

Invasion of Igbo Culture and Belief System by Modernization

BY

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Abstract

One area where the Igbo differ significantly from the Hausa and the Yoruba is in the area of culture and tradition. There is no one society that is al-cultural. The importance of culture to a society cannot be over-emphasized. It is an unarguable fact that the Igbo are recognized over the years by some physical and behavioural qualities other than language. It is total dismay to observe that as civilization keeps increasing, the Igbo culture keeps eroding away gradually. This paper is set to look into some aspects of Igbo culture that are facing a lot of threat as a result of modern civilization. Useful suggestions are proffered as to the way forward. These include maintaining and sustaining the Igbo culture in its totality just like the Hausa and Yoruba cultures are still preserved in spite of the modern civilization.

Introduction

It is true that humans develop from infancy to adulthood just like a society develops from primitivism to modernism or what could be referred to as civilization. Civilization brings about positive change in the life of

individuals in a society. If it cannot bring positive change on the totality of the living standards of the people in the society, it should not be seen as civilization any longer.

The Igbo man's culture may have some similarities with other ethnic groups in Nigeria and even beyond but it cannot be the same entirely. This may be enunciated by the Igbo proverb "nkū dī na mba na-eghere mba nri" which is translated thus: the firewood in a society cooks food for that society. This paper looks at the negative effects of civilization with regard to embracing a foreign culture and abandoning the original one on the living standard of the Igbo.

The Igbo Man

The Igbo are found in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The only language they speak is the Igbo language with so many dialects. According to Ezikeoha (1994), Igbo language is not spoken in any other part of the world as in the case of Hausa and Yoruba languages.

According to him, this claim is among other reasons why some scholars in Igbo language believe that the Igbo did not migrate from Israel like some other scholars claim. Trading is the predominant occupation of the Igbo and this is perhaps why they are seen all over the world. Ajaegbu (1998: Pg 29) opines: "Anywhere in this wide world you go and find no Igbo man, run for your dear life." This claim is buttressed by the fact that Igbo adapt easily to any society they find themselves. It has been discovered that many foreign cultures have been acquired by the Igbo as a result of constant interaction with other alien cultures. Note this, "My people travel a lot; they stay away for too long and forget the culture of the land; they come back eventually and pollute the people's culture with foreign ones" (Nwogu 1992: Pg. 68t). To add to the above claim,

one may forget the culture of his people if he stays away for a long time especially if he was young when he left. He may not see anything bad in violating the culture of the people when he returns. This explains Ibe's claim (1993: Pg 16): "what you do not know you cannot explain."

The Concept of Culture

Culture has been defined in different ways by different scholars. Rodney (1987) defines culture as the complex pattern of living that humans have developed that they pass on from generation to the next. A society without culture may be regarded as nonexistent. A man who is not grounded in the culture of his people may be seen as a slave in his fatherland. The importance of culture is quite overwhelming and needs to be embraced all the time.

Mbegbu, N. E. (2002: Pg 6) sees culture as "... the totality of man's way of life." He went further to say that culture include the food we eat, the way we dress, the type of house we live in, the language we speak and the way we even worship our gods etc. Culture touches every aspect of human activities. It is noteworthy that the culture of one ethnic group may differ from the culture of another ethnic group. It does not mean that there may not be areas of similarities.

Yoruba culture may have some similarities to that of Igbo and Hausa cultures. Culture is handed over from one generation to the other. If this is true, it is therefore reasonable that a people should preserve their culture for the incoming generation to meet and appreciate them.

Civilization and Igbo Marriage Custom

Marriage as an institution ordained by God was

over the years cherished with joy and pride owing to the customary way it was handled. According to Ubani (1990), when you want to hand over a bride to her groom, such statement as this is often made to the groom.

If you want to divorce your wife according to Igbo culture, you will ensure that you gather all the people that are present here today and make your intention known to them for approval, if you cannot bring them all together, then forget the issue of divorce. The above statement is often made during the handing over of the bride to the groom. This warning is an indication that divorce is not encouraged in the Igbo culture. It takes serious matter for a man to divorce his wife in those days. Today, the case is no longer the same. Divorce is now very rampant due to interactions with foreign cultures. It was never heard in the past that women packed into men's houses, gave birth before the customary marriage rites. It was a taboo to do so, but today, this is very common as a result of civilization. Ugoji (2000) has this to say about marriage: it is a practice to warn a bridegroom during the marriage ceremony that divorce is highly discouraged. When culture was culture, a man could pay the bride-price of his intended wife by farming for his intended in-laws for a period of seven years, but today riches in monetary terms is the first consideration before a lady accepts a man's hand in marriage.

Similarly, a wife could be given to a man who distinguished himself by winning a wrestling competition in the community. This can be seen in Onyekaonwu's *Nwata Rie Awo* (Pg. 40) where Aworo married Obioma as a result of emerging victorious in a wrestling competition.

Money and wealth is now the major factor to be

considered before considering a man for marriage, which is a total contrast of what it is used to be. Mbaegbu (1999) notes that many ladies are found in many Igbo families still single. According to him, ladies now resort to helotism, women trafficking and other illicit sexual practices just to satisfy their financial obligations hence, young men and women now contract marriage abroad without visiting home for proper traditional marriage rites because of civilization. This could be likened to what is now popularly known as “Abuja marriage” – Abuja marriage is a type of marriage where couples meet themselves in the city and get married there without going to the village to observe all the traditional rites with regards to marriage and custom. The end is usually catastrophic.

Civilization and Igbo Diet

The Igbo are blessed with a lot of nutritious and palatable dishes. Oguine (2001) says: The food our fore-fathers ate made them live longer and stronger despite the hard work they were doing. Most of Igbo dishes that were eaten by our fore-fathers have disappeared, when they are there, they have been so modernized to lose their original nutrients and value. Such sicknesses like diabetes, liver related problems, hypertension and partial blindness are on the increase as a result of the food we now eat.

Civilization and Igbo Language

Language cannot be separated from culture and vice-versa. The role language plays in the preservation and development of culture cannot be over-emphasized. To lay credence to the above claim, Mohammed (1996) opined that: indigenous languages are the means of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of

sound and sound symbols inherited by a people in a habit from their fore-fathers.

It may not be out of place to point out here that Igbo language is the least developed among the three (3) major Nigerian languages. Parents prefer speaking English language to their children. Children prefer to study English language in higher institutions of learning to Igbo language. It should be noted that no language is superior to the other.

Afigbo, (1975) has this to say: in order to upgrade Igbo Language, advance its study and make it the effective vehicle of our culture, we need to revolutionize the philosophy which under-pins our school system or ensure that the education in Igbo language is as lucrative as education in English and science.

Civilization and Igbo Music

Music is a vehicle which the ethics, norms and the culture of the people are harboured. The Igbo have varieties of music which give them adequate entertainment on different occasions and situations. There is music used for stimulating work to do more work. There is music used to mourn the dead. There is also music used to offer sacrifices to the gods. The Igbo have music composed specially for war. They have music also used for entertaining people during marriage ceremonies, child dedication, chieftaincy installation etc.

There are good traditional music instruments that give good production. These instruments are quite cheap compared to the western instruments. It is sad to note that these varieties of music are gradually facing extinction. People now prefer western music such as pop, disco, reggae and blues to our traditional music

like okonko music, okorosha, ekpe music etc.

Conclusion

It is very important to note that if something is not done and immediate too, very soon the Igbo may become a people without culture. It is also important to note here that due to adulteration and abandonment of Igbo culture by the people, many terrible things are happening such as untimely death, insecurity, poor harvest, untold hardship etc.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to address the above burning issues.

- i. The teaching and learning of the Igbo language should be given more priority in pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education than English language in all the Igbo speaking states.
- ii. The teaching of Igbo culture should also be introduced as a separate subject in all the levels mentioned above.
- iii. Parents should speak Igbo language to their children all the time, where they reside notwithstanding.
- iv. Automatic scholarship should be given to students studying Igbo language and culture at higher institutions of learning.
- v. The teachers of Igbo language and culture should be adequately remunerated to encourage them and to inspire others to join.
- vi. Seminar, conferences and symposia should always be organized to address issues related to culture.

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