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The Quest for Unity: *Midwest Igbos' Desire for Integration with the Eastern Region*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

The Midwest Ibos seeks to join the Eastern Region

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THE QUEST FOR UNITY

The Quest for Unity: Midwest Igbos' Desire for Integration with the Eastern Region

By Chuka Odike · Historical Studies · Ozikoro.com

The Midwest Igbos, share a deep ethnic, linguistic, and cultural affinity with the Igbos of the Eastern Region. Although they were part of the Midwest Region which was created in 1963, their Igbo identity remained significant.

The Eastern Region was largely Igbo-dominated, and joining it would align them with their ethnic group, thus preserving their cultural identity and avoiding what they perceived as potential assimilation, marginalization and violent attacks from a multi-ethnic Midwest Region.

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In the Midwest Region, the Igbos were a minority compared to other groups, they were lumped with the likes of the Edo, Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri. They felt politically sidelined in the new Midwest structure.

The Midwest region was created as a compromise to address the demands of various ethnic groups, but this created a situation where the Midwest Igbos believed their interests were not adequately represented. Joining the Eastern Region, where the Igbo were the majority, promised greater political leverage, safety and influence.

The Midwest Igbos feared domination by larger ethnic groups both in the Midwest Region and in the broader Nigerian political landscape. Within the Midwest, they were wary of the larger Edo-speaking population and other ethnic groups who might dominate political leadership and resource allocation.

The growing tensions between regions, especially after the 1966 coup and the counter-coup, which saw ethnic violence erupt, it made the Midwest Igbos vulnerable to attacks from they fellow Midwesterners which they weren't exempted during the Igbo pogrom.

They saw the Eastern Region, where their fellow Igbos were concentrated, as a safer and more supportive environment for them politically and culturally. These heightened they agitations.

The political instability and ethnic tensions following Nigeria's first military coup in 1966 worsened the Midwest Igbos desire to join the Eastern Region. The 1966 massacre of Igbos in the North led to widespread fear and insecurity among Igbos throughout Nigeria.

The Midwest Igbos were exposed and vulnerable, especially as ethnic divisions deepened across the country. They believed that aligning with thy kiths and kins in the Eastern Region, would offer them protection in the event of further ethnic violence or political turmoil.

This concern became even more pressing as the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) loomed. The Eastern Region, under Ojukwu's leadership, declared the independent state of Biafra, and the Midwest Igbos saw this as an opportunity to join their fellow Igbos in securing self-determination and protection from perceived ethnic hostility.

The Eastern Region was economically significant with access to oil and other resources. The Midwest Igbos, particularly those in regions near the Niger River, may have seen economic benefits in aligning with the Eastern Region, which had growing aspirations for economic independence. The Eastern Region's wealth and resource base, especially with the emerging oil industry, presented potential

advantages that the Midwest Igbos believed they could benefit from if they were part of a unified Igbo region.

The rise of Igbo nationalism played a crucial role in the Midwest Igbos desire to join the Eastern Region. As the idea of a unified Igbo state gained momentum under (Ibo State Union), the Midwest Igbos, seeing themselves as part of the broader Igbo Nation, wanted to be included in the Eastern Region with they “Kith and Kin”. Their desire to join the Eastern Region became even more urgent during this period, as they viewed it as a sanctuary for all Igbos, offering a chance to escape the marginalization and violence they faced in other parts of Nigeria.

The Midwest Igbos desire to join the Eastern Region from time immemorial was shaped by a combination of ethnic solidarity, political aspirations, fear of marginalization, assimilation the search for security in a period of great instability in Nigeria. They saw the Eastern Region as their abode, where their ethnic identity and political interests would be better protected. However, the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War meant that this desire was never fully realized.

West African Pilot Newspaper, pp 2-3, Sept, 28th, 1966.

“The Nigerian Civil War” by John de St. Jorre (1972)

“The Igbo People” by Elizabeth Isichei (1976)

“Igbo Nationalism and the Nigerian Crisis” by Okwudiba Nnoli (1978)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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