



Nigerian National Question and State Sponsorship of Terrorism in Igbo

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Cite this article:

C.O. Okwelum (2023), Nigerian National Question and State Sponsorship of Terrorism in Igbo. African Journal of Law, Political Research and Administration 6(1), 9-27. DOI: 10.52589/AJLPRA-FBGOFPI

Manuscript History

Received: 2 Feb 2022

Accepted: 27 Feb 2023

Published: 15 March 2023

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ABSTRACT: *The Igbos in eastern Nigeria are stigmatised and marginalised. Since the last war, every effort has been made to shortchange them. Their desire to be welcomed back into the mainstream of the federal state system has always been rebuffed. The return to civil rule in 1999 even accentuated the marginalisation than bringing it to bail. They then took back to separatist agitation which is familiar terrain for the Igbo. But the Igbo still have found no respite. The Federal government of Buhari which the Igbo had never supported or voted for in the previous elections of 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 schemed to infiltrate the Igbo with the virus of herdsmen and terrorist incursions. The resistance of the Igbo still rattles and aggravated the Buhari state characterizing the Igbo as 'a dot on a circle'. This Study which employs the doctrinal method looks critically into the motive behind insurgency and terrorism in the Igbo of the southeast. It finds that genuine security structures which Igbo have put in place to secure the southeast heartland are being undermined by both the Federal and the State governments. They are viewed within the suspicious spectrum of separatist agitation while those instituted and used by the State are destabilising Ndigbo, prevaricating and inducing more bloodshed in Igbo. It concludes that genuine efforts should be made by the Federal government to reconcile with the Igbo and come away from the pre-war disposition of the Nigerian state against the Igbo.*

KEYWORDS: Igbo, Insurgency, Terrorism, State and national Question



INTRODUCTION

This Study attempts to trace the origin of conflict in the Nigerian public space to the aftermath of colonialism arguing that the stage and manner in which the various ethnic groups in the country were integrated into a vast country without their active desire and participation cannot but breed dissensions and organisational crisis. It believes that the crises have found expression in the current challenges of insecurity in many parts of the country. In the east where the Igbo is the dominant group, it points to the fact that nationalism in Igbo cannot be traced beyond the coming of colonial rule and that the Igbo detest domination or foreign rule. Therefore, it was unfortunate that they got integrated into a larger Nigerian state they were ill-prepared and ill-equipped to belong. It argues further that the Igbo are a people that were never in the throes of nation-building and as such when they found themselves cut up with the regionalist government in the processes leading to independence they were in the realm of first-generational people producing national elites. The elites of the Igbo stock took so much for granted that when the first revolutionary fevers to check decadence in the colonial rump that was left behind as the first republic, they threw caution to the winds and assaulted the other ethnic groups in a surprise-spring such that at the end of the day, they became suspects and created the fertile ground that their hatred and derision became planted. None of the political elites of Igbo extraction was killed 1966 coup while the five Majors, who were predominantly of Igbo stock, eliminated the northern and western national political leaders and even taunted the other tribes in pejorative colour. The subsequent attempt to right their wrongs against the other ethnic groups was equally mismanaged by the Gen. Aguyi Ironsi military administration leading to a fatal reprisal that the Biafran leader, General Ojukwu and the Igbo were unable to manage and overcome to date.

The consequences of the foregoing have led to many soul-searching studies on the Igbo many of which are relevant to this study. In *Issues in Politics and Governance in Nigeria* a publication of twenty chapters on papers presented at the 2006 conference of the South-East Chapter of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA) with the theme, *Politics and Governance in South-East Today*, the consequences were dealt with in far-reaching ramifications. Hamischfeger in *Igbo Nationalism and Biafra* also dwelt elaborately on the consequences of the actions of the five Majors leading to the historic conundrums the Igbo nation has found itself in today. This study is essentially the icing on the cake of the studies that have already been done. It tries to merge the current literature on the Igbo with the existing ticket of study directing its attention to the role being played by current state and non-state actors in the region.

Conceptual clarification

As the main sources of facts and evidence with which this research is done come mainly from the media, it is necessary to make some conceptual clarifications regarding the same. The primary function of the media is, to tell the truth. Truthfulness in reportage and presentation of information to the public is always an essential ethical issue. As submitted by Cecilia Friend and Jane Singer¹ the fact that the truth may be bitter and painful should not discourage the media from pursuing it to the best of its ability and to its logical conclusion. It is thus not a modern phenomenon to expound on the issues and claims of fairness, balance and truthfulness in the presentation of information to the public by media. To present information impartially without fear or favour regardless of whose ox is gored and regardless of party, sect, clan or interest is paramount because in a study of this nature, if the information or facts relied upon



in the analysis of the issues are unreliable and or are drawn from faulty premises, the conclusion to be reached would be faulty or wrong. Therefore, the promotion of any private interest or ideological bias contrary to the general welfare of the public or even the State for whatever reason is incompatible with objective and honest media. As Friend and Singer² state, partisanship in editorial commentaries which knowingly departs from the truth does violence to the best spirit of the media all over the world: east or west: and conduces to a subversion of the fundamental principle of the media. The four major obligations of the media are, therefore, an obligation to the truth, the public, the facts and independence. Respect and adherence to truthfulness, allegiance to the citizens and the community at large and informing rather than manipulating are keys to Friend, Singer and Seema Hasan⁵ in the calling of the media. Nigeria's media is one of the freest and most independent in Africa.

Although the media does not have as strong ethical norms as the medical and legal professions and members are not subjected to Hippocratic oaths and disbarred or defrocked or disrobed if found defaulting and deviating, the media is a gatekeeper. It ensures, through the selection of items, facts and evidence for inclusion or exclusion from the product meant for public consumption, that the public shall hear as facts only those events which, as a representative of its culture, are true. As a form of information controller, the gatekeeper role gives the media the ability if not a duty to construct public knowledge in a particular way and to ascribe particular importance to it.⁵

As Waseen⁶ believes that the media focuses on events rather than issues and processes, it is our contention that a combination of events gives rise to issues and processes. The object of our engagement here is academic journalism, it concerns issues and processes: the issue and process of the militarization of the southeast and State sponsorship of terrorism in Igbo. A clear concept of what constitutes terrorism and how it functions at the disposition of the State over a part of it must be addressed. Terrorism is not the exclusive preserve of a State. It is like violence, power and threat, no group has a monopoly on it. But when employed as an instrument of the State, it is targeted at a perceived enemy. The enemy or the target of terrorism may not in actual fact and reality be the one who suffers from it. It is the innocent that does. But by the innocent suffering from the fear of terrorist attack to the knowledge or awareness of the targeted group, the effect of terrorism is achieved. In Igbo, who is the targeted group and who is suffering from State terrorism? It is Ndigbo that suffers from State terrorism but it is targeted at separatist agitators in Igbo space. According to Shipra Chawla⁷ terror is a superlative form of fear and fear is a human emotion that pertains only to the living. The dead cannot be terrorised, they have been killed. Helpless victims may die or get murdered but it is the survivors that get terrorised. To restate Shipra, the victims of political terrorist atrocities are not normally the targets. The political terrorist victims are symbolic. A victim is representative of a target group that is strategically involved in the terrorists' agenda and goal.⁸

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Igbo is an ethnic group in the southeast of Nigeria. An ethnic group in the popular definition by Barth is a unit of people who perceive themselves as sharing common affinities and features which are different from those of others and are accepted as being so different by others.⁹ The Igbo can be found in south-south Nigeria sharing boundaries with the Edo, Isoko, Ijaw, Idoma, Ibibio etc. They are found all over the world in Diaspora. Since pre-colonial times,



the Igbo had never been conquered nor have they established any strong empire in history to dominate a vast area of land yet they occupy a large swath of land. They believe in individualism and kindred village democracy than nation-states. They are very wise people and industrious. The Igbo eulogises self and personal achievements. It was only after the last civil war that they began to have serious aspirations for political power beyond their land after the impressive outings of great Igbos like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Thus, the Igbo within Nigeria resent being dominated or ruled by those they perceive to be aliens or with who they do not share the same cultural and historical affinity, values and ideals.

Until the coming of the Europeans to the coast of the West African Atlantic with Christianity, the Igbo were core traditionalists believing in earth gods and gerontocracy. Like the Igbo, the Fulani also resent being governed by those who do not believe in Islam. An infidel cannot rule over a Fulani Muslim. Sometimes a Muslim must be 'pure' to rule over other Muslims. Thus among Muslims, there are unhealthy and violent rivalries on questions of ruler-ship and leadership. Therefore a political space that comprises these two ethnic groups and others is bound to have perennial leadership and the national question.

The law of national question interrogates how legislation is used to keep the nationalities and national entities willy-nilly together. How different laws are made for different sections of the country and how the same legal regime is enacted, interpreted and enforced or applied differently in the same country raises the national question. It examines how the instrument of the law is employed to hold down self-propelled development of certain sections of the country because of the inherent implication on the un-productive, un-reproductive and un-progressive ideologies of other sections of the country founded on religion, world views, sectionalism or nepotism. The law of national question looks at a broad spectrum of legal regimes that are anti-people and obtuse in economic and political development issues. How for instance coastal, and littoral States of Nigeria are unopened to international commerce due to Federal control of seaports and the continental shelf. How the States in the face of heightened insecurity cannot have its police outfit because police security is a federal preserve and mandate. It studies how a wide range of legal issues are considered 'no-go areas' due to the nature of the plurality of the country and the perceived disadvantage some tribes have and the advantage others have over certain policy matters whether of economic, military, political or religious nature.

According to Kargbo¹⁰ national question explores and interrogates the challenge of organising and maintaining different nationalities with diverse historical backgrounds and ties under a single political structure and government called the State. It goes beyond keeping and maintaining the country as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign State that shall be governed only in accordance with the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). It goes beyond the sanctity of its geographical divisions and boundaries created under section 3 of the above Constitution. It extends to the challenge of making all Nigerians including public office-holders accountable to the people and the supremacy of the Constitution. It is synonymous with the questions of national identity and patriotism; ethnic identity and loyalty.

It is a term used for a variety of issues related to nationalism. It is the totality of political, economic, territorial, legal, ideological and cultural relations among nations.¹¹ Abubakar Momoh and Said Adejumobi¹² posit that the national question identifies challenges that must be addressed if the nation is to survive and the critical issues that have been left unresolved that threaten the nation State. For Biose, the most Nigerian military and political elites proceed with



the belief that the national question does not exist in the country or that it has been settled with the political independence of 1960. This poses one of the greatest problems facing the country, particularly in Igbo. There, the feeling of affinity is losing strength with separatist agitations resorting to building parallel structures like MASSOB, IPOB and ESN and the Federal government resorting to using force to compel Igbo to remain within Nigeria: while according to Edmond Burke (1729 – 1797), ‘a nation is not governed that is perpetual to be conquered.’¹³ Therefore, the alleged sponsorship of terrorism and insurgency in the east of Nigeria of Igbo is a national question.

For Mefor, Igbo would have produced a Nigerian President but for the military intervention through the Buhari coup against the Shehu Shagari government in 1983. Thus, the agitation of IPOB for separatism may not be helping the Igbo quest for reintegration. Igbo cannot be asked to rule Nigeria on the one hand and be asking that it would like to be on its own by restoring Biafra on the other hand. It is contradictory. But the agitation became loudest since 2015 when Buhari took over after four straight contests at the ballot even as ISWAP had already carved a Caliphate in the Northeast and commenced more than terrorism but guerrilla war. Mefor argues that IPOB ought, therefore, to be used as a measure and gauge of Igbo’s commitment and patriotism to the Federal government corporatism or suitability for the presidency or to unleash terror on Igbo.¹⁴

The Buhari administration (2015 – 2023) is a personal government. The personal rule is a dynamic world of political will and action that is ordered less by institutions than by personal authorities and power; a world without the assured mediation and regulation of effective political institutions.¹⁵ It has been canvassed that most dictators feature some degree of personalism but a host of factors and circumstances influence the extent to which the leader retains the ultimate say in policy.¹⁶ The policy to terrorise the Igbo in order not to give them the space for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra is a strategy in military engagement. Across Igbo, as shall be demonstrated, all military formations are manned by the military Fulani or northerners and this may make the policy to sponsor state terrorism beguiling. But sometimes personalism (which is a doctrine that emphasises the significance, uniqueness and inviolability of a ruler) makes calamitous mistakes because policy in personalism follows the whims and caprices of the individual and not until the end of such a personal regime the folly of such a policy may remain locked because what gauges and betrays extant personalism is the change and amendment of the Constitution to prolong the rule of a dictator. Sponsorship of terrorism in parts of a country has the potential of raising resistance that is capable of creating unstable environments or ethnic crises which the dictator may employ or cash in upon as an excuse to remain in control as the country boils. As Festus Adedayo¹⁷ makes clear in 2015, ‘We planted the seed of a terrorism-loving president and today, we are alarmed that terror has festooned the neck of the country.’ With our very own hands, ‘we have brought into office a man who is either too complicit or too incompetent to lead’ the country. His administration had spent N4.85 trillion while withdrawing \$2.35 billion from the ECA fund ostensibly to wage war on terrorism yet the menace was on the tip of the administration’s nose. In February 2022, outrage greeted Buhari’s personal approval (without going through the budget or the National Assembly) of N1.4 billion for the purchase of military security vehicles for the neighbouring Niger Republic arguing that no nation can fight insecurity and insurgency alone. The administration’s Finance Minister, Zainab Ahmed, had also argued in justification of personalism that while Nigerians had the right to question the approval, the President had the right to make his own assessment to fight insecurity from all



fronts.

But the insincerity of the Buhari administration has been queried on several fronts. While the Chief of Army Staff's refusal to engage mercenaries to combat insurgency had been thumped down in insincerity, Gen. Erabor, the Chief of Army Staff, had argued that it would do better to harness military votes to improve the army's capacity than to deal with unpredictable foreign characters which may further jeopardise the sovereignty of the nation. This and others had left the Nigerian Indigenous National Alliance for Self-determination to call on western powers to cease the sales of arms and security goods to the Federal government because the previous ones acquired with borrowed funds by the administration ended up in the hands of Boko haram insurgents and bandits in Bornu and Zamfara and were being used to annihilate harmless and defenceless people in the Middle belt and South-east. Considering that the administration's record on human rights and security was poor and tended towards the genocide of perceived ethnic communities, and thus a clear danger to democracy, the alliance pushed for sanctions against the administration. Therefore, an allegation of sponsoring insecurity in Igbo would not be strange to the milieu but shall be interrogated in this study.¹⁸

LITERATURE REVIEW

Usman Evelyn¹⁹ has consistently painted a graphic picture of the attack on the State institution of Police, particularly in the east of Nigeria. On 8th January 2021, there was an attack on Onueke Police Station in Ezza South Local Government in Ebonyi State. Three policemen have killed two sustained bullet injuries. On 1st February 2021 gunmen razed Omoba Police Divisional Headquarters in Isiala-Ngwa South Local Government Area in Abia State. A policeman was killed and the armoury was looted. On 4th February 2021, a Police Station at Isu Onicha Local Government Area in Ebonyi was razed by hoodlums. On 5th February 2021, Umulogbo Police Station in Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State was attacked. Two policemen were killed. On 23rd February 2021, there was an attack on the World Bank Housing Estate Police Station in Abayi in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State. Two policemen were killed and the Station was burnt. On 24th February 2021, hoodlums killed policemen and burnt Patrol vehicles in the Ekwulobia area of Anambra State. On 25th February 2021, gunmen attacked a Police Station in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State, killing a policewoman.

On 1st March 2021, Iboko Divisional Police Headquarters in Izzi in Ebonyi State was razed down by hoodlums. On 9th March 2021, a Police Station at Ihitte Uboma Local Government Area of Abia State was burnt down by hoodlums. On 18th March 2021, hoodlums numbering 20 attacked the Police Patrol team in Neni in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State and killed a policeman. On 19th March 2021, gunmen attacked Ekwulobia Police Station in Anambra State killing a policeman. On 20th March 2021, a Divisional Police Station in Umuelemai in Isiala Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State was attacked. On 22nd March 2021, bandits killed three policemen at Abiriba Police Division, Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State and carted away police rifles. On 31st March 2021, three Police officers attached to Charles

Soludo, an APGA gubernatorial candidate in Anambra State were killed during an attack at Izuofia in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.



On 5th April 2021, Imo State Police Command Headquarters in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State was razed down with several vehicles burnt. On 8th April 2021, armed men invaded Mbieri Divisional Headquarters in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State and freed all detained suspects. On 14th April 2021, gunmen disguised as mourners killed three policemen attached to the Safer Highway Patrol team along Ogoja-Abakaliki Expressway, Ebonyi State. On 19th April 2021, armed gunmen invaded Zone 13 Police Headquarters in Ukpo, Dunukofia Local Government Area, Anambra State and killed three policemen. On 21st April 2021, gunmen attacked Adani Police Station in Uzo-Ani Local Government Area of Enugu State and killed two policemen and set the Station ablaze.²⁰

The Governors in the east have through their Chairman, David Umahi,²² called attention to the fact that the monster of insecurity in the east must be stemmed so that the national question behind it may be addressed because if it is not, fringe elements behind it may start attacking stakeholders and elites. He opined that those burning down Police Stations and killing policemen were criminals operating under the guise of IPOB and ESN whereas the groups have consistently emphasised that they were not responsible and have specifically disclaimed responsibilities. This has left a snag in the interpretation of the cause and the groups behind the attacks.

As Umahi was making reference to the fact that one of the world wars was started with a quarrel within a family, the foremost Igbo group, Ohaneze Ndigbo World Wide, was claiming that its attention had been drawn to an ongoing massive arrest of Igbo youths by the Nigerian Army led by the 34 Artillery Brigade, Owerri in Oguta and Ohaji communities. The youths were being clamped into Army vans and taken to unknown destinations. Calling the action cowardly and uncivilised, Ohaneze claimed that it ran contrary to every sense of natural justice and rights of citizenship for the Army to invade Igbo communities in search of youths most of whom were brilliant University graduates whose society has denied employment and a sense of belonging. The group had called on the Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru (who was to die in a plane crash soon thereafter) to halt the invasion as it could give impetus to the proposal by the United Kingdom Visa and Immigration Office to offer asylum and open support for IPOB and lead to persecution of the group that had continued to decline involvement in the eastern security crises but was neck deep in the nationality agitation.

It is true, according to Nwakanma Obi²² that Easterners have long suffered under the brutality of soldiers and policemen who have become visible symbols of a failed State, targeting them, however, this must stop. Such acts of political vengeance would spiral out of control, and grow into their own beast. But it is also important to examine the root of the growing attack on state institutions. The current generation of Igbo is spiritually and emotionally uncoupled from Nigeria. It is a terrible situation, and indeed a tragic turn of events. It is more so because the Igbo are the spine of the Nigerian federation. 'If you break the spine of the nation, it becomes crippled. Igbo constitutes the most active economic and cultural force that welds Nigeria. These are people driven by an independent and free spirit whom anthropologists have described as freedom-loving people.' The sole and real character of the Igbo has very often, been mistaken by those who do not understand them or who hardly study them. The accusation of extreme individualism of the Igbo is a misreading and an error in judgment.

Clearly, according to Nwakanma, two main factions have emerged in Igbo cosmology today. First, there is the militant separatist movement, whose main arrowhead is IPOB. They are driving a very youthful militant uprising which is creating a political storm in the old eastern



region. This neo-Biafra movement rests squarely on unsettled grievances; it began to assume new militant dimensions because of the failed politics of Mohammed Buhari whose policies and doctrine of nepotism drove a permanent wedge with long-suffering Igbo youths. The serial acts of misgovernance by the Buhari administration only added lint to the fire. Igbo youths are said to be rushing to join and enlist in the Eastern Security Network their aim being to protect Igbo land from the activities of gun-wielding Fulani herdsmen who have taken over many forests in Igbo land and caused havoc. The Igbo youths argue that 'It is the herdsmen who carry AK47s whom we do not know who supplies them that is the problem. Those accusing IPOB of being responsible for the attacks and insecurity are only giving the organisation a bad name to destroy it.'²³ To this separatist half of the Igbo moon can be found the likes of Douglas Anele²⁴ who provide the ideological advocacy for the movement. Anele *On the non-negotiability and sacrosanctity of one Nigeria* had canvassed that had Nnamdi Azikwe, the foremost Igbo politician, not allowed his naïve dream of one Nigeria to trump his sense of pragmatic realism and read the Fulani handwriting on the wall accurately, there probably might not have been a country called Nigeria beyond 1956 where Fulani supremacists such as Alhaji Maitama Sule, Ango Abdullahi, Nasir El Rufai and other nouveaux riches from the north would be talking about non-negotiability of one Nigeria or the purely fictional divine right of northerners to lead, and threatening those who demand a nation of their own because they are thoroughly dissatisfied with the Lugardian contraption which seems to have been designed to keep them perpetually under political bondage. Anele argues in '*The possible impossibility of Nigeria*' that she may cease to exist as one in the foreseeable future if these oligarchs fail to concede to serious devolution of powers along six geopolitical zones.

Secondly, there is the 'one Nigerianists' movement who though disenchanted with Nigeria, do not see separation from the Federal Republic of Nigeria as much of a political choice. Their argument is quite simple, according to Nwakanma: 'Nigeria is a work in progress; Buhari's time will come and go; the Igbo have invested too much in Nigeria to allow it to perish; it is, therefore, in the long term strategic interest of the Igbo and Nigerian ethnicities to work together and revamp Nigeria to fulfil the terms of its founding fathers as African's super state.'²⁵

The Minister of Interior, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola²⁶ rose to the continued attacks on State institutions when he observed that, 'A pattern of syndicated attacks on custodial centres was emerging and developing.' During the ENDSARS riot of 2020, there were coordinated attacks on custodial centres in Edo State and unsuccessful ones in Lagos State. The Imo State attacks on the Prisons and Police Headquarters were the worst in living memory in Nigeria. They were nothing short of a declaration of war against Nigeria: 'We are at war with an enemy that you may not yet know but who knows you inside out.' The attacks were meant to imperil law-abiding citizens with possible harm that could come on them from hardened criminals on the loose. Although the Minister did not see the attacks directly targeted at the nationality question, he raved that the State would react appropriately by going after the criminals and making them face the full wrath of the law: 'We will leave no stone unturned in fishing them out. Make no mistake, they will be hunted to the ends of the earth. They can only run but they cannot hide. We shall bring them to justice or in the alternative, take justice to them.' Yet, it was the same regime of the Minister that allowed the low penetrating risk of foreigners and bandits into the country bringing Nigeria into the legal context of modern upheavals and a spring.



Levelling the Accusation

The accusation of State sponsorship of insurgency in the southeast has been very virile even though the accusation should or ought to have been in the reverse; that is, the government accusing Igbo of terrorism. The accusation has been levelled by critical stakeholders in the region. Mbazulike Amechi²⁷ a first republic statesman, brings Hitlerism to the crisis and argues that the insecurity in the east is the mastermind of the State. That the killings of Igbo and their structures for self-determination, IPOB and ESN, are in the taste of Hitler! They are induced to blame the Igbo and used to annihilate them. He states, 'What is happening is what Hitler did against the Jews. He sent secret service to commit certain crimes and go back to accuse the Jews.' The Statesman believes that Buhari's regime sends in its agents into the east to commit attacks and burn down properties and turn around to blame the Igbo, IPOB and ESN in order to declare a state of emergency during which the military will plough down on the people after suspension of civil laws.

Mbazulike is also not comfortable with the position of all the Governors of the eastern states especially Ebonyi and Imo States where the Buhari regime and its party, APC, have established a foothold in the east. He believes that the Governors have become subservient to the Fulani ethnic nationality that the Buhari regime represents. He states that the Governors 'have been handed the keys to a wing of the Central bank by the Federal Government and none of them wants to lose his key as that will offend the one who handed over the keys to them. They are the tools of the Federal Government. They are not the kind of nationalists that we were. They are induced by money and personal gain.' As Johannes Hamischfeger notes the return to civil rule in 1999 has rather than end Igbo marginalisation, accentuated it; increasing ethno-religious clashes and due to land hunger which is the worst conditioning factor of Igbo, Ndigbo were forced to venture outside its environment making them live among those who hate and suspect them.^{27a}

The dissent of the Igbo against the Federal Government and its Governors is even expressed against the 'Ebube Agu' security structure put in place by the Governors of the eastern extraction. They ask, 'How do you expect the Fulani security officers whose kiths and kin are the herdsmen to plan the security of the southeast? How do you expect the same people whose kiths and kin hold the sword of Damocles over our heads to be our defenders? Our tormentors cannot protect us from a planned annihilation.' Emma Powerful²⁸ the spokesperson of IPOB claims that its intelligence unit had uncovered a secret file containing the list of suspected ESN and IPOB leaders to be annihilated or tortured. The list was compiled by southeast Governors, Traditional rulers, and President Generals of Community Town Unions and handed over to the Federal Government. This was even as IPOB had denied complicity with the wave of bloody attacks in the region. Rather than targeting an innocent organisation, IPOB opined that the government should face Boko Haram in the north instead of infiltrating into the only Igbo defensive mechanism.

The sister organisation of IPOB, MASSOB, which does not fully share the same ideological bent and practical steps in the struggle for the actualisation of the Biafra Republic, exonerates the organisations from criminal culpability. MASSOB's leader, Uchenna Madu²⁹ states, 'These acts of criminal terrorism by unknown gunmen being perpetrated in our land against government facilities, security agents and some prominent individuals are being sponsored by enemies of Ndigbo.' Through their Intelligence Agency, Madu submits that all the attacks are being sponsored and executed by the Federal Government of Nigeria through its protected



militiamen called ‘bandits and unknown gunmen.’ The government’s primary aim is to discredit non-violent pro-Biafra freedom fighters like IPOB and MASSOB and create the erroneous impression that they are violent and militant.

Madu argues that the attacks at Owerri Prisons and Police Command Headquarters (and later Kuje Prison, Abuja in 2022) were part of the ongoing destructive measures to create an erroneous impression that Biafrans are waging war against Nigeria. He fervently believes that the Fulani Commissioners of Police and Military Chiefs posted to Igboland are parts of these terrorists and they will never stop until they achieve their desired goal of the annihilation of the Igbo.

Thus, for Okoli Anayo³⁰ the apex Igbo-cultural body continues to express the fear that some powerful elements could be deliberately orchestrating violence to justify the predetermined invasion of the southeast. The incidences of the criminalities going on by the sophisticated nature and capacity of the likely perpetrators show that powerful elements are involved. The Federal Government should therefore seriously investigate the nature and sophistication of the incidents. But even the Governors of the eastern region do not seem to place the mastermind in the non-state actors. Governor David Umahi³¹ for instance states, ‘I am not standing for either IPOB or ESN, but they continue to deny involvement in the violence. But for me, criminality is criminality and I have directed security agents to crack down on all criminal activities in the State... We are aware that a policeman..., two soldiers ... and a civilian were killed. These are pure bandits. They do these killings and put them on social media that they are members of IPOB or ESN. These are rampant fake news.’ Vanguard³² investigations link the attacks to the failure of the authorities to free members of the pro-Biafra group in the Correctional Centre after warnings from ESN had earlier been issued. But the thing about these conflicts in this part of the world, developing countries, according to Yemi Osinbajo,³³ the Vice President in the Buhari regime, is that they are usually conflicts and wars without an end: ‘Everyone who thinks he has some monies stored up somewhere will eventually run out of money. Everyone who thinks he can go and hide somewhere, won’t even find a place to hide. In the end, everyone will suffer. Even if you don’t suffer, parents, children, young and old people and relations will suffer.’ The Professor of law and Vice President in government argued that Nigeria cannot afford another civil war and that every conflict is a result of elite failure to speak up the truth and tell the truth to their communities: ‘Keeping quiet will lead to a dangerous situation if we don’t speak up against disunity. If we keep quiet and remain under the radar, the enemies of peace and those who want to promote disunity will have their ways and when this happens, we start to run helter-skelter.’

But be the position of the Vice President as it may, the Coalition of South East Youth Leaders (COSEYL) has warned Governors David Umahi and Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu and the Ebonyi States of the admission of herdsmen into the east as it had become clear that they are killers and land grabbers with the intent of overrunning the natives and they cited the historical example of the fatal consequences of Oba Afonja’s admission of the Fulani migrants into the Ilorin empire which they soon thereafter overthrew till the modern era.³⁴ In support of the question of unchecked admission of Fulani into the east, Audu Ogbeh,³⁵ a former Minister of Agriculture, may not be far from the position of the Eastern States Youth Leaders when he canvassed that the bulk of violent herders is those marching in from neighbouring African countries in large numbers, showing no regard to boundaries, state or region. He opined that the fact remains that most herdsmen believe that they are free to enter any farm, eat up the crops and rape and kill anyone raising objections. But no modern society can accept that. He



thus called on the country to seek an amendment to Article 3 of the ECOWAS protocol, especially as regards the free movement of cattle and other livestock with special permits.

But while the position of Audu and the Eastern youths may be correct, factual situations do vary even in the southeast. Uyo farmers in Akwa Ibom State, for instance, have revealed that politicians are the real owners of cattle destroying their crops over the years.

The politicians merely employ the herders to work for them. When the farmers are killed by herders the politicians move in to pacify the relatives of the farmers deceptively promising to investigate the killing through the Nigerian police force and bring the herders to book but will always fail to do so. And this is essentially the reason why the Akwa Ibom State government will not key into the ban on open grazing. If politicians hire Fulani to take care of the cattle for them, they should be held responsible for their crimes of carrying knives, sophisticated guns and weapons, the farmers maintain. This is because the fact that they work for politicians in the State emboldens them to commit atrocities against the farmers and farmland crops.³⁶ It is for reasons of this nature that Pat Utomi³⁷ has found it difficult to tell which bandits are Nigeria's greater problem, the ones in the bush causing insecurity or the ones in positions of public authority as politicians. Therefore, when President Buhari announced a special security measure for the S-east and S-south disapproval greeted it because it was considered a trap for the State capable of leading it into regrettable civil unrest, armed struggle and war with IPOB, ESN and the herders being drawn into the fray. In line with the observed infiltration of militiamen into the S-south and S-east, Ikot Afanga, Ntak Ikot Akpan and Ukana Uwa in Essien Udim Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State have been struck. Suspected ethnic militiamen that infiltrated the communities ceaselessly attacked security agents and facilities, displacing indigenes then camped at St Anne's Catholic Cathedral Ikot Ekpene.³⁸ In Umutu in Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta State, the Police Station was attacked overnight and vehicles parked at the Station were set ablaze. In Ashaka in Ndokwa East Local Government Area, Delta State, a checkpoint was first attacked. A policeman was killed and a patrol van was set ablaze. Weeks later, the Ashaka Police Station was stormed and burnt down. In neighbouring Kwale town in Ndokwa West Local Government Area of Delta State, a police checkpoint near Obetim Uno was similarly attacked and a policeman was killed.

The attack on the Owerri prisons and the Police Command Headquarters was an advanced stage in the ENDSARS phenomenon. The attackers came in their numbers with general-purpose machine guns, sub-machine guns, Ak49 rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and improvised explosive devices. Omonobi et al³⁹ submit that they were members of IPOB and ESN. An operational vehicle of the attackers was recovered and subjected to forensic scrutiny and investigations. The fact that six inmates voluntarily returned to the Correctional Centre while 35 others refused to escape ought to provide sufficient sports witnesses to give security agencies a lead into their investigations.⁴⁰ But after freeing 1,844 inmates of Owerri prisons and bombing the Police Command Headquarters in Owerri, the IPOB and ESN were still fingered in the razing down of Ehime Mbano police station. No fewer than 25 police stations have been burnt in southeast and south-south with 67 security men killed. Again Yemi Osinbajo SAN argues, 'When you attack police stations and release criminals you put men and women in society in danger. When you attack institutions of law and order, it is evident that it is not just an attack on justice but on the welfare and wellbeing of the people.'⁴¹

But MASSOB does not agree on the fingering of the ESN and IPOB. MASSOB accuses the Federal Government of the frequent attacks with the primary aim of discrediting non-violent



pro-Biafra freedom fighters like MASSOB and IPOB arguing, ‘How can untrained people with no military background overpower the entire security apparatus of Nigeria in the southeast? Why was it that there was no security resistance during the implosion of the Owerri prisons and the Police Command Headquarters for an attack of such magnitude that lasted more than three hours? Even the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) queried the methodology deployed by a past Inspector General of Police, Adam Mohammed, at arriving at the conclusion that the attack was masterminded by IPOB when no forensic investigation was carried out. HURIWA fingered dereliction of duty on the part of the Comptroller of Prisons and called for his resignation because the government was busy rewarding the failure and incompetence of officers who went to bed while their command and offices went on fire.⁴²

But Chief of Defence Staff⁴³ and Kadaria Ahmed⁴⁴ do not consider it necessary for the public to know that all is not well with the Nigerian security apparatus. They advise civil society organisations and media to stop giving oxygen to terrorists or tune down paying attention to terrorists and criminal elements in the fringes which kill and maim without rethink as it emboldens them to commit more despicable acts. They argue correctly that the solution to the security challenges requires asymmetric actions across broad policy areas because conflicts and crises situations present the most formidable challenge to the protection and observance of human and peoples’ rights and that experience has shown in Africa and elsewhere that it is in conflict and crises that most egregious violations and abuses of rights are perpetrated. History also shows that military and violent means to solve the national question is bound to fail as it leads to further national fractionalization, anarchy and eventual or inevitable disintegration as in all empires, multi-national states and countries.

Back-grounding the crisis: role of the people

The people have the most critical role to play in crises and during the insurgency. The people must be willing to report those committing crimes to law enforcement agencies. Working with police and military officers to identify criminals is important to peace. It is only when the police and security services are working with the community that the situation can be turned around. As stated by Vanguard, no one has the magic wand to convert a failed system into a successful one. What is needed is the shifting of more power to the people. There is no better way of achieving this than to let the people play their natural role in their own affairs and defence.⁴⁵ Countries that have done this are: Brazil, Bermuda, Belarus, Myanmar, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Egypt, Finland, Israel, Morocco, Norway, South Korea, North Korea, Mexico, Switzerland, Singapore, Russia, United Arab Emirate, Ukraine, Turkey, Tunisia, Thailand and Taiwan.

The background to the current agitation in the southeast may require a short overview. It is to be found in the marginalisation of the south-easterners in civil and military services especially in promotion and placement in strategic positions at the Federal level of government. During the administration of Obasanjo, Nnamdi Kanu was the second in command to Uwazurike in MASSOB but shortly before the end of the administration, Nnamdi Kanu pulled out and formed IPOB. During the Jonathan administration, they increased their demands and formed a militant wing: the ESN.⁴⁶

South-eastern Governors have also been surprised by the sudden volt-face in their relationship with the nomadic Fulani that they had to go into the simple historiography of the citizens’ impression of the situation before the coming into power by their kinsman, President



Mohammed Buhari. David Umahi⁴⁷ captures it as follows, ‘We have been living with herders for hundreds of years with minor misunderstandings. You spoil my farm you pay some compensation. I kill your cow I pay compensation until the crisis in

Libya and other West African countries erupted. Foreign herders with Ak47 infiltrated the entire country killing and raping women. And they are in the forests beyond the control of any State government and security agencies and suddenly, IPOB said, it can’t allow it and both are in the forests so what do you expect? Nobody is saying herders should not be in the south but it has to be a business. When people go to other areas, they buy land and rent a shop. That is how business is done. You don’t enter peoples’ land without their knowledge.’

In another narrative similar to the foregoing, Governor David Umahi captures the historiography as follows, ‘It was always as strange as it was curious that a boy of 12 years and pregnant women would endure the harsh weather and the risk of the wild forests tending cattle. Only very rarely, the cattle would stray and destroy the crops on the farm and they would sincerely apologise. The apologies were taken in good faith... But a few years ago, the Fulani became impudent and uncontrollably lionised. They would unleash their cattle and would maim and kill the owner of the farm if he or she complained. They would violate and debauch young girls and mothers before sending them to their early graves.’⁴⁸

But the same David Umahi will give a contrary impression of the same people. After they had killed and sent young girls and women to their early graves, they would turn around to Umahi to volunteer information on how the culprits can be apprehended. The same Governor would turn around and state, ‘To volunteer information is something that is cheering. We are happy with you since 2015. We are deeply satisfied with the way you have carried out your business in the State. You are not discriminatory and violent. Through your contact and reach, let us follow through. We are still looking for those who murdered innocent people at Nkalagu. We trust that you will assist the State in that direction. Islam is a religion of peace, unity and generosity and its tenets are wrapped up in peace and love. You must continue on that path. Nigeria needs it at this time.’⁴⁹

Yet, the rising hostility against the S-east and S-south zones since the beginning of the Buhari regime has not only been of concern to the people of the region but other stakeholders and the leaders of the S-west, particularly, the Afenifere. The Yoruba ethnic group under their umbrella has fingered the misgivings of the Buhari administration against the Igbo which have consistently failed to vote for the regime in the two previous general elections in 2015 and 2019. The shoot-on-sight order against the youths of the S-eastern extraction by the regime is wrong and divisive. While the regime allows the Fulani to roam freely, killing and raping, protecting and prevaricating to their atrocities, the Igbo have been denied dialogue and civil discourse.⁵⁰ The desperation of the Nigerian State to rein in the Biafran agitation has been unequalled even in the face of the inauguration of a Boko Haram Governor in Bornu State while Professor Zulum is the seating Governor of the Nigeria State of Bornu.

Upon the killing of Ikonso, the second in command in IPOB, 48 years old Anwurum Eze (aka Maputo) was alleged to have taken over in ESN. The State went after Eze to the extent that IPOB had to disown him claiming that there were better energetic young men in Igboland to lead IPOB and ESN than a 48 years old man whom IPOB alleged was being framed up by his Traditional ruler over issues completely unconnected with the Biafran struggle.⁵¹ Although the military stoutly denied later (without better factual evidence or convincing argument)



military postings in the east and south were surfeited with core northern elements whose presence in the zones was sufficiently suspected to be an agenda to hold down Ndigbo while the infiltration of their zone was completed. For instance, in Anambra State, the Cantonment Commandant 302 Artillery Regiment Onitsha was Col. Abdulsalm Abubakar Sambo, a Hausa-Fulani Muslim. In Imo State, the Brigade Commander 34 Brigade, Obinze has Brig. Gen Ibrahim Tukura, northerner. In Abia State, the Brigade Commander 14 Brigade, Ohafia, was Brig. Gen. M. Ibrahim, a northerner. In Akwa-Ibom State, the Brigade Commander 2 Brigade, Uyo, was Brig.

Gen. Faruk Mijinyawa, a northerner.⁵² The suspicion of the Igbo that they were being encircled, that there was a conspiracy against it was quite palpable just like before the last civil war that Professor Obiozor, President General, Ohaneze Ndigbo Worldwide, canvassed that a lesson ought to be learnt that Nigeria should not fight an un-win-able war against ethnic nationalism but should seek amicable peaceful options over the conflict in the land as there had been a systematic exclusion of the Igbo in the national scheme of things capable of generating and engendering resentment much as it had previously led to war. Much as these suspicions were on, a former Head of State, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar had to come forward to extricate himself from the clear suspicion that he was involved in the ownership of an arrested helicopter used in supplying food and weapon to bandits and insurgents in Niger State and that former Governor Peter Obi, a former Vice Presidential aspirant in Peoples Democratic Party in the 2019 presidential election was involved in the sponsorship of the Biafran movement through the offer of money to sustain the agitation and the use of Igbo for selfish ends including winning elections illegally.⁵³ The latter allegation had been considered wild.

Dakuku Peterside⁵⁴ painted the picture more polemically. Imo State has witnessed more than five attacks on security formations in the first quarter of 2021. The southeast has become a morbid theatre of the absurd where security men are randomly murdered. Many have wondered about the fate of the ordinary, unarmed, defenceless Nigerians if those with arms to protect the unarmed are themselves killed at random. It was apparent that something was seriously wrong with the security architecture and the right policy to tackle insecurity and take the proper steps to safeguard lives. Delivering the verdict, Peterside states, 'The head of the Owerri Correctional Centre will continue in office. The Prison Officials who were supposed to ensure that the hoodlums did not gain access to the Prisons would continue to receive all their salaries and emoluments. Simultaneously, the soldiers manning the armoured personnel carrier will return to their duty post. No one resigns. No one is demoted. No one is sacked. No one takes responsibility. When the fire of the incident eventually dies down, we will continue as if nothing has happened.' In saner climes, many heads would have rolled.

Blaming Drivers of crisis

Emeka Diwe,⁵⁵ the National President of the Association of Southeast Town Unions (ASETU) lays the blames on all the stakeholders in the imbroglio in the southeast. Diwe blames Nnamdi Kanu for a threat he issued after the Orlu incident when a Church was destroyed and members of his IPOB sect were taken into custody he vowed that if they were not released within a month, the whole State would be on fire. Diwe also indicted the government of Imo State because during the attack which took several hours, the government did not respond to the counter-attack and the Government House was in the neighbourhood of the attacked facilities. Thirdly, Diwe indicted the Police for failing to react only to claim that it was able to secure and remove its armoury. In light of Diwe's apportionment of blame for the attacks, Chilos Godsent,



the President of Igbo National Council (INC) called for the immediate demotion, arrest and trial of all the heads of security agencies in Imo State for suspected conspiracy and lack of capacity to effectively protect Nigerians of south-east extraction. However, a top Commander of ESN who was not ready to volunteer his identity at the time and shortly after the attacks stated that the ESN was not behind the attacks days after Nnamdi Kanu also denied the mastermind of the attacks.

The response of the southeast Governors was the launching of a security network coded Ebube-Agwu. The pressure on the Governors to set up the security outfit had been in the pipeline for many years previously until it was accentuated by the ferocious bloody attacks in the Uzouwani community in Enugu State and Egedegede community in Ebonyi State where not less than 20 persons were brutally butchered by killer Fulani herdsmen. An outrage that greeted the massacre compelled the Vice President, Professor Osinbanjo, to visit Ebonyi State. Governor David Umahi, Chairman of south-east Governors had been in an unholy romance with Fulani herdsmen treating them with kid gloves and granting them swathes of the eastern heartland to settle to please the Federal government controlled by a blood-thirsty Fulani man.⁵⁶ It was even alleged that there was an intelligence report on the attack on the Police Headquarters and Prisons and the Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma, and all the heads of State Security Services in the east did not pay attention to the reports. Shortly before the attack, a retired Deputy Inspector General of Police, Celestine Okoye had warned of the presence of over 332 camps in southeast forests being established by AK47-wielding Fulani herdsmen. 'The signs had been there but the Governors refused to pick it up from there thus, the entire blame must be on them. They had behaved as if the Fulani had elected them'⁵⁷

Sam Amadi who had perused the communiqué setting up the Ebube-Agu Security states that he is not impressed with both the quality of the thinking and political will displayed by the document, that there is so much hesitation and prevarication. The ban on open grazing has no law backing it. It is a mere declaration. That an executive declaration is not a law that criminalises an act and there is no agency or commission committed to enforcing the ban. That it hangs on non-descript vigilante groups scattered all over the southeast to enforce it. That it buttresses the claims of IPOB that ESN is the only hope of south-eastern security and that the Governors have sold out to Fulani oligarchy for the 2023 presidential election.⁵⁸

Amadi argues that the Ebube-Agu security outfit was most likely the baptism name given to the 2019 illegitimate and unpopular community policing arrangement by the same Governors during which all the security chiefs that attended the meeting where the decision to use community policing to checkmate the menace of Jihadist Fulani herdsmen in the southeast were made up of Officers of Fulani-Hausa Muslim extraction. Thus, the outfit was likely for the protection and consolidation of the Jihadist Fulani herdsmen incursions and settlements in south-east bushes, farmlands and outposts in Benue, Kogi,

Rivers, Delta, Cross Rivers, and Bayelsa States.⁵⁹ It is argued further that it is similar to Egwu-Eke and Atilogwu Udo that the Nigerian Army camouflaged to massacre over 700 Igbo and maimed over 800 defenceless citizens of the southeast. That the recruitment of Igbo youths into Ebube-agu to face Fulani herdsmen who are armed to the teeth with AK47s and GPF who are equally backed by the Federal government army would be foolhardy.

In fact, since 2018, 2019 and 2020 the Association of Southeast Town Unions (ASETU) had convoked and organized retreats for the establishment of a security outfit in the east but the



eastern Governors had been lagging until it became late in the day after IPOB had entrenched ESN to the appreciation of hapless Ndigbo. However, Governor Ikpeazu has maintained that Ebube-Agu was established at the right time to do the needful to protect the people of the eastern region from non-state-actors terrorising south easterners and urge the Federal government to address the injustices driving IPOB secessionist agenda. MASSOB has also supported the Governors' security outfit arguing that Mazi Nnamdi Kanu had no constitutional power or authority to unilaterally constitute ESN for Ndigbo claiming that the ESN was just an internet affair, a social media network.

But the rise of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and his radio Biafra between 2012 and 2014 were regarded as distractions that were better ignored until the situation changed when Buhari became President in 2015 with a Fulani charter which he used to corner the commonwealth to his ethno-religious and regional kinsmen while Ndigbo who do not vote for him were shut out. Kanu's arrest, detention, trial, bail and miraculous escape from Nigeria when the Nigerian Army attacked his father's Palace and his re-arrest and retrial have catapulted him into the symbol of the renewed Biafran struggle. For Nnanna Ochereome⁶⁰ Buhari's chronic nepotism which the Igbo decided to bear until 2023 is not really the issue. He demanded land from the eastern Governors to settle down his nomadic herder kinsmen but failed. He proposed RUGA and it failed. He asked for cattle colonies he failed. He gunned for the Federal government's ownership of water resources for all people, but it also failed. He decided to infiltrate by force. There was a nationwide drift of people of northern extraction southward during the Covid19 lockdown and thereafter, the communal attacks began to lead to the establishment of ESN by IPOB.

Observations

The nail is better driven into the coffin. Since the last war, the Igbo have been a special target for vendetta and appear to be suffering from an 'officially inspired policy of marginalisation and stagnation.' They are treated in official circles like 'Pariah' and worst than second-class citizens. And no people can be subjected to what the Igbo are going through and remain quiet or have a sense of belonging. If the Igbo are responsible for the insurgency in the east, the government has not been able to establish a clear case from the available evidence. If the government is behind the insurgency, evidence on the ground seems to sustain the claim.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

The consciousness and the lessons of the last war cannot be lost on the Igbo. There is no manifest desire on their part to confront any military authority whether of the Federal government or even the agitators of the Biafra republic. The Igbo do not want to be statistics in any open confrontation with anyone. They sit at home on the declaration of the agitators because they know the implication of failing to do so and not because they want to obey the illegality of sit-at-home. The agitators have also roundly dissociated themselves from the terrorism that has been witnessed in Igbo land. The denial is not in the taste of the general method of terrorists and separatists. Accepting the responsibility for terror is the known disposition of separatists. The desire to resist the incursion of herdsmen and bandits into Igbo land has been the outspoken reason for the formation of the Eastern Security Network which is the military wing of IPOB. The sponsorship of terrorism and insurgency in Igbo by the



Federal government is, therefore, diversionary and uncalled for and should be stayed.

RECOMMENDATION

Dialogue and democratic exercise should be employed in getting the Igbo reintegrated into the Federal system by getting their own to aspire to the highest political office in the land even though it may not disillusion the Igbo from the call to be on their own.

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