

## ETHNIC POLITICS IN NIGERIA AND THE QUEST FOR IGBO NATIONALITY, 1999-2019

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**Abstract:** Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with over four hundred ethnic groups and numerous sub-ethnic nationalities. Ethnic consciousness has been deeply entrenched in the Nigerian politics to the extent that policies initiated by government are either perceived to be for or against one ethnic group or the other. Thus, ethnicity has been elevated as powerful instrument for power acquisition in Nigeria. In Nigeria politics is defined by inter-ethnic competition, resulting in zero-sum game, where the winner takes all at the detriment of rest. In the light of the foregoing, this study sets out to examine ethnic politics and its implications for the quest of Igbo nationality. It was methodically anchored on theories of pattern variables and ethnocentrism, while documentary method and content analysis were employed for data collection and analysis respectively. The study reveals that it is the interactions among the diverse ethnic groups with the political environment that produces ethnicity. Furthermore that few privileged elites among the ruling class from the Igbo extraction have been working tirelessly to undermine the common interests of the Igbos. The ethnic platform was rather been used by these elites to gain and consolidate their political influence. This explains why the Igbo nationality has not been able to hold a common front on national issues, present and negotiate an acceptable power positions among the comity of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria since independence. The paper argued that the sense of common identity among the Igbo is too fragile, and must be strengthened for the advancement of the group.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Ethnic Politics, Ethnic Nationality, Igbo Nationality, Marginalization, Elites.

### Introduction

The Nigerian political system represents an interesting theatre of ethnic struggle for acquisition and use of state power and vital resources of the society, as well as the staking and manipulation of the divergent interests of the various ethnic groups in the country. The Igbo leadership and structures have been unable to effectively fashion out a way to pursue the interests and political agenda of the Igbo people in an ethnic based polity. In all political activities in Nigeria, the factor of ethnicity is reflected. It is particularly obvious in areas like voting, distribution of political offices, employment and government general patronage of the citizens.

Nigeria has the largest number of ethnic nationalities amongst all African countries. It is believed that there are more than 400 ethnic nationalities in the country and recent discoveries are being made of new ethnic nationalities in the northern region of the country (Akwara, Agba&Edino, 2013). With so many ethnic nationalities purposely and forcefully put under a roof by the colonial forces without due regard for their ethnic differences, there is bound to be struggles for who gets what, when and how along ethnic lines. It is evident that ethnic politics is a precursor to ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, which took a national outlook with the formation of the Nigerian state by the British. To be sure, it was the colonization of Nigeria that halted state formation processes in the present day Nigeria, and set the

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stage for ethnic politics which have characterized the country's political processes and militated against the development of egalitarian and stable democratic governance in the country. In addition, these ethnic nationalities which emerged through the marriage of convenience by British colonialist toed the line of least resistance by playing politics of tribalism, prebendalism, parochialism and primordial loyalty.

Some political parties in the country resorted to the zoning of certain political positions to some ethnic regions as a measure of stemming down the tide of ethnic crises in the political process but there were no measures in place to ensure that the positions rotated among the various ethnic nationalities and geo-political zones or regions in the country. These zoning policies became sources of personality clashes and ethnic crises that sometimes led to political assassination and balkanization of political parties that had national appeals. All these devices have failed to solve the ethnic question in Nigeria and the ethnic crises become more intense during political and regime transition periods.

Nnoli (1978) observed that in Nigeria, the colonial urban setting constitutes the cradle of ethnicity. It provided the converging point for members of the different pre-colonial politics and diverse linguistic and cultural formation; it was here that ethnic group acquired a common consciousness. He went further to show that contact alone did not cause ethnicity, but the competition for scarce resources among different groups enhance people being conscious of the ethnic group they belong to. Nnoli tried to show how ethnicity does not exist in a pure form; it is always closely associated with political jurisdiction, religious and other social view which constitutes its important ingredient as well. To him ethnicity is a social phenomenon associated with interaction among members of different ethnic groups. These ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character, may be language, culture or both.

Although issues like citizenship rights, exclusion and marginalization, both in political and economic terms, all find expression under the Igbo question in Nigeria. The Igbo presidency project seems to have become a cardinal negotiating point in the Igbo quest for reinventing Nigeria.

This assumption forms the basis of the tripod theory which holds that stability can only be achieved in the Nigerian federation when there is a balance between the three major ethnic groups. But the inability of the Ohanaeze Ndigbo and the entire Igbo leadership to have a common front on national issues and throw up a formidable presidential candidate underscores the disarray in Igboland and raises the question, who is afraid of unity in Igboland? Arising from the above, this paper will investigate why the struggle for political power in Nigeria has been characterized by ethnic configurations and ethnic considerations rather than issues of national development and good governance; and how the ethnic politics in the political process affects the Igbo nation in the political equation of Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Like any other terminology employed by social scientists, the concept of ethnicity is a term that does not lend itself to easy definition. To fully understand this, some related concepts like 'ethnic politics', 'Igbo nation' and 'ethnic nationality', need to be analysed. Ethnicity as a political concept denotes the expression of ethnic sentiments or ethnic nationalism. It involves the practice of ethnic ideology which enables a group to exploit natural differences in nationality for specific purposes. As Igwe (2002) pointed out, it is an outward-looking chauvinistic attitude towards one's nationality and cultural group with a correspondingly suspicious and hostile attitude towards others, especially those held to be in competition with one's own ethnic group. Nnoli (1978:5) sees ethnicity as a: ... Social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of the largest possible competing communal groups (ethnic groups) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture, race religion and/or common history. Ethnicity is only one of the phenomena associated with interactions among communal groups (ethnic groups). Others include trade, diplomacy, friendship enmity, corporation, self-abnegation and self-extension. What is peculiar to ethnicity is that it involves demands by one group on other competing groups ...

Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity in Nigeria. This claim is supported by the fact that both in competitive and non-



competitive settings, Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity (Achimugu, Ata-Agboni&Aliyu, 2013). Indeed, according to Lewis and Bratton (2002, cited in Achimugu, Ata-Agboni&Aliyu, 2013) ethnicity “is demonstrably the most conspicuous group identity in Nigeria”. Their survey found out that almost (48.2%) of Nigerians chose to label themselves with an ethnic identity, compared to almost one-third (28.4%) who opted for class identities and 21.0% who chose a religious identity (Bratton and Lewis 2002). In essence, close to two thirds of the population see themselves as members of primordial ethnic, regional and religious groups. In other words, “Nigerians tend to cluster more readily around the cultural solidarities of kin than the class solidarities of workplace”. What is more “religious and ethnic identities are more fully formed, more holistic and more strongly felt than class identities”, as evidenced in the fact that “whereas those who identify with religious and ethnic communities are almost universally proud of their group identities-, those who see themselves as members of social class are somewhat more equivocal about their pride” (Lewis and Bratton 2002, cited in Achimugu, Ata-Agboni&Aliyu, 2013).

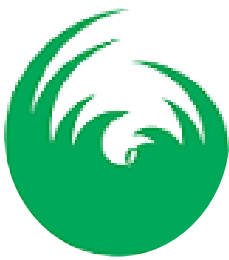
Contests for political offices at the Local, State and National levels are ethnically based. Candidates are fielded and backed by ethnic groups in order to bring political gains to themselves and their ethnic groups. In the same vein, appointments as ministers, commissioners, chairmen of parastatals and into other political offices at all levels are ethnically based. The syndrome of “our own son is there” or “he is our son” is always the reason why people fight among ethnic group is dominating or marginalizing the other groups or that the interest of a particular ethnic group has not been taken care of, could also trigger off ethnic conflict. All these weaken the political base of a nation, and could lead to political anarchy, chaos and wanton destruction of lives and property. (Adebayo, 2006:106-107).

It is a statement of fact that colonial administration fostered ethnic consciousness among the people through the creation of artificial boundaries. Ethnicism was therefore brought to the fore in the political dispensation of the country (Ukiwo, 2005). Ethnicity manifests in the political,

economic and cultural processes of a country and is propagated by the family, economic groups, and political groups in the labor process. As Nnoli (1988) noted, it is determined by the size of a linguistic group, location of the group, strength and cohesion of its leadership, the nature and leadership of underprivileged classes, foreign influences and dominant ideology. Ethnicity has become a potent force in politics. It was the basis for the formation of nationalist movements during colonial era in Nigeria (Coleman, 1963), and the basis for political party formation, membership and support (Sklar, 1963).

The search for a scientific understanding of the Igbo nation is not recent; it has its historical roots in the early twentieth century, at a time when Igbo political consciousness and interest were aroused by the women’s demonstration against the warrant chief’s system in 1929. The Igbo as a people have a great historical and cultural pedigree as widely acknowledged, recognized and attested by some world class anthropologists, colonial administrators and foreign missionaries who have always recognized their great human qualities, their strive and dynamism, their versatility and creativity. For instance, Forde and Jones (1950: 25) contend that Igbo people are generally held to be tolerant, ultra-democratic and highly individualistic. They have a strongly developed commercial sense and a pragmatic approach to life. Corroborating this, Nwabara (1977) opined that the people exhibit a tendency of materialism resulting in a highly competitive and economically stratified society.

More comprehensively, the Igbos are those who have as their natural home the Igbo-land which is located formerly in the East Central region of the Southern Nigeria, but of today located in the South East geopolitical zone comprising five core Igbo speaking states – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. It also extends to some parts of Delta state - Agbor, Ika, Issel-Uku, Anioma and parts of Rivers State - Obigbo, Ikwerre, Egbema, Elle, Omoku (Ojukwu, 2009). The most outstanding quality of the Igbo is his innate receptivity to new ideas and adaptability to change which, under the stimulus of Christianity and western education imported into Nigeria by the modern government, readily triggered in him an



obsessive desire for self-improvement and modernity through education.

Ethnic nationalism is seen as the tendency to see one's self as a member of an ethnic group rather than as a member of a nation. This tendency is shown in the allegiance individuals in this country pay to their ethnic groups. Consequently, many still prefer to identify primarily with their ethnic groups rather than with the state. This manifestation of strong allegiance to ethnic group encourages primordial sentiments among Nigerian people. Thus, the individuals are concerned with socioeconomic and political development of their own group and not the nation as a whole. It is important to note here that ethnic politics has manifested itself in many ways in Nigeria. Particularly interesting is the one that is related to party formation. Ethnic nationalism has had a lot of negative consequences for the nation's movement towards democratisation to the extent that it remains an enduring threat to institutionalisation of democracy in Nigeria. Among its resultant negative consequences as observed by Babangida (2002), are wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violence, encounters, clashes and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property and disinvestments of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy; and increasing gaps in social relations among ethnic nationalities including structural suspicions and hate for one another. Ethnic nationalism is equally responsible for upspring of ethnic militias across the country; the Oodua People's Congress of the southwest, Arewa People's Congress in the north and Egbesu in the east among others (Salawu and Hassan, 2011).

Generally, the manifestation of ethnic politics in Nigeria is the administrative division of the country into three regions. Each of these regions is dominated by one of the three ethnic groupings thereby reinforcing the popular philosophy of three-player of ethnic game. Many things have been affected by this tri-polar pattern. Particularly interesting was the move then for self-government, which if attained would usher in a democratic government in Nigeria. The north was unwilling to see a self-rule at the

center. The position taken by the north on this issue was indeed another expression of fear of domination. The north then felt that the enlightened south could use their advantage position to marginalize its people. The fear continues till today, almost five decades after independence.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study**

The problematic nature of ethnicism as conceptualized above can be explained in the context of some theoretical positions. In the first instance, one can examine the negative aspect of ethnicism by linking it to the theoretical framework of Talcott Parsons' pattern variables. To understand this, it is important to make reference to his work, where he argued that while developed countries are characterised by the pattern variables of universalism, achievement orientation and functional specificity, the under-developed ones are characterized by the opposites, namely particularism, ascription and functional diffuseness.

A conclusion that can be drawn from our discussion so far is that it has led us to belief that ethnicism leads to primordial sentiments in multi-ethnic society. This position is supported by the theory of ethnocentrism. On a general note, the theory of ethnocentrism simply denotes differentiation according to origin. This is to say that it is a kind of behaviour where a group of people look down on others and discriminate against them. Thus, one can see ethnocentrism as a belief in the unique value and rightness of one's own group. This human attitude manifests in form of prejudice and tribalism (ethnic communalism and conflict). The aspect of prejudice that is relevant to our discussion here is the one that has to do with group solidarity. Peil, (1977) claims that group solidarity provides security in situation of potential conflict and informal support when official agencies cannot or will not help. Prejudice can be turned to discrimination. If this happens, there will be strong pressure to exclude outsiders in the sharing of scarce resources such as political power. From our discussion so far, it is logical to argue as Nnoli (1978) did that the Nigerian politics have presented an image of struggle among various ethnic groups for the sharing of national resources. Thus, as observed by Crawford (1993) social competition in Nigeria first for



place and preferment, political competition in Nigeria arena subsequently placed ethnicity in the centre of public cognition of political struggle. It is in this context that this paper examines ethnicism and its resultant ethnic politics as an important factor that contributes to political attainment and which subsequently has always threatened democratic rule in Nigeria. This tendency has been shown in some ways and particularly in the allegiance people pay to their ethnic group. In Nigerian society today, many prefer identification with their ethnic group rather than with the nation or even state. The above shows that Nigerians still exhibit a strong allegiance to ethnic group and which has consequently encouraged primordial sentiments among Nigerian people.

#### Methodology

The study adopted documentary and observation methods for data collection. Documentary method involves eliciting information from already existing documents. Thus enables us gather, investigate, categorize, interpret and identify the usefulness or otherwise of documents consulted as sources of data in the study. While observation method on the other hand is a process of watching and noting behaviour and events as they unfold in the environment of the study. In line with the above, the study essentially relied on and utilized relevant data from books, journal articles, national dailies and official publications among others.

Content analysis was adopted for the interpretation of data generated in course of the study. This method involves making inferences through objective and systematic identification of specific characteristics of a message. In addition, figures and tables were equally used where necessary to further enhance the clarity of the analysis.

#### The Trajectory of Ethnic Politics in Nigeria: Where In Lies the Igbo Nation

Ethnic politics is as old as the Nigerian state and remains the greatest challenge to national development. Ethnicity run high in Nigeria politics, ethnic royalty remains stronger than national loyalty. Minority ethnic groups accuse the majority ethnic groups of political, religious, and cultural oppression. Minority ethnic groups in the oil producing Niger – Delta region feel they are victims of a gang-up by the three major ethnic groups to share the nation's oil wealth among them. Ethnic sentiments permeate national life in Nigeria. Everything in the country has its own ethnic tag i.e. allegation of ethnic discrimination in appointment into jobs, admission into schools, business transactions and sharing of amenities, cuts across and can be heard in every state of the federation (Musa 2009, cited in Achimugu, Ata-Agboni & Aliyu, 2013). While table 1 below shows the lopsided distribution of major appointments in under President Buhari, table 2 reveals composition of state and local governments in the northern and southern parts of the country.

**Table 1: Lopsided Distribution of Major Appointments in Nigeria, 2015-2019**

| S/N | Name               | Designation               | Geopolitical Extraction | Tribe        | Religious Affiliation |
|-----|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1.  | TukurBuratai       | Chief Army staff          | North East              | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim                |
| 2.  | BabaganaMonguno    | National Security Adviser | North East              | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim                |
| 3.  | Boss Mustapha      | SGF                       | North East              | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim                |
| 4.  | Ahmed Idris        | Accountant General        | North East              | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim                |
| 5.  | Anthony Ayine      | Auditor General           | North East              | Edo          | Christian             |
| 6.  | AbayomiOlonishakin | Chief of Defence Staff    | North East              | Yoruba       | Christian             |
| 7.  | Ibok-EteEkweibas   | Chief of Naval Staff      | North East              | Ibibio       | Christian             |
| 8.  | SadiqueAbubakar    | Chief of Air Staff        | North East              | Hausa/Fulani | Christian             |
| 9.  | Monday Morgan      | Chief Defence Intel       | North East              | Idoma        | Christian             |





|     |                            |                             |               |              |           |
|-----|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|
| 10. | Yusuf MagajiBichi          | DG, State Security Services | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 11. | Mahmood Yku                | INEC Chairman               | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 12. | HadizaBala Usman           | MD, NPA                     | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 13. | Paul Boroh                 | SA, Niger Delta Amnesty     | North West    | Ijaw         | Christian |
| 14. | DakukuPeterside            | DG, NIMASA                  | South South   |              | Christian |
| 15. | Sen. OlabiyiDurojaiye      | Chairman NCC                | South south   | Yoruba       | Christian |
| 16. | Babtunde Fowler            | Chairman FIRS               | South West    | Yoruba       | Christian |
| 17. | MaikantiBaru               | GMD, NNPC                   | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 18. | Boss Mustapha              | SGF                         | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 19. | Abba Kyari                 | Chief of Staff              | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 20. | Hameed Ali                 | DG, Nigeria Customs         | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 21. | Mohammed Babandede         | CG, Nigeria Immigration     | North Central | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 22. | Ahmed LawanKuru            | MD, AMCON                   | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 23. | Mohammed Kari              | Insurance Commission        | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 24. | Ibrahim Magu               | Acting chairman EFCC        | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 25. | AbikeDabiri                | SSA, Diaspora               | South west    | Youra        | Christian |
| 26. | Abdullahi Muhammadu        | CG, NSCDS                   | North Central | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 27. | Winifred Oyo-Ita           | Head of Service             | South South   | Ibibio       | Christian |
| 28. | Funso Doherty              | DG, PENCOM                  | South West    | Yoruba       | Christian |
| 29. | DikkoAbdulRahman           | Chairman BOI                | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 30. | Mr. Adebayo Somefun        | MD, NSITF                   | North East    | Yoruba       | Christian |
| 31. | Lady Azinge, AzukaObiageli | Ag. Registrar General, CAC  | North East    | Igbo         | Christian |
| 32. | Alex Okoh                  | DG, BPE                     | South South   | Edo          | Christian |
| 33. | Shetima Abba               | Chairman FCC                | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 34. | Umar GamboJibrin           | DG, BPE                     | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 35. | Roli bode George           | CEO, NDLEA                  | South West    | Yoruba       | Christian |
| 36. | GarbaAbari                 | DG, NOA                     | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 37. | SuleKazaure                | DG, NYSC                    | North West    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 38. | Jelani Aliyu               | DG, NADDC                   | South West    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 39. | BayoOnanuga                | MD, NAN                     | North Central | Yoruba       |           |
| 40. | Ibrahim Idris              | IGP                         | North East    | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 41. | Ghaji Bello                | DG, NPC                     | South South   | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 42. | Julie Okah-Donli           | DG, NAPTIP                  | South West    | Ijaw         | Christian |
| 43. | IshaqOloyode               | Registrar, JAMB             | South west    | Yoruba       | Muslim    |
| 44. | BolajiOwasanoye            | ICPC                        | South West    | Yoruba       | Christian |



|     |                    |                    |             |              |           |
|-----|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| 45. | LenrieAina         | National Librarian | South West  | Yourba       | Christain |
| 46. | Sani AbubakarMashi | DG, NiMet          | North South | Hausa/Fulani | Muslim    |
| 47. | Patience Oniha     | DG, DMO            | South South | Edo          | Christian |

**Source:** Authors' Compilation

**Table 2: Composition of States and Local Governments in Northern and Southern Nigeria**

| North |          |                  | South |             |                  |
|-------|----------|------------------|-------|-------------|------------------|
| S/N   | States   | Local Government | S/N   | States      | Local Government |
| 1.    | Adamawa  | 22               | 1.    | Abia        | 17               |
| 2.    | Bauchi   | 20               | 2.    | AkwaiBom    | 31               |
| 3.    | Benue    | 22               | 3.    | Anambra     | 21               |
| 4.    | Borno    | 27               | 4.    | Bayelsa     | 09               |
| 5.    | Gombe    | 11               | 5.    | Cross River | 18               |
| 6.    | Jigawa   | 27               | 6.    | Delta       | 25               |
| 7.    | Kaduna   | 23               | 7.    | Ebonyi      | 13               |
| 8.    | Katsina  | 34               | 8.    | Edo         | 19               |
| 9.    | Kano     | 44               | 9.    | Ekiti       | 16               |
| 10.   | Kebbi    | 22               | 10.   | Enugu       | 17               |
| 11.   | Kogi     | 20               | 11.   | Imo         | 27               |
| 12.   | Kwara    | 16               | 12.   | Lagos       | 20               |
| 13.   | Nasarawa | 13               | 13.   | Ogun        | 19               |
| 14.   | Niger    | 24               | 14.   | Ondo        | 18               |
| 15.   | Plateau  | 17               | 15.   | Osun        | 30               |
| 16.   | Sokoto   | 22               | 16.   | Oyo         | 34               |
| 17.   | Taraba   | 16               | 17.   | Rivers      | 23               |
| 18.   | Yobe     | 17               | 18.   | -           | -                |
| 19.   | Zamfara  | 14               | 19.   | -           | -                |
|       | Total    | 411              | 20.   | Total       | 357              |

**Source:** Authors' Compilation

From tables 1 and 2 above, it can be deduced that All the ethnic groups complain of one form of marginalization or the other. The Hausa/Fulani are accused by other groups before now of monopolizing the political power, the Hausa/Fulani accused the Yoruba's of dominating the economy and civil service, the Igbo blame their woes on the Hausa/Fulani political domination and also blame the Yoruba's domination of economy and federal bureaucracy. Nigerian politics have presented an image of a struggle among the various ethnic groups for a division of national resources. Thus, by 1953 the major political parties in the country, the NCNC, AG, and NPC had become associated

with the three regions of the country, East, West and North respectively (Nnoli, 2008). It should be noted that ethnicity first became relevant economically and later was politicized. There are various accounts to the origin of ethnic politics in Nigeria. One account traced the origin of the politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria to the Samuel Akinsanya – Ernest Ikoli leadership tussle that became the lot of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1941 (Nnoli, 1978). In contrast however, Olawole (2000), Williams (1980) and Sklar (1963) have quite persuasively argued for example that the origin of ethnicity in Nigeria may be traced to the disadvantaged position of the



Northerners in comparison with their southern counterparts which not only became evidently clear with the introduction of the Richards Constitution but, significantly compounded the suspicion among different ethnic groups. This ushered in the era of acrimonious ethnic politics in the country.

As captured by Nnoli, (2008), at the time of independence, ethnicity in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa had been thoroughly politicized, and politics was made essentially the business of self-appointed ethnic leaders. Political parties followed ethnic lines and, in turn, intensified this politicization. Parties that earlier were national in outlook splintered into ethnic factions. Unable to achieve or retain the leadership of such parties, politicians, civil servants and businessmen opted for the leadership of ethnic entities. The history of the political party, Action Group (AG) in Nigeria, is illustrative. The three major political parties of that era then took steps to entrench themselves in their predominant cultural regions; Northern People's Congress in north (N.P.C), Action Group (A.G.) in the west and National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C) in the east. As Nzemiro (1982:36) observed:

The old politicians who constituted the members of the new political elite were unable to evolve an ideological concept which could bring the people of Nigeria together. Instead of preaching one national ideology, they preferred to preach ethnocentric ideology of regionalism. Regionalism inculcated political chauvinism. For within any region in the then old Nigeria, there were also groups of ethnic nationalities who produced additional ethnocentric leaders who championed the cause of their various ethnic groups. The result was the breakdown of the concept of Nigerian nationhood. The characters who peddled these ethnocentric philosophies among their ethnic groups were also persons who had political ambition.

Thus, the ethnic and regional origin of Action Group forced the other parties to increasingly assume an ethnic and regional character. To capture and win votes, they had to emphasize the concept of unity of their group and not the unity of the nation. In the process, these regionalists succeeded in creating the false impression that the various political parties were the champions of the interests of

various ethnic groups, and that struggles of these parties for political dominance in the country represented the struggles of the various ethnic groups for political ascendancy in the society. They covertly and even openly used emotive ethnic symbols and preyed on alleged ethnic conflicts of interests as a means of mobilizing mass support for their own selfish class interests. In competition for the limited numbers of positions and scarce resources within the regions and at the federal level the regional parties generated antagonism and hostility among the major linguistic groups in the country. Their propaganda often emphasized some alleged conflicts of interests among these groups, with each party claiming to be protecting and advancing the interests of one of the ethnic groups or the other. The inevitable consequence was the intensification of the politicization of ethnicity. The unification of the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria and their political systems in the colonial period led to the emergence of primordial loyalties within the context of collective national interests, which consequently served to disaggregate sectional interests and collective state interests. This also created differences within the polity in terms of attitudes, values and a number of social disparities etc., whose impact continues to shape the nature and character of the social relations and of the struggles for power and dominance in Nigeria (Adilije, 2009).

According to Ayatse and Akuva (2013), the origin of ethnicity began with the evolution of the Nigeria federalism. It was Sir Bourdillon who initiated the idea of federalism for Nigeria in 1939. He divided the country into provinces and regional councils along the three major ethnics in the country. According to Nwabughuogu (1996:49):

Bourdillon himself now begun to develop the federal idea ... which would provide for regional councils in the provinces with a central council in Lagos... Bourdillon took a practical action to implement his ideas. He divided the protectorate of southern Nigeria into: eastern and western provinces... But he had not yet built a true federal structure before he left Nigeria in 1943. For he still left the North intact thereby worsens the imbalance which is inimical to the growth of true federation.





Nevertheless, Bourdillon had created a skeleton of a federation.

The federal structure which Bourdillon laid generated the nation of divide and rule. The west and the east that was initially intact as the southern protectorate got spited to separate the Yoruba (west) from the Igbo (east) however the Hausa/Fulani (North) was left not divided, whose size was bigger than the west and the east put together. One question which remains unanswered is the non-divisions of the Northern region, perhaps the Hausa/Fulani ethnic was the major dominant of the north. At this point, the West and the East who used to do things together under the notion of southern protectorate solidarity withdrew into identifying with their unique ethnics. By 1951, Nigeria was already clearly structured into three major regions: the Northern Region (Hausa/Fulani); the Western Region (Yoruba) and the Eastern Region (Igbo). These major ethnic regional entities became the basis for many political administrative and economic policies in Nigeria. These groups became conscious of their groups and insisted on wooing favors from the central government to the regions which they belong to.

It is clearer now that, ethnic sentiments and the cut-throat struggle and competition among the ethnics in Nigeria today have a genesis in the political and economic activities which were the reasons for colonization and imperialism. So, ethnicity cannot be totally separated from colonialism. It was colonialism that forcefully brought the different ethnic groups who were initially separate, together to govern them in diversity. It was this forcefully union of the various ethnics that have generated sentimental feeling by the ethnic group against the others hence the state has proved to be a failed state for not guarantying the safety and provision of social amenities to the people.

Achebe (1983) noted that, ethnic politics led to the creation of a “cult of mediocrity” because incompetent persons get these power positions due to their ethnic origins, religion and other undue considerations. And this has also led to the mismanagement of the nation’s economy and corruption among political office holders. This has really affected the development of democratic governance in the country. It led to the “zoning” of key political posts in the political

party, and in the nation to certain ethnic regions or ethnic nationalities. The National Party of Nigerian (NPN) during the 1979 political transition zoned its party elective positions along ethnic divides, and this saw the Party chairmanship going to Chief Akinloye of the Yoruba Western region, Presidency to Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the Hausa/Fulani group of the North and Vice President to Chief Alex Ekwueme of the Igbo ethnic group of the Eastern region. Some other posts in the legislatures – the speakers and deputy speakers of the Senate and House of Representatives were also zoned to ethnic nationalities. This zoning system attracted most conservative elites of the various ethnic regions into the Party and made the Party victorious at the 1979 Presidential election. The desire of the other ethnic groups to have the Presidency zoned to another ethnic group in the regime transition of 1983 almost tore the NPN to shreds. From the lessons of zoning system in the country, it has become clear that ethnic politics led to zoning of political offices in Nigeria. Thus, can the peace, security and corporate existence of the country be secured and democratic governance evolved and sustained, and even consolidated on the altar of ethnic politics?

The marginalized Igbo majority ethnic group and the ethnic minorities of the former Eastern region had once seceded from the Nigerian Federation due to genocide against the groups and fear of political domination by the other ethnic majorities and minorities in the northern and in the western regions of Nigeria; and due to their perceived further marginalization in the country’s political and economic processes should they continue to remain in the Nigerian federation. The secession led to a thirty-month civil war that forced them back into the Nigerian federation. Since the end of the civil war, they have remained as “endangered species” in the Nigerian federation, suffering all forms of ethnically and religiously motivated attacks wherever they are found across the country; and have remained virtually excluded (marginalized) from the nation’s economic and political processes. The marginalized Igbo majority ethnic group and the ethnic minorities of the former Eastern region are in the oil producing areas of Nigeria, and they are threatening to secede again from the rest of the country



should they not be allowed to produce the next President. The ethnic groups of the former Eastern region are responsible for about 75% of the national foreign revenue

earnings due to the mining of crude oil and natural gas in their regions (Akwara, Agba&Edino, 2013). Table 3 below shows geo-political zones of the past presidents.

**Table 3: List of Past Presidents and their Geo-Political Zones**

| S/N | Name                | Date                        | State   | Region        |
|-----|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 1.  | Tafawa Balowa       | Oct 1, 1960-15 1966         | Bauchi  | North-East    |
| 2.  | J.T.U. Ironsi       | Jan 15 1966-July 29, 1966   | Abia    | South-East    |
| 3.  | Yakubu Gowon        | July 29, 1966-July 29, 1975 | Plateau | North-Central |
| 4.  | Murtala Mohammed    | July 29, 1975-Feb 13, 1976  | Kano    | North-West    |
| 5.  | Olusogun Obasanjo   | Feb 13, 1976-Oct 1, 1979    | Ogun    | South-West    |
| 6.  | Alh. Shehu Shagari  | Oct. 1, 1979-Dec 31, 1983   | Sokoto  | North-West    |
| 7.  | Muhammadubuhari     | Dec 31, 1983-Aug 27, 1985   | Katsina | North-West    |
| 8.  | Ibrahim Babangida   | Aug 27, 1985-Aug 26, 1983   | Niger   | North-Central |
| 9.  | ErenstShonekan      | Aug 26, 1983-Nov. 17, 1993  | Ogun    | South-West    |
| 10. | Sani Abacha         | Nov. 17, 1993-June 8, 1998  | Kano    | North-West    |
| 11. | AbdulsalamAbubakar  | June 8. 1998-May 29, 1999   | Niger   | North-Central |
| 12. | Olusegun Obasanjo   | May 29, 1999-May 29, 2007   | Ogun    | South-West    |
| 13. | Umani-Musa Yar'Adua | May 29,2007-May 5, 2010     | Katsina | North-West    |
| 14. | Goodluck Jonathan   | May 5, 2010 to 2013         | Bayelsa | Soth-South    |
| 15. | Muhammadu Buhari    | May 29, 2015 till date      | Katsina | North-West    |

**Source:** Aluko, O. and Usman, S. (2016).

It is evident in table 3 above that the Igbo nation has only managed to produce the vice president in the person of Dr. Alex Ekwueme during the second republic. The Igbo nation is a politically marginalized ethnic majority group that has not held presidential power position for a very long time. This ethnic group in the eastern Nigeria and the Niger Delta regions has not produced a Nigerian President with the exception of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (an Igbo) who served as the Colonial Governor-General of the Federation, and as the first President of the Nigerian Federation when Nigeria became a republic in 1963 (3 years in office) and Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo Military officer that emerged as military head of state after the coup lasted only six months in office before being killed in another military coup by General Yakubu Gowon, a Hausa/Fulani military officer. For the past forty-four years after the Nigerian-Biafra civil war, Igbo people have been deliberately marginalized and skewed out of national reckoning, especially in terms of key appointments and opportunity to partake in key sectors of the economy. The one million dollar questions remain which way for the

political emancipation of the Igbo nation in the political equations and ethnic politics in Nigeria?

#### **The Igbo Position in Nigeria's Political Equation**

The high-point of the instability of the Nigerian Federation came in the wake of the military coups of 1966 and the series of massacre of civilians and military officers of Eastern Nigeria and particularly Igbo origins in different parts of Nigeria. There has been problem of Igbo integration in Nigeria particularly since the end of the Nigeria – Biafra civil war. With the emergence of Islamic insurgencies in Nigeria and the campaign to Islamize Nigeria, the Igbo have been the major victims in the Boko Haram attacks on Churches, markets, motor parks and other public institutions. Though the war ended in 1970, it appears the same war is still on albeit by other means against the Igbo which some have tagged: ‘the Igbo question in Nigeria’. To Uwalaka (2003: 19), it is a ‘war’ against the people’s psyche, against the people’s self-consciousness, against the people’s economic, welfare, but symbolized in the now widely used word ‘marginalization’. This consists in the official and



calculated attempts by the powers that be to keep the Igbo poor, deprived and psychologically defeated. Ojukwu (2009) opines that the whole issue of Igbo question in Nigeria can be reduced to three major spheres, namely: economic, political and social strands.

At the economic sphere, the general assumption is that the Igbo are in control when it comes to the Nigeria's economy. This probably may be predicated upon their aggressive, competitive and enterprising spirit. Without a doubt, the Igbo prior to Nigeria's independence were once a force to reckon with, as far as commerce and industry in Nigeria were concerned. In the colonial era, the Igbo had great men such as Sir Louis Phillip Odumegwu Ojukwu, one of Africa's most successful entrepreneurs at a time when the business environment was highly disciplined to the extent that integrity and hard work were the only key factors for success in business. The economic strangulation of the Igbo aspiration started in the first Republic when the Northern dominated federal government located all the important projects earmarked for implementation in the first national development plan (1962 - 1968) in the northern Nigeria. Some of such projects include, the £150 million Bornu Railway extension project, £50 million defence and administration factory and the £7 million Kainji-Dam, Sokoto Road project. Meanwhile, the Iron and Steel Industry originally for Eastern Nigeria was subverted. The claim was that it would mean using Iron-Ore mined in the North to run an industry in the East (Nnoli, 1995: 116; and Dudley, 1973: 69 cited in Ojukwu, 2009) despite the obvious fact that oil from Eastern Nigeria and Niger Delta locations was routinely piped north to feed the Kaduna oil refinery.

This pattern of denying the Igbo area federally owned projects and industries has continued unabated, and thus, made Achebe (1983: 49) to comment that 'many have tried

to ask but nobody has quite succeeded in explaining away the sitting of five steel mills worth 4.5 billion naira on final completion with estimated employment capacity of 100,000 by 1990, only in the North and West of the country'. As finance minister of Nigeria during the civil war, Obafemi Awolowo put a ceiling of 20 pounds on all bank accounts that had been operated in Biafra during the hostilities, a calculated attempt to neutralize the savings and therefore the economic capacity of the Igbo people to rehabilitate themselves and to re-enter the Nigerian economy. Other strangulatory policies that have operated to marginalize the Igbo include the manipulation of the revenue sharing arrangements and minimal allocation of federally funded economic projects (Ikpeze, 2000: 96).

With respect to the political sphere, the Igbos has been less than fortunate except in the recent times (during Olusegun Obasanjo's regime). The Igbo have always been short-changed in the mainstream Nigeria politics. A close observation of the pattern of appointments in Nigeria suggests that the federal government may have resolved that no Igbo should be trusted with a key sensitive command position. This situation perhaps prompted Omo Omoruyi to remark thus: What about the Igbo, a major ethnic nationality in the South that dominated the officer group before the civil war? It is a fact that since the civil war, the Igbo one of the three major ethnic nationalities has now become a glorified ethnic minority in the military and in the polity. Do you know that by the unwritten rules governing succession within the armed forces, no Igbo officer would ever be trusted by the military leadership to become a service chief for the army (TELL, April 5, 1999: 25 cited in Ojukwu, 2009). Table 4 and 5 are comparative lists of appointment of Service Chiefs under Jonathan and Buhari.

**Table 4: Service Chiefs under Jonathan's Administration**

| Head of Agency             | Agency        | Region      |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Oluseyi Petinrin           | Defence       | South-West  |
| Ola Ibrahim                | Defence       | South-West  |
| Alex Sabundu Badeh         | Defence       | North-East  |
| Abdulrahman Bello Dambazau | Nigerian Army | North-West  |
| Azubuike Ihejirika         | Nigerian Army | South-East  |
| Kenneth Minimah            | Nigerian Army | South-South |



|                            |                              |               |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Mohammed Dikko Umar        | Nigeria Air force            | North-West    |
| Alex Sabundu Badeh         | Nigeria Air force            | North-East    |
| Adesola Nunayon Amosu      | Nigeria Air force            | South-West    |
| Ola Sa'ad Ibrahim          | Nigerian Navy                | North-Central |
| Dele Joseph Ezeoba         | Nigerian Navy                | North-Central |
| Usman Oyibe Jibrin         | Nigerian Navy                | South-East    |
| Ogbonna Okechukwu Onovo    | Nigerian Police              | South-East    |
| Hafiz Ringim               | Nigerian Police              | North-Central |
| Mohammed Dikko Abubakar    | Nigerian Police              | North-West    |
| Suleiman Abba              | Nigerian Police              | North-West    |
| Solomon Arase              | Nigerian Police              | South-South   |
| Ita Ekpeyong               | Department of State Security | South-South   |
| Ambassador Olaniyi Oladeji | National Intelligence Agency | South-West    |
| Ambassador Ayo Oke         | National Intelligence Agency | South-West    |
| Peter Ekpendu              | Nigerian Prison              | South-East    |
| Rose Chinyere Uzoma        | Nigerian Immigration Service | South-East    |
| Rilwan Bala Musa           | Nigerian Immigration Service | North-West    |
| David Shikfu Parradang     | Nigerian Immigration Service | North-Central |
| Abdullahi Dikko,           | Nigerian Custom Service      | North-West    |
| Ade Abolurin               | NSCDC                        | South-East    |
| Osita Chidoka              | Federal Road Safety Corps    | South-East    |
| Joseph Anebi               | Federal Fire Service         | South-East    |
| Ibrahim Loamorde           | EFCC                         | North-East    |
| Ekpo Una Owo Nta           | ICPC                         | South-South   |
| Roli Bode-George           | NDLEA                        | South-West    |

**Source:** Authors' Compilation

**Table 5: Service Chief Under Buhari's Administration**

| Heads of institution/Agency | Agency                                   | State of Origin | Region |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------|
| Leo Irabor                  | Defence                                  | Delta State     | South  |
| Ibrahim Attahiru            | Nigerian Army                            | Kaduna State    | North  |
| Isiaka Oladayo Amao         | Nigerian Air Force                       | Osun State      | South  |
| Awwal Zubairu Gambo         | Nigerian Navy                            | Kano State      | North  |
| Usman Alkali Baba           | Nigeria Police Force                     | Yobe State      | North  |
| Yusufu Magaji Bichi         | Department of State Security             | Kano State      | North  |
| Ahmed Rufal Abubakar        | National Intelligence Agency             | Katsina State   | North  |
| John Mrabure                | Nigeria Correctional Service             | Delta State     | South  |
| Muhammed Bbandede           | Nigeria Immigration Service              | Delta State     | South  |
| Hameed Ibrahim Ali          | Nigeria Customs Service                  | Jigawa State    | North  |
| Ahmed Abubakar Audi         | Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps | Nasarawa State  | North  |
| Boboye O Oyeyemi            | Federal Road Safety Commission           | Kwara State     | North  |
| Dr. Uman Alhaji Ibrahim     | Federal Fire Service                     | Niger State     | North  |



|                   |                                      |              |       |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------|
| Abduirasheed Bawa | EFCC                                 | Kabbi State  | North |
| Bolaji Owasanoye  | ICPC                                 | Ondo State   | South |
| Bube Narwa        | National Drug Law Enforcement Agency | Adamwa State | North |

**Source:** Authors' Compilation

From tables 4 and 5 it can be seen that the Igbo and other minor ethnic groups have taken the rear gear in some major indices of national development and stability; politics and security. The Igbo nation seem to have lost out at the highest echelon of political leadership in Nigeria, where albeit it held sway in the first and second republics, particularly in the current political equation.

Alli (2001: 65 cited in Ojukwu, 2009) observed that the ex-Biafran officers ... were condescendingly referred to as re-absorbed officers, and therefore, had a boundary, and their horizon hardly exceed the rank of brigadier-general, only a few were fortunate to squeeze through the rank of major-general in the three services, serving or retired, living or dead ... For instance, the appointment of Rear Admiral Allison Madueke as the Chief of Naval Staff from November 1993 to August 1994 was characterized as an accidental breakthrough for the Igbo in the military service where everything was done to repress the Igbo officers (Alli, 2001: 64). The glorious rise using Albert's (2002) phrase, of Major-General Ike Nwachukwu in the army was also not ordinary given his Igbo ethnic origin.

Lending credence to this, Igbokwe (1995: 24) added that those who managed to get there are either disgraced or retired with ignominy. Important military facilities such as mechanized division and armories are sited in the north and the west and are also commanded by northerners and westerners. Igboland is virtually bereft of such military facilities. But they are remembered when it comes to high-level assignments mainly in non-combatant positions (usually in the navy and the Air Force). The under-representation of the Igbo in the military, complemented by a similar situation in the police, state security service, directorate of military intelligence is using Ikpeze's words, a clear case of the deliberate violation of the post-war principles of 'federal character' and 'quota system' by the victorious coalition (Ojukwu, 2009).

Out of the fourteen heads of state of Nigeria since 1960 ten came from the north, one from the Middle-Belt, two from the west (Shonekan ruled for only 82 days) and Aguiyi

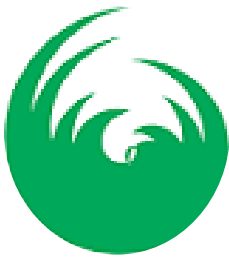
Ironsi, an Igbo who ruled for six months following the failure of the January 1966 coup attempt. Is the headship or leadership of Nigeria only meant to be occupied by one or two ethnic groups? What about other ethnic groups that have not produced any since the forty-seven years of independence? It should be recalled that the issue of rotational presidency was resolved in the 1994 constitutional conference (constituted by the Abacha government) where Dr. Alex Ekwueme on behalf of the southern delegates recommended that the presidency be rotated among six geopolitical zones namely, Northeast, North west, North central, South east, South west and South-South (The NEWS, April 10, 1995: 13-16; TELL, October 10, 1994: 16-19 cited in Ojukwu, 2009).

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

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

With regards to the social strand, social discrimination against Ndigbo by other ethnic groups has continued unabated. The blood-chilling discrimination to which Igbo citizens living outside Igboland have always been subjected to, even at the slightest provocation cannot be quantified. It is in the face of this that they are always gripped by fear, the fear of being punished, the fear of being killed, and the fear of not being accepted. All these create in them a spirit of subservience, a spirit of easy surrender, a spirit of trying to please the 'others' even at a great loss to them. As Chuks Iloegbunam (2005) remarks: 'The Igbo man in the country is always on the run – 'Ogba Oso'. If a problem erupts between him and the Yoruba, he is on the





run; if it is between the Yoruba and the Yoruba, he is on the run; if it is between him and the Hausa or between Hausa and Hausa or Hausa and Yoruba, he is on the run. Why does he always run? He runs because in virtually every case of the above instances, his business is not only usually attacked and looted, but his physical safety is often threatened’.

The point however, is that the Igbo are today not more than ‘second class citizens’ in Nigeria. The claim of Gowon that the Igbo could live wherever they wanted in Nigeria was also a dream that never came true. In spite of the fact that they travelled out of their homeland after the war to different parts of Nigeria, they are often targets of aggression from their hosts especially in the northern parts of the country (Ifoh, 2000: 40 cited in Ojukwu, 2009). What Igbo nation needs is how to be delivered from the retrogressive forces imposed on them by the Nigerian state.

#### **The Igbo and the Search for Leadership and Unity**

The Igbo nation is one of the three largest ethnic nationalities that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria which was created by the British Colonial Administration in 1914. The nation has an estimated population of about 150 million people world-wide. Her citizens are highly cosmopolitan and are found in every nook and cranny of the world. Outside Igboland and within the Nigerian federation, the Igbo are second in population after the native population of any particular group in other parts of Nigeria. They occupy the entire South-East region, most of the South-South region and a significant part of the Middle Belt region. The Igbo are basically democratic and egalitarian in their socio-cultural worldview; with a highly intellectual, religious, industrious and entrepreneurial spirit. There is more Igbo investment in the other parts of Nigeria than inside Igboland. They are among the few, if not the only African society, that worshipped the Supreme God before the coming of Christianity. At the present, she has over 90% Christian population.

Her citizens were in the forefront of African nationalism and led the struggle for Nigeria’s independence. She has produced world-renowned citizens in the various fields of human endeavour. Some of these include: Olaudah Equiano, the great ex-slave writer; Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, historically regarded as the doyen of African nationalism;

Dim Odimegwu-Ojukwu - the Biafran War Lord, Chinua Achebe, the author of the epic novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the father of African literature and of the greatest writers in the contemporary world; Philip Emeagwali, the world-acclaimed father of the internet; Sir Akanu Ibiam, the one-time President of the World Council of Churches; Cardinal Arinze, one of the leading Roman Catholic Cardinals in contemporary times and many other accomplished patriots who left positive imprints on the sands of time.

As postulated above, the Igbo people are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, and they constituted the pre-dominant group in one of the regions – the Eastern Region. One of the earliest attempt to organize the Igbo people as a political unit in context of Nigeria was the formation of the Igbo Federal Union in 1936, this later metamorphosed into the Igbo State Union in 1948. This signified the establishment of a formal structure for the articulation and pursuit of the rights and interests of Igbo people in Nigeria. According to Nnoli (1978:165):

At the lower political level, the Igbo State Union worked tirelessly to identify the N.C.N.C. with the cause of the Igbo advancement and welfare. In many cases the town, village, district and clan unions affiliated with the Igbo state union filled in the gaps left in the official party organization. In fact, certain branches of the party...derived their strength and drive from various units of these associations which were affiliated with the union...

The Igbo State Union was formed in Lagos by a couple of Igbo elites essentially to advance and promote the collective interests of the Igbo. At that period, the Union was conceived as the symbol of Igbo unity and identity. It made ceaseless efforts to identify the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) with the cause of Igbo advancement and welfare. It also attempted to secure an overwhelming Igbo support for and solidarity within the party, reconciling the party’s factions and making arrangements for the party’s campaign rallies (Smock 1971). However, in May 1966, the Igbo State Union and some other ethnic organizations were proscribed by the Federal Military Government for far of working against the unity of Nigeria. This happened within the period the country’s political temperature was high vis-à-vis the



coups and counter coups that followed the first Nigeria's coup d'état that took place on 15 January, 1966.

In the post-independence period, Igbo interests were generally pursued under the umbrella of the N.C.N.C. until the outbreak of the civil war in Nigeria. Following the Nigerian-Biafran war, there was the oppression, and the systematic exclusion of the Igbo from the main stream of Nigerian politics. Achebe (1983) opined that the lack of real leaders in Igbo land goes back of course to the beginning of colonial administration. Once the white man had crushed Igbo resistance it was relatively easy for him to locate upstarts and ruffians in the community who would uphold his regime at the expense of the own people. From those days the average Igbo leader's mentality has not been entirely free of the collaborating warrant chief mentality.

The Igbo leaders were and are still decidedly uncommitted, incoherent, self-centered, mutually destructive and usually

opportunistic. One veritable platform for the articulation and projection of the interests of the Igbo in Nigeria – the 'Ohaneze' has particularly been disappointing in this regard. The failure of Ohaneze at the level of leadership has exacerbated the already precarious situation of the Igbo to an unimportant position in the Nigerian political system continues unabated; while notable members of the Igbo political elite are increasingly making themselves available to external forces as agents of the destabilization of the Igbo political structures. Many in this group, all too often engage in activities which tend to negate the essence of Igbo solidarity, indeed there has been the diminution of Igbo solidarity (Adilieje, 2009). Table 6 shows the lopsided composition of states in the six geographical zones in Nigeria.

**Table 6: The Composition of the Six Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria**

| S/N | North central | North east | North West | South East | South South | South West | Total |
|-----|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| 1.  | Benue         | Adamawa    | Jigawa     | Abia       | Akwabom     | Ekiti      | 6     |
| 2.  | Kogi          | Bauchi     | Kaduna     | Anambra    | Bayelsa     | Lagos      | 6     |
| 3.  | Kwara         | Borno      | Kano       | Ebonyi     | Cross River | Ondo       | 6     |
| 4.  | Nasarawa      | Gombe      | Katsina    | Enugu      | Delta       | Ondo       | 6     |
| 5.  | Niger         | Taraba     | Kebbi      | Imo        | Edo         | Osun       | 6     |
| 6.  | Plateau       | Yobe       | Sokoto     | -          | Rivers      | Oyo        | 6     |
| 7.  | -             | -          | Zamfra     | -          | -           | -          | 1     |
| 8.  | 6             | 6          | 7          | 5          | 6           | 6          | 36    |

**Source:** Authors' compilation

It is evident from table 6, that Igbo lacked committed leaders, who are only interested in their personal enrichment and "stomach infrastructure" at the detriment of the collective interest of the people who they represent. Thus, majority of the individuals regarded as the Igbo political elite are people usually anointed, chosen and nurtured into national prominence by forces outside of the Igbo land. They lack the requisite autonomy to articulate and pursue those interests and issues (additional states, seaport and modern railway infrastructure etc.) that are capable of advancing the welfare of the Igbo people. Indeed, one common factor that predisposes them as the 'natural choice' of these external forces is usually their lack of commitment to the pursuit of Igbo interests or their

willingness to acquiesce to external control and forces even at the risk of jeopardizing the legitimate interest of the Igbo. It is within the context of their emergence that one may effectively understand the extent to which the Igbo political elite have worked towards the realization of Igbo interests in the contexts of a plural Nigeria and thus situate the Igbo's continued search for political relevance. This lends credence to the claim that the Igbo political elite lack common interest and agenda, and that the absence of a respectable and selfless leadership is a major problem confronting the Igbo today (Adilieje, 2009). Achebe (1983) corroborated the above views...the real problem with the Igbo since the independence is precisely the absence of the kind of central leadership, which their competitors



presume for them. This lack has left them open to self-seeking, opportunistic leaders who offered them no help at all in coping with a new Nigeria in which individual progress would no longer depend on the rules set by a fairly impartial colonial umpire (Achebe, 1983).

There has been problem of Igbo integration in Nigeria particularly since the end of the Nigeria/Biafra war. Currently, there is an alleged conspiracy among some leaders of other ethnic groups to repress and hold down the Igbo and keep them politically irrelevant in the affairs of Nigeria. God forbid! The Igbos need Nigeria just as Nigeria needs them. They need Nigeria for the wider scope it affords for the Igboman's boundless industry, resourcefulness and competitive energy. They need it for the better conceptualization and perhaps realization of their vision of Africa and the world. The Igbos perceives themselves as citizens of the world, and is imbued with a sense of fraternity with all other Africans. There is need therefore for us to rethink our tactics for co-existing with other Nigerians. There is also an urgent need to provide platform for Igbo to commune, collectively over the economic, political and socio-cultural challenges facing her in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

The federation which resulted from the British amalgamation of 1914 produced a highly crisis and corruption ridden country, endemic absence of basic human rights, with the Igbo being the major victims in the series of political, religious and ethnic riots that have bedeviled the Nigerian federation since its formation. The Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-70 claimed over 3 million Igbo lives in an unprecedented genocide in human history; the destruction of enormous material resources belonging to the Igbo in different parts of Nigeria, great devastation of Igboland and the rest of the former Eastern Nigeria. Apart from the genocidal experience, there was deliberate dismembering of the Igbo territory, with the core sector of Igboland locked and economically made prostrate. There is an obvious conspiracy among the leaders of the other major ethnic groups in Nigeria to continue to repress and hold down the Igbo and keep them politically irrelevant in the affairs of the Nigerian State and at the same time

antagonized them with their kits and kin as well as neighbours in other parts of Nigeria.

The economic deprivations of Igbo citizens and region have given rise to kidnappings and other social vices which compound the economic and social problems in the region. There is acute feeling of loss of self-confidence and national pride among the Igbo. This is aggravated mainly by the Biafra experience and the continued peripheral role of the Igbo nation in the scheme of things. And this is a nation that has contributed more than any other nationality in the economic and political development of Nigeria. Particularly there is acute restlessness among the Igbo population over their peripheral status in Nigeria. While many elders in Igboland continue to advocate for the continued membership of the Nigerian Federation, the younger generation think otherwise.

The paper attempted to examine the salience of ethnic politics and its implications in the political equations in Nigeria. It explored how ethnicity has played a central role in politics of distribution in Nigeria's political environment. Its role reflects and unravels the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in viewing ethnic nationalities as pressure groups especially as standing in opposition to the state or holding the state to account. The study also reveals that ethnic politics has come to stay as all our politicians are ethnic bigots who projects sectional narrow interests at the detriment of the common interest of the country at large. Ethnicity provided the springboard for other ethnic leaders to gain and consolidate their political influence while the Igbo passes through the horrendous experiences of "second-class" status of her membership of the Nigerian Federation. This was largely due to lack of ethnic nationalism and unity among the Igbos. There is also lack of cohesion within the Igbo nation and absence of national focus. Igbo people know their leaders and we dare say that our true leaders are those who brave all the odds to speak the truth in face of oppression and marginalization of the Igbo nation.

As Nwabueze (2001: 24) remarked: "to lift ourselves from our present marginalized position and realize our group interest in the fierce competition and struggle among the antagonistic ethnic nationalities comprised in Nigeria imperatively requires an effective, credible organization,



without this, we will remain rudderless, forever drifting aimlessly with no sense of purpose or direction. In such an organization, lies our only hope of salvaging ourselves from the abyss into which we have sunk. Our defeat in the civil war and the consequent loss of much of our possessions certainly has something to do with it. But with an organization of this nature, the defeat and loss can be made good”.

The Igbo nation was well ahead in terms of development until the forced union called Nigeria began to steal our institutions from us. Presently, nothing would please Igbo nation other than a return to regional government through maximum devolution of powers and a return to parliamentary democracy because we reckon this is the best form of public governance that gives us the opportunity to develop at our own pace and contribute our quota to Nigeria’s development.

Our sense of common identity as Igbos is too fragile, and must be strengthened. Igbos must learn to restrain the propensity for intra-group feuds. It is a tragedy of Igbo historical development in Nigeria that, in their pursuit of excessive individualism and self-centeredness, the Igbos have lost the co-operative spirit and the sense of obligation to the family, village and clan which characterized them during the period 1930-50 and enabled them to achieve an almost revolutionary breakthrough in the educational field. That spirit needs to be revived. We enjoin every Igbo to replicate their courageous act to overcome the contemporary Igbo predicament so that her citizens can live a life of dignity, co-exist and at peace with other ethnic groups in the country.

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