol for inclusion, a project aimed at breaking the chain of Igbo exclusion from the scheme of things; a quest for a sense of belonging and identity; it is not an issue of secession but that of justice and fairness. It is the whole concept of consciousness in a people forcefully kept in a country that hardly protects their interest. It is a protest against and rejection of patterned and constant marginalization of a people over a long period of time (Vanguard on May 14, 2000: 11; Adekson, 2004: 87-107).

Consequently, the group's demand for self-determination through a separate Biafran state has continued to be a source of worry to the Nigerian government. For instance, it is to redress the structural imbalance in the country which seems to have impacted enormously on the Igbo nation that MASSOB on 26 August 2004 called on Ndigbo both in the Southeast and other cities across the country to shut down their businesses. The success of that protest was a great feat, considering how passionate an average Igbo man could be about his trade (The NEWS Magazine 27 June, 2005: 24-25). Again, to the chagrin of the Nigerian government, the group succeeded in internationalizing its struggle. To be sure, in May 2005, MASSOB embarked on demonstrations in Canada, France, Germany and Italy. It has also established a radio station in the United States for the purposes of reaching out to Igbos in the diaspora and attracting international attention (TELL Magazine, 11 October 2004: 18- 19). Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that though the apex Igbo socio-cultural group – *Ohanaeze*, and many Igbo elite discountenance the approach the MASSOB group adopts to tackle the Igbo question, they identify with the reasons behind the formation of the group. In the words of Dim Odumegwu Ojukwu: There are certain things Ralph Uwazuruike wants to do. At nearly 67 I don't think that is the best way to do things. I personally have evolved over the years, and increasingly, I go back to the Biafra of the soul, of the mind (but Uwazuruike) is an Igbo man and he has courage, per-haps more than many others who claim to be Igbo lea-ders' (TELL Magazine, 15 January 2001: 28).

Conclusion

In this study, an attempt was made to examine the nature andÁcharacter of the Nigerian modern state and account for its failure in the areas of the structure of power and economic relations amongst (ethnic) groups. The analysis suggests that the structural and institutional imbalance in the polity especially in the aspects of group exclusion and marginalization perhaps portends the current national obsession with geopolitical struggle for national survival which is another expression of ethnic tension that has always shaped the temper and temperature of politics in Nigeria.

In all, the question is, how do we ameliorate the deployrable situation, how do we bring about social change or structure the Nigerian state in order to accommodate groups and guarantee access to power and equitable distribution of political resources? To really address these problems, the following should be considered:

First, there is need to devise or evolve a federal structure in which the center is not all-powerful, where no ethnic group or coalition of groups can monopolize political-cum-bureaucratic power and the nation's economic resources; and where no Nigerian can officially be socially discriminated against anywhere in the country on account of his or her ethnic or state or regional origin. The implications of this include, structural geopolitics (regrouping of states perhaps into regions); power-sharing and resource allocation arrangements (adequate representation and equity) and enforcement of national citizenship and residency rights.

Second, to properly address the issue of evolving an integrated federal structure (as stated in point one) it will be expedient and instructive to find a process by which the representatives of the component parts of Nigeria – the ethnic nationalities should engage in a formalized national dialogue, call it a national conference, or forum, motivated by the grand desire to establish a new Nigeria of their own liking. This forum would offer each of the stakeholders in the Neo-Nigerian project an atmosphere of goodwill and fairness to put across their various ideas aimed at charting a new course that upholds unity in diversity.

Third, there is a serious need for Igbo self-examination which entails reawakening those values and attributes that historically made Igbos successful within the indigenous and colonial orders: the attributes of hard work, industry, enterprise, intellectual pursuit and integrity. It is a call for a positive change in their approach to national politics; and for their elite to come together to articulate and harmonize their programmes with a view to bringing Ndigbo and their aspirations under a common political platform.

This is necessary because the discordant tunes of Igbos in recent times (especially on issues of national importance) have contributed to the erosion of the unity and solidarity of Ndigbo. It is in the interest of Ndigbo that they should, as a group, develop a deeper, subtle and more acute political sense founded on greater unity than is the case at present.

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