

ESN Trojanism, Violation of Human Rights and the Consequences of Separatist Maniac in Imo State

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Abstract

This research work is on ESN trojanism and the consequences of separatist maniacs in Imo State. The ESN (Eastern Security Network) has, for some years now, staged somewhat of a war against the Nigerian nation at large and the Imo state in particular under the guise of agitation for independence. ESN attacks affect mostly Orlu, Orsu, Oru East, and Oru West L.G.As. The objectives of the research are to examine the degree to which citizens are exposed to the violation of human rights, investigate the causes of the violations of human rights in Imo State, examine the IPOB/ESN Trojan inclination and the violation of human rights, the consequences of the violation. The researchers invoke the theories of Feminism, Marxism, and Interest Theory of Rights. The outcome of the research is significant in terms of resource material for policymakers in the area of human rights. The researchers recommend, among others, quality reforms in the security sector and penalization of the violators of human rights.

Keywords: Consequences, ESN, Human Rights, Maniac, Separatist, Violation

1. Introduction

Imo State before now has been far-famed for its peacefulness, serenity, and the hub of relaxation. Lately, however, it has “become a theatre of war” (Okeoma, 2021) where “several cases of extrajudicial killings were documented” (Igomo, 2021), and “human rights abuses and citizen intimidation by the military have reached astronomical heights” (Okeoma, 2021). All these queries the fundamental roles of government towards the protection of lives and property as well as major ethical concerns. Society’s etiquette and values are also measured by the extent of respect for human rights. Also, individual’s viewpoints on their fellow human beings foreground their moral courage to defend or abuse the course of human rights. Thus, the issue of human rights is multifaceted and everyone is expected to be involved in its protection.

Nigeria has developed, to a certain extent, in terms of democracy and democratic governance. The advanced gains of democracy are, however, hampered by systematic and systemic human rights violations. Importantly, Nigeria has been active in signing and ratifying international human rights treaties, over the years, but the challenges have been implementing the treaties, and the contents of Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution (as amended) on human rights. It is, however, regrettable that despite the signed treaties, constitutional backing, and Nigeria’s effort to establish the Human Rights Commission and other sister agencies in the fight against corruption and human rights abuses, human rights violations seem to be increasing daily in the geometric progression. The Bureau of Democracy (2012) notes areas where more improvements are needed such as abuses by Boko Haram, killings by government forces, lack of social equality, and issues with freedom of speech. The Human Rights Watch’s 2015 World Report has it that “intensified violence by Boko Haram ... and government corruption continues to undermine the status of human rights in Nigeria”. Beyond the violence of Boko Haram are the militancy in the Niger Delta area, abduction for ransom in the southeast, and more worrisome violent-rending activities of Independence People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security arm, Eastern Security Network (ESN).

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One wonders why the gains of democracy and the signing of the treaties have not made a great impact on the reduction of violations of human rights. Adenrele and Olugbanja (2014) are quick to point out that “it is because individuals, groups, and state actors are complicit in this vicious circle”. Another reason why human rights violations seem to be thriving is owed to what McCully (2013) describes as “a culture of impunity in the country in the forms of extra judicial killings, illegal detention, and destruction of property by security forces”. Adetoro (2012), Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013), Udama (2013), and Ojo et al (2014) are synonymous in their contention of the role of extrajudicial killings of Mohammed Yusuf and other Boko Haram leaders in worsening the sectarian violence that almost destroyed completely the entire North Eastern Nigeria. Also, “perceived ethno-national super ordinary and the compromised integrative state-building capacity of the Nigerian ruling groups” (Nwangwu, 2022) significantly contribute to groups of persons taking up arms to express their grievances.

2. 1. The concept of ESN Trojanism

ESN (Eastern Security Network) is the security arm of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist group operating in the southeast. Trojan denotatively refers to the ancient city of Troy and its inhabitants (Hornby, 2006). The Trojan War in history recounts the Greek mythological war against Troy to recover the Helen of Troy, the pretty wife of Menelaus. In our context, we use it to connote a concerted but war-like attempt by the IPOB/ESN to recover their beautiful bride and pride, the Biafran Republic, declared in 1967 by late Lt. Col. Odimegwu Ojukwu. From IPOB’s perspective, Biafra has been subsumed into Nigerian federalism to the point of extinction through state repression, intimidation, denial of federal character quota, and other basic social, economic, and health amenities and infrastructure. The connotative conceptualization of *Trojanism* delineates a program that appears desirable but contains something harmful. Biafranist agitation appears desirably needed and the members of IPOB are enthusiastically optimistic about the positive outcome of their separatist clamor, the independence, but their fanatical and extremist approaches are bereft of peace and orderliness. The *trojanistic* or war-like strategies are rather undesirable and oriented towards human rights violations.

Historians and secessionists would say that no independence or sovereignty is gained on the gold platter. Yet, it does not require insurgency and terrorism. The history of nationalism and political independence in Africa shows that it was not characterized by insurgency, militancy, and terrorism. African nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Nelson and Winnie Mandela of South Africa, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Patrice Lumumba of Congo and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania never carried any gun to get independence. Instead, they took the option of nationalism which is “the ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of self-government” (Ndoh and Njoku, 1997), and the formation of political parties.

2.2. The Concept of Human Rights

The human right was first conceived by the Persian King, Cyrus the Great in 539 BC when he wrote that “all human beings had the right to choose their own religion and established social equality” (Moyn, 2010). From the Magna Carta (1215), The Petition of Rights (1628), the US Bill of Rights (1791), the United Nations Charter (1945) to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), it has been more of a global concern to confront injustice, inhumanity and any other forms of oppression. All the above documents see human rights as basic and inalienable to human existence. Adenrele and Olugbenga (2014) state that human rights are “legal entitlements which every citizen could enjoy without fear of government or its fellow citizens”. Kaluge (2013) conceptualizes human rights as

Those rights cannot be said to have been given to man by man but are earned by man for being a human being because these are necessary for his continuous happy existence with himself, and his fellow man, and for participation in a complex society.

Onwuazombe (2017) asserts that “by contemporary consensus human rights are generally understood as the moral-political claims which all human beings are deemed to have upon their societies or governments, claims recognized ‘as of rights’ and ‘not by love, grace or charity’”. They are “the articulation of the needs for justice, tolerance, mutual respect, and human dignity in all our activities” (Kennedy, 2001). Human rights constitute the “moral principles or norms for certain standards of human behaviour” (Nickel, 2021). Weston (2023) gives us the meaning, utilitarian essence, trans-cultural orientation and characteristics of human rights as that which “belong to an individual or group of individuals simply for being human, or as a consequence of inherent human vulnerability, or because they are requisite to the possibility of a just society...., human rights refer to a wide continuum of values or capabilities thought to enhance human agency or protect human interests and declared to

be universal in character, in some sense equally claimed for all human beings, present and future". In fact, they are "those rights without which we live" (Nzarga, 2014).

Characteristically, human rights addressed the questions about the existence, content, nature, universality, justification, and legal status of human rights. For Feigberg (1973), human rights characteristically exist as (a) a shared norm of actual human morality, (b) a justified moral norm supported by strong reasons (c) a legal right at the national level (where it might be referred to a "civil" or "constitutional" right), or (d) a legal right within international law. Onwuazombe (2017) adds that the "rights provide a common standard of behavior among humanity and are natural, inviolable, rational and unalterable, as their deprivations would constitute grave offenses to the citizens' sense of justice".

2.3. The Concept of the Violation of Human Rights

The concept of *violation* derives from the Latin word *violare* which means failure to observe duly. The verb, violate, refers to abuse, to ravish, to profane, and to defile. As a word, it is synonymous with usurpation and misdemeanor. It is the acts of willful and inadvertent omission and commission targeted at denying persons their fundamental human rights by the government, security agents, heads of institutions, associations, and other establishments and individuals. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), "When those rights are not protected or blatantly disregarded, they are violated". Maiese (2003) contends that "to violate the most basic rights... is to deny individuals their fundamental moral entitlements". The violations manifest in crimes against humanity such as genocide, torture, deliberate starvation, medical experimentation, slavery, rape and enforced sterilization. Others include trafficking in persons, forced disappearance, political oppression, and state repression (Boykoff, 2007). All these Onwuazombe (2017) refers to as "deprivation which constitutes a grave offense to the citizens' sense of justice".

3. The Magnitude of Exposure of Citizens to Violation of Human Rights

Human rights violations cut across all aspects of human existence. It is practically seen in homes and workplaces; in churches and communities; among individuals in groups and associations; in micro and macro societies; in local, national, and international settings; between superiors and subordinates; between husbands, wives, and maidservants; between friends; between teachers/lecturers and students/undergraduates; employers and employees; political/religious leaders and the lead; and above all, the security agents and the citizens. Daily, in Imo state in particular and other Nigerian states in general, we see one form of exposure of citizens to violation of human right or the other such as harassment, proscription, arbitrary arrest, extraordinary rendition, torture, mass killing, kidnapping for ransom, rape, fraud, slavery, child abuse, kidnapping for ransom and rituals (Agabe, 2013; Atoyebi, 2014); harassment, brutality and extortion of motorists by security personnel; political assassinations, undemocratic imposition of candidates in leadership and intimidation of political opponents (Akhaine and Chizea, 2011); education denial and domestic violence (Adesupo, 2013; Ayoola, 2013 and Hamzat, 2013); accidental discharge, suppression, of the minority and downtrodden, insurgency, stampede on farms and crops by herdsmen and their cows, sporadic or coordinated attacks on security agents especially the police and army, state repression, restrictions on free expression and media as well as peaceful assembly and freedom of association, extrajudicial and summary executions, forced eviction owing to government's demolition of houses and purported shanties under the guise of development (Mario-Utomi, 2020; Amnesty International, 2017), oppressive widowhood practices (Okeke, 2000), child labour and child marriage (Kuteyi, 2000; Ako-Nai, 2012; Braimah, 2014; Ogundowo, 2022); and marginalization of ethnic minorities (Rindap and Auwal, 2014). US Department of State (2011), Zarifis (2002), and Ilesanmi (2001) add other forms of citizens' exposure to violation of human rights such as destruction of property; ethnic, regional, and religious violence; sporadic abridgment of citizens' right to change their government, owing to election fraud and other irregularities; degrading treatment of prisoners, detainees, and criminal suspects; harsh and life-threatening prison and detention center conditions; prolonged pretrial detention; denial of fair public trials; executive influence on the judiciary and judicial corruption; infringements on citizens' privacy rights; violence and discrimination against women; female genital mutilation; the killing of children suspected of witchcraft; child sexual exploitation; trafficking in persons for prostitution and forced labor; and discrimination against persons with disabilities. Specifically, in Imo, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, Intersociety, through its Chairman, Comrade Emeka Umeagbalasi, "lamented the frequency at which people were being killed, abducted, disappeared, arbitrarily arrested/detained and tortured" (Okoli, 2023). Okoli (2023) further quotes Umeagbalasi as saying that "no fewer than 1600 unarmed citizens of Imo State have been killed while 300 others disappeared without trace between January 2021 and May 2023, a period of 29 months".

4. The Incidences and Causes of the Violation of Human Rights in Imo State

The violation of human rights in Imo State is more hydra-headed. It ranges from security forces' excessive use of force, physical abuse, secrete detentions, extortions, burning houses, theft, and extrajudicial executions of suspects to unknown gunmen attacks on government infrastructure (such as prisons, police stations, and public buildings) and killing of several security men to the menace of baby factory phenomenon, and Fulani herdsmen attacks. Far back in 2012, there have been sparks of insecurity challenges resulting in the forms of violation of human rights in many local governments in Imo State. For instance, in Owerri Municipal, North, and West, "between January 2012 and December 2014, ... there were lynching and attempted lynching of suspected robbers along with several kidnappings ... ritual killings and killings related to cult violence" (FFP, 2018). Ohaji/Egbema L. G. A. in July 2011, witnessed a clash between the herders and farmers; "herders reportedly entered a village to graze cattle and destroyed crops, leading to clashes that killed at least two and injured others" (FFP, 2018). In January 2014, in Oguta L. G. A, "a woman was reportedly raped and murdered" (FFP, 2018). Recently, it has escalated to a regrettable proportion. Thus, Okeoma (2021) regrets the unfortunate violation of human rights in the state:

Owerri, the Imo State capital, which was once renowned for its peaceful nature, has lately become a theatre of war. While security operatives have been battling gunmen, who have launched vicious attacks on no fewer than 15 divisional police headquarters, the state police command headquarters, the correctional center in Owerri, military checkpoints, two offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission, and others, cases of extrajudicial killings, human right abuses and citizen intimidation by the military have reached astronomical heights as a result.

In a similar vein, His Grace, Archbishop A. J. V Obinna (2021) laments:

Now, our very lives are at stake, as killings of Imo people are taking place in broad daylight and at night by both officially and unofficially armed men. Imo people are on the run from known and unknown gunmen.... There is fear in the air and anxiety on the ground. Imo people are living in fear. Reports of indiscriminate arrests for no clear reasons and killings, as a show of power or in alleged retaliation, continue to spread.

Ojigho (2021) insists that "the evidence gathered by Amnesty International paints a damning picture of ruthless and excessive force by Nigerian security forces in Imo...." For instance, "more than 500 were arrested after police and military raids with widespread allegations of torture and ill-treatment" (Ojigho, 2021). Many of those arrested were detained for a long time against the law of detention of not more than 24 hours. In May 2021, the Imo State government announced the arrest of at least 400 people allegedly linked to some violence in the state. Specifically, Amnesty International according to Ojigho (2021), documents two victims of military rascality. The first was Ugwuchi Unachukwu, a German-based businessman, killed by soldiers on 31 May 2021, at an army checkpoint near Owerri airport, and Mathew Opara, a 45-year-old businessman shot by soldiers on 25 May 2021, in Orji, near Owerri. On the other hand, according to Ojigho (2021), "the police said ESN fighters killed 21 of its personnel in three months in Imo alone".

Imo State also witnessed the wanton destruction of government infrastructures such as prisons, public buildings, INEC offices, and police stations. For instance, on March 2021, Isinweke police station, Ihitte/Uboma and several police vehicles were burnt down (Alozie, 2021), and on 5 April 2021, Imo State Police Command Headquarters, Owerri, was set ablaze; almost all the vehicles parked at the command were burnt, and 1,844 inmates of the Nigerian Correctional Services were all freed (Kuteyi, 2021). Most recently, on 19 September 2023, the serene peace of Oriagu, in Umualumaku in Ehime Mbano was disrupted by the heinous fatal attack of unknown gunmen on the combined team of Operation Search and Flush and the reprisal attack by the heavily armed soldiers. Okey, Sanusi, and Salami (2023) report that "gunmen killed and set ablaze soldiers, policemen, and men of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps in two patrol vehicles in the community". In a reprisal attack, soldiers invaded the community and razed down "several shops, buildings, properties, food shops and bars" (Okey, Sanusi and Salami, 2023), which are, of course, owned by innocent citizens. Amid the crises, many residents fled and became displaced. In the same vein, on Monday, 27 November 2023, two policemen (a DPO and an Inspector) and a civilian were shot dead at Ahicara Junction in Ahiazu Mbaise L. G. A by unknown gunmen. Just the same week, on Saturday evening, 3 November 2023, the lifeless body of the traditional ruler of the Otulu Autonomous Community in the neighboring Ezinihitte Mbaise L. G. A, Eze Joe Ochulo, was found in the neighboring Abo Mbaise L. G. A (Okeoma, 2023).

The baby factory phenomenon and its menace significantly constitute a causal form and factor in the violation of human rights. Illegal orphanage homes, popularly referred to as “baby factories” thrived in Imo between 2008-2011, although there is still evidence of its pockets of existence to date. The Rochas Okorochoa administration dislodged many of them. The baby factory phenomenon has been a serious avenue to the violation of human rights, especially that of the vulnerable less privileged girls. Alozie (2020) states that “some persons in the business of child trafficking use the illegal orphanage homes as a cover in Imo State”. The areas identified where the baby factory owners operate freely are Orlu L.G.A, Orji, and Uratta in Owerri North L.G.A (Alozie, 2020). Another place is Umuaka in Njaba L.G.A (Ndege, 2013).

A baby factory is a place (company) where girls are lured into sleeping with unknown and unsolicited men who get them pregnant. Upon delivery of their babies, they are paid a token and their babies are sold to either barren women in the form of adoption or to ritualists. Ndege (2013) tells us that the girls

Were tricked into thinking that the baby factory was a haven for teenage girls who did not want to keep their babies, but did not want an abortion either. They intended to give their babies up for what they thought was a formal adoption. But once they were in the compound, they were held prisoner by [Madam One Thousand], the owner of the factory, and forced to get pregnant again and again and again.

According to Ndege (2013), “the police discovered that the babies were sold for as little as \$600”. Fortunately, the government frowns at such illegal business and flagrant abuse of human rights of freedom of choice. For example, Odunsi (2023) reports that police arrested 47-year-old Evangelist Ugochi Orisakwe who uses her church, Jesus Life Assembly, along MCC/Uratta road as a baby factory. She was arrested alongside her gang members; Chidi Orisakwe, 34; Pauline Nwagbunwanne, 42; Elizabeth Uzoma, 61; and Chibueze Joy, 31. Ndege (2013) also tells us that the police arrested a 23-year-old man hired by Madam One Thousand (an owner of a baby factory at Umuaka) to impregnate the girls. In the same vein, on 17 September 2023, NDLEA intercepted and rescued five pregnant teenage girls suspected to be victims of child trafficking. Their names and ages were given as Chioma Emmanuel, 15; Uma Faith, 15; Divine Adimonye, 17; Opara Gift, 15; and Amarachi Mbata, 16 (Igwe, 2023).

5. The IPOB/ESN Trojan Inclination and the Violation of Human Rights

Imo State (and perhaps, Anambra) are eastern states often referred to as the base of operations of IPOB/ESN. IPOB is the acronym for Indigenous People of Biafra while ESN implies Eastern Security Network. ESN is the armed wing of the IPOB. IPOB is a neo-Biafran separatist/liberationist movement that primarily operates in the South East of Nigeria. From the original existence of IPOB in 1999 as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) to the Biafra Zionist Movement, Biafra Zionist Front, Biafra Independent Movement, Biafra Youth Congress, Biafra Revolutionary Force, Biafra Liberation Council and now IPOB, it has been peaceful in its agitation. Nwangwu (2022) states categorically that IPOB is “founded on the avowed doctrine of non-violence about the conservative Igbo nationalists who favor dialogue and diplomacy in their pursuit of Igbo nationalism”. At the beginning of the formation of IPOB, there was nothing like ESN, and its primary purposes have been to restore the defunct Republic of Biafra declared by late Lt. Col. Odimegwu Ojukwu in 1967 that led to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 (Allison, 2017) and the emancipation of the Igbos (Onichabor, 2022). Other reasons for the ultimate call for secession by Biafra were economic depletion, ethnic and religious tension and the failure of the government in power of the then Yakubu Gowon to implement the new Aburi Accord, infrastructural stagnation, deep-rooted hatred from other ethnic groups, and insecurity of lives and property (Onichabor, 2022). Ojukwu’s Ahiara Declaration in 1969 sums up the principal ideological perspective for Biafra’s secessionist bid: “When Nigerians violated our basic human rights and liberties, we decided reluctantly but bravely to found our state, to exercise our inalienable rights to self-determination as our only remaining hope for survival as a people” (Abati, 2017).

Forty-five years after the war, “the Igbos still cry for marginalization, still bound by political subjugation” (Onichabor, 2022), even with the document and principle of federal character (Federal Character Commission, 1996); and due to the War of Secession, many other tribes have developed some form of resentment for the Igbos. They are stigmatized and treated suspiciously (Abati, 2017; Nnamani, 2016; Majekodunmi, 2013).

The re-emergence of the eastern secessionist movement in the form of IPOB in 2012, its leadership, and avowed members is essentially owed to the above mental suspicion and an increased sense of heightened marginalization. Thus, IPOB has severally spoken up against the Nigerian Federation government’s poor investment, political alienation, inequitable resource distribution, ethnic marginalization, heavy military presence,

and extrajudicial killings in the southeastern region of the country (Mahr, 2019; Gaffey, 2015). Despite this *negritudized* feeling of estrangement and disillusionment in one's country, IPOB remained a peaceful secessionist movement asking for either independence through a referendum or an adequate solution to the above objects of criticism.

The formation of ESN on 12 December 2020 and the attendant pervasive violation of human rights were only responses to the Nigerian government's clamp down and the killing of the members of IPOB/ESN in Aba, Onitsha, Enugu, Umuahia, Owerri, Orlu, etc (The Nation Newspaper, 2016; Maya, 2016); arrest and detention of Nnamdi Kalu (IPOB leader) by Nigeria's Department of State Services (DSS) on October 19, 2015 and it lasted over a year without trial. (BBC News, 2017; Onochie & Adewale, 2019); an unprovoked attack on Nnamdi Kalu's Afaraukwu residential home (Mahr, 2019); feeling of a sense of collective suffering and victimhood among the Igbo people (Ibeanu, Orji and Iwuamadi, 2016); trauma and documentaries associated with memories of the civil war (Ugwueze, 2019); the lopsided structure of Nigeria's federalism (Adibe, 2017), and ineffective implementation of the 3-Rs (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction); failed post-war peace building program in the revival of Biafra separatism (Johnson and Oluniyan, 2017; Nwangwu et al, 2020). The remote causes for the formation of ESN are the illegal detention and unprovoked shooting and killing of pro-Biafra protesters and failed attempt to stampede and stop the existence of Biafra Radio, the proscription of the IPOB and the extraordinary rendition of Nnamdi Kalu from Kenya and his incarceration without trial. For instance, Ibrahim (2016) reports that "countless IPOB protesters were killed between the 29th through 30th May 2016 during a government operation wanting to prevent IPOB members marching from Nkpor Motor Park to a rally". Even though the army claimed that they acted in self-defense and that only 5 persons died instead of 50, the clampdown has not been investigated to date. Maya (2016) asserts that "from August 2015 through February 2016, 170 unarmed civilians (IPOB members) were killed and 400 were arrested, charged or detained without a proper trial". All the above incidences plus the "armed transhumant pastoral attack on farming communities ... and the repressive disposition of the Nigerian state towards Biafra separation" (Nwangwu, 2022) are significantly responsible for the "current mutation of the Biafra separatist strategy from non-violence to armed movement" (Nwangwu, 2022). Thus, their Trojan inclination, Biafran program, and movement appear desirable but contain something harmful which is a violation of human rights.

It is imperative to add that the South-West governors' formation of the Western Nigerian Security Network, codenamed *Operation Amotekun* as a regional security outfit (Kabir, 2020), the "collaborationist role of the conservative Igbo nationalists ... and the disinclination of the South-Eastern political leaders to launch a regional security network" (Nwangwu, 2022) compelled Nnamdi Kanu to form ESN. As a paramilitary arm of the IPOB, the ESN is "mandated to defend Biafra land, protect the South-East and South-South from banditry and attacks from suspected armed Fulani herdsmen against peasant farmers and local communities" (Nwangwu, 2022; Channels Television, 2021). Nnamdi Kanu specifically said at the inauguration of ESN on December 12, 2020, that "its purpose is to flush out bandits and illegal forest occupants that always clash with farmers in Biafra land". In a nutshell, the formation of ESN and its dramatic change to armed struggle was a direct response to the unwarranted perennial onslaught of Nigeria's security forces against neo-Biafra separatist movements, to protect the purported Biafra indigenes and territory of "the oil-rich Southeast region against incursions by ethnic Fulani herders it accuses of grazing on farmlands and committing crimes against the local" (Osae-Brown and Alake, 2021).

Thus, violations of human rights by ESN include but are not limited to the killing of soldiers, burning of their vehicles and checkpoints infrastructure; imposition of Monday sit-at-home and other week or month-long sit-at-home thereby restricting citizens' movement; the beheading of innocent citizens especially those perceived to have anything to do with the government of the day and displaying their heads at the market squares as obtains in Oru East and West Local Government Areas; killing of innocent citizens in the course of the enforcement of the sit-at-home order; and continuous threats to lives and properties of those who do not want to support their movement.

6. The Consequences of the Violation of Human right in Imo State

There is no gainsaying the fact that the violation of human rights has far-reaching consequences on individuals, their families, society, and the government. The primary essence of constitutionalizing human rights was to ensure the corporate welfare of the people as well as national and trans-border peace and progress. These noble objectives are, however, hampered by indiscriminate violations of human rights. Adetoro and Olugbenga (2014) emphasize that "human rights violations and abuses have held our people down, devaluing our cherished values and constituting blight on our diplomatic relations with the rest of the world". For Weston (2023), the aftermaths include "exploitation, oppression, persecution, and other forms of deprivations". Akanni (2019) adds

that “usually in the process of conducting counterinsurgency campaign by government forces, human rights of citizens of the states where insurgents operate are abused”.

Specifically, in Imo State, unfounded violations of human rights contributed to the emergence of unknown gunmen. It is not unlikely that the intricate implication of the #EndSARS protest was the transposition into unknown gunmen. The #EndSARS protest could not satisfy the yearnings of the youths coupled with the government’s dissatisfying treatment of their demands contained in the #EndSARS communiqué, the youths cannot but take laws into their hands under the guise of unknown gunmen. Imo is among the southeastern states that were the worst hit by the attacks of the arsonists (also known as unknown gunmen). In Imo state, Onyejiuwa (2021); and Eze, Uzoaro & Ndukwu (2021) report that “no fewer than 15 police stations had been attacked and (or) razed down in the state, especially at Obowo, Abo Mbaise, Isiala Mbano, Etiti, Ehime Mbano, Orlu, Orsu, Nworieubi, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbaise and Mbieri”. Independent National Electoral Commission’s (INEC) offices are not spared by the arsonists. Nwangwu (2022) states explicitly that “there were several attacks on INEC facilities by arsonists and unknown gunmen ... across Nigeria. Of the total number of incidents, 15 attacks occurred in 2020 across nine states in Nigeria whilst 2021 witnessed 11 attacks in seven states in the country”. In the South-East, the main domain of neo-Biafra separatist agitation, “no fewer than nine attacks on INEC facilities were recorded in 2021” (Nwangwu, 2022). Besides the destruction of government facilities is the arrest and killing of citizens that are assets and breadwinners of individual homes. Unfortunately, in Imo for instance, “state and non-state actors were responsible for Imo killings” (Okoli, 2023). Quoting comrade Emeka Umeagbalasi, the Chairman of Intersociety, Okoli (2023) states that:

Between January 2021 and May 2023, a period of 29 months, over 700 persons had life-threatening injuries with over 900 others abducted State actors accounted for the death of 900 out of 1600 unarmed persons killed by armed non-state actors within the period under review ... 600 out of the 900 were secretly killed by state actors while 300 died in open shootings 400 out of 700 were killed by armed non-state actors died in captivity while 300 others were killed in open shootings Within the period under focus, 3,500 young people were arrested by state actors with about 1400 of them paying through their noses to secure their freedom while over 1500 of them are still being detained in various detention facilities within and outside the state About 1200 houses were burnt with their 30, 000 dwellers displaced while 500,000 citizens of the state in active age brackets were forced to flee to escape being shot and killed or abducted.

The extended tremendous psychological, social, and economic consequences of the above account/report are better imagined. The displacement of the active age bracket of *Imolites* spelled near irredeemable doom which the state is still grappling with to date.

Armed conflict necessitated by violation of human rights paves the way to the breakdown of economic infrastructure and civil institutions, which in turn, further subverts other forms of rights. The breakdown is manifested in the closure of schools and hospitals and their resultant denial of adequate health and education. While the collapse of economic infrastructure can result in pollution, food shortages, starvation, lack of basic shelter, and general poverty (UN, 2000); the breakdown of civil or government institutions would certainly lead to denial of civil rights, oppression in the form of corrupted abduction, arbitrary arrest, detention without trial and political execution (Maiese, 2003). The most dangerous effect of protracted conflict is that reconciliation and peace building are near difficult, if not practically impossible (Vauthey, 1998). Quite clearly, unresolved human rights issues are potential obstacles to peace initiatives and processes.

The illegal Monday sit-at-home order (and sometimes, weeks or month-long) and its enforcement have devastating and tremendous effects. For instance, Orlu, Oru East, and Oru West Local Government Areas at a time experienced near shutdown of religious, social, educational, and economic activities owing to aggressive and fatalistic agitations of IPOB. To date, movements are still highly restricted at the aforementioned local governments on Monday’s sit-at-home or any day or week(s) IPOB declares curfew.

7. Conclusion

IPOB/ESN and its cataclysmic agitation distressingly stare everybody in the face, and unfortunately seem to have come to stay. This is quite evident by the people’s seemingly total compliance with its imposed curfew. We are aware that the violation of human rights has taken a global dimension when we consider different agitations and varying degrees of wars around the world and their interconnectivity in human rights violations.

However, the Trojan approach by ESN is greatly worrisome, especially as the battle between it and the government leaves much to be undesired in terms of the destruction of lives and properties, and the stampeding on the social, religious, and educational activities. Shall this battle for unfounded supremacy and contention with forceful means continue indefinitely? Of course, where two elephants fight, it is the grasses that suffer. Since the innocent, even the poor citizens are always at the receiving end, we cannot but seek egalitarian and practically feasible solutions. Thus, the recommendations are essentially significant in bringing enduring solutions.

8. Recommendations

1. There is an absolute need for quality reforms in the security sector. The security architectural design should embody instilling the culture of civility and value reorientation. With exquisite refinement, security personnel would have respect for inalienable human rights and curb avoidable extrajudicial executions and unlawful killings. A culture of civility would positively engender the right perception, mutual tolerance, and corporate understanding.

2. The government and its security agencies should see agitations from a positive perspective. Agitation simply means that citizens are no longer comfortable with a particular system or policy. It is always better to establish the reasons for agitation and address them squarely than intimidating and perhaps, crushing the agitators or protesters. Such brutal force often increases vengeance, retribution, and reprisal attacks as well as the tendency of multifarious violations of human rights. True to fact, agitations should challenge the government to sit up to the needs of the people, and should not be seen as a confrontation to the reigning government.

3. The proliferation of light weapons and sophisticated arms should be highly controlled through sincere and exemplary leadership, strong institutions, adequate policy implementation, and reorientation of citizens. All hands must be on deck in this case. It has been observed that the proliferation of arms in African countries in general and Nigeria in particular with Anambra and Imo as case studies is intricately linked to politics and politicking. Politicians want to win elections at all costs, including intimidating, kidnapping, and maiming perceived arch opponents as well as sponsoring terrorist attacks around their less political strongholds. It is unfortunate that do-or-die politics, necessitated by over-zealous ambition to grab power, perhaps as a birthright, breeds political toutism, thuggery, and rigging of elections. All the above vices associated with the menace of political power *grab-mania* constitute gross violations of human rights and can only be curbed via exemplary leadership, strong institutions, policy implementation, and reorientation of citizens.

4. The outcome of this research adumbrates the fact that IPOB has a strong case against Nigeria. Its mutation from non-violent to armed movement (refer to the IPOB/ESN Trojan inclination and the violation of human rights) is regrettably understandable. Nigeria's government through the state governments is obliged, not only to listen to their complaints but also comparatively address their collective demands. The assumption that their concerns are illegitimate, perhaps massive, and un-addressable is merely diversionary and unacceptable. Numerous problems and demands can be scaled in preference, and solutions can begin somewhere, perhaps one after the other. The journey of one thousand miles starts with a step. The right time to initiate solutions and begin execution in batches is now.

5. Victims of human rights violations and their families should be given the privilege of access to justice by seeking redress in court using recognized human rights organizations. The government can facilitate this by creating an interface committee that would encompass senior officers of various security agencies and their legal team, rights activists, civilians, and religious leaders. The committee would ensure transparent investigations, address issues of objectivity, and supplicate adequate compensation to the victims and their families.

6. Violators of human rights must be penalized and (or) sanctioned, be him/her security agent, IPOB/ESN, or ordinary citizens. The punishment should be achieved through immediate court adjudication and execution of court pronouncements. The sanctions and penalties would certainly serve as a deterrent to prospective violators.

7. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) should be given every legitimate support to operate effectively. Today, some people refer to NHRC as a toothless bulldog. The reason is that the commission does not have the required basic facilities for efficient operation. The Commission lacks funding, qualified manpower, office infrastructure in all the states, and other basic substructures. The government should, therefore, equip the commission to function optimally.

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