

Marginalization Syndrome in Nigeria's Politics: The Case of Ndigbo

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ABSTRACT

This study examines what has now turned to be a deliberate strategy of denial against the Igbos in Nigeria's politics. It identifies salient issues to the full actualization of the political aspiration of Ndigbo in Nigeria's political space. Marginalization has been the complaints of almost all the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Fortunately, we have democratic groups contending for a proper integration of all ethnic nationalities in the country. The safety, happiness and joy of the Igbo will be completed when the deliberate bottlenecks against them are removed; and putting in place an atmosphere conducive for achieving their desired aspirations in an inclusive Nigeria. Based on the findings, it is recommended among others that Ndigbo have lost the cooperative spirit and sense of obligation to the immediate family, village and clan which was a hallmark of the Igbo man before the Nigeria-Biafra war, they must learn to restrain from the propensity of internal feud and bickering in pursuit of excessive self-centeredness and individualism.

Keywords: Marginalization, politics, Ndigbo, alienation, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Marginalization is without doubt a recurring phenomenon prevalent in the socio-political life of the Igbo in Nigeria. It is not as if there are no complaints about marginalization by other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. But the present predicament of Ndigbo can be traced to the Nigeria – Biafra war of 1967-1970. The war which ended since 1970 left the Igbos devastated and disorganized in unimaginable proportion. The Igbomen, according to Uwalaka (2003), have particularly been made to feel vanquished. Even though the physical formal war has been ended, yet there appears to have been more insidious, more perfidious, more destructive and dangerous 'war' against the Igbo. Therefore, our interest in this study is to unearth the strategy of denial against the Igbos in Nigeria, be it economic, bureaucratic, structural and political space.

Commenting on the issue, Nwankwo (2000) insists that marginalization has become an Igbo bed mate. In fact, it is now a State alienation and exclusion. This phenomenon has brewed an inherent alienation of the Igbo in Nigeria, resulting in resentment and fear (Nwabueze, 2001). The marginalization of Ndigbo is so intense that no Igbo man, however good his credentials can today expect to command nationwide acceptance as a leader in the government and politics of Nigeria. Rather, a deliberate policy of casting over board the price-less colonial heritage of meritocracy in an insidious bid to stem the tide of

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competition, and largely succeed in emasculating the enterprising, competitive and geographically mobile Igbo is now in vogue. The progressive principles of merit and competition are now supplemented by such nebulous and retrogressive policies as 'federal character', 'quota system,' and State of origin'. It is therefore, the intension of this article to bring into focus the specific policies, programmes and projects which have been devised and adopted by successive administrations in Nigeria (democratic and military) to punish the Igbo nation for going to war in 1967. Our analysis shall be based on a situation where one group marginalizes another, which brings about unequal relationship. Therefore, class analysis will be our framework for an understanding of this work. This concept believes that the take-off point for understanding the formation with interaction that goes on in a society is by first of all understanding and analyzing the relationship that exists between the various classes and means of production.

Karl Marx, a German born economic philosopher, is the leading proponent of class structure in a society. According to him, the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle (Marx and Engel, 1989). The State is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another. It therefore postulates that the division of society into classes is linked with private ownership of means of production. Lenin on his part posits that:

In an exploitative society, the term class applies to groups of people, one which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy (Lenin, 1977).

Again, class, as seen by Ekekwe (1986) is largely a group of people different from one another by the place they occupy a historically determined system of social production. In summation, class relations are in other words, contradictory. It involves conflicts and opposition. Class lacks co-existence, which leads to antagonism. A systematic understanding of the above will help affirm why the intense quest for a redressing of the marginalization of the Igbo nation in Nigeria politics, by the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba power configurations is necessary. This of course, offers an explanation for the persistent agitation by Ndigbo for a more egalitarian posture in Nigeria's politics. Our explanation is that the Igbo's deliberate exclusion from the commanding height of Nigeria's politics is due to the marginalization policy. This is because; marginalization is similar to the oppression of the poor in Karl Marx theory of class struggle. The policy of deliberate exclusion which is the order of the day in Nigeria, results in class struggle among the various ethnic groups. In explaining the application of the theory to this work, Nnoli's interpretations of Lasswell's postulation of politics seems most suitable. Politics involves the allocation of social, economic and cultural resources to individuals, groups, regions and classes (Nnoli, 2003).

The dominance of Nigerian politics by the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba has seen them controlling the commanding height of Nigeria's key positions in politics and governance. Therefore, in the context of marginalization, it is multi-faceted (political, economic, social, psychological and cultural). It is both disheartening and agonizing to the Igbo nation and their sympathizers as well. According to Aja (2000), marginalization is a deliberate set

back in development efforts, and to be structurally disadvantaged is a structural function of development. Echoing further, Afigbo (2000) states that marginalization is a deliberate disempowerment of people in the federation politically, economically, socially and militarily by another group or groups from either having access to and or taking due possession of common key positions and common resources, as manifested in the political, economic, military, educational, media and bureaucratic realms in Nigeria. He further observes that by extension, it is a deliberate conscious evil which results in 'powerlessness', 'subject powerlessness' and organizational powerlessness (Afigbo, 2000). It is therefore, instructive to state that this phenomenon is prevalent in societies where component groups are bedeviled by unequal and antagonist relationships.

Marginalization of Ndigbo before Independence to 1970

Marginalization during this period was perpetrated against all Nigerians irrespective of ethnic or regional affiliations by the British colonialist. There were ethnic and regional rivalries, but no group(s) had the power to marginalize others. But the colonial masters marginalized all the ethnic groups, which means all ethnic groups operated on a level field. Therefore, to fight colonial induced marginalization, there emerged nationalist movements whose thrust was to fight for the restoration, protection and preservation of the rights and privileges of these nations within the colonial Nigeria. In response to this, Taiwo *et al* (1974) posit that the nationalist movement were not to organize any anti-government movement, but to the work of the government in a loyal and constitutional manner.

However, it took the intervening period of 1960-1970, for the forces of ethnic particularism which had been artificially repressed during the colonial regime, to burst forth, gather momentum and culminate into the crises of 1967-1970. In reaction to this ugly development, Achebe (1983) observes that the marginalization against the Igbo may have started in 1968, when Nigeria changed her currency. This made Ndigbo to lose over 50,000,000 million pounds in foreign exchange. In his account, Achebe (1983) states that:

A banking policy was evolved which nullifies any bank account, which had been operated during the civil-war, this had the immediate result of pauperizing the Igbo middle class and earning a profit of 4.5 million pounds for the government treasury.

Further, the marginalization of the Igbo could be seen from the creation of more States in Nigeria. From the perspective of today, Gowon's action could be seen as wonderful to the East. But, at the time, it was a political master-stroke to scatter the solidarity of the eastern region. It was this that prompted Okadigbo to remark that through the State creation, they were trying to sever the Efik, Ibibio, and the rivers people from the Igbos and hence destabilize their common resolve, to face the danger confronting them (Okadigbo, 2000).

Marginalization of Ndigbo from 1970 till date

By the end of the civil war in January, 1970, the control of power and distribution of economic resources at the center had fallen absolutely into the hands of the war victors.

The discrimination in the siting of major federal government projects in Igbo land coupled with the abandoning of many of them, also attests to this syndrome of marginalization. Again, Achebe (1983) affirms that:

Many have tried, but nobody has quite succeeded in explaining away the siting of five steel mills worth N4.5 million on final completion, with estimated employment capacity of 100,000 by 1990; only in the North and West of Nigeria (Achebe, 1983:49)

A further, confirmation of the post civil- war Igbo marginalization, was seen in the siting of projects like major industries, huge irrigation schemes and agricultural projects to other parts of Nigeria, deliberately excluding the Igbo heart land. It was therefore, evident that the cumulative consequences of these wide ranging marginalizations were quite pronounced in the economic sector, which has sentenced Ndigbo to economic penury and strangulation. In laying credence to this ugly trend, Nwakanma (2000) got it right when he states that:

... economic and political policies of the federal government which limited access to political power of Easterners, especially the Igbo, has led not only to economic hemorrhaging, but also to an economic wasteland.

In summation, it is the context of this study to state that right from the Yakubu Gowon's administration through to the Murtala/Obasanjo era of 1975-1979, to the Shagari presidency of 1979-1983 and to the dictatorship of Buhari/Idiagbon of 1983-1985, up to the Babangida and Abacha regimes of 1985-1998, culminating into the Abdulsalami Abubakar, Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Yar'Adua's administration of 1998-1999, 1999-2007 and 2007-2010 respectively, Ndigbo have suffered an unbelievable discrimination in every sphere of Nigeria's socio-political and economic life. The only exception to this ugly trend is the Jonathan administration of 2010 to 2015.

Salient Indicators of Marginalization against Ndigbo

Marginalization does not take an automatic form of disempowerment of ethnic group or territory by those who control the center of power, authority and resources. In practice, it appears subtle and hidden yet, marginalization is real. Going by experience, public policies are not formulated from the stand point of objectivity and overall national interest or on the basis of justice, fair play and equity. Rather, it is from the point of parochial ethnic considerations such that the ethnic groups whose members dominated the federal government since independence and especially since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war has persistently swung the political pendulum to their favour. Without mincing words, Ndigbo have suffered tremendous marginalization through clearly designed and well-crafted state policies all of which have left them emasculated, psychologically battered, drained and unsure, socially harassed, economically and materially dispossessed and pauperized. It is against this background that this work attempts an exposition of the salient indicators of marginalization against Ndigbo within the context of Nigeria's politics. These indicators include:

Political emasculation: The ability to stabilize Nigeria's unity depends highly on the extent to which the Igbo are integrated in Nigeria. This is the most fundamental of all the instrument of marginalization. It is the instrument that has been used to exclude the Igbo

effectively from being key players in the formation and execution of major policy decisions in Nigeria.

The politics of State creation: State creation in Nigeria has been as controversial an issue as the political actors themselves. The State creation instrument has been used to emasculate and clip the wings of the Igbo. That is why one wonders the rationale behind the lumping together into one State in 1967 by Gowon, one of the tripods that make up Nigeria. Also, the State creation exercise of Ibrahim Babangida was lopsided in favour of the Hausas. So also was that of Abacha's regime during his own State creation exercise. The Hausas always maintain a higher number of States to have a political advantage above the Igbo in particular and the South in general. In the light of the above, Ojukwu in an interview observes that the person who has political power decides the way country goes (Ojukwu, 2001). Therefore, the purpose of this strategy is simply to dispossess, pauperize and indeed marginalize the Igbo, and reduce their relevance in Nigeria.

Discrimination in federal appointments: It is a fact that the Igbos have enough manpower to aspire for any political leadership in Nigeria. Also, the utmost permanent occupation of the presidency by the Hausa/Yoruba is seemingly immutable. A critical appraisal of the appointive and elective positions in the federal level points to a prerogative right for certain ethnic groups in Nigeria. Instances abound, the office of the President of the Federation, Chairman and Directors of federal parastatals, commanding structures of various military installations, have been specifically left for the Hausas, Fulanis and Yorubas. The table below illustrates the deliberate slide against the Igbo.

Table 1: Composition of highest decision making bodies of the governance in Nigeria on the basis of regions of origin (figures in percentage)

S/N	Regime	North	West	East
1	Balewa (Cabinet)	37.3	37.3	25.4
2	Ironsi (SMC)	50	33.3	16.7
3	Gowon (SMC)	60	40	0%
4	Gowon (Cabinet)	41.7	41.7	16.8
5	Murtala/Obasanjo (Cabinet)	44	36	20
6	Shagari (Cabinet)	37.5	22.5	20
7	Buhari (SMC)	61.1	27.5	20
8	Babangida (AFRC -1985 Set)	50	36.7	13.3
9	Babangida (AFRC-1991 Set)	54.5	36.4	9.1
10	Babangida (AFRC-1992 Set)	55.6	38.8	5.6
11	Shonekon (ING)	47.9	31.2	20.9
12	Abacha (PRC)	63	27	9
13	Abubakar (PRC)	65	26	9
14	Obasanjo (Cabinet)	56.5	25	19.5
15	Yar' Adua (Cabinet)	64.5	12.5	23
16	Jonathan (Cabinet)	20	32.5	47.5

Source: Nnamani (2013:48)

It should however, be noted that it is only the Jonathan's administration that has not complied implementing the lopsided cabinet structure of his predecessors in office against Ndigbo.

Rather, his administration has demonstrated enormous zeal, unanimity of purpose and more proactive in reintegration of Ndigbo and thereby has played a more inclusive politics in Nigeria.

Military neutralization: In the logic of the victorious coalition, military neutralization is found to be the final strategy to Igbo possible resurgence. To neutralize the Igbo militarily, the policy of “according to them”, only token presence in the Nigerian army was accordingly adopted. The lowly presence of the Igbo in the military hierarchy has been the absorption of only a negligible number of the Nigerian army offices of Igbo origin.

Selective Development: The seaports of Calabar and Port Harcourt which are close the Igbo have been excluded from a serious development attention to promote import-export activities. No reason is cogent enough. Today many importers travel to Lagos to clear their goods. More so occasional ban on importation of second hand vehicles (Tokunbo) and stockfish (okporoko) are intended to marginalize the Igbo. The question to ask is, why the Oguta Lake has not been transformed into an international seaport and the dredging of River Niger at Onitsha.

Educational Policy: This was another deliberate weapon of denial against Ndigbo. The introduction of quota policy of admission, establishment of unity schools; and the denial of access to infrastructure, instructional materials, funds, curriculum etc., was to achieve stunted advancement of Ndigbo into occupying key positions in our public life.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Marginalization has been the complaint of almost all the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria including Ndigbo. Fortunately, we have democratic groups contending for a proper integration of all ethnic nationalities in the country. The safety, happiness and joy of Ndigbo will be complete when the deliberate conspiracy against their aspirations is removed. This phenomenon has affected the sense of common identity among the Igbos, both as individuals and as a nation. Ndigbo must learn to restrain from the propensity of internal feud and bickering in pursuit of excessive self-centeredness and individualism, they have lost the cooperative spirit and sense of obligation to the immediate family, village and clan which was a hallmark of the Igbo man before the Nigeria-Biafra war. In this regard, there is the need for the revival of the old spirit. The outcome of this, coupled with the complexities of a post war Nigeria and a new democratic culture in Nigeria demands that an Igbo man should be given the opportunity to be the president of a new Nigeria. It is after this, that we can safely say that the civil-war is indeed now over. If we are to trust, hope and have confidence in a united Nigeria, justice, equity and fairness should not only be done, but should manifestly be seen to have been done. It is on this basis that this research makes the following recommendations for a major government policy that will help neutralize this obnoxious policy.

Resource control: The demand by the oil producing States for the control of the mineral resources located in their territory is too fundamental in nature and for radical departure

from the existing arrangement is not to be within the contemplation of the government's power of constitutional amendment. Therefore, our position is for the federal government to sustain this policy of resources control for the oil producing States in Nigeria.

The religious neutrality of the state: Hardly had any other issue threatened the unity and stability of Nigeria more than that of the freedom of worship. The adoption and implementation of the Sharia law and its integration in Nigeria's Constitution amount to affronts and infringements on the fundamental rights of the citizens as enshrined in the Constitution. Hence, religion should be made personal affair rather than the State. Consequently, government should only play the regulatory role.

Rotational presidency: We are here confronted with an issue of justice and equity. The office of the president should be allowed to rotate between the north and the south or between the six geo-political zones. The inequity of its having been monopolized largely by one section of the country during the past fifty-five years has to be properly re-examined

Restructuring of Nigeria's Federal System: Nigeria's federal system should be restructured. The federal system based on the six geo-political zones should be re-organized as may be necessary; while at the same time, retaining the already existing states as units of the federation. Furthermore, efforts should be made to evolve a more generally-accepted formula of sharing our common revenue.

Deliberate politics of internal discord and conflict: The deliberate policy of making the world see Ndigbo as people that cannot hold key positions in politics and government is not acceptable. This evidently manifested itself during the Obasanjo administration of 1999-2007, when he deliberately allowed his government to have five senate presidents of Igbo extraction.

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