

WANDERTHIRST AROUND IGBO NEIGBOURLINESS IN TALES, SONGS AND PRACTICES: A REFLECTION ON THE PRISTINE SURVIVAL OF THE PRE – MODERN AWGU PEOPLE

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Abstract

The word Igbo, according to the Western missionary, Bishop Joseph Shanahan (1871 - 1943), stands for industry, boldness and obedience. One may extrapolate that industry shuns loafing (as represented by Unoka), boldness confronts any situation intrepidly (as represented by Okonkwo), obedience identifies with values, philosophies and mores of a social group (as represented by Obierika). These tripartite traits translate to no-existence of indolence, pervasive resourcefulness, unwavering piety to family, extended family and communal multilateral relations among Ndigbo. Undeniably today, change and decay are gradually crumbling these remarkable features of a race as demonstrable evidence of pungent social change suggestive of societal chords that are fast snapping apart. This study considers aspects of Igbo (Awgu) communal relationship contributing to the sustenance and survival of this social group until lately. Though not intended as comparison between life then and now, the study strives to reawaken nostalgia in us about some negligence for our culture, to constrain us to retreat to pick up the pieces of what are edifying, and to combine these essentials with the flower of the present to ensure continual survival of Igbo civilization.

Introduction

This paper considers various aspects of human relationship contributing to social survival or sustenance of an Igbo society. Though not intended to be a comparison between life then and now, it intends to instill in us a thought about what we have neglected about the past, to constrain us to retreat to pick the pieces of what were good and to combine them with the flower of the present to ensure continual survival of society. In the attempt to make the reflection real, some Awgu songs and folktales celebrating virtues and declaiming vices are used to lace this thought. In making the reflection palpable, some Awgu songs and tales heralding virtues, communal ceremonial proclivity, tacit acknowledgement of what affects the nose affects the eyes and declaiming villainy are used to lace the reflection. Those songs, to retain their naturalness in this social milieu, are rendered in the Awgu dialect of the Igbo language and as well transliterated into the English language.

Optimism vs Pessimism

These antonymous terms are used in the context of this piece of writing to portray two human worldviews. Those who neglect to work for tomorrow, who derive pleasure from frivolities, are the pessimists, while those who plan for tomorrow's needs, who do not quake before any obstacles but strive to overcome them, are the optimists.

Two friends, Mr. Ant and Mr. Grasshopper, once existed, however, their worldly views were different. Mr. Ant had foresight and, so, would not allow any problem to overtake or overwhelm him. He did not relent in accumulating and stockpiling assorted goods. On the contrary, Mr. Grasshopper engaged himself in frivolities like visiting fun-fare, attending waltz, and giving parties. This favourable period granting free movement to procure one's priorities was the dry season. Afterwards, an inopportune period, the rainy season, set in. Movement was halted and businesses were paralyzed. Heaven opened her doors and windows and let off her water. The downpour so continued unabated that those who had little provision had it consumed and those who provided nothing for this seemingly unexpected period were famished.

When this excruciating hunger became unbearable, Mr. Grasshopper, who was on the side of "I am here for a nice time, why bother my life", set aside his pride and called at his friend's house. His friend had initially warned him about sparing little time and providing for future economic hardship. But he had laughed this advice off and quipped, "I won't trouble myself about tomorrow. A fun missed today can't be reclaimed again". After being ushered into his friend's sitting-room, he solicited his friend to give him some food for he was dying of hunger. His friend gave him lingering look, and, subsequently, burst into guffaw. Mr. Grasshopper was obfuscated about the loud laughter. When he was gathering himself together to ask about this mime, Mr. Ant wiped off tears that had started gushing from his eyes and, still grinning, quipped: "Those who don't work won't eat". Mr. Grasshopper got up, said nothing further, went home and died of starvation.

This story confirms the Awgu idiom, which says that a grasshopper, which is burning thinks itself as exuding oil. Mr. Ant's success in meeting the demand of future hardship inspires one to look at the brighter side of life no matter whatever a stumbling block one encounters. These further historical allusions suffice to illustrate optimism as the quintessence for social survival. In the Middle Ages in England, according to David Jowitt (40/41), the House of Lancaster and the House of Tudor were embroiled in an internecine war, a war called the "War of the Roses", to decide who should rule England. This war was protracted and indecisive, but subsequently, the House of Lancaster was vanquished. The struggle for survival of any society can be likened to the above wars. The society becomes Lancastrian if it fails but Tudorian if successful. Again, before the birth of Christ, Alexander the Great became the Master of Asia. In one of his military campaigns against Persia he was standing on a seashore and gazing at golden island city. King Darius through an emissary offered millions of dollars worth of gold and diamond to turn his attention away from the city, but he turned down the offer. Alexander was not daunted by the ocean, which posed an obstacle between him and the island city, nor was he deterred by the overwhelming military personnel of King Darius. Subsequently, he crushed the military might of Darius, crossed the ocean and took the golden island city. The survival of any community is predicated on the inhabitants not quailing at any difficulty attempting to mar effort to strengthen society. Furthermore, Julius Caesar invaded Ancient Britain during the expansion of the Roman Empire. Incidentally, he with his army found themselves beleaguered in every direction. The British soldiers were in the front, in the right and in the left; behind them the Atlantic Ocean formed a barrier. Between this devil and the deep blue sea, Caesar had no alternative than to command his soldiers to advance and conquer their enemies. Roman soldiers, not admitting defeat

in war nor giving themselves up for captivity, threw themselves against the British and overpowered them. This exploit made Caesar utter a famous statement in Latin: Veni, Vidi, Vici, which means I came, I saw, I conquered. So, the Roman soldiers survived, the Roman empire expanded, sustained and strengthened. In addition, the Okuruoha of Ngwo, Chief Onyeama n'Eke of the early nineteenth century, prepared his family for the future. When our grandfathers were busy ferrying their children to "Omoni" in Cross River State, Onyeama was busy ferrying his children to Europe and America. One of his sons, Charles Daddy Onyeama, was a one-time member of the United Nations International Court of Justice at Hague. Finally, Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" shows the conflict between optimism and pessimism. A number of persons were clamped into a very dark cave. Some resigned their fate to the condition of the cave; some defied the condition and wanted to be free. They worked through the cave for an exit. On exploring the cave, they discovered certain streak of brightness seeping into the cave. Their attention was drawn to this. On a closer observation they found out that such brightness was from the sun outside. They worked seriously on this opening and made their way to freedom. The survival of any entity is ensured by planning for tomorrow, by not resigning to seeming impossibility, by defying anything that brings discouragement, and by resisting engaging in frivolities.

Encouraging Pathos; NOT Apathy

Our grandfathers were known for their neighbourliness or anxiety about their neighbours or relatives' welfare. This filial affections created extended family, kindred, village and town recognition and acceptability. Names, fathers' names and grandfathers' names evoked admiration and accounts of adventures or exploits undertaken in the past. Ancestral names were instrumental in cementing family pedigree and in eliciting concern in times of distress. The inability to relate well would result in abandonment and compel neighbours to be apathetic to your condition. An Awgu folktale illustrate this. a woman had a husband. She did not bother to know the husband's name. She was neglected in every family activity. As a result of this she became dejected, famished and lonely. Sadly, one day she was caught in a trap set up by her husband. All her wailings, shrieking, entreaties and foot-kickings for rescue could not attract rescuers to her. Later on, someone was touched by this woman's agony. This person secretly stole in to the ostracized woman and acquainted her with her husband's name and advised that the instant she called out this name she would receive immediate extrication. The call was proclaimed in a song:

Initially: A cry of complaint

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|--|---|
| Ooo onye nwonyenu onyenu Iijee 2ice | Somebody, the child of somebody you're welcome |
| Amaulo | Amaulo |
| Labialum akpalu nwamkpalu otaa | I came to pick some ripe palm fruit to eat |
| Amaulo | Amaulo |
| Ekankpa akpalu ekaali kpagide | A trap caught my hand down |
| Kpagidem lulo di m, kpagide lulo nnwee | Caught me down in my husband's house; caught me in his wife's house |
| Nwoke amavo eva nwee | That man that knows not his wife's name |
| Nwoke nkovu bu olee | That man is worthless |
| Nwaayi amavo eva die | The woman that knows not her husbands name |
| Nwaayi nkovu bu olee | That woman is worthless |
| Amaulo ulokoo | Amaulo |
| Amaulo ulokoo | Amaulo |

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Her cry, when no name was mentioned, did not bring any help. However, immediately she mentioned her husband’s name, the man astonished at how she called his name rushed to rescue his wife. So, the recognition of a person’s worth in society encourages the social survival of that society.

Unity is Strength; Victory is Certain

U.S.S.R survived the onslaught of Adolf Hitler in the Second World War of 1939 to 1945 because the nation forged a united front. Alexander of Macedon became the master of Europe and Asia because of the unity of his army. Othman dan Fodio overran the Hausa speaking Northern Nigeria because he had the unity of his flag bearers. On the other hand, the Great Julius Caesar of the Roman Empire was killed because there was no unity. The Nigeria Civil War was fought because of want of unity. Civil and guerrilla warfares in Africa were fought because unity was lacking. Awgu General Assembly of 1986 slugged it out with the Egbeleli in council. This divided Awgu into two camps: “Ivirigbati” (Progressives) and “Imienwuru” (Conservatives). The survival of a society characterized by tension and discord is minimal while it is assured in the atmosphere devoid of rancour. This accounts for why our ancestors spun a yarn about social solidarity to crush a common foe: the birds admitted the tortoise to accompany them to heaven to honour an invitation to a feast. The self-centeredness of Mr. Tortoise made him outwit the birds to claim an all encompassing name, All-of-you, and consumed the better part of the dish served. United in anger for a common cause of rooting out their enemy the birds, having retrieved their feathers, abandoned the over-bloated tortoise to descend to earth on his own scheme. Deflated and helpless, greedy Mr. Tortoise came crashing on to the earth, and so, sustained his unique coverage. Many of us are like Mr. Tortoise, very selfish, very avaricious, and fiercely frustrating others from rising. The stigma of Tortoise today is his patched up shell. The survival of any society can only be assured by the majority stripping these social misfits of recognition.

Equitable respectability, Acceptability and Recognition of Male and Female Offspring

Afamefuna, Amaechina, Ikemefuna, Obodochina, Onochie are names heralding the preference of male issues to female ones in the perpetuation of family lineage. This expectation caused our grandfathers to ill-treat their wives for bringing forth female children. This parochial proclivity is enunciated in this folktale song:

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Eze! Eze! | O king, o king! |
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |
| Ezeke ogbulokwa! | The King that slaughters animals |
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |
| Ezeke Oko Ji! | The king famed in farm work! |
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |
| Ezechi ukwoko! | The king unsurpassed in anything! |
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |
| Akwa nna u shiri! | Your father decreed! |
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |
| Nnwe m mukwa nwoke e! | If my wife put forth a baby boy! |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |
| Ya kulu e leta a ! | She should bring it home! |
| Ma ya mukwa nwayi! | But if she brought forth a baby girl! |
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |
| Ya kuse I' egu! | She should abandon it at the farm fields! |
| Doo lima doo lima doo! | Doo lima doo lima doo! |

As a criticism of baby – girls preference, the song sarcastically reminded the king of his wealth attainment and addressed us to witness this king in his height, and challenged us to judge this king and the warped tradition that cultivated him. It is a critic on men who ultreat, divorce or even murder their wives for begetting female children. This is sexism in practice. Today the reverse about negative regard of women is the case. I wrote a poem entitled WOMAN. It was improvised after much thought and observation. A woman suffers no barricade in seeking anything. Out-of-bounds affixed on certain office doors or difficulty in reaching whoever is needed to make things done is not in the dictionary of a well educated today's woman. A lot of families exist where male children could not erect houses for them. These families had houses erected by female ones. Many women these days no longer accept leaving out their father's name in their marital homes.

Giving honour to whom honour is due

Our grandfathers accorded reception to those who distinguished themselves in valour or other superhuman exploits. The grandiose reception for giving this honour was laced with certain panegyric songs replete with praise names. The person so honoured was much more enlivened if the honour came from a group known for its model of excellence. An Awgu folktale accounted for this: it happened that a fierce beast was ravaging a community. So many able-bodied men were killed by this beast that the thought of its appearance was a nightmare to the inhabitants. After sometimes, the youngest son in one family wilely plunged into a bowl in which the beast drank water from after its havoc and was swallowed. In the belly of the beast the lad drew out a small sharp dagger and slashed the entrails of the beast in pieces. The beast fell down dead and the lad cut open the stomach and walked away to freedom. As he was walking home he was chanting a song of bravado and liberation:

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|---|---|
| Okolokoludele alata o o! 2ice | The name of the lad: Has come back! |
| Elilikalajamma! | Elilikalajamma! |
| Ulo o! | Singer exclaims: Has come back ooo! |
| Elilikalajamma! | Elilikalajamma! |
| Uloko o! | Singer exclaims: Has really come back ooo! |
| Elilikalajamma! | Elilikalajamma! |
| Nwantinti olowe e olewe olowe olowe ee! | Swaggering fancy steps |
| Elilikalajamma! | Elilikalajamma! |
| Otulu ivemelu nna ya ooo! 2ice | He searched for and destroyed what killed his father! |
| Elilikajamma! | Elilikalajamma! |
| Nwantinti olowe ooo 3ice | Swaggering dancing steps |

The people gathered and a grandiose reception commenced. Today, the “Okolokoludeles” in our midst are the political leaders in the local, state and federal governments. They are in our

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midst now not as avengers of certain killings or destructions but as people who have attained enviable positions. These people have performed fits others may not perform. However, the new beast staring at us menacingly is the education of our youths. To sustain the social survival of the people of Awgu let all of us now hold our palms together to crush this irritating fly.

The lad in this song is a patriot; society’s reception shows recognition of this patriotism, as inspiration for others to emulate selfless service to society. Today, sadly, nepotism, inefficiency and corruption have been institutionalized.

A Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body

Ancient Greece strove assiduously to ensure the healthiness of the body and mind of her youths. She was convinced that a healthy mind must be found in a healthy body (This in Latin means *Men sana in corpore sano*). These people who were expected to obey the sound of the trumpet never failed their society. There are people who are expected to be the vanguards or avant-gardes or pathfinders of social changes or enlightenment. It is odd if such a group is conspicuously absent in a campaign against the renunciation of negative practices or a demoralizing cause. Our grandfathers had a song reserved for expert wrestlers, men or women. This song was rendered while inviting experts to a wrestling challenge or to commemorate the death of an invincible wrestler.

The song:

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| A Uzoma Mgbadaoko o o! 2ice | Uzoma Mgbadaoko (a name) Magbaoko o o! |
| Onye mgba kulogele e e! | The person wrestling is beating gong for Magbaoko o o! |
| Uzoma bia nga la mgba aga olie o o! | Uzoma join the company for wrestling is going to Orié (a market) |
| Onye mgba kulogele e e! | Wrestling is beating a gong for you - Magbaoko o o! |
| Mgbe evi gbulueku ayi ala ooo! | When a cow offers a gift, we will go home |
| Onye mgba kulogele e e! | Wrestling is beating a gong for you – Magbaoko o o! |
| Enyanwu tituzu ayi ala ooo! | When the sun is beating intensely, we will go home |
| Onye mgba kulogele e e! | Wrestling is beating a gong for you – Magbaoko o o! |
| Ogele mgba! | A gong of wrestling |
| Onye mgba kulogele e e! | Wrestling is beating a gong for you! |

If this consummate wrestler who always took the forefront could not appear to join her colleagues it would be known that something tragic had happened to them and the community. This dirge recalled a missing portion or a loss in their midst. John Donne’s epigram applied to them. Their energy was sapped whenever they lost anybody, particularly a known figure. According to John Donne in Hibbs et al: “Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” (74)

It should be understood what the above pristine song connotes. Literally, “Uzoma” means the good road; the road that brings success. It, therefore, connotes ethnocentricisms; it connotes a pivot on which something revolves; it connotes live-blood of a group; it connotes industry, boldness and obedience. If these qualities are accepted, should not society strive to make these qualities passwords for development?

Marriage Contract

Our forebears restrained themselves from bringing any nubile girls into their homestead no matter how ravishingly beautiful the girls were. Emissaries would be dispatched to the girls’ villages to pick information about the girls’ families; relations being married around the girls’ villages helped to bring forward information concerning the girls. Such pieces of information involved whether the girls’ families had been dying prematurely, whether they were victims of certain ailments or they were involved in organized theft or they were quarrelsome and ungovernable. When all these were ascertained or discovered to be non-existent, negotiation for marriage contract would convene. This pre-marital information showed that our forefathers painstakingly laboured to eschew bringing an-infested faggot into their compounds to avoid inviting the lizards for feasts. These marriage contracts were observed in stages: “Igba Nju” (inquiries about the background dispositions of the would-be in-law as aforementioned), “IKwe Eka” (Not the literal hands shake but one involving the giving of some money and cosmetics to assure the girls’ consent), “Ikpa Nni” (the grooms’ procurement of comestibles-cooked rice and stew, pounded cassava and soup, a castrated he-goat, assorted cloths and wine), “Ime-Ego” (grooms’ presentation of agreed sum of money and wine), and lastly, Igba Nkwu” (the presentation of assorted drinks in the company of relations, friends and well-wishers).

These marriage stages meticulously carried out were to portray the dignity of a well-preserved woman and marriage. The whole procedures would be disrupted if it were subsequently discovered that the initial information about the girls’ and their families’ wrongdoing was not initially divulged. However, the absence of this ensured the gradual or hastening accomplishment of the marriage. One thing that strikes one about Awgu marriage ceremony, then, was a song advising the bride and the groom to be obedient to each other.

The Song:

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| O dulu o o o 2ice | Somebody has taken ooo! |
| O dulu ya la a 2ice | He has taken her home ooo! |
| Eke o o o | Eke (name of bride) – Reminding advice |
| Ive di wu gwalu kiye eme o o o | What your husband tells you, that you will do |
| Ive di wu gwalu u u | Repetition of preceding line |
| Ola a o o o 2ice | Is she going ooo! |
| O la ibe ya a 2ice | Yes, she’s going to her home |
| Okere ooo! | (Okere ooo name) Advisory reminding call |
| Ive nwewu gwalu k’iye eme e e e | Whatever your wife tells you, that you must do |
| Ive nnwewu gwalu uu | Whatever your wife tells you! |

Marriage was sacrosanct. The sound and sense in this song depict reciprocal obedience as the indubitable key strengthening a family. Of course, occasionally, many wives went to their parents’ homes because of ill-treatments, but these were amicably settled and the erring husbands accepted turning over new leaves. Nevertheless, such absconding in most cases had never resulted

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in permanent estrangement. There was mutual respect between wives and husbands, between in-laws, between families, extended families and villages or towns of wives and husbands. This ensured the social survival of Awgu and also extended the semantic associations of “NWANNE”, my relation. Any person adjudged a relation would receive equal treatment as others of the same kindred circle.

Presently, certain marriages contracted are performed as though the grooms are acquiring new sets of possession procured by the highest bidders. Extended families, villages and towns which are the cornerstones elongating and cementing in-lawship are thrown to the dustbin and nuclear-family system is entrenched. This is conspicuous when one considers why one’s relatives will be living in affluence and having their compounds fully electrified while ones relative who has the same blood running in his veins and living close-by will be neglected to wallow in penury. Does this picture present a society surviving earnestly? A song points out this callousness, this darkness of man’s heart, this ego-centricism of man; thus, showing that our ancestors declaimed this inhumanity and dissociated themselves from such sordid act as shown in the song.

The Song:

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|--------------------------------|--|
| Onye legbu leboekwe o o o 2ice | Who is cutting at the wood/forest of Ekwe? |
| Se – le – | Se – le |
| Kelelu m nne m o o o | Greet my mother |
| Se – le – | Se – le |
| Kelelu m nna m o o o | Greet my father |
| Ikeleshi ada m o o o | Do not greet my sister |
| Se – le – | Se – le |
| Ada m ino bu ino o o o | My sister is real enemy |
| Se – le – | Se – le |
| Kwalum ti logbu o o o | She pulled me unto a deep pool of water |
| Se – le – | Se – le |
| Shi azu taa m enu o o o | She tells the fish to bite me |
| Se – le – | Se – le |
| Tikwelu m’ uhuko o o o | Also the crabs to bite me |
| Uhuko ama nwelete | The crabs that do not recognize their young ones |
| Se – le – | Se – le |
| Akpakolo nwa ohu mkpi | A water-snail like creature that has folded shell (also attacks) |
| Se – le – | Se – le |

This is a song of helplessness, of hopelessness, of powerlessness, negating neighbourliness. The voice is proclaiming the cause of her woes, woes exacerbated by other scourges in her new wretched condition. The proclamation pinpointed that the person, her sister, who would have been her aid became her woe. Is this voice happy? Can people of her type in any society be happy? Can a society whose new nouveau-riches flaunt their mammon ostentatiously before less fortunate citizens survive?

New Births: The Perpetuation of Social Survival

Mankind helps God in the existence of the world through procreation. The arrival of a newcomer is exultantly received. High regard is given to the woman and gratifying petitions for sustaining the baby arise from elated visitors. One such petition is

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------------|
| Okute lu chiwe! | - | Awgu dialect |
| Let he who brings protect | - | English |
| Eka ive nwe madu | - | Awgu |
| Glory be to the owner of mankind! | - | English |

This successful delivery of a baby made the mother rest for twenty-eight days. During this period the woman was provided with assorted comestibles which made her regain her lost strength and refill her sunken chins and thinned skin. Relations and none filed in and out of the compound to register their joy for the newcomer. The joy of this arrival was entwined with the joy of the society. This was depicted in songs commemorating this divine gift by the women who lived in that hamlet.

Song:

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Chinenye nwa aa | God the giver of a child |
| Ekwela k' uwa k' omu olu nwa a | Do not permit the world to abuse me because of a child |
| K' ayara ijum | So that people should not ask me |
| O lee ebe nwa m ahu no oo | Where is that child of mine! |

This is a rendition that society improvised to appeal to God to give them responsible children and not the type society (the world) will perceive as treacherous, that will make society panic-stricken, and so, bring shame and mockery to the family and community. Again, the out-dooring ceremony of the newcomer exemplified social unison and belongingness. Children of the hamlet and relations elsewhere were invited. There was no discrimination in this invitation because the children, the baby being brought out to the open and those yet to be born, were all gifts from God as pointed out in the salutations of visitors above. Those too young to accompany the baby's mother to water-bathe at a streamside were lulled in a song which aimed at wiping off their tears and keeping them calm for the troop of children accompanying the woman delivered of the baby was already on its way home.

The song:

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|-----------------------------------|---|
| Unu akwavo I' ayi alamite o o o | Do not cry again for we are already returning home! |
| Iya e – e – e | Chorus |
| Unu akwavo I' ayi alamite o o o o | Do not cry again for we are already very near home! |
| Iya e – e – e | Chorus |
| E – e - e – e – e – e | Chorus |
| Iya e – e – e – e | Chorus |

This song shows spiritual union between those on the way and at home; it shows the social recognition that what touched a group touched the other; it shows that those at home were

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patiently waiting for the returnees and would not do anything until everyone was around. This tradition along with its associated songs becoming moribund shows that different tunes are being beaten by those who have come home and by foreigners who encourage their culture but beat discordant tunes about how not to keep a people going.

Out-dooring or “Nfuta Omugwo” is a celebration of social acceptability of every child. It celebrates, also, the children’s acceptance of the new comer who has come to join them. It is a reminder that the OWNER OF MANKIND whose supplicating name is variously given to these children has, once again, added to the number of those who go by His name. Such names given to these children and which are reenacted in outdooring are: Chibike, Chinenye, Ikechukwu, Chinyere, Chinweuba, Chinecherem, Chiagoziem, Chidiebere, etc. Does out-dooring involve oracular worship? Does it involve child sacrifice? Does it involve any path-way sacrifice? Does it involve voodoo practice? Do we abandon what nature has put in our midst to ensure togetherness, trust, neighbourliness and rapport?

“Mkpamkpa Ovia” – Crop Fields Scavenging

This is a fiesta of giving free reins to poor people to scavenge harvested farm fields and to harvest leftovers deliberately or oversightly left. Awgu people were aware that many among them were poor or destitute who could starve if not aided. So, every year, at the appointed time, these paupers were able to be cared for by their fairly established neighbours. Where is this welfare that had sustained our less fortunate ones? Where is that spirit of brotherly keeping? (onye aghale nwanne ya)? I remember this as if it were yesterday! Today, despoiling one at an empty field not belonging to one is tantamount to theft, especially if one is holding something harvested from such a farm.

The essence of a moonlight play is for one to identify oneself with one’s fellow mankind: the moonlight reaches everyone’s compound. The isolation of one from one’s neighbours makes one soulless. Such a person like Shylock must have been reincarnated by the soul of the fiercest wolf which informed his not being bothered with the wretched conditions of his likes.

Conclusion

The characters, Mr Grasshopper and Mr Tortoise, epitomize indolence, avarice and sabotage of functioning social group. Rejecting Grasshopper’s plea for help is a direct denunciation of the undesirability of loafing around while others toil and sweat for tomorrow. Similarly, stripping the paraphernalia of majesty off Tortoise apparently depicts spontaneous renunciation of power unanimously bestowed on him, declamation of abuse to trust, and rejection of authority seemingly conferred on him. This on-the-spot scorn on these symbols of personality brings to mind the sensory picture of rejecting an Oba by the Oyomesi (king makers of Yoruba land):

The people reject you!
The earth rejects you!
The gods reject you!

This avowed contempt for greed and laziness resulted in the death of one and the smashing of the shell of one as testimonies for what society detests. In contrast to distaste for villainy and mischief-making, manifesting in social ostracism, is society’s panegyricism for honour, patriotism, and bravery. ‘Okolokoludele’ and ‘Uzoma’ symbolize the soul of society. They wiped tears of

intimidation and humiliation off the face of society without counting gains there from. These were archetypal Awgu and Igbo children whose legacies are block phrase appellations: “One who volunteered to take an oracular oath on behalf of a whole community!” These prototypes of divine creation did not have mercenary intention nor titular craving for rendering help to their people. Today, this joy is growing dim and the Igbo glories are passing away, as nondescripts, loafers, and saboteurs of Igbo race and of fundamental principles are on the arena beating and dancing tunes unknown to Igbo-land. The very substructure of Igbo leadership suffering the blitzkrieg is the ‘OZO’. Lamenting on the decay of this administrative machinery, Basden (264/5) observes:

Unfortunately, the order has degenerated of recent years into little more than a money-making concern. In many cases the holders of the title are mere youths who inspire no feelings of respect and who detract from its dignity rather than added to it. Young men acting as clerks, interpreters, carpenters and so forth having seized the opportunity of making money which presented itself simultaneously with the opening up of the country by the government, and earning (or otherwise collecting) money quickly, have immediately offered themselves as candidates for the Awzaw order...; with such a collection of irresponsible young men as members of the order, all right to exercise any real control over the affairs of the community has been forfeited.

Basden’s observation unequivocally indicts the colonial government, the *nouvou-riches* ostentatiously flaunting their wealth to entice, and “the old men, (who) for the sake of temporary gain, have sacrificed the dignity and the privileges of the Awzaw order and are chiefs in the proper meaning of the term no longer” (265). This undoubtedly marked the beginning of the recognition of the like of the slack Mr. Grasshopper and the unconscionable Mr. Tortoise in Igbo society and, so, the commencement of the corrosion in consolidating Igbo values.

In line with degeneration of values is what I term ‘cross-boarder’ marriage (Marriage contracted without bothering to find out the parental backgrounds of spouses). This reminds one of a character Rosalinda as the boy Ganymede in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* who rebukes another character (a girl) for falling in love with a dream and subsequently quips: “It is your type that litters the earth with ill-behaved children”. Many Igbo children in offices exemplify behaviours suggesting the absence of “Igwebuiké” as Mr. Tortoise and “onye aghara nwanne ya”, and in so doing, portray themselves as ill-behaved, trait anathema to pristine Igboland.

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