

THE IGBO TRADITIONAL VALUES AND INSECURITY IN IGBOLAND, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Insecurity is a situation where lives and property are not safe. It is a state in which lives and property are in danger. Insecurity means a condition in which there is incessant loss of lives and property. Therefore, the work examined the role played by African traditional religious values in curbing insecurity in Igboland for peaceful and orderly society. The study used phenomenological approach. It was descriptive and analytical. The researcher used two sources in collecting data. The two sources used include primary and secondary sources. It was discovered that there was no guarantee of protection of lives and property. Insecurity put human lives at risk and ushers in disorder in the society. Insecurity was a bane to the security of lives in both urban and rural areas due to neglect of African Traditional religious values that held sway in the past. The work recommended that city dwellers should imbibe the cherished African traditional religious values in order to checkmate the high rate of insecurity in Igboland.

KEYWORDS: Poverty, Insecurity, Role, values and culture.

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity is a situation where people find it difficult to enjoy safety of lives and property. It thrives in a situation where there is no protection of lives and property. Igboland has witnessed insecurity of lives and property, particularly, in the cities. There are murder and armed robbery that lead to loss of lives and property. Furthermore, kidnapping, human trafficking, political violence, inter communal wars, boundary disputes, armed robbery pose security challenges in Igboland. The efforts of security agencies, state governments, local governments and other interest groups to stem the tide of insecurity have proved abortive. People engage in all sorts of crimes as a means of livelihood. This has resulted to both life and property being unsafe. But, that was not so when people paid allegiance to the African traditional religious values that upheld security of lives and property. Therefore, the work examined the role played by the African Traditional Religious values and customs with the aim of encouraging the people to practice their worthy aspects of their culture that foster security of lives and property. Phenomenological approach was used. It was descriptive and analytical. It was discovered that there was rapid urbanization in Igboland which had eroded the people's sense of traditional values, particularly, the ones that protect security of lives and property. The western culture's disposition to violence had not helped matters.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TERMS

Poverty

It is pertinent to define the term poverty for easy clarification. Gwamna (2008:17) asserts that poverty means lack of basic necessities of life. The basic necessities of life are shelter, food and clothes. Iheanacho (2016:153) defines poverty as a “state of deprivation, in terms of both economic and social indicators, health care, access to food, social status, self-esteem and self-actualization”. Poverty is lack of means of livelihood. Tamuno (2007:36) quips that poverty is a condition in which a person is unable to provide basic necessities of life that make life decent and comfortable. It is a state of lack of basic amenities of life that make life worth living. According to Oji (2004:12), poverty is “the state of being poor, necessity; want, lack, deficiency”. It is a state of miserable life.

Insecurity

Ebhomielen and Idemudia (2011:181) define insecurity as a condition of being in risk or danger. It is a state of experiencing danger or injury. Insecurity means exposing a person, building, country and so on to danger. It also means a condition in which lives and property are not safe. According to Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary, insecurity means a state of not having confidence or assurance. It means a condition in which a person is not guarded or sustained. Insecurity connotes something that is not firmly fastened or fixed. It is a situation of instability and lack of adjustment. Insecurity is a state of fear and anxiety due to feeling of being unsafe. Wehmeier (2006:771) sees insecurity as a condition in which a person is not sure of his relationship with other people. It means a situation in which a person is not safe or protected. Watkins and Watkins (1992:352) maintain that insecurity means a state of being insecure. It is a situation, whereby, a person lacks confidence both in himself and the environment. Insecurity means a situation where a person or group of persons are confronted with risks. It is exposure to hazards.

Role

Role has to do with the interaction of an object with a set of constraints as they emanate. It means a part played by the object, institution and organization in addressing the problems in the society. It is a duty or responsibility which a person, group of individuals, associations, organizations and institutions are expected to perform. Role is “a prescribed or expected behaviour associated with a particular position or status in a group or organization”. It is a function that is carried out either against or in favour of the society (icawww.epfl.ch, www.businessdictionary.com). According to Wikipedia, role is a set of behaviours, rights, obligations, beliefs and norms in a society. It is an expected behaviour that is in connection with the individual’s status (<https://en.wikipedia.org>).

Values

Igboabuchi and Ofojebe (2003:77) maintain that the term value was originally an economic term which means the worth of a thing. They insist that value was later classified under the branch of philosophy known as axiology that consists of ethics and aesthetics. Igboabuchi and Ofojebe submit that value literally means something that is good, esteemed, desirable, liked and worthwhile. Value means a thing that is precious and indispensable. Ugwu (2004:287) defines moral values as “a set of social rules and norms intended to guide the conduct of people in a society”. Moral values are

channeled to control peoples' misconducts that jeopardize the peace and security of the society. Agha (2003:66) intones that value is an object that satisfies some interest. It is a quality or feature in an object which attracts admiration and appreciation.

Culture

Many people have defined culture from their vantage points. Arinze (2001:96) cited Tylor as saying that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Culture is not innate in man. Rather, it is acquired through education or socialization. Ikwemesi (2012:132) quoted UNESCO as saying that culture is "the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional feature that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs". Every culture is holistic. Agune (nd: 2) defines culture as "the sum total of what individuals learn in common with other members of the group to which they belong". Culture is shared by the members of the society. Iwe (nd: 16) states that culture is "a body of stored knowledge, characteristic ways of thinking and feeling, attitudes, goals and ideals". It distinguishes a community or village from others.

The Background of Igbo People

Diara (2001:10) asserts that Igbo people of south-east, Nigeria, inhabit the same geographical location and share homogenous culture and language (Igbo language). Although, they have various dialects. It should be noted that Igbo people have lived in their present geographical location for centuries. Isichei (1976:3) opines that Archeological evidence has shown that Igbo people have lived in Igboland for five thousand years. Before the advent of Christianity, Igbo people were adherents of African traditional religion that had pantheon.

Ejizu (1986:xvi) affirms that Igbo people of the eastern bank of the River Niger is situated in the tropical forest zone within the latitude 5 and 7 degrees north, and longitudes 6 and 8 degrees east. This study revolves around the present geographical location of Igboland (south-east geo-political zone of Nigeria). Nmah (2003:10) posits that Nigerian census of 1973 and 1991 stipulated that the population of Igbo people is five and a half million and ten million, seven hundred and twelve thousand six hundred and seventy five respectively. From the above statistics, the population of Igbo people is growing rapidly.

Diara (2001:9) insists that Igbo people live in villages and clan. The village includes homesteads which are linked together by kinship ties. Clan or community is the largest political unit that comprises villages. Every community is autonomous and has a traditional ruler that performs political functions for his subjects. The Igbo are predominantly farmers. Ekwunife (1990:3) points out that Igbo people's occupation is subsistence farming. Although, not every Igbo man is a farmer,

there are business men and women, artisans, civil servants and public servants. Igbo people produce crops like yams, cocoyams, cassava, rice, maize and so on.

IGBO TRADITIONAL VALUES AND SECURITY

Ekwunife (1990:153) makes it clear that the Igbo traditional values promote community, co-operation, hard work and peaceful co-existence in the Igbo traditional communities, the kinsmen were their brothers keepers, thereby, refraining from anything that can hurt one's kinsman. Obioma and Uduak (2010:115) aver that the importance attached to the community made humane living, sharing and harmonious living possible. O'Donovan (2000:11) observes that there was a strong value for community. Everybody showed concern for what will be for the good of his community, extended family, clan and the tribe. There was sharing of life in which people cared, helped and showed concern with one another. All these things were tailored toward ensuring peace and harmony in the society. Nwala (1985:150) asserts that the Igbo observed Omenela (customs) with the view of ushering in peace, order and cordial relationships in the society. Omoregbe (1993:68) affirms that apart from human value (human life) which is the highest value, value of justice, honesty, fidelity, human freedom and fundamental human right feature prominently in the regulation of insecurity, disorder and chaos in the society.

In the past, there was no distinction between the poor and the rich. The Igbo were known for egalitarianism. Poverty in Igboland is a brain child of the colonialists that introduced capitalist systems in Igboland. Animalu (2001:2) insists that capitalism augurs well with the elite (bourgeoisie) at the detriment of the poor (proletariat) by creating wealth and power for the rich who controls the means of production, distribution and exchange of goods and services. But, in the pre-colonial period, there was no money economy with its attendant profit making motive. The economy was not centered on market system. Market is a place where trade takes place. Trade means buying and selling of goods. The Igbo were not conversant with trade, rather, individuals depended on their extended families for the provision of simple necessities of life (Basden, 1982:194; Ilogu, 1974:93). It should be noted that Igbo people are known for hospitality. Ilogu (1974: 159) further states that extended family system played a vital role after the Nigeria/Biafra civil war when about half a million Igbo people that were displaced from various parts of Nigeria returned home and were accommodated by their kinsmen at home. The extended family system is still vital considering great number of Igbo returnees from northern Nigeria that came home as a result of religious riots and Boko haram that were taken care of by their kinsmen at home. Omoregbe (1993:141) describes extended family as an institution that is rooted in mutual help and interdependence. The extended family prompts a well to do member of the family to come to the aid of the disadvantaged relations. Ilogu (1974:93) posits that a wealthy man who had possessions of farm crops, cattle; wives and children were not considered wealthy until he used his wealth to help members of the family and the poor.

It should be noted that in old days, there was nothing like inordinate ambition and quest for materialism that are the bane of the society. The economy was simple and less sophisticated. Mbiti (1975:16) affirms that wealth was measured by the possession of children, cattle, sheep and goats. But, today, the story is no longer the same. Onyeidu (2004:39) argues that get –rich quick syndrome is one of the major causes of crimes like murder, prostitution, pushing of drugs, child trafficking and 419 practice.

Violation of laws, traditions and customs attract severe punishment to the culprit. Punishment is an act of disciplining an offender for the offence committed. Ajor (2008:205) maintains that in the traditional system, punishment serves as a deterrent and revenge for the offence. Ezeh (2002:159) notes that in old days, notorious criminals were sold into slavery. Stealing from kinsmen was a serious offence. Thieves were either tortured or sold into slavery as a mark of punishment. Iwe (2003: 20) submits that the severe punishment meted to the thieves underscores Igbo traditional ethics that adhere to personal righteousness and justice without mercy, particularly, to the thieves.

The Igbo world view is different from Christian world view that sees the world as a place of preparation for heavenly bliss. For the Igbo, the world is not a place meant for suffering in order to acquire eternal bliss. Human suffering is treated as a negative force that poses great obstacle to earthy bliss. Therefore, every effort is made to solicit for the support of spiritual powers like the Supreme Being, divinities and ancestors to remove evil that frustrates the security of health, peace and prosperity (Osunwokeh, 2007:61-62). Of course, there are physical problems that have spiritual undertone which must be handled by spiritual powers. Kalu (1985:10) opines that African traditional religion plays pivotal role of explanation, prediction and control of space – time events that yield dividends of order, security and prosperity. The African traditional religion is saddled with the responsibility of explaining mysterious events, predicting the future and controlling socio-political, economic and religious events that are likely to bring disaster and insecurity.

The Igbo perceive life as the ultimate, precious and valuable possession. To possess life means possessing the most precious and valuable “commodity”. The Igbo philosophy of life is encapsulated in their names like Nduka (Life is greater), Ndubuisi (Life is the ultimate) Ndudiri (If there is life) and so on. Perhaps, that may be the reason for showing hatred and condemnation of murder, armed robbery and other violent acts that are capable of destructing life (Ekeopara, 2006:17). The Igbo do everything possible to protect life and create enabling environment for people to live their lives to the full.

In Igboland, marriage is a means of sustaining social security. Nmah (2003:115) argues that “one person does not marry a woman. This indicates that the participation of the paternal family Umunna of the man ensures social security for the woman”. Marriage was utilized to strengthen political, social and economic alliance among communities. It was one of the means of nipping potential inter-communal conflicts and wars at the bud. Marriage protected the woman from assault and murder. It

saved the woman from reckless divorce, oppression and exploitation.

There is a relationship between religion and economic growth. In most cases, Igbo religious belief influences the economy favourably. Nyimi (2009:97) points out that the Igbo use prayer and thanksgiving to improve their economic production. Before the planting of seeds, the Igbo make rituals and sacrifices for bountiful harvest. In appreciation, they give thanksgiving to the deity through the celebration of new yam festival (Iriji or Iwaji). Ugwu (2002:62) stresses that African traditional religion promotes social justice, hard work and integrity which are hall marks of prosperity, thereby reducing poverty that causes insecurity. There is no doubt that Igbo people are industrious and strive for self realization. The Igbo determination to overcome poverty motivates them to travel long distance in search of greener pastures. Uchem (2001:36) quips that about “6 million people are believed to be dispersed all across the country in the various Nigerian states as well as in other countries of the world”. The Igbo people hardly sever relationship with their home people. Uchem (2001:37) further opines that “thus, at death, an Igbo person must be brought back home to his or her land of origin”. This enables the deceased to rest with his ancestors. Igbo traditional religious values and insecurity in Igboland

African traditional religion is a religion born out of insecurity, fear and crisis of the primordial men. African traditional religion originated from the primordial man’s feeling of insecurity in the midst of cosmic and supernatural powers that threatened his existence. Akpan (2011: 47) observes that the primitive man was emotional and cognitive of the events that were looked upon as mysterious and awesome. Park (1997: 82) affirms that hierophany describes the manifestation of the sacred in the midst of the profane. Usually, there is a dialectic tension between the sacred and the profane that led the primitive people to employ religion in resolving the tension. The dialectic tension between the sacred and profane is born out of the belief that some objects which are new, unusual, unique, perfect, or freakish are endowed with magico-religious powers that inspire fear in the minds of the religious people. Naturally, African traditional religion handles spiritual insecurity with divination, rituals, sacrifices and observance of taboos which manifests in physical security.

It should be stated that Igbo people are predominantly farmers. This accounts for the incessant land disputes that threaten the security of the people. The incessant land disputes are attributed to insufficient land and land tenure system that hamper agricultural activities. Ekeopara (2007:40) notes that land disputes usually result to inter-tribal conflicts and socio- political upheavals that serve as a clog in the wheel of security of lives and poverty. There are communities, villages and states whose security is fragile as a result of inter-communal wars.

The inter-communal conflicts that broke out between the warring communities of Umuleri, Aguleri and Umuoba-Anam in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State led to the loss of security of lives and property. It was land dispute that caused the hostility that broke out among the communities on Friday 23rd July, 1999 that lasted till Tuesday 27th July, 1999. The violence that

lasted for five days resulted to loss of 300 lives and houses worth of millions of naira were destroyed. These armed conflicts took place in Igboezuwu Aguleri, Ifite Aguleri and Otuocha that inhabit the hinterland. Even the police sent to restore peace in the area lost 30 policemen. Refugees that ran away from the affected communities took refuge in Awkuzu, Nteje, Nneyi, Umuleri, Igbariam, Onitsha and so on (TELL, August 9, 1999).

Poverty influences security negatively. The Igbo people experience crimes owing to the high rate of poverty. O'Donovan (2000:143) opines that there is a relationship between poverty and crimes. It is fallacious to think that every poor person is a criminal. However, there is a tendency that some unscrupulous poor people may be enticed to commit crimes in order to survive hardship. Anyacho (2009:74) makes it clear that "poverty and hunger are twin social evil of the age. They cause unbearable suffering, anxiety, restiveness and sometimes may lead to violence". Violence is a serious threat to security of lives and property. More often than not, the psychological problems of anger and fear find an outlet in violence, riots, demonstration and crisis.

Recently, insecurity has affected tranquility and security of the people. Igboland has experienced political tensions between some Governors and their political opponents. There are kidnapping and assassination of political rivals. The electorates are compelled to vote against their will. Political intimidation and harassment have become the order of the day. There is no doubt that the rich take advantage of the poor unemployed youths and use them as political thugs and hired assassins to cause terror in Igboland.

It is observed that among the cities in Igboland, Onitsha is notorious for stealing which hampers security. The visitors to Onitsha feel insecure owing to the criminal activities that are carried out by hoodlums in the city. Onyeidu (2004:40) observes that stealing in Onitsha attracted public attention to the extent that Cheetham, a Bishop of the Anglican Mission who visited Onitsha in 1927 decried the high rate of stealing in the city of Onitsha. Igbo and Anugwom (2011:84) aver that before the emergence of "Bakassi Boys" at Onitsha in Anambra State, Onitsha was known for criminal activities, like, armed robbery; pick-pocketing; car theft; hired killing, cheating, burglary and so on. The inhabitants of major cities in Igboland like Aba, Owerri, Enugu, Umuahia and Awka pass through similar experience. Ezeh (2002:163) recalls that armed robbery started in Igboland after the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War when gangster leaders Oyenusi and Lawrence Anini terrorized Igboland in 1970s and 1980s respectively. The Igbo passed through economic hardship after the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War which rendered Igboland a foothold for criminality.

According to Nwokeoma (2010:1), Mike Okiro, the Inspector General of Police held his last meeting with senior police officers. In the meeting, Ogbonna Onovo decried the criminal acts of kidnapping and armed robbery that have increased the rate of insecurity in the south-east. It was also reported that the south-east is the region of kidnapping, considering the fact that a great number of people were kidnapped in the south-east (Igboland) more than in other regions of the country. He further

asserts that two white men and their Nigeria colleagues that worked at a car assembly plant in Nnewi in Anambra State were abducted on March 19, 2007. Nwokeoma (2010:1-2) notes that in about April, 2010, thirty armed robbers in a convoy of about four vehicles moved to Okigwe in Imo state where they robbed more than six banks in Owerri road in the day time. The armed robbery attack started at 3pm and lasted for two hours. Unfortunately, the armed robbery incident resulted to the death of seventeen lives, including two soldiers and five policemen. The armed robbers also abducted the wife of the former Governor of Anambra State, Onyedi Ezeife.

As stated earlier, military and political tensions underscore Igbo people's unquenchable desire to express their anger of marginalization and poverty. Ebhomielen and Idemudia (2011:181) affirm that poor people usually express their anger through militancy. The various political movements like movement for the Actualization of sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Independent Movement (BIM) caused political unrest in Igboland and beyond. Members of these political movements believed that they should celebrate Biafra Day, on 30th May every year, to commemorate the day Late Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared a Biafra State on May 30th, 1967 and Raph Uwazuruike (MASSOB Leader) implemented it by hoisting Biafra flag at Aba, Abia State (Daily Sun Monday, May 15, 2017). Currently, the federal government had proscribed the Biafra Independent Movements. Political violence is a source of insecurity in every society. Kabuk (2015:164) sees political violence as "a form of deliberate behaviour by citizens or functionaries of states intending to disrupt social processes or visit serious harm upon person or valuable private or public property". Violence is visible in every strata of the society. It encourages disregard of due process of channeling grievance and encourages people to take laws in their hands at the slightest provocation. Kabuk (2015:164) further maintains that political violence manifests in form of riots, rebellion, terrorism, insurrection, institutional violence, genocide, political vigilantism, civil war, revolution, demonstration, strikes and so on. Violence is a source of restiveness that makes security elusive.

It is observed that drugs influence criminals to commit all sorts of crimes. Udeagha (1995:114) points out that drug abuse occurs when there is application of drugs without doctor's prescription. Drugs are used to bring relief to the drug user. It is discovered that some poor people use drugs in order to lose grip of the reality of life. Unfortunately, drugs are responsible for criminal acts that cause insecurity. Ekwunife (1995) describes the influence of drugs on people thus:

"Rather the victim of hard drug may be confronted with certain problems of life as the drunkard. Unable to face them squarely, he takes refuge in drugs. Once the effects of these drugs wear away, the problem mounts. Dejection sets in and hunger for more drugs is badly felt...a person under the influence of drugs can perform surprising feats. As a hired assassin or armed robber he can easily kill his victims – an act which in normal circumstances he would think twice before undertaking (p.139)."

There is no doubt that a victim of hard drugs is a threat to peace and security. Some of the hard drugs are alcohol, cannabis, heroin, morphine, marijuana, caffeine, nicotine and so on (Agha, 2003:91). These hard drugs have caused a lot of setbacks to the security of lives and property.

Kidnapping has seriously affected security in Igboland. The kidnapers jeopardize states' government efforts in ensuring security of lives and property of citizens. For instance, in Imo State, particularly, in Owerri, a gangster leader of kidnapping, Vampire, who was executed recently, was notorious for making the state a haven for kidnapping. The gangster leader and his gang kidnapped innocent citizens in the night, hence, the name Vampire. This notorious gang made Owerri and its environs unsafe, particularly, in the night. Similarly, another gang leader of kidnapping, Osisikankwu, prior to his execution terrorized Aba and rendered it a city known for every criminality. Ezeibe and Eze (2012:30) posit that kidnapers had kidnapped about 600 persons in Igboland between January 2007 and May, 2010. They attribute the prevalent kidnapping cases to business moguls, unscrupulous politicians and top security personnel that sponsor kidnapping for their economic and political gains.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Igbo that live both in rural and urban areas should abide by the good tradition, customs and laws of their people, particularly, the ones that forbid crimes and other violent related acts.
2. Government should fight poverty by boosting agricultural production in the area, thereby, making agriculture attractive to the teeming unemployed youths.
3. The government in all levels should sensitize the youths on the danger of engaging in crimes.
4. The politicians should desist from using youths to commit all sorts of crimes like kidnapping, 'thurgery', political assassinations and so on.
5. Security agencies in the area should live up to their expectation by fighting crimes effectively.

CONCLUSION

The Igbo people have passed through incessant armed robbery, kidnapping, communal clashes, menace of movement for the Actualization of sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) which have worsened the security situation of the region. There is no doubt that poverty is a major factor that is responsible for the high rate of insecurity in Igboland. It is discovered that insecurity in the region has affected economic, religious, political and educational sector. Insecurity has resulted to the loss of lives and property. However, African traditional religion has reduced the rate of poverty by enhancing agricultural output through ritual and sacrifices. It encourages agriculture by measuring wealth in terms of goats, cattle, sheep that depict the occupation of the people. African traditional religion fights insecurity by enforcing tradition, customs and laws among the people. There are social sanctions that are meant for the culprits that violate security of lives and property.

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