

ECONOMIC DISPLACEMENT, YOUTH CRIMINALITY AND THE BURDEN OF THE IGBO NATION

Magnus A. Aniago, PhD
Institute of African Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Email: magnus.aniago@unn.edu.ng
Tel: +2347064977068

Thankgod Ikenegbu, PhD
Institute of African Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Email: thankgod.ikenegbu@unn.edu.ng
+2348037726826

Abstract

The economic resettlement policy adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria at the end of the Nigerian civil war led to huge economic displacement of the Igbo-speaking people of Southeast Nigeria. Their immediate economic progress in a short while after the civil war, reproduced side-lining in the political sphere and further increased their economic exclusion. This prompted massive external and often irregular migration of Igbo youths from Nigeria with risks of exposure to global criminal networks. Progressively, these resulted in an upsurge in crimes cynically tagged 'Igbo crime' among the other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Though, there is considerable lack of consensus among scholars on the exact impact of economic displacement on crime, this paper argues that the economic resettlement policy of the Nigerian government towards the Igbo people following their unsuccessful secession, and its attendant political exclusion, largely accounts for the involvement of Igbo youths in certain kinds of crime and extends also to the protracted pro-self-rule agitations within the Igbo-speaking parts of Nigeria. The study adopts the theory of differential association by Edwin Sutherland as its framework of analysis. It derives its data from documentary sources such as newspapers, journals, other publications, and oral evidence.

Keywords: Economic displacement; political marginalization; migration; youth criminality; the Igbo nation; differential association.

Introduction

The harsh economic policies meted out to the Igbo people of Nigeria at the end of the civil

war in 1969 could not augur well for nation-building in Nigeria. Many people had expected that at the end of the Nigerian/Biafra civil war, that the government of General Gowon, the then Head of State would have learnt from the previous world civil wars where the highhanded treatment of the vanquished side gave birth to another wave of crises that made governments of such countries show greater magnanimity and fatherly love to the vanquished side to avert further bloodshed. In the case of the people of South Eastern Nigeria that fought the war of secession, the action of the Federal Government and some local authorities towards the Eastern bloc was far beyond what is obtainable in the “civilized world.” The then Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, in his maiden speech at the end of the civil war talked on the 3Rs (reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reintegration) policy that would re- unite the country. The Igbo people that formed then the bulk of the Biafra Nation received it with high hopes but it was not to be. What followed rather was a seemingly orchestrated marginalization of the Igbo people in the economic and political spheres. Whether General Gowon deliberately abandoned the policy he initiated or whether it was hijacked by other forces or mere coincidence can only be answered from investigation.

Some of the draconic actions that took over the initial nice policy include: the 20 pounds flat refund to all bank account owners irrespective of the amount deposited, Indigenization Decree of 1972, Federal Character Principle, creation of states and local government areas in favour of some regions, deliberate underuse of seaports within the Igbo territory, lack of a standard international airport, and other exploitative actions. These formed many overt and indirect actions to reduce the ability of the Igbo people to compete on a level-playing ground with other major ethnic groups(Nsoedo,2019). Some of these programs, though, are not by itself bad, the subjective implementation makes it suspicious to the South Easterners. It should be acknowledged also that there have been some improvements in some areas in the present time such as the upgrading of the Enugu International Airport and creation of more states in the South East, though done over time. The Igbo people in reality experienced an overwhelming level of setbacks based on public policies that seemed crafted to undermine their ability to maximize political and economic potentials. In spite of the above, the Igbo men and women made gigantic economic gains which later as should be expected gave way to jealousy that resulted in a wave of marginalization in the political sphere. This further increased their economic exclusion. The result was massive external and often irregular migration of Igbo youths from Nigeria with high risks of exposure to global criminal links. Consequently, these resulted in an upsurge in crimes cynically docketed 'Igbo crime' by some ethnic groups in Nigeria. These misconducts include: kidnapping, armed robbery, cybercrime, etc. These negative behaviours further exacerbated the burden of the Igbo people of Nigeria. The situation has, however, improved as crime rate in Igbo Area comparatively reduced, just as it increased in some other regions.

It is against the above background that the study examines the economic resettlement policy of the Nigerian government towards the Igbo people of Nigeria following their botched secession and the attendant political exclusion which largely accounts for the involvement of some Igbo youths in certain kinds of crime, and the prolonged struggle for a separate nation.

Theoretical Perspective

The theory of differential association adopted for this study was propounded by Edwin Sutherland, an American sociologist. Differential association theory enunciates that through interaction with others, individuals learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for criminal acts. The theory projects environment as a key player in deciding which rules people pick up to disrupt (Sutherland, 1939). The principle emphasizes that a person becomes delinquent because of an "excess" of descriptions that support the violation of law above explanations unfavourable to defilement of the law. This means that an individual will become a criminal because he is exposed to more promising criminal behaviour. That is when one is subjected to more criminal influences rather than more satisfactory legal influences. In other words, criminal behaviour arises when one is exposed to more social messages favouring misconduct than pro-social messages that do otherwise. This can be seen in settings with poor socio-economic conditions which may encourage negative views towards the law and authority.

According to Sutherland, criminal behaviour is acquired in interaction with other people in the course of communication. This means that an individual is influenced to take part in unlawful conduct through watching and interrelating with other individuals who are involved in criminal acts. The prime part of the acquisition of criminal tendencies occurs within intimate private gatherings. When criminal acts are learned, it encompasses techniques of committing the crime, which is sometimes very complicated or simple. The new initiates learn the specific direction of reasons, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes for committing the crime. This suggests that an individual will be influenced into believing that the deeds which he may have previously believed was wrong, is now right through rationalization of his action.

Furthermore, an individual will be pushed into deviant action depending on his or her view of the legal code as being advantageous or disapproving. A person becomes delinquent because of surplus of meanings advantageous to defilement of law over explanations hostile to desecration of the law. As a result, an individual breaks a law if he or she sees more reasons to go against it than to stay in compliance with it. Differential Associations may also differ in manifestation, intermission, implication, and motion. The process of learning wrong deeds by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all of the processes that are associated with any other learning. This means that individuals

learn criminal and legal actions in the same manner. This theory states that while unlawful acts are an expression of wide-ranging desires and values, it is not necessarily the fulfilment of these needs and preferences which causes deviant deeds since non-criminal conduct is an expression of these same needs and values. There may be another factor responsible for such.

Differential Association Theory can be applied to kidnapping, armed robbery, drug peddling, and cybercrime which some Igbo youths are accused of championing. Some of these evil deeds and social deviation were acquired by these youths by associating with deviants who taught them the acts either by direct tutorials or by examples. The main premise behind this theory is that illegal actions are learned through social interactions with others. The profile of youth criminality is likened to one who is very smart and highly knowledgeable. Their social interactions may come through the first point of contact during migration with individuals who share similar motives and actions. This theory which was developed to help explain youth criminality fits in well with those who violate or commit crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, drug touting, cybercrime, and other vices. Some Igbo youths who engage in these crimes convince themselves that the nation is not friendly to them. They accuse the government of favouritism which displaces them from their well-deserved positions, thereby placing them in a tight corner. For them, the only option left for them to survive is crime. It must, however, be emphasized that this option of crime is for the few who want to opt for it. Majority of Igbo youths are known to have shun crime and evil tendencies even in the midst of grave injustices and nepotism. For those who opt for crime, their activities fit well into Edwin Sutherland's theory of 'Differential Association' which examples have been given above. Some of these promptings for crime are regurgitated, analysed, and emphasized in the passages below.

The negative socio-economic and political devices against the Igbos

The socio-economic cum political injustice meted out against Igbos after the civil war is as follows: 20 Pounds flat refund, Indigenization Decree of 1972, federal character principle, creation of states and local government in favour of Northern Nigeria, deliberate underuse of seaports within the Igbo axis and lack of a standard airport and other exploitative actions.

20 Pounds flat refund

When the civil war ended in 1970, the Igbo people had expected that some of these economic policies would be struck out entirely. This was not to be. Shortly after the war, the Igbo were requested to deposit their Biafra currency and the old Nigeria currency in their possession. They complied with this directive and what they got in return was a big shocker which is twenty pounds per depositor regardless of the amount deposited. The amount approved by the federal government to be paid to each Igbo depositor of Biafra currency was ridiculous and frustrating, to say the least. Those who had accounts with commercial banks in the formal eastern region were told that as soon as the government lifted the prohibition on payment of such bank deposits, they would be allowed to withdraw such

amount of money. The Federal Government decision was contained in the banking obligation (Eastern States) Decree 1970. The provision of the decree cancelled all bank deposits operated in the old Eastern region. The decree further explained that the banks may, however, honour at par any deposit account that existed before the war but not operated within the war years. Any banks which fail to comply with the new directive would be liable to pay a fine of \$50 for each day during which the offenses continued. (Obi-Ani, 2009). This was in stark contrast of the “No Victor No Vanquished” speech by Yakubu Gowon, the then Head of State. This policy decreed into law became albatross to the Igbo nation's progress both economically and politically.

Indigenization Decree of 1972

The Indigenization Decree of 1972: Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree (often referred to as the 'Indigenization Decree') seems to be predicated on a strong feeling of political and economic nationalism. In the pre-independence era, the Nigerian economy was dominated and controlled by foreign nationals (Ogbuagu, 1983). Some of the nationalists had advocated for the nationalization of some of the public enterprises as soon as independence was achieved although there were some companies earmarked and managed by the foreign nationals. Furthermore, the civil war became a golden opportunity to press for immediate implementation of the transfer of some of the enterprises to indigenous people. The promulgation of the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972, also known as Indigenization Decree, was not done with the accommodation of Igbo interest. The government enacted the policy when the Igbo people were at the lowest economic point just after they have emerged from the civil war (Obi-Ani, 2009). As Chinua Achebe aptly captured, Chief Awolowo the then finance minister of Gowon administration presided over the monumental transfer and consolidation of economic, bureaucratic and professional power to his home base. This had the immediate result of pauperizing the Igbo middle class and earning a profit of 4 million pounds for the Federal Government treasury. The Indigenization decree routed the Igbo from the commanding height of the Nigerian economy to everyone's apparent satisfaction (Achebe, 1983). The present economic situation in Nigeria, however, seem not to award a clear-cut edge to any ethnic group. People of the middle class of all Nigerian ethnic groups complain of hardship. This can be assessed from the daily media reports. It goes to show that the indigenization policy has not given greater advantage to the masses. If any gain or advantage can be adduced to it, it should be for the few aristocrats who are known to always take advantage of the masses and the nation.

Creation of states and local government areas

The creation of states and local government areas was deliberately made to favor Northern Nigeria. The Southeast Zone is the only political zone among the six political zones that has only five states, while, the rest of the other zones have six states each (Aribisala, 2015). Aribisala opined that this development has consequently led to Southeast being the only zone with the least amount of revenue allocation in the Federation. The former governor of Anambra state, Dr. Ezeife, and OluFalae, the former secretary to the Government of the

Federation had vehemently contended in varied platforms that the creation of more states and local governments in favour of the Northern states was an injustice against their zones, Southeast and Southwest Zones respectively (Kalu, 2017; Eya, 2017).

Kalu and Eya observe that the injustice spoken about by the elder statesmen is pointing to the lopsided size of revenue allocations from the Federal Government that go to the Northern States and that that go to the Southern States. OluFalae using Lagos state as an example stated that Lagos state which is densely populated, used to have a uniform number of local governments (precisely 20 LGAs) with Kano State (Eya, 2017). Falae pointed out that while Lagos has been made to retain the same number of local government areas, Kano has skyrocketed to 77 LGAs.

It is not only the lopsided revenue allocations being channelled to the Northern Region that is perceived as injustices, but the political inequities acutely manifested in addressing the national issues. Achebe (1983) criticized the Muhammed-Obasanjo conspiracy by which four states and considerable interest in a fifth were given to the Yoruba while their Igbo competitors of about equal population got two. This was done in preparation for a new fiscal arrangement in which states would determine what share of federal allocation went to whom. Nnia Nwodo in one of the speeches he gave at an event he attended cited the issue of state and local government creation in Nigeria which the Igbo people were grossly short changed. He also went further to say that the military created states and local governments and gave the North the highest numbers not because our population was the smallest but just as part of the marginalization. That is why the “interests” of the Southeast are never adequately protected because the states and LGAs created by military fiat to the detriment of Southeast negate their ability to be effective. The enumerated consequences of states and local government areas creations were some of the reasons for the call to restructure Nigeria.

Redundancy of Seaports

There is a well-coordinated plan to render the seaports within the Igbo axis redundant even when one considers the fact that Port Harcourt port was booming before Nigeria's independence, up until Nigeria civil war (Information Service, 1956). The Port Harcourt port was the second largest port in the country commissioned in 1913 as with Lagos port (Nimasa e-library, n.d). The Calabar Port was equally busy handling exports and imports. To date, Nigeria's Lagos seaports are the only major port in usage and are fully congested; the lives of residents, business owners, and motorists are impacted negatively due to conditions at the ports. The Pointer (2019) reports that "a recent report based on estimates by terminal operators has it that more than 2 million twenty tons equivalent units (TEUs) of laden containers are awaiting clearance at Lagos seaports". The Lagos ports handle over 80 percent of the cargoes that enter the country (The Pointer, 2019). Despite these environmental congestions, the Federal Government had refused to dredge the river Niger, improve the Calabar and Warri Ports, etc., or make it friendly to use Port Harcourt to ease

the economic waste arising from the concentration of activities in Lagos ports. Such actions by successive governments were geared toward frustrating the Igbo businessmen and women that are importers.

Lack of federal industries and international airport

Since the war ended, there has been a lack of federal industries in Igboland. Federal projects like the irrigation scheme and agricultural projects of the revolutionary dimension were not sited as a result of the transparent discrimination of the past and present federal government towards the Igbo people. Achebe (1983) reported the siting of five steel mills worth 4.5 billions on completion with an estimated employment capacity of 100,000 by 1990, only in the North and west of the country. There is no way anyone with the slightest interest in fairness will defend the inhuman treatment being meted out on the Igbo people by the successive Nigerian government.

The Igbo people are known as the most adventurous group in the country and are found in every nook and cranny of Nigeria, and virtually, in all parts of the world. The Igbo people are constantly on the move, both domestically and internationally. Most of the times, they must travel to Lagos or Abuja, before they could board any direct international flights. It was in 2013 that the President Goodluck administration completed the facilities at Enugu airport, now Akanu Ibiam International airport, which enabled the first international flight led by Prince Arthur Eze to land at the airport (Edike, 2013). Arthur Eze declared on arrival at Enugu airport: “Look at me, I flew from Senegal to Enugu for four hours non-stop. I don't need to go to Lagos or Abuja to book a direct flight again to Europe or Senegal. I can now go from my house to any place of my choice globally” (Edike, 2013).

Prior before now, one could note that the federal government has not invested in upgrading the facilities at Enugu airport to international airport status. The runways were very bumpy without the approach lights; there were no water supplies, the cooling systems were not working, etc. (Mikairu and Agbo, 2019). The Southeast governors raised alarm about the dilapidated state of the airport, and why the contract that had been awarded for the airport by the present government had not reflected at the airport (Mikairu and Agbo, 2019).

The federal government had already announced that it will shut down the airport as a result of insecurity (Aliyu, 2019). The announcement did not go down well with the people of Southeast both on social media and mainstream media. The Ohanaeze Ndigbo asked the government not to embark on such action as the timing was not right, and it will impact negatively on the development of the Igbo economy (Olorok, 2019). Mr. Chiedozie Orizu, the spokesperson for Ohanaeze Youth leader, advised the federal government that such a move would not augur well for the development of the Igboland (Okeke, 2019).

Other Impediments

Other retrogressive policies directed against the Igbo people included excessive police checkpoints directed against the Igbo people and businesses; customs personnel harassment of Igbo people's business interests; the use of touts to harass and collect illegal

levies from the Igbo shops with the active support of some politicians in places such as Lagos state. It should, however, be admitted that some of these issues are not direct products of federal government policies, but are acts of greedy and vindictive individuals who found themselves at threshold of power and influence.

This greediness can be identified in Igbo excessive extortion and harassment at numerous police checkpoints both within the Igbo Axis and routes leading to the Southeast. The harassment is more intense during the festive periods when the people of Southeast visit their families (Okolie, 2017). Mr. Peter Obi, the former governor of Anambra, state condemned the activities of the Customs on the highway, particularly, on roads leading to Igbo heartland, where he observed numerous Customs checkpoints from Ore to Onitsha (Olowookere, 2016). The extortion by the Customs on containers that had been cleared at the ports on roads leading to the Southeast calls to question the President's professed fight against corruption (NAN, 2016). The leader of the southeast zone of the Amalgamated market trader association remarked that men of the Nigerian customs service and the police are barricading highways to extort motorists and traders (Punch, 2016). Nnia Nwodo also shared in their plight where he asserted that the establishment of these checkpoints deliberately serves as "toll gates" for extortion. In some instances, these security agents attend these "toll gates" with POS (Point of Sale) machines which they use to force travellers who have no cash but possess debit cards to forcibly transfer cash to their private accounts (Legit,2019).

Federal character principle

Federal Character principle is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, but its first introduction was the 1979 Constitution. Section 14 (3) and (4) of the 1999 Constitution provide for the equitable distribution of positions in the military, paramilitary, police, all other security institutions, public service, parastatals, and publicly owned companies (Constitution of the Federal Republic, 1999). The plain accommodation of the principle as it ought to be applied has not always worked according to the dictates of the constitution, especially, when it comes to placing the Igbo people in certain positions. According to Iyabode (2018), President Muhammadu Buhari has been the worst offender on this.

In a similar vein, Senator Eyinnaya Abaribe expressed his candid opinion about the incumbent Nigeria president, General Buhari and said that he wilfully ensured that the Southeast zone is not included in the National Défense Council and the National Security Council (Busari, 2018)

The implications of economic and political injustices to the Igbo youths

It could be argued that unemployment accounts for most of the social crimes perpetrated by youths in the Nigerian society today. It has become a major problem tormenting the lives of the Igbo youths in Nigeria since the civil war ended. The phenomenon of youth unemployment is devastating to both individuals and society as a whole psychologically and economically. The magnitude of the danger which youth unemployment portends to the society can be better understood when one considers the statement by Awogbene and

Iwuamadi (2000), that unemployment causes frustration, dejection, desperation, and dependency on family members and friends who have their problems to contend with. This precarious situation has left the youth in the vicious cycle of poverty that erodes their confidence and bright future. There is a feeling of joy and great expectations when a student graduates from the university or any other tertiary institution. But as the expectations gradually fade away and are replaced by a feeling of frustration after some years of joblessness caused by little or no opportunity the society offers the young graduates, there is a greater probability that the individual or people will resort to illegitimate activities to actualize their expectations in the society. According to Ajufo (2013), desperation as a result of unemployment can drive many people into living outside the law to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction for the apparent neglect of their very existence. She noted further that the negative consequences include poverty, psychological problems, and all manner of criminal behaviours that cause general insecurity of life and businesses across the nation.

The frustration and desperation that daily torment the unemployed create a fertile ground for crime to thrive. The accelerating level of prostitution, armed robbery, rape, drug peddling, kidnapping, and all facets of violence can largely be attributed to the incidence of unemployment (Eze, 2012). The author noted that an examination of most of the apprehended criminals shows that a large number of youths that engage in criminal activities are those without gainful employment. Some of them are those who have the potentials for gainful employment but have been denied such an opportunity. She states emphatically that unemployment, then, can be seen as one of the core causes of the rising level of social disorder and insecurity permeating the entire country of Nigeria. The crimes are brought about by mere desperation and nurtured by the socio-economic climate pervading most economic backward nations. Adejumola and Tayo-Olajubulu (2009) contend that unemployment has been identified as the major cause of social vices like armed robbery, destitution, prostitution, political thuggery, kidnapping, and many more.

The rate at which young people move from Igbo land as a result of negative socio-economic policies to the urban centres both in Nigeria and abroad in search of greener pastures is alarming. Many of these youths are fleeing from poverty in the economically dormant Igbo states. This can be explained in the light of the push-pull factors. The push factors include the pressure resulting from the man-land ratio in the rural areas and the existence of serious underemployment arising from the seasonal cycle of climate (Okafor, 2011). This is further compounded by the gross lack of infrastructural facilities and industries in the Igboland, which makes the standard of living very unattractive. Since the industries and social amenities are concentrated in the other parts of Nigeria and western countries, Igbo youths migrate to the urban areas to seek employment in the industries and ministries, as well as enjoy the comfort which the social amenities offer while some of them move abroad to engage in all sort of social vices with the assistance of the people they associate with on the course of their migration in search for greener pastures. Some of those crimes attributed to the Igbo Youths include: kidnapping, prostitution, armed robbery, internet fraud, and drug peddling even though crime does not have an ethnic identity. For

Sarr (2000), youth migrants in Africa are three times more in number than other migrants. He argues that the urbanization rate of the youth was 32 percent in 1990, compared to less than 25 percent for the non-youth population. He estimated that by the end of the year 2010, over 50 percent of the youths in Africa will be residing in urban areas where job opportunities are limited to a few modern sectors and establishments. Okonkwo (2005) observes that crime may be a consequence of unemployment, but it is also an additional factor causing youth unemployment through its negative effects on the economy. He pointed out that crime affects the economy through some channels/ways. First, it increases the cost of doing business for the private sector and in providing public services as it has become necessary that armed guards must be hired for protection of life while on duty. Second, resources that would otherwise have been invested in increasing output and funding of education, health programs and the provision of other essential services are diverted into crime prevention and procurement of relief materials for the displaced persons. Finally, the increase in crime rates has scared away foreign and local investors and substantially limited the rate of business expansion across the country (Economic Commission for Africa, 2010).

Having seen all these prejudices and stigmatization against them, the Igbo people started nursing the feelings that they are not wanted in Nigeria which institutionalized memories of hurt or perceived sense of injustice which they expressed as marginalization. It is this hatred that fuels separatist agitators like the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB).

Conclusion

In considering the involvement of some Igbo youths in crime, one may view many factors which include the neglect of the Igbos and their territory by many federal government administrators. This abandonment came in form of the economic resettlement policies of the Gowon administration such as the 20 Pounds flat refund, Indigenization decree, federal character principle, creation of states and local governments, deliberate underuse of seaports within the Igbo axis and lack of a standard airport/seaport and other exploitative actions widely believed to be responsible for the socio-economic deterioration prevalent in Igboland after the Nigeria/Biafra civil war. However, the majority of Igbo people characterized by their resourcefulness, hard work, and determination are into different legitimate means of livelihood and are doing very well in their various fields of endeavour. They never allowed the condition they found themselves in the Nigerian enterprise to discourage them or dampen their spirit. They continued to struggle to make both ends meet even in the midst of apparent provocation and what resembles official designed injustice. That foretells why those who visit the Igbo Area wonder whether they are the same people that claim to be marginalized. They observe massive infrastructural development and buildings that are not the handiwork of government. The average Igbo man keeps moving and does not wait on government to do for him that which he can do for himself. His business ventures wherever he goes pay off and attracts more jealousy from their neighbours. However, it is expected that government makes deliberate policies to address the concerns of the Igbo race in Nigeria as to have a more harmonious and progressive

nation where no one is oppressed.

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