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Obnoxious Labels as Language of Class Struggle in Nigeria: The Igbo Experience (Pp. 197-211)

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Abstract

Obnoxious Labels as derogatory language have some truths Nigerians especially the Igbo have not set free. The essay identifies some discriminatory practices and postures of intolerance, occasioned by linguistic, religious, gender, and ethnic related sentiments as being reinforced by revivals of primordial differentiations occasioned by the politics of identity. Moreover, prejudice is even being intellectualized and rationalized, such that the society itself appears to become a training ground for future practitioners of discriminations in Igbo society. In as much as these obnoxious terms determine social cohesion, filial obligation and the emergence of genuine democratic Igbo society, it becomes urgent to confront the class struggle and the recourse to obnoxious labels in a more pragmatic way through education, mobilization and transformation.

Introduction

Different forms of labels as language of scorn have given rise to discriminatory and intolerant disposition in different spheres of Nigerian life.

They are, therefore, not peculiar or more pronounced to the Igbo society. It would be a faculty conclusion to restrict these problems to Igbo society. Hence, it is misleading and unfortunate to hold such positions, as could be seen from the reporting of conflicts in Nigeria in National and foreign media. It could be observed that such attempts at typifying Igbo society as one of violence and discrimination are traceable to early western idea of Igbo life, as could, for instance, be seen in Hegel (1956) where it is claimed that Africa, is a violent and non-historical part of the world, that its people are barbarians, ruled by despots, and lacking in civilization. Nigeria is no exception in this generalization. Nigeria is made up of many ethnic extractions of which the Igbo is one of them. Representing Africa as a context that is exceptional in its use of labels, practice of discrimination and intolerance point to the same vexatious problem scholars have been trying to tackle.

The continual existence and use of labels in the 21st century in Africa is a cause for serious concern and deserves the attention we are giving it in the present discourse. There is need to identify these forms of obnoxious expressions that are in existence as far as possible, and discuss cultural basis of their use and practices. It is hoped that exploring such offensive misinterpretations, that the problems, effects and impacts would be more properly understood, and strategies for tackling them more appropriately designed. The clarification of some of the concepts that relate to the subject of discourse is needed before we explore the forms of derogatory labels observed.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concepts such as labels, language, class, struggle and class struggle may seem simple, but they in fact turn out to be problematic especially when it comes to actual discussion of their manifestations. There is need, however, to narrow down their meanings in order not to shift their meanings thereby create problems of focus and comprehension.

Label has to do with human activity or behaviour as it relates to a note, tag or sticker which Mairi, Robinson (1998:758) says “specifies details of something, contents, destination, ownership, advice about how to use it, wash it, care for it”. Label has deeper meaning than stated. It refers to a word or short phrase which is used to describe a person, movement or school of thought. Label makes a mark on people, institutions and relationships in a way with a special tag or calling someone or group of people by specified names like heathern, pagan. From the above labels, it does seem that they do

not have religious connotation in scholarly publications but crept in to religion especially in Africa as a mark of distinction between developed and underdeveloped, rich and poor, civilized and uncivilized, free and bonded, monotheism and polytheism. Label does not seem to refer to the uncomplimentary terms the arm-chair writers have effectively used to deride the cultural elements of others. He who wears the shoes knows where it pinches him.

Language has to do with what Mairi, Robinson (1998) describes as “any formalized system of communication, especially one that uses sound or written symbols which the majority of a particular community will easily understand”. (p.764). It is a vehicle of expressing ideas, notions, views, attitudes, behaviour, meaning, interaction and communicative modes of behaviour.

Obnoxious labels refer to offensive terms, ideas, attitudes and communicative modes of behaviour used by scholars from different cultural settings to describe traditional religious elements such as beliefs, practices, norms and values of the people. These descriptions do not seem to reflect the norms and values for which they are so described. They were imposed by the early missionaries, colonial administrators, tourists and scholars whose height of ignorance, biases and confused thinking are displayed to the wider society who rushed into faulty conclusion. The continued use of juju, heathenism, paganism, idolatry, primitivism fetishism, for example are unpleasant, insulting, disgusting and repulsive especially to African sense of religiosity. In spite of the great missionary zeal, and civilizing influence of Christianity, these offensive weapons, actions and attitudes affect aggressive effort to achieve balanced view or understanding of African view points. In Igbo context, obnoxious labels as disagreeable terms include; *Osu* (cult slave) system, *Ohu*, (domestic slave) widowhood or husband killers, ritual murderer or killers, witch or wizard, sorcerer, *dibia Alusi* (traditional medicine man) have evoked disagreement involving open hostility.

Class: Chinoy Ely (1967:133-34) sees class as “a group possessing the same economic position in society”. It is identified with Marxist theory of dialectical materialism. This is a way of explaining individual or group identity or status in economic terms. However, other scholars like Max Weber see class as a group of people who have a similar level of wealth and income. It may be noted that there is a consensus among scholars that the individuals and groups may not be understood solely in economic terms.

Class is therefore adopted to mean those who share either the same social or economic position or fate in the society. Richard Schaefer (2005:205) describes “class as a group of the people who have a similar level of wealth and income.

Class is said to be formed, according to Irving Krauss (1976:15) “when an aggregate of persons define their interests as similar to those of the others in their aggregate, and as different from and opposed to the interest of another aggregate of persons”. Class division and structure in Igbo society in particular, and Nigeria in general go beyond the Marxian class grouping of the capitalist or Bourgeois and the working class. Class structure seems to denote a framework of structural context or the regularized patterning of the relationships of exploitation and domination of *Osu, Ohu*, widows, orphans and other minorities within specific mode of production in Igbo society.

Claude Ake (1978) divides Nigerian classes into three namely; exploiters by class situation (owners of means of production), exploiters by class position (those who play major role in administering and actualizing exploitation and maintaining its conditions). It is noted that class consciousness is a common idea in understanding class.

Struggle is variously described. In the words of Mairi, Robinson (1998:1399) struggle refers “to strive vigorously or make a strenuous effort under difficult condition”, or make one’s way with great difficulty”. It is a task requiring strenuous effort, a fight or contest.

Class struggle explains strenuous effort made or shared by individuals and groups who share either the same social and economic position or fate in the society.

The *diala* do not seem to acknowledge that none of *Diala* is above developing prejudices. In the people’s strivings, Lewin, V.I. (1968:22) says “it is common knowledge that in any given society, the strivings of some of its members conflict with the strivings of others, that social life is full of contradictions, and that history reveals a struggle between and within nations and societies”. The strivings which conflict probably explains Karl Marx contention that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle”. (Lewis A. Coser, p.48).

Class Struggle in Igbo Society

The meaning of class given above has shade light on categories of class in Igbo society. The Igbo are class in and for themselves. This classification is

in line with Marx's dialectical materialism and goes beyond the bourgeois and proletariat distinction in the society. Igbo society is made up of the *Amadi* (the rich), the *Ogbenye* (the poor), the *Ohu* (the slaves) the Ume (people said to be prone to calamity), the *Diala* (the freeborn), and the *Osu* (cult slave). There is another group known as *Ndi obia* (strangers) who have become part of the communities of their residence due to long years of sojourn. The level of coexistence seems to have been affected with the coming of western culture exemplified in Christianity, western education and civilization.

The long years of western influence has not changed or altered the dichotomy between the two major class structures in Igboland – the *Diala* (freeborn) and the *Osu* (cult slave). Every class mentioned above falls within either the *Diala* (the freeborn) or the *Osu* (cult slave) in Igboland. In communities where there is no *Osu* system, the fear associated with it explains the large scale and open discrimination against them. Igbo tradition has it that they are rather seen than heard in matters relating to Igbo culture. They are said to carry permanent curses, their great grand parents were dedicated to Igbo religious duties and were dreaded by the wider Igbo society.

The long years of civilizing influence, transformation and social change in Igboland has not improved the belief, practice and attitudes associated with obnoxious label called *Osu*. It has become a reference point to remind people of their social and religious background which is rigidly unchanging. With their membership of the Christian church, they are still dreaded because the curses are said to be transferable. The recognition and acceptance the early missionaries and colonial masters accorded the *Osu* did not last long as the *Diala* launched campaign of calumny against them. The *Osu* pride of place was not based on early missionaries and colonial masters trying to impose the *Osu* (cult slave) on the *diala* (freeborn) but it was based on the *Diala's* (freeborn) refusal to send their children to embrace Western education, Christianity and western Civilization. It was thought by the *diala* as a wasteful exercise their children did not deserve. It was the lot of the *Osu* and the *Ohu*. This opportunity they grabbed to the fullest paid off as they became the very first cream of Igbo society. The *Osu* did not seem to help matters because few in positions of authority abused their positions by being autocratic and oppressing the *Diala* in Igbo land. This was the basis of class struggle because the *Diala* wanted a reverse to the old order in which the *Osu* were seen but not heard. Their spheres of operation should be in the shrines of the Igbo divinities where their great grand fathers were dedicated.

However, those who held this view seem to forget that it was not in all cases that the *Osu* great grand parents were men and women of dubious characters or were accursed people. History had it that under threat to life and property such victims ran to the shrines of *Amadioha*, *Agwu* and Ala by clinging to and embracing the emblem of the object of worship, they were made *Osu*. All their rights and privileges as freeborn were denied them. This social dichotomy between the *Osu* and the *Diala* has received divine sanctions in marriage, land transactions, agriculture, commerce and worship. The *Osu* social status has been relegated to the background.

Obnoxious Labels as Language of Class Struggle

Language remains a vital vehicle of communication in human life. “The ability to communicate”, Awake (2003) says, “is truly a precious gift” (p.3). The question which is yet to be resolved is whether the precious gift of communication exemplified in obnoxious labels is divinely inspired or ordained? One or two communicative modes of behaviour will serve as examples in Igboland.

Uche, O.O.C. (2004:86) states that the differences between *Osu* (cult slave) and *Diala* (freeborn) are articulated and presented in certain metaphors in Igboland. *Diala*, (freeborn) for instance, refer to *Osu* (cult slave) as people of left hand (*ndi aka ekpe*), people with dog hands (*Ndi aka nkita*). Strangers (*Ndi obia*), people who always carry knife or cutlass (*Ndi okpa nma*) and people who live in the markets (*Ndi obi n’ahia*). Others include prosperous people (*Ndi ihe na-agara nke oma*), violent people (*Ndi aghom mobu ndi oma*). The use of proverbs and recourse to Omenala (*Igbo tradition and custom*) are not left out.

Similarly, following the abortive attempts to resolve *Osu-Diala* dichotomy, with the Eastern Nigeria Law of May, 10, 1956, symbolic signs of expression were introduced and they constitute another form of obnoxious labels in Igboland. They constitute the revelation of *Osu* identity and its increased practice both in secrecy and in open. The Eastern Nigeria Law of May 10, 1956 abolished *Osu* system and calling people *Osu*. Many *Diala* have resorted to the use of symbolic signs of expression and communicative modes other than calling one an *Osu*. The symbolic signs of expression are exemplified in the raising of the left hand as a sign that shows somebody that the other person is an *Osu*. This raising up of left hand is usually done during cultural meetings or communal development associations at home or outside. This is different from raising of one’s shoulders, which may denote

disagreement and disapproval especially when consent on issues such as marriage is sought. One may avoid utterances but his eyes are used to fix on someone, which may be enough to show his disapproval. The next example is traditional practice of joining of two fingers to produce uncomplimentary sound of disapproval.

Symbolic signs are forms of expression which are articulated by a section of the people to recreate fuel and reveal ***Osu*** (outcaste) identity. They go beyond the use of words or names. Examples of symbolic signs of communication by the ***Diala*** (freeborn) against the ***Osu*** (cult slave) have been shown above and pointing to status dilemma. They are behavioural social attitudes denoting an abomination, tabooed category of persons, and uncertainties in traditional events. These symbolic signs of communication are used in recreating ***Osu-Diala*** social dichotomy.

Differences between ***Osu*** and ***Diala*** social groups are articulated and presented in Igboland in certain metaphors. They are weighty in communicating disapproval in all customary and traditional relationships with ***Osu*** in order to maintain an advantage position. A personal communication with Mazi Okere on 4/3/2010 shows that the use of Igbo proverbs and recourse to ***Omenala*** or Igbo traditions and customs are not left out of communicative modes of behaviour. Arikpo (1956:201) opines that ***Osu-Diala*** class struggle is recreated through ***Osu*** dogma which fuels indoctrination in the wider society. It is noted that the use of the above communicative modes of behaviour has remained persistent factor in revealing class struggle in Igboland.

Osu dogma is “a statement, according to Uche (2004) about the beliefs about ***Osu*** (cult-slave) and general attitude toward them” (p.2). According to Arikpo (1956:201) “The ***Diala*** (Freeborn) have for generations, continued to inform the wider society that the ***Osu*** (cult-slave) are a tabooed category of persons within their communities. As a result, the ***Osu*** (cult-slave) is excluded from the mainstream of the social activities of their communities because of their ritual status”.

In the light of symbolic signs and communicative modes of behaviour, ***Osu*** participation in religious sacraments is understood in terms of pollution which is believed to incur the wrath of Igbo divinities. ***Osu*** dogma has ascribed ritual position which has made them, alienated, secluded, marginalized and despised. The concepts of pollution and contamination

have been evoked to fuel stigmatization of *Osu* and other minority group members of Igbo extraction such as the Ume.

Scholars seem to have ignored the negative effects of using derogatory names such as *Ndi Aka Nkita* (people with dog hand) and *Ndi aka ekpe* (Lefts hands) among others already stated to recreate *Osu* dogma in Igboland. The reverence and respect associated with the *Osu*'s offices in the traditional religious setting are ignored. Instead their ascribed ritual position has made them to be secluded and despised. The concepts of pollution and contamination have been evoked to fuel stigmatization of people so described as outcast, primitive and untouchable. Igbo traditional religion is used as agent of cultural conflict.

Obnoxious labels such as people with dog hand or *Ndi aka Nkita* promote inferiority complex in people. In Igbo society, for example, Uche (2004:139) says dogs are seen as very unclean animals and are not models of behaviour. A person that is referred to as a dog is often seen as being sexually loose which is a violation of spiritual and physical selfhood or somebody that is not morally sound. Having a dog's hand instead of a human hand means also being non-human or being a monster. Only monsters, as we have in myths and fabulous tales such as those of centaur, can be partly human and partly animal. Such animalization strategy is used in rationalizing the unwantedness of the *Osu* individuals or the need to eliminate the *Osu* (cult slave) group from Igbo society. Similarly, Oha, (2002:70) states that being regarded as a person of-the-left-hand *Ndi aka ekpe* in Igbo society makes the reverent unnatural and undesirable; apart from the fact it clearly speaks about the polarization of the society. The label ascribed to *Osu* as strangers (*Ndi obia*) implies "the disadvantaged social group, relegated to the background as strangers whose decent lineage cannot be traced. This means that the *Osu* have no birth right in terms of inheritance and cannot claim any". (Uche, O.O.C 2004:139).

Whereas people could use animals such as lion (*Agu*) the ram (*Ebule*), the elephant (*Enyi*) in framing their titles such as *Odumegwu* (Fearless Leopard), *Ogbuagu* (Killer of Lion), *Agudike* (One as strong as Lion), nobody seems to use or answer dog. This shows that the religious labels are better described as a symbol of destruction in a religious setting. Their constant and continued use implants negative concepts in the minds of people. In the words of Norman Vincent Pearl (1971), "self-depreciatory weakness is one great many face under name of inferiority and which can be extremely painful and self-

defeating” (p.271). It could be responsible for the lack of positive decision and responsible action. Consequently, it belittles people who are so described, making them ineffectual and corroding their sense of worth and dignity.

Effects of Obnoxious Labels in Igbo Society

Is our strong conviction that there is gods” anywhere in Nigeria. It is the ignorance, and racial pride aimed at finding a distinction between the reasoning of the people of Nigeria and the less developed areas of the world. Awolalu and Dopemu (1979) see it as “a delusive academic or intellectual creation that exists rather prejudicially in the minds of schools that created it” (p.14). Bringing the concept of God to bear on class struggle in an enlightened age negates the divine self-revelation, transcendent and immanent of God in Igboland.

These errors of interpretation are made known in the withdrawn God, which is described as an academic invention, perpetuated by the obstinacy and dishonesty of those who will refuse to learn in penitence that the living God shows no discrimination or partiality in his universal self-disclosure. Those who promote obnoxious labels are short sighted in accepting that “the imperfect knowledge of the nature and character of God is a result of the limitation of the human person. Critics such as Idowu need to be complemented by contemporary scholarship on the right perspective on these obnoxious labels.

A great deal of imaginative and fabricated tales about the culture mostly exaggerated and distorted from various motives. African scholars according to Uche (2007) have been defensive and the efforts that would have been used in creative direction find it difficult to reconstrue these cultural dichotomy.

The dynamism of Igbo Traditional Religion is put to question. Igbo religion like culture is more closely related to the historical and geographical circumstances of its adherents. The principle of continuity and discontinuity applies to religion in general. In the same vein, religious leaders sometimes dishonestly try to suppress the fact of their indebtedness to the past. It is offensive to describe a group of the unreservedly *Osu*, a name that implies outcast, untouchable, ostracized and alienated from the mainstream of Igboland. It is derogatory and hence derogatory to so described socio-religious group in Igboland except perhaps on the ground of social prejudice.

Religious Effects of Obnoxious Labels

In traditional religious beliefs and practices, Awolalu, J.O. and Dopemu, A. (1979) see obnoxious labels as wrong nomenclature. They are used to describe the object of religious functionaries, practices, worship and other ways of life. A little illustration will suffice here. Nabel (1954:11) used the 'high-gods' of the primitive peoples or "the primitive God" (p.11) to differentiate between "Supreme Gods" such as the Christian God, Muslim God, the African God, and the Western God. It may be true that certain religious ideas such as the Nupe of Nigeria who sang that "soko (God) is far away". (p.11). Nabel must have been too tasty in concluding that God in African Traditional religion is 'withdrawn', 'remote' and 'uninterested' in the affairs of the people. The 'withdrawn god' is another error of terminology used by such scholars as Ellis (1894) who used it to distinguish between God in African belief and God as conceived by the Westerners. Thinking that *Olodumare, Chineke, Olorun, Osanabuo, Obasi Mbom* and *Temeran* are totally unknown to the people is misleading.

Nabofa, M.Y. (1979:59) says a number of difficulties bedeviled the study of African Traditional Religion. They include the idea that Africa is a dark continent because much about her is unknown. The unknown usually appears mysterious and is shrouded with dread. "A great deal of imaginative and fabricated tales is introduced in order to fill the banks which pleased the arm-chair scholars. More to this was very many languages, lack of written records, biased attitudes, secrecy about some aspects of African Traditional Religion and indoctrination in schools, churches and mosques. Nigerians have grown to misconceive and misrepresent indigenous culture. Nabofa, M.Y. (1979:59) maintains that "such misconceptions and misrepresentations have been indelibly planted in the minds and mentality of most people and as such it is very difficult to erase such ideas from their minds, even most Africans refer to African Traditional religion in such terms, which is not the nature of the religion" (p.59).

Osu-Diala conflict is fuelled by the use of spite, scorn and derogatory labels expressed through empowerment, Symbolic signs. It has created a new breed of heroes and heroines who dare struggle with the various issues concerned with the shadow of social evil that obscures every human heart.

There is need to disarm the Eurocentric self in order to find clarity to envision and promote the courage in people within and outside Nigeria to create a new and improved social order free of organized or systematic

campaign of calumny. They needed to be reminded that love can triumph over enmity.

Social Effects of Obnoxious Labels in Igbo Society

Obnoxious labels have become a delicate ground one has to tread warily and be sure of one's perception when discussing what others hold to be socially binding, spiritually enriching and religiously refreshing. Respect for people's faith calls for social recognition of their belief system, mutual respect and balanced understanding. The fact of preconceived notion gave rise to all sorts of offhand names which are coined to describe what Idowu, E. B. (1970) sees as "What appeared to be indescribable is the essential characteristics of African Traditional Religion" (p.108).

Obnoxious labels are attributive words which have been abused consistently by writers on Nigerian culture. They have, therefore, called for immediate attention in order to put the records straight and more forward. This is informed by the fact that these attributive words seem to defy sound scholarship. In consequence of collaborative studies, obnoxious labels are products of lip-service which Idowu, E. B. (1970) feels is being so loudly paid to progress in scientific and open-minded thinking. This paper may subscribe to obnoxious labels being sure way of addicting themselves stubbornly to the obviously incongruous, in order to satisfy racial, ethnic and personal egocentricity.

It is observed that obnoxious labels are inappropriately used especially when they are used or applied by highly placed or educated people to indoctrinate, humiliate and segregate people. The use of certain cultural patterns of the western civilization are applied to Nigerian context in abstract, substantive and make the wider society to believe the cultural bankruptcy of the Igbo in particular and Nigerians in general. The current use and the application of these labels do not convey original meanings and remain imaginative of those who so describe them as offhand names. The users seem short sighted in recognizing that those so describe in uncomplimentary terms are their contemporaries.

In sociological spheres of operation terms such as *Osu* system, widowhood, ritual murder and human sacrifice could be said to refer to human behaviour or pattern in Igbo culture. The context in which they originated has significantly changed. Culture as the sum total way of life of a people in a given time, place and situation is dynamic with much contact from outside.

Obnoxious labels are used to create the image of an enemy in the minds of the people. Men, women and children are plunged into the unconscious well of their own disowned darkness. Sam Keen (1988:9) says the creation of the image of an enemy explains the greed, hatred, carelessness, they dare not claim as theirs". It becomes difficult to erase all hints of the myriad levels, hopes, fears that seem to play through the downward arc of cruelty. On the other hand, obnoxious labels help to exaggerate each of the ascribed malignant features of these nightmares. This icon of enemy makes people pass judgment without reservation. By implication, they 'kill' without guilt and 'slaughter' without shame. There is need to put a human face that will compliment concerted efforts aimed at destroying an impediment to the sacred dialectic of history being experienced in Nigerian society.

Obnoxious labels have taken a new dimension when one considers this campaign of calumny as a way of getting things backward. They are like wars which began in the minds of men. They have formed images which come before weapons. Similarly, as propaganda machinery they proceed technology. They have provoked people into fright rather than civility. This provocation does not make people *Homo sapiens* ("rational human"). There is need to make peace by rational negotiation and optimistic assumptions. In this way, the problem would not lie in our reason but in the hardness of our hearts which find excuses to hate and dehumanize each other. Obnoxious labels seem to make man the enemy making animal. They try to paint linguistic rhetoric which makes man fabricate an enemy as a scapegoat to bear the burden of our denied enmity.

The Way Forward

A functional end to the various insidious acts of malicious propaganda could be realized by critically examining in details the need to change the various uncomplimentary ways and means we think of the culture of other people. The eyes with which we see the way of life, belief systems, religious practices and world views have to change. There is need to explore the minds of hostile humans who manufacture and promote propaganda that do not justify the hostility.

The above could be actualized through functional education. Education is viewed as the most powerful tool against obnoxious labels remains an index in transforming, reforming and appealing to the conscience of the people in order to promote true humanity in Igbo society in particular and Nigeria in general. It is articulated as capable of exposing the root causes of obnoxious

labels, enable the people irrespective of class examine their attitudes more objectively and help us deal wisely with obnoxious labels and class struggle in Igbo society.

Education will hopefully transform old ways into new life in our traditional beliefs and practices. It will reduce the elements of the ancient subsisting in every culture of man in Igboland in particular and Nigeria in general. Culture contact has a way of reducing the stubbornness of cultures which Idowu, E.B. (1970) says “some how resist the solvent of foreign agents” (p.109). There is need to revitalize the people the basic culture which makes them distinctive even within a new cultural situation of which they are part. This could be done by way of cultural revival in every five years.

In as much as it is human to demonstrate an innate desire to communicate, it is honourable to use loose terms, abusive of all collotations and attributive words to describe people created in the image of God. It is observed also that since obnoxious labels do not place within the Igbo a spiritual capacity, the desire to communicate with man should be based on the fear of God. God requires people who are sincere to listen obediently to him. (II Tim). By listening to God, we need to allow our learning, teachings found in the scriptures such as (IITim 3:16: and IIPeter 1:20f) have refreshing influence on people, institution and relationship. Therefore, one way forward according to the gospel of Saint Matthew is to state: “man must leave. . . on every utterance coming through God’s mouth” (4:4). This will help people gain divine favour and enjoy according to Philipians 4:6,7 and Proverbs 1:33 “the people of God that excels all thought”. In addition to the prospect of everlasting life, anxiety and suffering experienced by the people, the word of God makes the best possible use of the miracle of intelligent communication.”

Conclusion

Obnoxious labels are insulting names, which provoke people into a fight, hurt and rejected. The hatred generated affect people, institutions and relationship in many ways. The fact that individuals and groups of people are treated like a nobody has given rise to the indignity of unfair discrimination which Awake (2009:3) believes tends to be based on prejudice. The magazine goes on to say that “those who are regularly treated prejudicially often live in fear of further ill-treatment . . . they may become sick with anxiety” (p.3).

A recourse to obnoxious labels in the 21st century shows that of all earthly creations, man is the only one not content to communicate with one another.

Regardless of social status, gender, educational level, man has demonstrated an innate desire to communicate but does so in attributive words which have been abused consistently by writers on African cultural life. Idowu (1973) calls them “the bewildering variety with which one is confronted within a basically more or less homogenous system”. (p.108). Obnoxious labels are facts of preconceived notion which constitute the cause off hand names. As abstract substantives, obnoxious labels are backward, rude, loosed terms which have remained outmoded, unsuitably used without any apology. The abusive connotations of obnoxious labels call for social and religious impact in Igbo society. Like the Jewish-Gentile dichotomy that made Peter to call some animals God had created unclean,

The above situation remains a challenge to people, institutions and relationships in Igbo society. A lot of time, energy and resources are wasted on clarifying the obnoxious labels. This situation is probably responsible for apparent lack of mobilization of people in Igbo society. The non-involvement is probably a product of tactical and deliberate lie which has fuelled socio-religious dichotomy in Igbo society. Such distortion has given bitter wrangling among the Igbo. The *Diala* (freeborn) decision to concede nothing by their refusal to listen has increased the discordant voices which have caused crack on the wall of the Igbo society.

Bigotry and intolerance persist even with the laws against discrimination. More than six decades after the adoption of the universal Declaration of Human Rights . . . the principle of equality and non-discrimination are still far from a universal reality. This seems disturbing because the tales o woe negate all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The universal Declaration of Human Rights is made a mere paper work. In addition to the above reasons, people do not see one another as being endowed with reason and conscience. Similarly, people do not seem to act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

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