

Ndiigbo in Nigeria: A Quest for Survival and Prosperity

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Abstract

The U.S. based Igbo Studies Association is gearing up for a global conference entitled, “Nkiruka,” (future is greater) scheduled for April, 2011, at Howard University, Washington D.C.. Chieke Ihejirika’s “Ndiigbo: A Quest for Survival and Prosperity,” comes when the defeated Igbo nation (formerly known as Biafra) is re-evaluating its position within the multinational Nigerian federation. Forty-Four years after the civil war, “What went wrong? When did the rain begin to beat Igbo people?” asks professor Ihejirika, metaphorically.

Introduction

Who are the Igbo? Ndiigbo inhabit the South Eastern part of Nigeria. They are one of the three largest, and by their ubiquity and visibility, they are arguably the largest group in Nigeria. There are several myths regarding the origin of the Igbo, but nothing is yet settled because of lack of written records. Some scholars say they fell from the sky.¹ Others say they are the lost tribe of Israel.² But one thing is certain, unlike the Hausa and Yoruba who are found in other African countries, the Igbo homeland is exclusively in the eastern Nigeria. Perhaps the unique presence of the Igbo in Nigeria accounts for their leading role in the formation of Nigeria. The prominent role played by the Igbo in Nigeria’s liberation struggle was manifest in the fact that many of them were incarcerated for their activism during the struggle for independence. According to Achebe, “the British had thrown more of them into jail for sedition than any others during the two decades or so of pre-independence agitation and troublemaking”.³

With a population of over 50 million, the Igbo rank among the five largest nationalities in Africa and perhaps among the top ten in the world. The history of Nigeria shows that the Igbo of have proven to be the sui generis among the Black race, as exemplified by the likes of *Equiano*, *Blyden*, *Azikiwe*, *Ibiam*, *Okpara*, *Ikoku*, *Ojike*, *Mbanefo*, *Ironsi*, *Orizu*, *Sir Odumegwu Ojukwu*, *Dike*, *Uchendu*, *Emeka Ojukwu*, *Achebe*, *Ekwensi*, *Okigbo*, *Afigbo*, *Nwapa*, *Oputa*, *Chika Obi*, *Arinze*, *Okere*, *Ukegbu*, *Anyaku*, *Nwabueze*, *Okonjo-Iweala*, *Emeagwali*, *Adichie*, *Nnaji*, and hundreds more who recorded their firsts in Nigeria and among the Black race.

Today, *Ndiigbo* are all over the globe doing remarkable things and operating at the cutting edge in every area of human endeavors. The profile of the Igbo in Nigeria, the largest Black country on earth, suggests a unique group almost tailor made to play a leading role in the emancipation of the Black race. The Igbo are bold and adventurous, enterprising, ingenious and highly adaptable. Nigerians have always been conscious of the unique character of the Igbo, shown by how quickly they dominated commerce, and the media all over the country, as well as how they took over the pro-independence groups and movements in the country. Robert Omote, writing about players in pre-independence Nigeria, said that the Great Zik himself in an unguarded moment interjected that "it would appear that the God of Africa has created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages."⁴

Even after the genocide and the deliberate policies of exclusion practiced by post war Nigerian governments, the awe of the Igbo persisted, and even dazzled other Nigerians and the world by their survival instincts and attributes. But today, *Ndiigbo* are rapidly fading into oblivion in Nigeria. The Igbo now fit the pattern of *Egu*, the baby caterpillar which holds firm while young, but falls when it matures. For a people reputed to be smart, enterprising, cosmopolitan, competitive, etc., the Igbo seem to have failed abysmally where it matters the most in the post-war Nigeria. They seem to have abandoned the basic values and characteristics that distinguished them as a nation. They have failed to cater to their collective future as a race, and hence have seriously jeopardized their survival as a cultural entity in a multicultural country. This paper will explore the nature of the Igbo problems and some of the causes of Igbophobia in Nigeria. It will also expose what the Igbo have already gone through and what they are going through in Nigeria as a consequence of this phobia. Emphasis will be placed on the political and economic challenges that they face, as well as how they can overcome these challenges and prosper in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper articulates the need for the Igbo to redirect their development energies, strategies and resources toward

their home front, and offers practical solutions to Igbo economic and political emancipation! The basic assumption here is that they must realize that politics is the struggle for power. Nobody relinquishes power willingly and none acquires it without first demonstrating internal strength and a willingness to show strong resistance to others even to the very point of brinkmanship.

What did the Igbo do Wrong?

Some time ago, Chinua Achebe, while explaining the Igbo character and their odyssey in Nigeria, compared the Igbo to “ants filing out of the wood and gaining possession of the floor.” They emerged from their remote forest (woods), village dwellings to dominate Nigeria until the genocide and civil war of the sixties. Consequently, of the three major groups in Nigeria, the Igbo showed the most promise and resilience. That was the Igbo that took Nigeria by storm.

The traditional Igbo political culture, which is segmental in structure and instrumental in attitude, according to David Apter,⁵ makes the Igbo naturally disposed to excel since it helps them to easily transcend obstacles to progress. It is therefore not surprising that the Igbo segmental structure protects them against the constraints of natural oligarchy that plagues their hierarchical neighbors; whereas, their instrumental attitude makes them most adaptable to change and progress.

Of the three main groups in Nigeria, the Igbo occupy the smallest land area. This has caused them to migrate in large numbers to other parts of the country. They have become the main traders, educators, transporters, construction workers, clerks as well as interpreters. They have joined the civil service, the military, the police and other government services that required western education. Their aggressive pursuit for western education and the advantages it conferred upon the Igbo in a largely illiterate country has earned the Igbo the wrath and resentment of other Nigerians. This was more so because the Igbo operated globally within Nigeria while their rivals confined themselves to their respective localities. The concentration of opportunities outside Igbo land by the national government did not help matters. The major theaters of economic competition were outside Igbo land. So while the other two major groups could afford to operate at home, the Igbo from the east invaded the Yoruba west and the Hausa-Fulani north, forcing the locals to compete with them for federal jobs located in their own homes. Needless to say, these groups resented the Igbos as a result.

The resentment of the Igbo, especially by the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, reached its climax in 1966 following the military *coup d'état* of January 1966, when young Igbo officers, acting on what many saw as patriotic instincts, overthrew the inept civilian government led by Northern born Prime Minister Alhaji Tafawa Balewa. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister was killed by the coup plotters as was the powerful premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The premier of the west, Chief S. L. Akintola was also killed. Since there were no Igbo casualties, a few days later through foreign prodding, the coup was interpreted as an Igbo conspiracy to take over Nigeria, triggering an orgy of killing of Igbo civilians unmatched in Africa until Rwanda and Darfur. As a result of the general insecurity of the Igbo and other Easterners throughout Nigeria, the Region decided to secede from Nigeria and establish the independent nation of Biafra. A thirty months civil war ensued. The war ended in January 1970 with a tragic loss of about two million lives, the most in any conflict in Africa.

Even after the massacre of the Igbo and the destruction of Igbo land during the pogrom and the subsequent civil war, the Igbo bounced back and quickly surpassed the groups that tried so hard to annihilate them. They were able to achieve their current economic feat of reclaiming the heights of Nigerian commerce, in spite of the deliberate state policy after the Civil War in 1970, in which the Nigerian state dispossessed millions of Igbos of all but twenty pounds each, irrespective of whatever amounts they had in their bank accounts.

The Igbo overcame this malicious policy and thrived, but Nigeria itself stagnated and even deteriorated in spite of the massive oil revenues it earned. The ruling Hausa-Fulani and their anti-Igbo allies installed unprecedented corruption and squandered the enormous petrodollar that accrued in the national treasury, with no regard for real national development. They ruined rather than revamped the country's post war economy and infrastructure.

Before and after the Civil War, the Igbo proved to be the single most important builders of Nigeria's private sector. The Igbo-led pre-war public service in Nigeria was as professional as those of emerging countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and India. Nigeria was performing as well as these countries due to Igbo leadership of the leading sectors. The Igbo-led Eastern Region of Nigeria also had one of the fastest growth rates in the world in 1965. These facts show that the Igbo are the stalled engine of the Nigerian enterprise without whose total mobilization and involvement the country cannot achieve its true potential.

The political exclusion of the Igbo in post-war Nigeria coincided with the free-for-all treasury-looting enterprise led by the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba triumvirates, who saw Nigeria as their spoil for winning the war. They looted and continue to loot Nigeria as they looted and raped the Igbo. Ironically, they exposed their inability to lead the nation called Nigeria because they are still brutalizing the nation in their effort to brutalize the Igbo. A few Igbos have, of course, joined the looting enterprise, but only as followers, having been excluded from the top leadership position. Occasionally, the cabal appoints Igbo to fix a crisis and drops them once they offer tough counsel on good governance.

Having been excluded from the upper echelon of Nigeria's political leadership, the Igbo have thrived in the private sector but still against extremely debilitating odds. The Igbo's predicaments in Nigeria persist due to their political exclusion, proving the veracity of what Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah's wisely said: "you must first seek the political kingdom and every other thing shall be added unto you."⁶ Ironically, this political exclusion of the Igbo in Nigeria has proven to be a huge loss not only for the Igbo but Nigeria as a whole. This hatred of the Igbo, which has been nurtured by bad politics encapsulated in vindictive and unimaginative leadership (Achebe 1980), is the bane of the whole country.⁷

Since Nigeria's inception, the Igbo have proved to be leaders in the country's education sector, in commerce and many other areas of human endeavor. As a result, demands for their services and leadership extended throughout Nigeria and beyond. But the ubiquity of the Igbo, which should be positive for nation-building, has rather become their major vulnerability because it has made them an easy target everywhere in Nigeria. This is in spite of their unmatched contributions in providing education, commerce and industry to every nook and corner of the country.

As mentioned earlier, the Igbo were forced to migrate to other parts of the country and abroad by two major factors: their natural desire for adventure and the search for opportunities that are lacking at home. One would think that a purposeful national government would do something to keep them at home. Instead, Igbo land remains the most infrastructure starved political space in the whole country. Unlike other ethnic groups, they did not see this as a special disadvantage because of their unique pan-Nigerian disposition. However, as a result of their numerical strength, they have been resented everywhere outside their homeland. The fact that the Igbo more than any other group are overwhelmingly Christians is a source of additional resentment from the dominant Hausa-Fulani Muslims who see them as the greatest impediment to their undisguised agenda for the Islamization of Nigeria. There has never been a doubt that the Hausa-Fulani still would like to actualize the ambition of their leaders, Othman Dan Fodio and his grandson Sir Ahamadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto pursued a systematic policy of subjugation of (non-Muslim) people. Neither leader concealed his millennial ambition to "dip the Koran into the sea."⁸ The fact is that *Ndiigbo* fly more than any other group in Nigeria. Yet they have no functioning international airport. Their people engage in more maritime trading than most, yet they have no easy access to any sea or river ports. They haul goods and people more than any other group in Nigeria and yet they have the worst roads in the country. They have the most innovative economic enclaves (Aba, Onitsha and Nnewi) without a requisite power supply or other amenities. Their children crave for medical education more than any other group, and yet they have only two medical schools, even though they produce more college bound candidates than any other part of the country. They produce more college graduates than any other zone, yet they have the least number of federal industries. These are some of the numerous woes of the Igbo in Nigeria, and the list goes on and on! These domestic woes have compelled mass emigration of Igbo from the country. Paradoxically, the Igbo Diaspora now accounts for a very significant amount of Nigeria's foreign exchange inflow, second only to crude oil revenues.

For a people whose skills and intellect are universally acknowledged, one wonders when they would intelligently deal with the state of victimization that has confronted them in the last forty years. The Igbo rightly say that: *Achara di woro mmiri na eji aka ya wuzuo onwe ya mmiri ahu*. They believe in the philosophy of *onye kwe chi ya ekwe*. The Igbo are known to not accept the fate ascribed to them by their enemies. They believe in the principle of *Onye ajuru aju anaghi aju onwe ya*. Above all, they subscribe to the fundamental principle of *igwe bu ike*, which means there is strength in unity and only this will get them out of the political and economic doldrums they have found themselves in since the end of the Nigerian Civil War.

What the Igbo are Going Through

Every Igbo person and any objective observer know that the Igbo are a threatened, wounded, handicapped and dissatisfied race within Nigeria today. For instance, the Igbo have been technically depopulated. The recent census shows that Igbo land was systematically undercounted and the population deliberately suppressed. Afraid of exposing their bogus figures and claims of numerical superiority in ethnicity and religion, the ruling Hausa-Fulani oligarchy expunged both ethnic and religious data from the census questionnaire. Ironically, the Igbo Christians insisted on determining an accurate population of the various groups in Nigeria as well as knowing exactly which religion has the most adherents in the country. It was not surprising that the anti-Igbo federal government, afraid of what it might discover, vehemently refused to allow the data during the last census to expose the true figures on ethnicity and religion. The government continued to make bogus and unsubstantiated claims in these regards. The central government of Nigeria has been chasing its tail and afraid of its own facts because a lot falsehood has been hoisted on the country to justify the marginalization of what is obviously a dominant ethnic group.

As stated earlier, when the civil war ended, a vindictive federal government, in a concerted effort to massively impoverish the Igbo, confiscated all their bank deposits, leaving depositors a paltry 20 Nigerian pounds each, irrespective of what they had in their accounts. Igbo are religiously targeted and routinely butchered by Muslims across Northern Nigeria. The fact is that Igbo land is infra-structurally denied, and the Igbo are politically excluded in Nigeria. Hence, they need not be told that they have to articulate and carefully execute a plan(s) for their survival either as an independent nation-state or an autonomous prosperous entity within Nigeria, because *Onye ajuru anaghi aju onwe ya*. That is, if you are abandoned, you do not abandon yourself.

What Can the Igbo do Now?

The Igbo question is imperative because it is already a tragedy that the Igbo race has not been accorded the recognition it deserves in the comity of nations because they exist in a hostile political state that has maligned and brutalized from the very beginning. Being without their own sovereignty diminished the beauty that is being Igbo. For instance, the Igbo traditional democracy, which could have been the envy of the world and their aggressive sense of accomplishment, which has distinguished them everywhere are both viewed negatively rather than positively as strengths. The Igbo need to recreate a socio-political and economic environment that will enable them to achieve a collective self-actualization, as defined by Abraham Maslow.⁹

First, the Igbo must extricate themselves from the current debilitating Nigerian polity or take control of their destiny within that environment. With their collective creativity and ambition, their large population and ubiquity, and their pedigree, they must focus on the goal of restoring their dignity because *Onye ulo ya na ere oke anaghi achu oke*. They must also make the development of their homeland a priority, which is the key to their survival in Nigeria and their relevance in the world.

Explaining the Igbo stance on Nigeria's current crises about the presidency and the massacre of Christians in Jos by Fulani herdsmen, Ohakim, the Imo state governor, simply reiterated the obvious without actually offering a patriotic solution to the perennial Igbo problem in Nigeria. According to *ThisDay*, Ohakim tried to:

link the current sectarian crisis in Jos, Plateau State to the need for the country to remain united and the consistent position of the South-east governors opposing any form of political crisis in Nigeria. What happens in Jos, Plateau State is one of the reasons why the South-east governors took a decision and said,

please let us cool the temperature of politics in Nigeria. There is no tribe in this country that has 80 per cent of its investment outside his tribe other than the Ibo man. There is no town you go to, from ward level to Local Government to State that you will not see and Ibo man doing his business. An Ibo man is an itinerant man, he loves other people, he goes to solve other peoples' problems and makes money out of it. He builds houses everywhere. When there is problem in anywhere in this country, an Ibo man will be involved, Ibo man will be killed, Ibo man's business will be disrupted even if he is not killed, the market will be closed down for two to three weeks and his source of livelihood will be affected. Ibo man suffers more than any other tribe. But there is nowhere you will not see an Ibo man doing his menial business. The Ibo man has suffered more losses, more calamity than any other tribe in this country.¹⁰

Governor Ohakim and his fellow Igbo governors do not seem to represent the true aspirations of the Igbo in Nigeria. They need to make Nigeria answer a few critical questions about the position of Ndiigbo in Nigeria. First, is it unity at all costs in Nigeria for Ndiigbo? Second, how many Igbo lives would be enough sacrifice for them to become truly Nigerians? Why not let the Igbo go if you don't want them in Nigeria? In other words, why did Nigeria wage a thirty-month war to keep the Igbo in Nigeria if they will always be maligned, brutalized and killed needlessly by their fellow citizens?

At home, the five Igbo governors must be at the forefront of those demanding for a Sovereign National Conference in Nigeria to deal with the plethora of inhumanity the Igbo are made to endure in Nigeria. As leaders, should they not be encouraging their people to relocate their vital businesses to Igbo land as they provide the critical infrastructure and security for such investments? If Nigerians can go to China, Taiwan and Japan and other places to import products, surely they can come to Igbo land for those same products. The governors should also explain why they really hate Igbo land.

Another necessary step the Igbo must take towards their renaissance is to debunk the philosophy of nonchalant individualism. By this I mean the current non-reference to the collective welfare in the pursuit of individualism. In the past, the Igbo pursued individualism only within the context of communal aesthetics, which was only fully expressed in overall unity of purpose and progress. Aloneness in Igbo was never a positive thing, which was why ostracism was a stringent punishment among the Igbo. Similarly, the exclusive solitary political and economic attitudes now prevalent among the Igbo can never lead to the full realization of their potential.

In Nigeria, this fragmentation is already resulting in debilitating underachievement. Unity is strength. *Agbakoo agbakoo nyuo mamiri ya agboo ufufu*. Igwe bu ike! Onye aghala nwanne ya! What is needed is unity of investments, a holistic development strategy integrating the whole of Igbo land. The entire Igbo land should be consolidated into a mega industrial estate. In a recent speech on how the Igbo can reclaim their position in Nigeria, Dim Odumegwu Ojukwu said: "that politics is not and should not be about self-neglect, such that the Igbo have become unwilling investors in Igbo land."¹¹ He further stated there is a "lack of personal and group courage among the Igbo to assert themselves that did not augur well, charging the people to develop the courage to defend their rights anywhere in the country and respect the rights of other citizens."¹² Unlike the Jews, the Igbo have not declared zero-tolerance on genocide and the constant brutal crimes and murders of the Igbo in Nigeria, especially at the hands of Hausa-Fulani Muslim since the country's inception.

Political Challenges and Action Program:

Survival for a nation especially in a multinational state, except in the rare case of economic catastrophe, as in Haiti, is essentially political. More specifically, groups within that country must effectively manage their relationships with others in the inherent struggle for power. Sometimes an external umpire might put one group in a serious disadvantage, as the British did to the Igbo in Nigeria. But the hard work of liberation and political survival still rests with the people working in concert with others who are cognizant of their collective national interests, problems and prospects within the larger political space.

Although Ndiigbo possess unmatched economic prowess, they must seek ultimate political security. According to Hans Morgenthau; "politics is the struggle for power" hence the Igbo must engage in this struggle with the clear goal of finding a way out of their current political marginalization, which is the result of long standing discriminatory policies. Politics is also a version of war and in war there is a victor

and a vanquished, in spite of pretensions to the contrary. In 1970, the war weary Nigeria lured the Igbo back into the country with the slogan of “no victor no vanquished,” but once the Igbo disarmed, the Hausa-Fulani military oligarchy systematically adopted punitive policies, primarily against the Igbo, and to a lesser extent other Nigerians, letting them know that Nigeria is now their spoil for winning the civil war. This is the way they have governed Nigeria since the end of the Civil War.

It has become obvious that the Igbo have to plot a strategy for survival. During the war, the slogan was *onye ndi iro gbara gburu gburu na eche ndu ya nche mgbe nile*. Is it not clear that the Igbo are surrounded by enemies? The primary strategy for political survival is strong nationalism. Nationalism is the feeling of solidarity by a group of people sharing a common heritage. This is a “we feeling” that distinguishes a people from others. Politically, it translates into a predisposition that the nation is the atomistic political unit that should be sovereign if it is not already. As one observes the predicaments of the Igbo in Nigeria over the decades, it becomes increasingly clear that one of their best options is to seek statehood, unless Nigeria offers them a better deal. Nigeria’s present interethnic relation is now quite unacceptable and untenable because the Igbo are increasingly seeing their very survival in it in big jeopardy. The more logical outcome, as Mazzini described it, is that: “the divine design will be infallibly fulfilled. Natural divisions, the innate spontaneous tendencies of the peoples will replace the arbitrary divisions sanctioned by bad governments.” He further states that:

Without country you have neither name, token, voice, nor rights, no admission as brothers into the fellowship of the people. You are the bastards of humanity. Soldiers without a banner, Israelites among the nations, you will find neither faith nor protection; none will be sureties for you. Do not beguile yourselves with the hope of emancipation from unjust social conditions if you do not first conquer a country for yourselves, where there is no country there can be no common agreement to which you can appeal; the egoism of self-interest rules alone, and he who has the upper hand keeps, since there is no common safeguard for the interest of all. Do not be led away by the idea of improving your material conditions without first solving the national question....Do not be led astray then by hopes of material progress which in your present conditions can only be illusions. Our country is our home, the home which God has given us, placing therein a numerous family which we do love and are loved by, and with which we have more intimate and quicker communion of feeling and thought than others; a family which by its concentration upon a given spot, and by the homogeneous nature of its elements, is destined for a special kind of activity. (Curtis, 238-9)¹³

Nationalism is not something to be toyed with by any serious country. It can be the strong glue holding a country together, just as it can be the knife that can slice it into pieces, especially in an artificial multinational state like Nigeria. Given this imperative, a country like Nigeria has for so long played with her very existence by the tolerance of the numerous ethno-religious crimes against the Igbo and other groups that make up Nigeria’s multinational state. This is why a sovereign national conference is a *sine qua non* for the survival of the Nigerian state as currently constituted.

Assuming that the Igbo must exist and operate within the context of Nigeria, as presently constituted, there are various strategies they can adopt to promote their progress. These strategies are both political and economic. Politically, the first need is introspection driven by their nationalism to get their house in order. Next, they must demand dialogue among the various nationalities in Nigeria in order to establish a new *modus Vivendi*. For instance, they must insist on having free and fair elections in Igbo land at all costs, thus ensuring that they elect only those who truly represent their aspirations. Once they control those who hold positions of power among for them, they can then use those positions for the common good. The Igbo can no longer afford to be governed by renegades or new era saboteurs. In addition, Ojukwu was right in “charging the people to develop the courage to defend their rights anywhere in the country and respect the rights of other citizens.”¹⁴

Another goal the Igbo must seek in Nigeria without compromise is equity. For example, the Igbo must seek additional state(s) in Igbo land with the same single-mindedness the Yoruba applied to redress the June 12th 1993 insult. The Igbo must pursue their right to rule Nigeria on an equal footing with other ethnic groups. They must continue to agitate for equity and justice in the polity. Furthermore, they must seek to achieve the goal of fair and proportional representation in the country based on true population figures, not

fictitious numbers concocted specifically to gerrymander the Igbo. Although these tasks seem very difficult, they can still be achieved through commitment and steadfastness.

If the larger Nigerian society continues to reject fairness and justice for the Igbo within the existing order, the Igbo should ultimately confront the national question, and their approach to its full realization must replicate what the Jews did for themselves. The Jewish people identified their problem as essentially a national question. In seeking a solution to the Jewish problem of injustice, Herzl (2008:244), having concluded that it was a national question, insisted that to solve it the Jews must “first of all establish it as an international political problem to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world in council.” In like manner, unless Nigeria is transformed into a more favourable political and economic space for Igbo self-actualization, they too must seek similar solutions to their own national question.

E.E. Schattsneider (1965) suggests the socialization of conflict¹⁵ as an effective way for a society to realize its desired social objectives. In furtherance of that principle, the Igbo should employ not just the socialization but also the internationalization of conflict as the Jews did with theirs. It is unfortunate that so far Christian co-religionists have not quite appreciated the danger the Igbo have been facing in Nigeria since 1953 in the hands of Muslims. The Igbo must build strategic alliances with kindly disposed nations around the world. This is necessary in case their ambitious Muslim Hausa-Fulani foes decide to take their aggression to its logical conclusion, through more genocide and ethno-religious cleansing. Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe describes the situation by stating that those who are not well aware of the Igbo nightmare in Nigeria would see this writer an extremist or alarmist, but the facts are there to prove that this is only a call for justice and survival, as no sane person would allow himself and his people to be perpetually maligned and murdered routinely under any political arrangement. He gives the timeline of anti-Igbo atrocities in Nigeria thus:

For the history of Igbo people in Nigeria, what else is genocidist Nigeria but a terror and terrorist state? The timeline of this Igbo experience of death, hate, dispossession, misery and pain from Nigeria in the past 65 years is hauntingly evident for anyone to study:

1945...1953...1966...1970...1980...1982...1985...1991...1992...1993...1994...1999...2001...2002...2004...2005...2006...2007...2008...2009...2010...¹⁶

Hence, political realism prescribes this precaution because the triumvirates seem unwilling to build a just political order in the country.

The Igbo should use their international human asset to the fullest. This is imperative because the Igbo Diaspora is currently the strongest and arguably the most patriotic cohort of Ndiigbo. They are also what Aristotle referred to as the natural middle class, the economic backbone of democracy because it is least susceptible to the corrupting influences of the political class. The Igbo have no choice but to use all their options to salvage their home land, dignity and destiny. However, Nigeria’s policies will eventually determine the ultimate choice for the Igbo.

In the meantime, the Igbo must first start using all legal means available to them as a people. For instance, their legal experts must commit to bringing lawsuits against all who injure the Igbo at home and abroad. Given the Shell example with the Ogoni, it is clear that the Nigerian government and other anti-Igbo groups including Igbo collaborators can be sued wherever Ndiigbo are resident. Since Nigerian politicians have a penchant for buying foreign assets with money stolen from the national or state treasuries, the Igbo can target such foreign based asset to redress local injuries and injustices.

Ndiigbo can no longer afford to stand idly by and gnash their teeth in frustration as a result of the calamitous thievery and maladministration by the Nigerian government and her accomplices. They have the option to be proactive and become a formidable opponent against all forms of injustice against their people. They can legally constrain all anti-Igbo forces and agents in Nigeria by exposing them and their machinations to the international laws that govern civilized humanity.

Similarly, the Igbo should not stand idly by in the face of an embarrassing revelation like the one recently made by the former central bank governor, Charles Soludo, that the Imo State Governor Ohakim received N100 billion naira grants from Abuja within weeks of his defection to the People’s Democratic Party

PDP.¹⁷ The people must demand accountability from Igbo leaders like Governor Ohakim and other custodians of public resources in Igbo land. As Ojukwu rightly charged the Igbo must “march forward without fear, but with a commitment to assert ourselves fully in the building of a nation that works for all and not for some of its citizens.”¹⁸

Self-reliance is the most predictable form of security. It is said that if you want something done according to your taste and standard, you do it yourself. The Igbo must assume control over their future and destiny. *Achara di woro mmiri jiri aka ya wuzue onwe ya miri ahu.* Igbo everywhere must accept that it is time they took control of their destiny. It is obvious that Ndiigbo are natural leaders in Nigeria, so there is no need for them to hope that any other group can lead them into glory. You can follow as much as you can, but you can only succeed as much as your leader. For four decades Ndiigbo have hoped that military and civilian leaders of Northern extraction can deliver the Igbo and Nigeria from this misery of political and economic stagnation. This is looking more and more like hoping against hope. The Igbo have placed their destiny in the hands of these lackluster leaders who have made Nigeria the laughing stock around the world. *Okwo m na azu, ukwu na apu m na ala ya hapum meji ukwu m gawa.* In the aftermath of the Biafra War, the North took ethnicity and tribalism to unprecedented levels, mostly aimed at the Igbo, whose advancement was thwarted by discriminatory means such as employment and education quotas and deliberate denials of basic infrastructure even at the detriment of the country itself. The fact is that the more doctrinaire and self-described educationally backward Hausa-Fulani have decided that the entire country must be reduced to their own pace, something that is very inimical to the restless, adventurous and progressive Igbo.

The Igbo must now resist and reject this destiny. Hence, they need a comprehensive approach to our development. Among other things, they must integrate Igbo land via transportation as in mass transit rail development, inter-state highways, industrial estates, agricultural development, oil and gas development, educational development, private universities, health education, recreational development, and security etc. What is needed very urgently is a conglomerate comprising all of Igbo land engaged in simultaneous and integrative development of Alaigbo.

The Igbo should immediately launch the Igbo Development Fund (IDF), a public-private venture with shares sold to Igbo and run by experts and even expatriates. The Fund should be headquartered outside of Nigeria, preferably here in the United States of America. This should be modeled after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank). All members of the Igbo Diaspora must be convinced to buy into the IDF as shareholders. The IDF would identify and supervise the real reconstruction of Igbo land to remedy the devastations of the civil war and the post-war neglect, including the rampant erosion menace, rather than the lip service General Gowon and Nigeria paid to the project of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction (the 3Rs) in 1970.

The Challenge

There is no question that convincing *Ohaneze Ndiigbo* at home and abroad to put their money into a general fund would be a huge challenge given the distrust that has accumulated over the past four decades. Some are even deceived by the artificial division of Igbo land into five states, and there are justifiable agitations for more given our numerical strength in Nigeria. But even so, the Igbo must resist the sinister efforts of some unscrupulous leaders and people who have seen state creation as a way of discriminating against fellow Igbo once a new state is created. Sadly, the so-called indigenes start treating other Igbo from outside the new state as foreigners.

In the nearly seven years this writer was the founding chairman of Ngor-Okpala Congress in America (NOCIA), one of the unnecessary but difficult challenges was convincing this group that any amenity located anywhere in Ngor-Okpala belongs to all. Most people want everything to be located in their immediate communities. The question was raised why *Ndiigbo* have no problem locating their businesses outside Igbo land but would not be that open-minded in their own home. This is in spite of the fact that they have suffered tremendous loss of assets outside Igbo land. *Ndiigbo* must be educated to desist from self-denigration and hatred.

Instead, a campaign for an Igbo renaissance must be launched in Igbo land and across the globe. The Igbo must penetrate all Igbo organizations at home and abroad to sensitize all about the need for the restoration of justice and dignity. Many have blamed the Igbo problem on disunity and extreme individualism, but

every nation in Nigeria has its problems and handicaps. The Igbo problems are not unique as some people may want to postulate. No doubt the problems of the Igbo are complex due to size and republican predisposition. But the Igbo are also traditionally known as consensus builders, and it is in this they should find the solutions to their problems.

The Igbo philosophy unequivocally shows that they are a very moral people. They only lost control of their destiny since their post-war occupation. The problem of a nation not having sovereignty over itself can have very far-reaching consequences, and can be very debilitating, as it might even cause the nation to lose its moral compass as a nation. When a nation is under the tutelage of another, it is usually derailed, with its progress seriously stalled for a very long time, if not permanently. In other words, this shows that when a nation is not in control of its destiny, it cannot address its own moral issues and concerns. Its people will only suffer in silence. This is the situation of the Igbo in Nigeria. For example, not too long ago the Igbo felt that crimes and anti-social behaviors had reached a saturation point. The community around Owerri the Imo State capital rose to purge itself during the Otokoto saga in 1996. The people rose to reclaim their moral high ground from 419ers that were terrorizing them with ill-gotten wealth. They carefully went after the criminals, differentiating them the way only the locals could. They went after those in their midst with shady means and character.

However, true to character, the enemies of the Igbo intervened from Abuja and denied the people the golden opportunity to cleanse their society. Eyewitnesses testified how the people made their own inventory of the known criminals among them to actualize the best of community policing outcomes in the face of failed national security apparatuses. The foreign champions of corruption in far away Abuja, led by the former heads of state, General Sani Abacha, promptly scuffled a homemade moral revolution that was underway in Igbo land to the utter dismay and disappointment of the people. This is how the people's move to sack the criminals was halted, and the criminals have since been further emboldened, not only in Igbo land but throughout the country.

Nevertheless, the Igbo political and economic emancipation in Nigeria can still be achieved, in spite of perceived obstacles. *Anaghi aso mgbagbu eje ogu*. The efforts must be made. There is no question that the Igbo are one people with one destiny. Ohaneze Ndiigbo is one nation. Their common predicaments have taught this lesson.

Yet there are many Igbo people today who classify Ndiigbo as congenitally selfish and distrustful of one another. This is erroneous. Ndiigbo are perhaps the most caring people on earth. Notice how Ndiigbo have individually sacrificed to sustain their relatives at home. They have in every aspect become a substitute for the seemingly non-existent government at home due to the deliberate marginalization of their people and homeland by the various Nigerian governments since the end of the Civil War. But most importantly, those cynical Igbo must recall that before the Civil War, Igbo Unions all over Nigeria gave scholarships to promising Igbo youths irrespective of parentages and places of birth.

Recent estimates have put the amount of funds remitted home by Nigerians in the Diaspora at an annual average of \$10 billion, accounting for only monies sent through official organs such as Western Union, Money Gram and other forms of bank transfer. This does not include informal transfers, which could be quite as substantial. Nevertheless, given the significant numerical strength of *Ndiigbo* relative to other Nigerians, they must own at least one third or even half of that sum.

Even at one third, the money transfers would add up to about four hundred billion naira annually, a sum which is bigger than the total sum of annual federal allocations to the five Igbo states. Setting three hundred billion naira aside annually for the development and industrialization of Igbo land would result in an economic miracle in less than ten years. The answer rests on the commitment and nationalism driven by a concerted effort by a people refusing to fall where their enemies predicted for them. With the requisite commitment and determination coupled with new initiatives, the Igbo can easily turn Igbo land into Nigeria's economic resorts. All they need is to politically pull back major parts of their already existing investments from other parts of Nigeria.

The Economic Challenge and Action Programs:

Any objective observer would notice immediately that Igbo land lacks significant industrial establishments when compared to other zones of the country. In a situation where the public sector, especially the national government, owns enterprises, the *de jure* neglect of the zone goes without saying. It is a fact that there is no significant federal project in the zone, which gives credence to the cry of marginalization echoing throughout Igbo land. For instance, there are no dams, in spite of many potential rivers for large scale irrigation projects to enhance agriculture, and no refineries, in spite of abundant oil and gas deposits in the area, and notwithstanding the fact that the zone remains unmatched in terms of skilled manpower. The infrastructure in the South East, such as; roads, railways, airports are either the worst in the land or totally nonexistent, even though the population in the area is more technically ready than in most other areas of the country to utilize them for national development. The need was so dire and the neglect so glaring that the Igbo had to build an airport of international capacity in Owerri with levies, only for it to be taken over and slowed down by the national government.

By contrast, Northern Nigeria contains the headquarters of all significant establishments in the country. The army, the police, the defense academy, the police college, the aviation college, the command staff college, the largest refinery, the largest auto assembly, and other sundry enterprises that provide most employment in the country are all located in the north, compelling the Igbo into perpetual migration within their own country. Therefore, the Igbo must press for their fair share of federal establishment, infrastructure and other capital and labor intensive public enterprises to absorb their teeming population of unemployed youth in Igbo land to bridge this gap of inequity.

Meanwhile, here is a homemade panacea for Igbo economic emancipation. This home-made panacea is defined by Dr. Basil Nnanna Ukegbu, its author, as *Agrarian Revolution Without Tears*, based on the unique principle of Micro capitalism.¹⁹ In his articulation in frontier society such as Nigeria, there can be no economic development without agrarian development and there can be no true industrial development without agrarian revolution.

Sometime ago a Namibian friend of mine was invited by the United Nations Agency for International Development to articulate a feasible strategy for sustainable development of her country in the immediate aftermath of that country's independence. In a private conversation, as she expressed uncertainty about what to do, I simply told her to identify for the world body the staple crop that had traditionally sustained her local population. Sustainable development for the country would therefore be anchored on mass production of the said crop, which would lead to food self sufficiency. Once the crop is produced in excess, the next logical step in the developmental process would be industrial initiatives aimed at preserving and exporting the crop and its byproducts to other people and places. This is when agricultural products would become the raw material for industrial expansion, inevitably leading to improved living standards which translates into development.

This same principle had been articulated comprehensively for Nigeria, as an action program, as far back as 1985 as Economic Miracle for Nigeria by Dr. Ukegbu under the auspices of the Technological and Economic Development Mission TEDEM. The TEDEM coordinator invented the principle of agrarian revolution without tears, after studying the perils of the enclosure system of British capitalism and state socialism of the former Soviet Union, both of which dispossessed the peasants of their most valuable asset, land. To avoid this misery, he articulates micro capitalism in which the same peasants would continue to hold their lands but bind together in village communities to form huge agricultural cooperatives that would launch them into agro-based industrialization.

Educational Agenda:

The Igbo have clearly distinguished themselves as one of the most adaptable groups in the world. At the risk of sounding ethnocentric, this writer is of the belief that the Igbo person is the most competitive character in the universe. The Igbo traditionally imitate the good. Igbo parents usually tell their children to look at their peers. *Lee ibe gi*. Similarly, communities compete with one another. At the end of the war, there was a community wide competition for which community would be the first to build a school, a hospital, a community center, and so forth in Igbo land. That collective endeavor and predisposition have declined because of the reckless and pernicious intervention of 419ers in Igbo land, who have destroyed the

moral sacrifices the people were making for their collective good out of their hard earned resources and moral obligation. When Nigeria's leaders want to be honest, they confess the preeminence of the Igbo. General Babangida was quoted as saying that: "if you want something to be well done give it to the Igbo man." Obasanjo confessed that he appointed Igbo ministers who recorded the most significant accomplishments during his eight year rule. One Igbo woman, Dr. Ngozi-Okonjo-Iwuala, negotiated the elimination of Nigeria's 30 billion dollar foreign debt as Foreign Minister and another Professor Charles Soludo saved the banks from collapse as governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. In spite of the Igbo's best efforts at national service, the oligarchy continues to hone its strategies for making things more difficult for the Igbo. Not too long ago, when the minister in charge of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja confessed that Ndiigbo are dominant in Abuja due to their sundry investments and property ownership, they quickly found a way to undercut them by demolishing their property and expropriating their lands without compensation. The fact is that any business dominated by Ndiigbo faces stiff regulation or ban.

It is imperative, that as a people, the Igbo must use their unique strengths to distinguish themselves from those who envy them. The Igbo are not ordinary. They envy the Igbo because they see them as extraordinary people. They are very aggressive in the pursuit of self-improvement. They are intolerant of failure and obsessed with excellence. These are what incurred the envy of others against the Igbo in Nigeria. The Igbo know this; others are just finding out. The Igbo are a supremely self-confident people. This is what led Achebe to publish *Things Fall Apart* more than half a century ago and dazzled the world. As far back as the 1980s, Governor Sam Mbakwe acknowledged that education was the biggest industry in the old Imo state and that has not changed. Ironically, even then, the same Governor Mbakwe recklessly sacked forty-five thousand teachers in Imo for protesting against non-payment of their salaries. The very same governor who constantly wept for the underdevelopment of his state and people due to federal neglect, decided to personally obstruct, for political reasons, what would have been the first private university in Nigeria-The Imo Technical University, Imerienwe Owerri, sponsored by Dr. Nnanna Ukegbu's Tedem in 1982. Most Igbo will acknowledge that Mbakwe tried his best as governor of old Imo State, but his opposition to the Tedem private university initiative led by his fellow Igbo, just for political reasons, no doubt hurt the Igbo cause. Today when the rest of Nigeria has woken up, there is not a single private university in Imo State, irrespective of the fact that Imo has consistently led the nation in college bound students since its creation. Ndiigbo have to be strategic in politics. Now, private universities are everywhere in Nigeria, especially in the South-West, and attracting hundreds of millions of education dollar investments into that region especially from the ubiquitous and education-hungry Igbo. The Igbo must reclaim their premier position in education not only numerically but also qualitatively. Our schools must be restored to their past glory. Education for self awareness and self fulfillment must be the new mantra throughout Igbo land. The universities must engage in sundry research to unearth the history, origin and wonderful heritage of the Igbo. The Igbo language and culture, law, customs and politics must be projected globally as among the finest. Is it not ironic that the rest of the world is today struggling with democracy and republican forms of governance, which the Igbo had practiced and had forgotten reminiscent of Ekwefi's night meal to Okonkwo in *Thing Fall Apart*?²⁰ It is obvious that the non-appreciation of Igbo culture globally is largely due to the absence of a sovereign Igbo nation-state to promote Igbo excellence and preeminence in many areas of human endeavor. Be that as it may, a concerted effort may yet showcase the good that is the Igbo culture and their tradition of excellence, ambition, and industry.

Furthermore, functional education must once again become the hallmark of the Igbo in their search for development and industrialization. The Igbo must join the race for private universities in Nigeria. The Yoruba have seriously outpaced the Igbo in this venture, and this is clearly a self inflicted economic injury because the Igbo are generally targeted as the biggest education clients. If the Igbo are leaders in education in Nigeria, it is only fitting that they too should benefit financially from educating the rest of Nigeria by establishing private universities.

In the final analysis, as part of the proposed micro capitalism through agrarian revolution without tears, the village based agro-industrial cooperatives must incorporate functional education. Where there is land there can be no poverty. There is land, everywhere in Igbo land, since almost all our communities are engaged in agriculture, but people must be given the right education to properly utilize the land to achieve the basic

goals of self sufficiency and development. The goal is to educate these land-owning village communities to bind together and form agro-based firms, incorporate as profit-making companies, using their land and labor as assets, which they are, as collaterals to procure loans. The loans would then be used to engage in large scale production of any crops of their choice for consumption, but more importantly for export and raw materials for allied industries to be located in their respective communities. Once this is done, the massive youth and adult unemployment currently plaguing Igbo land would become a thing of the past. While agriculture would be the driving force for industrialization in Igbo land, many other opportunities would exist. People will utilize educational opportunities in ways that would make them relevant both to themselves and their immediate communities. The end result will be the natural division of labor, where individual talents will develop to cater for the needs of the community. There will always be a need for doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, entertainers, and of course, agronomists, etc. As prosperity flourishes in the newly modernized communities, people will have needs for all requisite services. Hence, the present mass unemployment would no longer exist, because people would educate and train themselves basically to occupy extant needs. Once the people become more affluent, their needs for both basic and ancillary services would expand considerably. This is the foundation for prosperity, which should be the ultimate goal of any group, including the Igbo.

Action Program for Technical Services

To say that the Igbo are among the most educated Africans is not hyperbole. They are also uniquely gifted with innovation and technology. A trip to Aba, Onitsha, and Nnewi would confirm this for any skeptic. Besides, the feat the Igbo performed during Biafra is there for all to see. Therefore, among other things, the Igbo must revisit the war time technologies of the Biafra era to quicken the pace of industrial development in Igbo land.

It is anticipated that the Igbo intelligentsia would constitute itself into a think tank or a hatchery of ideas, providing centers for on-going technical and managerial assistance, as well as educational and industrial counseling for both communities and individuals. This would resemble the civil service commission except that it would be privately owned and managed. It would have offices across Igbo land to provide consulting services like the former agricultural extension services of the farm settlement era of Eastern Nigeria. The major difference would be the comprehensive nature of the current program.

CONCLUSION:

It must be emphasized that the uniqueness of the proposed action program is in its comprehensiveness. There should be no pilot project. It is a simultaneous undertaking covering all areas of Igbo land. The people have waited long enough. Every community is in urgent need for development and industrialization. God did not create Lagos or Kano or other so-called urban industrial areas of Nigeria to which a Nigerian must migrate to seek a good life. In the current articulation, everywhere in Igbo land has the potential of becoming like or even surpassing Lagos.

As already stated, Igbo land is the infrastructural-deficit area of Nigeria. It is also clear that this is part of the pernicious marginalization of the area by the national government, which requires a remedy. Therefore, the intended consequences of this comprehensive development in Igbo land would include the development of a modern rail-network system for the total economic integration of Igbo land. Ndiigbo should emulate the Yoruba and establish an Ohaneze Enterprise in the tradition of Odu'a Enterprise. It is encouraging that the five Igbo governors have set a 2010 target to revitalize their joint investments. However, they must not fall victim to what Ukegbu (1985) described as: "Tokenitis, a disease which has its main symptoms in the prescription and application of token solutions to very large and fundamental problems with a pious and cynical expectation of miraculous and curative achievements."

The governors must imbibe the principles of micro capitalism and agrarian revolution without tears. They can invite this speaker and others who would master this plan as consultants for the anticipated agro-industrial revolution of Igbo land. It is heartwarming even theoretically that the governors now realize that the past must be incorporated in the revitalization and replication of the phenomenal economic growth experienced in the defunct Eastern Nigeria. It is also critical that they improve on that past by embracing

the policy which Dr. Ukegbu articulated since 1962, after an extensive tour of Europe and Asia, to fully realize the desired economic transformation of Nigeria.

The Igbo must find a way or ways to deal with the aftermath of the war. They must preach a philosophy and abide by it. They preach that unity is strength. Many people assume that the Igbo are incurably individualist. This does not totally capture their real nature. Igbo individualism is only an interim character utilized to ensure competition and industry. Economic success has never been the necessary and sufficient condition for success among the Igbo, and the Igbo abhor isolationism, which is the politics of exclusion. Ostracism is considered the worst punishment reserved for the worst crime such as murder of your kinsman.

Among the Igbo, ultimate beauty and satisfaction only come when there is the satisfaction of the collective. The task before the Igbo now, which is none other than their very survival, calls for thorough and concerted efforts to salvage and advance their collective destiny. Anything short of this will be tantamount to “racicide” or self extinction and perchance the footnote of history would reminisce about the Igbo people who arguably are among the most gifted of humanity but bereft of the commonsense to survive and place their posterity among the great races of the earth.

As Achebe has said, the Igbo must retrace their steps and discover where the rain started beating them so that they can clearly know when the sun dried their body. My father used to say that a certain man went and got a charm that would make him invulnerable to mortals, and also got another that protected him against spirits, but he obtained none against self-destruction, and that was his Achilles heel. The Igbo cannot assist their enemies to assure the demise of the Igbo race.

FOOTNOTES

¹Professor Afigbo’s legend is that the Igbo fell from the sky and landed in Eastern Nigeria where they have dwelt ever since.

²Gustavus Vass (Olaudah Equiano), whose 1789 biography "The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano" It was Equiano who came up with the theory that that the Igbo were one of the lost tribes of Israel.

³Chinua Achebe “What Nigeria means to me.” (Guardian Jan. 23, 2010).

⁴Robert Omote (Guardian, Feb. 21, 2010).

⁵David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization*, 1965.

⁶Cited in Wallerstein, Immanuel. *Africa*, 2007. May 2007.

⁷Chinua Achebe had declared in his seminal political treatise *The Trouble with Nigeria* that leadership has been the bane of the country.

⁸See Bishara John Goni “Plateau the Middle Belt and the Myth of One North’

⁹Abraham Maslow “A Theory of Human motivation”. 1943.

¹⁰Ohakim: “Why Governors Oppose Yar’Adua’s Removal” *ThisDay*. March 12, 2010

¹¹Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, “Cowardice, lack of strategic thinking, the problems of Igbo nation,” An address at the conference of South East Elders and Leaders, Owerri March 5, 2010.

¹²Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, *ibid.* Owerri. March 5, 2010.

¹³Mazzani in Curtis, Michael. Ed. *The Great Political Theories*. 2008.

¹⁴Ojukwu, *ibid.*

¹⁵E.E. Schattsneider. *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist’s View of Democracy in America*.

¹⁶Ekwe-Ekwe, Herbert. Reflections on this state of terror.

¹⁷The Tide. “PDP Largesesse: Imo Received N100bn From FG, Says Soludo.” Jan. 11, 2010.

¹⁸Ojukwu, *ibid.*

¹⁹Basil Nnanna Ukegbu, *Economic Miracle for Nigeria 1985-1999. Concepts and Action Programmes*.

²⁰Note that Okonkwo had threaten that he would no longer accept his wife Ekwefi’s habit of bringing him food late, that is, when others have eaten and have forgotten.

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