

**CULTURAL IDENTITY POLITICS IN NIGERIA AND MARGINALIZATION OF IGBO  
TRIBE: CASE FOR BIAFRANISM**

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**Abstract**

*It is now obvious that two major cultural or two major ethnic groups have dominated the helms of Nigeria politics and claim the Lords of this nation, in such a way that Igbo person will never smell the seat of Aso rock till infinity. Though it was silently a problem under the marrow but majority of people from other cultural background did not realize the antics till the emergence of Maazi Nnamdi Kanu and the announcement of the recent Nigerian presidential election result of 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 cum some utterances from some Northern political elites such as Former Kaduna State Governor, El-Rufia, who puts that “Peter Obi has a 100 percent chance to win Tinubu and Atiku, but he is an Igbo man, we rather go to war than see Igbo man win”. The indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) refers to people who claim to make up the former Republic of Biafra after the Republic of Biafra seized to exist in 1970. IPOB is under the leadership of Maazi Nnamdi Kanu who have been clamoring for separation from Nigeria because of marginalization. This paper looks into why Federal Republic of Nigeria insisted in cultural and ethnic politics rather than true federalism. It employs New Historism by Walleys and Warren (1954:40) as a frame work for analysis. It analyses the verifiable literary history and other opinions which are completely neutral facts. Summary and Suggestions were done based on Nigerian political structure in Nigeria and the IPOB objective for self-determination because of the marginalization of Igbo people.*

**Keywords:** Politics, Nigeria, Marginalization, Biafrans & Igbos

**Introduction**

Culture is the totality of people’s way of life, while cultural identity refers to person’s or people’s features that lead to sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group. It could be the way of people’s conception and perception. Those ways must be related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, traditions, heritage,

language, ancestry, kinds of thinking patterns in a given group that has its own distinct cultural features. Cultural identity is also an integral part of human being that proves a whole totality, together and how people relate to others. It contributes to people's overall wellbeing. Cultural identity is unexclusive in human grouping because it is the only main physical parameter or yardstick to show the actual result of a person.

Identifying people's culture provides the access to their social networks that could provide support to values and aspirations. The four cardinal points to cultural identity are as follows; gender, security, ability and race. Though two major areas this paper emphasizes are the ability and race. Ability in this research is not only to test whether people have the ability to rule, walk, eat, dance, cultivate etc. but also how people use their language ability to create peace or instigate war.

In Nigeria, we have more than five hundred (500) languages that made up different cultural groups. After the amalgamation of both the northern and southern protectorates, the colonial master in the year 1914, Fredrick Lord Lugard later grouped the entire people into three major ethnic groups known as Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. These three separate regions were independently existing where Nigeria was carved out around 16<sup>th</sup> century. They are the Zamfara region in the north, the Biafra in the east, the Benin Kingdom in the West. Zamfara region are the present-day Niger and Chad, Biafra left some to Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea while Benin left some to Dahomey which is now called Benin Republic (Emekesiri, 2020).

This amalgamation by the colonial master brought unending cultural and political problems in Nigeria because of differences in cultural identity. Though, Lugard really knew the implications. He did not deny the fact that the groups he amalgamated had nothing in common, even both in religion and that was why he quoted that "the oil and the water can never blend together" but out of his economic and selfish interest, he went further to unite those regions that he called "oil and water".

In Nigeria, the three regions brought together do not have and will never have the same cultural identity. Their cultural diversity paved way to deep hatred that led to killing of Igbo people even before the independence in 1960, The same hatred, killing and persecution on Igbo people living in the northern Nigeria made Lt. Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu to seek for their former root by declaring a republic of Biafra in the year 1967 which led to Nigerian- Biafran civil war from 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1967 to 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1970. The war swallowed millions of people in Igbo land. Yes, it was agreed that after the war, it was declared there was "no vanquish and no victory" but in actual sense, there was "victory". The two other regions are Hausa (Northerners) and Yoruba (Westerners) have it behind their minds that there is "victory". The evidence has not ended till date with so many proves.

### **True Federalism**

Federalism is a combination of the central government with the regional government for example provincial, states, cantonal, territorial or other sub-unit governments in a single political system and dividing the powers.

Federalism in Nigeria means transfer of some power, and delegation of some functions from central sovereign government to local government. Federalism in Nigeria could be traced to what was commonly called the Richards Constitution of 1946 that balkanized the amalgamated Protectorates into three groups known as the North (Kaduna) the East (Enugu) and the West (Ibadan) and the legislatures were assigned to each region (Eremie, 2014 :79). Today, Nigeria is a federation that consists of thirty-six states. Each state has a semi-autonomous political unit that could share power with the federal government according to the Constitution of Nigeria. Abuja is the Federal Capital Territory which does not counted as a state but the capital of Nigeria, where the seat of Presidency is situated. The Constitution of 1999 created the Fourth Nigerian Republic that truly made Nigeria a federation with democratic rule. The Constitution made Nigeria not only a nation of thirty-six states but seven hundred and seventy-four local government areas with about 150 million in population.

Defining the true federalism and the characteristics, it includes the presence of central authority that could represent the whole and also act on behalf of the whole in other external affairs and not only in internal affairs (Appadora, 2000: 495). The present condition of Nigeria as observed needs to pose if Nigeria practices a true federalism or do they lack the merit for true federalism? From the analyses, it is observed that if Nigerian federal authority kept maintaining the true federalism in all angles, there would be no agitation of some sections of Nigeria. For instance, most mineral resources that is holding Nigeria economically is from the southeastern part of Nigeria, but the former administration led by President

Muhammad Buhari constructed some standard railways gauge in the Northern part of Nigeria that even extended to Niger Republic, which is another country. Tolu, (2021) in the historical and praising view, narrates that “Standard Gauge Rail construction from Lagos- Ibadan was completed in the year 2022, President Buhari commissioned it and flagged off commercial operations on June 10, 2021”. Till date, is there anyone for the southeastern part that generates the resources? The answer is “no”. True federalism, does it not include balancing of resource benefits to 36 states of the federation instead of lopsided?

### **Agitation**

The unpronounced body language of Nigerian-Biafra war on “victory” continued in the corridor of Nigeria politics. The outward cultural identity enrolled in, due to lack of true federalism which paved way to discrimination and marginalization. Its effect

on Igbo people pushed Maazi Nnamdi Kanu to agitate with indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB). He first opened a Radio Biafra in London in the year 2009 where he started the call for an independent state for Igbo people.

Marginalization of Igbo people in Nigeria was the key point that made Maazi Nnamdi Kanu to champion the secession of Igbo dominated in Southeastern Nigeria along with some States around the Igbo territory that were originally carved out from former republic of Biafra to get their independent nation since they are being treated like third-class citizen in their own nation called Nigeria. In the year 2012, Maazi Nnamdi Kanu and Uche Mefor founded the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). What the group wants is nothing but to allow them have referendum to determine whether to continue with Nigerian government since they are being treated as non-citizens of Nigeria or to have their independent states.

Though, Nigerian government, even some Igbo people deemed Kanu as a terrorist who opened a radio Biafra to cause violence and formed IPOB to terrorize and destroy Nigerian government and were arrested in the year 2015 with some treasonable felonies. According to Ameh, (2015) who claims thus:

Maazi Nnamdi Kanu and other unknown persons, now at large, at London, United Kingdom, opened a Radio Biafra with intention to levy war against Nigeria in order to force the President to change his measure of being the President of the Federation, Head of State And Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) by doing an act to wit: Broadcast on Radio Biafra your preparations for the states in South-East geo-political zone, South-South, the Igala community of Kogi State and the Idoma/Igede Community of Benue to secede from the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Form them into Republic of Biafra, and thereby committed an offence Punish-able under Section 41(C) of the Crime Code Act, CAP C38 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004

The first arrest of Maazi Nnamdi Kanu by Nigerian Federal government was on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2015 in Lagos and detained for one year and six months in Abuja, Nigeria despite various court orders for his release but Nigerian government gave it deaf ears. In April 2017, he was granted bail on health grounds and was in his home town in Afara-Ukwu in Abia State, Nigeria when the Nigerian military envisioned his house in September, 2017 and killed many Igbo people there but Kanu survived the killings. The action made him fly away in rescue of his life. The Nigerian government then declared IPOB a terrorist group in the year 2017.

On June 26<sup>th</sup> 2021, Maazi Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in Kenya by Interpol and was immediately handed over to Nigerian government and was detained in the Directorate of State Services (DSS) facility. Though, some people had described his rendition as abduction because the method lacked the due process, particularly the Nigerian Extradition Act, Cap E25, Laws of the Federation 2004.

The method of Kanu’s rendition brought the claim by Kanu’s lawyer, Ifeanyi Ejiofor that “both national and international laws were flagrantly flouted by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the action and consequently accused Nigerian Federal Government terrorism”. A three-member panel of the Court of Appeal, led by Justice Oludotun Adefope-Okojie followed up and studied the terrorism and treasonable felony charges against Kanu. Following the issues and abnormalities that surrounded Maazi Nnamdi Kanu’s rendition and arrest, Justice Oludotun Adebola, the presiding judge in Court of Appeal sitting in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory on Thursday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, termed the rendition illegal and dropped every terrorism charge leveled against Maazi Nnamdi Kanu by the Federal Government. It was then that Maazi Nnamdi Kanu was discharged and acquitted.

Now, to justify that Igbo people are placed as third-class citizen in their own acclaimed country, David Kaswe (SAN), who represent the Attorney-General of the Federation insisted that Maazi Nnamdi Kanu must not be discharged and acquitted which still keep Kanu under the DSS till date with no just reason. The question now is, can only David Kaswe (SAN) single handedly determine and disobey the Judiciary? After the analyses of what is happening to Maazi Nnamdi Kanu, it is well observed and very obvious that such can neither happen to Hausa/Fulani nor a Yoruba indigene.

When Maazi Nnamdi Kanu initiated the agitation, many indigents of Igbo were thinking he was bringing confusion. Many could not understand the ideology till this year 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The arrival of Mr. Peter Obi who was one of the Presidential Aspirant came up with incredible and unimaginable crowd. The type of crowd Mr. Peter Obi pulled emanated fears into those that were thinking they are in the helm of Nigeria politics who always proclaim that “they are born to rule”. On 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2023, Kaduna State Governor, El-Rufai publicly and boldly made a terrible utterance thus “Peter Obi has a 100 percent chance to win Tinubu and Atiku, but he is an Igbo man, we rather go to war than see Igbo win”.

El-Rufai, who incites war for the whole nation is from Fulani tribe. Fulani people are known as nomadic tribe that migrated into Northern Nigeria from somewhere not absolutely known. Fulani origin is somehow not clear because some writers pose them as people that migrated from Egypt while others trace their origin from Fezzan (Mustafa, 1966:170). They secured some portions of land in the northern Nigeria through grazing and also became invaders and conquerors. According to history, Fulani people are not Nigerian origin by birth but by migration. Why should El-Rufai, a Fulani origin now come and incite war to more than 200million lives because of tribe or cultural background of Mr. Peter Obi? Or could it be that El-Rufai wants to seize the political opportunity to bring in their jihads, holy war which they pursue zealously?

It is highly observed that the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended did not point out in any section that Igbo man will never rule this country Nigeria as was quoted by El-Rufai. Since El-Rufai is a core Muslim who carries his faith in a zealous manner, could his fear of an Igbo man be that Mr. Peter Obi, from Christian cultural background will enforce his Muslim people into Christianity if he becomes the president of Nigeria? In other hand, it may be a quest to accomplish what his religious for-father; Usman Dan Fodio did in the year 1804, made El-Rufai so eager to voice out war during 2023 political campaigns.

The Fulani religious leader and also a teacher, Dan Fodio who lived in Northern Hausa city state of Gobir, introduced the jihad war in 1804 (Kelvin, 2004). He declared a religious war lasted for six years in the year, 1804. His aim was to revive and put the Islamic religion into purity and to encourage the weaker devout Muslims to go back to orthodox Islam. For Martins, (1976) “This Islamic revolution brought all Hausa states under Islamic law, and in 1812, led to the establishment of an empire known as Sokoto Caliphate which comprises of emirates and sub emirates, which many of them were built on the sites of previous Hausa states”.

Jihad had very big impacts in Nigerian politics. This is because their culture varies from another people’s culture. Their perception is always that everything must be gotten through war. This is the reason Jonathan, (1997) opines thus “The legacy of this Islamic states has dramatically influenced Nigerian politics, which became particularly evident during the period of political activities in the 1950s and the subsequent events”. It is this historical violence that El-Rufai wants to take the whole Nigerians to. By pure observation and analysis of his utterance, he was quite serious. That was why Mamood Yakubu, the INEC Chairman disenfranchised the people’s choice by waving the electoral law single handedly which stipulates that the winner of 2023 presidential election must get up to 25% in the Federal capital territory before he emerges as Nigerian president.

In the discourse of Nigerian politics, the country is totally represented with the sharp disharmony between the large Muslim north and Christian predominantly south, especially the Igbo people in the southeast. In the southwestern part of Nigeria, Muslims and Christians have co-existed peacefully and even inter-marry each other. The northern people believe that they have related culture with the southwestern people than the people from the southeast, thereby have more political trust by the northern political elites such as El-

Rufai. By mere looking at all the whole scenario, Nigeria is practicing nothing but cultural politics.

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We rather go to WAR than see Igbo man rule Nigeria~~Nasir El-Rufai

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Peter Obi has a 100 percent chance to win Tinubu and Atiku, but he is an Igbo man, we rather go to war than see Igbo win - El Rufia

The Kaduna state president El Rufia has opened up as to the reason why Peter Obi can't win or rule Nigeria, in a statement released, he said Obi has the chance to win, but that such can't happen as to Igbos are not allowed to rule Nigeria

Full details here 📌

<https://igbotimesmagazine.online/2023/02/22/peter-obi-has-a-100-percent-chance-to-win-tinubu-and-atiku-but-he-is-an-igbo-man-we-rather-go-to-war-than-see-igbo-win-el-rufia/>



### Questions

- (i) They should go to war instead of allowing Igbo man rule Nigeria. “does it therefore mean that, one Nigerian” is just a mere lip service?
- (ii) Since the Nigerian politics do not accommodate any man from Igbo cultural background, why are they denying Igbo people their original rout known as Biafra?
- (iii) After the court order to release Maazi Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of Indigenous people of Biafra, why are they still keeping him under their custody in DSS dungeon?

In trying to answer the above questions, it is safe to bring in “Language power and Race”.

### **Language Power**

A language is method of communication which could be a set of sounds and even written symbols that used by a group of people in a particular region or country to disseminating information either verbally or non-verbal. Language is a principle way of human communication which can convey by speech, writing or gesture. In deep meaning of what language consists is nothing but for communication.

Communication on its side does not have a well cleared dispensation in context. This is because many scholars keep maintaining that the word was derived from the Latin verb “communicare” which could mean to “discuss, chat, highlight, talk, confer or even to sensitize each other”. Onuora and Obiakor, (2020:172) explain that in an attempt to exchanging information between entities as well as transferring information from one or more parties to another, communication has taken place. For another person’s view, when there are transmission and reception of information between a source and a receiver using signaling, there is a communication (Crystal 1997:72)

Looking at the definition of language, it is clearly known that it has immense power and the impact fully depends on how one wields it. Language can be seen as the mightiest weapon that can be used and as the highest instrument to instigate war. After analyzing the El-rufai’s statement, it was observed that he did not only incited war to frighten the Igbo people rather very prepared to induce other cultural groups against the whole people from Igbo cultural setting for total evacuation instead of allowing Mr. Peter Obi, an Igbo man to rule Nigeria.

Linguistic analyses of El-rufai statement “they rather go to war” and that of Maazi Nnamdi Kanu that always speak “referendum to determine the faith of Igbo people in Nigeria”. The semantic analysis of “war” shows the organized armed conflict between countries, ethnic or other sizable groups usually involving the engagement of military forces, that is the meaning of El-Rufai’s statement. Maazi Nnamdi Kanu’s statement “referendum” which means “direct popular vote on a proposed law or constitutional amendment”. For instance, if it is an Igbo man that made a statement which Nasiri El-Rufai publicly made, it is either the person is dead by now or start to rot under the DSS custody but because he is a Fulani man, no one cares about that. He moves freely and can even speak more deadly words without punishment. Sometimes, one could imagine if the Nigerian law is only punishable to Igbo people alone. Therefore, since the language of politics is the way language and linguistic differences between people are being dealt in political arena, this should be how language is being treated in official capacity by government. Could it be that any dangerous statement incited by anyone from other cultural areas in Nigeria are being disregarded except those incited by people from Igbo cultural background? El-Rufai incites war forgetting that Nigeria is already facing heavy ordeals. According to Achebe, (2011) who captures that “there are violent armed robberies across the entire country, kidnapping, turf war by militarized cults and gangs in Bayelsa State and senseless intra-and inter-communal warfare are all increasingly common”.

### **Race**

Nigeria as a country is made up of different races. Race in this context can be brought down to ethnicity in Nigeria. An ethnicity or ethnic group is a set of individuals that share a distinct cultural attribute.

Ethnicities are usually found with a geographical region where the group originated. According to history, people did not move around very well in the previous centuries. They tended to stay in the same area and locality over many generations, marrying and giving birth with people living close to them and with this reason, the DNA was related resembled. In Nigeria, there are more than five hundred languages and ethnicities combined together in making up a country. Though, after the amalgamation in 1914, it was later grouped into three major ethnics known as Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba.

Before the amalgamation of Nigeria by Lord Lugard, Emekesiri opines that there were three regions who were not really together but were maintaining their cultural heritage. These regions were carved out in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Zamfara region in the north, the Biafra in the east, the Benin Kingdom in the West. These three regions were in the ancient map of Africa, up to 1885. It was from these three regions that the country, Nigeria was created. Right from time immemorial, Nigeria has been a country with diverse cultural identity. Obviously, the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) neither relate nor being the same. The Nation according to the history was done by “cut and join” races. The “part of Zamfara region are the present-day

Niger and Chad, Biafra left some to Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea while Benin left some to Dahomey which is now the present-day Benin Republic”. Lord Lugard created a very big problem just to achieve his economic selfishness by creating incompatible ethnic groups, merged them and called them Nigeria as one country.

Igbo race doesn't believe in staying and dying in one place. That is why people normally say that “any country where Igbo man is not seen, make a U-turn because that land is not fertile”. They are very hardworking people by nature. They easily change their environments looking for greener pastures. In Lagos State and nearby States, Igbo race are many there. Anywhere they are, they must put live and help in developing the place. Their quest to make money made many Igbo people dwell in Lagos State of Nigeria. To crown the hatred other races have for the Igbo people, the Yoruba indigenes in Lagos State of Nigeria fought Igbo people on 2023 Governorship election with heavy weapons that wounded many people from Igbo race.

Nevertheless, no action was taken by Nigerian government, despite all the assaults and the deprivation of human rights. With all these applications of racism or ethnicism

in the same country, it is believed that what Maazi Nnamdi Kanu has been crying for, is nothing but the truth. Through the analysis, other races cannot deny the fact that Igbo people are truly marginalized, hated and maltreated.

### **Summary and Suggestion**

Federal republic of Nigeria is seen as a nation that practice true federalism. It has thirty-six states deriving power from the main seat of power presiding in Abuja. In this case, the practice of true federalism is meant to be fair, free and equal to all concerned in distribution of power and in all sectors but some sections, especially the southeastern part of Nigeria has been experiencing marginalization which led to serious agitation from the people. The agitation started long ago with some Igbo group of people known as MASSOB led by Mr. Raph Uwazulike before the emergence of Maazi Namdi Kanu.

After the analyses, it is observed that Igbo people have been experiencing real marginalization by federal government of Nigeria despite that they the real developers in different states of Nigeria because of their industriousness. It is this deep hatred amongst other tribes on Igbo led Governor El-rufai to make his utterance that “instead of Igbo man to rule Nigeria, they rather go to war”.

This paper suggests that instead of treating Igbo people like third class citizen, making caricature of the Judiciary by disobeying the law and order made to release Maazi Nnamdi Kanu but David Kaswe (SAN), who represent the Attorney-General of the Federation insisted that Maazi Nnamdi Kanu must not be discharged and acquitte till date. Instead of playing Igbo people the more you look, the less you see politics, let them allow Igbo people go their way and have their independent nation.

Nevertheless, separation from unworkable union is never a crime, so it is not a crime or civil disobedience to ask for referendum from a Democratic system which is exactly what the Igbo people are asking for through agitation or for the Federal government to start involving them in politics just like other regions.



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