

IGWEBUIKE ETHIC AND THE CASE OF BIAFRAN AGITATION

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Abstract

The phenomenon of diverse people espousing different ethical schemes, demonstrates that ethics, for the most part, originates from the history and experiences of a people. Every society, by reason of distinct experiences, are structured in peculiar ways, and are guided by peculiar principles of action. This, by no means, derogates from the universalist appeal of ethics which, was patently espoused by Immanuel Kant, but a sober reminder of the feminist epistemologists' grounds for perspective relativity of ideas. The centrality of Igwebuiké — literally 'strength in numbers' ethic, to life and development in Igboland, cannot be exaggerated. Its significance to the protection of human and natural rights echoed by the UNDP, and the sustenance of the Biafran agitation for nationhood, is weighty. In this paper, we established the Biafran agitation within the gambit of the Igwebuiké ethic, and by the same token, demonstrated the futility of applying physical solutions to a collective ideological task. We underscored the profuse immersion of the Igwebuiké ethic in the origin, growth and sustenance of the Biafran agitation, which, in so doing, established a strong nexus between them. By using the hermeneutic and expository methods, we critically appraised the problems, and proposed that for a lasting solution to the current quagmire, efforts must be made to assuage the pains of the right's violations of the Igbos.

Keywords: Igwebuiké, Biafran agitation, ethics, self-determination, collective ideology.

Introduction

Ethics is a Science of Conduct,⁷³ which encapsulates the fundamental standards by which we live. Every society has its own ethics—written or unwritten. Although individuals might have distinct ethics in the sense of self-imposed standards within which they operate, personal ethics are generally subsumed under the gambit of that of the larger society. In fact, it is rare for an individual to

⁷³ P. Krishnamurthy, 'An Introduction to Ethics', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, (2011), 3,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228237796_An_Introduction_to_Ethics, accessed 7 December 2021.

have an ethics that is clearly different from that of the society they belong to. This is so because ethics is not a product of nature but that of nurture; it is not innate, but is rather learned or passed down through various processes of socialization. Once a child is born, he/she begins to assimilate (both formally and informally) the principles of conduct governing their people's way of life concerning what is right or wrong, good or bad. This integration provides a safe guide to human conduct, as it is only on a people's ethical groundwork that actions are weighed.

Ethics originates from the history and experiences of a people such that the ethical system of a society is structured in line with human practices and environmental impacts. As there are different people with peculiar experiences, so are there different ethics. Apparently, what is considered ethically right in one part of the world, might not be seen in that light in some other parts of the world. This does not derogate from the universalist character of philosophical ethics which, by hinging on reasoning, promotes actions that are acceptable across board—a position specially advocated in Immanuel Kant's deontological principles. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, Kant underscores the point that ethical actions should follow universal moral laws.⁷⁴ But given that every society, by reason of distinct experiences, are structured in peculiar ways, there then exists peculiarities in the world ethical system.

The Igbos, much like other ethnic nationalities, historically have an ethical system that suits their reality and experiences. This system is manifest in the values espoused and the norms that guide their individual and collective actions. It is within this ambience that we situate the *Igwebuike* — literally 'strength in numbers' ethic. *Igwebuike* is an unwritten ethic that is passed down from one generation to another through various socialization processes like storytelling, proverbs and folklores. Its centrality to life and development is germane, as it is the underlying factor that guides the actions and inactions of the people both individually and as a group, consciously or otherwise. In this essay, we shall attempt to link the Biafran agitation within the gambit of the *Igwebuike* ethic, and by the same token, demonstrate the futility of applying material solutions to a collective ideological challenge. But in order to achieve this, we must first adumbrate the concept of *Igwebuike* and its place in traditional Igbo society.

Understanding the Leitmotif of Igwebuike Ethic

⁷⁴ I. Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Trans. by Ellington, J.W. (3rd ed., Hackett, 1993 [1785]), 4:421.

The Igbo — one of the three major tribes in Nigeria, occupy the South-Eastern region of the country. Its organizational structure is majorly acephalous, as there are rarely any positions for monarchs with supreme powers. It is a decentralized and egalitarian society. Chikendu aptly captures the nature of the traditional Igbo society as he notes:

The basic unit was the family, the most operative unit being the kindred, then the village and the town. The village groups were not organized in kingdoms. The function of government was carried on by a council of elders who shared power in various levels of intensity with various other groups – age grades, titled men, women, ritual priests, etc.⁷⁵

The Igbo traditional society is called a gerontocracy (government by a council of elders) known as ‘Ndi iche’. The people are known for their rich socio-cultural heritage, which, for the most part, revolve around their ethical system. The training of a child in Igboland is not solely the duty of the nuclear family. The community at large is involved. In fact, parents, guardians, relatives and a wider circle of kinsmen in Igboland consider it a sacred trust of discharging their obligations as it concerns the socialization of the Igbo child.⁷⁶ During the formative period of life, the community ensures that the child is properly initiated into the traditional ‘cults’, and be well versed in the tradition and practices of the community, in order to become a responsible member of the clan. This practice is borne out of the cherished system of communalism that caters to the needs of the individual *writ large*.

The traditional Igboland is community structured. Columbus Ogbujah incisively outlays this in *The Idea of Personhood*.⁷⁷ All human life and activities revolve in and around the community such that one could rightly say that to exist, is to exist in a group, in a community. A person is a person within a community that provides collective security as well as safeguards all that is precious to the individual entity.⁷⁸ This, in turn, elicits in the individuals, a high sense of communality. Everyone contributes their quota for the enhancement of the common stock. The idea is that when the individual alone is enriched, the wealth is only for his family, but when the community is enriched, the wealth trickles

⁷⁵ P. N. Chikendu, ‘Nigerian Politics and Government. Enugu: Academic Publishing Company. 2003, p.18

⁷⁶ B. O. Ukeje. *Education for Social Reconstruction*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.1976, p.54.

⁷⁷ Here, Ogbujah provides insights for this communal structure by analyzing the meaning and relationships of the human person in Igbo land. See: C. N. Ogbujah. *The Idea of Personhood*. (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 2006).

⁷⁸ P. N. C. Okigbo. *Ahiajiku Lecture*. (Owerri: Culture Division of Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports, 1986), 14.

down to every individual within the society. It was a sacred duty for one to exert oneself for the growth of one's community. Ogbujah avers:

The Igbos carry out their civic and social responsibilities according to the provisions of *Omenala* (community tradition). At one time, it may require a participation in a communal labour, as in clearing of village pathways; at other times it may demand all the members of the community to cultivate a member's farmland. When one's palm tree is being tapped, it specifies certain days when one makes available the palm wine for general free consumption....They afford one the opportunity of contributing his own quota to the growth of the community that has nursed him into existence.⁷⁹

The mark of a true Igbo is his ability to prioritize communal interest over his personal ones, and his greatest joy is found in amusing himself in the midst of companions.

The individual efforts of the citizens are exerted towards achieving the greatest good of the community. *Igwebuiké* is thus, anchored on the Igbo system of communalism. Etymologically, the concept derives from two nouns and a copula, namely: *Igwe* - number, people; *bu* - is/are (copula); and *ike* - strength/power. *Igwebuiké*, literally 'number is strength' or 'number is power,' is a phenomenon which depicts that when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or constitute an insurmountable force.⁸⁰ The Igbos recognize that human beings are not self-sufficient; that no one is an island. This lends credence to the communal structure of personhood which Ogbujah establishes from the biological, operational, ontological and processual standpoints.⁸¹ Human beings as such can only survive and thrive in reciprocal love and co-operation. The flaw of insufficiency in individuals, the Igbos believe, is not found in the society, as the society is one super structure that is self-sufficient as a result of the co-operative spirit of its members. The *Igwe* is hence a super human that possesses might that no single individual possesses. This is reiterated in the Igbo proverb, *I shiri oha nri, oha ga e ri cha ya, mana Oha shiere gi, I gaghi e richa* - if an individual cooks for the community, the community will finish it, but if the community cooks for an individual, the individual will not finish it. The community enjoys power against which no individuals can compete.

⁷⁹ C. N. Ogbujah. *The Idea of Personhood*, 99.

⁸⁰ I. A. Kanu, 'Igwebuiké and Being in Igbo Ontology', *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 4, No. 5, (2017), 12.

⁸¹ C. N. Ogbujah. *The Idea of Personhood*, 139-145.

Igwebuike is the action of human beings as an entity.⁸² It involves the actualization of a common interest through collective capability. Although *Igwebuike* is community centered, it does not lose sight of the individual needs. In fact, the hallmark of *Igwebuike* philosophy is 'no individual, no community'; that is, if there are no individual persons, there is no group formation as a result of the aggregate of individual persons.⁸³ It is the various strengths of the individuals that make up the insurmountable strength of the *Igwe*—community. Thus, *Igwebuike* ethic is not some lofty abstract ideology. It is the sum total of the ethics of the individuals in the society. Although individualistic spirit is encouraged, it is always understood in relation to the other.⁸⁴ Rather than being anchored in 'individualism' which is rooted in egocentricism, the Igbo individualistic spirit emphasizes and promotes personal achievements—one's individuality, which often manifests on the number of signature projects attributed to one within the community.⁸⁵ What this means is that the traditional individualistic ethic transcends from egoism to altruism. Kanu buttresses this point as he notes:

Unlike Western ethics that emphasizes individual rights, and sometimes to the point of promoting selfish interests at the expense of the interests of the other, *Igwebuike* goes beyond the self, to feel the pain of the other as though it were my pain, the redemption of the other as though it were my redemption.⁸⁶

In a nutshell, the *Igwebuike* philosophy determines the ethical system which individuals are required to adhere. The implication is that the overriding motif of ethical principles is to foster the common good or interest of the community. *Igwebuike* ethic argues that to be is to live in solidarity and harmony, and to live outside the parameters of complementary solidarity is to suffer alienation.⁸⁷ It is to live like a fish cast out of water unto a sandy beach, panting. To promote complementary solidarity, there is high regard for the ethics of honesty and integrity. These ethical principles are germane for conflict resolution, as they are

⁸² J. I Onebunne & N. A Mirian, 'Igwebuike, Individual Freedom and Responsibility in African Ethics', *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6(9), 120, <https://www.acjol.org/index.php/iaajah/article/view/978/963>, accessed 7 December 2021

⁸³ J. I Onebunne & N. A Mirian, 'Igwebuike, 120.

⁸⁴ I. A. Kanu, 'Igwebuike and African Ethics', *Igwebuikepedia*, 2012, Sec. 3, <https://www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikepedia-articles.php?open=25>, accessed 7 December 2021

⁸⁵ C. N. Ogbujah. *The Idea of Personhood*, 101-102.

⁸⁶ I. A. Kanu, 'Igwebuike and African Ethics', *Igwebuikepedia*, 2012, Sec. 3.

⁸⁷ J. I Onebunne & N. A Mirian, 'Igwebuike, 120.

essential for the restoration of harmonious relationships amongst members of the community. Other allied ethos that bolster the *Igwebuike* ethic include respect for life, justice and freedom. We shall return to these values in the later part of this research.

The phenomenon of *Igwebuike* ethic depicts a symbiotic relationship between the individual and the community (*Igwe*) such that the *Igwe* is responsible for the actions of the individual and the individual as well, is responsible for the actions of the *Igwe*. This is possible because of the cherished Igbo principle of *sharedness* of life.⁸⁸ People are evaluated in the light of their community, and vice versa. For instance, we hear Igbos make statements like: Ngwa people are XYZ, so this man from Ngwa is XYZ; or put differently, this man from Ngwa is XYZ, so Ngwa people are XYZ. It is of less concern to the people that psychologists declare such statements as stereotypical, or logicians see them as fallacious. What matters is its informative and pragmatic relevance to the people as it reinforces the Igbo ethical system, which reminds individuals that their actions or inactions have direct bearing on their community. Although this system of thought is not peculiar to the Igbos, as it is common in other African cultures, and most recently applied on a broader global stage where diplomatic policies that impact countries are made based on the actions of a few citizens of those countries, it is specially reinforced by Igbo values.

The Biafran Agitation

Biafra is an almost rhomboid shaped territory which is demarcated to the west by the lower reaches of the River Niger and its Delta, to the East by the Obudu plateau and the Highlights of Oban and Ikom, to the south by the Bight of Biafra and to the North by an administrative boundary following, approximately, the seven (7) deg. N. latitude.⁸⁹ The Biafran region is predominantly occupied by the Igbos. The Biafran agitation for secession began in 1967 by some Igbo nationalists led by Lieutenant Colonel Odimegwu Ojukwu who believed they could no longer coexist with Nigeria as a result of injustice perpetuated against the Igbos. After the coup and counter-coup of 1966 deepened Nigeria's ethnic tensions, an

⁸⁸ I. A. Kanu, "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Ethic of Reciprocity", *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (2019), 4.

⁸⁹ A. U. Ebony, "A Critical Reflection on the Biafran Agitations and the questions of Nigeria amalgamation in 1914." *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 3 No 5 (2017), 61.

approximately 30,000 Igbo civilians were killed in the north.⁹⁰ In search of political solution, Ojukwu instigated a meeting with the federal government and northern leaders at Aburi, Ghana, which agreed to a less centralized union of regions. But on return to Nigeria, the federal government reneged on the agreement and unilaterally enacted policies to shortchange the Biafra enclave. Piqued by this action, Ojukwu, on 30 May 1967, declared independence of the Republic of Biafra, citing the apparent inability of the federal government to protect the lives and properties of the Igbos.⁹¹ His speech followed the resolution passed on May 27, 1967 by the Chiefs, Elders, and Representatives of Eastern Nigeria, which reads in parts:

Whereas we cherish certain inalienable human rights and state obligations such as the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness; the right to acquire, possess, and defend property; the provision of security; and the establishment of good and just government based on the consent of the governed; Whereas in practical demonstration of these beliefs, our people settled in other parts of Nigeria, served their country in many capacities, and contributed immensely to the growth and development of Nigeria; Whereas we are living witnesses of injustices and atrocities committed against Eastern Nigeria, among which are the premeditated murder of over 30,000 of our innocent men, women, and children by Northern Nigerians, the calculated destruction of the property of our sons and daughters, the shameless conversion of 2,000,000 Eastern Nigerians into refugees in their own country, all this without remorse; Whereas in consequence of these and other acts of discrimination and injustice, we have painfully realized that the Federation of Nigeria has failed, and has given us no protection.... Now, therefore, in consideration of these and other facts and injustices, we, the Chiefs, Elders, and Representatives of all the twenty provinces of Eastern Nigeria... hereby solemnly: 1. mandate His Excellency Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, to declare at the earliest practicable

⁹⁰ "Nigeria 1967–1970". *Armed Conflict Events Database*. *onwar.com*. *Biafran Secession*. 16 December 2000, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080905090002/http://www.onwar.com/aced/data/bravo/biafra1967.htm>, accessed 10 December 2021.

⁹¹ B. Philips. "Biafra: Thirty years on". *BBC News*, (13 January 2000), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/596712.stm>, accessed 10 December 2021.

date Eastern Nigeria a free, sovereign, and independent state by the name and title of the REPUBLIC OF BIAFRA.⁹²

On the 6th of July 1967, the Federal forces, under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon, attacked Biafra to force it back to the union, and this ignited the civil war. Biafra enjoyed independence from 1967 till 1970 when they were defeated by the Nigerian forces. Although the civil war ended in 1970, the Biafran agitation endures, as the problems that led to the war are yet unresolved. In fact, the agitation has over the years birthed three movements with different approaches, but with same ideals and vision.⁹³

These movements include Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM); and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).⁹⁴ MASSOB, which was led by Ralph Uwazuruike, was declared a non-violent agitation, and the leadership advertised a 25-stage plan to achieving its goal peacefully.⁹⁵ It held rallies, hoisted the Biafran flag at significant points in the South East and introduced the Biafran currency. MASSOB was accused of inciting violence by the Nigerian Government, and their leader Ralph Uwazuruike was arrested and detained on grounds of treasonable offence in 2005, but released in 2007. MASSOB lost its momentum when a large number of its followers were detained and allegedly executed secretly by the Nigerian Government forces. Years later, a UK based lawyer Benjamin Onwuka, with the support of Igbos in diaspora founded the Biafra Zionist Movement. Benjamin was a little more diplomatic with his approach. He sent an application to the United Nations' (UN) secretariat, dated August 6, 2012 with reference BZM/OS./REPUBLIC OF BIAFRA, noting the insecurity of lives and property and a lack of religious freedom/worship as grounds for the application.⁹⁶ Excerpts from the application read thus:

It is now abundantly clear that the security of lives and property of the Biafran People are no longer guaranteed in the entity called Nigeria. It is also very clear that the Right of the Biafran peoples to peacefully practice

⁹² C. O. Ojukwu. *Biafra Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu* (NY: Harper & Row, 1969), 191-196.

⁹³ A. U. Ebony, A Critical Reflection on the Biafran Agitations, 61.

⁹⁴ A. U. Ebony, A Critical Reflection on the Biafran Agitations, 61.

⁹⁵ Oneindia, 'Dream of free Biafra revives in southeast Nigeria', [media release], 11 July 2006, para. 12, <https://www.oneindia.com/2006/07/11/dream-of-free-biafra-revives-in-southeast-nigeria-1152596368.html?story=5>, accessed 10 December 2021.

⁹⁶ C. Orji, 'The Biafra Zionist Movement', *The Nation*, (6 November 2012), para.6, <https://thenationonlineng.net/the-biafra-zionist-movement/>, accessed 11 December 2021

their religion and freedom of association under the United Nations Charter of freedom of Association is no longer safe and guaranteed in the entity called Nigeria. Therefore, the people of Biafra have resolved that on 5th November 2012, we shall be re-declaring our independence and opt of Nigeria in order to guarantee and protect the Biafran Peoples' Right to practice their religion without being killed and bombed.⁹⁷

The most recent organization in the Biafran struggle, however, is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Like the previous bodies, its main aim is to restore an independent state of Biafra in the Old Eastern Region of Nigeria, comprising mainly today's South-East and South-South Regions of Nigeria; and also parts of the Middle Belt such as Benue and Kogi States, through an independence referendum.⁹⁸ Nnamdi Kanu, a political activist and leader of the IPOB group garnered significant media attention to the body through his radio broadcasts. IPOB has criticized the Nigerian federal government for poor investment, political alienation, inequitable resource distribution, ethnic marginalization, heavy military presence, and extra-judicial killings in the South-Eastern, South-Central and parts of North-Central regions of the country.⁹⁹ The movement has succeeded in mobilizing millions of Igbo youths worldwide who have been protesting the peace of Nigerian embassies and officials around the world.¹⁰⁰ Their largely peaceful protests in Nigeria, has often been broken down by military/police violence which, lead to human casualties. On 19 October 2015, IPOB leader Kanu was arrested by the Nigerian security forces on charges of sedition, ethnic incitement and treasonable felony.¹⁰¹ After he was granted bail, he later fled the country in 2017 when the military launched an attack on his home at Afaraukwu, Abia State. He was subsequently declared wanted by the government. As a follow-up, the Buhari regime in 2017, proscribed and declared

⁹⁷ C. Orji, 'The Biafra Zionist Movement', para.6.

⁹⁸ A. Simon, 'Mystery of the missing Biafran separatist', *The Continent*, (6 October 2017), para. 4, <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-10-06-00-mystery-of-the-missing-biafran-separatist-1/>, accessed 12 December 2021

⁹⁹ M. O. 'The dream of Biafra lives on in underground Nigerian radio broadcasts', *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April 2019, para. 8, <https://www.latimes.com/world/africa/la-fg-nigeria-war-legacy-20190430-story.html>, accessed 11 December 2021

¹⁰⁰ A. U. Ebony, A Critical Reflection on the Biafran Agitations, 61.

¹⁰¹ O. Ibeanu, N. Orji, K.C. Iwuamadi, 'Biafra Separatism: Causes, Consequences and Remedies', *Researchgate.net*, 3 November 2016,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312129707_Biafra_Separatism_Causes_Consequences_and_Remedies, accessed 11 December 2021

IPOB a terrorist organization, even when virtually the rest of the world refused to follow suit. On June 29, 2021, the Nigerian government announced the re-arrest of Kanu in a rather bizarre manner.¹⁰² He has since been remanded by the department of State Services, and is answering the charges proffered against him at the court of law.

Igwebuiké Ethic: A Concrete Grounding for Biafran Agitation

As a nation, Nigeria is constituted of a pluriformity of cultures, religions, languages and values. The members of each ethnic group are identified and defined by their ethics (acceptable principles of conduct) which are in turn structured by their values. Values are implicit and explicit assumptions or beliefs that constitute the foundation of ethical actions.¹⁰³ Owing that all rational choices and decisions originate from underlying values, and given that assumptions or beliefs –being reflective of values, determine individuals’ actions in specific situations, values are thus, the livewires of societies. Little wonder they are held in high esteem. This is perhaps, why conflicts that border on values are a tad more difficult to handle.

For over half a century, precisely fifty-two (52) years after the end of the Nigerian civil war, the Biafran agitation persists not only because the factors that birthed it still exist, but because these factors are at odds with the ethics and values of the Igbos of the South East of Nigeria. In the preceding section, we established the centrality of *Igwebuiké* ethic in the life and values of the traditional Igbo. To set forth the basis of the aforesaid grounding in this section, we shall discuss the Biafran agitation in the light of the various elements of *Igwebuiké* ethic.

The traditional Igbo community is an egalitarian one akin in various respects to the modern day democracy. The Igbos propagated sublime democratic features such as liberty, equality and accountability even before the political system gained traction within the Nigerian state. In a typical Igbo community, all indigenes have equal rights and powers. These rights, as recently categorized by the UNDP, include the right to life, freedom of movement, freedom of worship, freedom of speech, right to self-determination, etc. With respect to life, the Igbos believe that human life is inherently sacred and precious. This belief is anchored in the understanding that human beings are *Imago Dei* (made in the image of

¹⁰² P. John, ‘Nnamdi Kanu rearrested, remanded in DSS Custody’, HotNaija, 29 June 2021, para. 7, <https://www.hotnaija.com.ng/2021/06/nnamdi-kanu-re-arrested-in-uk.html>, accessed 10 December 2021

¹⁰³ C. Ogbujah, African Cultural Values and Inter-Communal Relations: The Case with Nigeria, *Developing Country Studies*, 4/24 (2014), 208.

God), and inextricably linked to the divine. Everyone has a *Chi*¹⁰⁴ that determines the course of their life. Hence, if an individual is successful, it is believed that their *Chi* willed it. Also, if an individual is unsuccessful it is also believed that it is the will of their *Chi*, as the saying goes: “*omere ma chi ya ekweghi, onye uta-atala ya* – when one struggles to survive and his *chi* refuses to assent, he should not be blamed.” *Chi* is the ‘guardian spirit’—a spark of *Chineke* (creator God) which He bequeaths everyone at birth. It is man’s portion of divine being.¹⁰⁵ And as possessing a spark of God, every human life is sacrosanct and should not be tampered with by man.

Unfortunately, the operators of the Nigerian state have constantly violated this ethic, or have turned blind eyes to its detractors. Right from the early years of independence, the Igbos have suffered gross violations, as their sons and daughters have lost their lives to meaningless attacks borne out of prejudices. In 1966, for instance, in what is termed an anti-Igbo pogrom, between 8000 – 30000 Igbos and other people of Southern Nigeria living in Northern Nigeria were massacred.¹⁰⁶ This was followed by the 1967 Asaba massacre of about 500 men, and the constant targeting of Igbo lives and properties in all the riots in northern Nigeria till date. In recent times, the terror attacks in Igbo states perpetrated by the so-called unknown gunmen (who are widely believed to be state actors), has abruptly ended the lives of many Igbo sons and daughters. Seeing, as Onwuka earlier averred, that the security of their lives and property are no longer guaranteed in the entity called Nigeria, and given that individually they could achieve little or nothing, Biafrans could not but band together to struggle for survival. Thus, the massive support of Igbos to the Biafran agitation for statehood, is both a manifestation of the realization that there is strength or power in numbers (*igwebuiké*), as well as their collective display of disgust with the violations to one of the core values of *igwebuiké* ethic—sanctity of human life.

Allied to this are the primordial liberty to function according to one’s choices, and the respect of the inherent dignity of agents of choices. The Igbos enjoy unabated freedom of worship. In fact, most families in the traditional society had their various deities and the shrines where they worshiped them in their

¹⁰⁴ *Chi* enjoys double signification in Igbo ontology: on one hand, it is taken as an ensemble of ‘fortune package’ from God to the individual, which connotes the idea of blind fate; on the other, it is understood as a ‘guardian spirit’ emanating from God—the spark of God in every human being. This later sense depicts *chi* as the principle of individuation which is strictly personal, indivisible and un-shareable.

¹⁰⁵ C. N. Ogbujah. *The Idea of Personhood*, 132.

¹⁰⁶ L. Murray, ‘Poison and Medicine: Ethnicity, Power and Violence in a Nigerian City,’ *The Royal African Society*, 104/417, (2005), 710.

compounds. This gives vent to other enjoyed freedoms like that of movement, speech, association, etc. Today, the Igbos are settled in large numbers in virtually all part of the country, and indeed, in almost every corner of the world, especially in places with good economic prospects. A typical Igbo enjoys freedom of speech. Like in Athenian democracy, every opinion of qualified citizens is considered. But unlike in ancient Athens, women and youths are allowed to express their views through the various *Umu Ada* associations and age groups respectively. However, the opinions of minors, much as in world democracies where only those 18 and above are enfranchised, are usually not solicited for.

Since the 1966 Igbo pogrom in the north, their right to freedom of movement has been drastically limited in Nigeria. Everywhere they went, they met with discriminations in terms of businesses and job opportunities; resistance in terms of political assimilation, and sometimes, outright violence on their lives and properties. Recently, this right's violation became glaring when seventy-two (72) Igbo Lagosians were arrested and deported from Lagos to Onitsha, for no known offence in law, by the Lagos State Government.¹⁰⁷ More so, in 2017, following a successful sit-at-home organised by two pro-Biafra groups, IPOB and MASSOB, in remembrance of the millions of Biafrans that lost their lives during the civil war, the Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF) on June 6 issued a three months ultimatum for all Igbos in the 19 northern states to vacate the region.¹⁰⁸ These constant moves to stifle Igbos' capacity for choices and liberal lifestyle—another core value of *igwebuike* ethic, have elicited grassroots support for the Biafra agitation.

In a typical Igbo community, all indigenes enjoy equal opportunities and same right to self-determination. In fact, with the absence of monarchs with special privileges and accrued wealth from communal tax payment, the differing factor is hard work. Everyone is inclined to work hard because their destiny lies in their hands. There are no handouts for lazy ones. Individuals are passionate in the pursuit of their heart's desires, although with deference to the interests of the community. This hard work has spurred the phenomenal Igbo apprenticeship system which, vividly manifests entrepreneurial spirit that is hinged on *Igwebuike*

¹⁰⁷ I. Nwamaka, 'Deportation of Igbos In Nigeria: The Constitutional Implications', *Pinnacle Sociology & Anthropology*, Vol. 2, No. 3, p.2.

¹⁰⁸ E. Onyeji, 'Northern youth group which gave Igbos ultimatum reviewing its stance', 24 July 2017, para 6, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/238045-northern-youth-group-gave-igbos-ultimatum-reviewing-stance.html>, accessed 12 December 2021

ethic. The Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) is a business philosophy of shared prosperity that utilizes the induction strategy to initiate young Igbos into entrepreneurial projects by already established entrepreneurs from their immediate communities. This *Igwebuike* model has, for the most part, led to meaningful engagement of the youth, economic prosperity and relative peace for the region.

However, the granting of unequal opportunities based on primordial affiliations such as ethnicity, language, or religion, and its quasi institutionalization through the 'Federal Character' principle in Nigeria, is at odds with Igbo value for enterprise and hard work. This flawed system, for the most part, celebrates mediocrity on the grave of competency, and sacrifices meritocracy at the altar of nepotism. It has so pulverized the nation that majority of Igbos want to opt out of the union. Given that "ideals and values are the lynchpin around which social life flourishes,"¹⁰⁹ and owing that *Igwebuike* (strength in numbers) philosophy demands collective responsibility in shielding societal values, it was a matter of "of course" for most Igbos to support the Biafran agitation. The backing is so robust not just because they believe they must suppress, or at least interfere with any action that seeks to destroy their long-held cherished values and ideals (deontic judgment), but because they believe that to do so is a responsibility judgment—a belief that it is mandatory to suppress or resist such an action.

Conclusion

The term *society*—living associated with others, is a sociological concept premised on the capacity of members to embrace common values and ideals. It entails a space where divergent individual aspirations which, sometimes can be inimical to common life, are intricately woven or regulated through the enforcement of ideals such as justice, or the enthronement of communal ethic such as *Igwebuike*. In the absence of unifying ideals and values, the assemblage of people will, strictly, not be considered a society, but a rambling mass of individuals reminiscent of Hobbesian state of nature.¹¹⁰ Values, as essential features of a people, constitute a culture, and are profoundly esteemed by the people.

From the foregoing, it is apparent the origin, growth and sustenance of the Biafran agitation is profusely immersed in the *Igwebuike* ethic. Whilst its

¹⁰⁹ C. N. Ogbujah. "Ideals and Values: Pivots to meaningful Intercultural Dialogue," *Dialogue and Universalism*, XXVII/1, (2017), 9.

¹¹⁰ Ogbujah. Ideals and Values, 9.

beginning is traced to the violation of some elements of *Igwebuike* philosophy like 'biri ma mbiri - live and let live'; 'onye aghala nwanne ya - people should be protective of their kinsmen,' etc., its sustenance has largely depended on the realization that there is 'strength in numbers—*Igwebuike*.' It is this sublime ethic that has unified the Igbos both home and abroad in the fight for freedom and protection of their customs and values. As in identity-related conflicts that are sustained by unifying values, the Biafran agitation has been sustained over half a century by the *Igwebuike* ethic.

Although many may object to the manner by which the IPOB pursues its objective, the Biafran agitation is an exercise of their basic right to self-determination. They want to be stakeholders in determining the course of their lives. Remember, it was the politics of inequity and marginalization that birthed and has continued to fuel its support, in the first place. Therefore, to seek for lasting solution to the current quagmire, efforts must be made to assuage the pains of these violations. This is not a big ask, since the elements of *Igwebuike* ethic, as we illustrated above, are same as the natural rights echoed by UNDP, and fostered by true democratic systems of governance.

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