

Full Length Research

POLITICS OR ‘POLITRICKS’: NIGERIAN POLITICS OF BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION IN IGBOLAND

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Public trust and citizen engagement in politics are in short supply in today’s Nigeria. This is because of the prevalence of “politricks,” the practice of the politics of bribery and corruption by the average Nigerian politician, with its attendant negative socio-political and economic consequences. Igboland, the geographical context of this paper, is particularly not immune to this reality. This self-serving politics is pursued with total disregard of the common good and has grown largely in a political culture that fears neither the Bible nor the Koran. Igbo politicians and their Nigerian counterparts revel publicly that pledges made under these sacred writs can be flouted with impunity. The dread of supernatural retribution in traditional society meant that laws are always respected and norms strictly adhered to. Such is no longer the case in our present dispensation. My thesis argues that only a return to traditional Igbo cultural trust-building mechanisms that ensure respect for the rule of law in society will abate the growth of bribery and corruption in politics in Igboland. In this regard, Christianity and other foreign religions can borrow a leaf from traditional religion with respect to its repertoire of retributions for taboo flouters.

Keywords: Public trust, politics, politricks, bribery and corruption

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INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, public trust and citizen engagement in politics no longer appeal to the average Nigerian. By “public trust” we mean the public character of what Fukuyama, in defining “trust,” sees as “the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of members of that community” (Fukuyama, 1996). As for “citizen engagement,” we mean individual citizen’s and/or groups’ engagement in tackling whatever may be the issues that confront them in society. Often, this engagement brings to the core the essence of

democratic politics, namely, the integration of the feelings, sentiments, views and opinions of the citizens into the policy and programme of government in the overall interest of the citizens. In other words, this understanding of “citizen engagement” is given a human face and, therefore, concretized when it is related to the voice the citizens, either as individuals or a group, add to the activities of the people they elect to represent them in the making of economic and socio-political policies that affect the lives of the citizenry at various levels of governance.

It is not without reason that there exists the lack or poverty of public trust and citizen engagement in Nigeria. We believe it is because of the prevalence of “politricks”

in the country, meaning the practice of deception-rooted politics that engenders mistrust and is nurtured on bribery and corruption. This brand of politics has, in turn, undoubtedly characterized the political behaviour of the average Nigerian politician, with its attendant negative socio-political and economic consequences in the country.

The preceding remarks inform our research intention for this paper. Given the attendant negative socio-political and economic consequences that are associated with 'politricks' in any given polity – Igboland inclusive – and the absence, so far, of an effective response to checkmate the menace of 'politrick' and, by so doing, usher in a positively new leadership and citizenry in Igboland, we intend to explore into traditional Igbo society's mechanisms for the maintenance of law and order, believing that therein lies perhaps the answer to our quest.

Our overriding argument is this: anyone who is involved in civic engagement towards the emergence of a new and positive socio-political order in and for Igboland must understand the reality of "politricks," especially how the Igbo got caught up in it; to lack this understanding or not to correctively appreciate its seriousness is to engage in a utopian enterprise in Igboland. Hence our thesis or hypothesis argues that only a return to traditional Igbo cultural trust-building mechanisms that ensure maintenance of law and order in society will abate the growth of bribery and corruption in politics in Igboland.

In pursuit of its objectives, the paper will be written mainly from a social scientific theoretical framework and purview - that is, from the wisdom of political science analytical and to real life perspectives, to be precise - while delving into Igbo cultural and religious terrain within the larger context of the Nigerian State and its politicization of ethnicity. The ethnic claims on the country is such that it is tied to structural imbalance among ethnic groups or, better, their elite contenders for power, many of who ironically, in the guise of competing for access to and allocation of scarce resources for their ethnic groups in terms of development, end up exploiting state resources to sustain patronage networks for their personal interests. It is on account of this and to better demonstrate the veracity of our thesis for the paper that we intend to adopt an instrumentalist methodological approach; here, it is our acknowledgement that the ethnicity that underlies the Nigerian politics is the creation of the elites, given its strategic utility, in achieving material or political goods formally in the name of a group, but indeed, solely to the elites' interest/advantage. Besides, in adopting this instrumentalist approach, we will take our cue from the Marxian perception of the State as the product of the social system that is characterized by class contradictions, struggle and domination.

To practically actualize the goal and the

preceding methodological intent of the paper, we will have seven headings for the paper, beginning with this introductory part that stands for the first heading. The second heading will attempt to put the problem of 'politricks' in contemporary Igboland in perspective. In the third heading we will dwell on the cultural mechanisms for maintenance of law and order in traditional Igbo society. Then comes the fourth heading. Here attention will be paid to how and when 'politricks' infested Igboland. In the fifth heading we will briefly look into how the Igbo responded to post-war politics in Nigeria. The sixth heading will focus on what can be done, leading to the seventh heading that will conclude the paper with suggestions towards minimizing, if not abating, "politricks" in Igboland.

Putting the Problem of 'politricks' in Contemporary Igboland in Perspective

One typical example of this 'problem' is the case of one Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State – a young, well known post-civil war nouveaux-riche Igbo politician. On leaving Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on whose platform he served as Governor of his home State, he formed his own Party, PPA, under which he ran for the Presidency in the country's General Elections of 2011. On losing his bid for the Presidency, he later returned to the then victorious PDP under whose platform he then contested and lost his bid for a Senatorial seat in the 2015 General Election. Soon after the loss, he abandoned PDP again to quickly join All Progressives Congress (APC), the victorious Party at the National level, under the leadership of Buhari, obviously believing his membership in APC will give him the cover to escape from Buhari's long arm of war against corruption. To solidify this belief, Kalu soon got himself turbaned respectively by the Emir of Sokoto – perhaps, Nigeria's most powerful Traditional-cum Islamic leader - and the Emir of Daura, Buhari's own town in Katsina State. These moves, however, could not save him as he expected; for, he soon ran out of luck and was eventually convicted and jailed for his numerous cases of corruption mostly while he was the Governor of Abia State.

Besides the preceding example of the problem of 'politricks' in Igboland is the drama that greeted the result of the 2019 governorship election in Imo State – the heartland of Igboland, its most populated and, perhaps, most highly educated of the Igbo States. The drama is specifically the upturning of the result of that election by the Supreme Court of Nigeria. A recall of the context of the case is worth stating at this juncture.

Following the country's general elections in April 2019, one Hon. Emeka Ihedioha of the PDP, the then opposition party at both the State and National levels,

was declared winner of the gubernatorial election in Imo State by the country's election umpire, the Independent National Election Commission (INEC). Without going into the nitty-gritty of how the election was won and lost, one fact was clearly evident: the great majority of the citizens of the State were seemingly happy with the outcome of the election. This was evidenced in the overwhelming welcome they gave to the winner and as they came in droves to witness his inauguration as their governor. Also, almost every who-is-who in politics in the State was literally decamping from their respective Parties to join the new Governor and his PDP at the State level. In other words, these politicians were literally jumping on each other to not only express and register their loyalty to the new Governor but also to position themselves well enough to attract the Governor's attention for possible political appointments in and outside the State either for themselves or for their political cronies. Part of the registration of loyalty was to try and shout louder than others in the condemnation of the obviously unpopular outgoing Governor, Rochas Okorochoa, and his eight-years of poor governance of the State. Not to be outdone in this were the members of the State House of Assembly (IHMA). For example, the then Speaker of the House, Rt. Hon. Collins Chiji, moved from All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) to PDP just as Hon. Kenneth Ibeh defected from his Party, Action Alliance (AA), to join PDP.

Barely eight months as Governor, Emeka Ihedioha was removed from office in favour of his challenger, Senator Hope Uzodinmma, by the Supreme Court judgement that many legal minds across the nation saw as bizarre as it was shocking and therefore attracted the condemnation of many citizens across the nation. Hope Uzodinmma, it is worth noting, came fourth in the gubernatorial election. But belonging to the country's ruling Party, APC, which by this time had brought under its full control the different levels of the nation's judiciary, including the membership of the Apex Court, especially the Chief Justice, not few discerning minds in the country saw the judgement as predetermined. If the judgement was shocking, what was more was the response to the judgement by the average politician in the State. For, barely few days following the judgement and even before Uzodinmma could be sworn in as the new Governor, the politicians in the opposition parties, including even those who were in the PDP like Ihedioha, were dumping their respective Parties to join the APC. And like what happened when Ihedioha became Governor, most of these same politicians were declaring their loyalty to Uzodinmma and, by so doing, positioning themselves to win his benevolence and that of the ruling Party.

The political behaviour of the members of the State House of Assembly was, perhaps, more deplorable and worrisome. Less than two weeks of the Supreme court judgement, more than 17 members of the House,

including even some PDP members, threw all manner of integrity, trustworthiness and reliability to the winds as they individually defected from their Parties to now join Uzodinmma and his APC. The Speaker of the House, Rt. Hon. Chiji Collins, for instance, moved from APGA to PDP but for the sake of retaining his Speakership position had to swiftly shift to APC. Another, Hon. Kennedy Ibeh, had earlier moved from APC to AA then to PDP and now back to his original APC.

No one represents this deceptive politics and disregard for the citizenry better, perhaps, than one former Senator Emeka Ararume who changed to three political parties within one year alone. Beginning as a former Senator under the platform of PDP where he lost his bid to be the Party's Governorship candidate in the 2019 gubernatorial election, he switched over to APC for the same interest. On sensing his slim chance to win the APC's nod, he quickly dumped her to buy up the Governorship candidacy of the APGA under which he eventually ran for but lost the gubernatorial election. Immediately following the Supreme Court judgement that favoured Uzodinmma, the same man, Ararume, quickly pledged his loyalty to him and the APC. And barely two weeks after, while still firmly holding unto his membership and leadership position in the APGA, he declared his interest to run as APC's senatorial candidate in the bye-election for the State's vacant seat at the Senate.

Given the timing and the foregoing remarks, it is doubtful whether these politicians have any regard for both the party on whose platform they got "elected," talk less of any consideration to the feelings or real interest of the members of the electorate who "voted" them into power. To put it candidly, these politicians behave like the proverbial rolling stone that gathers no moss; so unmindful are they of their constituents' interest and feelings that they give their loyalty to the highest bidder or go to whoever and which direction beckons with the juiciest goodies. Commenting on the behaviour-trait of these politicians vis-à-vis their relation with the electorate, one journalist and Public Affairs Analyst has this to say:

On several occasions and with undeterred impunity, the politicians have clearly demonstrated and proven beyond doubt that the electorate count for nothing while vote casting is a mere electioneering ritual of no relevance.

The electorates are regarded as objects to clinch power and discarded after all. They are never again consulted until the next election season. (Onyekachi, 2020).

Meanwhile, Senator Hope Uzodinmma on his part and in the pattern of his predecessors, began what could easily be discerned as laying the necessary foundation to play out his own "politricks" – being himself a politician largely in the mode of Orji Uzor Kalu we noted above. The

pattern usually entailed, among other things, securing the goodwill and support of the State's civil servant. Thus, few days after the Supreme Court verdict that saw Uzodinma as Governor, one of his first major policy actions was to declare, in a grand fanfare, the provision of brand-new motor vehicles to each of the Permanent Secretaries of the State ministries. A grateful and enthusiastic State's Head of Service was profuse with thanks and appreciation to a supposedly generous Governor. This was not lost to the Governor's Chief Press Secretary/Media Adviser as an achievement. As he put it while praise-singing his boss, Hope Uzodinma:

Civil servants in Imo [State] have not been as happy as they are today before. They have given their commitment to be part of the journey to reclaim, recover and rehabilitate Imo by Governor Uzodinma [Imo State] because they have seen the sincerity of purpose in the man on the driver's seat. (Nwachukwu, 2020).

That an ordinary provision for good governance should be turned into an achievement goes to show a seeming desperation in Uzodinma to win over the confidence of the citizens of the State the majority of whom are seemingly not happy with the Supreme Court judgement that catapulted him into being their Governor.

As a result of the foregoing political behaviour of the politicians, "there is a loss of confidence in institutions and their representatives, which totally discredits politics and social organizations in the country." Thus, while the Igbo are not immune to "politricks," they have ended up being its principal victims within the general context of Nigerian polity and politics. Nor can we exclude the possibility that the general citizenry of Igboland have been part of networks of corruption, at times to the point of agreeing to condone the politics of bribery and corruption in exchange for whatever pittance that the politicians give to them. But this may not be surprising in a country where people most often than not secure jobs, including those in the public service sector, on the basis of who they know and not necessarily on their qualification or competence – a systemic matter that I will address later in the paper.

Cultural Mechanisms for the Maintenance of Law and Order in Traditional Igbo Society

Prior to the colonial period or, better, the arrival of Christianity in Igboland, the Igbo had a well-organized system of governance. It is founded and rooted in the centrality of religion in Igbo tradition and culture. As a matter of fact, life in the traditional Igbo society revolves and rebounds on belief in *Chukwu* (Supreme Deity or God in Christian parlance) whose power it is to give and

take away life. Tied to this is the belief in and concern for the "after-life" – that is, the individual's ultimate goal to experience contentment and happiness after death. And for this goal to be achieved, the individual must maintain a cordial relationship with both the members of the spirit world and one's fellow human beings on earth, thus making religion and its values to be at the very hub of people's life - be it political, economic, social, etc. – in traditional Igbo society.

From the preceding remarks we appreciate the import traditional Igbo society places on having mechanisms for maintaining law and order for its citizens. Like in any past and present society, the citizens complied with the rules and laws of the land not necessarily because they like them as such but because they would not like to live out the consequences - the punishment by the community or the anger of the gods, specifically in traditional Igbo society. Strict compliance with the rule of law was such that people would even distance themselves from associating with someone whose source of wealth was questionable or not explicitly clear and transparent; they do so in order to avoid any chance whatsoever of being included for the indictment or punishment they believe would surely be visited on the suspect by the gods of the land.

On a related note, is the issue of sin vis-à-vis social and communal relationships in traditional Igbo society. 'Sin,' in the context of this paper, is not with reference to minor every-day infractions individuals do to one another but rather those very gravely serious wrong-doings that are considered abhorrent to both the gods and humanity. That is, acts the Igbo consider as *Nso Ala* (very offensive acts against the land) - e.g. murder, incest, sexual violation of a minor, habitual stealing, misappropriation of community fund/property, etc. An individual who commits any such act is ostracized from the community; and members of the community are banned from having any interaction or communication with the ostracized until he/she performs communally stipulated series of punitive restitutive steps all of which are together aimed towards restoring her/his membership in the community. Such acts would take quite some length of time, sometimes weeks or months or years to complete, depending on the gravity of the offence.

As a matter of fact, the reconciliatory steps cannot be taken together in one swoop of a time; it follows a one-step-at-a-time approach. This is to not only register the gravity and seriousness of ostracization but also to ascertain and ensure that the ostracized is truly sorry for his/her sinful act and is sincerely willing not to take the community for a ride in matters concerning the maintenance of rule of law in the community. Each step carries a heavy financial burden to perform. On completion of the final step, the ostracized is received back into the community in a festive mood, following a celebrative sacrifice to the gods that is often led by the

priest of the community's deity and supported by the council of the titled men, *Ndi Nze na Ozo*. of the community. Thus, when one considers the shame and loneliness that one would visit on oneself and family, the long duration of time and the heavy financial expenditure it takes to fully and finally reconcile with the community as well as the denial of proper traditional burial rites, one would think deep and twice before one would dare to embark on any such act that attracts ostracization.

The foregoing mechanisms, among many others, for the maintenance of, and compliance with, the rule of law in Igboland were drastically affected with the advent of both Christianity and colonialism – two sides of the same coin of European forceful intrusion into Nigeria and, by inclusion, Igboland. As Chinua Achebe rightly asserted in his famous work, *Things Fall Apart*, (Achebe, 1958) things really fell apart with the Christian and colonial intrusion into Igboland. Even if granted that not everything fell apart, at least this much can be said to have happened: the combined intrusion of Christianity and Colonialism in Igboland together largely left on their trail a legacy of denigration of almost anything and everything Igbo. Under the guise of bringing true and authentic religion (Christianity) and civilization (colonial ethos) – what they describe as “the blessings of Christ-inspired civilization of the West” – the missionaries and colonialists prided themselves to have come to share these blessings with a people, the Africans, who are “suffering under satanic forces of oppression, ignorance, and disease” (Boer, 1988).

Worthy of note is the act of oath-taking. In traditional Igbo society, it is the last resort – meaning it is beyond human solution or adjudication - for individuals to prove their innocence or to re-establish their trustworthiness. As such, only the gods can now settle the matter by way of witnessing the individuals take an oath. Nowhere is this point better exemplified than, perhaps, in the case of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe accusing Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe of having participated in a plot to kill him. To re-establish their trust in each other, the two men, with all their education and political prominence, agreed to have their village relatives arrange a traditional religious oath-taking ritual between the two of them. Mbadiwe's last minute refusal to go along with the arrangement made Azikiwe place him in perpetual suspicion as one never to be trusted, declaring: 'I shall forever be suspicious of him'" (Sklar, 1963).

With the intrusion of Christianity and colonialism, however, instead of the traditional oath-taking in the name of a deity, disputants or people accused of committing a crime were led to take their disputes to the courts which were set up and ran according to Western-European legal culture. Here, in the courts, oath-taking in the name of the gods, the deity, was replaced with one swearing by the Christian Bible which the people, with time, experienced to have no deadly potency or consequence as it used to be the case with the traditional

deities or gods. On the flip side of oath taking, is the reality of sin which Christianity reduced in general to a private affair between individuals and their God. Thus, be it Catholic or non-Catholic Christians, the Christian approach to sin and making amends for it are akin to a slap-on-the-wrist or, at best, a trivialization of sin, when compared to the seriousness with which traditional Igbo society considers and handles *Nso Ala* and its violators (the sinners). The import of this assertion, especially as it will affect political practice in Igboland where Christianity has made its deepest and most enduring mark, will become clearer as we venture into our next heading.

Infestation of 'Politricks' into Igboland, How and When?

It is possible to argue that the infestation of “politricks” in Igboland owes its deep and remote beginnings to the politics and vision that gave birth to independent Nigeria. For, to begin with, what we know today as Nigeria was founded on a lie and, therefore, a fraud. This is in so far as the nationalities that were cobbled together to make up the so-called country were neither consulted nor were their consent received to become one country. If anything, the truth is that Nigeria was made a country for and in the sole interest of the British colonialists, not that of the nationalities. Thus, by the 1914 amalgamation, the three founding fathers of independent Nigeria and political rivals – Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello - were mere kids and, therefore, had no hands whatsoever in the politics that gave birth to the country. They simply met, grew into and later had to work with what the British colonialism created, namely, what Baxter succinctly described as an “incompatible and mutually antagonistic tribal and ethnic groupings forced to cohabit within the indivisible precincts of political geography”

(<https://www.rememberingbiafra.com/news/oral-histories-and-memoirs/biafra-the-nigerian-civil-war-1967-1970>).

In the face of the preceding scenario, each of the founding fathers had his own individual dream and vision for an independent Nigeria. Awolowo sought for a Nigeria with a federal system of governance “to safeguard the interests of each ethnic nationality and region and thus create a sustainable basis for Nigerian unity” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Path-to-Nigerian-Freedom>). Azikiwe, in contrast, favoured a unitary government with a unitary constitution (Crowder, 1978). In the pursuit of their individual and respective dreams as just noted, Nigerian nationalism was affected. It began with the formation of Pan-Igbo Federal Union in 1944 and followed by Awolowo's formation of Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1945 in order to “create among the Yoruba the same sense of 'ethnic solidarity' that had been achieved among

the Ibo" (Ibid.). This scenario exacerbated an already "intense feelings of rivalry between Yoruba and Ibo," reaching its crescendo, so to speak, particularly in 1948 "in Lagos where there was severe danger of communal disorders from July to September" (Ibid.). Walter Schwartz succinctly captures the mood when he noted: "As if banished from the Garden of Eden [Nigeria nationalism] was now steadily losing its innocence of tribal consciousness, and the Ibo-Yoruba rivalry began to assume political proportions" (Schwartz, 1968).

Add to the preceding scenario the entry of Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto with his own vision of an independent Nigeria and the formation of his own Party, the Northern People's Party (NPC) in October 1951. For him his vision was a Nigeria that will facilitate his eventual actualization of the dream of his great grand-father, Uthman Dan Fodio; that is, a Nigeria that would have been entirely Islamized if not for the intrusion of British colonialism that halted the enterprise. Thus, Ahmadu Bello seemingly played along with the duo of Azikiwe and Awolowo, appearing to like what each was saying but not at the expense of giving up his own dream as noted above. For, while Awolowo's idea of a federal form of governance that would safeguard the interests of each ethnic nationality came close his idea of 'One North' under Hausa/Fulani Islamic dominance, Azikiwe's advocacy for a unitary Nigeria with one unitary Constitution would give him the best chance to eventually achieve an Islamized independent Nigeria.

However, it would appear that Azikiwe was speaking from both sides of his mouth: he was championing a unitary federated Nigeria but one which will be dominated by the Igbo. As reported in the excerpts of the memoirs of Sir Bryan Sherwood Smith, Governor of Northern Nigeria, 1952-1957: "The Ibo giant,' according to Azikiwe, "is waking from stupor.... A mighty nation shall arise again in the west of the Sudan.... to rewrite the history written by their ancestors...the God of Africa has willed it...." (Smith, 1969). It was this mind-set, coupled with the vicious cold war of sorts between the Igbo and Yoruba that made Azikiwe refuse to join Awolowo to form the federal government; instead, Azikiwe aligned with Ahmadu Bello, believing that Ahmadu Bello would be more trustworthy and therefore easier to handle than Awolowo. Azikiwe was mistaken, as later events would show. The British colonialists, whose age-long dislike for the South in favour of the North has never been in doubt, seized the opportunity of the Azikiwe-Bello alliance to checkmate Azikiwe and therefore installed in power in 1959 Ahmadu Bello's NPC, rather than the more nationalistic but Southern-based NCNC. The veracity of this assertion has been discussed in great details, especially as discernable from the attitude of Lord Lugard - Nigeria's foremost colonialist - towards the North, in contrast to the South (Enwerem, 1995).

By October 1960 when an independent Nigeria was

born, the lie of 1914 had matured to metamorphose into vicious ethnic politics that took a central stage in the governance of the entire country; its federal structure of governance notwithstanding, the three major ethnic groups were bent on outdoing one another. With the combined force of Ahmadu Bello's Northern-dominated NPC and Azikiwe's Eastern-dominated NCNC, Awolowo's Action Group Party was easily and swiftly demolished in 1962 and its Western regional government replaced by Akintola as its Premier. The onslaught against Awolowo would later culminate in having him incarcerated in Calabar prison through the instrumentality of the NPC-NCNC joint government.

This seemingly good working relationship between the NPC and NCNC was hiding more than it was ready to reveal—the deep internal contradictions in the alliance. These were already rife by 1962, exploding in the open during the census of 1962 and 1963 when both the political leadership of North, Ahmadu Bello, and its counterpart in the East, Nnamdi Azikiwe, sought to supplant each other in the struggle for the control of power and leadership at the centre of the Nigerian federation. Herein we locate what, together, unwittingly spawned the civil war, alias Nigeria-Biafra war.

Prior to the beginning of the war, the scions of Ahmadu Bello, with their commitment to his One-North politics still intact, out-staged the South from Federal power; this was following their successful staging of the July 29th 1966 counter coup d'état to the January 15th one that was planned and executed by mostly soldiers from the South. The correct version of those who were behind the January 15th 1966 coup and their reasons for the undertaking could not be better given by anyone else but by A. Adegboyega - one of the major participants in that coup (Adegboyega, 1981).

Ahadu Bello's scions, in order to assuage any possible fear of Islamic domination or persecution of the Christians in the North and in the guise of keeping the North together, fronted Yakubu Gowon – a Christian and most senior officer from the North at the time – to head the resultant federal military government.

Their next strategic move was to secure the support of the Yoruba. The opportunity presented itself with the release of Awolowo from prison by the Biafran leadership; Calabar, the location of the prison, was by this time in Biafra. The Yakubu Gowon-led Federal military government immediately co-opted Awolowo into its ranks. Obviously to convince him of its sincerity, the government placed him as the second-in-command to Gowon. To further its high regards for Awolowo, the government bought into his long-held dream and vision for Nigeria – the creation of states for the minorities in the country – and actualized the dream by restructuring the entire country with the creation of twelve states from its original four Regions.

With the absence of his chief opponents from the central government – Ahmadu Bello having been killed in the January 15th 1966 coup, and Azikiwe escaping to the East to be with his kith and kin in the embattled Igbo-dominated Biafra, Awolowo had the opportunity to right the wrongs his opponents had visited on him and the independent Nigeria of his dream, the raging civil war notwithstanding. But for the securement of his dream for the creation of states for the minorities as noted above, and his more or less circumstantial support for a united Nigeria during the war, there was not much that Awolowo did during and after the war that stood him out as a committed believer in a united Nigeria – an entity he had earlier described as a mere geographical expression! Worthy of note here is his failure to take advantage of the Aburi Accord to advise the young and inexperienced Yakubu Gowon not only against renegading from the accord but also against a more entrenched ethnic loyalty. Needless to say a full implementation of the letter and spirit of that Accord would have saved the country from a prolonged war in the interest of all and sundry, the Yoruba inclusive. Instead, Awolowo was bent on cornering for the Yoruba most of the benefits that flowed from sharing federal power, especially as the then more educated Yoruba took over the public and private sector jobs that the Igbo left behind to flee to Biafra.

In fact, it would appear Awolowo was on a punitive or, at best, retaliatory mission against the Igbo to disadvantage them in a manner seemingly similar to, but actually worse than, what he had accused Azikiwe of visiting on the Yoruba before the war. Nowhere was this assertion more evident, perhaps, than in Awolowo's advocacy for starvation as a legitimate weapon of war; as such, he had no qualms supporting the then Gowon-led federal military government to use it on the then totally embattled and blockaded Biafrans. Awolowo's mission against the Igbo took to economic and political dimensions following the end of the civil war.

As Federal Minister of Finance at the time, he masterminded the government's enactment of three crippling anti-Igbo economic-cum-political policies. One was the "Twenty-Pound" policy whereby the Federal government directed the Banks not to honour any withdrawal more than Twenty Pounds in Nigerian currency by any of their clients who tampered with their Bank Accounts in Biafra and in the Biafran currency during the civil war; and whatever amount that remained in excess after the withdrawal was to be forfeited to the Federal Government. There was hardly any Igbo who did not tamper with their Bank Accounts while in Biafra, meaning that the average Igbo had only twenty pounds to start life afresh and live on in a hostile Nigeria after the civil war. And to rub it in, so to say, came the "Indigenization" policy. It mandated all foreign companies in Nigeria to sell off their companies to willing and financially capable Nigerians. By having this policy

passed simultaneously with the "Twenty-Pound" policy that financially dispossessed the Igbo, the intent was a blatant exclusion of the Igbo from participating in the indigenization exercise – the buying of any of the foreign-owned companies – even if they had wanted to. This was followed by the "Abandoned Property" policy by which the Igbo, against their will and interest, were dispossessed of their pre-war real estate properties (lands and houses) in Port-Harcourt under the pretext that they had abandoned them when they chose to flee to Biafra for their lives during the war. It is worth noting that Port-Harcourt - a pre-war heavily Igbo populated city in the old Igbo dominated Eastern Region of Nigeria that became Biafra – is the largest city and capital of the present-day Rivers State as well as part and parcel of Ikwere-land of the Ikwere-speaking Igbos. With the creation of the Rivers State during the civil war by the then Yakubu Gowon-led federal military government, the Ikweres, who form the largest single ethnic group in a State with a number of minority ethnic nationalities, were excised from Igboland and made part of Rivers State.

The preceding policies were in addition to a number of others that, on the surface, appeared to have been aimed at the Nigerian citizens as a whole but on a closer look were subtly targeted on the Igbo. Here, one recalls the government's "Federal Character/Quota systems" of employment, the take-over of mission schools and the expulsion from the country of all the Irish missionaries who stayed on in Biafra during the civil war. The former (the "Federal Character" and "Quota System") policies were targeted on not only limiting the employment of the Igbo who were in the public service prior to the war but had to flee to their Igbo homeland for their lives during the anti-Igbo killings of 1966 mostly in the North. The later (the school take-over and the expulsion of missionaries) was targeted not only on checkmating the continued success of missionary enterprise in Igboland that made it to be the strongest and most Christian part of Nigeria, but also to punish the Irish Catholic missionaries in Igboland for siding with Biafra – and by implication the Igbo – during the civil war. And so, by the time Awolowo finally bowed out from the government about four years after the war, he had immensely and significantly contributed to inflicting potentially crippling political and economic policies on the Igbo.

With these developments, there emerged in the country 'overnight millionaires' from among those in power or within the corridors of power. It was not long, therefore, before the average Nigerian suddenly began to see the federal government, more than before, as the source, controller, and dispenser of economic and, invariably, political power. This newly emerged reality was clearly akin to Max Weber's idea of 'patrimonialism,' that is, a principle of administration or governance in which, among other things, authority is entirely exercised through favours' which are distributed to clients, at the whim and

discretion of the ruler or patron on the basis of loyalty, rather than merit (Weber, 1964 & 1968). In its neo-patrimonial character, it is indicative of an informal patron-client relationship that can reach from very high up in the state structure, down to individuals in, say, small villages (Eisenstadt, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neopatrimonialism>).

A common offshoot of any neo-patrimonial system is the undermining or supplanting of the rule of law to the extent that the real power in the polity is held only by those with close connections to the strongman (patron) rather than those who hold legitimate positions through merit or the ballot box (Ibid). The strongman system breeds, feeds and thrives on corruption in its different forms and shapes (See, Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002). It is exemplified, for instance, in the collection of bribes, blatant falsification of records, nepotism and favouritism, cover-ups of unethical behaviour, such as the misappropriation of state funds, electoral fraud, to name a few of such corrupt practices – all of which have largely become common features of political behaviour in Nigeria since the end of the war till date!

The Igbo Response to the Post-War Politics in Nigeria

With the economic and political emasculation of the Igbo following the end of the civil war, they were literally brought to their knees, to a crossroads to choose between survival and death, so to speak. They were nowhere found among the powers that be in the struggle for both the creation and control of political power at the centre at the time. In their more or less crippled and displaced state at the time, the best the Igbo could count themselves lucky to get were crumbs that literally fell from the table of the member ethnic nationalities that won the war. The more daring and luckier ones among the Igbo were only too willing and prepared to play a second fiddle to the Strongmen figures in the polity - that is, become Godsons and errand boys for them. In the course of dining and wining with their God-fathers, these Igbo learnt and imbibed their spirit and mannerisms; these they then enthusiastically replicated in Igboland, not minding whether the replication was against the interest of the Igbo.

The fact of the matter was this: no average Igbo during the war ever thought Biafra would lose the war, having convinced themselves that Biafra was fighting a just war and, therefore, would not be let down by God. But the unthinkable, the unimaginable, happened – Biafra or, better, the Igbo, lost the war, leaving them in a mental and psychological trauma – a consequence that is yet to receive deserved intellectual attention beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that the post-war situation and condition the Igbo found themselves necessitated a response that is akin to the Biblical clamour: “to your

tents oh Israel.” With the never-say-die attitude and character of the Igbo coming to the fore, individuals had to find a way to survive by whatever means possible – be it by crook or ‘politricks.’

Also arising from this trauma was a second and hard look the Igbo gave to religion, specifically their long-held perception of God as all powerful vis-à-vis their cultural belief that victory ultimately and unfailingly belongs to the one who goes on the journey of life with *Ofo n'Ogu* (equity and justice). With these beliefs shattered or at least put into serious doubts, the Igbo, being pragmatists in matters religious (See, Echeruo, 1979), began to look for another but a better performing god. It has to be one that can give them power and help them solve their immediate material problems or predicament; this god was found in Mammon (Money) by a significant number of the Igbo. Pursuit for this ‘new god’ by any means possible has become the order of the day in Igboland. And the more the success, even in spite of the unrelenting anti-Igbo policies unleashed on the Igbo by their traditional rivals to politically and economically keep them in check, the more the Igbo continue to find a way to flourish, at least economically.

Meanwhile, in the course of this pursuit, morality was thrown to the winds. For, if an unjust Nigeria could be victorious over a Biafra on whose side were equity and justice in that war, so the many Igbo reasoned, then the concern for morality should take a back seat, at least for the moment. It is like, for these Igbos, the end justifies the means, be it in politics, economics and even social relationship. With the foregoing thought and pursuit, a ‘new Igbo’ was born! This ‘new Igbo’ could not but fit well and thrive in the country’s dominant systemic political culture and behaviour that gave birth to the group – that is, the neo-patrimonial-based system of politics in all its manner of exemplification as we had earlier noted in the paper.

What is to be done?

By now it has become clearly discernible that ‘politricks’ cannot thrive in or promote an atmosphere that demands for integrity – the willingness and preparedness to honestly and openly criticize those in power and back it up with walking the talk – and for credibility – the capability to resist accepting enticements and by so doing be believable and worthy of confidence. These two moral qualities, both of which mutually enhance each other, are found lacking among the majority of the members of the political class in Nigeria, Igboland inclusive. It is this lack among the politicians that gave birth to ‘politricks’ which, in turn, has become the dominant feature of their political thought and behaviour or practice. As such, members of the ‘new Igbo’ we noted earlier in the paper are gradually

and steadily becoming role models of sorts for the generality of *Ndigbo*. For, as Eric Fromm insightfully noted:

In any society the spirit of the whole culture is determined by the spirit of those groups that are most powerful in that society. This is so partly because these groups have the power to control ... and thereby to imbue the whole population with their own ideas; furthermore, these powerful groups carry so much prestige that the lower classes are more than ready to accept and imitate their values and to identify themselves psychologically (Fromm, 1941).

The foregoing raises this fundamental question: does the emergence, growth and dominance of this 'new Igbo' bode well for the Igbo race? In other words, does a situation where the Igbo race are led by politicians – role models of sorts - majority of whom lack both integrity and credibility ultimately mean well for *Ndigbo*? On a more serious note, would a society whose members cannot trust and repose confidence in each other be heading to life, to progress, or to doom? One is led to express the fear that if care is not taken the generality of the Igbo would soon so mistrust one another that they may miss recognizing genuine and authentic leaders for the Igbo.

The pertinence and relevance of the preceding questions as well as the response to them are worthy of attention, especially in the context of a Nigeria where the Igbo, for all practical purposes, have lost their pre-war importance and relevance in the country's scheme of things at the centre – be it in politics or economics. It should be even more frightening or at best disturbing to the Igbo in the light of the new-found alliance between the Yoruba and the Hausa/Fulani ethnic nationalities. For, without being oblivious of the circumstantial alliance between these two ethnic nationalities as represented by Awolowo and the Hausa/Fulani dominated political elites of the North during the civil war, this current alliance is the first time ever in the history of the country that the two nationalities entered into such a deliberate, well calculated and ethnically targeted alliance. In the context of the ongoing 'politricks' in Igboland, the Igbo should be extremely worried that the alliance was initiated, is currently represented, driven by and epitomized in the twosome personalities, Tinubu and Buhari, whose hatred for the Igbo is an open secret. For instance, while the former openly and successfully, with death threat, discouraged the Igbos in Lagos from voting in the Gubernatorial elections of 2019 - for fear of their potential voting power to sway the result against the former's Party, APC - the later, as President, saw to it that among the country's six geo-political Zones, the Igbo-speaking South East was the only zone that was completely excluded from benefitting from his

government's recent \$22.7 billion foreign loan.

The preceding remarks and observations as well as the emergence of the "new Igbo" and the value the group generates and promotes pose a serious challenge to the Igbo, especially when considered in the light of social relationships in Igboland vis-à-vis the Igbo communal interest. One such interest is the urgent need to raise a new generation of *Ndigbo* and a corresponding class of Igbo politicians to counter the 'new Igbo' that post-war Nigeria unleashed on Igboland.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper, we tried to demonstrate that 'politricks' has no promissory positive value for contemporary Igbo society and beyond. This is insofar as its practitioners could be said to be engaged in actions that are akin to Nso Ala (against the land) – that is, actions that run against the common interest of the Igbo race. This is especially when seen from the perspective of mechanisms for the maintenance of law and order, including even in governance, without which there would be no enabling environment for progress in the society. As is currently the case, political practice and behaviour in Igboland have developed to a level that *Ndigbo* can no longer trust their political leaders or even the leaders trust themselves. And when social relationships reach to this point, traditional Igbo society would resort to asking individuals to take an oath to prove their innocence and trustworthiness.

Brought to bear on political practice in Nigeria, Igboland inclusive, it is not as if oath-taking is alien to contemporary Igbo society. It has been one of the required undertakings one must fulfil before assuming a position of trust, say, either in executive or legislative and even judicial office. The fulfilment is met, in contemporary times, with either the Bible (for Christians) or the Koran (for Muslims). And so, oath-taking is not contentious. Rather, what is contentious is the potency of the means by which the oath is taken. This contention is a fall out of the trivialization the foreign religions, as we noted earlier in the paper, brought to addressing sin and leading to the reduction of the required amendment for sin to a level akin to a slap-on-the-wrist. For, from their lived experience, Nigerians or, for the purposes of this paper, the Igbo have not witnessed any drastic result like, say, death from the oath-taking by politicians, public servants and, indeed, all those entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the common patrimony of the society. No wonder then why people in public service – be they Nigerians or Igbo – easily and gleefully swear by the Bible or the Koran, knowing and believing fully well that this manner of oath-taking does not carry any drastic consequence, say, death. Hence, even after taking the oath, those who took it arrogantly and nonchalantly keep

on living out 'politricks' - keeping it alive and well - in Igboland and beyond. In the end the Igbo society is the loser for it!

The preceding attitude to oath-taking is a far cry from that which used to hold sway in the traditional Igbo Society where oath-taking is fear-inspiring, given that the oath is compulsorily taken in and through the name of the most revered deity whose deadly potential is highly acknowledged and feared in the community. The Igbo politicians and, indeed, every Igbo in any level of public service know this and, therefore, would prefer to avoid the deities at all cost. In the face of the growing menace of 'politricks' and its negative portends against the emergence of good governance for meaningful development in Igboland, this paper, therefore, proposes an intellectual re-visiting to the time-tested and honoured but long abandoned traditional Igbo society's mechanisms for the maintenance of law and order in Igboland. With specific reference to oath-taking vis-à-vis public service in Igboland, such an intellectual attention, for a realistic result, must be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective that must necessarily and collectively engage theological, cultural and socio-scientific disciplines. No time is as timely and urgent for such a study as this time in Igboland; only by so doing will the Igbo arrive at the urgently needed effective response to eradicate or, at least, curb the menace of 'politricks' in Igboland.

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