

# THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE IGBOS'S INDIFFERENTISM IN THE AUGUST 1<sup>ST</sup> TO 10<sup>TH</sup> 2024 *END BAD GOVERNANCE NATIONAL PROTEST*: A COUNTER PROTEST, A POLITICAL REACTION OR MISTRUST FOR NATIONAL UNITY?

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## ABSTRACT

The extent to which ethnic nationalities are able to effectively manage the interplay of ethnic differences determines to what extent a multi-ethnic nation develops without crises. Ethnicity in Nigeria, is a product of inequality among the various ethnic groups orchestrated by a long period of colonialism; a period which witnessed the ascendancy of ethnic groups to the socio-political domination of other ethnic groups and a period when the ethnic groups were used as a pedestal for the distribution of socio-political goods, resulting in the inability of other ethnic groups to access these socio-political goods. This paper examines the socio-political implications of the Igbos' indifferentism towards the August 1<sup>st</sup> -10<sup>th</sup>, 2024 *#End Bad Governance National Protest* in Nigeria. The Igbos' lack of enthusiasm for the protest raises questions about their stance on national unity and governance. This study reveals that historical marginalization, perceived exclusion, and fear of political manipulation contribute to the Igbos' indifferentism. The implications of this indifferentism include mistrust in national unity, regionalization of politics, weakened national cohesion, and further political marginalization. This research highlights the need for inclusive governance and addressing ethnic grievances to promote national unity and stability.

**Keywords:** Igbos, indifferentism, national protest, bad governance, socio-political implications, national unity, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed a period of unforeseen socio-political and economic instability as well as bloodshed. This is partly due to the petty- bourgeois origins of Nigerian nationalism and the politicization of ethnicity in the polity. Like the national formations on the Indian subcontinent, the political formation of Nigeria came into being alongside several contextual socio-economic and political factors; the fear of domination, economic exploitation, social and sometimes religious discrimination (Awoshakiu, T. 2002). These and others have not only set the tone for socio-economic and political underdevelopment, but have also set the various ethnic groups against each other. The recent national protest in Nigeria has brought to the fore the complex dynamics of ethnic relations and national unity. The *#End Bad Governance National Protest*, scheduled for August 1<sup>st</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, aims to address the pervasive issues of corruption, mismanagement, and ineptitude plaguing Nigeria. However, the Igbos, a significant ethnic group in the country, have exhibited indifferentism towards the protest. This lack of enthusiasm is puzzling, given the protest's objectives align with Igbos' long-standing grievances against the Nigerian state. This article delves to unravel the socio-political implications of the Igbos' indifferentism, exploring the historical, cultural, and political factors contributing to their stance.

By examining the Igbos' indifferentism, this research aims to provide insights into the

complexities of Nigerian politics, the challenges of national unity, and the nuances of ethnic relations in the country. By examining the past, we can better understand the present and the implications for national unity.

## **BACKGROUND**

Historical experiences, including the Biafran War and marginalization, have contributed to the Igbos mistrust in national unity. Their indifferentism may stem from a perceived lack of commitment to addressing their concerns, leading to skepticism about the protest's effectiveness.

### **(a)The Biafran War: A Legacy of Trauma**

The 1967-1970 Biafran War left an indelible mark on the Igbo people. The devastating conflict resulted in massive loss of millions of Igbo lives, displacement, and economic devastation. The trauma of this period has been passed down through generations, shaping the Igbos' perception of Nigerian politics. The Nigerian Civil War – also commonly referred to as the Biafran War – took place from 1967 to 1970 with estimates ranging from one million to six million people killed (Oduah, 2017). The civil war is widely understood as a conflict between the secessionist state of Biafra in the eastern region led by Colonel Ojukwu and Yakubu Gowon's Nigerian federal government. The war was particularly poignant not solely because it attempted to break apart one of sub-Saharan Africa's biggest nations, but also because of the global humanitarian response to the conflict and the dissemination of images of war and brutality around the globe. The Nigerian tactic of isolating the seceding Biafran state by taking its principal port town and sole access to the sea (Port Harcourt) in the military campaign of May 1968, perpetually land-locked the region. Biafra quickly became impoverished and overpopulated, facing serious threats of starvation and famine. This manoeuvre by the federal government was a key factor in the eventual surrender of Biafra on 15 January 1970 (Heerten & Dirk, 2014: 175-176).

Fifty-one years after the conflict, demands for the secession of South-eastern Nigeria to create the independent and sovereign state of Biafra have been reignited. In light of perceived ethno-religious persecution targeting the Igbo people of the East and South-east via socioeconomic deprivation and political marginalisation, as well as the perceived lack of justice for the survivors and victims of the Nigerian government's starvation policy during the war, many Igbos within Nigeria and the diaspora have become very vocal about the need to carve out a separate Igbo state and bring to fruition the goals of Colonel Ojukwu and his Biafran forces during the civil war, leading to the creation of new pro-Biafran political groups such as the Movement for the Actualisation of Independent State of Biafra (MASSOB) in 1999 (Orji, 2017), and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

However, the general national aggression towards the agitations of these groups through the use of brute force against members and the dismissal of their concerns by branding them terrorist organisations (Kazeem, 2017) points to a larger and more insidious issue being the collective historical amnesia of Nigeria as a nation state and the underlying continuous process of national identity fragmentation.

Consequently, this thesis will address the question: What explains the continued fragmentation in Nigeria's national identity today? It will argue that this fragmentation can be understood through the lens of trauma as a post-Biafra legacy. The research will in turn explore trauma as an international and national discourse on the question of genocide in Biafra, particularly focusing on the debates around semantics and the politics of labelling which that discourse produces. In addition, the research will address trauma as the intersection of a political and personal loss of a

Biafran imagined community and how this relates to rampant ethno-religious violence in the country.

It goes without saying that there is a wealth of academic knowledge on the processes of the Nigeria-Biafra war and the build up to the conflict, however there has not been nearly enough emphasis on what it produced as its legacy. An emphasis on 'legacy' is precisely the focus of this project, as it becomes an attempt to tie together previously established academic discourse about the conflict as a post-colonial phenomenon, whilst moving towards a conversation on the ramifications of such violence and what that means within the context of nation-building and national identity formation in Nigeria today.

The focus on trauma as legacy is of great value, in bridging the gap on historical discourse surrounding the war, but it brings the conflict back to a site of temporal relevance by suggesting that Nigeria's current issues with national fragmentation are not mutually exclusive from the war, rather the conflict can be viewed as an emphatic manifestation and an exacerbation of national identity rupture.

### **(b) Marginalization and exclusion**

The Igbos have historically been marginalized in Nigerian politics, economy, and education, leading to feelings of exclusion and disenfranchisement. The Igbo race continues to face enormous political and economic challenges since the instigated and imposed civil war. A plain glance at the economic and political development in Nigeria may be considered normal in terms of where the Igbo people stand politically, especially economically when compared to other ethnic nationalities. Indeed a cursory look at the poverty level among the ethnic groups would make the Igbo race appear exceptionally successful.

The Igbo people in reality experienced an overwhelming level of disadvantages based on public policies that seemed crafted to undermine their ability to maximize political and economic potentials. The restructuring of Nigeria to create more states for the northern states to the detriment of the Southern Nigeria, especially, the Southeast was not only an impediment politically; it impacts the economic potentials of the Igbo people negatively. Such policies as the failure to rehabilitate the Biafra land after the war, the 20 pounds flat refund to any Biafran who wished to convert the old currency, or deposits with banks prior to the war; the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972, also known as Indigenization Decree, Federal Character Principle, manipulated population census, creation of states and local government areas in favor of the Northern Nigeria, deliberate underuse of seaports within the Igbo axis, lack of standard international airport, and other exploitative actions. These formed many overt and indirect actions to diminish the ability of the Igbo people to compete on a level-playing ground with other major ethnic groups.

Unlike today where some political actors will dare the Igbo people to vote against their aspirations, and perhaps, would still go ahead to win whether the Igbo people voted for them or not. It was not like that during the fight for the country's independence from the British colonial masters, and neither was that way during the first republic. The Eastern region used to play a very significant role politically in determining which parties collaborated to form a government. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun, which later changed to National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) under the leadership of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe partnered with the Northern People's Congress founded by Tafawa Balewa to form the government (University of Central Arkansas, 2019). Tafawa Balewa was appointed the Prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe was made the Head of State (University of Central Arkansas, 2019).

Economically, every region was autonomous, and developing at its pace's ability. The

Information Service (1956) reported that the Eastern region's economy was heavily dependent on palm produce, through which palm kernels were exported to earn foreign exchange, as well as palm frond is used for roofing, and palm wine for drinking. The Eastern region government promoted systematic agricultural economy, including farm settlements; cash crops such as rubber, cocoa, and palm grove scheme were established, creating an opportunity for people to earn a living through farming (Ministry of Commerce, 1966).

The coal industry was thriving under Nigeria Railway Corporation, and Nigerteel's rolling mill which produces mild steel bars were among only a few such operations in West Africa (Information Service, 1956). The NCNC led-government established a cement factory at Nkalagu, the Nigeria Breweries set up a stout factory at Aba, while in Port Harcourt, a Tobacco and glass making plant was sited there. "Oil mining in the region started by Shell D'Archy in 1937 did not yield commercial quantities until 1957. But by 1965, oil was a promising source of income" (Van Buer, 1968, 23).

Having appraised the background to the phenomenon that prompted this study, the researcher will look at some of the antecedents of the Igbo people within the economic and political realm before 1967, and the prevailing condition in the present Nigeria. It is the hope of the researcher that the outcome of this study will be beneficial to the scholars, policymakers, and Nigerians, etc. as well as, add to the body of literature.

### **INDIFFERENTISM: A COUNTER PROTEST OR POLITICAL REACTION?**

The Igbos' indifferentism may be perceived as a counter protest, signaling their disengagement from national initiatives. Alternatively, it could be a political reaction to the protest's perceived lack of inclusivity or addressing of Igbo-specific grievances which include:

#### **a. Lack of Rehabilitation after the Civil War**

General Gowon promised to rehabilitate and reintegrate the defunct Eastern region which its infrastructure was devastated during the civil war back to the country on equal footing, hence, the slogan: "No victor, no vanquished" (Gowon, 2014). In that spirit of oneness, General Gowon's military government decreed the policy of Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation (3Rs) for the defeated Eastern region (Udejah, 2017). The policies were merely cosmetic in since they were never actually carried out, while, such policy as the "abandoned property policy" was pursued vigorously (Obi-Ani, 2009). The consequence was not only economical, but a deliberate strategy designed to weaken the relationship between the Igbo people, and other minority ethnic groups of the Eastern region.

#### **b. Twenty Pounds Flat Fee Refund**

Several policies decreed into law became albatross of the Igbo nation's progress. Saro-Wiwa (2012) wrote that even though the Igbos were reintegrated into society, they continued to face economic discrimination. The £20 flat rate policy for any amount any Biafran who wishes to exchange his old currency was a deliberate policy to keep them from recovering from the economic devastation. Aduba (2017) argued in *The Will* newspaper, that Nigeria government deliberately imposed the £20 flat rate policy without any circumspection.

#### **c. Indigenization Decree**

The promulgation of the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972, also known as Indigenization Decree, was not done with the accommodation of Igbo interest. The government enacted the policy when the Igbo people were at the weakest economic point just after they have emerged from the civil war (Obi-Ani, 2009). The implication was that the other ethnic groups

were able to participate in purchasing shares of those blue-chip companies that the Nigeria government decided to appropriate.

**d. Manipulated Population Census**

There were several instances of the Nigeria census exercises found to be less than desirable. The need to maintain a very high population figure advantage by certain regions over the others was intense. That notwithstanding, even the demographers found the 1973 population census incredibly manipulated (Metz, 1991). The census exercise confirmed that Nigeria's population grew by 44 percent in 10 years, while, Northern Nigeria's population jumped to 64 percent compared to 53.7 percent in 1963 (Metz, 1991). The bloated population advantage has consequences for the creation of states, local governments, and the sharing of accrued revenues at the center since, in practice, Nigeria runs a unitary system as against the federal system on paper.

**e. Federal Character Principle**

Federal Character principle is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, but its first introduction was the 1979 Constitution. Section 14 (3) and (4) of the 1999 Constitution provide for the equitable distribution of positions in the military, paramilitary, police, all other security institutions, public service, parastatals, and publicly owned companies (Constitution of the Federal Republic, 1999). The plain accommodation of the principle as it ought to be applied has not always worked according to the dictates of the constitution, primarily, when it comes to placing the Igbo people in certain positions. The President Buhari's administration has been the worst offender that he had been called out for his insensitivity to other ethnic groups when making appointments. According to Senator Abaribe, the incumbent Nigeria's President, General Buhari has willfully ensured that the Southeast zone was not included in the National Defence Council and the National Security Council (Busari, 2018).

**f. Creation of States and Local Government Areas**

The creation of states and local government areas were deliberately made to favor Northern Nigeria. The Southeast zone is the only political zone among the six political zones that has only five states, while, the rest of the other zones have six states each (Aribisala, 2015) [18]. Aribisala concluded that this has consequently led to Southeast being the only zone with the least amount of revenue allocation in the Federation. Former Governor of Anambra state, Dr Ezeife, and Olu Falae, the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation argued that the creation of more states and local governments in favor of the Northern states was an injustice against their zones, Southeast and Southwest, respectively (Kalu, 2017; Eya, 2017).

Both writers observed that the injustice argued by Ezeife and Falae is based on the lopsided size of revenue allocations from the federal government that goes to the northern states. Olu Falae pointed out that Lagos state which is densely populated, used to have a uniform number of local governments (precisely 20 LGAs) with Kano state (Eya, 2017). Falae argues that while Lagos has been made to retain the same number of local government areas, Kano has grown to 77 LGAs. The Kano state in 1991 was divided into two states, with Jigawa as the new state out of the old Kano state (Adisa, 2011). It is not only the lopsided revenue allocations being channeled to the northern region that is perceived as injustices, but the political inequities acutely manifest in addressing the national issues. Take, for example, Nwabufo (2019) who highlights that in "In 2015, the south-east had no representation in the leadership of all the arms of government. This was rationalized at the time with a bogus claim, 'the zone did not produce any ranking senator or member of the house of representatives on the platform of the APC'" (para. 7). The interests of the Southeast are never adequately protected because the states and LGAs created by military fiat to the detriment of Southeast hollows their ability to be effective. The enumerated consequences of



States and LGAs creations were some of the reasons for the call to restructure Nigeria.

#### **g. Deliberate Underuse of Seaports**

There is a well-considered perception that the seaports within the Igbo axis are deliberately underused when one considers the fact that Port Harcourt port was a bustling port prior to Nigeria independence, up until Nigeria Biafra civil war to (Information Service, 1956). The Port Harcourt port was the second largest port in the country commissioned in 1913 as with Lagos port (Nimasa e-library, n.d). The Calabar port was equally busy handling exports and imports.

Today, Nigeria's Lagos seaports are fully congested; lives of residents, business owners, and motorists are impacted negatively due to conditions at the ports. The Pointer (2019) observed that “a recent report based on estimates by terminal operators has it that more than 2 million twenty tons equivalent units (TEUs) of laden containers are awaiting clearance at Lagos seaports” (para. 1). The Lagos ports handle over 80 percent of the cargoes that enter the country (The Pointer). In spite of these problems, the federal government had refused to dredge the river Niger, improve the Calabar and Warri ports, etc., or make it friendly to use Port Harcourt to ease the economic waste arising from the concentration of activities in Lagos ports.

#### **h. Lack of International Airport**

The Igbo people are found in every nook and cranny of Nigeria, and virtually, in all parts of the world. The Igbo people are constantly on the move, both domestically and internationally. Most of the times, they must travel to Lagos or Abuja, before they could connect any direct international flights. It was in 2013 that the President Good luck administration completed the facilities at Enugu airport, now Akanu Ibiam International airport, which enabled the first international flight led by Prince Arthur Eze (Edike, 2013). He said on arrival at Enugu airport: “Look at me, I flew from Senegal to Enugu for four hours non-stop. I don't need to go to Lagos or Abuja to catch direct flight again to Europe or Senegal. I can now go from my house to any place of choice” (Edike, 2013).

It is worth noting that the Federal government has not invested in upgrading the facilities at Enugu airport to international airport status. The runways are very bumpy without the approach lights; there are no water supplies, the cooling systems are not working, etc. (Mikairu and Agbo, 2019). The Southeast governors have raised the alarm about the state of the airport, and why the contract that had been awarded for the airport by the present government has not reflected at the airport (Mikairu and Agbo, 2019).

The federal government has recently announced that it will shut down the airport for security reasons (Aliyu, 2019). The announcement was not well received by the people of Southeast both on the chat rooms and mainstream media. The Ohanaeze Ndigbo asked the government not to embark on such action as the timing is not right, and it will impact negatively on the development of the Igbo economy (Olorok, 2019). Mr Chiedozie Orizu, the spokesperson for Ohanaze Youth leader, Arthur Obiora, advised the federal government that such move will not augur well for the development of the Igbo land (Okeke, 2019). There had not been anything to show that the contract award for the Enugu airport has reflected on it yet.

#### **i. Other Impediments**

Other impediments are directed against the Igbo people. Some of the barriers are excessive police checkpoints directed against the Igbo people and businesses, and Customs personnel harassment of Igbo people's business interests. The use of touts to harass and collect illegal levies from the Igbo shops with the active support of some politicians in places such as Lagos state.

The Igbo people suffer excessive extortion and harassment at the ubiquitous police checkpoints

both within their homeland and routes leading to the Southeast. The harassment is more intense during the festive periods when the people of Southeast visit their families (Okolie, 2017). Mr. Peter Obi, the former Governor of Anambra, state condemned the activities of the Customs on the highway, particularly, on roads leading to Igbo heartland, where he observed numerous Customs checkpoints from Ore to Onitsha (Olowookere, 2016). The extortion by the Customs on containers that had been cleared at the ports on roads leading to the Southeast calls to question the Buhari's professed fight against corruption (NAN, 2016).

### **MISTRUST FOR NATIONAL UNITY**

Between 1960 and 2008 Nigeria has been characterized by social inequities in the distribution of power and resources. These inequities, which are rooted in the foundation of the Nigerian state led to a civil war in 1967 in which the Igbo, one of the major ethnic groups sought to secede from Nigeria. But the attempt was not successful. The war was followed by a number of systematic and calculated policies, which the victors used to keep the Igbo people down and to hegemonise their grip of political domination of Nigeria for a long time in both the Nigerian military and civilian rules. The widened democratic space in 1999 gave rise to a renewed expression of resentment by Igbo youths whose rejection of their post-war socio-political and economic repressions have sparked off the emergence of youth based movements. Thus, nationalism resurgence is manifested in the renewed demand for Biafra by these organizations. They elicited responses from the democratic government, which seemed to have relapsed to the old order of military style of violent repression of dissension that end up as counter productive. Through the processing of primary data, this paper examines the reinvention of Igbo nationalism in eastern Nigeria. The paper looks at its linkage with the 1999 democratic transition in Nigeria, the implications of this development and the management of the issue by the government.

Deep rooted ethnic grievances and rivalry among the major Nigerian ethnic groups had accompanied the politics of decolonization, culminating in the first attempt at Igbo ethnonationalism expressed in the declaration of the Biafran Republic in 1967. This attempt at secession was crushed by the Nigerian state after a cruel three year war that resulted in the loss of over one million lives and displacement of many others in eastern Nigeria. The end of the war was followed by deliberate social, political and economic policies aimed at reducing the capacity of the Igbo people to challenge the state or the dominance of the victorious groups. These policies of marginalization were efficiently and effectively carried out through the autocratic military regimes that dominated Nigerian politics for the greater proportion of its post-war history that spanned between 1970 till 1999. The transition into a democratic dispensation has coincided with the emergence of a post-war Igbo generation who do not accept the professed marginalization of the Igbos in Nigeria. The manifestation is seen in the number of groups and movements that have emerged to demand for the resuscitation of the defunct Biafran state as a panacea to the alienation of the Igbos in the Nigerian polity. This new Igbo nationalism like any other nationalism is a politicized ethnicity, which often develops when an ethnic group manifests a political agenda (Joireman, 2003). For Hobsbawn (1990), nationalism comes before nation, in the sense that an ethnic group must be somehow politically mobilized before it becomes a nation. The political mobilization occurs in the form of some sort of recognized collective objectives as perceived by an ethnic group that feels marginalized in a heterogeneous society. Joireman (2003) had argued that nationalism is intensified by the politics of exclusion. So any time a group of people in a multi-national polity feel particularly targeted for ill-treatment or oppression, there is the likelihood that their

identification will turn from ethnic to national identity as it becomes politicized.

When a group in a society is marked out for unequal treatment, either economically or politically, then the boundaries of that group become clearly defined. The origin of Igbo nationalism started with the quest for an independent Biafran state which extends back to four decades ago. That quest can be aptly situated in the politics of decolonization in Nigeria that saw to a gradual constitutional evolution by relatively orderly processes of conferences and negotiations, culminating in the independence of Nigeria from British colonialism in 1960.

The hiccups that were associated with these processes, gave rise to the structure of constitutional agreements that collapsed shortly after independence following a military coup in January 1966; the army was broken into regional groups after a counter coup in July of same year thus precipitating series of actions and events before the outbreak of the civil war. At this point citizens of the former Eastern region origin had fled from the rest of the country during a series of massacre known as pogrom in Nigeria that produced a migration of hundreds of thousands of persons as never witnessed in the country before. As Nixon (1972) noted, the central government lost its effective authority over the Eastern region and following a breakdown of the orderly process of negotiations, the Eastern region sought its own security and survival by declaring its independence shortly after which the central government sought to re-establish its authority in the area by military action. The result was the bitter war that lasted for almost three years and with over a million casualties from military action, disease and starvation.

The conflict was ended with the collapse of Biafra in January 1970, as the immediate issues of the war were resolved in favor of Nigeria under the Federal Military Government that subsequently declared the war as no victor, no vanquished. The re-entry of the former Biafrans, dominantly of the Igbo ethnic group into the Nigerian society was phenomenal in the annals of group integration. This was the situation, until the emergence of MASSOB in 1999 re-opening the issue of Biafra and working towards its actualization. For a better understanding of the genesis of Igbo nationalism, it is imperative to highlight graphic details of the events that have led to the present situation under discussion. Nixon (1972) had chronicled the distinctive circumstances that led to the first declaration of Biafra in May 1967. According to him, the Biafran claim to independence began in May 1966, following a series of attacks targeted against peoples of Eastern region living in the north of Nigeria.

The attacks were followed by the coup of 29 July 1966, during which Nigerian troops of northern origin systematically killed about 240 southern officers and men, of whom at least three quarters were easterners and leading to the emergence of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as the Supreme Commander to replace General Aguiyi Ironsi, an ethnic Igbo affected by the mutiny. This action destroyed the Nigerian army as an effective agent of Nigerian unity as well as the unity of the command because Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, who was the Military Governor of the Eastern Region, did not recognize Gowon as the rightful person to assume the position of supreme commander.

The subsequent massacre of citizens of the Eastern region in the north, starting again in September 1966 and the mass migration back to the east that ensued widened the rupture in national unity. It was at this point that issues such as problems of refugees, economic support of displaced persons and intensified fears of citizens of the Eastern region for their personal safety combined to escalate the tension between the Eastern region and central government. Nixon (1972) remarks that none of the series of efforts to find a peaceful basis for renewed



cooperation between the Eastern region and the center yielded fruit, but it was rather series of unilateral moves in areas of economic and political relations by both the East and the center that worsened the conflict until the Eastern region transformed into Biafran Republic by proclaiming its independence on 30 May 1967. In a bid to stop this secessionist move, the central government opened a military action against the East on July 5, 1967. This action was prolonged till 15 January 1970 when the resistance by the Biafran rebels caved in leading to victory for the unity of Nigeria. The victory created the condition for the re-absorption of the citizens of the defunct Biafra into the Nigerian society as Nigerians, rendering the quest for Biafra completely a forgotten matter amidst for the time being. This re-entry came with assurances of the victorious federal side that the war ended in a no victor, no vanquished designation, but post-war events indicate that the former Biafrans particularly the dominant Igbo ethnic group were reabsorbed into Nigeria as conquered people (Amadiume, 2000).

It was this scenario that created conditions for the cries of marginalization by the Igbos, in their struggle for full insertion into the post-war Nigerian society. Onu (2003) notes that the resurgence of Igbo nationalism which is spearheaded by MASSOB, a youthful and radical organization of succeeding generations of Igbo who fought the civil war, is a result of their frustration in the Nigerian entity and perception that the existing political structure that seeming consign the Igbos to a lower status than it deserves vis-à-vis other groups is illegitimate. Several documented facts supports this view, no wonder the cries of marginalization have been loudest from them. Ikpeze (2000) in an attempt to establish that the Igbos in post-war Nigeria were marginalized, articulated four clear dimensions this marginalization has manifested; economic strangulation, politico-bureaucratic emasculation, military neutralization and ostracism.

Some of the issues that readily come to mind include the 20 pounds ceiling placed on bank lodgments for every Igbo after the war no matter how much such persons had in banks. This has been interpreted as a calculated policy to neutralize the savings and capacity of the Igbos to rehabilitate and re-integrate into the Nigerian economy (Ikpeze, 2000; Ojukwu, 2005). Related to this is the sudden withdrawal of federal troops from the east, a ploy that was aimed at denying the Igbo economy the stimulus for recovery as Igbo people who could have been empowered as suppliers to the troops were denied the opportunity. Also was the timing of the indigenization policy which came shortly after the war when the Igbos were financially constrained to participate, thereby incapacitating the Igbos economically. Of note in postwar Igbo marginalization was the deficient infrastructural development in their homeland resulting in the mass migration of the Igbos to other areas of the country for economic survival. There were also cases of discrimination against the Igbos in the location of industries and the attendant loss of benefits of linkages that come from such locations. Also worthy of mention, is the deliberate neglect of ecological problems in the east, especially the problem of soil erosion that results in the loss of agricultural lands and settlements.

The ecological devastation becomes obvious in relative terms when compared with the massive attention given to desertification in the north and beach erosion in the western parts of Nigeria (Ikpeze, 2000). Apart from these policies that economically disempowered the Igbos, other instruments were also used to effectively exclude them from economic and political power at the centre. Such include the 'tokenist' appointments to strategically insignificant positions in administrations, marginal presence in the administration and headship of ministerial and extraministerial departments and parastatals. Also worthy of note is the distortions of the federal structure to the disadvantage of the Igbos, such that the zone has the least number of

states and local governments compared to the other major tribes, implying smaller resources and representation, because number of states and local government areas are the main basis for resource allocation and representation at the federal level.

Furthermore, the indifferent response of the federal authorities and even governments of other states to uphold the constitutionally inviolable natural residency and citizenship rights of original Igbo owners as far as the issue of 'abandoned property' of the Igbos who fled the pogrom and war is also mentioned. Aware of the role Nigerian military officers of Igbo extraction played in the Biafran armed forces, there was a policy to ensure under representation of the Igbos in the military. Re-absorption after the war was negligible, for the few that were reabsorbed, rate of upward mobility were very slow aimed at preventing the resurgence of the Igbos militarily. Related to this is the virtual exclusion of Igbo land from highest sensitive military facilities of such important installation as mechanized division or armories. The predicament of post-war Igbo in Nigeria is a perception that is widely held by members of the ethnic group and its capacity to culminate into negative reactions may have been bottled up due to the hold on to power by the military.

For close to thirty years after that war, the major pre-occupation of the Igbos was how to be fully reintegrated into the Nigerian society and possibly attain the pre-eminent position as a power bloc which the people had tried to construct prior to the war and thus end the cry of marginalization (Igbokwe, 2005). However, all through this period, there were no recognizable groups that have agitated for the resuscitation of the Biafran Republic as it seemed a forgotten affair publicly. After the war till 1990s, the major public discourse centered on how the Igbos, the major ethnic group in the Biafran rebellion could be accepted back fully as participants in Nigerian political process. But democratic transition in 1999 seems to have created the space for the renewed expression of Igbo nationalism as it marked the beginning of emergence into the scene of organizations and movements calling for the resuscitation of the defunct Biafran Republic. Generated from the above are some pertinent questions; why is there a renewed demand for Biafra, thirty-years after a similar move was crushed? Who are the people behind the organizations spearheading these agitations? How much do they know about the war that was fought in the past and what are the impacts of memories of the former war in this new demand? Does this renewed agitation have solid social bases or is it a ploy by Igbo elites to achieve a greater stake in Nigerian politics? All these, form the major thrust of this paper in an attempt to create insights into political imbalances in Nigeria that has remained a major crises of Nigerian development since the 1960's.

## **SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Inequalities (socio-economic) among the various ethnic groups as orchestrated by a long period of colonial administration (1860-1960) have made Nigeria a cynosure of ethnic conflicts. The central issue is that the social formation of Nigeria which is basically ethnically heterogeneous and by implication a multi-cultural society may result in a high potentiality for lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear and in addition a high tendency towards violent confrontation for various sociopolitical reasons. Ethnic conflict has arisen out of this context of mutual fear and suspicion over distribution of socio-political and economic goods and lack of cordiality. Thus, the inability of every ethnic group to access socio-political and economic goods continues to impact negatively on the force of national integration and cohesion. It is a product of the long history of unequal access to power, resources and opportunities among the different ethnic groups in the country.

Thus, the demands of such a challenge are exacting. Significantly, this context has led to open confrontation and conflict because the stressful condition of the body polity raised questions that challenge the very basis on which the political community – modern Nigeria – is organized. This prompts the question, 'is ethnicity in Nigeria an invention of the people or of colonialism?' What raises this question is the fact that the various ethnic groups that constitute the pre- Nigeria state once co-existed socially and economically, hence the question of whether ethnicity is a social construct or a natural order? Through the division of the country into six geo-political zones, all the major ethnic groups are now found within these zones along with the minority ethnic groups, as Arowolo, D. (2011) has put it, the re-engineering of the country into six zones has made the minority groups in the country to cluster around the major ethnic groups, thus giving the country a tripartite ethnic structure. By implication, the mobilization for socio-political contest still revolved around the major ethnic groups. Invariably, this has made it possible for the politics of exclusion to persist even to the detriment of the minorities, which has resulted in conflict over the demand for such rights as well as underdevelopment of the polity.

The foundation for the politics of exclusion was laid by the construction of the Nigerian political environment around the three major ethnic groups which saw this as an opportunity to exert their hegemonic power over the rest of the country. "Fragment of a democracy: Reflections on class and politics in Nigeria" opines that the Nigerian regional political elites within the frame work of regional politics see democracy as a mechanism through which political power can be gained or distributed together with economic power and the social status that follows. It could be reasoned that right from the beginning the minorities have always been sidelined within the polity. Or better still the regional political leaders contributed to the ethnic conflict in the country through the consolidation of each ethnic group's main political parties which was equally evident in the Second Republic.

Thus, politics in Nigeria before and after independence was used as an ethnic weapon to the detriment of the minorities in the country. It became a game between the majorities where the distributive resources were under their control with the minorities significantly excluded from the mainstream of governance. That is, they are given positions only to solicit for their political support and not as forces to be reckoned with in the political game. This situation provided leverage for ethnic identity as well as politics of exclusions to thrive. Without mincing words this has been a challenge to the unity of Nigeria or the survival of Nigeria as a state; given the plurality of Nigeria state.

In the present political dispensation, efforts are being made by civil society to consolidate the hard won democracy through its various intervention activities on issues of human rights, electoral reforms, constitutional reform, gender equality, civic education, transparency and accountability. The efforts of civil society to promote good governance are likely to remain futile as long as the problems of unemployment, corruption, political apathy, and people oriented constitution and the like are not addressed. This is because civil society has put Nigeria in a market place of idea and ideologies, the essence of which is to propel healthy competition towards national integration, growth and development. This has made civil society an indispensable tool in the consolidation of socio-political development due to the fact that citizens can actualize their goals through their operations in the state.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ethnicity in Nigeria, no doubt, has been a significant challenge to the socio-political development of the country; not because the phenomenon is in itself dangerous but that the tendency is for

political leaders to manipulate it. Thus, the functionality of ethnicity can either be negative or positive. Ethnicity can be problematic if not managed properly and at the same time, a highly rewarding phenomenon if well managed, which means that ethnicity will continue to remain a force to be reckoned with notwithstanding the strategic mechanisms adopted to diffuse its flame. The historical context of Igbo indifferentism reveals a complex web of socio-political factors that contributed to their stance. The legacy of the Biafran War, as well as marginalization, exclusion, ethnic tensions, and unaddressed grievances, have fostered a deep-seated mistrust of the Nigerian state. The effects of military takeover, including human rights abuses, displacement, and economic hardship, have further entrenched this mistrust. The socio-political implications of Igbo indifferentism for national unity are significant. Their disconnection from national initiatives and lack of investment in Nigerian politics undermine efforts towards a unified nation. To address this, it is essential to:

- i. Acknowledge and address historical grievances
- ii. Promote inclusive governance and representation
- iii. Ensure human rights protection and accountability
- iv. Foster ethnic harmony and dialogue
- v. Encourage economic development and empowerment

By taking these steps, Nigeria can work towards rebuilding trust and promoting national unity.

Indeed, the Igbos' indifferentism serves as a reminder of the need for a more inclusive and equitable society where all ethnic groups feel valued and represented. Only then can Nigeria hope to achieve true national unity and prosperity.

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