



THE IGBOS IN NIGERIAN POLITICS (1941-1967)

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is for the present day Igbo generations to understand how the Igbo Nationalists worked tirelessly, to compelling the colonial overlords to accord equal social status to Nigerians. To understand the political imprints of Igbo Nationalists in Nigerian politics before and after independence. To give an insight about the Nigerian and Biafran's Civil War, which lasted for 36 months since teaching history has been proscribed in school curricula at all levels in Nigeria's school systems.

Keywords

Igbo, Colonial, Nigerian Politics

The Igbos are among the significant ethnic groups that constitute what became the Federation of Nigeria. Predominantly, Igbos are found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. Some Igbo populations are also sported in Delta and Rivers States. They were active participants as well as redemptive contributors to the political emancipation movement in Nigeria.

By definition, an emancipation movement is a socio-political protest movement. Igbos joined with Yorubas and other Southern ethnic groups to organize a social protest movement demanding social justice aimed at compelling the colonial overlords to accord equal social status to Nigerians.

In 1941, the various protesters united to form the Nigerian Youth Movement which in 1944 morphed into a political party known as The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (N.C.N.C.). Igbos were active in the N.C.N.C. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the first national secretary and Herbert Macaulay a Yoruba, was the party's national president. Igbos residing in Lagos were highly involved in the nationalist movement that expressed itself in three political parties -N.C.N.C., A.G, and N.P.C.

The unified efforts of the three political parties achieved political autonomy for what became Nigeria in 1960. Each of the parties was led by a representative of the major ethnic group in the three regions in Nigeria.

The nature of Igbos' perception of their place and role in the Nigerian Union is defined by their cultural mantra. They are culturally egalitarian, socially and economically competitive, and respect achievement. In addition to the qualities mentioned, Igbos have a knack for location adaptability. They adapt and excel in the location in which they find themselves.

Nnamdi Azikiwe, co-organizer of what became the N.C. N.C. in 1944 and the pre-eminent Igbo Nationalist said, "It would appear that the God of Africa has specially created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages."

The martial prowess of the Igbo nation at all stages of human history has enabled them not only to conquer others but also to adapt themselves to the role of preservers. (Azikiwe, N. June 25, 1949). Azikiwe's comment was a reflection of how Igbos regard themselves in relation to other ethnic groups. It is this self-defined role of the Igbos that may have made them see Nigeria as one nation with equal rights for all the inhabitants.

In the context of the above, the political party around which the Igbos rallied was not formed in a region dominated by Igbos. It was organized in Lagos, a city dominated ethnically by the Yorubas. On the other hand, all other political parties that were elected to the federal parliament were ethnically based. The parties were Action Group, founded in the West, Northern People's Congress, formed in the North, and National Council of Nigerian Citizens, formed in the West but largely patronized by the Igbos.

However, other political parties emerged from disagreements within some regional-based parties. These include Northern Element Progressive Union (N.E.P.U.) led by Aminu Kano, and Nigerian National Democratic Party led by Samuel Ladipo Akintola. The Igbos remained faithful to their adherence to the national philosophy of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens. Throughout the duration of the Nigeria's First Republic (1963-1966) the

N.C.N.C. political mantra was built on the belief on oneness of Nigeria irrespective of tribal differences. On the basis of oneness in the Nigerian Union, Nnamdi Azikiwe invested his political talent in nationalizing the N.C.N.C. During the First Republic, Igbos migrated to major cities across Nigeria and easily adapted to the social culture of those cities. They became fluent in the local languages. In the cities to which they migrated, they formed Igbo unions that reflected the different villages from which they originated. These unions primarily protected the interests of their members, particularly in terms of life security. The number of these unions could be as many as the number of Igbo villages from which they migrated. Membership in a union, named after the village of the members could range from as few as five to over one hundred. The Igbos who migrated to cities in non-Igbo regions engaged in chain migration to the cities of migration. Over time, their siblings, uncles, cousins, and nieces would join their relatives in their host cities.

The Igbos provided essential services in the cities to which they migrated. Igbo immigrants to other regions could be regarded as development agents. They provided services such as car repairs, pharmacies, hotels, inter-regional transportation and real estate. The primary factor that induces Igbos migration to places outside their region of birth is the search for opportunities to improve their lives.

The ubiquity of Igbos in many cities in Nigeria, coupled with their ability to easily adapt to unfamiliar cultures, reveals the ambiguity of the Nigerian concept of citizenship. The Igbos, as well as others who are domiciled in states other than their own, do not have political rights in those states. They were not allowed to vote. Nigerian citizenship is defined in regional context. It is a two-layered status. The pre-eminent citizenship is regional. The normative one is federal and is politically functional only to the extent that the regions send their representatives to a federal parliament that allocates funds to respective regions for social and economic development.

Igbos in Nigerian Politics during the First Republic

The Igbos were activists in Nigerian politics that achieved the colonial independence in 1960. The foremost Igbo man who organized a political protest against the British social policy of discrimination against the colonized was Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996).

Nnamdi Azikiwe received graduate and postgraduate degrees from the USA. His education in the USA particularly at Lincoln University shaped his political worldview. Lincoln University of Pennsylvania was established in 1854 by the Presbyterian Church. During this period, Americans were segregated in educational institutions. Black Americans were permitted to attend colleges that would teach agricultural and mechanical subjects.

However, Lincoln University was created as an institution that exposed students to humanistic, scientific, social sciences and behavioral studies. By incorporating these areas into their academic curricula Lincoln University graduates became agents of emancipation. They saw wrongs in the social and political justice of the colonies and always sought to right them.

As a result, many Igbos who attended Lincoln University of Pennsylvania from 1930s to 1950s became active participants in the struggle for social and political justice in Nigeria. These included Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kingsley O. Mbadiwe, Nwafor Orizu, and Kalu Ezero. These men were part of Zikist's movement which was the backbone of the Nigerian Council of Nigerian and Cameroons organized by Herbert MacCauley and Nnamdi Azikiwe. In 1960, when Southern Cameroon chose to integrate with Northern Cameroon, the N.C.N.C. was renamed National Council of Nigerian Citizens.

Following the inception of independence, the different major ethnic groups in each of the regions began to incline more towards ethnic nationalism. Political Parties were ethnically based and pursued goals that defined ethnic interests. The three major parties that led Nigeria to independence were the Northern Council of Nigerian Citizens, the Northern Peoples' Congress and the Action Group. The Igbo people largely patronized the National Council of Nigerian Citizens which was formed by Herbert and Azikiwe. The intent of the N.C.N.C. was to create a political party that would embrace a national consensus that would govern an independent Nigeria.

Following the creation of the last constitution under McPherson, Azikiwe led a delegation supported by funds raised in a tour in the Northern Nigeria and other regions. It is important to understand the philosophy of erecting a strong Pan Nigeria Movement which unfortunately would be undermined by centrifugal local ethnic nationalism. No one was surprised that Nnamdi Azikiwe was given a role in the Federal government. He became Nigeria's president.

The Igbos thoroughly understood the positive impact of education on societal development. This understanding was derived from the exposure to Western education and culture. Igbo mobility to cities outside their homeland compelled them to seek employment. Most of them were uneducated and worked as cooks and drivers. However, in these menial jobs, they assimilated some of the European culture. They invested their efforts in educating their children who later became the pillars of Nigerian bureaucracy and politics. Even before Nigeria's independence, the Igbos formed a national Igbo union headquartered in Lagos. The union established nineteen secondary schools in different parts of Nigeria aimed at encouraging their children to embrace education. This goal

yielded positive results. Educated Igbos held many positions in various firms and federal civil service in the Eastern and Northern regions of Nigeria.

The penchant for strong national unity led the N.C.N.C. party to strike a strategic party alliance in national parliament. It formed the government with the Northern People's Congress as the senior parliament. This alliance accomplished an important objective for the N.C.N.C. The unity of Nigeria which was separated by Islamic culture in the North and a Christianity Western education, oriented in South East Nigeria. That the N.C.N.C., an essentially Igbo political party allied with the N.P.C. ideologically different from it, seems odd.

Some Yorubas felt that the N.P.C./N.C.N.C. alliance deprived them of a role in the federal governance of Nigeria. Among some of the Northerners, an alliance with the N.C.N.C. appeared to be a betrayal of Northern cultural ethos. But to the N.C.N.C. and the Igbos in particular, the alliance is a pragmatic effort to sustain the concept of a united Nigeria in which every Nigeria can move to any city in Nigeria, make it his/her home, and enjoy the social and political privileges of that city and the region.

Contrary to this Igbo vision, ethnicity in Nigeria is so deep-rooted that allegiance to it usually overrides any attempt to create a truly national patriotism that all ethnic groups would submit to. This created a dilemma for the Igbos whose mantra is cultural adaptability. Other ethnic groups became apprehensive of the ubiquity of the Igbo in almost every city in Nigeria. They advanced economically in their adopted environment, became fluent in the local languages and their educated children held lucrative positions in the federal bureaucracy. The robust presence of Igbos in Nigeria's socio-economic and political activities was perceived by non-Igbo ethnic groups as an Igbo ambition to be Nigerian's leader. This suspicion ignited ethnic chauvinism of other groups. The fear of an Igbo political domination of Nigeria is unrealistic given the political paradigm the British erected before they left the Nigerians to take control of their political destiny.

In a democracy, it is the interests of the majority which are always promoted that become either the law or the culture of a society, ethnic group or nation. Following the census of 1952-1953, the Northern people were assigned more parliamentary seats than the ones assigned to the two regions in the southern people combined. The political effect of the population imbalance makes it a main effort for Igbos to dominate Nigeria's political landscape. This, however, could be possible if the regions agree on rotational leadership. Even then, Igbos' neighbors within their regions would also need to cooperate with them to make their political leadership a reality. In the absence of rotational political leadership, regional alliances would be the next feasible approach. The reality is that the cultural DNA of the Igbos invites suspicion and misinterpretation of intent of the Igbos.

Igbos and the Nigeria Crisis in First Republic

The three political parties representing the three regions fully understood that the party or the parties in power at the federal level would control the wealth of Nigeria. The regional population determined the possibility of any regional party leading the federation in political terms. Unfortunately, the pre-independence census appeared to be rigged. The result favored the Northern Region to an extent that the combined population of the Southern Region was less than that of the North. The census of the 1962-1963 was inflated by 200% as each region was angling for a larger population in order to gain more allocation of seats in the parliament. The census did not achieve the objectives of the different regions except the Northern Region, which opposed any recount.

Other regional political parties felt that to gain rewarding influence in the Nigerian federal structure requires an alliance with the Northern Peoples' Congress (N.P.C.) the major political party in the North broaden their supports into regions other than theirs. The two approaches had a destructive impact on Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Samuel Akintola respectively. Chief Awolowo, who was a member of the Federal Parliament as the opposition leader pursued a policy of making Action Group strong enough and embraced by more Nigerians, to the extent it could control the Federal government. Chief Akintola, who was the Premier of the Western Region, sought an alliance with the N.P.C. as a mechanism to gain access to power and share the country's wealth.

The two approaches created a rift between Chief Awolowo and Chief Akintola, who was asked to relinquish his premiership. He was charged of maladministration. The Action Group split into two factions. Chief Awolowo's faction reconstituted itself as Nigerian National Democratic Party (N.N.D.P.) and allied itself to N.P.C. to form a new party- the Nigerian National Alliance (N.N.A.). The rump of the Action Group coalesced with N.C.N.C. and some other parties in the South to form United Progressive Grand Alliance (U.P.G.A). These parties resulted in the demise of the original political parties- N.C.N.C., A.G., and the N.P.C. - that successfully fought and achieved Nigerian independence in 1960. However, it would appear that the Southerners were less politically united since a faction of it was attached to the Northern political power housed under Alhaji Bello - the Sardauna of Sokoto, and Alhaji Tafawa Belewa, the Prime Minister.

The political rearrangement had one factor in common - the Igbo factor. The Igbo factor translates into domination of other ethnic groups. The Yorubas were not pleased with N.C.N.C. /N.P.C. that controlled the federal government. They feared the alliance of the two groups would edge them out from participating in the national "Cake". The North, which was allied with the N.C.N.C. had done so largely on pragmatism at the time. Sardauna

and Belewa indicated that there was no love lost between them and Azikiwe. The subtext seems to indicate that Nigeria's political exercise is shaped by "Igbophobia", the need to contain the seemingly suspected intention of Igbos to dominate other ethnic groups in what is Nigeria. This subtext would play out in the federal election of 1964 when the U.P.G.A. would compete with the N.N.A. for the political and economic control of Nigeria. By the composition of the two parties, the Yorubas would gain, no matter which national party controls the parliament. This is because the Action Group which represents the Yorubas, split itself into two. One part allied with the Hausa-Fulani and the other allied with the Igbos. This may have been the political calculation of the Yorubas.

However, the 1964 federal election resulted in a significant crisis. As Nigeria grew in independence and claimed the status of a republican nation, problems of ethnic nationalism began to manifest. Minorities in each of the regions began to feel that the dominant groups were depriving them of their economic and political shares of Nigeria's wealth. Some of the minorities sought alliances with the dominant ethnic groups of other regions. This political strategy paid off because some of those who joined the political parties of the dominant population were given ministerial appointments and were appeased.

The 1964 election, held barely one year after Nigeria became a republic, tested the country's ability and willingness to survive as a united nation. Whether Nigeria would remain a unified nation depended on the possibility of eradicating what could be called "Igbophobia". This feelings of the Yorubas about the Igbos in Yoruba regions became a volatile issue in Yoruba politics, particularly in the AwoIowo-Akintola split. Chief Akintola's faction constantly appealed to Yoruba nationalism, becoming a rallying point of Yoruba mantra. Chief Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party called Yoruba attention to what they regarded as Igbo economic progress in Lagos and Ibadan local cities.

Events preceding the demise of Nigeria's first republic exposed the seemingly unbelievable depth of dislike of the Igbos in different regions of Nigeria, especially among the Yorubas and the Hausa-Fulani ethnics. These ethnic groups used "Igbophobia" as the rallying point for their tribal politics and solidarity. The political coalition of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.), largely patronized by Igbos and the Northern People's Congress (N.P.C.) whose membership was almost entirely of Hausa-Fulani governance, disintegrated during the 1964 federal election.

Chief Samuel Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (N.N.D.P.) built its strength on an appeal to Yorubas to guard against the tendency of the Igbos to dominate. Akintola was able to create a rift in the Action Group party that he had led with Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The Nigerian National Democratic Party in its quest to gain access to the control of the Federal government fought and succeeded in coalescing with the Northern People's Congress creating what became the Nigerian National Alliance. The N.N.A. carried a majority of minor parties in the Northern Region. On the other hand, whatever remained of the Action Group coalesced with the N.C.N.C. and some other minor tribal parties to form United Progress Grand Alliance (U.P.G.A.), a Southern based political party. The election in 1964 was to determine which of the two regional parties would control the federal government and have access to the control of the distribution of Nigeria's wealth.

The Election of 1964

Two political parties largely contested the federal election of 1964. As noted earlier, the N.C.N.C. and its affiliates coalesced with the Action Group and its allies to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (U.P.G.A.). In response, the Northern People's Congress and its allies joined with Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (N.N.D.P.) to form the Nigerian National Alliance (N.N.A.). The N.N.A. enjoyed strong support in the North while the U.P.G.A. was Southern-based and supported. Three major ethnic groups dominated the two political groups, the Igbos, the Yorubas and the Hausa-Fulani. Politically, the Igbos and the Yorubas understood the political and economic rewards that could be derived from an alliance with the leading political party in the Northern Region.

Prior to the demise of the first Republic, the N.C.N.C. enjoyed the political and economic advantage of its alliance with the N.P.C. Additionally, the dying period of the first Republic set in motion a spiral ethnic nationalism that ushered in political crises among the Yorubas of the Western Region and spread to some other regions, particularly the southern sections. During the election to the Federal parliament, the U.P.G.A. alleged that there were rumors of plans by the N.N.A. to harass their members and candidates during the campaign and election. In the West, the N.C.N.C. headquarters in Ibadan City were attacked, followed by the burning of A.G cars and the damaging of the houses of prominent U.P.G.A. members - Mr. S.O. Osokoya and Chief Lanlehin. (Mackintosh, J.P., Nigerian Government Politics, p. 577).

Against this background, the U.P.G.A. decided to boycott the elections (Schwarz, W., Nigeria, 1968, pp 164-168). However, despite the decision by the U.P.G.A. to boycott the 1964 elections, the elections were held. The N.N.A. won more seats, as none of its candidates participated in the boycotts. As the results of the elections showed, the decision of the U.P.G.A. to boycott the election seemed unwise and wasteful.

Regions	Allocated seats	NNA	UPGA	Independence	Seats not filled no polling
North	167	162	4	1	0
East	70	0	19	0	51
West	57	38	18	1	0
Midwest	14	0	13	0	0*
Lagos	4	0	0	1	3
Totals	312	200	54	3	54

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The 1964 Federal Election Results (Total votes cast-approximately 4, 000, 00)

*Unreported

Sources: Richard Harris, *Nigeria: Crisis and compromise*, P.30

In other to save the Nigerian federation, the political leaders agreed to form a broadly based government in which the major political parties participated. However, one could also detect northern influence in that broadly based government (Walter Schwarz, *Nigeria* p. 175).

The Coup d'état, January 15, 1966 and the subsequent breakup of the Nigerian Federation

A series of crises, beginning with the census controversy of 1962 and culminating in the Western region election of 1965, highlighted the Federal government's inability to effectively govern the country. Public suspicion of the government reached an unprecedented high. It was at this juncture that the army intervened to correct the government's wrongs and purge the country of corruption, nepotism, internal strife and disunity.

On January 15, 1966, a military coup ended the first Nigerian republic, plunging Nigeria into a future of uncertainties. The coup claimed the lives of Abubakar Tafawa Belewa, a Northerner and Nigeria's Prime Minister, Samuel Akintola, a Yoruba and Premier of Western Nigeria and Festus Okotie-Eboh of Mid-West Province, who was also the Minister of Finance. Notably, no Igbo leader in the Eastern region was among those assassinated. The public reaction to the military coup, particularly in the Southern regions, was one of jubilation. Many Nigerians, gripped by a psychology of rising expectations felt that the army untainted by political corruption would be better equipped to lead the country towards progress and stability. The feeling that the army came in to redeem the nation of the maladministration was a misguided feelings, as the entrance of the army into the governance, and handling of the economic status quo of the citizenry fell short of expectations.

The military government, recognizing the importance of maintaining national unity, issued Decree 34, which abolished the federal system in favor of a unitary one. However, a section of the country, the North, was not enthusiastic about the decree and openly opposed it. The negative reaction to the decree indicated that the military government had misread the political mood of the nation it had chosen to govern.

The January 15, 1966 coup turned out to be a prelude to Nigeria's disintegration. Barely seven months later, had a second coup taken place on July 29, 1966. General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, of an Igbo extraction who had taken over reins of government after the overthrow of the first Republic, was brutally assassinated. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, from the North, became the Commanding Officer of the Nigerian Army and the Head of the military government. The July coup d'état was a reaction by the Northerners, who, because of the January coup, had lost their political powers at the center. It was accompanied by the wanton massacre of Nigerians of Eastern origin, as the military government could not control, resulting in the mass exodus of Easterners to their homeland. At this point, Nigerian unity suffered its greatest setback, a situation reflected in the head of the military government's broadcast on August 1, 1966, thus:

"I have now come to the most difficult part, or the most important part, of this statement. I am doing it, conscious of the great disappointment and heartbreak it will cause all true and sincere lovers of Nigeria and of Nigerian unity both at home and abroad, especially our brothers in the Commonwealth..."

The statement was ominous for the cause of Nigerian unity, as subsequent developments appear to have been determined by sentiments of disunity.

The program of the Igbos, which occurred before and after the second coup d'état strained the relationship between the North and the East, and the inability of the Federal military government to stop the killings, made the Easterners, largely the Igbos, fear that their general security could not be guaranteed by the military government. This fear was touched upon when Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military governor of Eastern Nigeria, made the secession proclamation, saying, "Aware that you (Easterners) can no longer be protected in your

lives and in your property by a government based outside Eastern Nigeria... I do declare that all political ties between us and the Federal Republic of Nigeria are hereby totally dissolved.”

However, six years after independence, the solidarity of Nigerian unity was tested and found wanting. A military coup d'état in January 1966, followed by civil upheaval later in the year, created a situation which led to the disintegration of the country in 1967. On May 30, 1967, the Eastern Region seceded and declared itself the Republic of Biafra. To nullify the secession, Nigeria declared war on July 6, 1967. Nevertheless, one Nigeria had disintegrated, and for 30 months, from July 6, 1967 to January 12, 1970, Biafra and Nigeria - were at war with each other. To the Nigerians, this struggle was a war for unity, to preserve the federation. Nevertheless, to the Biafrans, it was a war for survival, to save a people from the throes of extermination.

Igbos Massacres

In 1966, nearly 1,000,000 of Igbos were killed in the North as revenge killings for a coup that was plotted by a young man bearing Igbo name but had never been to Igboland. They escaped back to their homeland and wanted a country of their own, but they were told that they must belong to one indivisible Nigeria. For three years, they resisted and lost another 3,000,000 of their kith and kin who were fed to the vultures. Their entire homeland was a killing field. They were killed, and were starved. Kwashiorkor finished up their starving children. Many of their wives and daughters were raped and some were taken into forced marriages.

After three years of annihilation, the genocide ended. The few that were still alive crept out of their holes and reembraced the country that has massacred them without a just cause. To return to the country, they were economically stripped of their remaining dignity and offered only £20 each in exchange for their money and millionaires before the war restarted life with £20. They did not complain, they accepted their fate and reintegrated with all.

Within a short while, the country embarked on an indigenization policy which enabled many of their South Western, South-South, and Northern brothers to buy up major multi-nationals at a giveaway prices. With £20 in their pockets, they could only watch those who owned houses in the big cities lost their homes to the criminal policy of 'Abandoned property' as enacted by some states aimed at committing official stealing.

In the civil service, the policy of the quota system made it impossible for many of them to be accepted back into their former jobs. While trying to get a quality education for their children, the policy of giving admission to children from educationally disadvantaged states saw their children score so high in entrance examinations, but locked out from most of the Federal Government Colleges and Universities. Even though they were survivors, they were still categorized as educationally advantaged. Fifty-three years after the war, the educationally disadvantaged states are still educationally disadvantaged and the Igbos are still blamed for everything and denied major government presence and projects.

Locked out of schools and out of public services, the Igbos embraced trading and other menial jobs that a man could do with his hands to feed his family. To survive, they spread out again to the big cities with memories of their dead ones and rundown homeland. Everywhere they went, they lived frugally, and sometimes, a master lived in his shop with his 5 boys until they made enough money to rent a one-room apartment.

Prominent Igbo Men and their Contributions in the Nigerian Independence movements

There are some notable men who continuously contributed to Igbos people's successes and futures. Through their tireless efforts and passions, they left an enduring legacy that continues to inspire generations. Most notable among them were:

Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996) was born on November 16, 1904 in Zungeru, Northern Nigeria. Azikiwe was a well-educated man, having attended several institutions in the United States of America. He attended Howard University and transferred and graduated from Lincoln University of PA in 1930. He also attended the University of Pennsylvania. He was known for his Pan-Africanism and his efforts in the struggle for Nigeria's independence.

Nnamdi Azikiwe often referred to as 'Zik', was a Nigerian statesman and political leader who served as the 3rd governor-general of Nigeria between 1960 and 1963 and the 1st president of Nigeria during the First Nigerian Republic, from 1963 to 1966. He was the driving force behind the nation's independence and is known as the 'Father of Nigerian nationalism.'

He played a crucial role in the struggle for Nigerian independence and became the country's first indigenous Governor-General and later the President. Additionally, he made substantial efforts to advance education among the Igbo population, establishing schools and educational institutions to improve literacy and knowledge within the community. Through his leadership, advocacy, and educational initiatives, Azikiwe left a lasting impact on the Igbo people, helping to shape their identity and future within Nigeria. He passed away on May 11, 1996 in Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Nwafor Orizu (Abyssinia Akweke Nwafor Orizu) (1914-1999) was one of the Igbo nationalist who followed the footsteps of Azikiwe. He attended universities in the United States of America. He was born into a royal family in Nnewi, Anambra State, of Nigeria. Orizu went to the United States in 1939, earning a BA degree in government at Ohio State University and an M.A. degree at Columbia University.

Like Azikiwe, Orizu was one of the renowned Igbo nationalists who contributed to the emancipation of Nigeria by compelling the colonial overloads to accord equal social status to Nigerians. He was elected into the Federal House of Representatives and became the President of the Senate – a position that made him number 3 citizen of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the time. He was the first Chief Whip of the N.C.N.C. party in the Regional and Central Legislatures that made him party champion. He served as the Acting President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria each time Azikiwe travelled out of the country. He was the acting President who surrendered power to the military under Gen. Aguyi Ironsi on January 15, 1966 when the first military coup took place.

Kingsley Ozuomba Mbadiwe was born in 1915 in Arondizuogu under the then Orlu division of the present day Imo State. He was a central figure in Nigerian political history for more than forty years. Starting in 1936 he left Nigeria to study at Columbia and the New York University for collegiate education. In 1941, with others students from West British African colonies, they founded ASA - African Studies Association.

In 1950s he became a frontline nationalist (K.O.Mbadiwe: A Nigerian Political Biography- Lynch, H.R. 2012). He became the most important figure in the Nigerian Federal Government in 1952 and was a very crucial figure during Nigeria's first military coup in 1966. During this time he held a succession of important Cabinet positions and was Parliamentary Leader of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), which was in a ruling alliance with the Northern People's Congress (NPC). In contrast, his older prominent political contemporaries, Azikiwe, of the NCNC, carved his political careers largely at the regional levels. But Mbadiwe's focus was always at the national levels, for he had his eyes on the Federal seat, hoped to be the president of Nigeria.

Kalu Ezera (19-) was among the renowned Igbo Nationalists whose revolt helped to compel the political overloads to relinquish the social and political powers of Nigeria to the Nigerians. He graduated from Lincoln University of Pennsylvania in 1953. Like his predecessors- Azikiwe and Orizu, Mbadiwe, just to mention but a few, he used the political knowledge he gained from attending universities in overseas, as weaponry in his quest for Nigerian nationhood. A lot of his speeches were published in *Lincolnian- Lincoln University of Pennsylvania Newspaper*. He was the African Students' Association President in 1952 at Lincoln University PA, his Alma Mater. His speech "West Africa in our World" delivered in Oxford Pennsylvania, made him notable. In this speech, he explained how Lincoln University has supplied the motive power which has succeeded to revolutionize the entire policy of colonial regime in West Africa. This motive power, he said, was embodied in the astute and indefatigable leadership of Nigeria's Azikiwe and Gold Coast's Nkrumah, both of Lincoln University classes of 1930 and 1939 respectively.

With classical rhetoric and oratory clarity, he stated his points to the over-all needs of a "Free West Africa" in our contemporary universe.

Jaja Anucha Wachuku, (1918-) was a prominent Nigerian politician and diplomat. Wachuku was born on January 1, 1918, in Oguta, present-day Imo State, Nigeria. He received his education at various institutions, including the University of London, where he studied law.

He was a notable figure in Nigerian history, making significant contributions to the political landscape of the country, particularly in the pre-independence and early post-independence periods. One of Wachuku's notable contributions was his involvement in Nigeria's struggle for independence from British colonial rule. He was a key figure in the nationalist movement and played a vital role in negotiating Nigeria's independence constitution as a member of the Nigerian delegation to the London Constitutional Conference in 1953.

He held ministerial positions such as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Minister of Education, and Minister of Information. He was also Nigeria's first Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, where he represented Nigeria on the global stage. Overall, Jaja Wachuku's contributions to Igbo and Nigerian society were significant, particularly in the realms of politics, diplomacy, and education. He played a crucial role in shaping Nigeria's path to independence and its early years as a sovereign nation.

Conclusion

It might be pertinent to realize that, immediately after the Nigerian/Biafran Civil War, the Igbos went back to the big cities in other parts of the country, not taking into considerations the casualties they suffered in the hands of Yorubas and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups. It is strange but true and sounds like a *déjà vu*, that, the Igbos when back to the big cities of those ethnic groups who "slaughtered" their kith and kin, was to show their support to one Nigeria. They were in Yoruba lands, especially in the hinterlands and bought over the swamps and the term "sand filling" became popular. They bought thick mangrove forests and in mowing them down, they became "Osuofia"

and money was coming in for the Yorubas. The places the Igbos bought and transformed had laid waste for years. With vigor, they negotiated for lands to build markets and welcome state and local government taxes. Despite all these efforts made by the Igbos in transforming the Yoruba hinterlands, these favors never deterred the Yorubas from developing anti-Igbo messages, once again.

Fifty-four years after the Civil War, the issues of corruption, nepotism, educational inequalities, economic imbalance, and internal strife, in Nigeria that prompted the five majors - Chukwuemeka Nzewu and his compatriots to strike - are still glaringly evident in the faces of Nigerians. Gen. Yakubu Gowon's proclamation of "No Victor and No Vanquished" remains a mere rhetoric, because, the Igbos have remained sidelines and have been politically "eliminated" from the map of Nigerian for so long.

Federal government policies have been entrenched to suppress the Igbos, as they have been alienated in the configuration of the country's political affairs. The only plausible explanation to these unhealthy political isolations were, that the Hausa-Fulanis and the Yorubas sought to undermine and limit the Igbos' intellectual advancement.

It is regrettable to note that, corruption, nepotism, and "Godfatherism" have deeply infiltrated the fabric of Nigerian method of governance. The traumatic effects, evident in persistent ethnic animosities and distrust of the Civil War, continues to shape the narrative of Nigerian identity and the nation's future.

Our leaders, both national and state levels, still govern the affairs of the country with impunity and audacity. Mismanagement of public funds and public lootings are celebrated.

With these ethnic issues still persistent in the Nigerian political arenas, Nigeria is once again taking a leap into the dark by all political measure and flying on the wings of dangerous doctrine, that Nigerian inching towards "extinction?"

A call on the country's watchdogs, at national, state and local levels, to come to a consensus to curb these ethnic and tribalistic issues that have so much divided Nigerian. Nigeria and Nigerians cannot afford again taking a leap into the dark by all political measure and flying on the wings of dangerous doctrine that might lead Nigeria into disintegration.

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