

Social Movement and Conflict in Igboland: A Response to Fragile State of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Social Movement in the contemporary world states arises from the social, economic and political conditions prevalent at each epoch. This comes on the heels of plethora evidence of structural violence in the prevailing capitalist system in the international circle including Nigeria. The Nigerian failing character has engendered social, economic and political convolutions creating dissatisfaction and despondency among the contending ethnic groups. In view of the prevailing phenomenon of abundant structural victimisation in Nigeria, several ethnic social movements have emerged to seek the protection and wellbeing of their people. The Igbo ethnic group has suffered more victimisation under the draconian policies, exclusion and politics of marginalisation in the fragile state of Nigeria. The massacre and pogrom of 1966 against the Igbo ethnic stock made them to respond by seeking for self-determination that culminated in the Nigeria-Biafra war between 1967-1970. While under democracy, the Igbo ethnic group continues to galvanise support under the aegis of MASSOB and other related associations to realise the republic of Biafra. The paper interrogates the nexus between the social movement and conflict as it affects Igbo people in Nigeria. The paper recommends the institution of good governance and maximalist democracy as a panacea to agitation and injustices being pursued by social movements in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Movement, ethnic group and capitalist system.

INTRODUCTION

The state of Nigeria is medley and motley of contending ethnic nations and tribes prior to the advent of colonialism and imperialism. The colonial invasion distorted and thwarted the individual and respective growth of these autochthonous nations, thereby sowing the seed of Pandora box of state fragility in the contemporary Nigeria. Before the

year 1914, there was no country in the world known by the name Nigeria. On the other hand, for hundreds of years, there existed within the geographical space known today as Nigeria peoples and nations identified as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Tiv, Benin etc [1]. In fact scholars and anthropologists have identified over 400 ethnic groups forming the

conglomerate of Nigeria. These social groups and ethnic nations had intra and international relations among themselves before the conflagration and holocaust of colonialism and imperialism, which distorted and emasculated the individual growth and development of the respective ethnic nations. The historical circumstances that brought these ethnic nations together in Nigeria created factors responsible for varying degrees of conflict and formations of social movement to protect the interest of the groups.

The Igbo nation is one of the major ethnic nations that constituted the modern Nigeria. The pre-independence non politicised census figures show that Ndi Igbo with a population of about 5.5 million constituting 16.6% of the country's population are the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria. (Estimation from 1952/53 to 1991 population) Igbo land of South east Nigeria is generally recognised as the most densely populated land area in the whole of Africa comparable only to the Nile valley [2]. This census generated one of the early controversies that rocked the independent Nigeria among other ethnic driven crises. Other census conducted in the independent Nigeria has been doctored in favour of other ethnic groups that have controlled the reins of government prior to this day.

The Igbo nation in their quest to contribute their quota in nation building in Nigeria received resentment. Nigerians of all other ethnic groups will probably achieve consensus on no matter than their common resentment of the Igbo. Modern Nigerian history has been marked by sporadic eruptions of anti-Igbo feeling of more or less serious import; but it was not until 1966-7 when it swept through Northern Nigeria like a flood of deadly hate that the Igbo first questioned the concept of Nigeria which they had embraced with much greater fervour than the Yoruba or the Hausa/Fulani [3]. The massacre and pogrom of July 1966 occasioned by the factor of January Coup of 1966 believed to have been masterminded by Igbo military officers forced the Igbo people to start to tinker the way out their trouble created by the post colonial fragile state of Nigeria. The northerners turned on Igbo civilians living in the north and unleashed waves of brutal massacre that Colin Legun of The Observer (UK) was the first to as a pogrom. Thirty thousand men, women and children were slaughtered, hundreds of thousands were wounded, maimed, and violated, their homes and property looted and burned and no one asked any questions [4]. The response of Igbo people to the hatred arising from the massacre imbued in them the courage to seek for political and economic protection in Nigeria. This led to the formation of Igbo consultative

Assembly under the able and dynamic leadership of Gen Chukwuemeka Odumuegwu Ojukwu, the leader of the former republic of Biafra. The Igbo intellectuals, professionals, youths articulated the way out to save the Igbo people from extinction visited on by the Nigerian government of Yakubu Gowon. The Igbo Consultative Assembly took form of social movement that drove the engine of the republic of Biafra, where the rights of the Igbo people could be protected. The Biafran agenda was war of emancipation and liberation for the whole eastern Nigeria under the siege. This was the point of conflict between Nigeria and the former republic of Biafra.

Historically, social movement arises out of political, social and economic conditions at the material time in any

THEORETICAL PURVIEW

A theory is a set of interrelated propositions, concepts and axioms which explains and predicts a given phenomenon in physical and social sciences. The seminal works of John Dollard and Aubrey Yates on frustration aggression theory explains social conflict arises in any given political environment from the inability to fulfil human needs and that frustrated individuals resort to violence as a means of changing the status quo. Social movement emanates as a result of structural violence with a view to

political society. The conflict that arose in Nigeria in the hey days of political independence gave parturition of social movement in Igbo land. At the dawn of democracy in 1999, gave rise to the formation of ethnic militia and radical organisations in the Nigerian Fourth Republic. Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) , and Bakasi Boys emerged as social movements in Igbo land to protect her from extinction meted on her by the Nigerian state. The paper tries to look at the roles of the social movements that arose in defence of the Igbo people in the fragile Nigeria. It also attempts to exhume the social and political prospect of the Igbo people in the fragile, conflict ridden and failing state of Nigeria. The study equally makes appropriate recommendations.

defending and protecting the interest of her members within the political society. The social movement in Igbo land has responded and risen to finding solutions to the inability of the Nigerian state to fulfil needs and protect her human rights. Where expectation does not meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions [5]. This the central thesis that relative deprivation addressed in saying that the greater the discrepancy, however marginal, between what is

sought and what seem attainable, the greater will be the chances that anger and violence will result [6].

The principal explanation that frustration- aggression theory provides is that aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct as realists and biological theorists assume, but that it is the outcome of frustration and that in a common situation where legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequences of the way the society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express his anger through violence

that will be directed at those he holds responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them [5]. This apt in explaining why the Igbo nation under the defunct republic of Biafra resorted to the war of liberation between 1967-1970, and the continued denial of the legitimate desire, and marginalisation by the fragile state of Nigeria orchestrated the formation of Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in 1999. This explanation applies and adumbrates the persistence and resistance of conflict across the country from 1960 to the contemporary epoch in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Social movement is an agent of change in the modern world characterised by gory of injustice and man's inhumanity to man. Social changes are brought about primarily by the roles of social and mass movement. Social change can be gradual or radical as in the case of several revolutions in the modern society. Therefore, social movement refers to a group of people acting with some level of continuity to either promote or resist a change in their society or social group of which they are members [7]. In the same vein, social movement represents collective attempts to bring about a change in certain social institutions or to create a

completely new social order. It can also mean the socially shared demand for change in some area or dimension of the social order [8].

So, social movement represents agent that motivates change gradually or radically within an existing political order. Social movement respond to structural violence and negative peace characteristics of modern capitalist states. Social movement should be conceived as springboards for mobilising people into actions deemed necessary to effect social change. Its characteristics include: permanence, group consciousness, goal orientation, and critical nature see, [7]. In a

democracy, civil societies and social movements are given expressions to

operate within the bounds of law and the constitutions.

FRAGILE STATE

The strength and performances of modern states vary, and so some states are classified strong, weak, failed and fragile. The paper concentrates on fragile nature of the Nigerian state. Many states in the developing countries are designated fragile because of their inability to attend to providing public good and welfare. Fragile state entails that states may be fragile because they lack authority (authority failure), fail to provide services (service entitlement failure), or lack of legitimacy (legitimacy failure) see [9]. The Department for International Development [5] of the United Kingdom defines fragile states as occurring where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of

its people, including the poor, where core functions include service entitlements, justice and security.

It is axiomatic that fragile states are those states characterised with poverty, lack of social cohesion, unwarranted conflict, identity crisis, electoral malfeasance, ethno-religious crises, lack of human security, and magnitude of corruption. Nigeria in spite of the fact that it has maintained uninterrupted democracy for fifteen years from 1999 possesses the indexes enunciated above. Militancy in the Niger Delta and currently the menace of intractable Boko Haram, where property worth millions and human are lost on quotidian basis make Nigeria a fragile state.

CONFLICT

The existence of human society makes conflict inexorable and inevitable. The nature, strength, and character of states checks or creates environment for conflict explosion. It can be prevented or avoided depending on whether the state is mature, developed or fragile. It is of perforce to articulate the conflict within the scope of this discourse. Therefore, conflict is the pursuit of

incompatible of interests and goals by different groups [10]. The author averred conflict as the resort to use of force and armed violence in the aggregate pursuit of incompatible and particular interest and goals among the contending social groups and social classes. The innate nature of man as articulated by the biological theories and quest for class domination makes

conflict inevitable in the contemporary states.

Conflict could be intra or interstate depending on the factors of productions and reproductions. Intra state conflict usually occurs as result of the failure of

HISTORY AND FACTORS RESPONSILBE FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA

The colonial power created urban life in Nigeria, and various ethnic groups started to jostle for social, economic and political security. This generated the formation of ethnic groups to protect them from the alleged fear of domination of perceived major ethnic groups. During the colonial period, the following formations came up as social movements. They include: the Ibibio Welfare Union (later Ibibio State Union) in 1928, the Urhobob Brotherly Society (later Urhobo Progress Union) was set up in Warri in 1931, and the Igbo Union (later Igbo Federal Union, and much later Igbo State Union was established in Lagos in 1936 see [12]. The emergence of these groups during colonial period stemmed from the pervasive fear of human insecurity and palpable fear of domination of one group over the other in the Nigerian polity. In Nigeria, the practice of ethnic politics has sustained the belief that each of the over 250 ethnic groups must struggle for its own share of the national resources. These usually come in the form of recruitment to top positions in government and the distribution of government institutions

good governance and evidence of structural victimisations. Conflict as a pervasive and invidious phenomenon can at the level of individual, group, community, state, nation or at international level [11].

and social services [13]. The factors governing all these ethnic formations have been the drive to secure economic and social security for the groups. The formations of NCNC, NPC and AG prior to the emergence of the First Republic were all supportive to reinforcing ethnic chauvinism among the contending social classes, who exerted influence to control the political economy of the nations. So political parties in the emergent independent Nigeria were more of social movements than organised parties desirous to secure political power. This factor continues to govern the country in spite of her claim of full democratic status akin to what is obtained in the developed societies.

In fact, it is noticed that the emergence of OPC on 24th August 1994 was connected with a feeling of alienation, which the Yoruba people claim has been their misfortune from the period of colonialism in Nigerian body-politic. This assertion became apparent at the annulment of June 12, Presidential election presumably won by Chief MKO Abiola, see [13]. The feeling of the Yoruba people over the injustice of June

12 annulment was also common in other ethnic nations in Nigeria over one form of structural violence evident in Nigeria. In the Niger Delta, reactions to contain the forces perceived to have underdeveloped the area over time, the Niger Delta youths quickly assembled and armed themselves to protect their land. This led to the formation of different militia groups including, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Volunteer Group (NDVG), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People among others[14]. The activities were to attack oil facilities and installations in the area, thereby making Nigeria fragile and failing in all

FRAGILE STATE, DEMOCRACY AND ETHNIC RESPONSES: THE IGBO EXAMPLE

Having being established that Nigeria is a fragile state rights from the time of political her independence to present day. The ripples of conflicts and wars are defining criteria that justify Nigeria as fragile and failing state. The Igbo people constitute one of the major ethnic bloc, and plays preponderant economic and political role in Nigeria. The parlous nature of the Nigerian state characterises by inequities and injustice warranted the plotting and execution of first military coup in 1966. Beginning with the January 15, coup d'état through the counter-coup staged mainly by Northern Nigerian officers, who murdered 185 Igbo officers and the massacre of thirty thousand Igbo

aspects. In the east, MASSOB came on the heels of continued injustice against the Igbo nation. And the activities of the dreaded Boko Haram currently rocking and threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria continue to validate the thesis that Nigerian state is fragile and failing in character. In fact, today Nigerian state is at lowest of ebb of nation building attesting to its character of failing state see [15]. On strict assessment, the plethora of social movements agitating for one thing or the other indicates that structural victimisation characterise the entire polity. This is an indictment on the current leadership of the state, Nigeria.

people and easterners in pogroms that started in May 1966 and occurred over four months- events of those months left many Biafrans terrified [4]. The anti-Igbo feeling followed by the massacre and the pogrom of over thirty thousand civilians of Igbo origin ignited the drive for self-determination spurred by Igbo Consultative Assembly under leadership of the eastern region in 1967. This led to the outbreak of Nigeria-Biafra civil war.

When the 30 months civil between Nigeria and the defunct republic of Biafra ended in 1970, with most of the achievements had been shattered in the war; the war had uprooted much of the economic infrastructure of Igboland,

claimed the lives of the cream of the society and disabled many. Confusion, a feeling of insecurity and despair prevailed among the Igbo people [15]. Marginalisation with its omnibus application pauperised and impoverished the Igbo peoples making them to play the second fiddle in political and economic life of the nation, thereby necessitating further agitations by Igbo people. This experience has lasted from 1970 to 1999 when democracy was restored in Nigeria.

The dawn of democracy in 1999, it created a better atmosphere for the expression of pent up anger of very many ethnic groups in Nigeria. This gave to the emergence of many ethnic militias agitating for the protections of the interest of their people. In the past, some associations have emerged to forge and protect the interest of the Igbo people. They include: Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo, Eastern Mandate Union (EUM) and Mkpoko Ndigbo. The emergence of these associations came with a view to righting the wrongs and injustices done to Igbo nation. In spite of the efforts of these groups, marginalisation of the Igbo ethnic group by the leadership of Obasanjo and subsequent regimes, and blatant genocidal attack by the Hausa-Fulani in Kaduna recently, the Igbo became more than ever threatened [16]. These threats came in the wake of application of Sharia law by some states in the Northern Nigeria. The frustrations

arising from these situations as exemplified in the frustration-aggression theory led young Igbo people to come up with contemporary social movement called (MASSOB) with the tinge of self-determination as a panacea to the plight of Igbo people in Nigeria.

The Movement for Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra was flagged off by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike on 7th May, 2000 at Aba (The New Magazine, Nov 2000). The activities of MASSOB would be understood if we probe why it came into existence and why at that point in time. The reasons for the formation of MASSOB could be divided into two: remote and immediate. Under the remote causes we have reasons that arose during the colonial days and those of the post-colonial days up to 1998. The immediate cause is traceable to the outcome of the presidential nomination of the People Democratic Party (PDP) in which an Igbo man was unjustly edged out. This indicated that Igbo people are experiencing political marginalisation in the body-politic. The birth of MASSOB in September, 1999 was in direct response to the negativities associated with that nomination [17]. The activities of the MASSOB are corollaries to the fragility of the Nigerian state, which entails its inability to grant equity and fairness to her citizens. As it has been observed in this paper that social movement arises out of structural victimisation within the social system of Nigeria. In as much

as injustice prevails in Nigeria, MASSOB and other social movements will continue to act as direct responses to the fragility and failing character of the Nigerian state. While this character endures, conflict resistance becomes

apparent, inexorable and inevitable in Nigeria. To avoid conflict in Nigeria, inclusive and maximalist form of democracy should be encouraged to engender social and political development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Igbo people are one among the major ethnic nations in Nigeria occupying the eastern part of the country. Its population and human resources are worthy of influence to bear on political and economic life of the country. Unfortunately, it has suffered political marginalisation and peripheralisation, in spite of its preponderant position in the polity.

The discourse traced the provenance of social movement in Nigeria to have emanated from the period of colonialism, and discovered that it was the pervading social and economic insecurity that gave birth to the phenomenon of social movement in the country. While the various governments in both military and civilian regimes have not addressed the questions of marginalization particularly on the Igbo

people, the question of social movement will continue to bother the country. This is why the emergence of MASSOB became inevitable in the dawn of democracy in 1999. The essence of democracy is rooted in the promotion and protection of human right [18]. The paper argues that the avalanche of structural victimisation in Nigeria, which in its entirety amounted to human rights denial by the state, generates conflict. While this continues to happen in the opinion of this paper, social movement will continue to organise itself on the basis of interest protection and this generates conflicts situation in the country. The paper proffers that it is only inclusive and maximalist democracy that can eschew state fragility, and provide social and economic development in Nigeria.

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