



IGBO CULTURE AND GLOBAL RECONCILIATION

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Abstract:

In the world bedeviled with outbreak of war, sickness, social vices, religious intolerance, racial discrimination, political killings and hostility, there is need for sanity and reconciliation as a way of creating enabling environment for peaceful co-existence and development. Reconciliation is an initiative that encourages dialogue and practical engagement across cultural, political, racial, religious, national and other differences. Culture, a generality of people's way of life, has the ability to foster global reconciliation, unfortunately, the world powers; peace keepers and international humanitarian agencies have not explored and harnessed the potentialities in different cultures of the world, as panacea to global disharmony. It is the position of this paper that Igbo culture, with its rich norms and values, has all it takes to promote global peace and reconciliation. This paper looked into those aspects of Igbo culture that promote harmony and peaceful co-existence, like marriage in Igbo culture, hospitality in Igbo culture, Igbo taboo system, Igbo hand work, Igbo family system and every other aspect of Igbo life. If these rich Igbo norms and values are projected and embraced by the entire globe through acculturation definitely there will be relative peace and global reconciliation to a greater extent.

Keywords: culture, peaceful co-existence hospitality, marriage, norms and values

1. Introduction

The prevalence of politically and religious motivated wars, cultural disparity, racial discrimination and sickness has brought a lot of crisis, face-off and mutual intolerance in the entire globe, hence the need to restore orderliness, mutual acceptance and peaceful co-existence through a reconciliation.

Conflict means hostility or stretching of peace to the point of war or threat for peace. Conflict occurs when two individuals or groups quarrel over a certain issue. Conflict involves struggle, contention, discord, antagonism, tension, dispute and battle, opposition and rivalry. It is a clash of interest between individual with conflicting

objectives. Conflict occurs when two opposing parties strive to gain, succeed or struggle over values or claims. (Okoli, 2012, p.21).

The essence of peace in the entire globe is so vital that Bishop Desmond Tutu, while discussing on ways to strengthen peace-building through reducing propaganda and widely accepted cultural prejudices, removing negative labels attached to regions and rules, and looking not for differences but commonalities among humans, asserts “young people, dream you have to go on saying that peace is possible. Dream this world can be better”. <http://www.tutufoundations.org/2012//culturesroles-in-the-art-of-peace-building-and-reconciliation>.

The above cited attitude will sow a seed of more peaceful future in the globe. Peace is usually achieved through reconciliation, which means, the use of dialogue, diplomacy and good conversation in achievement of harmony.

Culture is one of the most viable instruments for peace and reconciliation. Culture represents the ways of living that are built up by groups and transmitted from one generation to another. Culture is not static. People adapt to changing climate, new inventions and influences from other people and other cultures. <http://www.shareourpride.org/our-culture>.

Culture is an overall way of life, including language, customs, beliefs and the use of material things. Culture has both material and non-material components, and both aspects of culture are acquired by every member of a society.

According to Abakare, (2009, p.6),

“The material components relate to overt or explicit aspects of culture, and mean the products of industry, technology and medicine, housing clothing etc. That is, every visible or concrete acquisition of man in society, such as artifacts, bridges, pots, cutlasses, hoes etc”.

The above mentioned items can be observed as the cultural products of any society. In other words, these material cultures involve things which people can produce and also make use of in the society. The non-material component of culture talks about the knowledge, philosophy, morals, motivations, language, attitudes, values, norms, etc, shared and transmitted in a society. They also form the basis of the reasons why a group acts in one way or the other. (Abakere 2009, p.6)

Igbo culture, the culture of the Igbo speaking people of Eastern part of Nigeria has rich norms and values that are capable of promoting global peace and reconciliation. This could be made possible through acculturation.

Acculturation is a process in which members of a cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another group. This may be evidenced in changes in language preference, adoption of common attitudes and values, members in common social groups and institutions, and loss of separate political or ethnic identification. (<http://www.rice.edu/projects/acculturation.htm>)

The following aspects of Igbo culture are capable of fostering global reconciliation.

2. Igbo Culture of Hospitality (Kolanut)

Igbo kolanut symbolizes peace, respect, good-will, acceptability, settlement of quarrel and in anything that stands for love and unity. Kolanuts are used for every occasion in Igbo culture. Once a person visits somebody, after receiving the visitor or before he announces the objective of his visit, (whether it is casual or otherwise), the first thing the host does is to present kolanut to the visitor as a sign of goodwill. (Osuji 2009, p.44) Onye wetara qj[wetara ndx (he who brings kolanut brings life) is a popular Igbo adage that usually accompany kolanut presentation, this is because the average Igbo man values life more than every other thing. The Igbo also regard qji to be life itself because whenever kolanut is being presented what follows is prayers to God Almighty for life and wellbeing of all.

In the words of Chukuezi & Chukuezi (2002, p.65)

“The Igbo kolanut is a symbol of hospitality and friendship. Kolanuts play very important social and ritual roles amongst the Igbo. The first act of friendship and hospitality to a guest is a present of kolanuts. The sharing of the kolanuts as an act of friendship, is also necessary before commencing and discussion on any subject. Marriages, peace treaties, visits and countless other transactions are initiated and arranged by means of kolanut shared by the parties to the transaction.”

In most cases before the kolanut is presented, the host kisses it. This act is aimed at proving to all present that the kolanut is given in good faith and clear conscience; and that it does not contain any impurity or poison. Kolanut in Igbo culture represents communal spirit; it is not taken in isolation.

The peace and reconciliatory import of kolanut hospitality culture of the Igbo also manifests itself when many people gather. The social impact is depicted as the kolanut is carried from one person to the other according to a trace of kinship relation, starting from the home of the host, and spreads in the direction of the left right movement and comes back to the host with this movement it could be easily discovered that people are one.

This account is confirmed by what Ofoegbu, (2006, p.3) describes as “*symbolic actions*”. The Igbo regard this as a manner of head count or a way of checking the identity of all the people in attendance in any gathering before any kind of discussion could be heard. The kola presentation symbolizes peace and welcome; and if one makes a mistake while carrying the kola round, he is traditionally dealt with according to the norms in different communities.

In discussing team spirit and brotherliness (onye aghala nwanne ya), for which the Igbo is known for, which this paper also recommends for the entire globe, the composition of kolanut is particularly meaningful. Each lobe is seen as whole and complete, but not separate. It must integrate with the other lobes to form nut, and as a nut, they reproduce themselves.

The Igbo see a person as an integer, but to realize the person-hood he or she must integrate with others. This is applicable to the real world situation. Every country of the world needs the other in order to stand firm, because no man is an Island. With this mentality in mind, there will be global peace and reconciliation because every country needs the co-operation and assistance of one country or the other in order to stand, it could be in the area of economy, security, education, health, technology or even natural resources and or human resources.

3. Igbo Taboo System

Taboo is a ritual prohibition. It is anything which is forbidden or disapproved of for religious reasons or by social custom. It is any system which forbids certain actions as being unclean or unholy. (Mairi 1990, p.1488)

In traditional Igbo society, their forebears raised fundamental questions on the meaning of life, order, peace, reconciliation, co-existence, and how the rebellious prone man could be put in check. Taboo speaks the language of restriction, prohibition, sacredness through ritual signs, imagery and sharing in their ideals. (Uche; 2009, p.238)

The above statement indicates that our forefathers thought of the best sort of progress in the society. Taboo system was introduced to promote stability cohesion and progress based on moral rectitude, diligence, hand work, truthfulness and the fear of God. A number of taboos exist in Igbo culture. Prominent among them include incest taboo, marriage taboo, religious taboos, political and social taboos. Igbo taboo system will help in arresting moral degeneration, which has become a cog in the wheel of world unity and progress. Socio-religious taboos, which include murder and blood - letting, if adopted by the world community will help to regulate people's life and promote peace and harmony in the entire public life, as against numerous unwanted killings of innocent souls as seen in the present day era of terrorism and insurgency.

4. The Igbo Masquerade Culture

The masquerade of the Igbo people of Nigeria is a representation of the forefathers of the people among the living. The masquerade performs various functions to the people, among them include the role of a disciplinarian. The Igbo society, like various cultures of the world is full of different kinds of people. The people include normally behaved individuals as well as people of unjustifiable behaviours.

By this role, the masquerade helps a lot to maintain sanity. It enables all to participate in the activities of Igbo life, as well as enjoy his life without anybody's attack and where evil doers attack people, they do not go unpunished. (Okodo, 2009, p.258)

The Igbo masquerade functions as Law Enforcement Agency, in such a way that it arrests offenders and disciplines them. Orji, (1999, p.156) supports, "*...the Masquerade was successfully used for maintenance of peace and enforcement of Laws and regulations*". The masquerade is also used in checking indolence; regulate those who keep late nights, collections of levies as well as judicial functions. Igbo masquerade can be used to expose

the evil of a tyrant, especially when the people are afraid to speak out because of fear of what harm the person may do them.

Osuagwu, (1980, p.116) supports:

“Masquerade is used to exhibit manliness. It was used as a means of recreation, in the olden days, when modern day recreational facilities were not out. Masquerade was the highest arbiter, in any case, in the olden days, because any judgment given by it was final. Masquerade was used for drive and collecting fine from defaulters... They make peace in the community, because they serve as the police of the various communities. They prevent vices like theft and witchcraft, by calling names of those involved in the night, telling them that the spirits have seen what they are doing, and as such they should stop it...”

If the different countries of the globe embrace this masquerade culture, It will go a long way in bringing sanity and good judgement, hence relative peace and reconciliation would be achieved.

Talking about Qkqkq Masquerade Society, for instance, it flourished in the traditional Igbo society as part of the need to erect a security system to guarantee the safe passage of travelers. The society has its peculiar signs and gestures, which served as a genuine passport through any territory in those days. Qkqkq could be described as *“the government of the land before the advent of the whiteman”*. In the olden days it had the power to control any person in its law when there was no government, especially those who steal, commit adultery and other similar offences.

Nwaubani, (1986, p. 58) supports,

“Qkqkq investigated crimes and decided the appropriate punishment, ranging from paying of fines to outright killing. If the stick or symbol of the society (mkpara qkqkq) was pinned on a land that was in dispute, nobody could enter such land again until qkqkq passed its verdict. This is similar to modern court injunctions; but contravention of qkqkq orders attracted heavy fines or even selling the person to the Aros. ... Today, qkqkq may have dwindled in significance, but it is still in existence flickering like a candle flame in the shadow of the 20th century, and contributing a modest quota to ensure social control.”

From the above citation, the role of the masquerade in enforcement of law and order is established.

Ubesie, (1978, p. 100) exposes the important role of the masquerade in justice delivery.

“...when two persons or families are in dispute, and they reject the initial judgement on their matter, the masquerade is usually invited. After receiving statements from those concerned the masquerades usually step aside to confer amongst themselves, and whenever they come in, whatever judgement they give stands indisputable.”

The Igbo masquerades are also used to grace occasions where they are meant to entertain people. When masquerades play, there is no doubt that two people who were in dispute ab-initio, will embrace each other in the spirit of joy and masquerade entertainment. Also during national and international cultural festivals and carnivals, people send their masquerades to the host community, state or country. This cultural export and exchange brings peace, reconciliation and co-existence.

Marriage in Igbo culture, another aspect of Igbo life that promotes global reconciliation. This notion is wrapped up in Osuji, (2009, p.8)

“Marriage is the foundation of every family and since Igbo practice extended family system that is predicted on solid linkage and network of families, it becomes important that marriage in Igbo land and amongst the Igbos must be regarded as one of the pillars of the people’s tradition and culture. There is an Igbo proverb that says “if a man makes a mistake in giving his daughter in marriage, he reincarnates into a wrong family”. Although, Igbos as a matter of tradition and culture practiced endogamy, to certain extent, they have due to modernization, travel and contact with other ethnic groups and races of the world started to practice exogamy.”

Because of the Igbo exogamous matrimonial affiliations that have established relationships across the globe, with their kits and kins all over the world, the Igbo have no other option than to preach peaceful co-existence amongst people of the world.

Akin to Igbo marriage system, as it affects global reconciliation, is also the Igbo extended family system. This practice makes every human, no matter the country of origin, a relation to each other; this could be possible through a trace of kinship relationship. When this system is applied, it will promote peace in the entire globe, given the qualities of good extended family, which include, that they must not cheat or lie to one another, good family must be proud of themselves and what they have, they must show interest in the welfare of others, must help and love one another as well as obey the rules and regulations of the family. (Odedokun, Bako, Olugbodi and Isiguzo, 2010, p.5)

This sense of being one’s brothers’ keeper is what is required to promote reconciliation in the society.

The Igbo occupation is another salient factor that is capable of promoting global reconciliation, especially as it affects trading, farming and education. These occupations more often than not involve by-lateral agreements with other countries which culminate in trade relations, exports and expatriate exchange. Anozie, (2003, p.20) observes *“Another characteristics for which the Igbo is known, is quest for knowledge. This takes them to different places like the land of the whites and other countries of the world”*. Inter-continental and International educational or academic tours and programmes are known for creating sustainable flora for harvests of ideas that promote development among the people of the globe. The zeal to learn and active participation in learning, as observed in the lives of the Igbo, if emulated by other races, will make the majority of

the people stake-holders in developmental programmes and projects hence the need for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence among people of the globe.

The Igbo Agricultural occupation and its relationship with International community is captured in Korieh, (2007, p. 139).

“The agricultural system of the Igbo at the beginning of the colonial period was fairly set, with most of the region producing palm oil and kernels for export... In this period, the government began to encourage peasant production, and local farmers sold large quantities of palm oil to British trading companies’. ... about 119 native owned palm plots were located in Owerri province and about 36 in Onitsha province. Rural peasants took advantage of demand in Europe to expand production and accumulate cash.”

The above citation buttresses the fact that Igbo occupation, in the area of agriculture through its export, fostered a relationship between the Igbo race, the Nigerian country and the British and European countries. This trade relationship was capable of spreading to other countries of the world, thereby boosting their economy as well as promoting peace and progress.

5. Conclusion

People’s culture especially that of the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, is capable of promoting peace and global reconciliation. Looking at Igbo marriage, Taboo system, masquerade, extended family relations, agro and educational based occupations, one is left without doubt, that through exchange programmes, enculturation and acculturation, there is bound to be peace and reconciliation in the entire globe.

6. Recommendations

- People’s culture is the backbone of their existence; therefore, people should invest more in the propagation of their cultural heritages.
- Exogamous marital affiliations should be encouraged as a way of establishing cordial relationship amongst people of diverse race.
- Agriculture, as an occupation does not only promote food sufficiency, but also engages people into exports and international transactions.
- Knowledge is power, and as such people should embrace education, as a means of acquiring knowledge. Also, seeking education abroad should be encouraged.
- Cultural festivals and exchange programmes should be organized, so that people will exchange the rich cultures of the people across the globe.

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