SUSTAINING THE COMMUNAL CULTURAL LIFE OF THE IGBO PEOPLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The Igbo people are known for their sense of community, they care for one another, and work for the common good of the community. Solidarity is simply the watch word of an ideal Igbo man. This paper is about sustaining the communal cultural life of the Igbo people in the 21st century, which is marked with the advancement in technology and the growing trend of globalization. It is obvious that the core communal values are eroding, resulting in a new generation of immoral personnel, who are selfish and self centered, criminal, and corrupt in management of resources, these form the problem of this paper. The paper therefore is set to sort how to sustain the communal culture of the Igbo society in the face of the 21st century advancement, and aims at striking a balance that will help embrace the benefits of globalization and at the same time maintain the uniqueness of this cultural attribute. The phenomenological method of research was used, and the approaches were comparative historical approach and the descriptive approach. The findings made clear the fact that the Igbo society was communal in nature and that the communality is under serious challenge in this 21st century as a result of globalization and its resultant explosion in technology, among others. It recommended that the Igbo should appreciate what they have and be unbiased to foreign culture. This paper concludes that the communal life of the Igbo can be sustained in the face of 21st century advancements

Keywords: Cultural Sustainability, Igbo Society, Communalism, Globalization, Technological advancement

Introduction

There has been an increase in the advancement of technology and a growing trend of globalization in this 21st century. This has brought about changes, not only in the communal life of the Igbo society but also in other spheres of life. Communal life which is a strong allegiance to one's own ethnic group, commonly based on sharing history and culture, characterized by collective cooperation and ownership by members of a community is gradually disappearing. Scholars like Agulanna 2010, Onuoha 1968, Obiwulu 2015, all agreed to the fact that the Igbo people lived a communal life, that favoured them to agreat extent. However, with globalization and its resultant technological advancement, the communal cultural life of the Igbo people has faced different challenges. Norbeg (1996) puts it straight when he said that "the impact of globalization on indigenous peoples is destructive". Owen (2016) also posits that globalization does not only fail to respect national boundaries, but it fails to respect national, regional and local culture. He further says that globalization has a homogenizing effect on different cultures. A critical look at this position, may give one reasons to worry about globalization.

This research therefore sets to uncover how the communal cultural life of the Igbo people can be sustained in the face of globalization and technological advancements of the 21st century. Making it clear that culture sustainability is different from culture preservation,

allowing traditional cultural expressions practices, norms and beliefs to change over time and the participants in a culture to control their fate (Owen, 2016). The Igbo can only run away from the effects of globalization by first appreciating what they have and not being biased to take the good part of foreign culture and avoid those that do not favour their culture. Since this research work deals with existential and experienced problems, the research made use of the phenomenological method and a multi dimensional approach, which includes the comparative historical approach and the descriptive approach. It is a qualitative research, and data collection was from both primary and secondary sources.

Concept clarification

It is important at this point to clarify some basic concepts that will be used in this write up.

Cultural sustainability

Culture according to Enebe (2015, p. 147) is "the knowledge, belief, customs, values, ideas and skills available in a society and by which the society can be compared to or differentiated from others". It is the way of life of a people. Sustainability on the other hand is the ability to sustain or continue. Cultural sustainability has to do with the preserving of cultural beliefs, cultural practices, heritage conservation, culture as a whole, and attempts to answer the question of whether or not any given culture will exist in the context of the future. (Saini et al., 2014)

Igbo society

This refers to a group of people living in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. According to Edeh (1965) they have common boundaries with the Bini and Warri people on the west, the Idoma and Igala on the north; and the Ogoni and Ijaw on the south.

Communalism

This is the doctrine that the communality (or group) is the focus of activities of the individual members of the society (Gyekye, 1997). The African economic development institute [AEDI], (2014), defined communalism as "a strong allegiance limited to one's own ethnic group, commonly based on sharing history and culture, characterized by collective cooperation and ownership by members of a community"(p. 72).

Globalization

According to Ndem (2018) globalization is a new economic reality that seeks to break all known national boundaries the world over in an attempt to promote trade liberalization, economic competition or free enterprises and an emergent political structure that is people oriented. It is a concept that attempts to wipe out boundaries and make the world a global village. Fafowora (1998) gave a better definition of globalization, when he said that" globalization, when he said that" globalization refers to the process of the increasing economic, political, social and cultural relations across international borders". (p.10).

Aspects of Igbo communal life

The Igbo man is known for his communal attitude in life. When a person is happy, others are also happy and vise versa. In Igbo society Nyasani (1997) said that individuals saw themselves not as individuals but as a collection of persons and when one person suffers or enjoys, the rest who are part and parcel of him suffers or enjoys with him. Eze (2014) said that the totality of Igbo value is anchored on communalism, these communal values are

evident in their care for others, interdependency, solidarity, reciprocal obligation and social harmony. According to Eze (2014) traditional Igbo values are centered on the philosophy of live and let live such that the weak and the aged, the helpless, the sick are affectionately taken care of.

Extended family structure was the foundation of Igbo communalism. The Igbo man lived together in groups called community, it was not just the coming together of anybody to live in the same place. It was a group of people who had the same descendants and ancestral linage. For him sharing one's life experience was the basis of Igbo community. The people who make up a community are many families and kindred, who have common cultural norms, language and thought patterns. According to Ekei, (2002) "one of the greatest unifying factors among Igbo of various segments is common notion of family, extended family, kindred and clan units as extensions of people with common ancestors". (p. 7)

Communalism in Igbo society was beyond the living, it involved both the living and the dead, as individuals remained linked to their society even after death. The Igbo belief that their kinsmen whether dead or alive have a hand in the well being of individual members of the community. Agulanna (2010) said that "the ancestors are believed to have a beneficent relationship with the living members of their former communities. This belief goes a long way in motivating the people to lead a moral life worthy of emulation, as it is an access way to ancestor hood. Ancestors are intermediaries between God and men. They are the unseen chairmen at family meetings. They can punish as well as reward those who derail or conform to the moral and social order as the case may be. Onuoha (1968) has it that communality was exhibited in communal ownership of land and related property, community development work, communal living and a high level of collective obligation. He went further to say that in African political society, there was an unwritten constitution consisting of one word 'solidarity'. Everyone understood it and no one dared infringe it. No one thought of himself apart from society; one might conflict with another member of the society but never with his community itself. According to Gyekye (1997, p. 16) "Traditional communal order was characterized by some ethical values such as brotherhood, interdependence, cooperation, reciprocal obligations, social justice, hospitality, mutual neighborliness, compassion, generosity, self sacrifice and control".

According to Agulanna (2010), for the Igbo people of Nigeria like other African nations, the only potent force that can stop a person from doing his/her will, is the community will. This is so, as one cannot wake up and start doing something that the society detests, even if he/she defends the action. Community life helps to create a sense of good relations among members of society. Edeh, (1985) said that the "Igbo community is a societal set up in which there is an intimate face to face interaction. Relationship is on a personal human basis as distinguished from the predominantly impersonal relationship that exists in today's urban society where everyone minds his or her own business". (p. 6). In Igbo society it is believed that human existence only makes meaning within a social setting. This they illustrate with the use of broom, as broom cannot be broken in a whole but a strand of broom is easy to break. The worst punishment in Igbo society is the sanction that leads to banishment of a person from the community. This shows the high value of social life in Igbo society.

Communal living was a mode of existence where an individual wholly surrenders the self to the group or the community (Wafula ,2003). This is because communal problems are shared collectively, the problems of survival are overcome with great success as a group. The African concept of man is inadequate without the idea of shared existence. An African will say that he exists because others exist. The awareness of himself is not in isolation but in company of others. This idea for the non Africans is unbelievable but for the Africans, it is so natural. This communality was highly checked with the institution of taboos and punishment for offenders.

Mutual care and concern were the bedrock of existence in Igbo community (Onah et al., 2016). They shared common life generally as a result of their common heritage. They also believed in the idea that what happens to one member affects all. Mbiti (1969) asserts that the understanding of community in Africa is " I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am". (p.17). Nyasani (1997) also has it that in the extended family set up, no person can starve if neighbours have food neither can a child be orphaned since children belong to the community. A child's welfare was not just the obligation of the family members but the community. Everybody was responsible for the other. People lived for each other. This is expressed in the Igbo adage "*onye lie onwe ya, otu aka ya aputa n'elu* (if a person buries him/herself, one of his/her hands will hang above the grave). This simply means that no matter how rich a person is, he/she must need the help of some other person. In Igbo society, people help each other in areas like, farm work, building of houses, training in schools and other works of life. Onah et al. (2016) agreed to this when he said that tasks such as farm work, building of houses to mention a few were accomplished with the help of age grades. This is why it is.said in Igbo that *igwebuike*, (unity is strength).

In Igbo society, begging was despised, members of the family or kindred were ready to help whoever had nothing to eat or do for a living. It was shameful for a clan to have a beggar in their midst. Obiwulu (2015) said that people in pre-colonial Igbo society were ashamed to beg and laziness was seriously frowned at. Igbo people never recognized the individual as an isolated, self existent being, who lived by and for himself. Eze (2014) said that a man in Igbo society is seen as a connecting link in the network of beings in existence so that what affects one equally affects the other. He went further to say that, he never swam in the ocean of affluence in the midst of his poverty stricken neighbours. They were out to help each other, and so it was difficult to find a beggar in their midst. People tried as much as they could to fight evil. Everyone was out to inculcate morals in children, and all forms of deviant behaviour by the children or youth were punished by anyone who found out. Child training was for all, anybody could correct a child, for doing something wrong without knowing the parents of the child. The society was very conscious of the saying that *otu mkpuru aka ruta mmanu ozu oha* (if one finger touches oil, it will definitely touch other fingers), and never wanted anybody to be a deviant, that is why it must not be the parent of a child that will punish or reward a child for his behaviour.

Communal life in the 21st century

The Igbo communal system which has the best indigenous ethical and environmental structure for the restoration of man's dignity is under serious challenge in this 21st century as a result of globalization and its resultant technological advancement. Globalization has been seen as a process that transforms local or regional phenomenon into global one (Etta et al., 2016). This affects African communism as it creates economic difficulty and separation of people from one another. The advantage of the internet is enormous and it greatly outweighs the disadvantage. It has caused lots of moral problem in the Igbo society, ranging from internet theft, watching pornographic videos (which in turn lead to rape, sex before marriage etc.). Global satellite system has aided the disappearance of boundaries, one can be in Nigeria, and see what is happening in China. This has made it possible for the Africans and the Igbo in particular to imitate the dress pattern of the Europeans, without taking cognizance of the climatic condition and the moral standard of the place. People dress half naked in recent times, throwing away the cultural dress pattern of the Igbo society.

Urbanization which is the driving force of globalization is seriously dealing with the communal life of the Igbo people, as many leave their villages to urban centers and adapt to urban lifestyle. Amadi, et al., (2015) has it that "the reduced number of people residing

cultural norms and values ineffective". (p. 22). This is true as so many people who resides in the urban centers, do not visit their villages regularly.

Cultural diffusion is another area that affects the culture of the Igbo society. Contact with other cultures of the world, especially America and Europe significantly affected the Igbo culture. This happened mainly during the period of colonization. According to Fadeye (2001) today many Nigerians prefer European diet, dressing, language, music, and dance to their native ones. People prefer to buy foreign things instead of the locally made ones.

Fafunwa (2006) said that the pillars of African culture are seven in number. These include physical training, intellectual training, respect for elders and people in authority, vocational, social and emotional training of the young. Consequently when the core values of African culture were religiously observed, everything went on well in the society. The intrusion of foreign culture and civilization, made most people prefer foreign culture. Most people in recent times get married without involving their parents, not to talk of the extended family. Regrettably according to Ajitoni, et al, (2015) recent happenings in the continent have revealed that youths and adults alike have abandoned their culture for the foreign (western and eastern) ones, raising questions on where lies our traditional value system.

The Eurocentric concept of the human person that places more relevance to individual person over and above the community has gradually taken up the communal life style of the Igbo society. Olasunanmi (2014) agreed to this when he said that, today individualism which is conceived as a product of globalization has replaced the sense of community; mutual antagonism and that of suspicious have replaced unity of purpose. He went further to say that individualism is a destructive divisive element in Africa society and promotes many of our problems. People now do things for their own interest, not minding the interest of the community. Obiwulu (2015) also supported this when he said that individualism has overthrown the communal spirit of the Igbo man. The individualistic spirit was supported by the colonizer as well as the early missionaries and has been worsened by globalization and market micro and macro economies where time is money. (p. 260)

Effects of eroding Communal life

There is no doubt that by abandoning Igbo core primordial values, the Igbo man of the 21st century has become a ghost of his former vibrant and dynamic self, who was capable of contributing selflessly to the creative and productive development of this society (Ekei, 2002). Here are some of the effects of eroding communal life of the Igbo on the society.

Economic effect

An ideal Igbo man is known for hard work and their occupation was mainly farming among other things like trading and craft. They took their work very seriously in other to fulfill their economic obligations. Everyone was carried along for a common good. In recent times with the effect of globalization many people have abandoned the farms and crafts in search of white collar job in the city. People engage in all kinds of corrupt activities such as; kidnapping, embezzlement of public funds among others in other to make money. According to Ndem (2018) wealth from no known source is being exalted as people fight to meet up with the challenges of a globalized economy. People no longer have the interest of others at heart and so they embezzle funds meant for the development of the society without fear. Ugwu Anene, (personal communication, 03/07/18) said that corruption has eaten deep into the members of the society to the extent that if a family member becomes a government official, he/she is expected to erect buildings, buy different cars without which he/she will be regarded as a fool.

Moral effect

With globalization and its agent like the internet, there is a great change in the attitude of the younger generation. The extended family system is no longer in place and this makes child upbringing or training solely the duty of his/her immediate family against the communal way of correcting a child. This does not portend well as most parents are involved in one form of work or the other, leaving the child to decide his or her own way of life.According to Ndem (2018) the filial bond between parents and their children is disappearing and while parents are out fighting to provide for the material needs of the children, the children are getting more and more frustrated because they are not receiving the family love they crave for from their parents. This makes them to occupy their mind with immoral acts which in turn affects all in the society.

The society is filled with immorality; dress pattern of the youth and most adults is disheartening, as they move about half naked without fear or shame. Rape, stealing, pre marital sex, have become a day to day occurrence. There are no taboos and sacrileges in the society today, which can hold people back from these evil. Respect for elders in the society is gradually passing away and their advice of any kind is no longer welcomed. Today chieftaincy titles that were predominantly used to reward people of good character and those who uphold the ethical ideals of the community are sold to rich people no matter the source of your income. Amadi, et al., (2015) said that "well known criminals now receive chieftaincy titles from their villages. A practice that has compromised the high moral and ethical values of the Igbo." (p.7). This constitutes a serious problem in the society as many will hold onto it and engage in evil acts.

Political effect

As earlier mentioned, due to globalization there is a high influx of people to urban centers, thereby reducing the number of people that are continuously living in the village. This reduction in the number of people in the villages weakens the village institution and it becomes difficult for them to implement the norms that govern the village.

The family structure is also destabilized as most people or *Okpara* (first sons) that head the *umunna* system may live in the city. In recent times, *Igwes* of autonomous communities, live outside their community all in the name of getting closer to technology. Ebuka Ugwoke (personal communication, 21/07/18)from Uzo- uwani complains bitterly of how their *Igwe* is not regularly available in the village. An *Igwe* is naturally supposed to live permanently in the village, to oversee the affairs of his people and also feel what they are feeling.

However, there are good aspects of the advancement in technology and the growing trend of globalization. Ndem (2018) said that the " first positive impact of globalization is the broadening of the perspective of the Igbo both in thought and behaviour and has allowed Igbo people the opportunity to experience other cultures and learn from them". p.25. This is so as many people have become aware of the importance of acculturation. Igbo people have become versatile in education, venturing into every field of knowledge as a result of globalization. Health care delivery quality has also improved. The prospects of Igbo artisans and business people have increased, through international trade and commerce. Practices like treating women as possessions instead of wives are no longer trending, including early marriages. Globalization has also helped the Igbo man to abandon his belief in superstition, and to stand on things that can be reasoned and logical.

Sustaining the Igbo communal life

The Igbo man has been debased as a result of foreign culture and modernization, and has suddenly become a stranger in his own land. There is no doubt that it will b

have taken place, but certain things need to be done to sustain the communal life of the Igbo society and Africa in general.

There is need for the Igbo people to rise and stop the inequality inherent in the global space, by making their culture and cultural believes visible to the world through the internet and television program. Globalization should not be rejected instead it should be seen as an opportunity to participate actively to enable them restore the cultural values and maintain their own cultural preference. The Igbo society should not close their mind completely to every foreign thing but rather be objective. According to Eze (2014) accommodation or openness to the other makes it possible to build a society of ends where only reasonable actors will have a respectable place. There is need therefore to strike a balance between the indigenous culture and the foreign culture. Africans must stand on the moral tone of their tradition despite their narrow scope and shelve off European values that antagonize the Igbo communal conscience. Igbo traditional practices should be on in all platforms that aid globalization, like television, internet, radio, instagram etc. there should be regular programme, on radios and television promoting the communal nature of Igbo people.

Parents should inculcate in their children the good moral life, they should always let their children know the right things to do; most importantly the values and tradition of the society should be made known to the children, because they are the society's future. Parents should apart from training their children, be their role model, because children learn faster from what they see. There is a serious need for reorientation of Igbo cultural values. It will be difficult for any society to achieve any meaningful objective if the values of that society are not kept (Obiwulu, 2015). The cherished values that use to be the reference point of good conduct have been lost. Obiwulu (2015) argued that the massive corruption in the country is a sign that truth, honesty, selflessness and integrity are lacking. He went further to say that for reorientation to work, people must imbibe good values and dishonesty in any form should be punished, while hard work and honesty should be rewarded.

Proper education is needed to help sustain the Igbo culture, it should begin as early as possible in a child's school and also at home. This is to help the child internalize the values of the society at a tender age. It is not enough to teach Igbo language in schools, culture, and history should also be made compulsory in schools.

Finally globalization has come to stay, the Igbo people should not take immature decision towards the cultural ideology of the west. Rather the fundamentals of the traditional Igbo culture should be reassessed by the Igbo stakeholders in an effort to incorporate these fundamentals with what is attainable in today's world.

Conclusion

As already seen above, the communal life of the Igbo society, which has the best indigenous ethical and environmental structure for the restoration on human dignity, is gradually eroding. The economy, morality and political principles of the society are greatly affected. The younger generation of the Igbo has lost the sense of communal life which puts the interest of the community first in all their dealings. Globalization and modernity have taken upper hand in the society today. It has become very clear with these findings, that the communal life of the Igbo can be sustained in the face of 21st century advancements. When there is accommodation and display of the Igbo traditional practices on platforms that aid globalization.

It is therefore right for all to rise up in pursuit of the diminishing cultural values of the Igbo society. Parents should take up their duties and educate their children on the right things to be done in the society, as failure to do so will bring doom to the whole society in the nearest future.

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Oral Interviews

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place Of Interview	Date
Eze Moses	78	Male	Farmer	Enugu	20/05 /2018
Onoyima Ifedi	43	Female	Civil Servant	Igbo-Etiti	16/05/2018
Ugwu Anene	52	Male	Trader	Udenu	03/07/2018
Ugwoke Chukwuebuka	30	Male	Student	Nsukka	21/07/2018