

**Ako-na-Uche versus Nzogbu-nzogbu:
Interrogating the Rupture between
Igbo Elite and their Lumpen in Igbo
Nationalism**



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***Ako-na-Uche* versus *Nzogbu-nzogbu*: Interrogating the Rupture between Igbo Elite and their Lumpen in Igbo Nationalism**

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Abstract

Post-war Igbo ethno-nationalism has witnessed two distinct but interconnected generations. Both of them emerged as a response to the ineffective and objectionable implementation of post-war peace-building initiatives as well as the progressive victimisation of the Igbo since the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. While the first generation is championed and dominated by conservative Igbo petty bourgeoisie, the second is revolutionary and commonly associated with populist youth-led lumpen neo-Biafran separatist movements. In line with the philosophy of *ako-na-uche*, the former seeks mainstream inclusivism through democratic and non-confrontational approach in its response to the perceived widespread victimisation of the Igbo. On the contrary, the latter is inspired by the principle of *nzogbu-nzogbu* and seeks radical separatism as the most sustainable solution to the Igbo question in Nigeria. The reinvention of the *nzogbu-nzogbu* approach to Igbo nationalism in 1999 has attracted substantial public and scholarly attention. However, extant studies are mainly awash with explanations of the recurrent agitation for Biafra. There has not been any systematic investigation of how the fissure between the lumpen and aristocrats (*Oha-na-Eze*) of Igbo extraction undermines the pursuit of Igbo nationalism. Using the Marxist social class analysis, the study found that the Igbo question will remain a wild goose chase until the contradictions in the material conditions of the Igbo petty bourgeoisie and their masses are conscientiously harmonised.

Keywords: Igbo nationalism, *Ako-na-uche*, *Nzogbu-nzogbu*, mainstream inclusivism, Biafra separatism, Marxist social class analysis

Introduction

The reinvention of Igbo nationalism after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 attests to the objectionable implementation of post-war resettlement and peace-building initiatives as well as the progressive victimisation of the Igbo since 1970. The end of the 30-month internecine war correspondingly marked the end of the short-lived Republic of Biafra. In a capitulation message delivered at Dodan Barracks, Lagos, Major-General Phillip Effiong – the defunct republic’s second in command – states, *inter alia*:

We (Biafrans) affirm that we are loyal Nigerian citizens and accept the authority of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria; that we accept the existing administrative and political structure of the Federation of Nigeria; that any future constitutional arrangement will be worked out by representatives of the people of Nigeria; that the Republic of Biafra hereby ceases to exist (cited in Onuoha, 2017, p. 1).

The ill-fated war has attracted a deluge of literature. Some of the most outstanding publications on the subject are authored by leading actors of the war or through their representatives who presented highly personalised accounts of the debacle. They include Uwechue (1971), Obasanjo

(1978, 1981), Madiebo (1980), Ademoyega (1981), Gbulie (1981), Ojukwu (1989), Ejoor (1989), Achebe (2012), and Alabi-Isama (2013). Almost 50 years after the war, it has continued to dominate discourses on Igbo nationalism and the future of Nigeria as a federation.

Among the Igbo, the marginalisation narrative has continued to resonate. Although the war ended with the rhetoric of *no victor; no vanquished*, several post-war policies and actions of the Federal Government against the Igbo have proven the mantra to be a ruse. As noted by Duruji (2009), the end of the war signalled the genesis of deliberate social, political and economic policies aimed at reducing the capacity of the Igbo to challenge the dominance of the Nigerian state. In corroboration, Ekwe-Ekwe (as cited in Heerten & Moses, 2014) posits that the Igbo have been subordinated in Nigeria since 1970 by removing their regional governance of the oil-producing areas, subjecting them to punitive abandoned property and post-war currency conversion regimes, and hindering the overall economic development of their region. The post-war marginalisation of the Igbo continues to be reinforced through economic asphyxiation, politico-bureaucratic disempowerment and exclusion from apex military hierarchy, among other subtle means. These actions of the Nigerian government have sustained the continuation of the war against the Igbo by other means (Okonta, 2012). Accordingly, O'Connell (1993) argues that many Igbo people remain secessionists at heart even though they accepted the Biafran defeat.

The responses of the Igbo to their perceived collective victimisation have witnessed two significant phases. The first is post-war phase, also known as the first generation of Igbo nationalism, which started immediately after the Nigerian Civil War. It is championed and dominated by the Igbo petty bourgeoisie. These petty bourgeois elements operate through some elite-led organisations like Ohanaeze-Ndi-Igbo (Ohanaeze for short), Aka Ikenga, Mkpoko Igbo, Alaigbo Development Foundation (ADF), Eastern Mandate Union (EMU), Odenigbo Forum, South East Movement (SEM), Igbo National Assembly (INA), Ndi Igbo Liberation Forum, Igbo Salvation Front (ISF), Igbo Redemption Council (IRC), Igbo People's Congress (IPC) and the Igbo Question Movement (IQM). Apart from Ohanaeze, Aka Ikenga and the ADF, most of these groups have either become extinct or redundant. These organisations have continued to provide the needed platforms for the protection and promotion of the interests of the Igbo petty bourgeoisie like South East governors, members of the National Assembly (NASS), professionals, intelligentsia, business moguls, royal fathers, the clergy and other political bigwigs. Arising from their total disconnect from the grassroots, these bourgeois elements are regarded as the clientele or surrogates of their counterparts at the federal level. With respect to the perceived widespread victimisation of the Igbo, the petty bourgeoisie is guided by the philosophy of *ako-na-uche* through which it seeks increased participation of the Igbo in the mainstream Nigerian politics through non-confrontational and democratic approach.

The inter-generational disconnection between the Igbo petty bourgeois class and their grassroots lumpen accounted for the reinvention of radical Igbo nationalism since the return to civil rule in 1999. This phase marks the second generation of Igbo nationalism. It is championed mainly by the masses who dominate the various youth-led Igbo ethno-nationalist organisations. These radical groups, otherwise called "neo-Biafran" movements, include the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), MASSOB International, Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Biafran Zionist Front (BZF), Biafra Independence Movement (BIM), Biafra Youth Congress (BYC), Biafran Liberation Council (BLC), Coalition of Biafra Liberation

Groups (COBLIG) and more recently, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Although founded on the avowed doctrine of non-violence, these grassroots populist organisations are mainly guided by the confrontational philosophy of *nzogbu-nzogbu*. Hence, they represent the radical wing of post-war Igbo nationalism. Contrary to the mainstream inclusivism of the petty bourgeoisie, these alienated lumpen elements are inclined to radical separatism as the most sustainable response to the perceived collective victimisation of the Igbo in Nigeria.

It is noteworthy that militant ethnic nationalism in Nigeria predated 1999. However, the dismantling of military rule in 1999 led to the proliferation of ethno-nationalist groups that were hitherto suppressed by successive military regimes (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2014). Consequently, the “democratic” space has been widened for open expression of discontents and grievances that were bottled-up during the heyday of military repression in the country. Civilian administrations since 1999 have, therefore, witnessed consistent and sustained pressure from different ethnic militias like the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu Boys, Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), Arewa Youth Consultative Forum, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), MASSOB and IPOB. According to Onuoha (2011), these ethno-nationalist movements mobilise support from their ethnic enclaves and, through their strategies, impose severe strains on national security.

The reinvention of radical Igbo nationalism since 1999 has received substantial scholarly attention (Duruji, 2012; Ibeanu *et al.*, 2016; Julius-Adeoye, 2017; Offodile, 2016; Okonta, 2012; Omeje, 2005; Onuoha, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Thompson *et al.*, 2016; and Uduma, 2013). Despite the growth of public and scholarly interests in neo-Biafran separatism, existing knowledge is mainly awash with explanations of the recurrent agitations for Biafra. Comprehensive and systematic accounts of how the underlying contradictions in the material conditions of the Igbo petty bourgeoisie and their alienated masses have affected post-war Igbo nationalism; they are also, to say that least and to the best knowledge of this researcher, not in existence. Hence, this study which investigates the place of the fissure between the masses and the aristocrats of the Igbo extraction on the promotion of Igbo nationalism.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The dialectical disharmony between the Igbo petty bourgeoisie and their lumpen in the post-war and post-military reinvention of Igbo nationalism – which has grave implications for the struggle for Biafra statehood – can better be appreciated within the theoretical binoculars of the Marxist social class analysis. The Marxist analysis arose as a counterpoise to the dominant liberal analysis of class and class struggle. Thus, Marxist conceptualisation of social classes is not in the sociological sense of upper, middle and lower classes which are often defined in terms of quantitative income or wealth. Instead, Marxist interpretation of social classes is contingent upon a group’s relationship to the means of production. Thus, Lenin (1965, p. 421) argues:

Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.

It is deducible from the above that classes are large groups of people which can appropriate the labour of one another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social production. One of the most significant dimensions of the Marxist's doctrine of classes borders on the ownership (by the exploiter) or non-ownership (by the exploited) of the means of production. Thus, in every society, there are two major classes: the class that owns the means of production (the "haves") and the class that neither owns nor controls the means of production (the "have-nots"). While the haves constitute the economically dominant group in society, who reproduce their domination, subjugation and oppression of the have-nots at the economic, political and ideological levels, the have-nots are the economically and politically disadvantaged groups who have only their labour power – having been alienated from the means of production.

The struggle of classes for the control of state power is inextricably built into the concept of classes. Across centuries, dominant classes have struggled to retain the status quo, while the dominated classes have continued to seek change. Hence, the Marxist social class analysis rests on the premise that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engel, 1973, p. 32). Class struggle applies to social tensions between two opposing classes of society. Although classes form at the level of production; in their struggle, they involve the organisation of power in order to dominate. Thus, this web of complex contradictory practices of social classes is found at the economic, political and ideological levels. The objective of this struggle is the creation or consolidation of a socio-economic formation in which the interest of that class is dominant. Each of the major classes mobilises all the power resources it can, including other classes and their resources, and organises them appropriately for this struggle. Marxists see class relations as political power relations, class struggle as political struggle, class organisation as political organisation, class consciousness as political consciousness and class conflict as political conflict (Marx & Engels, 1973; Nnoli, 2003).

The African ruling class is basically dominated by the petty bourgeoisie intermediate class with no fixed abode in the system of production but rely on state power as a means of capital accumulation (Ekekwe, 1986; Nnoli, 2008). As they are unable to create a novel strategy for acquiring resources in the post-colonial order, the petty bourgeoisie imitated the colonialists by adopting the ethnic strategy. However, while the colonialists used this strategy for divide-and-rule, the petty bourgeoisie is using it for divide-and-enrich (Nnoli, 2008). They have practically no economic power comparable to the bourgeoisie of the mother country that they replaced at independence. Its ranks are filled with men in business, agriculture and the liberal professions like doctors, barristers, traders, commercial travellers, as well as general and transport agents. They are not engaged in production, invention, building or labour, but are completely canalised into activities of the intermediary type (Nnoli, 2003).

The emergence of radical Igbo nationalism as expressed through the activities of MASSOB and IPOB is fuelled both directly and indirectly by the petty bourgeoisie. Directly, it is made possible through the constant manipulation of cultural diversities in order to advance their private material ends. Since 1950, they have propagated the false, unpatriotic and despicable narrative that Nigerian politics is all about the struggle of ethnic and religious groups for power and national resources. The propaganda in promotion of this falsehood has been so successful that practically every politically conscious Nigerian now believes that ethnic politics is the reality of

Nigeria's existence. Indirectly, however, the emergence of these groups which are dominated by the masses can be situated within the dwindling fortunes of the material conditions of their membership. In other words, the limited access to economic opportunities and the associated youth unemployment are central to the intensification of the activities of these radical separatist movements in the country.

The post-war reinvention of radical Igbo nationalism, therefore, is a direct response to perceived widespread social injustice, political marginalisation and economic strangulation of the Igbo lumpen in Nigeria. As noted earlier, the lumpen are predominantly found within the rank and file of Biafran radical separatist movements. On the one hand, they are squared up against the Igbo petty bourgeoisie who are widely seen as the clientele of the Nigerian government¹ and the Nigerian state, on the other. In other words, the Igbo lumpen youths in MASSOB and IPOB are waging twin warfare against the Nigerian state as well as Igbo petty bourgeoisie who advance their mainstream political agenda through such socio-cultural outlets like Ohanaeze, Aka Ikenga, ADF, and so on. The struggle between these frontline separatist movements and the various elite-led groups is all part of the yearnings of the former for freedom, equality and social justice in the process of production and allocation of material resources in Nigeria. This struggle is a function of power and this can be understood within the context of the material conditions of the youths who are predominantly artisans, traders, commercial motorcyclists, taxi drivers, unemployed and under-employed graduates.

Apart from the perceived victimisation of the Igbo, the lumpen separatists are mainly driven by their material conditions which have not shown any promise of improvement. Thus, the *nzogbu-nzogbu* nationalism of the neo-Biafran movements is undergirded by the people's broader perception of their perennial social inequities and injustices in the distribution of power and resources in Nigeria. The separatists have interrogated the logic of the inclusivists' narratives and described them as pathetically perfunctory and collectively unsustainable.² In line with the Marxist's thesis that "man's consciousness changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence" (Marx & Engels, 1973, p. 57), the Igbo petty bourgeois inclusivists always strive to protect and preserve the status quo which is favourable to their material condition. The condition of the Igbo lumpen is, therefore, analogous to those of the periphery of the satellite nations who are subjected to the exploitation of both the comprador bourgeoisie and the metropolitan capital, with the former being the surrogate of the latter.

Ako-na-Uche: The Pursuit of Igbo Nationalism by Petty Bourgeois Organisations

Prior to the crystallisation of radical and confrontational youth-led lumpen organisations with separatist agenda in Igbo land, the post-war Igbo ethno-nationalist aspiration was dominated by different socio-cultural platforms, especially the Ohanaeze, Aka Ikenga, Mkpoko Igbo, and ADF. Most of these groups have either become extinct or redundant, save for Ohanaeze, Aka Ikenga and the ADF. Besides these conservative groups, some vibrant youth and youth-dominated groups with non-confrontational approach and inclusivist orientations include the Igbo Youth Council, Igbo Youth Movement, Ohanaeze Youth Council and the Federated Council of Igbo Youths.

Worthy of note is that the pursuit of Igbo nationalism predated the above organisations, and indeed, the independence of Nigeria. Historically, Igbo ethno-national mobilisations have followed the elitist path. The nationalistic aspirations have undergone processes of change and renewal over time. Ethnic mobilisation of the Igbo originally manifested as part of the national resistance to British imperial rule in Nigeria. Between 1920s and 1930s, there were unsuccessful attempts in major Nigerian cities like Lagos, Aba and Port-Harcourt to give birth to a pan-Igbo Union. In 1944, the Igbo Federal Union (IFU) was launched during which Nnamdi Azikiwe emphasised that being blessed with natural resources, land and manpower, as well as a common language, the Igbo could achieve a great deal if they would unite (Onuoha, 2014). Membership of the IFU was mainly made up of educated elite of professionals, businessmen and politicians. In 1949, IFU was re-christened the Igbo State Union (ISU). According to Irukwu (2007), IFU/ISU was aimed at protecting and advancing the political, economic, social, cultural and other interests of the Igbo people in Nigeria and the Diaspora. The truncation of the First Republic in 1966, however, narrowed the democratic space by proscribing the activities of ISU, and indeed, every other ethno-regional organisations. Accordingly, no ethnic organisation existed in Nigeria until the run-up to the 1979 political transition when the political space was opened for the triumph of political and other related activities in Nigeria.

Consequently, Ohanaeze was founded in 1976 as a successor to the defunct ISU. It was meant to serve as a unifying apex organisation for the Igbo in the post-war Nigerian public space. In the process of its evolution, issues began to emerge around its structure and management systems, and there were perceptions from the Igbo at the grassroots level that the organisation was not only immersed in partisan politics, but was equally elitist and non-democratic in nature (Irukwu, 2007). With the advent of the Second Republic in 1979, Igbo expectations of Ohanaeze failed to materialise due to the fact that it was hijacked by post-civil war Igbo petty bourgeoisie who sought to align with the ruling ethno-hegemonic petty bourgeoisie from other sections of the country and submit to a subordinate role in the prevailing power configuration. For strategic reasons, the leadership of Ohanaeze became inclined to the Shehu Shagari-led National Party of Nigeria (NPN) at the centre and was largely recognised by many as the “Igbo wing” of the NPN operating under a different name (Onuoha, 2014). Thus, the leadership of Ohanaeze saw the emergence of Dr. Alex Ekwueme as Vice-President under the Hausa-Fulani NPN-led government not only as a solution to the lack of leadership in Igboland, but as a means of reconnecting to mainstream politics at the national level. There was a rallying of Igbo positions behind Dr. Ekwueme, with Ohanaeze being openly and strongly opposed to Nnamdi Azikiwe-led Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) and indeed other interests of the Igbo outside the Ekwueme-NPN connection. This gave the initial inkling that the organisation is no more than a clientele of the Hausa-Fulani supremacists.

The mainstream-inclusivism of the Ohanaeze is well-founded on the philosophy of *ako-na-uche* which symbolises the value of approaching issues with the ancient wisdom of Igbo ancestors, dressed up with a lot of tact, diplomacy and respect for the interests and intelligence of others. This conciliatory tone has marked the organisation’s stance on Nigerian politics and shaped its dealings with the state in post-military Nigerian politics. As part of the bridge-building efforts to reconcile the Igbo with all the segments of the Nigerian society, the leadership of the organisation visited the then President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in May 2004. The delegation which comprised the *crème* of Igbo petty bourgeoisie raised a number of topical issues including

the need for “true” federalism, power shift, democracy, and emphasis on the mutuality of Igbo and Nigerian interest, among others (Irukwu, 2007). The new-found principle of *ako-na-uche* embodies the vision of the entire Igbo petty bourgeoisie and defined the basis of Igbo relations with other ethnic nationalities at the federal level.

The advocacy for the inclusive mainstreaming of the Igbo accounts for the employment of the philosophy of *ako-na-uche* by the Igbo petty bourgeoisie as its guiding principle. This is because mainstream-inclusivism represents the attitude of the Igbo who see greater political, economic and social inclusion of the group as the most effective way of addressing the group’s victimisation. Contrary to the abrasive *nzogbu-nzogbu* approach, *ako-na-uche* is founded on the application of wisdom, common sense, sound judgement and restraint in dealing with all issues and situations to achieve desired results (Irukwu, 2007). It is less-confrontational, subtle, tactful and diplomatic. It underscores the need for dialogue at appropriate times, to be silent rather than being unduly vocal and provocative, as well as the need to promote amity rather than enmity (Ibeanu, *et al.*, 2016). The Igbo petty bourgeoisie comprise many war veterans and much older adults who have bitter memories of the pain and agony of the civil war. Rather than secession, their campaign for inclusion is mainly centred on reparation and political restructuring of Nigeria. As a by-product of the civil war, *ako-na-uche* is popular among the older generations who are naturally hesitant to support any military action, against the Nigerian state, that might undermine the security of the Igbo.

The philosophy of *ako-na-uche* is highly conciliatory and usually manifests through the occasional condemnation of orchestrated attacks against the lives and property of the Igbo, especially in Northern Nigeria. However, what appears as a watershed in the pursuit of Igbo nationalism by the mainstream inclusivists took place in 1999 when Ohanaeze chronicled various instances of rights abuses meted against the Igbo in Nigeria. In a memorandum submitted to the Human Rights Violations Investigation Panel (otherwise called the Oputa Panel), Ohanaeze segmented the violations of the human and civil rights of the Igbo into four phases, namely: the immediate pre-civil war period, during the civil war, the immediate post-war era, and later post-war era (Oha-na-Eze Ndi Igbo, 1999).

The violations recorded during the immediate pre-war era include misplaced aggression, waves of pogrom and genocide with the attendant problem of internal population displacement which was greeted with the highest dose of insensitivity by the federal government. During the civil war, violations recorded include the continuation of genocide, land war (concentration on civilian targets), bombing of civilian targets, scorched earth policy, rapes, maltreatment of war prisoners and the use of hunger and starvation as legitimate weapons of war. The immediate post-war era is associated with such violations like social strangulation (physical liquidation, continuation of starvation policy, mass dismissal of Igbo public servants, destruction of education and social ostracism), economic strangulation (denial of pre-war savings, exclusion from the commanding heights of the economy, abandoned property policy, poor implementation of the 3-Rs [Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation], denial of livelihood opportunities to Igbo traders and excision of Igbo mineral-rich areas from Igboland), and political strangulation (exclusion from the apex political position at the federal level and manipulation of census figures). Lastly, the later post-war era violations of the rights of the Igbo centre on political disempowerment (creation of states, exclusion from political apex, and a new

height in marginalisation during Chief Obasanjo's regime), social disempowerment (short-changing of the Igbo in the distribution of employment at the federal level as well as racial discrimination), and economic disempowerment (denial and delay of infrastructural facilities, use of the Petroleum Trust Fund as a conduit pipe for inequitable resource transfer, discriminatory industrial policy and inequitable sharing of revenue).

In a very persuasive analysis, the frontline petty bourgeois organisation argued that the Igbo, similar to the situation during the 1953 Kano riots, have been made the favourite scapegoats of the various ethnic, political and religious conflicts in post-war Nigeria. The organisation listed ten violent encounters between 1980 and 1993³ in which the Igbo were killed and their property looted or destroyed, regardless of whether or not an Igbo was involved in the conflict. Consequently, the Igbo petty bourgeoisie have used every available opportunity to make a case against the seeming calculated effort to make the Igbo "second class citizens" by denying them representation in key appointive positions in the country.⁴ However, the activities of Ohanaeze were later stalled by series of factional and personality disputes among its members.

The emergence of President Muhammadu Buhari-led Federal Government since 29th May 2015 has aggravated the conditions of the Igbo. They have been brazenly excluded and marginalised from national politics and positions. Post-election appointments at the federal level have further exacerbated the fear of domination among the Igbo. Contrary to the President's avowed declaration in his inaugural address that he "belongs to everybody and not to anybody", his appointments and siting of physical infrastructure across the federation have continued to subtly but systematically follow the infamous 97% versus 5% ratio.⁵ Consequently, in his celebrated speech of 28th January 2017, the 9th President-General of Ohanaeze-Ndi-Igbo, Chief John Nnia Nwodo, lamented as follows:

Under the current Federal Government, Igbo representation is abysmal and falls extremely short of the constitutional provisions for the reflection of federal character in the appointment into important government positions. No arm of Government namely, the Executive, Judiciary or Legislature is headed by an Igbo. No Section of the Armed forces or paramilitary organisation is headed by an Igbo. Neither the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal nor the Federal High Court [sic] is headed by an Igbo.... No railway construction is going on in Igbo land. The Enugu/Port-Harcourt and Enugu/Onitsha Expressways have become national embarrassment. State Governors in Igbo States now rehabilitate federal roads in Igbo land from their lean budgets so as to keep alive mobility of factors of production. Whereas 70% of power generated in China is from coal and 40% of America's power is from coal, the coal in Enugu which is a federal resource continues to lie unexploited. Ebonyi State continues to bring up the rear in federally allocated resources in spite of its mineral endowments of salt and lead (*Vanguard*, 28 January 2017).

Also, conforming to the 97%/5% ratio, the President presented a US\$29.9 billion three-year External Borrowing Plan to the National Assembly on 25th October, 2016 without considering it fit to allocate any project in the plan to the South East (a geo-political zone that is wholly peopled by the Igbo). The borrowing plan which will raise Nigeria's total external debt to US\$41

billion in three years and its debt to GDP ratio from 13.2% to 20.7% serves as nothing but part of the carefully crafted economic strangulation of the South East, nay, the Igbo nation.

In view of the glaring cases of marginalisation identified by Ohanaeze across different historical epochs, the organisation has prioritised equality of states in all zones and creation of additional state for South East zone, the issue of “true” federalism as a national stabilising factor, the question of power shift with emphasis on the election of a Nigerian president of Igbo extraction, and economic development of the South East zone. Surprisingly, apart from the constant reverberation of the marginalisation mantra, the apex Igbo organisation has not initiated any legal action against the Federal Government of Nigeria (both past and present) over the perceived collective victimisation of the Igbo in the country. Instead, the organisation has identified a number of strategies required to mainstream the Igbo agenda in contemporary Nigerian politics to include:

1. Reinventing the pre-civil war Igbo spirit and values, especially the spirit of genuine national reconciliation based on the Igbo idea of *egbe bere ugo bere* (justice for all);
2. Encouraging the emergence of good leaders and quality leadership;
3. Promoting positive attitude to money, including rejection of all forms of abuse of money;
4. Cultivating good manners, respect for ourselves and others, decency and better human relations;
5. Rigorous application of the Igbo concept of *ako-na-uche*;
6. Placing emphasis on the principle of justice for all in the relationship between the Igbo and other Nigerians; and
7. The use of deeper, subtle and more acute political sense (Ibeanu, *et al.*, 2016).

The reinvigoration of Ohanaeze as a consequence of the emergence of Chief Nwodo-led National Executive Committee in January 2017 has further re-echoed the ideology of mainstream-inclusivism, although with a more confrontational tinge, as the panacea to the perennial cases of Igbo victimisation in Nigeria. In a justification of why the Igbo, especially within the Ohanaeze platform, prefer restructuring of the country to total secession as championed by separatist groups like MASSOB and IPOB, Chief Nwodo argues that no ethnic group has more stakes in the Nigerian project than the Igbo, and as such cannot consider a break up as a viable option.⁶ This position was further reiterated by Chief Nwodo in a paper delivered at Chatham House on 27th September 2017 with the titled, *Restructuring Nigeria: Decentralisation for National Cohesion*. The argument borders on the notion that there is no part of Nigeria where Ndigbo have not invested their resources even without any corresponding investment from others in Igbo land. Thus, while Ohanaeze appreciates the circumstances that prompted the youth agitations under the MASSOB and IPOB platforms, it is not disposed to the separatist option. It is, therefore, deducible from the above that the Igbo petty bourgeoisie place more premium on their economic interests (which is presumably served better in a united

Nigeria) than the liberation of the Igbo masses from the ill-fated patrimonial system of the Nigerian government.

Nzogbu-Nzogbu: The Reinvention of Radical Igbo Nationalism in Nigeria

The activities of Ohanaeze (a foremost petty bourgeois platform in Igbo land) since its founding in 1976 have further alienated the grassroots of the Igbo population. The extant disconnect has made the lumpen who are found mainly within the frontline neo-Biafran movements perceive Ohanaeze as a partisan club of Igbo petty bourgeoisie who are wholly interested in the preservation of their privileged material conditions. Put differently, the clamour for reintegration of the Igbo into the patrimonial politics of the Nigerian state where they will play the “politics of the centre” is not driven by any populist or altruistic objectives.⁷ Thus, reintegration of the Igbo through inclusive mainstreaming is not only ephemeral, but also not sustainable or viable as an option. Having interrogated and exposed the futility of the inclusivists’ approach to Igbo nationalism, the lumpen youths have continued to exploit the opportunities provided by the widening of the “democratic” space since 29th May 1999 to openly express their discontents and grievances which were suppressed during the heydays of military repression in Nigeria. According to the separatists, without an independent Biafran state, the Igbo would not be able to realise their socio-economic and political aspirations.⁸ Guided by the ideology of radical-separatism, these ethno-nationalists, with confrontational secessionist inclinations, have continued to flourish in Igboland since 1999.⁹

Radical-separatism was reinvented into Igbo nationalism as a post-war response to perceived exclusion and victimisation of the Igbo in Nigeria. The radical separatist groups are represented by MASSOB, MASSOB International, BZM, BZF, BIM, BYC, BLC, COBLIG, and of course, the now proscribed IPOB. Prior to the founding of these groups, starting with the pioneering role of MASSOB, discourses on Biafra were regarded as taboo. These organisations define themselves as post-war second-generation nationalist movements that contest the marginalisation of the Igbo since the end of the civil war in 1970. MASSOB was the most radical separatist group in the country before the popularisation of the IPOB by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu through Radio Biafra – an internet-based station. Led by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike, MASSOB was able to secure the buy-in of a vibrant global network of Igbo organisations like the Biafra Foundation (BF), Biafra Actualisation Forum (BAF), Igbo USA, Ekwe Nche and the Biafra Nigeria World (BNW) (Omeje, 2005). However, a combination of state repression and internal leadership tussle weakened MASSOB and introduced deep cracks in its organisation, thereby paving way for the emergence of the IPOB. Although founded on the avowed doctrine of non-violence, these youth-based organisations are mainly guided by the confrontational philosophy of *nzogbu-nzogbu*; hence, they represent the radical wing of post-war Igbo nationalism.

Nzogbu-nzogbu enyimba enyi is a well-known traditional war song in Igbo land. The song rallies the people’s solidarity and collective sentiments against any adversarial forces and threats that must be urgently crushed. According to Omeje (2005, p. 631), “*nzogbu-nzogbu* is a song that evokes the idiom of the presumed bravery and fighting prowess of the menfolk likened to the bulldozing power of elephants, which rely on their extraordinary body mass to trample and crush their adversary”. It is, therefore, designed to inspire optimism and faith in the people’s ability to defeat any adversary. The *nzogbu-nzogbu* philosophy presupposes the certainty of victory in any

given confrontation. Just like the bulldozing power of elephants, facilitated by its mountainous body mass to crush adversaries, the mass of lumpen of mainly Igbo origin has continued to identify with the neo-Biafran movements as a viable solution to the Igbo question. The neo-Biafran separatists' project is rooted in the aborted secessionist war for Igbo self-determination between 1967 and 1970. The project rejects a state-led process, seeks the realignment of the generational balance of power, and ultimately, demands an exit of the Igbo ethnic group into an alternative political and administrative arrangement (Onuoha, 2014). Although the separatist agitators agree on secession as the only solution to Igbo victimisation; they differ on the modus operandi. At least three possible routes to sovereignty – armed secession, civil disobedience and referendum – which are not mutually exclusive have been advanced by pro-Biafra organisations.

The option of armed struggle was first mooted in 2014 when the Director of Radio Biafra and supreme leader of IPOB – Mazi Nnamdi Kanu – threatened the Igbo delegates to the 2014 National Conference not to return to Biafraland¹⁰ unless they are able to negotiate secession from the Nigerian federation. According to this IPOB leader, “if they fail to give us Biafra, Somalia will look like a paradise compared to what will happen to that zoo.”¹¹ It is a promise, it is a pledge and it is also a threat to them” (*Saharareporters*, 25 March, 2014). Furthermore, the BZM – a splinter group from MASSOB led by Barrister Benjamin Onwuka – claimed responsibility for the 8th March 2014 invasion of the Enugu State Government House. Members of the BZM occupied the State House for four hours during which they successfully hoisted Biafran flag and banners at the main gate. In line with the bellicose rhetoric and hate speeches associated with the neo-Biafran movements, Onwuka warned Nigerians to vacate Biafraland before 31st March 2014, or risk bloodbath (Edike, 2014). The Zionists struck again in the early hours of 5th June 2014 at the Enugu State Broadcasting Service (ESBS) in a failed attempt to seize the state-owned radio and television station for a broadcast. The move was foiled by a team of policemen who were alerted by some staff of the station. The attack which claimed the life of a police sergeant and a member of BZM ended with the arrest of Mr. Onwuka and twelve (12) members of his movement by the police (Adibe, 2014).

The option of armed secession further reverberated on 5th September 2015 during the Convention of the World Igbo Congress (WIC) in Los Angeles, California. While speaking, during his address at the WIC Convention on the global efforts to restore Biafra, Kanu posited that patriotic citizens in the Diaspora are always in the lead for collective objectives of achieving nationhood in most revolutions and emancipation struggles. Thus, he called for the active support of the Igbo in Diaspora in the procurement of weapons, because “we need gun and we need bullets”.¹² Needless to say, this call for armed struggle and other confrontational rhetoric associated with the IPOB leader largely accounted for his arrest on 14th October 2015 at Golden Tulip Essential Hotel, Ikeja, Lagos by operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS). The arrest sparked off protests by members of the IPOB in different parts of the defunct Eastern Region, especially Abia, Anambra, Cross River, Delta, Enugu, Imo and Rivers States. The protests heightened security fears and tension in the South East and Niger Delta regions of Nigeria, and put pressure on the Nigerian government to deal with the agitation.

Lastly, during the so-called show of force by the members of the infamous *Operation Python Dance II*¹³ (otherwise called *Egwu Eke II*), Kanu explained why he could not attend a scheduled meeting between the leadership of IPOB and Igbo elite under the aegis of South East Governors’

Forum and Ohanaeze. As widely reported in different dailies, Kanu stated, among other things, that the IPOB leadership, through the instrumentality of the Directorate of State (DOS) headquarters in Germany, will be meeting to vote on the viability or otherwise of continuing the struggle in a non-violent manner (see *Vanguard*, 14th September 2017; *Authority*, 14th September 2017; Ujumadu, 2017). He also noted that there was urgent need to begin the process of defending themselves in the face of relentless attacks from the Nigerian state. Other strategies adopted by the separatists and which are within the conceptual purview of armed struggle include the founding of the stillbirth Biafran Security Agency (BSA), Biafra Secret Service (BSS) and Biafra National Guard (BNG).

The second and perhaps more important strategy commonly used by the Biafran separatist movements is civil disobedience. Buoyed by the success of this strategy in Ghandi's India, Mandela's South Africa, American Civil Rights Movement, independence of the Baltic countries from the Soviet Union, the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, among others, the neo-Biafra movements have continued to exploit this non-violent liberation strategy in their separatist's agitations. This strategy has manifested through rallies, demonstrations, sit-at-homes and boycott of census and elections in Biafra land.

Most of the rallies and protests by neo-Biafran agitators are usually held on 30th May every year, otherwise known as Remembrance Day, in commemoration of Biafran fallen heroes during the war and other neo-Biafran agitators who were brutally murdered by the Nigerian state. The rallies are often accompanied with hoisting of the green-red-black Biafran flag in major roads, streets, billboards and strategic places in Biafra land. On 26th August 2004, MASSOB rallied traders and civil servants of Igbo ethnic extraction to observe a sit-at-home order which was widely adhered to despite massive government campaign against MASSOB and its leaders. It was called primarily to remind the government of the plight of the Igbo. According to Adeyemo (as cited in Uduma, 2013), the success of that protest was a great feat, considering how passionate an average Igbo man could be about his trade. Hence, the message of MASSOB for an Igbo identity and self-determination for the race is gaining ground. Moreover, as part of the events to celebrate the 10th anniversary of MASSOB on July 1, 2009, the movement launched the Biafran International Passport and currency at the Freedom House in Okwe, Onuimo Local Government Area of Imo State. Although rallies and peaceful demonstrations by Biafran separatists have always been associated with various gradations of rights abuse by Nigerian security operatives, the violations reached their apogee during the 2016 Biafra Remembrance Day and the 49th anniversary of the declaration of Biafra. According to the Amnesty International (2016), the security forces shot people during the Remembrance Day celebrations in several locations, especially in Nkpor, Asaba and Onitsha. Apart from the Amnesty International, other credible human rights organisations which have documented cases of harassment, torture, inhuman and degrading treatments, disappearances, abductions and extra-judicial killings of suspected members of pro-Biafra separatists' movements include the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), the Intersociety for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHSPA) and Forum for Justice.

From August 2015, there were series of protests, marches and gatherings by IPOB members and supporters. In particular, after the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu in October 2015 on charges of sedition, ethnic incitement, terrorism and treasonable felony, the protests were mainly planned to coincide

with his court appearances. Following his release on 28th April 2017 after meeting his stringent bail conditions¹⁴, Kanu has been holding interviews and rallies in major cities across Biafraland. In view of the unprovoked attacks recorded against unarmed pro-Biafrans during the 2016 Biafra Remembrance Day, different separatist groups, including the IPOB, MASSOB and BZM proclaimed a sit-at-home order to mark the annual event in 2017 which also doubled as the golden jubilee celebration of the declaration of Biafra by Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu. The exercise recorded an unprecedented success as all the markets, schools, banks, companies/industries and businesses in Biafra land totally complied with the directive. The commemoration was also observed by many Igbo who are resident in other cities across Nigeria and in the Diaspora. Among others, the success of the sit-at-home order led to the Kaduna Declaration¹⁵ of 5th June 2017 by the Arewa Youths Consultative Forum.

The radical separatists have also used boycotts, or threats thereof, of some national events in Nigeria in order to advance their agitation. The ultimate aim of this strategy is to pressurise federal and sub-national authorities to organise a referendum in Biafra land in order to ascertain the willingness or otherwise of the Igbo, and indeed the defunct Eastern Region, to secede from Nigeria. Thus, these separatists campaigned vigorously for the boycott of the 2005 National Identity Card Scheme as well as the 2006 population census in the former Eastern Region on the grounds that states in the region are not in Nigeria but Biafran territory. Some of those who participated in the exercises were harassed and intimidated by the separatists (*Saturday Champion*, 7th September, 2007; *Daily Sun*, 1st December, 2008). In the build-up to the 2007 General Elections, MASSOB particularly used handbills, posters and newspapers to mobilise the masses, political aspirants and public office-holders of Igbo ethnic nationality to boycott the elections in Igbo land.

Still relishing the successes recorded during the 2017 Remembrance Day sit-at-home, the IPOB leadership ordered a boycott of the 18th November 2017 Governorship Election in Anambra State and subsequent elections within the Biafran territory until a referendum is conducted (or at least a date is set for a referendum) to determine the realisation of Biafra. The order which first appeared on the Radio Biafra Facebook page reads in part: “18 November 2017 is sit-at-home in the whole of Anambra State. Please, stay indoors on that day to avoid anything happening to you” (Radio Biafra Facebook page, July 16, 2017). While justifying the call for boycott, the group noted that there was nothing to show for their previous political participations in Biafra land as the governors and other so-called Igbo leaders have always turned against the people who they are elected to represent.¹⁶ One of the strategies employed by IPOB members to ensure effective boycott of the Anambra election is what they termed “community evangelism” which entails moving into villages to preach and convince community members not to participate in the exercise. Needless to say, this threat of election boycott, if not disruption, accounted for the militarisation of the South East through *Egwu Eke II*. According to Okafor (2017), the operation has subjected unarmed and defenceless neo-Biafran youths to physical torture and other inhuman treatments such as ordering them to slap each other and forcing them to drink and eventually drown in muddy waters. In all, these developments challenge the ‘absolutist’ posture of the Nigerian state as the main source of social rules guiding the day-to-day existence of people in the country (Onuoha, 2014). It also calls into question the state-centric approaches to governance by unveiling alternative forms of social regulation and governance in the polity.

The reinvention of the *nzogbu-nzogbu* approach to Igbo nationalism since 1999 has brought the plight of the Igbo to national and international limelight. Through the works of MASSOB, BZM, IPOB and their global network of supporters, agitation for the self-determination of Biafra has become a recurrent discourse in most frontline international media outfits such as the VOA, BBC, France 24, RFI, CNN, Aljazeera, among others. On 23rd September 2001, Biafra House was acquired and celebrated in Washington, DC with the former Biafran warlord – Emeka Odimegwu Ojukwu – in attendance as the chief guest of honour. The movements also established Voice of Biafra International (VOBI) – a shortwave radio broadcasting service – while the first international conference on Biafra was held in Greenbelt, Maryland, USA on 18th October 2003. Moreover, the IPOB (alongside Radio Biafra London) has stepped-up the struggle championed by MASSOB since 2012. According to Kanu, IPOB has gained recognition as a national liberation movement in over 88 countries.¹⁷ Being the most high-profile and radical movement for a separate State of Biafra that currently exists, IPOB and Radio Biafra have raised the consciousness of the Igbo on their rights to self-determination and the legality of their quest for the Republic of Biafra based on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) which Nigeria is a signatory to.

Conclusion

This paper argued that Igbo nationalism has experienced two interrelated generations which emerged as a response to the perceived progressive victimisation of the Igbo since the end of the Nigerian Civil War. However, these generations have not achieved consensus on the best strategies for pursuing a collective Igbo agenda in the country. This is largely because of the extant class divisions (with the attendant differentials in resource access) that exist between the two generations. While the first generation is dominated by Igbo petty bourgeoisie who are mainly interested in the preservation and promotion of their patrimonial heritage in Igboland and other parts of the country, the second is peopled mainly by the economically disadvantaged and deprived lumpen youths. Guided by the confrontational philosophy of *nzogbu-nzogbu*, the lumpen youths in neo-Biafran organisations such as MASSOB and IPOB see radical dismemberment of Nigeria as the necessary condition for the realisation of their socio-economic and political aspirations. Despite the agreement of these agitators on secession as the only solution to Igbo victimisation, they tend to differ in the area of strategies. Thus, armed struggle, civil disobedience and referendum have been proposed, by the second generation, as possible routes to Biafran independence. On the other hand, the interests of the various petty bourgeois platforms – Ohanaeze, Aka Ikenga, ADF, among others – are diametrically opposed to those of the lumpen. In line with the philosophy of *ako-na-uche*, the Igbo petty bourgeoisie seek mainstream inclusivism through less-confrontational approach as the panacea to perceived Igbo victimisation in the country. The political economy underpinning the petty bourgeois stance is based on the undisputed fact that they are the prime beneficiaries of any agenda that is designed to promote greater mainstreaming of the Igbo in Nigeria.

This study has authenticated, as evidenced from the foregoing using the Marxist social class analysis, that the Igbo question has remained a wild goose chase, because of the irreconcilable contradictions in the material conditions of the Igbo petty bourgeoisie and their lumpen.

Arising from the foregoing too, the petty bourgeois elements, especially in the five South East states, should urgently marshal out realistic job creation plans in order to address recurrent incidents of youth restiveness and separatist agitations in the region. The leaders of the South East states should establish an economic revitalisation scheme that would complement the interventions by the Federal Government and other stakeholders. As a corollary, promising economic programmes like the South East Nigeria Economic Commission (SENEC) should be revisited and actualised. Other conscious measures geared towards improving the investment climate of the region in order to attract private enterprises should also be promoted. Lastly, Nigeria's development partners should provide targeted funding and technical assistance to support initiatives aimed at improving the economic conditions in the South East, and which will also address the grievances of neo-Biafran organisations.

Notes

1. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with IPOB members at Nkwere Ezunaka and Onitsha on 6th September 2017.
2. FGD with IPOB members at Umuahia and Port-Harcourt on 10th and 12th September 2017 respectively.
3. These are the Kano Riots of December 1980 and October 1982; the Buluta Maiduguri riot of 1982; the Yola riot of February 1984; the Gombe riot of April 1985; the Kaduna Religious crisis of March 1987; the Zaru Religious Crisis of May 1988; the ABU Religious crisis of June 1988, the Bauchi Riot of 1992; the Zango Kataf uprising of May 1992; and the June 12th 1993 crisis.
4. See for example, Press Statement by the Igbo-Speaking Delegates to the National Constitutional Conference, Abuja, on 11th January 1995 published as Appendix III in Nwala, U. (1997), *Nigeria: Path to unity and stability*. Nsukka: Niger Books and Publishing Co.
5. During a state visit to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on 22nd July 2015, President Buhari stated that the constituents, for example that gave him 97% of the vote cannot in all honesty be treated the same on some issues with constituencies that gave him 5%. This was a direct response to how he would tackle militant agitations in the Niger Delta.
6. Chief Nwodo stated this during an address to a cross section of Igbo leaders in Abuja on 7th July 2017.
7. FGD with IPOB members at Umuahia and Port-Harcourt on 10th and 12th September 2017 respectively.
8. FGD with IPOB members at Umuahia on 10th September, 2017.
9. Besides MASSOB and IPOB, other self-determination agitators in other parts of Nigeria include Arewa Youths, Niger Delta Republic, Republic of the Middle Belt and YELICOM.
10. This is a term used to describe the geographical location of the envisaged Republic of Biafra. According to the groups, it covers the defunct Eastern Region, parts of Edo, Benue and Kogi States.
11. Zoo is a name used by Nnamdi Kanu to disparagingly describe the oppressive and repressive Nigerian state.
12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fPQOPEH-0Y> (accessed 20th September 2017).
13. The codename of the military operation that is slated to last from 15th September to 14th October 2017 in the South East of Nigeria. The operation was putatively deployed to

combat ‘kidnapping’ ‘armed robbery’, ‘killing of priests’ and ‘violent agitation’ but has since turned into a repressive tool against unarmed neo-Biafra agitators, especially the IPOB.

14. These included three sureties (including a highly respected and recognised Jewish leader, a highly placed senator of Igbo extraction and a highly respected person who is resident and owns landed property in Abuja) who must deposit ₦100 million each. Other conditions include the surrendering of his Nigerian and British international passports, not to attend any rally or grant any form of interview.
15. A name given to the quit notice given to Nigerians of Igbo origin to leave the North on or before 30th September.
16. FGD with IPOB members at Nkwere Ezunaka and Onitsha on 6th September, 2017.
17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fPQOPEH-0Y> (accessed 20th September 2017).

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