

JUSTICE FOR RECTIFYING SOCIAL ANOMALIES: A STUDY OF IGBO PROVERBS

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Abstract

The Igbo people of Nigeria are so enterprising that there is no part of the world where they cannot be seen. But their nation is in disarray due to such vices like injustice, wickedness, corruption and so on. But then, the Nigerian judicial system is incapable of curtailing the excesses of the people due to its own corruption. In view of these problems, the researchers had to go to the people to study their records in order to see how their ancestors handled their society. However, there are no written records; but fortunately, the folklore of the people is rich and intact. After looking at it, they took proverbs, collected and studied some of them that have justice as their content. They discovered that these proverbs contain what these ancestors named *aka nkwumoto* and *ikpe nkwumoto* which can be translated as fairness in dealing with others and justice in settling disputes, respectively. The lack of these has put the people in disarray. It is the stand of this research that if modern social scientists and politicians can study and enthrone these in that society, the distressing trend can be rectified.

Keywords: Proverbs, Justice, Society, Fairness, Igbo people

1. Introduction

The Igbo people reside mostly on the south-eastern side of Nigeria. However, part of their homeland can be located on the mid-western part of the country, mainly in Delta State. In that south-eastern part of the country, they occupy Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi States. Also, outside this terrain, Igbo presence can be found in Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Benue and Cross River States.

In further locating the terrain occupied by the people, Chinwe M. A. Nwoye (2011) says that “The Igbo have a common border with the Igala and the Idoma on the northern part of Nigeria, the Ijaw and Ogoni on the south, the Yako and Ibibio on the eastern boundary and the Bini and Warri on the west” (p.305). But to be specific, there is no part of the world where they do not reside for the purpose of making a living because a typical Igbo man is somebody who cannot be a beggar but wants to be rich through being a trader, a farmer, a craftsman or whatever his hands find to do.

In view of this quest to be rich and self reliant, there is a joke circulating in Nigeria that if somebody arrives at any place and does not find an Igbo man there, the person will make haste and escape because the place is not conducive for human habitation. Another joke emanated during the Nigerian civil war which occurred between 1967 and 1970. The joke was that if a Hausa man shot down an Igbo man, he should jingle some coins in his ears. If the Igbo man was really dead, he would not react in any way. But as far as the Igbo man had some life in him, he would react to the jingling of the coins.

In her evaluation, Nwoye (2011) states that:

The Igbo are by character, tolerant, competitive and ultra-democratic, highly individualistic with an excessive penchant for achievement and egalitarianism.... Among them, enormous emphasis is placed on solid personal achievement that promotes the life of independence as one matures with age (p.313).

This heedless quest for wealth has some implications. For one thing, it is impossible to know the actual population of the people because the Nigerian Population Commission only counts the people that reside in a particular place as being members of that place. For the other, they make a lot of enemies who feel that the strangers among them are usurping their wealth. It is often heard that some people have descended on Igbo shops located in faraway places, looting

and setting them ablaze. The accusation against these Igbo migrants sometimes was that they came just some years before with polythene bags containing all their worldly possessions only for them to turn overnight into landlords whose shops were found everywhere. Also, it should be noted that anybody who insists that he must be rich no matter what it takes, cannot be excluded from those who are found wanting in moral rectitude.

At home, the people have developed some of their cities to become centers of international trade. Some of these cities are Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, and so on. The markets in these cities are controlling many trading centers in both the West African sub-region and in central African sub-region. As an illustration, Onitsha main market is one of the biggest markets in West Africa, and Nnewi main market controls the automobile spare parts markets of West Africa, Chad Republic and Central African Republic.

Traditionally, the Igbo man is a very religious person who sees the divine in almost everything. This can account for shrines in all villages and homes. When British imperialism interfered with the life of the people, Christian places of worship displaced some of these traditional places of worship in many towns. But then, this belief in the potency of the supernatural can still be seen in roadside sacrifices, trees tied with white, red, and sometimes yellow cloths, fetishes known as *iyi* tied or placed on people's properties and so on.

In assessing the religious life of the people, Emeka George Ekwuru (1999) states that: "Major Leonard went as far as to declare that the traditional Igbos were 'a truly and deeply religious people of whom it can be said, as it has been said of Hindu that they eat religiously, drink religiously' " (p.94).

Since there are shrines, there must be priests who interpret the rules of their deities. These help to curtail the excesses of the people. Also helping out are the elders and the kindred groups known as *umunna* who help to settle cases and put society in order. In actual fact, the system of kings was obtainable in only few places until the British government imposed her warrant chiefs on the people. In totality, the influence of the supernatural and the kindred organizations help to curtail people's excesses and bring about tranquility. Such helped to put on hold the people's vaulting ambition and excessive wealth acquisition.

Among the Igbo, certain trees are venerated because of their potency and what they are used for. Among such trees is the *ofo* tree (*Delarium Senegalese*). This tree can only be found in

shrines or other sacred places. When any part of the branches is ritually energized, it becomes so potent that the elders use it as their staff of authority. While deciding cases, these energized bits of wood are struck on the ground four times which represent the four traditional days of the Igbo week. Also, priests use them for their ritual performances, since the people believe that any transgression made against any of these objects is dangerous. Because of this, they tend to steer clear of certain behaviour most especially when the Earth-goddess is involved. This goddess, Ana or Ala or Ani (depending on the dialect) has a lot of observances which must not be tampered with. Transgressing against any of them is regarded as *alu* or abomination. The repercussion of going against any of them can affect even the entire kindred since the people believe that “*Otu aka luta mmanu, o tee ndi ozo* - When oil stains one finger, it will also soil the others.” The result is that everybody is all out to see that nobody goes against the dictates of the goddess. The expected result is a tranquil society with hardly any atrocity being committed.

Such was perfectly how it used to be in far-off years. Today, with much preaching and many churches, atrocities are happening on daily basis in all parts of Igbo nation. Today, some poison their own brothers in order to acquire more of the speedily disappearing pieces of land. From time to time, nauseating stories are heard of brothers impregnating their sisters; name any evil deed, you are sure to find it in Igbo land. Situations like this must have motivated Ekwuru (1999) in his observation which is:

... ritual killings, armed robbery, tricksterism, etc have become the order of the day. Thus, the off-centered Igbo cultural universe has fallen into *Yaghara Ayagha* [disarray and] is characterized by certain basic systems of societal insanity: crisis of sense, excessive materialism, religious commercialism and various forms of counter-cultural movements and attitudes (p.87).

In short, Igbo society is now in disarray. There is no longer any restraint. The beast in men has been let loose and people are now depicting their beastly disposition. To be at the top is often the driving force without any restraint that can curtail the people's excesses. They are no longer afraid of the repercussions that trail behind committing of *aru* (abominations). That Ana, the Earth-goddess may sweep off an entire kindred together with the culprit into the grave is now a cock and bull story. But then, Ekwuru (1999) emphasizes that:

Any sin against Ala, the Earth-Goddess was considered as *aru*. Such socio-religious sins range from willful spilling of human blood, suicide, incest, covetousness, to fighting during the sacred seasons, failing to observe the totems and taboos of the land and a host of others (p.87).

A lot of Igbo scholars keep on pointing out the desultory state of affairs among the people. One of such scholars is F. U. Okafor (1992). According to him, what used to be obtainable in the days gone by is no longer obtainable today with the result that things have fallen apart in Igbo land. To him:

... the notorious Igbo who kills his fellow citizens by magic, sorcery, witchcraft or poisoning or other occult means would be expected to die a “bad death” and would be denied a ground burial which means that the gate of the ancestral abode is eternally shut against him (p.86).

But must this sordid situation continue unabated? Is there nothing that can be done, if not to restore the situation to its pristine state but to get something near it? But if the truth must be told, this chaotic situation if left unchecked will lead to total annihilation. If nothing is done, future generations will lay heaps of blame on the people of the present age. But then, what is it that can be done?

It is here that the present age has to look at the records of our ancestors. However, such records are not written in books for all to look at. Rather, they are in myths, tales, proverbs, legends, and so on. As expressed by F. B. O. Akporobaro (2005):

... although he [the traditional man] has not written out systematized philosophical works, human experience and his perception of the tragedy all round him has led him to develop creatively his unique and original ideas about divinity, supernatural forces, causality, life after death, justice and good and evil. These ideas are often implicitly expressed in his poetry, myths, narratives, ritual songs and proverbs (p.61).

In view of these records, the present work seeks to look at Igbo proverbs not only to know whether they actually contain records of “justice, good and evil” but to see how our ancestors used them to curtail excesses in behaviour during their time. The essence is that if actually they recorded their experiences in them, modern social scientists can see a way of

adapting the results so as to suit present life style and in this way, checkmate the abominations happening today.

That these proverbs contain worthwhile records of the people's former life experiences is supported by Joseph Igonu and Ugochukwu Ogbonnaya Ogudu (2018). These researchers make the following observations:

... proverbs have meanings that cover all aspects of life and, this in turn makes them important elements in people's speech. They are so wide in scope that they could cover such themes as women, professions and occupations, money, love, marriage, divorce, friendship, education and learning, alcohol and drugs, children and parents, taxes, God and religion, telephones, cars and computers (p.1).

In other words, the terrain covered by proverbs keeps on expanding as new events and inventions keep on coming out. Therefore, that they contain the gems and nuggets with which the shattering society will be repaired is a foregone conclusion.

2. Igbo Proverbs

According to the CD-ROM, *Encyclopedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite* (2015), the proverb is a:

succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs. [Proverbs] ... form part of codes of behaviour and exemplify the proverb's use for the transmission of tribal wisdom and rules of conduct. The study of folklore in the 20th century brought renewed interest in the proverb as a reflection of folk culture (n.p.).

In other words, whatever one wants to study about a particular people can be found in their proverbs. This is because these originated from their experiences. For one thing, they are historical records. As an illustration, the Igbo man's experience of British colonialism generated the proverb, "*Bekee bu agbala* - The white man is a deity". This is because those living then saw the pipe [gun] which the white man was carrying, inside which he imprisoned Amadioha [the god of thunder]. When he pointed the pipe at anything, Amadioha would bark and the thing would be struck down. Added to this were other marvellous things that the white man was displaying.

The Igbo man's contact with Hausa people brought out many proverbs one of which is *Obughi taa ka anyi fubalu Hausa na uta* - It is not just today that we saw the Hausa people and

their arrows.” These crude weapons are the main weapons of the Hausa and Fulani people. The Igbo people even today feel that they have been surviving those Hausa weapons and they can handle them and their weapons.

Also, in these pithy statements are encoded whatever is relevant to the people. In other words, the wisdom and experiences of a people are encapsulated in their proverbs. What remains is their usage by any person and at the person’s discretion.

The above view is not different from that of one of the illustrious sons of the land who helped to create the orthography of the Igbo language and collect and record the folklore of the people. This scholar, F. C. Ogbalu (1965) studies Igbo proverbs and states that:

Igbo proverbs are accumulation of Igbo experiences throughout the history of the Igbos. In absence of any written history, they serve as the medium through which much can be learnt about the Igbos. Their past history, their philosophy of life and family structure, their politics and religion can best be learnt through the proverbs (p.5).

The whole idea boils down to the fact that knowledge about the people are presented in their proverbs. To be precise, justice which has taken flight away from Igbo land and indeed, from the whole Nigeria, can be found in their proverbs. Studying them can show us where we were before our fall, what could be responsible and what can be touched, for normalcy to be restored.

In Igbo land, young people are not supposed to use proverbs for their elders. Rather, the elders use them to garnish their speeches so as to educate the younger ones and to converse among themselves. Any person who cannot use proverbs or who does not understand them is looked down upon. To the people, whoever has a proverb explained to him has wasted the bride price paid to marry his mother. This is because in these proverbs are the wisdom, culture and everything worth knowing. As Onwuliri Joshua (2016) observes in an online publication:

In proverbs are condensed the nitty-gritty of Igbo custom, ethical standards, traditional and wise sayings. For the Igbo, proverbs constitute the spice or salt of human communication. Certainly, the Igbo understanding of justice in all ramifications is well expressed in various proverbs (n.p.).

Therefore, it is the stand of this paper that “*Uzu amaghi akpu ogene, ka o nee egbe anya n’odu* - The blacksmith that does not know how to make a gong should look at the tail of the kite.” In other words, if the present generation does not know how to tackle the anomalies raging

on in Igbo land, it should study how their ancestors lived their lives and enthroned justice during their days. To the Igbo people, justice is known as *aka nkwumoto na ikpe nkwumoto* (straight hand and fair trial). Fair dealing between people is totally lacking in the Igbo society of today. That can account for cases of witchcraft, poisoning, theft, self centeredness and so on. To the people, the following proverbs aptly capture the present people's thinking and ways of life:

S/N	Igbo Proverbs	Literal Translation	Real Interpretation
1	<i>Azu erighi ibe ya, o dighi ebu.</i>	If a fish does not eat another, it will not grow.	Selfishness and ruthlessness in human interaction help in wealth acquisition. It can be stated here that some have used human parts for making money. These believe that for them to rise higher, they must destroy others.
2	<i>Nke m bu nke m; nke anyi bu nke anyi.</i>	Mine is mine, ours is ours.	I shall only be particular with that which is mine rather than with that which is ours. Because of this, public projects are neglected. That explains why politicians divert rural development funds into private accounts.
3	<i>A kobalu nwa ogbenye ihe eji a ba ogaranya, o si ka ya hakwa ka ya ha.</i>	When the poor man is told what it entails to be wealthy, he says he wants to be as he is.	What it takes to be wealthy may sometimes entail something that is socially abhorred, not easily achieved and can easily scare away the lily-livered poor person. Some of the riotously rich

			people sacrificed their parents, children, etc to occult organizations who then helped them to acquire wealth. Therefore, some poor people will prefer to continue being poor.
4	<i>Okuko, o na akpanye n' afo ewu?</i>	Does the fowl eat for the food to enter into the goat's stomach?	One struggles for one's benefit, not for another's. In other words, selfishness enriches, for that which has been given out cannot be retrieved.
5	<i>Eji isi m gwoo ana di mma, onye ebili?</i>	If my head is used in a charm that will heal the land, who will live on that land?	That which does not benefit a person should be quickly abandoned. How can it benefit the person when his life has been destroyed? Therefore, let selfishness and self centeredness be your guiding principle.

These are all modern proverbs and they all are going towards one direction – self centeredness, ruthlessness and selfishness as the input for successful acquisition of wealth. This is similar to the biblical question which Cain asked God, “Am I my brother's keeper?” (Gen. 4:9). It is this selfishness that generates unrestrained quest for wealth. One who is all out to make it can go to any extent so as to achieve his aim. That can explain the activities of kidnapers, advance-fee fraudsters, armed robbers and even those who poison others -- in fact blatant disregard for all the sacred practices of the people. Or why do you think that in Proverb 3 above,

the poor and lily-livered man prefers his poverty to great wealth? This poor man has still in him, the old teachings of the people.

Helping others is ruled out because that will, in a way, pull somebody down. Rather than help others, it is the opinion of this materialistic society that the little which the poor person has will be snatched away from him. This situation can be well illustrated with one Igbo children's game which is recited as follows:

Onye kwulu oto ebutue ya, so m bu eze ga-akwu oto n'uwaa -- I shall pull down any person who stands upright. I, the King, only shall stand upright in this world.

Once any child sings this song, he starts wrestling with others to pull them down. Others will start wrestling with him and among themselves until everybody has fallen down, leaving one person standing. But to be fair to these children, if somebody falls on the ground, the person has lost out and will not be disturbed again. The child will simply withdraw. But this is not so among their elders for some will pursue their targets until these targets end up in the grave or are penniless.

But then, if somebody in the days of the ancestors wanted to do so, what was it that would be used to checkmate that move? Since the situation keeps on getting worse as the years go by, how were the olden days' people curtailing the excesses of some of them who were behaving like some modern days' people? Why is it that in spite of modern judiciary system and law enforcement agents, life is no longer safe? In fact, today the practice is that might and wickedness are right, woe to the weak and the merciful. This is why it is necessary to study the Igbo man's ancient justice system.

3. Justice in Traditional Igbo Society

The concept of justice according to *Merrian-Webster.com* (n.d.) is "... the maintenance or administration of what is just especially the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments" (n.p.). What is required is to have fairness in human relationships. To the people, what it entails is either using punishment or rewards to have fair treatments for and from each other. But then, with all sorts of law enforcement officers, one expects fair dealings. But from what is happening in society, otherwise is the case.

D. D. Raphael (n.d.) in bringing out the meaning of justice to the understanding of everybody has it that:

The meaning of justice is pretty well captured in a more familiar term “fairness” which is not at all obscure and is readily grasped even by young children. “Justice” and “fairness are not in fact synonymous” ...nevertheless they are very close to each other so that it is usually possible to substitute one for the other without serious change of meaning (p.1).

What this boils down to is for one to have honesty of purpose in all one’s endeavors. Be honest to all the people you encounter both in your speech and in all your dealings. For the Igbo to instill this in people’s memories, they have a proverb which says, “*Okuko tushe, onu jie ya --* When the fowl deviates, let its neck break.” Dishonesty and lack of fairness kill.

By coining proverbs such as this and by such proverbs coming from the mouths of the elders who the people took as being near the ancestors, people hardly stepped amiss. The fear was that any curse from an elder would be disastrous. The result was that justice was maintained in society. It was irrelevant whether this justice was obtained due to fear or out of full conviction of its importance. The important thing was that justice was enthroned.

Expatriating the meaning of justice is John Rawls (1999). He goes back to the days of Aristotle. What it meant then is what it means today. The social turbulence it generated then when gone against is what it generates today. The ways it manifested in those days are similar to how it manifests today. Add to these, modern man’s proclivity towards the grandiose in order to see its severity. As Rawls (1999) notes:

The more specific sense that Aristotle gives to justice and from which the most familiar formulations derive, is that of refraining from *Pleonexia*, that is, from gaining some advantage for oneself by seizing what belongs to another, his property, his reward, his office, and the like, or by denying a person that which is due to him, the fulfillment of a promise, the repayment of a debt, the showing of proper respect, and so on (n.d.).

A study of these enumerations can show that they are not far from the Igbo man’s definition of justice which is “*Ikpe nkwumoto*” and “*aka nkwumoto.*” Literarily translated, these mean “straight judgment” and “straight hands”. The latter one means fairness in dealing with others. These two concepts help in ordering society aright.

In explaining the two terms in an online article, Ikenga K. E. Oraegbunam (n.d.) states that:

While “Akankwumoto” denotes justice as a virtue of a particular person “Ikpenkwumoto” or “Ikpeziriezi” refers to the expression of this virtue in practical judgment at the event of dispute. The latter can also be described as truthfulness in making judicial decisions (n.p.).

After dealing with some issues, this scholar explicates the meaning of *Ikpenkwumoto* which is all about unbiased judgment. It may sound strange to the modern man who buys the services of highly placed and intimidating lawyers who can bribe the judge or has an understanding with the judge because they belong to the same cult group. It was not so before.

To Oraegbunam (n.d.):

It (*Ikpenkwumoto*) means that one’s life is straightforward, upright, honest, predictable and impartial. In the latter understanding, a just action is one that is not crooked, is performed as it should be, is done in a disinterested manner, or has followed a due process (n.p.).

To be realistic, these virtues are fast disappearing. You may even be seen to be odd when you practice them in some quarters. To be precise, society is ruined, through and through. What is happening today in Igbo society may be worse than what happened in the Athenian society. Today in Igbo land and throughout Nigeria, some greedy people use robbery, cheating and all sorts of rituals and even human parts to make money. Today, if you are robbed and you go to the police to complain, nobody listens to you if you fail to bring out some money. The Athenian society could not have degenerated to that extent. But then, D. R. Bhandari (n.d.) in an online article notes that:

Plato was highly dissatisfied with the prevailing degenerating conditions in Athens. The Athenian democracy was on the verge of ruin and was ultimately responsible for Socrates’ death. Plato saw in justice the only remedy of saving Athens from decay and ruin ...” (n.p.).

Who knows whether it can dampen the hypersonic tempo of ruthlessness in Igbo land and indeed throughout the whole of Nigeria? Therefore, whatever type of justice is found in these proverbs

is expected to be taken up by social scientists and the rulers who would adapt them to today's situation.

In explaining justice in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* CD-ROM (2015), the editors talk much on the views of Aristotle. According to them, to Aristotle:

... the key element of justice is treating like cases alike, an idea that has set later thinkers the task of working out which similarities (need, desert, talent) are relevant. Aristotle distinguishes between justice in the distribution of wealth or other goods (distributive justice) and justice in reparation as for example, in punishing someone for a wrong he has done (retributive justice) (n.p.).

Both retributive and distributive justice is heavily shown in Igbo proverbs. To the Igbo “*Emee nwata ka emelu ibe ya, obi adi ya mma* -- Do unto the child as it was done to another child and he will be happy”. In this case, favoritism and lack of fairness are avoided for all to be happy. This is in the sphere of distributive justice. On that of retributive justice “*Eke etisheghi nkita nso nso, o dighi esodebe* -- When the python has not hit and nearly missed a dog that is always trailing behind the owner, it will never stop doing so.” Here, the essence of punishment is not to destroy but to scare away. This is because the law of the land abhors bloodshed. The python's hitting and missing the trailing dog is to put fear in it and not to kill it. This is the essence of punishment. But to some extent, since to the people, like begets like, a killer must be killed.

This idea of like begetting like among the Igbo drives them to revenge on wrongs done to them. This is similar to the Mosaic law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Why? To the people, “*Onu adighi eje be onu gbalu aka* – A mouth does not go to another mouth's house and leave with empty hands”. If the visiting mouth comes biting, it will be bitten back. If comes talking, it will be talked to. According to F. U. Okafor (1992), a situation like this:

... drives the Igbo man to justify revenge and to say “*Eme mbolu abughi ajo ihe* (To revenge on wrong done is not wrong). Praying that justice be done, the Igbo pray: “*Egbe belu ugo belu, nke si ibe ya ebena, nku kwapu ya* (Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch; whichever says that the other will not perch, let its wings break off!” (p.33).

On another page, the scholar emphasizes that this principle of accommodation between the two birds is “... a doctrine of peaceful co-existence based on the philosophy of equal right”

(p.88). If such is adhered to, one can see that the situation will be calm, devoid of rancor. For one thing, there is going to be a conducive atmosphere for creativity and progress. For the other, fear of repercussion which is represented with the breaking off of wings will augur well for more social harmony. This is the justice which is referred to as “*Akankwumoto*” and “*Ikpenkwumoto*”.

In all, justice in Igbo society is maintained from two perspectives -- human and spiritual realms. From the human perspective, everybody belongs to one kindred or another. All kindred hold meetings and interact through many ways. All families that make up the kindred hold meetings. These meetings serve different purposes one of which is to settle disputes, thereby instituting social harmony. The leaders of these kindred groups and families are the elders who by virtue of their ages hold the *ofo* and must be at the helm of affairs so as to be directing the younger ones or else, they will derail. Or why do you think that the people coined the proverb, “*Arusi obula nwata no n’isi ya adighi ara ahu igbu mmadu?* – The idol whose priest is a child does not take time to kill somebody?” Because of youthful zeal and inexperience, the priest, instead of pleading on behalf of the guilty person will invite the deity to kill. Inexperience is a problem.

After making rules or deciding cases, the elders strike these wooden objects, the *ofo*, four times on the ground. Each of the four times represents a day in the Igbo week. Therefore, any person who goes against the decision is sure to be affected because the person will misbehave in any of the days of the week.

Citing Njaka, Okafor (1992) on the importance of the *ofo*, has it that: “The *ofo* symbolizes justice, righteousness and truth. For these reasons, it plays many important roles in the social, political and the religious life of the Igbo. Hence, no serious rite or ceremony can be performed without the *ofo*” (p.60).

It is in view of the central position of this object that the Igbo say; “*Ofo bu ike – Ofo* is strength.” Also to them, “*O ji ofo ga-ana – He* that holds the *ofo* will escape unhurt.” Therefore, fairness, justice and truth as symbolized by the *ofo* are the requirements for successful living. Hold tight on these, when your enemies waylay you on the road, you will escape unhurt. These are your only strength anywhere and at any time. The reason is that “*Ofo du m ogu – The ofo* helps me in fighting.” This is similar to the biblical injunction that “Righteousness exalts a nation” (Proverbs 14:34).

After these elders have decided a case and there is still a problem, the next move is to consult a god or a diviner. While the former sees beyond the physical and takes action, the latter only reveals and advices. These help to settle cases easily and put fear into the litigants.

The importance of employing the services of metaphysical help in order to untwist stubborn cases was observed by John C. Messenger JR (n.d.) among the Annang people. In his online paper, he states that: “The court may call a diviner to uncover hidden facts if it lacks sufficient evidence for a conclusive decision, or it may consult an oath swearer if it is falsifying his testimony” (n.p).

The belief here is that even when humans suppress truth, the supernatural will not do so. Swear falsely and you die. When the diviner is consulted, he will reveal the truth. The repercussion that he will face will not allow him to tell lies for behind his power are the deities who monitor his activities. But what is stated here is how it used to happen in the days gone by. Today, anything can happen for society is totally corrupt and decaying.

It is not everybody who can go to the full length of inviting a deity. When the person sees that he is guilty, he either apologizes or withdraws, or he will simply pretend that he is no longer interested in the case. It is not for nothing that the people have it that “*Onye ikpe mara na-asi ka ekpee n’ulo* – The guilty person usually says that the case will be settled in the house.” He will not allow the case to be settled, using external participants.

Also, it is on record that “*O nabu ikpe ma onu, agba ehuru* -- When the mouth has been convicted, the jaw droops”. The meaning is that when somebody is guilty, he then lacks words. He can no longer argue and talk but that was then. Today, the guilty can use any means to silence the innocent and win the case. He goes to court and uses diabolic means and swiftness of the tongue in order to see himself through. The court today and the *umunna*'s (kindred group's) settlement of cases are just a travesty of justice because of lack of truth. No longer is the power of the *ofo* invoked. After swearing with the Bible, Koran or even some weird looking objects purported to belong to the traditional religion, one immediately witnesses the battle of lies between the two contestants.

But if it were before, the elders would be emphasizing *ezi okwu* (truthfulness). As explored in Igbo proverbs, the following would have been observed.

S/N	Igbo Proverbs	Literal Translation	Real Interpretation
1	<i>Ezi okwu bu ndu.</i>	Truth is life.	To tell the truth about any particular case will help others to have a right perspective of what transpired. Such can be life saving.
2	<i>Ezi okwu na-agba agba na nti.</i>	Truth stings in the ear.	Although truth is life-saving, evil doers do not like it because it blocks them from achieving their nefarious aims. When they hear the truth, they become shaken due to the oncoming exposition of their evil deeds.
3	<i>Ebupuchaa ezi okwu, emechaa, ebughachi ya azu.</i>	After truth has been carried away, it will be carried back later.	Dubious people jettison truth but at the end, the need for its restitution will arise. Those who threw it away will look for it and bring it back.
4	<i>Ezi okwu daa oshimiri emechaa o see n'enu mmili.</i>	Even when truth has sunk into the bottom of the sea, it will later float on top of the water.	No matter where truth is lost or suppressed into, it will finally resurface in the lives of the people who wanted to strangle life out of its existence. This is similar to the previous idea.
5	<i>Ikpe malu ezi okwu, aka</i>	The case that convicted truth	Bribery can make the

	<i>azu di ya.</i>	has bribery behind it.	innocent person to be convicted. It is this bribery and its follower, nepotism that can debar the most qualified from being employed or to lose out in a contest.
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In all, what are needed for the smooth flow of social activities and relationships are truthfulness, uprightness and fairness. These make up the realm of justice. These, when suppressed, will initially look as if they are dead. But they are not. When finally the need to have them arises, people will look for them. When they are rejected, such can bring about disaster.

Situations such as this, can explain why there is not much advancement in most parts of Nigeria, Igbo land inclusive. This is because of the appointment of unqualified people in certain positions. Nobody can ever give what he does not have. The unqualified person who is employed to serve as qualified medical personnel will end up being a mass murderer. An unqualified civil engineer or architect or building technologist will finally be involved in collapsing buildings and roads that annihilate the lives of many. What will make an unqualified pharmacist not to be a mass poisoner? When such start happening, the suppressed truth will be looked for.

But then, when those who call the shots feel that they can manipulate their way using falsehood and intimidation, and they persist in doing so, that calls for enlisting the help of the deities whose decisions are devoid of falsehood. It is not for nothing that the news media were flooded by what the Imo State governor, Rochas Okorocha once called for. After seeing the desultory situation caused by the country's politicians, Okorocha, as reported by Chika Ebuzor (2017) in an online version of *Pulse Newspaper* has been credited with the following:

The Imo Governor, Rochas Okorocha has made a call for politicians to swear by deities before they take office. He also said that politicians get away with anything because the Bible and Koran are too merciful. According to *Daily Post*, the Governor said this while speaking at the National Institute for Cultural Orientation Quarterly Public Lecture titled

“Promoting Culture, Developing the Economy.” These deities don’t have mercy on anyone once ... the person goes contrary to their standards (n.p.).

However this call does not go well with the Nigerian populace. Many people denounce the governor and his call. Their reasons range from oath-taking being fetish to its being anachronistic. As reported in the *Pulse* website (2017):

An Abuja-based legal practitioner, Mrs. Stella Benjamin says it is not tenable in the eyes of the law to start administering traditional method of oath-taking to public officers in the country ... She said that swearing in of public officers in the traditional ways would be taking us centuries back, adding that we have been adopting the British system (n.p.).

In all, none wrote that the method does not work or that it is fraudulent. The major reasons are that the method is superstitious, uncivilized, criminal, fetish, barbaric and a host of other reasons. The major constraint seems to come from its challenge of British legal practice as it was hoisted on the country, and its deviation from Christian ethics and Nigerian jurisprudence.

Nevertheless, it works for those who follow that way of life as can be illustrated with the result of a field research at Nnobi which is in Idemili South Local Government Area of Anambra State. There, one of the researchers met one old woman, Nwanyiafor Nwosu who reported what happened when one Nnanyelugo Ugochukwu was the priest of Udo Eziehulu.

It happened that the wife of the priest was processing palm nuts in an oil mill. After extracting oil, she heaped the nuts at a spot. Also heaping her palm nuts nearby was a woman from Ndam, Ngo Nnobi. Some fowls went to the heap of palm nuts of the priest’s wife and scattered them, with some entering into the nearby heap. When the Ndam woman arrived, she collected both the nuts scattered from the priest’s wife’s heap and went so far as to go to the main heap and helped herself. But unknown to her, the owner had before then put something she got from Udo’s shrine through the husband.

Soon, the god came demanding for the stolen palm nuts. Through the help of diviners and the sign of the god which is bees swarming in the woman’s house, she came begging, pleading that she would bring back what she stole. She stole because she needed something with which she was training her children, and the deity took pity on her and did not kill her. However, the deity insisted that she would pay her debt after training her children.

Then, many years passed and she finished training her children. Yet, she simply forgot her promise. One day, an old and irate man carrying a stick came to her house. In anger, the old man asked the woman's daughter where the mother was. Seeing the strange and old man, the girl hollered for the mother to come. When she came out from the backyard and met the man, she could not recognize him. But without wasting time, the stranger angrily asked her, "Where is the cow you promised me! Where are my palm kernels?" As he was saying these, he raised his hand to strike her with the stick, and the woman shouted. He himself disappeared.

With the help of diviners, she recollected what transpired some years before. With the members of her kindred, she brought many cows to the shrine of the god. Whether out of old age or due to her encounter with the supernatural, all the cows her sons finally offered to the deity did not prevent her from dying. After her death, the family had to come and offer something to the deity to prevent him from killing them.

Finally, in the olden days, the use of oath-taking and making use of deities were the easiest and most successful ways of eliciting truth, protecting property, safeguarding lives and so on. Today, such methods are no longer in use. Today, any rascal can do anything and bribe his way through police stations and law courts. Today, Igbo society is degenerating with a lot of abominations done against the Earth-goddess. But a look at some proverbs can still recall how it used to be as can be seen below.

S/N	Igbo Proverbs	Literal Translation	Real Interpretation
1	<i>Ewere otu okuko chuoro arusi abuo aja, ha egbuo mmadu were mezu ya.</i>	When one fowl is offered to two deities, they will kill someone to complete it.	It is dangerous and life effacing not offering due sacrifices to the deities. The above story can illustrate what negative result it can bring. Had the woman promptly redeemed her pledge, there would have been peace and no death.
2	<i>Arusi na-eri asaa erighi asaa, o naghi ezu ike.</i>	Any deity who is used to eating seven sacrificial	Whatever the demands of a deity are must be fulfilled.

		animals, will never rest until they are given to it.	Except in cases of pleading and promise, the deity will continue disturbing. Look at the story above.
3	<i>A dighi aju arusi ihe mere ihe ji aga nke oma.</i>	You do not ask a deity why things are going normally.	Deities are mainly consulted when there is a problem. During that time, the litigants consult them and after the solution is obtained, they go back home forgetting everything.
4	<i>A gaghi m eji make na nwunye m ma obu enyi m nwanyi amaka wee ghoo ube edoro iyi.</i>	I cannot, because of the beauty of my wife or that of my girlfriend, steal pears being protected with a fetish from a deity.	People usually place protective fetishes from these deities on their properties. Therefore, no sane person no matter the inducement will steal anything being so protected, for such is suicidal.
5	<i>Onye amaghi onwe ya adighi ama arusi o kwere nkwa.</i>	It is only somebody who does not know himself that does not know the deity he has pledged to give something.	This also emphasizes the danger in pledging something to a deity. When you do so, dare not forget about it or else it will kill you because it will never forget. In that case, you do not know yourself.

This last resort in solving thorny cases is very dangerous. It is either lives are lost or that a lot of resources exchange hands. These deities are so dangerous that they dig into the root cause of the case, detect the guilty person and will never forget to punish the person with death.

When they kill somebody, some of them demand for the corpse and the properties of the decease. Woe betides members of any family that do not go to the priest to negotiate. Whatever the priest says is the demand of the deity must be paid. Else, it will kill another person in the family. It can continue like this until whole kindred has been wiped out because of the misdemeanor of one person. The result is that whenever a case drags to the extent of consulting a deity or whenever any property is under the protection of a deity, people are scared and so, they veer off that property. The result is that there is peace even if the peace is negative because it is gotten out of coercion. But then, justice is maintained.

But no matter from which perspective justice is studied, it should be:

... discovered that the Igbo have a very rich notion of justice which quintessence is precipitated into its reconciliation, communal, social and religious nature. However, this indigenous idea of justice is primordially anchored on a traditional world view that is fast undergoing rapid transformation due to contact with western culture (Onwuliri 2016, p. 42/43).

4. **Conclusion and Summary**

Igbo society is in disarray. No longer are the observances of the olden days taken note of. The result is that a lot of abominations are being committed. People with ruthless inclinations do not care about what they do. All they want is to be at the top without minding whose ox is gored. What rules this society now is material acquisition at the detriment of the weak. In view of this chaotic situation, one wonders what can be done so as to restore normalcy.

Even a cursory look at this society can reveal that behind this desultory situation is a total lack of justice. But it is not that nothing has been done to rectify the situation for in this society, there are law enforcement agents. But the people are more than corrupt. Since the nation modeled these after their colonial masters, it means that the British legal system has failed to work well for the people. Therefore, something else must be done.

It is because of this distressing situation that the researchers were forced to look at the traditional Igbo society in order to see if there is something worth harnessing. However, this

society has no written records of its earlier experiences. But what ought to be put in writing was coded in folklore, a genre of which is the proverb. By studying these proverbs, one can get something which the politicians and social scientists of today can study so as to tackle the people's problems.

In these proverbs are all that the ancestors of the nation used in organizing their society. These people since the colonial days have been noted as being highly religious. It was the influence of this on their lives that helped in restraining people's excesses.

Socially, the people tried their best to create just laws. The *umunna* (kindred) was there monitoring all and sundry, making sure that the dictates of the Earth-goddess (Ana, Ala, Ani, so called due to differences in dialects) were fully observed. Their belief was that deviants must be punished. The result was that people were not eager to go against the will of the goddess.

In addition, there are other deities who the people used so as to bring about justice in treating cases. These deities are merciless in judging people and apportioning punishments. Such punishments were mainly in killing the guilty person. Because of the fear of such deities and the intervention of the kindred who may also be negatively affected, many people complied in keeping society rancor free. In this case, inside these proverbs are the gems and nuggets with which the members of the olden society controlled themselves. Today's politicians and social scientists can study the happenings of those days as recorded in these proverbs and use their findings in re-engineering the modern society which is devoid of fairness as represented by justice.

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