

Igbos, Think Home: Re-education of Ndi Igbo

Dr. M. C. Nwafor

Department of Accounting, Banking & Finance
Godfrey Okoye University
Enugu.

BACKGROUND

The average Igbo man has wonderful faith in his capability to survive any form of hardship or situation, irrespective of his place of abode and the hostility. But the question is; how long will the Igbo man persevere since 1970 to date? Nwobodo (2016) lamented that the fate of Igbo nation since the end of the unfortunate Nigerian-Biafra civil war in 1970 has been that of a sojourner on a voyage, mission, and quest for political and economic survival. The after effects of the war which depleted Ndi Igbo politically, economically, psychologically and humanly are still conspicuously visible for even the blind to see in the country. The gross infrastructural dilapidation of Igbo nation as a result of the civil war and deliberate economic strangulation of the people via anti-Igbo economic policies initiated by then Gen. Yakubu Gowon-led Federal government, forced surviving Igbos into massive exodus from Igbo land to look for greener pasture.

It is a known fact that post-civil war economic policies of Gen. Gowon's government cost Igbos more than what they lost during the three-year protracted civil war. The change of currency which culminated in giving twenty pounds to each Igbo person, irrespective of how much one had in the bank and subsequent introduction of the Indigenisation policy (what is known today as privatisation), when Ndigbo was struggling to recover from the negative consequences of the war made hitherto Igbo millionaires paupers and economic slaves in their land. These hostile anti-Igbo economic policies made to cripple Ndigbo economically made some of our Igbo brothers outside South-East geo-political zone to deny their Igbo heritage just to survive. It also turned some of our brothers and sisters into economic scavengers and adventurers—moving out in droves from the East to look for opportunities in other regions and countries of the world. Failure of the Gowon-led Federal government and successive governments after him to implement the 3Rs—Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Renovation in the war-ravaged South-East of the country alienated Ndigbo nation more.

Since then, there has been unwritten conspiracy against Igbos, not just to deny them political power but economic wherewithal. Igbos, out of sheer ingenuity, entrepreneurship and adventurous spirit have prospered, blossomed and advanced their economic fortunes in the midst of daunting challenges and stark marginalisation in Nigeria. At the individual level, Igbos have regained and made more than what they collectively lost during and after the civil war, but the

psychological effect of the war still hangs on the Igbo nation. Some of our people seem to have forgotten “home” entirely. They are busy investing and developing other parts of Nigeria while leaving Igbo land to deteriorate. A situation where an Igbo person is fixated on building industries, businesses and houses across the length and breadth of this country and beyond while neglecting where he comes from calls for serious concern. Ikpeazu (2016) lamented that our region is undeveloped because our businessmen and women are investing outside our region. The irony and pathetic aspect of it is that the people Igbos are helping to develop their places still treat them with so much disdain and contempt, irrespective of the economic gains they have made from investment of Igbos in these places. They see Ndigbo as ‘opportunists’ who are trying to dominate them in their own land. For example, Lagos State—Nigeria’s economic capital will become a shadow of itself without investment and huge opportunities created by Ndigbo, yet we see markets built and run by Ndigbo being demolished at the slightest provocation without adequate consultation and compensation, thereby pushing Ndigbo to go and develop other virgin lands which are mostly swamps, that will still be taken over from them forcefully later.

The Lagos State government makes 70 percent of its Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), from business investments of Igbos, yet they are still treated like third class citizens in their own country. Eighty percent of goods coming into Nigeria via Lagos seaports are owned and imported by Igbo business people, yet no Igbo person has been appointed Managing Director of Nigerian Ports Authority (I stand to be corrected). Senator Stella Oduah was blackmailed out of office as Aviation minister for daring to upgrade Enugu Airport to international status, thereby opening Igbo nation to the outside world. Dredging of River Niger and construction of the second Niger Bridge have remained tools for political campaigns while other federal government projects more gigantic than these ones in other regions have been given accelerated construction. It is no longer news that the South-East has the worst network of federal roads in the country. The Federal Executive Council recently approved additional seaport in Badagry, Lagos State, and there are plans by this administration to establish a ‘Dry Port’ in Kaduna State—where goods shipped to Nigeria via Lagos ports would be transported to Kaduna through railways for onward clearance, while Igbo nation, a major tribe in Nigeria famed for business exploits has no functional sea port or cargo airport. What an irony!

The Biafran Struggle – An Overview

The Northern pogrom that preceded the war and the events that took place during the struggle are all matters of details for historians and those of us who either witnessed it or took part in the war as soldiers, mobile policemen, air-force officers and militia men. This paper, far be it, is not intended to x-ray the reasons for the Biafran resistance and struggle for independence; but suffice it to say that Igbos, having been pushed to the wall, had no choice than to defend themselves and express their intention to have a sovereign State of Biafra.

Unfortunately, the commercial/imperialistic/capitalistic motives of the developed nations of Britain, Russia and America via their superior/stronger military coalition brought down the

Biafran struggle. It is common knowledge that at the end of the war, every Igbo man that survived the war was given a paltry sum of 20 (twenty Pounds) to rehabilitate himself. The Igbo has similar *Israeli Spirit to Survive*, and this is the God-given self determination and spirit to survive, against all odds. It has kept the Igbo man alive today in this political expression called *Nigeria*.

Igbos – Only True Patriots in Nigeria

Igbos are often referred to as secessionists who wanted to break up Nigeria; but in the real sense of it, it is the Igbo man that is the only true and patriotic Nigerian, who sees Nigeria as his only home, given the following few facts, namely: -

1. It is only the Igbo man who is found and lives in every state of Nigeria.
2. He is not only found in every part of Nigeria, he resides and trades freely there.
3. He acquires plots of land and builds PERMANENT structures there as his home.
4. He interacts freely with the indigenes of his host community.
5. The Igbo man has no other country other than Nigeria, and hence, their massive investments all over the states of Nigeria.
6. The Igbo man inter-marries more than any other in Nigeria, etc.

Marginalization

The marginalization of the Igbos since the end of the war cannot be over-emphasized as its evidence abounds by merely looking around you. The roads are as good as non-existent while the juicy factories/industries are located far away from the Igbo states even where the raw materials abound. Can one explain the reason for the creation of only five states in the South East Zone whereas others have more states?

Tertiary admissions

The Igbos are heavily discriminated against in the admissions of students into the federal tertiary institutions as evidences abound where Igbo students with JAMB score of 200 and above are denied admissions in favour of their northern counterparts with much lesser scores, yet we are in one Nigeria.

Federal appointments

The key positions/appointments are not for the Igbos as is evident from the recent ministerial appointments of the federal government. In the military positions no Igbo man was found fit enough for any key appointment in all the military formations across the nation.

Economic growth and challenges to the Igbo man

Only very recently, a plan by our northern and western counterparts, as captured (and yet to be denied) in an audio clip leaked and to the effect that Igbo zone would be left out of the new proposed giant agricultural scheme in the face of declining oil fortunes. The plan went further to ensure that no drug from an Igbo man's pharmaceutical firm should be patronized in Kano. The Igbo man would find it very difficult to have value for his property in case he wants to dispose of it, and worse still will pay through his nose to acquire any meaningful property henceforth. It was clearly stated in the audio clip that at the end of the agricultural programme, the Igbo should go and on quote "drink their oil". Only most recently we heard and read (yet to be confirmed) the news of the plan to exclude Capital Oil, who saved the country from collapsing last May 2016, from the list of oil importers; while Innoson Motors and Ibeto Cement were also not left out of the diabolical plan to distract their business investments.

From the audio clip, one could also see the envy/plot against the Igbos who lost everything and received only 20 pounds each to start life afresh, by a people who mostly believe/depend on government funds, patronage and political power. They are not happy with the Igbos who work hard and build good number of houses in their states, the clip also revealed. It is very revealing and astonishing. In the clip, Igbos were falsely accused of denying them rights to land. Igbos have no tribal boundaries I can state you authoritatively. It is only Alhaji Baba Enugu that has any worth-while house in Enugu, given the fact that he was not only born in Enugu, was a one-time Mayor of Enugu. They prefer living in make-shift structures to permanent structures, having better understood the fragile unity of this country Nigeria. A visit to Ugwoba close to Anambra State, Lokpa Ukwu in Abia State and elsewhere, this author will be proved right. Their pre-war mosque at Owerri Road/Lagos Street in Enugu is yet to have one block added to it but all the past northern military administrators worship there. The truth is that none of them wants to own any property in Igbo land, which is fondly known as home for all. No race in Nigeria is as accommodating as the Igbo race.

Need for Igbo unity

The Ohaneze Ndigbo should live up to its obligation by steering the course of the Igbo man aright. This it should do by unifying all the Igbo speaking States by adopting a common stand like our northern and western counterparts, on any economic, political, cultural and social issue. Efforts should be made to do away with this Igbo mentality of "Igbo enwe eze". Emphasis should now be on the collective interests of the Igbos as against individual interests.

Copying the Nnewi template

The author enjoins all Igbos to copy the Nnewi template of *charity beginning at home*. It is advised that before any Igbo man ventures out to any state other than the Southeast Zone, he must first start from his home state or senatorial zone. The governors must make available land to any serious entrepreneur to discourage investing outside the state or the zone. The cosmetic

unity of this country will die as soon as the hitherto much-depended-upon oil stops to flow in the Southeast and South/South. The exploration of oil in the north has been slated to start this 2016 for which huge sum of money has been voted for.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The Igbo adage, which says that “Onye ajulu aju ada aju onwe ya” (the reject wont reject himself) says it all. Since the Igbo man is not wanted in the north, what is he doing up there? Will the Igbo man be rejected up north and also at home? No! Of course; Igbos should now think home rather than developing other states only to be compensated with their corpses back home. It is not only true to say that we do not have enough land to site industries/factories, it sounds defeatist. We should see all Igbo speaking people as our brothers in order to achieve the much needed but elusive unity. Nnewi is a shining example of my message. Enugwu-Ukwu, Nneni and others should follow suit.

This is the time for Igbos to think home since we learnt nothing from the Nigeria/Biafra war. We should concentrate now more at home, site our factories/industries at home, develop our state infra structures and develop our economic activities here at home with a view to increasing our Gross Domestic Products (GDP).

Recently, the Southeast states are working on an Economic Summit that will marshal out roadmap on how to resuscitate economic potentials of South-East by ensuring amongst others: more international flights to Enugu Airport, revival of the Onitsha seaport; reconstruction of all Inter-state (Federal) roads in the zone; re-invigoration of moribund industries and siting of new ones in the zone that have the capacity of transforming South-East into an industrial hub; construction of good network of railways with new model speed trains linking major cites of South-East and beyond, especially South-South zone; huge investment in media industry to help in reawakening and reorientation the Igbo nation, massive deployment of resources in human development, etc. It is time for Ndigbo to take the bull by the horn. Waiting for the Federal government to come to our aid, is to wait in vain (Nwobodo, 2016).

Obiano (2016) stressed at the World Igbo Congress in Houston, USA, that Ndigbo have gradually been waking up to the imperatives of unity and brotherhood in what he saw as "a raging sea of bigotry and threatening territorial expansionism. "It is indeed a great achievement and a thing of pride to every Igbo man and woman. I dare say that in the years ahead, our struggle for a place on God's green earth will be even more demanding. So, we need more strategic approaches like this one for the survival of Ndigbo into the next millennium. "... whenever I contemplate the place of the Igbo in our fast changing world, my pride in the Igbo nation is rekindled; whenever I remember the scientific and technological exploits that shook the world from 1967 to 1970, my heart glows with pride. And whenever I realize the enormity of Igbo contributions to modern thought and knowledge, I feel more confident in the future of our people." Governor Obiano described the Igbo story as "a narrative in courage; A great epic that celebrates the resilience of the human spirit. The story of a people who rose vigorously from the rubble of genocide and extinction to assert their membership of the human race in the 21st

century with so much brilliance, so much promise! It is a story that I am immensely proud of, he added.

“We can’t be going about looking for investors when Igbo people are the biggest investors all over the world. The time to encourage our people to come home and invest is now because investing here at home will create jobs for our people, and reduce crime as well,” said Governor Okezie Ikpeazu of Abia State at a recent Igbo gathering. The Governor maintained that the prospects for the Igbo nation are enormous as he described Igbo as global catalysts for economic growth. “If you want to spread prosperity, leave it in the hands of the Igbo. Apart from their spirit of entrepreneurship, you will notice also that they develop every environment they find themselves. An Igbo man in Kano is not there just to make money and go away, but he contributes to the development of the community there,” Ikpeazu added.

He said that the Igbo forum was beyond politics as the focus was for the survival of the Igbo nation, stressing that it does not matter which political party they belong, that the paramount thing is to pilot the development of the region. The Igbos will never be subjugated by the grace of God. God bless us and keep us steadfast in this our solemn obligation of getting us to think and invest home in Igbo land.

REFERENCES

Web Support

<http://www.mogbeats.com/explosive-plans-by-northerners-to-subjugate-eastern-region>

<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/09/ndigbo-time-think-build-home/>

<http://www.elombah.com/index.php/reports/10200-governor-obiano-challenges-igbo-in-diaspora-to-think-home>

<http://www.leadership.ng/news/541919/think-home-ikpeazu-tells-igbos-in-diaspora>

Documents

King of Kano, Emir Muhammadu Sanusi 11, 1999 Speeches @ The Arewa Forum, Kaduna.

Modibbo H. Aliyu – PMB must hear this. Article.