

# The Crisis of Nationalism and Ethnic Agitations in Nigeria: An Analysis of the Indigenous People of Biafra

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**Abstract** - This paper centers on the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a corollary to nationalistic struggle for recognition and self-determinism. The proliferation and activities of ethnic based agitations in Nigeria constitutes a serious worry and thus account for a probe into its *raison d'être*. Utilizing secondary sources of data generation and content analysis, the paper employed the group theory and Instrumentalism as its theoretical underpinning. The paper revealed that the activities of ethnic based agitations in contemporary Nigeria is consequent upon the consciousness to a nation in a multinational state and perceived marginalization of the nation as well as the response of government to nagging issues in the polity. In light of the above, the study concludes that government should jettison the use of suppression and adopt peaceful strategies in relation to such nationalistic agitations.

**Keywords** – Nation, Nationalism, Ethnicity, Ethnic Agitation, IPOB.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a conglomeration of distinct peoples scattered all over its territorial landscape with more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups; the major groups being Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (Okeke, Nduba and Akam 2019). These diverse ethnic groups are also referred to as 'nations'. Historically, before the advent of colonialism in the present day Nigeria, the various ethnic groups cum nations that make up the country existed as mini states and autonomous political entities. These entities had their own cultural values, norms, political arrangements and religious beliefs distinct from each another (Okafor 1997). They also possess a proven capacity for autochthonous development.

Against this backdrop, Chikendu (2003) notes that before 1914, the different parts of the country were administered differently and a great rivalry developed between the Southern and Northern administrators. In agreement with the above, Hatch (1971, p.15) posits that the "rivalry between the north and south became acute and was marked by contempt among northern administrators for the commercialism of the south and derision among the southerners for the ossified feudalism of the north."

Accordingly, the purpose of the imperialist in bringing these hitherto separate entities together in 1914 (the infamous and forceful amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria) was purely for administrative convenience and exploitation of capital. To expedite this, the divide and rule tactics was employed by the administrators thereby creating animosity among the various nations. This also facilitated the consolidation of British foothold with little interest in the social, economic or political development of the country or its people (Chikendu 2003).

Consequently, British colonial (and neo-colonial) policies, were not fashioned to promote unity among the diverse nations that make up Nigeria, rather it was intended to create distrusts, suspicions and cleavages among them as well as exploit the varied differences that exists (Uzoigwe 1996). The entrenchment of these

variance and competition among the nations to acquire and control power in the country led to several violent confrontations between them prior to the country's independence (Okafor 1997).

In line with the foregoing, independence in 1960 was unable to alter this pattern of politics as successive administrations (both civil and military regimes) failed to initiate and execute far-reaching cum overarching policy measures to coalesce these ethnic diversities into positive ventures that could create a pan Nigerian identity. According to Okeke, Nduba and Akam (2019, p.27), the policies undertaken by various governments "were rather aimed at crushing ethnic consciousness in order to disparage the challenge it poses to the legitimacy of the state or the authority of the incumbent administration or regime."

The result of this is the intense hegemonic contest for power at the centre by the nations that make up Nigeria (Nnoli, 1978). This rivalry for ethnic ascendancy has over the years, assumed varying forms in the politics of Nigeria. At one time or the other, the groups that are disadvantaged in this game (which is usually a zero sum game) have either threatened to secede from the country or attempted secession. This is obvious in many cases like the outcome of the 1953 Kano riot that formed the Nigerian Northern leaders to come up with an 8-point programme effectually pressing for a confederation; the 1967 declaration of independence by Gen. Odumegwu Ojukwu for the peoples of Biafra; the ultimatum by sixteen (16) Northern youth associations demanding that Igbos resident in the Northern part of the country to leave before October 1, 2017; the July 2019 ultimatum by the Northern Elders Forum and the Coalition of the Northern Groups for Fulani herdsmen to leave the Southern part of Nigeria among others.

Madunagu (2017), posits that the prevalent resort to violence-oriented strategies by ethnic based formations in Nigeria as a means to achieve their ends, stem from the character and nature of politics that compels political organization at a certain stage of its evolution to acquire a youth and/or an armed wing.

As hitherto noted, suppression has constituted the response of government to the biting concerns raised by these groups, and thus does not often allow the expression of grievances on discussion table. Thereby, allowing ethnic consciousness to heighten from simple agitation to the level where such groups employ tactics that are semi-violent and/or violent in character in questioning and demanding answers from the government, thus invariably challenging the legitimacy of the state and government. This development accounts for the rise of some of the agitations with ethnic undertone such as the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC), which was formed against the backdrop of the annulment of the 1993 presidential election that a Yoruba purportedly won; the rise of Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South-Eastern (Igbo dominated) region as against the backdrop of gross marginalization of the Igbos in the polity; the Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC), which emerged to counter the OPC in the Northern part of the country; the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), that called attention to the despoliation of the region as a consequence of oil exploration and demand that a certain proportion of the resources extracted from their region be given to the communities, so as to alleviate years of deprivation; the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which is an attempt to resurrect the struggle for self-determination waged by the Igbo of South East Nigeria and the perceived inefficiency of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) among others (Okeke, Akam and Nduba, 2019).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATION

This paper employed the group theory and Instrumentalism as its framework of analysis. The group theory is associated with Bentley (1908) and is a very important framework for understanding, explaining, analysing and interpreting politics and political behaviours. Group theory holds that group behaviour is at the centre of politics. Bentley (the Group theory progenitor) sees politics as actions through groups aimed at the realization of interests. This simply implies that; group activity is interest activity. He contends that the raw materials we study in politics is never found in one man by himself nor by adding men to men, but must be taken as it comes in many men together. Truman argues alongside Bentley that groups constitute the basis of politics and the political process can be understood and analyzed in terms of the role of groups. The human groups inevitably become the fundamental unit of analysis for Group theorists.

A group therefore to Bentley entails a certain pattern of the men of a society taken, however, not as a physical mass cut off from other masses of men but rather, as an aggregate of activity which does not prohibit the men who partake in it from engaging likewise in any other groups' activities. Another essential aspect of the group besides interaction and patterned process is 'interest'; which refers to "a shared attitude concerning a claim or

claims to be made by one group upon certain other groups in a social system" (Ezeani 2010, p.81).

The Instrumentalism theory sees ethnicity as not simply a mix of affective sentiments, but like class, it is also a means of political mobilization for advancing group interests. This theory is associated with Glazer and Moynihan (1975) and contend that ethnicity has no or very little independent ranking outside the political process and is in its character commensurate to other political associations like ideological beliefs or party membership. Ethnicity according to instrumentalists, is a consequence of personal or individual choice and essentially separate from the circumstantial or specific context or the presence/existence of cultural and biological traits. (Dodeye, 2015; Hammond and Axelrod, 2016).

To instrumentalists, ethnic conflict does not materialize precisely from variations or disparities in ethnic identity. Rather, ethnic conflicts emerge only when ethnic identities are politicized and/or manipulated to generate economic, social and political advantages for an ethnic group at the cost of depriving or neglecting other groups (Chandra 2004).

The group theory and Instrumentalism are quite apt for this paper as a result of the fact that our unit of analysis is a group and thus addresses the core of the paper on nationalism and ethnic based agitations.

**Nation/Nationalism:** Nationalism is hinged on the idea or doctrine of one nation one state. It holds that the nation (language, morals, beliefs, culture and/or identity) should coincide – the maximum amount as possible – with the state. Chikendu (2004) conceives nationalism as a socially constructed belief, creed or political ideology that involves a powerful identification of a group of individuals with a nation. According to Okeke, Nduba and Akam (2019), there are two major perspectives on the origins and basis of nationalism; first is the primordialist perspective which construes nationalism as a mirrored image of the traditional and perceived evolutionary tendency of humans to arrange into diverse groupings supported on an affinity of birth. The second perspective is Modernist perspective that describes nationalism as a recent phenomenon that needs the structural conditions of modern society so as to exist.

There are many definitions of what a nation entails. This thus results to several different strands of nationalism. It may be a held belief that citizenship in a state should be as far as possible limited to one ethnic, cultural, religious or identity group, or that multinationality in a state should fundamentally span the right to express cum exercise national identity by all the diverse or distinct nations. Accordingly, James (1996) conceptualized nation as a stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, history, ethnicity, or psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. Also, Smith (1991) deems a nation as a cultural-political community that has become tuned in to its autonomy, unity and particular interests. Chikendu (2004, p.47) asserts that "In English language, the word nation has two different connotations. First, it indicates a

political unit coterminous with a state. Secondly, it also entails an ethnological group coterminous with a tribe or a race." A state may consist of one national group, for example, the present state of Japan as well as Portugal; or many national groups, for example Nigeria as well as Switzerland.

Anderson (1983 p.6) argued that the word nation is an imagined political community in his book "Imagined Communities". He stressed that it is imagined, because, the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, "yet, in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." Likewise, it is a community as regardless of the substantial discrimination, exploitation or inequality that may exist in it, the nation is consistently perceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Coleman (1986) defines it as a consciousness of belonging to a nation (existent or within the realm of aspiration) or a nationality, and a strong desire, as evidenced in sentiment band activity, to secure and maintain its benefit, advantage, and rectitude, and to maximize its political autonomy. Chikendu (2003) declared that the character of belonging together and seeking to protect and perpetuate the groups' identity is the essence or thrust of nationalism. This spirit or desire is entified by similar racial linguistic, historical and religious ties.

Some scholars like Chikendu (2004) & Okeke (2018) have argued that there is quite more than one type of nationalism. Nationalism may display itself as a part of approved state ideology or as a famous (usually not having anything to do with the state) movement expressed along civic, ethnic, cultural, religious or ideological lines. Integrative nationalism entails nationalist activities targeted at the integration of numerous petty kindred states into one strong nation-state as exemplified by Germany and Italy. On the opposite hand, disintegrative nationalism refers to the dismemberment of the massive polygot empires of the Eastern Europe- the Russian, Austrian and Turkish empires, and creating new nation-states hinged on socio-cultural factors.

Nationalism is also sometimes related with oppression, manipulation and conflict as it submerges individual identity within a national whole; gives the elites or political leaders potential opportunities and avenues to manipulate and/or control the masses; and since it feeds beliefs of ethnic, moral or cultural superiority that, in turn, justifies within the eye of the fanatic the forcible subjugation, annexation or exploitation of 'lesser peoples' (Hobsbawn, 1990; Ozkirimli, 2000; Camacho, 2017)

**Ethnic Agitations:** Ethnic agitations are intense style of ethnic struggle for self-determination. It occurs when an ethnic group assumes non-militant and/or militant posture and gradually metamorphoses into militia alleging to act as the system through which the will of its people are sought and realized (Badmus, 2006). They are solely peopled by individuals with common cultural traits. Its manifestation is against the backdrop of past repression and marginalization usually in a multinational society when an out-group ethnically monopolized incumbent government is regulating the levers of power (Guichaoua 2005).

Adejumobi (2002, p.2), portrayed them as "youth based groups formed with the purpose of promoting and protecting the parochial interests of their ethnic groups and whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence". Agbese (2001) in agreement with Adejumobi (2002) opines that the prevalence of the phenomenon within the geographical space of Nigeria pre-dates the country's independence. Furthermore, Okeke, Nduba and Akam (2019), Ndikumma (1998) and Nnoli (1978) underscored that the infamous colonial strategem of divide and rule adopted to strengthen European domination and control was compelling and impressed politics and ethnic relations, symbolized by disagreement and unhealthy antagonism among the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

These ethnic associations were at times expressed in violent forms as the example of the 1953 Kano riots clearly demonstrated. The riot was a repercussion of some value judgement originating from witnessed catachresis of northern delegates by the crowd in the Lagos for antagonizing the 1953 motion moved for independence in 1956 at the federal house of representatives. That kind of upheaval which has not been witnessed before was a discriminatory violence aimed an out-group deriving from the colonial administration's design and device of divide and rule leading to a consciousness of an 'us versus them' in Nigeria politics (Agbese 2003). This shows that ethnic related violence is derived and positioned in the public policies and legacies of the Nigerian state.

Agbese (2003) contends that this style of the Nigerian state has not fundamentally changed despite the transition to the post-colonial dispensation from the hitherto colonial administration which created it. Besides the 1953 violent riot that occurred in Kano, there has been an avalanche of violent ethnic eruptions in Nigeria. They include the census crisis of 1962 and 1963, the 1967 civil war, the 1981 bloodshed in Numan, the 1987 mass killing in Kafanchan and other parts of southern Zaria, the clashes in Takun and Wukari in 1990, the Tafawa Belewa bloodbath as well as the mass killings in Kano city in 1991, the Zango-Kataf massacre in 1992, the Ogoni and Andoni carnage in 1993, the sporadic Warri crises between the Urhobos, Itsekiris and Ijaws, the recurrent arrests, imprisonment and killing by security operatives of MASSOB members in 2005, the occasional crackdown on IPOB members especially 2016 through 2019, the unending conflicts between armed Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Benue state and Kogi State, among many others (Okeke, Nduba and Akam, 2019).

The frequent re-occurrence of these ethnic outbursts stems from the character of the Nigerian state which was designed to breed inter-ethnic rivalries that promote the interests of the colonialists/neo-colonialists. As noted by Nnoli (1978), colonialism was the cradle of ethnicity (politicization of ethnicity) in Nigeria and a key factor in the crystallization of contemporary identities. The forced union of the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria through the infamous 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates was purely for administrative convenience of the colonialist. Independence was unable

to change this character of the Nigerian state but merely re-inforced it, because the texture of post-colonial politics has been characterized by domination and hegemonic context by the ethnic groups. Commenting further, Nnoli (1978, p.8) noted that “the fear of being confined to the bottom of the interethnic ladder of inequality generates divisive and destructive socioeconomic competition which has antisocial effects.” In essence, the form and structure of the Nigerian state and its politics has been preserving and buoying this relationship of inter-ethnic suspicion, distrusts and rivalry.

These inter-ethnic rivalries have metamorphosed into dimensions where violence is used; creating the conditions for the emergence of groups making claims and competing with the state for legitimacy (Okeke, Nduba and Akam 2019). The fact of the matter is that the group that controls the state uses its power and economic resources to protect the material interests of some members of their folks. The result is the institutionalization of the relationship, perpetually re-inforced by economic and political hierarchies and exacerbated by deliberate policies of the ruling class that promotes ethnic exclusion and encourages alienation which ultimately results into resistance expressed in form of ethnic movements activities (Okafor 1997; Ojo 2014; Ebegbulem 2016; Okeke, Nduba and Akam 2019).

Even though most of the ethnic-related strife's listed above were spontaneous, they were orchestrated to further ethnic-related interests of the elite (Okafor 1997). However, the trend has changed as violent-oriented organized groups who reject the authority of the state and conduct their activities outside the confines of the law have become the order of the day.

**Ethnic Agitations in Nigeria:** Accounts of the literature on ethnic agitations in Nigeria have come under many broad but related perspectives. One perspective views the evolution of ethnic agitation from the angle of subjugation of the state by coercive government as another perspective views it from a bourgeois point of view consequent upon economic frustrations.

The state subjugation perspective contends that ethnic agitations are logical outcome of the increased militarization of the state, especially during those many years of military dominance of politics in the country (Richard 1999, Anugwom 2000). Scholars who advocate this perspective anchor their case on the basis that the Nigerian state was a project of force and that this character of force has stuck with the state because subsequent rulers in the country have always sought to maintain control and hegemony through the mechanism of violence. This culture of force stifles debate and opposes any form of challenge to the ruling elite, hence leaving those marginalized out of the power equation to come up with counterbalancing ethnic based resistance as the main option of response (Adeoye 2005).

The bourgeois perspective is closely linked with the economic explanation of the origin and growth of violent rebel groups that are motivated by economic or material gains. The argument of scholars with this view

point is that ethnic agitations in Nigeria results from a logical outcome of the frustrations brought about by the material deprivation of the people. The economic problems faced by the country in the aftermath of the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the failure of the federal government that has transformed to become much stronger consequent upon long military interregnum in her governance and politics to deliver economic benefits to the people stimulated demands for devolution of powers and more liberty to the regions, that is, a return to the *status quo ante* (Jega 2003). The correlation here is that folks who believe that local autonomy has potentials of improving their economic wellbeing are amenable to join these violent-oriented ethnic formations which they believe shall change their economic downturns (Udogu 1994, Akinboye 2001, Badmus 2006). Some other scholars have expressed that this is also related to the rapid population increase which gave rise to a great number of youths which no economic opportunity nor the poor cum collapsed education system could take care of, thereby leaving a great number of people to face severe conditions. It is circumstances like these that expose them to a culture of marginality rooted in drugs, loose morality, violence, profanity and disrespect for social institution (Sesay, Ukeje & Adetanwa, 2003). The people in this category are employed as thugs and socialized into participating in organized violence by overambitious politicians. The politicians tend to dispose these youths just after accomplishing their goals. But the recognition accorded these youths in the process and the need to preserve their respectability added significantly in metamorphosing them into a more tenacious group, and these groups now camouflage behind the banner of fighting for their ethnic groups' interests (Adebanwi 2002).

Another point of view that is not quite different from the perspective discussed is taken by scholars who see the phenomenon of ethnic agitation in Nigeria as cultural and inherent in the character of the Nigerian societies. They argue that an arrangement that either defend the territorial integrity of communities or enforce laws within the communities has always been in existence (Barongo 1987, Egwu 2001, Sesay et al 2003, Adedimeji 2005). These groups were primarily made up of the able bodied members of the local community and given credibility and authority to operate. For instance, the 'age-grade system' and the 'Agbekoyas' in the eastern and western parts of the country respectively. It is this type of arrangements that led protests against the excesses of government before the military intervened in 1966. The oil boom of the 1970s and the consequent economic prosperity distracted potential groups for some time as the improved economic condition deterred the rise of disaffected people.

The increased availability of unlawful and unauthorized small and light weapons smuggled into Nigeria predicted to be around 3 million is also accredited as a factor to the rise and proliferation of violent social formations. The somewhat easy access to these illegal

weapons has encouraged a culture of violence and invigorated discontented groups to put up serious challenge to legitimate government authorities (Udeh 2002, Akinwumi 2005). This is linked to the 20<sup>th</sup> century global phenomenon of de-nationalization of the states that have resulted in the clash of cultures and encourages regional units in plural society whose predilection to violence is expedited through unfettered access to these illegal weapons (Okeke, Nduba & Akam 2019).

The Nigerian federalism which is supposed to accommodate the country's diversity has been cited by some scholars as the factor behind ethnic agitations. The scholars here argue that the Nigerian federalism was debased during those many years of military rule and turned the state to a unitary state. They therefore posit that the phenomenon of ethnic agitation is a logical derivative of the process of de-federalisation of Nigeria since 1966 (Babawale 2001). It is the over concentration of power at the centre that created the latent for open disaffection and discontent of the Nigerian ethnic groups. The scholars reasoned that the emergence of these ethnic based formations came through a process of manipulation of ethnicity by the governing elite across the various regions of Nigeria as a means of bargaining for power. As such ethnic agitation is seen by them as a consequence of the mismanagement of ethnic grievances by the Nigerian state and its agents (Anifowose 2001, Ebegbulem, 2016). Related to this is the view that the opening up of the polity following the completion of the transition to democracy contributed to the emergence of these groups (Akinboye 2001, Asamu 2005).

Nduba (2019, p. 67) in his thesis found out that marginalization is significantly responsible for ethnic agitations in Nigeria. Likewise, Duruji (2010, p.237) in his study, found out that these groups such as the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) and the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) were "manifestations of sub-nationalism that emanated from the unattended issues surrounding Nigeria's national question. These issues include citizenship, representation, resource control and allocation as well as to and use of power in Nigeria."

The consensus in the literature is that ethnic agitations are rooted in ethnicity and has been with Nigeria prior to independence. There is also general agreement in the literature that in Nigeria, these groups are youth based (Okeke, Nduba and Akam, 2019). Also drawing from the existing literature on the subject; we can affirm that the generic term of ethnic agitation as used in common Nigerian parlance, refers to the arousal of public concern by organized groups with potential for violent tendencies based in any of Nigeria's geographical region and usually claims to be fighting for and defending some common ethnic or geo-political interest whether broad or narrow (Okeke, Nduba and Akam, 2019).

### 3. THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA (IPOB)

**History:** The Indigenous People of Biafra was officially founded in 2012 by its leader Nnamdi Kanu (Robyn,

2016). Nnamdi Kanu was an abstruse figure till 2009 when he started a station named Radio Biafra that called for an independent cum sovereign state for the Igbo nation and broadcast to Nigeria from London. Despite Mr. Kanu growing up in Nigeria's South-East geo-political zone and attending the prestigious University of Nigeria, Nsukka, he moved to the UK before graduating (Hegarty, 2017).

The call for a sovereign state for the Igbo ethnic nationality is not a new phenomenon. The emergence of IPOB is an attempt to resurrect the struggle for self-determination waged by the Igbo of South-East Nigeria that led to gruesome thirty months' civil war that claimed the lives of over a million people and displaced several others; and also the perceived inefficiency of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The movement (IPOB) wants a group of states in South-East zone of Nigeria, consisting essentially people from the Igbo ethnic nationality, to secede from Nigeria and form the independent nation of Biafra (Adonu, 2017).

The acrid civil war which followed the declaration of Biafra by Odumegwu Ojukwu in 1967 ended with the Biafrans acquiescing to the superior might of the federal military government and consequently reunited the country. Despite that victory, General Gowon the Military Head of State, announced that there was no victor nor vanquished at the end of the war and subsequently launched a programme of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation (3Rs) as a way of reintegrating the South-East back into the fold of a united federal republic of Nigeria, (Chikendu, 2004).

That declaration of no victor nor vanquished by the 'victorious' Federal Military government, ended up as pure rhetoric as practical reality demonstrated otherwise. Indeed, the Igbos were regarded essentially as conquered adversaries by those in power who saw themselves as the heroes of the civil war and who had remained in the corridors of power for a long time (Amadiume 2000). Marginalization of the Igbo nation became the watchword in post-civil war epoch and was manifested in the form of premeditated disempowerment, politically, economically and otherwise by those groups who wielded power and control over the allocation of material and other resources at the centre (Ikpeze 2000, p.90).

The cry that became prevalent among the Igbo nation was that since the end or collapse of the Biafran state, their ethnic group have been at the receiving end of determined policies of marginalization. This view is not only held by the Igbos. For example, Adeyemo (2004) enunciated some of the issues that includes the neglect by government to check and appropriately tackle erosion menace in Igbo areas, lack of industries in the area as well as the deliberate policy of non-inclusion in the country's power structure. Re-echoing this view, another non-Igbo, Douglas Oronto (cited in Adeyemo 2004) expressed the same line of thought in the following words;

if you look at Nigeria prior to the civil war, you find that the Igbo occupied the top echelons of the

military, the civil service and so on. But after the war, they are nowhere around the cadre of leadership. It took a very long time for the Igbo to begin to demand for presidency (p.18).

This thought shared by other ethnic groups in Nigerian is widely held by the Igbo people including those who did not witness the Biafran-Nigerian war (Onu 2001). Ikpeze (2000) states that the marginalization of post-civil war Igbo ethnic group is exhibited in power distribution and control of the allocation of economic cum material and other resources at the federal level. This is illustrated in three dimensions; economic strangulation, politico bureaucratic emasculation and military neutralization and ostracism all tailored at facilitating an aim of keeping the Igbo race very weak in the context of power equation relative to the other major groups in the country.

In line with the foregoing, some of the instances that buttress the fact above include, but not limited to, the twenty pounds ceiling placed on bank lodgments for all Igbos after the civil war no matter how much they had in banks before the war. Scholars have argued that this policy is a calculated effort to nullify the savings and capacity of the Igbos to rejuvenate and reestablish into the Nigerian economy (Amadiume 2000). Associated with this is the abrupt removal of federal troops from the eastern region, a device that was designed to deny the Igbos the economic stimulus for recovery as people who could have been accredited as suppliers to the troops were denied the opportunity. The timing of the indigenization policy which came shortly after the war when Igbo people were financially constrained to participate also incapacitated the Igbo economically. Also of note was the inadequate infrastructural development in the Igbo area resulting in the mass migration of the Igbo to other parts of the country for economic survival. This tendency results from the discrimination against the Igbo in the location of industries and the attendant benefit of linkages that come from such location (Okeke, 2018). It is also connected to the deliberate neglect of ecological problems of soil erosion leading to loss in agricultural lands and settlements. "The ecological devastation becomes obvious in relative terms when compared with the massive attention given to desertification in the north and beach erosion in the western parts of Nigeria" (Ikpeze 2000, p.98).

Long after Biafra insurrection was crushed by the Nigerian military, agitations or secessionist groups have attracted the support of many young people. There has been the Biafran Zionist Movement (BZM), the Igbo Youth Movement (IYM), the Biafra Nation's Youth League (BNYL), and the Uwazurike led Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The philosophy behind the formation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was to identify with the historical and cultural origin of the Igbo so as to seek the secession of the nation from the state Nigeria. This is seen as the remedy for the perceived gross injustice and marginalization of the Igbo nationality. To achieve this,

the group is calling for a referendum to be conducted in Igbo territories to settle the issue of Biafra in a civilized and democratic manner. Another strategy employed by the IPOB movement is the 'sit-at-home' protest in states in the South East in remembrance of the Biafrans that died in the 1967-1970 Nigeria-Biafra war and those that have lost their lives in the struggle for the actualization of Biafra, and also, to demand Kanu's release from detention (when he was still incarcerated). For example, residents of South-East Nigeria (mainly Igbos) were ordered to stay at home on September 23 2016, May 30 2017, May 30 2018 and May 30 2019 (Nwaiwu 2016, Okafor 2017, Chukindi 2018, Ugwu 2018, Okeke 2018, Chioma et. al 2019).

Against this backdrop Thompson, Ojukwu and Nwaoegu (2016), stated that IPOB's grievances are that the Igbos have been "politically, socio-economically, and culturally marginalized in the Nigerian project". Thompson et al. (2016) described IPOB as "a faction" of MASSOB and indicated that Kanu "fell out" with the former leader of MASSOB in 2009, and "emerged as the leader of IPOB in 2012".

IPOB notes that they are a movement to aid Biafrans accomplish self-determination under the auspices of the law through diplomacy, mass media, civil rights activism, human rights movement, political as well as every other legitimate process. Though some statements from its leader Nnamdi Kanu for example, his famous remark: "We need guns and we need bullets,..." negates this strategy of pursuing the group's objectives. However, IPOB spokeswoman Amarachi Chimeremeze argued that this was not a literal call to arms but that it was a metaphor, to tell the people we are going to fight for this (Robyn, 2016).

In October 2015, soon after arriving in Nigeria for a visit, the leader of IPOB Kanu was arrested in his Lagos hotel. He was charged with criminal conspiracy, intimidation and membership of an illegal organization - charges that amounted to treason. His lawyer, Ifeanyi Ejiofor, stated that the charges were fortuitous and were fabricated to insure his detention in prison. These are masked charges that will never see the light of day (Robyn, 2016).

**Membership and Leadership Structure:** The membership of the group according to the leader of the movement Nnamdi Kanu, is not limited to the Igbo ethnic group. Okeke (2018 p.3) observed *inter alia* that "the defunct Republic of Biafra was the name for the entire Eastern region of Nigeria as at May 30, 1967, which comprised of 8 provinces namely: Port Harcourt Province, Calabar Province, Ogoja Province, Abakiliki Province, Enugu Province, Onitsha Province, Umuahia Province, and Owerri province." Five out of these eight (Abakiliki, Enugu, Onitsha, Owerri and Umuahia) are homes for the Igbo nation, while the other three Province (Calabar, Ogoja and Port Harcourt) are homes for the Ogoni, Ikwere, Ibibio, Efik, Ijaw and few other ethnic nationalities (Okeke 2018). According to Kanu, all the inhabitants of these provinces are members of IPOB.

In line with the above, the leader of IPOB disclosed that the federal government of Nigeria offered him Biafra Republic while in prison with only the five South East states as the component parts but he rejected it (Chioma, G., Anayo, O., Alaribe, U., Nwaiwu, C., 2017). Though some cultural leaders in some of the provinces outside the South East states has come forward to reject Kanu's proposal that they belong to Biafra, for example the Igala Socio-Cultural Group frowned over their incorporation in Biafra. Mr. Barry Moses Idakwo the spokesman of the group, noted that the incorporation has made a mess of the ancient Igala Kingdom and asseverated that such inclusion should be revoked. He noted that the Biafra agitation or grievance is hinged on the striking marginalization of their people and hence unthinkable to annex the Igala kingdom without consulting the Igala people first. ([www.nigerianbulletin.com/threads/4-states-reject-nnamdi-kanu's-biafra-proposal.242204/](http://www.nigerianbulletin.com/threads/4-states-reject-nnamdi-kanu's-biafra-proposal.242204/)). Others (those that rejected kanu's proposal for inclusion to Biafra) includes Urhobo Progressive Union representing the Urhobo tribe, former Director-General of the Nigeria Intelligence Agency (NIA), Chief Albert Korubo Horsfall speaking for Port Harcourt and a former Minister of state for Education, professor Jerry Agada representing the Idoma people of Benue state.

The leadership structure of the IPOB movement is amorphous but media sources have cited several persons holding positions in the movement. Mr. Nnamdi Kanu is the undisputed leader of the group, Mr. Anayo Chukwu-Okpara, spokesman (AFP 31 May 2016; Al Jazeera 1 June 2016), Mr. Emma Powerful, Media and Publicity (The Advocate 5 Oct. 2016; National Mirror 8 Oct. 2016); and Emma Nmezu and Clifford Iroanya, spokespersons (The Sun 3 Oct. 2016).

**Response of Nigerian Government:** International Crisis Group reports that the authorities' response to Biafran separatist activities, initially was restrained, although they broke up rallies and arrested scores of people, including the filing of charges against one hundred and thirty-seven (137) pro-Biafran people as of 1 December 2015 (International Crisis Group 4 Dec. 2015). Notwithstanding, the same source reports that on 2 December 2015, the police shot at protesters and clashes between the police and pro-separatist protesters led to the deaths of two policemen and at least eight protesters.

Amnesty International released a report showing the many IPOB protesters killed between 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of May, 2016 during a governmental backed operation by the Nigerian army trying to forestall IPOB members proceeding from Nkpor motor park to a rally (Amnesty International, 2016). Though the Nigerian army claimed that they were acting in self-defense, and that the death count lies at five instead of over fifty reported. Amnesty International (2016) holds that these killings have not been investigated by Nigeria despite urgings by it and others.

Human rights organizations have also been keeping records of extrajudicial killings in Biafra. They claim that from August 2015 through February 2016, one hundred and seventy (170) unarmed civilians were killed

and that four hundred (400) were arrested, charged and detained without trial (Maya, 2016).

The Nigerian Military on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017 released a statement declaring IPOB "a militant terrorist organization" (Ibrahim 2017). On 16<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the chairman of the South-East Governor's forum and governor of Ebonyi state, Dave Umahi said the forum decided to proscribe the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra to stop the rising tension in the zone (Eze, 2017). Furthermore, on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the federal government secured an order from the Federal High Court in Abuja proscribing the Indigenous People of Biafra (Nnochiri, 2017). All these and the unknown whereabouts of Kanu after the infamous army exercise (operation python dance 2) deflated the activities of the IPOB movement.

On March 12, 2020, the leadership of the IPOB alleged that the gunmen who killed over twenty persons and destroyed properties worth billions of Naira in Ndiagu Orié village Umuogodoakpu-Ngbo community in Ohaukwu local government area of Ebonyi state (an area known for being pro-IPOB) were from Agila in Ardo community, Benue state and acted in complete connivance with the Nigerian Army (Nnachi, 2020).

**Extent of Support of Masses and Elites of Igbo Ethnic Group:** There has been mixed reactions cum support for the IPOB movement from the elites especially from the South-East Governor's Forum and the apex Igbo socio-cultural group in Nigeria – Ohanaeze Ndigbo. Under the cover or umbrella of the South-East Governor's Forum, the Governors of the South-East geo-political zone in Nigeria, had in September 2019 proscribed IPOB. Defending their actions, the governors said the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu had lost control of the group and the group was causing tensions in the geo-political zone (Okafor, 2018). They argue that the actions of IPOB have denied them of foreign investments and it is very critical that the people should know that and that nobody wants to come to a place that is under tension that is why they want to keep pressing for peace.

Furthermore, the declarations of sit-at-home in the South-East by the IPOB leadership has been variously scoffed and condemned by the state governors. For instance, the sit-at-home call by the IPOB leadership on 30 May, 2019 was described as 'anarchical' by the Anambra State government through its Commissioner for Information and Public Enlightenment (Okeoma, 2019).

In line with the above, Ohanaeze Ndigbo disagreed with some of the *modus operandi* of the IPOB movement especially as regards boycott of elections. As reported by Sahara Reporters (February, 8 2019) Ohanaeze Ndigbo noted that the marginalisation of the Igbos can only be corrected if the Permanent Voter Cards (PVC) are used wisely to vote and called on Igbos to disregard cum shun the directives of the IPOB leadership on election boycott. Ohaneze Ndigbo has also shown support for the IPOB movement, this is evident when it did label the clampdown order on the IPOB group by the Chief of Army Staff, Tukur Buratai as inhuman and degrading. The

President General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Chief John Nnia Nwodo noted *inter alia* that the order could be used to carry out killings in the part of the country and have the capacity to discourage the people (those who have their PVCs) from coming out to vote due to fear.

On the other hand, the IPOB movement has enjoyed huge support from the masses in its area of influence. This is evident in the mammoth crowd at IPOB rallies and strict cum total adherence to sit-at-orders in most places like Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, Owerri, etc. Chioma et.al (2019) noted that there was a near-complete lockdown of the entire South-East geopolitical zone following the sit-at-home order at the instance of the Indigenous People of Biafra, which has illustrated the success as a confirmation that it was in total control of the zone. She stated that the group recorded total compliance in some major cities (Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, Nkpor, Obosi, etc.), partial compliance in some (Enugu, Ihiala, etc.) and defiance in some cities (Awka, Umuahia, etc.).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Nationalism and the struggle for ethnic identification will always throw up controversies as well as unite people(s) and will constantly be employed for ethnic based agitations. The activities of these ethnic based agitations in Nigeria continues to have significant effect on the state (by way of questioning the legitimacy of government and threats to its sovereignty) with its attendant cum concomitant obvious implications on the economy. Given the mandate of the government to protect lives, properties of the people and state as well as maintain equity and fairness in government relations with the people(s) especially in a multi-national state like Nigeria, it is imperative that government jettison the use of suppression and adopt peaceful strategies in addressing nagging issues raised by these groups. Also, the Nigerian government should adopt significant measures to curtail the perception of marginalization by ensuring that the principles of equity and justice are always considered in revenue allocation, appointments, infrastructures etc. among the different nations that constitute the state. The perception of marginalization can also be seen in the recent case of the IPOB and other Igbo ethnic socio-cultural groups' foul cry of the share of the South-East region in the disbursement of the recently sought after loan of \$22.7 billion from China and the World bank.

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