

## **INDIGENE-SETTLER RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF THE IGBO COMMUNITY IN LAGOS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Igbo ethnic group is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are big players in the economic sphere and can be found in virtually all regions of Nigeria. This paper is premised upon the Igbo community in Lagos. The paper addresses the lingering problem inherent in indigene-settler dichotomy most especially as it affects the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria's economic nerve centre, Lagos State.

**Keywords:** Igbo, Indigene-Settler Relationship, Lagos.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The endemic problem of indigene- settler unhealthy relationship in Nigeria is a variant of ethnic intolerance. This ethnic intolerance can be attributed to many factors including the restricted conceptualization of the contentious concept of citizenship. Ethnic intolerance according to Kunovich (1999) is defined as the unwillingness of an ethnic group to extend political, economic, and social rights to other ethnic groups, regardless of perceived similarities and differences in basic values, norms, or beliefs.

Ethnic intolerance in indigene-settler relationship manifest in form of ethnic protest and conflicts, ethnic solidarity and ethnic group political solidarity. A prominent defining characteristic of the indigene inclusiveness which also translates to settlers' exclusiveness is the creation and adoption of primordially defined boundaries and borders. The criteria therefore for belongingness include occupation, land ownership, descent, language and other defined values that may be socially constructed on either fixed or temporary basis to keep other out.

Any treatise on the recurring issue of indigene-settler relationship must essentially involve some theoretical discussions on the factors and conditions that influenced the attitudes, disposition and perception of one group towards the other. These factors explain the acceptability and accommodation or otherwise of one group by another. Several theoretical postulations have been advanced by scholars to explain inter and intra social relationships which could also be utilized in the indigene-settler relationship.

The contraption known as Nigeria was conceived in 1914 when the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated under the Sir Lord Lugard's administration as the Governor General of the British colony. The British arrangement that birthed Nigeria was to the detriment of the indigenous people because the diverse ethnic groups that were joined together never shared common affinities. Shortly after independence, Nigeria was engulfed in series of political turmoil fueled by ethno-religious politics that led to the abrupt end of the first republic. Nigeria experienced a bloody 30 month civil war (1967-1970) as a result of the then Eastern region's secession from the federal republic of Nigeria.

Despite the re-unification of Nigeria in 1970, ethnic rivalries and religious sentiments remain key features of the Nigerian society. Within the Nigerian state, Indigene-Settler dichotomy has become a recurring decimal. Currently, the over 170 million Nigerian population is composed of 36 states and 774 local government areas (LGAs). Within these states, sharp differences in language, religion, culture and ethnicity contribute to the indigene-settler dichotomy. Within the Nigerian context, there are different classifications of the societal structure; all Nigerians are citizens; the citizens can be divided into rightful indigenes and settlers (non-indigenes) who do not possess equal rights with the indigenes of a particular geographical location.

Sections 25, 26 and 27 of the 1999 constitution make provisions for all categories of citizenship in the country that is by birth, registration and naturalization (FRN, 1999).

Section 42 (1) of the 1999 Nigerian constitution forbids the “application of any law... any executive or administrative action that discriminates against a Nigerian citizen solely on the basis of “community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion”.

It must be noted that in reality, there is widespread discrimination against settlers all across Nigeria. Up until now, the three arms of government in Nigeria (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary) have been unable to address the indigene-settler relationship. It is against this background that the paper will be analyzing indigene-settler relationship using the Ibos in Lagos state as a case study.

### **CONCEPTUALIZATION: INDIGENESHIP AND SETTLERS**

At this juncture, it is pertinent to clarify some basic concepts in this research. An indigene in colloquial Nigerian context means “son of the soil” or “land owners”. Kyernum and Agba (2013) asserted that an indigene is often used to describe an individual who can trace his or her ancestry to a particular place. Similarly, Plotnicov (1972) posited that “owners of the land” is a terminology used in Nigeria to describe indigenous peoples of an area, even when they are politically sub-ordinate there; while “stranger” (settlers) covers people of alien origin who are permanently settled among these indigenous people. Indigenes are essentially a group of people which has common identity, a common descent or lineage and cultural identity (Kyernum & Agba, 2013). The Plateau Peace Conference (2004) defined indigeneship as “been peculiar to a people who are the first to have settled permanently in a particular area and who are often considered as ‘natives’. Such people have rights to their lands, traditions and culture.

Settlers or non-indigenes are regarded as aliens, visitors, strangers and second class citizens in the host communities they reside. The indigene-settler dichotomy has been worsened due to the politicization of the Federal Character Principle as enshrined in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution.

Section 147 (b) of the 1999 Constitution stipulates that “the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each State, who shall be an indigene of such State”. However, it has been

observed that there is a loophole in the Constitution as there is no clear cut explanation of who an indigene is.

The political class in Nigeria often capitalizes on the Indigene Clause and the Federal Character Principle in order to gain control over the economic resources and dictate who gets what, when and how at any given time. The privileged few that have access to the national wealth of the country enjoy patronage from their benefactors. Indiscriminate wealth accumulation in Nigeria gives the super rich Nigerians the opportunity to have great influence on their respective geo-political domains.

Usually, those that are not considered to be indigenes of a particular place are schemed out from enjoying the benefits at the local, state and national levels.

Former military ruler and President, Olusegun Obasanjo in Ibrahim (2004) rightly explains the indigene-settler dichotomy in this way:

Many citizens are threatened and denied their God-given and constitutionally guaranteed rights to live and earn their living, anywhere in the nation by such monstrosities as ‘non-indigenes’, ‘stranger’, ‘native’ or ‘settler’ constructions which creates huge barriers between our people. Very often, the irony is lost to our people that every Nigerian is both an indigene and a settler, and we pay a huge price when we ignore this fact, for amongst others, it exposes all of us, and all our primordial loyalties to the evils which it generates.

Furthermore, the indigene-settler dichotomy hinders the quest to attaining national integration through gross discrimination against the settlers in Nigeria.

### **APPROACHES TO INDIGENE-SETTLER-RELATIONSHIP**

Primordial Theory of Ethnicity: This theory explains that groups’ ethnic and religious identities “have deep social, historical, and genetic foundations” and that the reason for the behaviour of groups for ethnic and kinship affinity stems from certain subjective psychological forces that are internal to the individual which are connected to the individual human needs for security and

survival. Primordial theory of ethnic conflict also known as the essentialist approach places its argument on the long history of ethnic affiliation as a defining characteristic for group categorization and the maintenance of cultural boundaries. The development of modern state has not succeeded in breaking the kinship ties and the culturally ascriptive attachment; rather it has strengthened the significance of identities. Primordialism is more concerned with the interrelationship between uniqueness and longevity of bounded cultures and the various distinct groups that incorporate them. This primordial attachment explains conflict in terms of psychological and cultural forces it invokes which is responsible for the ways in which individuals within groups understand and perceive themselves and others in their social relations (Ross 1993).

From the foregoing, three major features can be identified. These are the overwhelming importance of ascribed identity/status, ethnic boundaries and common ancestry. These three represent both the socio-biological and cultural currents in the primordial school.

Instrumental theory of ethnicity: The central argument of the theory is that ethnicity is mobilized when it is seen as a strategic tool for gaining access to certain resources in the state.

Ethnic competition theory: The ethnic competition theory by its postulation provides a very powerful explanation for the indigene-settler relationship from the perspective of groups' struggle over scarce resources. In every society there is the struggle over scarce resources by groups. Dichotomies built or based on constructed identities are therefore mobilized in intergroup struggles over scarce resources.

The relationship between the settler and the indigene become strained when there are inequalities on an increasing proportion on the side of the indigenes. In other words, this division is mobilized when economic advancement of previously disadvantaged settlers seems to be increasing. According to Olzak (1992) this conflict or strained relationship over competitive resources could be at the individual or at the contextual level. Many theoretical explanations have emerged to buttress these lopsided economic inequalities among settlers (migrants) and the indigenes. Prominent among these is Traditional Selectivity Theory which holds that migrants

(settlers) are seen to be more daring, ambitious coupled with their diligence and talents which are seen to be more than the indigenes (Carliner, 1980, Chiswick, 1977).

### **INDIGENE-SETTLER CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA**

Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed various communal clashes traceable to frictions in the indigene-settler relationships. Indigene-settler feud has led to the destruction of several lives and property. The Tiv/Jukun crisis; Ife/Modakeke crisis; Owe/Idamori crisis in Kabba; the Plateau indigenes-Hausa/Fulani conflicts; Hausa/Fulani herdsmen-Yoruba clashes in Sagamu are some of the most widely publicized cases of indigene-settler conflicts in Nigeria.

### **THE IGBO ETHNIC GROUP**

Nigeria with a population of about 170 million is made up of over 250 ethnic nationalities. The most predominant ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa/Fulani, Yorubas and Ibos also known as Igbos. The Hausa/Fulani can be found mostly in Northern Nigeria. The Yorubas occupy the South-Western part of Nigeria, while the Ibos can be found in Eastern Nigeria.

The Ibos are naturally enterprising. As a result of their ingenuity and economic interests, Ibos can be found in virtually all over Nigeria. Buttressing this fact, Onunwa (1994) asserted that “inherent in any Igbo irrespective of sub-culture area is the spirit to achieve and excel, the Igbo continue to look for spheres or areas of influence”.

Igbos either educated or uneducated always exhibit the “I can do attitude” and the will to succeed in any every given task. The true nature of an average Ibo was captured by foremost writer, Chinua Achebe in his 1958 classic book “Things Fall Apart”. Achebe described Okonkwo the main character of the book as a warrior, a great wrestler, a wealthy farmer and a highly revered personality (Achebe, 1958).

In contemporary Nigeria, Igbos have made sterling contributions towards the development of Nigeria. The likes of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe; Chinua Achebe; Dr. Okonjo Iweala; Philip

Emeagwali; Austin Okocha; Kanu Nwankwo and Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu are people from the Igbo extraction.

Comparatively, Igbos have not enjoyed huge success in politics unlike in other key areas such as merchandising, manufacturing, transportation, telecommunications, banking, oil and gas industry where they have reached the zenith. In Nigeria's first republic, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Ibo man served as the ceremonial President, while Alhaji Tafawa Balewa served as the Prime Minister between 1960 and 1966. The January 15, 1966 coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu was perceived by the Hausa/Fulani elites as an "Igbo coup" because the Hausa/Fulani lost two of their most powerful politicians namely; Sir Ahmadu Bello and Alhaji Tafawa Balewa were killed during the coup.

The January 15, 1966 coup threw up General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo as Nigeria's first military ruler. One of Nigeria's foremost political scientists, B.J. Dudley (1967) noted that the Igbos had the grand plan to dominate Nigeria during Ironsi's tenure. On July 29, 1966, Northern military officers staged a counter coup which led to the assassination of Head of State, General Aguiyi Ironsi and hundreds of Ibo military officers. A pogrom was launched by top Northern military officers against the Igbos in many parts of the country. The feelings of insecurity prompted Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu to recall all Igbo people to return to their homeland. According to Nixon (1972), the central government lost its effective authority over the Eastern region and following a breakdown of order of the orderly process of negotiations; the Eastern region sought its own security and survival by declaring its independence shortly after which the central government sought to re-establish its authority by military action. Nigeria fought a bloody civil war against the Biafran secessionists between 1967 and 1970 that claimed millions of lives.

Despite the "no victor", "no vanquish" declaration by Nigeria's ruler, General Yakubu Gowon after the end of the civil war in 1970, the Igbos have suffered gross marginalization in the Nigerian federation. Shortly after the war, Igbos were given twenty pounds each irrespective of how much Biafran pounds they brought for exchange (Okaneme, 2014). Successive Nigerian

governments have systematically ignored Eastern Nigeria in the developmental process. For instance, no refinery is sited in Igbo land. Additionally, both the federal government and other state governments did not make practical efforts to return the property deserted by the Igbos prior to the civil war. In the post war era, it is a rare feat to see an Igbo indigene rise to the top in the armed forces and other para-military agencies.

Ikpeze (2000) asserted that:

To be sure, the lowly presence of the Igbo in the military has been brought about over the past quarter of a century through the re-absorption of only a negligible number of the Nigerian army officers of Igbo origin who had fought on the Biafran side; a post-war recruitment policy that was aimed against Igbo presence in the military; a promotion policy that ensured both a slow rate of upward mobility for Igbo officers and the virtual exclusion of Igbo officers from the highest military positions; and a recruitment policy calculated to ensure that the few Igbo officers who get anywhere near the top do not stay there for any reasonable length of time.

It is pertinent to note that since 1960, late General Aguiyi Ironsi is the only Ibo to have become Nigeria's number one citizen. There is a general perception amongst other ethnic nationalities that Igbos cannot be entrusted with political power given their roles in the January 15 1966 coup and the secession that led to the 30 month civil war (1967-1970).

### **IGBOS IN LAGOS STATE**

Lagos state is a major driving force in the political economy of Nigeria. Lagos is one of the most populous cities in the world. Lagos was Nigeria's capital city between 1914 and 1991. Up until now, Lagos serves as the economic capital of Nigeria. Lagos boasts of the busiest seaport, the busiest airport and the only stock exchange market in Nigeria. Most of the big indigenous and foreign companies have offices in Lagos. Situated in the South West, Lagos is primarily a Yoruba land, however, due to its cosmopolitan nature, all the ethnic nationalities are well represented in Lagos.

After the civil war, many Ibos migrated to Lagos to seek for greener pastures. In no time, they were able to establish durable business ventures ranging from small scale to large scale enterprises. The success story of the entrepreneurship of Igbos resident in Lagos was captured in the Vanguard of April 11, 2015. Vanguard reported that:

The civil war ended, Igbos with their 20 pounds, poured out of the villages and many returned to Lagos. And Lagos welcomed them. And before long, Igbos, by sheer industry, came to dominate street commerce in ‘Lagos and as their businesses flourished, their numbers grew.

The Igbos’ preferred trade apprenticeship system meant that as Igbo entrepreneurs grew they brought in family and friends from the east as apprentices. And apprentices imbued with the “young shall grow” mentality soon became business owners and brought in more apprentices. So unsurprisingly Igbos would dominate whole trade lines likes the motor spare parts and electronics business and all dealings in imported goods. Naturally, they would dominate market complexes like ‘Alaba’, and ‘Aspamda’ and ‘Trade fair’ and ‘Balogun’. And that meant that they would dominate areas like Ajeromi Ifelodun, and Amuwo Odofin and Oshodi, Isolo and Ojo residential areas around major markets.

Despite the sterling contributions of the Igbos towards the economic growth of Lagos, they have not enjoyed wide political representation in the state. Right from the first republic, the predominant party in the South West has always held sway in Lagos state. In the first republic (1960-1966), the Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo controlled Lagos politics. During the second republic (1979-1983), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) spearheaded by Obafemi Awolowo maintained its dominance in Lagos. Lagos was the centre of chaos, anarchy and political instability during the June 12, 1993 crisis. In the 1990s, Lagos proved to be the most potent opposition against the military regimes of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha.

Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999 has not changed the political configuration of Lagos. The Action for Democracy (AD) which was later re-christened Action Congress (AC) and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) respectively served as the umbrella party for the Yoruba speaking

people. From 1999 up until 2011, Action Congress was the ruling party in Lagos. On February 6, 2013, the All Progressive Congress (APC) was born when Nigeria's three biggest opposition parties; the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), merged to form the APC (The Nation, May 29, 2015).

### **THE IGBO FACTOR IN 2015 ELECTIONS: CASE STUDY OF LAGOS**

The 2015 general election in Nigeria was quite unique. Former military ruler, General Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd) of the opposition party, APC upstaged President Goodluck Jonathan of the then ruling party, People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the March 28, 2015 presidential election.

The indigene-settler conflict reared its ugly head prior to the 2015 gubernatorial polls in Lagos. Considering their large presence in Lagos, the Igbo community proved to be influential in the outcome of the election. Prior to the election, it was alleged that the Oba of Lagos, Oba Rilwan Akiolu threatened that all Igbos in Lagos will be drowned in the Lagos Lagoon if the Igbos fail to vote for APC at the gubernatorial polls (Surajudeen, 2015). Oba Rilwan Akiolu's audio and video recordings of his alleged hate speech caused public outrage (Thisday, April 7, 2015).

Dr. Josef Onoh, son of former governor of old Anambra State, late Chief C. C. Onoh, vowed to drag the Oba to the International Criminal Court, ICC, over the alleged threats, even as Ohanaeze Youths Council, OYC, gave the Oba 48 hours within which to retract and unconditionally apologise to Ndigbo in Lagos over the threat (Vanguard, April 7, 2015).

Condemnations and criticisms also came from Chief Olabode George, Mr. Femi Fani-Kayode, Mr. Tony Nwulu (Oshodi-Isolo Rep-elect), the Lagos State Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Afenifere, Igbo Youths Movement (IYM), Aka-Ikenga and Igbo Professionals Lagos (IPL), Oodua Youths Congress, Oodua Democratic Coalition, Yoruba think tank, Oodua Nation in Diaspora and United Self-Determination Platform of Oodua, among others (Vanguard, April 7,

2015). The PDP exploited the scenario to their advantage by extending their hands of fellowship to the aggrieved Igbo community in Lagos.

A school of thought kicked against the attitudes of the Igbos towards who wins elections in Lagos state. APC supporters pointed at the kind gestures that Bolaji Ahmed Tinubu and Babatunde Raji Fashola showed the Igbos by appointing some Igbo settlers into their cabinets during their tenure as Governor of Lagos state. Ben Akabueze was part of Tinubu’s cabinet and he served as Commissioner for Economic Planning and Budget under Babatunde Raji Fashola’s administration. Another Ibo man, Joe Igbokwe, the publicity secretary of APC in Lagos was the General Manager of Lagos State Infrastructure Maintenance and Regulatory Agency (LASIMRA) during Fashola’s tenure as Governor of Lagos state (The Sun, April, 9, 2015).

It is interesting to note that, Yorubas do not enjoy the same privileges in Eastern Nigeria unlike their Igbo counterparts residing in the South West especially in Lagos.

Table 1.0 Successful Igbo Candidates at the 2015 Election in Lagos State.

NAME	PARTY	CONSTITUENCY	TRIBE	TYPE
OGEHEN EGBOH	PDP	AMUWO ODOFIN	IGBO	HOUSE OF REPS
MRS RITA ORJI	PDP	AJEROMI/IFELODUN	IGBO	HOUSE OF REPS
TONY NWULU	PDP	OSHODI/ISOLO FEDERAL CONSTITUENCY II	IGBO	HOUSE OF REPS
JUDE IDIMOJU	PDP	OSHODI/ISOLO FEDERAL CONSTITUENCY II	IGBO	HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

**Source:** Author’s Input

Table 1.0 shows the list of Igbos that won electoral seats at the 2015 election in Lagos. The Igbos won in Igbo dominated areas at the expense of Yoruba candidates that contested under the platform of APC. However, Oluremi Tinubu, Gbenga Ashafa and Solomon Olamilekan Adeola of the APC swept all the three senatorial seats in Lagos.

The 2015 Presidential election in Lagos as shown in table 2.0 reflects the impact of ethnic cleavages on the voting pattern of Lagos residents.

Table 2.0 2015 Presidential Election Results in Selected Constituencies in Lagos State.

CANDIDATE/PARTY	CONSTITUENCY	NUMBER OF VOTES
DR. GOODLUCK JONATHAN (PDP)	AJEROMI/IFELODUN	57,494
GEN. MUHAMMUDU BUHARI (APC)	AJEROMI/IFELODUN	37,715
DR. GOODLUCK JONATHAN (PDP)	OSHODI/ISOLO	48,878
GEN. MUHAMMUDU BUHARI (APC)	OSHODI/ISOLO	42,585
DR. GOODLUCK JONATHAN (PDP)	AMUWO ODOFIN	39,391
GEN. MUHAMMUDU BUHARI (APC)	AMUWO ODOFIN	24,612
DR. GOODLUCK JONATHAN (PDP)	OJO	40,685
GEN. MUHAMMUDU BUHARI (APC)	OJO	26,117
DR. GOODLUCK JONATHAN (PDP)	SURULERE	58,649
GEN. MUHAMMUDU BUHARI (APC)	SURULERE	52,798

**Source:** The News, March 30, 2015.

The incumbent President, General Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd) lost to erstwhile President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan in five Lagos constituencies largely dominated by the Igbo speaking people.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Indigene-settler conflict remains a lingering national issue in Nigeria. The Indigene-settler dichotomy is traceable to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914.

This paper has analyzed different sections of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Section 147 (b) of the 1999 Constitution spells out the Federal Character Principle, however, the constitution did not elaborate on the Indigene Clause.

Sections 25, 26 and 27 of the 1999 Constitution outline the different categories of citizenship. It has been observed that despite the non-discriminatory clause as enshrined in section 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution, Nigerians who are non-indigenes in other states of the federation face limitations that question the essence of Nigeria's federal system.

This paper reviews the political history of Igbos from the Independence era. As one of the most dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbos have contributed immensely to the economic development of the country. Despite the laudable feats achieved by the Igbos in the economic sphere, they have fallen down the pecking order in the struggle for power. The January 15, 1966 coup and the secession which ultimately prompted the civil war (1967-1970) continue to hunt the Igbos. Since the end of the civil war, Igbos have continued to spread out and settle in different parts of Nigeria. Lagos, the economic nerve centre of Nigeria serves as the case study of this research. The political intrigues that happened before the gubernatorial election and the voting pattern in the Igbo dominated areas in Lagos indicate a new dimension to the Indigene-settler relationship.

It is on this note that some recommendations will be made to solve the Indigene-settler problem in Nigeria. Firstly, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution should be reviewed in order to solve the Indigene-settler status by defining who an Indigene/settler is. Secondly, amendment should be made on the 1999 Constitution in respect to section 42(1). Citizenship Clause should be used to replace the Indigene Clause in order to put an end to the gross abuse of power wielders that have access to political and economic power in Nigeria. The replacement of the Indigene Clause with the Citizenship Clause will afford every Nigerian citizen equal opportunities.

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