



BEYOND RELIGION AND ETHNICITY: Sit-At-Home and Freedom Agitations among the Igbo in South-Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

The concept of "sit-at-home" is a recent term used by freedom agitators, particularly of Igbo extraction, to get the attention of the Nigerian government to grant sovereignty to the Indigenous people of Biafra. It is also a concept that challenges the authority of the government while asking it to end marginalisation and to release the leader of IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu, who was arrested and is presently in the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS). Sit-at-Home, particularly in Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi (South-Eastern states of Nigeria), has been given socio-political interpretation. Generally, politics is supposed to be the machinery for resolving conflict and governing the people sincerely. Unfortunately, it has become an agent of disunity in the Nigerian state. This has led to several agitations in the past, but they are more vocal in present times. The agitations for freedom have often triggered violence and conflict between the government and the freedom agitators, given room for the marginalisation of certain regions, and consequently proved Nigeria's government's inability to decide on behalf of the governed. The methodology used in the study is a qualitative phenomenological method. The study examines the challenges and implications of the concept for the socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural, and socio-religious lives of the people of southeastern Nigeria. The paper observes that this face-off could be resolved if the needs of the Igbo were critically examined and attained. The paper calls on the government to organise a dialogue and a referendum in order to end the menace in the South-Eastern region.

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Introduction

The British colonial masters amalgamated the Southern and Northern protectorates to form the entity called Nigeria on January 1st, 1914. This action has been viewed as the major cause of Nigeria's problem and has given rise to different secessionist agendas. Many scholars have questioned this action of the British led by Lord Frederick Lugard, and some have tagged it as a combination of two unmixable elements such as water and oil. Many people and groups

have, on the basis of this problem, often desired to liberate themselves. The Igbo people of Nigeria are one of such entities who think that the union called 'Nigeria' is not favourable to them and this ideology aligns with their belief in the essential role of "chi", which is stated in the Igbo proverb that *Onyekwe, chi yaekwe* (when one says yes, his personal god says yes). This expression functions as a motivator and force in Igbo social behaviour and is totally seen in their attitude toward freedom from marginalization, and victimization, believing that their god will also fight for them as long as they express the will to fight for themselves. However, the struggle for freedom from the Nigerian government has given rise to conflict, protests, violence, and sit-at-home tendencies. In fact, it was the hostility harboured by these never willing elements to mix that threw the nation into witnessing civil war from May 30th 1967 to January 12th 1970. The war was a terrible experience that culminated in the death and injury of many people, and destruction and loss of property worth millions of naira. The reasons for the civil war, according to Ugwueye, Umeanolue and Ihemekwala¹ and Oyewo², are tribal incompatibility of the three major tribes: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, and feelings of alienation. Also, the quest to control the resources in Nigeria and the feelings of non-belongingness resulted in agitations, further resulting in the military coup on January 15th, 1966, followed by counter attacks of bloodshed. So, when Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, on May 30th 1967, through the radio station, declared the then eastern region a sovereign state of the Republic of Biafra (the land of the rising sun), all hell was let loose on this particular tribe and nation (Igbo). At the time, the Igbo people became a genocide target. Millions of Igbo died during the war and millions became refugees. The civil war was estimated to have caused the deaths of about one million people, largely due to malnutrition and disease.³ This struggle for Biafra is still rooted in Igboland and every Igbo man is a Biafran in spirit; he believes strongly in the Igbo spirit of independent hard work and struggle to achieve success.⁴

¹ Luke, Ugwueye, Umeanolue Ikenna, and Ihemekwala Alex. "Israel's Genocide on Amalek (1 Samuel 15) and Jos Crisis in Nigeria: A Socio-Religious Discourse." *African Research Review* 6, no.1 (2012): 223-236. <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v6i1.18>.

² Hussain Taofik Oyewo. "Threat of Secession: The Biafran Story. Conflict Trends 2019/3." *Accord*, 17 November 2019. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/threat-of-secession>. Accessed 28 November 2021.

³ World Peace Foundation. "Nigeria: Civil War." *Mass Atrocity Endings*, 7 August 2015. <https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/nigeria-civil-war/#Works%20Cited>. Accessed 29 November 2021; see also Bridget Conley-Zilkic and Alex de Waal. "Setting the agenda for evidence-based research on ending mass atrocities." *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, Iss. 1 (2014): 55-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.878113>.

⁴ Anayo Okoli, Chidi Nkwopara, Dennis Agbo, Chimaobi Nwaiwu, Ugochukwu Alaribe, Nwabueze Okonkwo, Chinedu Adonu, Chinonso Alozie, Ikechukwu Odu, Steve Oko and Uchenna Ali. "How Monday Sit-At-

From time to time, due to the imbalance of power at the national level and also the failure to employ Igbo citizens in a proportional way in comparison to the other major tribes, particularly the Hausa, there have been occasional conflicts and turmoil. However, it was President Buhari's health challenges that awoke the politics of secession again. Also, the declaration on June 6, 2012, under the sponsorship of the Coalition of Arewa Youth, that Igbo youths should vacate Northern Nigeria before October 1, 2012, further heightened the tensions and the social distance among Nigerians.⁵ The people of the South-East began to agitate for the independence of the Republic of Biafra once again, a situation that has created a volatile environment. Igbo people who believe in *Ikenga*, which is a symbol of strength, by this renewed quest show that they cannot be defeated even though they surrendered during the civil war. Consequently, the people were once again saying that the surrender in 1970 did not mean the end of the fight for the independence of Biafra and, as such, 'they lived to fight another day'. According to Uwalaka, Igbo people feel like proud fighters because the war 'brought out the best in the Igbos (sic) endurance, creativity, adaptability, indomitable will to be, sense of solidarity, sense of common cause, collaboration and vigilance'.⁶

It should be clear that freedom agitation is not peculiar to the Igbo but is a global phenomenon. Adibe⁷ asserted that such movements are seen in the 300-year-old Scottish separatism movement and the long-time Quebec separatism in Canada. Thus, it is not unusual for some form of separatist agitation to form in low-trust, multi-ethnic, and multicultural societies such as Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Morocco and even Spain, in the form of Catalonia.⁸ This kind of separatist movement is not new in Nigeria. Currently, the agitation and movement are led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), who has been detained for nearly one year on several charges, which include treason, terrorism, and operating a pirate radio, Radio Biafra.

Home is Affecting South-East Economy." *Vanguard*, 25 August 2021. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/08/how-monday-sit-at-home-is-affecting-south-east-economy/amp>. Accessed 8 August 2021.

⁵ Jideofor Adibe. "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria: Causes and Trajectories." *Africa in Focus*, 12 July 2017. <https://www.Brookings.Edu/Blog/Africa-In-Focus/2017/07/12/Separatist-Agitations-In-Nigeria-Causes-And-Trajectories>. Accessed 28 November 2021.

⁶ Lawrence Okwuosa, Chinyere T. Nwaoga, and Favour Uroko. "The Post-War Era in Nigeria and the Resilience of Igbo Communal System." *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 13, no.1 (2021): a867. <https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v13i1.867>.

⁷ Jideofor Adibe. "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria: Causes and Trajectories."

⁸ Ciaran Giles and Aritz Parra. "Spain: Top Court Officially Rules Catalan Referendum Illegal." *Chicago Tribune*, 17 October 2017. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-catalonia-spain-independence-20171017-story.html>. retrieved 9 August 2021.

Kanu was refused bail, despite several court rulings granting him bail, but he later jumped bail and fled to the United Kingdom, even though Kanu's special counsel was quoted to have said that his client did not actually jump bail as accused, citing the prevailing scenario in Kanu's hometown under which he escaped for his dear life and personal safety as sufficient enough to deny such an accusation.⁹

However, what is clear enough is that the refusal of the Nigerian government to grant him bail turned him into an international figure, and people all over Nigeria talked about him. Thus, it can be said that the tension for the sovereign state of Biafra became prominent when Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, jumped bail and moved to the United Kingdom, only to be brought back some years later from Kenya and detained by the Department of State Security, DSS, in Abuja. The body (IPOB) introduced sit-at-home as a measure to draw the attention of the government to its demands despite the educational, economic, social, political, and religious challenges to human society, especially in the south-eastern zone. The non-appearance of Kanu in court and the refusal of the federal government of Nigeria to release him made members of IPOB, through the media and publicity secretary of the group, Comrade Emma Powerful, to declare that every Monday would be sit-at-home until Kanu is released from detention.¹⁰ This action has destabilized the region hence Okoliet¹¹ observed that sit-at-home inflict more problems to the people already burdened with lots of hardship and are urging IPOB to adopt another method that will not be very injurious on the Igbo as the struggles continue. Apart from the agitation for independence of the Republic of Biafra, there are other secessionist groups in Nigeria calling for independence, such as the Oduduwa Republic, the Arewa Republic, and the Niger Delta Republic. Some of these groups have received outright rejection from the natives.¹² However, what is common to all these secessionist groups is that

⁹ Gordi Udeajah. "Kanu did not jump bail, says lawyer." *The Guardian*, 27 July 2021. <https://guardian.ng/features/law/kanu-did-not-jump-bail-says-lawyer/>

¹⁰ Vincent Ujumadu. "Sit-At-Home: IPOB Exploiting the Docility of Igbo." *Vanguard*, 21 August 2021. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/08/sit-at-home-ipob-exploiting-the-docility-of-igbo>. Accessed 29 November 2021.

¹¹ Anayo Okoli, Chidi Nkwopara, Dennis Agbo, Chimaobi Nwaiwu, Ugochukwu Alaribe, Nwabueze Okonkwo, Chinedu Adonu, Chinonso Alozie, Ikechukwu Odu, Steve Oko and Uchenna Ali. "How Monday Sit-At-Home is Affecting South-East Economy."

¹² Emmanuel Ani. "Oduduwa Republic: Group Rejects Secession Move, Tackles Igboho, Kanu." *Daily Post*, 6 May 2021. <https://dailypost.ng/2021/05/06/oduduwa-republic-group-rejects-secession-move-tackles-igboho-kanu>. Accessed 29 November 2021.

they all arose as a result of corruption, bad leadership, and marginalisation bedevilling the state of Nigeria.¹³

Due to the marginalisation of the eastern region and alienation, IPOB agitates and calls for all Igbo in the region to observe sit-at-home in solidarity for the release of their leader, Nnamdi Kanu. Many Igbo support Igbo because of the amount of global awareness they have brought to the plight of Igbo. For instance, the former governor of Anambra State, Chukwuemeka Ezeife, led others to court as a mark of solidarity. Also, a group under the aegis of the Highly Respected Igbo Greats, led by First Republic parliamentarian and Minister of Aviation, Chief Mbazulike Amaechi, visited President Mohammad Buhari at the State House, Abuja, calling for the release of Nnamdi Kanu. The response of the presidency to this plea was cited by Adenekan,¹⁴ to wit: "You've made an extremely difficult demand on me as leader of this country. The implication of your request is very serious. In the last six years, since I became President, nobody would say I have confronted or interfered in the work of the Judiciary. At this age, God has spared you, and given you a clear head with a very sharp memory. A lot of people half your age are confused already. But the demand you made is heavy. I will consider it." Igbo people were looking forward to the release of Nnamdi Kanu, which they believed would end Sit-At-Home in the south-east region. Unfortunately, despite the plea of this notable Nigerian and others, force was adopted as a measure by the Federal Government to handle the socio-political and security challenges in the south-east region, a measure which inflated the situation. Hence, this paper holds that force is not the best measure to handle the socio-economic and security challenges in the region and that the government should give a listening ear and adopt proactive measures for the peace, progress, prosperity, and development of the region and for the nation at large, while insisting that there is a need for dialogue and referendum.

The Need for Freedom Agitators

Igbo people are agitating for freedom, freedom from dehumanization, marginalization, victimization, and alienation. These challenges have lasted for more than 40 years after the civil

¹³ John Campbell and Nolan Quinn. "what's Behind Growing Separatism in Nigeria?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 3, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/article/whats-behind-growing-separatism-nigeria>. Accessed 28 November 2021

¹⁴ Samson Adenekan. "Igbo leaders meet Buhari, want Nnamdi Kanu released." *Premium Times* 19 November 2021. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-east/496261-igbo-leaders-meet-buhari-want-nnamdi-kanu-released.html>. Accessed 28 November 2021.

war. Some authors have noted that the reasons for such challenges are that the Hausa and Fulani still believe that the Igbo are the brains behind the first military coup that saw many prominent northern politicians killed. The Hausa also see the Igbo as the cause of their backwardness and trouble with Nigeria. Besides, the Nigeria-Biafra War, in which the Igbo were defeated even though the Nigerian government declared that there was no victor or vanquished, pitted the Igbo against all the other parts of the country.¹⁵ More so, the Igbo people are often perceived as naturally loud, adventurous, and proud people, and this does not go well with other ethnic groups in Nigeria.¹⁶ The agitators therefore do not consider themselves part of the union called 'Nigeria' and so demand self-determination; the release of IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu; and a referendum. One may ask: Does the leadership of various agitators really know what they are fighting for? Do the wishes reflect people's wishes? Or are they fighting for their personal interests or for the interests of the people in that particular region? The case of the agitation for the independence of the Biafra Republic has been a major issue in recent times. As has been stated already, it has drawn international attention to the plight of the people of Eastern Nigeria. Underdevelopment of the region and inability to resolve grievances of the region have contributed to the massive agitations voicing the incompetency of the government, both federal and state, to address the economic and political development of Igboland. Adibe¹⁷ observed that *structural disparity* has resulted in unfairness, injustice, and conflict between the north and the south. For instance, according to him, the northern part of the country constitutes about 79 percent of the country's land mass and an estimated 53.6 percent of its population. The north is, however, much poorer than the south and similarly lags behind the south in education and other modern indices of development. For this reason, some people in the north believe that the region should control a majority, if not all, of governmental power, an ideology that has over the years not settled with the Igbo.

The present Igbo feelings of insecurity with such ideology conformed to the speech of Ojukwu that the people's lives and properties can no longer be protected by any government

¹⁵ Lasse Heerten and Dirk Moses. "The Nigeria-Biafra War: Post-Colonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide." *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, Issue 2-3 (2014): 169-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.936700>.

¹⁶ Lawrence Okwuosa, Chinyere T. Nwaoga, and Favour Uroko. "The Post-War Era in Nigeria and the Resilience of Igbo Communal System."

¹⁷ Jidefor Adibe. "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria: Causes and Trajectories."

based outside eastern Nigeria and that it shall repel any interference in its internal affairs.¹⁸ The clear aim of IPOB is to restore the independent state of Biafra, which was crushed during the 1967-1970 Biafra-Nigeria Civil War. To make its case more precise, IPOB noted the disparity in the current president's appointments, where only 8% are from the five south-east states. This made Mr. Powerful to state that the Igbo are suffering more than neglect; they are hated. Indeed, the IPOB issue extends beyond neglect to include resource distribution and a power struggle. Earlier in the year 2007, Ralph Uwazuruike, the leader of MASSOB, had given his reason for agitating for the sovereign nation of Biafra to be that "there is a lot of tribalism here and we cannot allow our people to be treated like slaves in their own land." In recent times, however, some people have condemned the move for secession, claiming that the IPOB leader was a mere opportunist who sought to make a name for himself after his fallout with Uwazuruike. It has even been claimed that the Igbos are the architects of their own problems, since before Ojukwu came up with the Biafra idea in 1967, the Igbo were at the commanding heights in every area of human endeavour.¹⁹

Many have likened this movement to the northern Boko Haram. For instance, a security expert, Jack Vince, noted that the two movements have more similarities than differences. This understanding is based on the fact that the arrest of the leaders of these groups brought them into prominence and the use of force in handling the members of the groups caused them to rebel against the ruling government. Even though Vince added that as Boko Haram kills people in uniform, so does IPOB, it remains to be seen whether the claim that IPOB is responsible for the killing of people in security outfits is true as the group has never taken responsibility for such acts in the south-east, whereas in the north, Boko Haram proudly claims responsibility for the many nefarious acts committed in that region.²⁰

¹⁸ Chinedu Asadu. "Flashback: The Biafra Declaration by Ojukwu and how the Civil War Ended." *The Cable: news and news unlimited*, 2020. <https://www.thecable.ng/flashback-the-biafra-declaration-by-ujukwu-and-how-the-civil-war-ended/amp>. Accessed 29 November 2021.

¹⁹ Lawal Ogienagbon. "A Wrong Path." *The Nation*, 21 September 2017. <https://thenationonline.net/a-wrong-path/amp>. Accessed 9 August 2021.

²⁰ Chinedu Asadu. "Nigeria: 'You cannot use force to solve every problem' in crushing secessionists, says analyst." *The Africa Report*, 16 April 2021. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.theafricareport.com/79271/nigeria-you-cannot-use-force-to-solve-every-problem-in-crushing-ipob-secessionists-says-analyst/amp>. Accessed 30 November 2021.

Understanding Sit-At-Home and Government Response

Sit-at-home indicates a peaceful but firm protest for the release of the Indigenous People of Biafra leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, and for the sovereignty of the land of the rising sun, Biafra. During this period, everybody is advised to stay indoors in total compliance. All markets, schools, motor parks, airports, and public places in Biafra Land were expected to be shut down from morning to evening. Largely, the sit-at-home takes place every Monday; on the day IPOB marks 'heroes' remembrance day, which also extended to the very day Nnamdi Kanu was presented in court for trial. Recently, the IPOB declared Friday 5th November to Tuesday 9th November, 2021 sit-at-home as a way of calling the attention of the Federal Government of Nigeria to release its leader unconditionally, to give a date for the Biafra referendum and also to attract the international community to the plight of the people of Biafra.

Nevertheless, the government's response to the agitations of IPOB and its sit-at-home order has not been encouraging. For instance, the South-East Governors Forum on Tuesday 5th October, 2021 condemned Monday's sit-at-home order given by the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and growing insecurity in the region.²¹ In Abia State, the home state of the leader of the Indigenous people of Biafra, Governor Okezie Ikpeazu asked the people of the state to go about their lawful duties and businesses, adding that security agents were on the ground to arrest those who might want to breach the peace in the state. Nwosu²² cites the words of the Governor, in his broadcast to mark the 30th Anniversary of the state, "Once again, I implore us all to resume our normal economic and social activities without fear of victimisation while assuring us all that the Abia State Government has put modalities in place in conjunction with security agencies to ensure the safety and security of everyone going about their legitimate endeavours". The governor also noted that there is no need to engage with IPOB for they are not as bad as the ones in the Northeast or northwest who go to schools and seize the whole population of teachers and students or invade the mosques and churches and kidnap all the worshippers and nobody can find them until ransom is paid.²³ Similarly, the Enugu State

²¹ Aina Ojonugwa. "South East Govs Condemn Sit-At-Home Orders, Killings." *The Will*, 5 October 2021. <https://thewillnigeria.com/news/south-east-govs-condemn-sit-at-home-orders-killings>. Accessed 9 August 2021.

²² Uche Nwosu. "Ikpeazu Urges Abians To Shun IPOB's Sit-At-Home Order Every Monday." *Independent*, 27 August 2021. <https://independent.ng/ikpeazu-urges-abians-to-shun-ipobs-sit-at-home-order-every-monday>. Accessed 30 November 2021.

²³ Bridget Chiedu Onochie and Abuja Bureau Chief. "Sit-At-Home: Igbo Group Blames Government's Apathy for Compliance, Insecurity in South East." *The Guardian* 17 September 2021. <https://guardian.ng/news/sit-at->

government asked its residents to ignore the sit-at-home stating that the IPOB order had no constituted power backing it.²⁴ The government assured its residents of adequate machinery in place to ensure that lives and properties were secured. The government further added that the sit-at-home merely imposed hardship on the citizens. On its part, the Anambra government warned its workers to ensure that they are found at their offices in order to get paid, or else sit-at-home and lose their August salary. The governor also ordered banks; traders, and transporters to commence complete and uninterrupted economic and business activities from Monday; if not, they will face the wrath of his government.²⁵ The governor also said that the sit-at-home compliance adversely affected the Gross Domestic Product and the general economy of the state, stating that banks that failed to open on such days would be sealed for a week, adding that if such banks refused to open subsequently, they would be permanently closed.²⁶ In Imo State, the government, through the state commissioner of police, further added that it was going to back its workers with security to resist sit-at-home. Thus, the government of the south-east states and police commands asked that residents ignore the IPOB order and go about their legitimate businesses. This order and counter order created confusion in the minds of citizens; a confusion the federal government of Nigeria, on its part, has so far done little to nothing to manage effectively and instead handled the agitations for self-determination in the country in what can best be described as high-handedness or inaction. After the August experience came the Monday sit-at-home and then the addition of certain days. Even when announcements are made suspending sit-at-home, people still observe the sit-at-home order as streets, markets, offices, motor parks, and banks are closed and deserted every Monday. Two reasons seem to give basic to this. First, the people are afraid of being attacked by hoodlums and miscreants, masquerading as IPOB members. Two, most people have some sympathy for IPOB's cause. Further, with the government's failure to act amidst the killings and burning of properties, the people have lost

home-igbo-group-blames-governments-apathy-for-compliance-insecurity-in-south-east. Accessed 28 November 2021.

²⁴ Dennis Agbo. "Sit-At-Home: Enugu Gov't carpets IPOB's order, tells residents to go about their businesses." *The Vanguard*, 8 August 2021. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/08/sit-at-home-enugu-govt-carpet-ipoobs-order-tells-residents-to-go-about-their-businesses>. Accessed 29 November 2021.

²⁵ Sahara Reporters. "New York, September 11, 2021, Obey IPOB's Sit-at-home And Face Government's Wrath – Anambra Governor Warns Residents, Banks." *Sahara*, 11 September 2021. <https://saharareporters.com/2021/09/11/obey-ipob%E2%80%99s-sit-home-and-face-governments-wrath-%E2%80%93-anambra-governor-warns-residents-banks>. Accessed 29 November 2021.

²⁶ Tony Okafor. "Punch Gov Obiano leads protest against IPOB sit-at-home order." *Punch*, 13 September 2021. <https://punchng.com/breaking-gov-obiano-leads-protest-against-ipob-sit-at-home-order>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

hope in the government of the day, and so fear does not allow the people to come out and risk their lives and investments.

Implications of Sit At Home and Freedom Agitation in Igboland

When on August 9, 2021, IPOB declared sit-at-home, noting it is sacrosanct, the whole region of the south-east became perplexed, knowing the implications for its residents, who are basically traders. The calls to sit-at-home were as a result of the opinion that Igbo people have not really tackled the problem of their marginalization; and have neglected their roles in the political practises of the nation. However, some people see sit at home as unfavourable to the Igbo course because of its economic, educational, political, and religious challenges. So, when the one week sit-at-home began on November 5th, markets were under lock, including the roadside shops. The transport companies did not move, and the banks and other private offices were locked. Kanunta also noted the body's awareness of some other implications of the sit-at-home order, including social, economic, academic, and religious implications.

The Economic Implications

Violent protests, agitations and clashes with security agencies have helped to impoverish Igboland through the destruction of properties worth millions. Sit-at-home and poor-toxic security environments discourage foreign investors from coming to the area for business. For example, Onitsha's main market and Aba market were shut down in solidarity with Nnamdi Kanu.²⁷ These two markets are the pride of Igboland. Also, the government loses million every Monday, the day Nnamdi will appear in court. Besides, the situation affects the financial capacity and income of the people of the region.²⁸ Thus, both the government and the people are affected economically. In his contribution, the Archbishop of Enugu Ecclesiastical Province Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Emmanuel Chukwuma, said that shutting down the South East region this time would destroy their economy and impoverish the Igbo. For him, he

²⁷ Nwanosike Onu, Damian Duruiheoma, Chris Njoku, Sunny Nwankwo and Emma Elekwa. "IPOB Sit-At-Home: Onitsha, Aba Markets Shut Again." *The Nation*, 23 November 2021. <https://thenationonlineng.net/ipob-sit-at-home-onitsha-aba-markets-shut-again>. Accessed 28 November 2021.

²⁸ Edward Nnachi, Raphael Ede, Chidiebere Okeoma, and Tony Okafor. "IPOB Sit-At-Home Continues Despite Suspension, South-East Traders, Others Lament Huge Losses to Protest." *Punch*, 4 September 2021. <https://punchng.com/ipob-sit-at-home-continues-despite-suspension-south-east-traders-others-lament-huge-losses-to-protest>. Accessed 29 November 2021.

calls on all pro-Biafra groups to have a rethink on the continued lockdown, since it will further impoverish the people, who are mostly traders, and create more hunger in the land. According to him, Igbos in the South-East "just struggle each day to make a living and have something to put bread on their tables. The move will be unfair to us, Ndigbo, who are engaged in various businesses. If carried out, it is wrong since when you are locking up your zone or region, other zones will be engaging in their businesses and daily human activities meant for their growth and progress. It is a way of destroying the economies of our brothers. We must be very careful about the way we are going about it. I also do not totally support it as many of our traders are in trouble already due to the COVID-19 lockdown and what they lost. It cannot be debunked that the close down of personal businesses inflicts more problems on the people already burdened with lots of hardship since the majority feed on daily earnings. For this reason, the former chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Okwesilieze Nwodo said that the impact of the sit-at-home is not the best for Igbo. The Archbishop of Enugu Ecclesiastical Province Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Dr. Emmanuel Chukwuma observed that sit-at-home destroys the region's economy and impoverishes the Igbo. The chambers of commerce, business owners and traders have put their losses at about 8 billion naira. The first vice president of Nnewi Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NCCIMA), Chief Moses Ezukwo, said the development has robbed the South-East zone of over 50bn so far, adding that the loss in the private sector amounted to over 60 percent. The transport sector loses at least 6bn any day there is a lockdown in the region.²⁹

Based on the negative impact of sit-at-home, the former national chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, OkwesiliezeNwodo, has urged the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra, IPOB, to rescind the call to lockdown the South East every Monday, because it is not best for Igbo. It would further deteriorate the economy of the zone. He also urged IPOB to find other measures of showing their solidarity for their leader, such as turning out *en masse* any day Kanu would appear in court. He also urged the Igbo to embark on massive and aggressive social media campaigns to demand for her freedom instead of locking down the zone. In support of this fact, a prominent Abia monarch, the traditional ruler of Abiriba Ancient Kingdom, EzeKalu Ogbu, Enachioken Abiriba cautioned that the action would compound the economic woes of Ndigbo. Enachioken,

²⁹ Anayo Okoli, Chidi Nkwopara, Dennis Agbo, Chimaobi Nwaiwu, Ugochukwu Alaribe, Nwabueze Okonkwo, Chinedu Adonu, Chinonso Alozie, Ikechukwu Odu, Steve Oko and Uchenna Ali. "How Monday Sit-At-Home is Affecting South-East Economy."

who strongly condemned the high-handedness of the Federal Government in handling the agitations for self-determination in the country, however, said that locking down the entire South East every Monday would not be in the economic interest of the region already suffering protracted exclusion. He regretted that the Federal Government seemed to be nonchalant about the danger signals.³⁰

Political Implications

The quest for power at the centre and state has made the Igbo political class not fight for their rights, which has led to internal division and a lack of communal commitment. The Igbo communal system and sense of brotherhood, which serve as uniting factors, have been affected. The order to observe sit-at-home has indeed conformed to the Igbo people's expression that *Igbo enweeze* meaning Igbo people have no king. The Igbo conceive the community as a source of strength, greatness, and success for the individual Igbo person. Hence, an individual's success is seen as that of the community, and the success of an individual does not extricate the individual from the community because the community's approval is always necessary and sought for. In fact, Igbo people are radical republicans or ultra-democratic in their social and political organization. The community is supreme and meaningful to every Igbo person. That's why the order to observe sit-at-home can be seen as a collective effort by all Igbo in the region.³¹ However, a South-east socio-cultural organisation (Igbonine), through its president, High Chief Emeka Okonkwo, has come out to say that the continuous sit-at-home order compliance in the region shows the failure of politicians to address the issue of insecurity. The body noted that "sit-at-home" is not synonymous with the Igbo people and their culture. The president also stated that compliance was as a result of the distrust that citizens have for their leaders.³²

³⁰ Anayo Okoli, Chidi Nkwopara, Dennis Agbo, Chimaobi Nwaiwu, Ugochukwu Alaribe, Nwabueze Okonkwo, Chinedu Adonu, Chinonso Alozie, Ikechukwu Odu, Steve Oko and Uchenna Ali. "How Monday Sit-At-Home is Affecting South-East Economy."

³¹ Lawrence Okwuosa, Chinyere T. Nwaoga, and Favour Uroko. "The Post-War Era in Nigeria and the Resilience of Igbo Communal System."

³² Bridget Chiedu Onochie and Abuja Bureau Chief. "Sit-At-Home: Igbo Group Blames Government's Apathy for Compliance, Insecurity in South East." *The Guardian* 17 September 2021. <https://guardian.ng/news/sit-at-home-igbo-group-blames-governments-apaty-for-compliance-insecurity-in-south-east>. Accessed 28 November 2021.

Educational Implication

The sit-at-home was publicised by IPOB's Media and publicity Secretary, Emma Powerful, but later Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's younger brother, Kanunta Kanu, released a statement saying that the planned sit-at-home order had been cancelled due to the pleas from well-meaning students, Nigerians, and groups within and outside Igbo land for their children to participate in the National Examinations Council (NECO) examination for junior secondary schools. In some of the south-eastern states, students have been made to stay indoors and skip school on Mondays due to the Monday sit-at-home order, which is fully effective in Enugu, Anambra, Abia, and Imo. As a result, some schools in this region have compelled their teachers and students to come to work on Saturdays for academic lessons, thereby depriving students and teachers of their rest day and attending other activities usually undertaken on Saturday. Speaking concerning the academic implications, Kanunta said that IPOB realized the academic deprivation the already marginalized Biafra students would suffer adding that it would amount to assisting enemies of Biafra to inflict more injuries on her children.³³ In Nsukka, the vicinity of the prestigious University of Nigeria, there are usually few vehicle movements on Mondays and any other day that IPOB declares as sit-at-home. The shuttle buses are usually not found operating on the days of sit-at-home out of fear that mayhem may occur; the university was closed and students whose exams still went on or who had classes and other things to engage in the university community had to walk long distances where the exam still went on as scheduled. Again, the world watched a video of unknown gunmen shooting sporadically, chasing students of Comprehensive School, Nkume in the Njaba local government area of Imo State and invigilators out of the examination hall and even destroying part of the school building (Uzoari 2021). All these affect the school system and calendars.

Militarization

Militarization of the South-east can also be linked and attributed to sit-at-home in Igbo land. Today, the military is found on the streets instead of the barracks even when there is no war in Igbo land. This has led to havoc and insecurity and the arrest of innocent civilians under the claim that they are causing disorder and inciting hate. More so, many masked groups have

³³ Vincent Ujumadu, Chimaobi Nwaiwu, Ugochukwu Alaribe, Chinonso Alozie and Nwabueze Oknonkwo. "Confusion Over IPOB's Sit-At-Home Order." *Vanguard*, 9 August 2021. <https://vanguardngr.com/2021/084/confusion-over-ipobs-sit-at-home/amp>. Accessed 28 November 2021

capitalised on the proscription of IPOB to carry out heinous activities such as burning of vehicles and houses, gunmen killings, robbery and looting of shops and banks. This situation has caused establishments to take precaution by choosing to keep their places locked and closed for business and transactions. For instance, in Enugu, hoodlums attacked a bus distributing bread around the old Orié-Emene market. It was gathered that the driver escaped by whiskers, but the bus, fully loaded with loaves of bread, was looted and the bus set ablaze by the hoodlums.³⁴ Similarly, a tricycle operator on Arthur Eze Road in Awka was stopped, matchet and his tricycle burnt to ashes. In another case, also in Anambra, a town service bus was also said to have been attacked by individuals believed to be enforcing the IPOB order. Sources said that the passengers were spared as they were asked to disembark before the bus was lit ablaze.³⁵ In Enugu state, precisely at a place called Eluagu-Obukpa, Ede³⁶ reports that a trailer conveying spare parts worth about 30 million was also set ablaze, while in Imo state, gunmen staged a prison break. These are being done and crafted to make it appear that it is Igbo boys or IPOB destroying Igbo land.

Contrarily, IPOB denies that they are not the ones committing these acts against humanity, stating that they cannot be part of the problem they are trying to resolve. It was in response to these problems in the south-east, particularly the prison brakes, that governors and stakeholders of the region held a meeting and announced on April 11, 2021, the creation of a new regional security outfit named Ebubeagu.³⁷ Further, sometime ago, a video emerged online of Nigerian Army personnel on a shooting expedition in some parts of Enugu state in the guise of foiling the evil activities of IPOB members and miscreants. Though the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), lieutenant general Yahayafaruk, denied the involvement of its personnel in the invasion of the Mgbowo community, there are public outcries that the incident should be thoroughly

³⁴ Hammed Salahudeen. "Sit-At-Home: Hoodlums Attack Bus Loaded with Bread, Destroy Tricycles in Enugu." *Intelregion*, 14 September 2021. <https://www.intelregion.com/news/sit-at-home-hoodlums-attack-bus-loaded-with-bread-destroy-tricycles-in-enugu>. Accessed 30 November 2021.

³⁵ Joe Chukindi. "Sit-at-Home: Suspected IPOB Members Set Tricycle, Passenger Bus Ablaze in Anambra." *Daily Post*, 14 September 2021. <https://dailypost.ng/2021/09/14/sit-at-home-suspected-ipob-members-set-tricycle-passenger-bus-ablaze-in-anambra>. Accessed 28 November 2021.

³⁶ Ede, Raphael. "Hoodlums Burn Trailer Carrying Spare parts for Disobeying IPOB's Sit-at-Home." *Punch*, 6 September 2021. <https://www.punchng.com/hoodlums-burn-trailer-carrying-spare-parts-for-disobeying-ipobs-sit-at-home>. Accessed 29 November 2022.

³⁷ Lawrence Njoku. "S'East PDP Deplores Formation of EbubeAgu Security Outfit in Ebonyi." *The Guardian*, 6 May 2021. <https://guardian.ng/news/seast-pdp-deplores-formation-of-ebube-agu-security-outfit-in-ebonyi>. Accessed 29 November 2021.

investigated.³⁸ If the trend continues, the end result would only be the emergence of an insurgency in the south-east, which this paper argues is the aim of the Nigerian government as this would enable them to fully employ the Nigerian security in the region. The effect such action will have on the region might just be unprecedented.

Exclusion

Aside from the economic hardship faced by residents of the south-east region, the sit-at-home has further heightened the exclusion already suffered by its residents. Ogienagbon³⁹ wrote that the Igbo are not the only marginalised group in Nigeria, and so the claim that they are being maltreated cannot be justified. He also said that the Igbo became successful people in commerce, politics, and the military because they enjoyed the support of others around them and did not depend solely on themselves to survive. In the final analysis, the author said that the Igbo are suffering exclusion today because they thought they could bring about Biafra.

A phenomenal analysis on Dialogue and Referendum

The sit-at-home proves that all is not well in Nigeria. It also shows the lack of dialogue and the inability of the federal government to protect its citizens. Dialogue could be achieved when the Federal Government addresses the challenges of the South-Eastern region using the available resources. "Media campaigns, diplomacy, and dialogue should be employed as alternatives to violence towards the actualization of Biafra through properly channelled agitation," Joseph Ozibo, an Ozo title holder, advised. Besides, it would not do any good for the government of the day to keep tagging secessionist movements as 'hooligans, thugs, and evil-minded individuals seeking to destroy the unity of Nigeria. Over time, the government has often said that the "unity of Nigeria is un-negotiable," a statement that is not only irrational but displays unwillingness to dialogue. The use of militarization to end secessions has not worked and will never work, but would only succeed in creating casualties, ethnic tensions, and even insurgency. Recently, two members of the house senate worked out of a meeting because of the refusal of a senate chairman committee to give the two senators room to quiz army personnel on

³⁸ Seun Opejobi. "ESN: Soldiers Behaved like Bandits in Enugu, probe them-HURIWA to COAS, Ugwuanyi." *Daily Post*, 4 November 2021. <https://www.dailypost.ng/2021/11/04/esn-soldiers-behaved-like-bandits-in-enugu-probe-them-huriwa-to-coas-ugwuanyi>.

³⁹ Lawal Ogienagbon. "A Wrong Path."

lopsided army recruitment. Giving heed to the worries of the south-east will go a long way in limiting, if not ending, suspicion among the ethnic groups. Onah Sunday, a onetime chairman of the Nigerian union of teachers, NUT, Ohaukwu chapter, also said that agitation in the south-eastern region is an age-long quest but said that the best possible approach, for now, should be diplomacy.⁴⁰

A referendum is a direct popular vote on a proposed law with the aim of knowing people's choices. Through this medium, it will be tested whether the leaders of the secessionist groups actually reflect the wishes of those they claim they represent and want to liberate. Unfortunately, the government of Nigeria always writes this option off under the claim that its unity cannot be negotiated. The paper recommends this medium as a way of giving an opportunity to nationals who want to secede to decide their fate. Even though one can argue that such a measure and its achievements can lead to more secessionist claims, one must agree that it will show the varying parts of a nation that it has its benefits at heart.

Recommendations

1. The Federal government should use available resources to address the challenges and grievances of the IPOB in order to unite different regions of the country.
2. The militarization of the south-east Nigeria is not the best solution to end agitations.
3. IPOB should do a proper assessment of sit-at-home and find a better way of improving the economy to avoid hunger in the land.
4. All Igbos should be law-abiding and avoid any act that might lead to a breakdown of law and order.
5. Individuals should desist from attacking buses and outlets.

Conclusion

Igboland witnessed and survived the civil war between 1967 and 1970, which resulted in the loss of lives and properties. Up to today, the region is still experiencing marginalisation from the Nigerian government. The freedom agitators perceive that the only way to overcome this dehumanization, marginalization, and victimisation is to call for a sovereign state of Biafra and a

⁴⁰ Anayo Okoli, Chidi Nkwopara, Dennis Agbo, Chimaobi Nwaiwu, Ugochukwu Alaribe, Nwabueze Okonkwo, Chinedu Adonu, Chinonso Alozie, Ikechukwu Odu, Steve Oko and Uchenna Ali. "How Monday Sit-At-Home is Affecting South-East Economy."

referendum, and they employ sit-at-home all over South-Eastern Nigeria, with the aim of drawing the attention of the current administration and international bodies to rescue them from the oppressive government. Such claims are a fundamental human right, and the government of Nigeria needs to do more than try to quell the agitation. The Federal Government's inability to reconstruct the southeast region of the country as promised after the war has become a serious challenge. Igbo people are facing a lot of challenges in the Nigerian polity, and these are what have led to some agitations and sit-at-home. The paper noted that the Nigerian polity is no longer favourable to Igboland and accessed several implications of the sit-at-home policy. The paper therefore concludes that the best approach is to call for dialogue and a referendum.

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