Place of Arts in Traditional Process of Conflict Resolution in Igboland of Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the place of arts in traditional process of conflict resolution in Igboland. In traditional process of conflict resolution arts plays vital roles geared towards amending estranged relationship. the article explores the use of arts such as graffiti, symbols and dramatization in conflict resolution. The study made extensive use of historical method of Qualitative contents and objective analysis of both primary and secondary sources. The findings of this study reveal among other things that graffiti, emotion and the application of symbols play vital role in the processes of dispute resolution in Igboland. Furthermore, the findings reveal that in Igboland the deployment of art in conflict resolution is not rehearsed like the ones displayed in theaters rather they are involuntary action.

Keywords: Arts, Tradition, Relationships, Conflict Resolution, Igboland

Introduction

Conflict is a culture which every society or individuals exhibit at any time under provocation. It is a product of human socio-cultural, political and economic interactions. However, individuals and societies in bid to manage or mitigate the destructive aspect of conflict evolved means towards its resolution as it surfaces. In Igboland, conflict is communally based and its resolution is treated as paramount for peaceful co-existence. To this end various means of conflict resolution are used. In these means of conflict resolution, arts play significant role even though it is not seen as such. A cursory look at Igbo traditional process of conflict resolution does not show any form of arts. But a careful look at the process of conflict resolution reveal arts but its uniqueness is that they are not rehearsed in any form from one community to another.

Arts play vital role in human activities especially in education and in changing ones mood. According to Thompson (2020,1) "*arts has the potential to change each one of us, on a personal, individual level, not only affecting our moods and attention span but also promoting better self-awareness and better social knowledge*." This assertion is correct because arts such like music, painting or sculpture is philosophical. The engagement of these arts enable us develop that spirit of empathy, encourages individuals to view issues or things from new perspectives and also position us to better understand others. Regular contact with arts enable us exercise our critical thinking ability (Thompson, 2020). The use of arts in conflict resolution has been getting current, however these arts are planned. It is intentionally used to create awareness on the need for real conflict resolution process (Mtukwa,2015). However the place of arts in conflict resolution in traditional process of conflict resolution has not been fully explored by scholars, hence the need for this paper.

For the purpose of clarity a distinction must be made here to clarify the type of art under discussion from others forms. There are diverse descriptions and definitions of arts. Aniakọ (2002) views that "art is any aesthetic object which stimulates and elicits emotional response from beholder, and lives such as a one with lasting emotional and perhaps intellectual experience." Aniako (2002) also states "*arts have the capacity to make both emotional and intellectual impression on someone that comes in contact with it*." Furthermore, arts generally are rarely involuntary activities because a lot of rehearsals go into it in order to perfect it before the actual presentations. On the contrary, the Igbo traditional arts in conflict resolution are involuntary response reaching out from the psych of the participants. The paper aims to explore the place of art in conflict resolution in Igbo traditional societies. This aim will be achieved through the discussions of the following variables such as symbolisms in conflict resolution, the place of graffiti and dramatization process of conflict resolution.

Symbolisms in Conflict Resolution

Symbolism is the use of symbols to represent emotions, mystical ideas, states of mind or imagination. In Igbo traditional processes of conflict resolution, the use of symbols play significant roles. The two notable symbols used in conflict resolution are the application of broomstick and the placement of *Omu* known as palm front. These symbols are preventive measures that warn the conflicting parties to sheath their swords and return to the resolution table.

Ini Aziza (to give broom stick)

The *ini aziza* was and still is an art that is used to another means of initiate a conflict resolution process in Igboland. The process was usually employed when there is a threat

to someone's life. The threatened individual would usually consult family members and after a careful assessment by the family, an emissary is sent with the *Aziza* to the family or compound head of the aggressor. On getting to the compound of the aggressor, the emissary will demand to see the family or compound head and then explained his mission. He will then hand the broom stick over to the elder with the following words: *nwangi si oya he egbu nwaneyi ila anyi ji nigi nkpisi aziza bu ile anyi nife gi du ya aka unu maya chotukwaya acho.* This literary means, your son threatened to kill our son and just as we have giving you this broomstick, so have we handed over the life of one of their own to your family for safe keeping and we don't want to look for the life Urum (2018)

Furthermore, in communities such as Afikpo, Amasiri and Edda the giving of broom stick was done without the physical broom stick. Rather, a pronouncement to that effect was done. Irrespective of how it was done, whether with physical object or not but provided the complaint was made in respect to threat to life, it commanded the strongest attention. The significance is that the aggressor's family and the community with this act are duly informed that a life threatening dispute had begun between the two families. When the aggressor's family received the broom stick, they would consult their own, and immediately sought for resolution. The purpose of making haste in resolving this type of matter was not to create any avenue for the enemy of the aggressor's family to kill the threatened individual, but that the family would be held accountable. If death occurred naturally, the offending family or individual were still held accountable. This death burden usually forces the aggressor's family to drive the conflict resolution process instead of the other way round. Usually this kind of conflict was usually resolved through oath-taking or blood covenant (Urum and Agbai (2018). The emphasis here is on the broom stick journey that moves from person to person. The significance is how the movement and broomstick play part in conflict resolution.

Ọmu (Palm Frond) Placement

Another symbol of arts in conflict resolution in Igboland is the deployment of palm frond. The palm frond was one and still is one of the most important and highly valuable symbols of peace and conflict resolution that is extra ordinarily revered and generally recognized in Igboland. The palm frond in Igboland is generally known as *Ọmu* or *Ọmu Nkwu.* The *omu nkwu* is the first and immature furl of the palm tree which is found at the centre of the topmost part of the palm tree. It is also the earliest formations of the palm tree which matures into the palm leaves. Generally, *Ọmu* signified peace, and an invitation to the negotiation forum and peaceful settlement of conflicts. Nwoko (2016) asserts that:

> If two members of a compound or different compounds are engaged in a disputes and. one of them sends the Ọmu leaflets to the family or compound head of the other, this implies that he/she is instituting a report against the other, which also translates that the search or need for peaceful resolution between the parties is needed by the party that sends the palm frond.

In a circumstance as indicated above, the head of the family or compound immediately summoned the two parties for peaceful action, negotiation and settlement of whatever matter. *Ọmu* played an important function as a special symbol of peace, harmony, negotiation and resolution. This traditional summons was observed or made through the given or extension *Ọmu*. When this was done; it indicated that the parties involved in the dispute were in need of peaceful and harmonious resolution.

The significance of *Ọmu* in conflict resolution is enormous. It initiated and sustained the resolution processes, by forcing the parties concerned to the resolution table. Its presence in the disputed property or economic tree signified that one had trespassed. Symbolically, it connoted that caution be applied in a given situation that warranted its usage. It is like placing a *caveat emptor* on a land until the issue surrounding its usage or ownership is determined. Its uniqueness and potency lay in the fact that its presence sent a signal to all concerned to keep off irrespective of social status until all the simmering issue concerning the property is amicably resolved (0nuoha, 2019).

Ọmu is usually applied in the following:

i. land boundary
ii. Buildings
iii. Economic and domestic trees (When it is placed in I, ii, and iii it serves as an injunction to stay off the land, trees or crops, and property).
iv. Masquerade setting. Its presence in this setting, warned the uninitiated and women to keep off from the area in order to avoid conflict with the group (D. Eze, Personal communication, June 10, 2018).

Apart from the general application of *Ọmu* among the Igbo people, the application varies from community to community. For instance, in Abiriba you can either place it as it is used generally or make a small palm frond house and place the *omu* in the disputed property Urum (2018).

The application of *Ọmu* varied in the Cross River Igbo area. In Abam and Ohafia it was the Ekpe cultural group that placed the *Ọmu*. This was also applicable in Bende, Umuhia, Ngwaland communities. Conversely, in Afikpo and Amasiri it was the age grade and the Ogo cultural groups who performed such task. But in Abiriba, it was the Eze court that placed the *Ọmu* on the disputed property. Unlike in other communities mentioned were *Ekpe* masquerade group that not only tie the *Ọmu* but also resolve the conflict. In Abiriba, the *Ekpe* masquerade group only entertained members of the public during cultural festivals and burial ceremony of one of their own and play no role in conflict resolution. It is worthy to note that individuals also are at liberty to place the *Ọmu* Urum & Anyim, (2018).

Dramatization

Dramatization in conflict resolution is different from actual drama. According to J.N Amankulo refers to drama as *"art of mimesis or imitation in which actors are used to tell a story for an assembled audience by imitating or re-living the actions of the characters in the story."* In other words drama involves rehearsals approach that all the participants are made to play a script before the display it in front of an audience. But dramatization in this context involves involuntary response. It is triggered by the need to restore order in conflict situation or to prevent the outbreak of conflict. The dramatization processes under review are libation, breaking of kolanut and peace protest march.

Libation and Breaking of Kolanut: These two activities go hand in hand. They can be used at the same time if both are available but either of them can be used to achieve the same purpose of inviting the gods and ancestors to be present in any event in Igboland. Libation is made to the gods and ancestors either with *Mmayi Miri* (palm wine) or *Ọji Igbo* (Igbo kolanut which was very important in any gathering in Igboland). In this context what is to be stressed in palm wine is its dramatization presentation. The palm wine is presented by an elder who uses wonderful lyrics of prayer to invite the ancestors and the gods to come and ensure that fairness and equity is achieved and also to ward off evil spirits that will come to ensure that progress will not be achieved. As the libation progresses the people present in unison responds the word *Isēē* (an equivalent of Amen or so let it be) to the prayers or incantation. The uniqueness of this is that neither the elder offering the libation nor the responding *Isēē* were beforehand told what to say or how to respond. In other words, it is a spontaneous respond from the psych of the people. And as the lyrics are said so the one offering the libation pour small quantity of the wine to the earth and at the end of the libation lyrics the whole palm wine in the cup is poured away. This exercise gives the people confidence that the gods are involved.

On the other hand, breaking of kola nut follows almost the same process like palm wine libation. But with little variation which this discussion will highlight such as type of kola nut and nature of participation. It is not any kind of kola nut that was used for conflict resolution or other events in Igboland. It is significant to note that *Gworo* (a type of kola nut owned by Hausa people) or any other type of kola nut that is not of Igbo origin is used in libation. Furthermore, it is not also every kind of kola nut of Igbo origin is used. For instance, *Ọji Otu Mkpi* (A Kola with one cotyledon) is a dumb kola or Kola for the spirit and is not used for libation. *Ọji Mkpi Abuọ* (Kola with two cotyledons like gworo or cola nitida) is equally a dumb kola and is not acceptable to the spirits. *Ọji Mkpi Atọ* (Kola with three cotyledons) is called *Ọji Ndi Ikė* (kola for warriors) and it is only meant for the warriors and war gods as a matter of principle. *Ọji Mkpi Anọ* (Kola with four cotyledons) is *Ọji Udo Na Ngọzi* (kola of peace and blessing) is the type of kola used for conflict resolution. Furthermore, *Ọji Mkpi isė* (Kola with five cotyledons) is *Ọji Mmuba Na Ihuọma* (Kola of procreation and favour mostly used in the blessing of newly married couples). *Ọji Mkpi ishii* (Kola with six cotyledons) is *Ọji Ndi Nmuọ na Mmadu* (Kola of communion between the gods and humanity), the smallest part is not eaten but thrown away for the gods to eat. This type of *Ọji* is also used for conflict resolution (Nwankwo, 2010 and Onuoha,2019). In terms of participation unlike the palm wine libation were it was an exclusive reserve for one elder to exercise while others present only responded by *Isēē* echo, breaking of kolanut involves mass participation. The movement of the kolanut and the the full participation of all present is a clear definition of an art without rehearsal.

Peace Protest Match

It is an unplanned means to alert the community that a person's right have been trampled upon and that there is need to calm the frayed nerves. It is deployed by mostly youths or women. In this protest march the people involved carry mostly leaves and begin to chant round the village and through their songs one can easily understand the issue that prompted the match. The protest always ends in the following places: family head house, chief of the community or king of the village. In these places is where they will tell the authority concerned that issue. A complaint laid by a peace protest receives speed hearing as delay may lead to breaking down of other. For instance, from 1984, a violent conflict plagued Abiriba Kindom of Estern Nigeria and every peace move proved abortive. In the early hours November 23, 1992, Abiriba women without exception sneaked out of their beds and assembled on where they agreed to meet. From spot at Abiriba embarked on the great trek to resolve the conflict that has defied everybody and the government. They trekked 45 kilometers from Abiriba and arrived at Government House in Umuahia. This action led to the resolution of the protracted conflict (Urum, 2018 and Oji, 2011). Another process of conflict resolution by women in some part of Igboland is called *Ikopefifia*

(dumping of refuse at aggressor's compound) and *Ibuo Ike* (old women basing their buttocks) either before the aggressor or at his or her compound. These method are deployed by women when other forms of conflict resolution proved abortive and when preventive measures are not respected (C. Okoko,Personal Communication, March 10, 2018).

Graffiti

Graffiti is the use of objects such as stone, painting, carving etc to transmit messages that is intended to teach, advice or orientate people. This statement agrees with (Obiozor,2008) statement that graffiti is filled with philosophical orientations, knowledge and interpretations. Graffiti are in many forms such as proverbs, idioms, philosophical writing, carving in wood and mental, paintings depicting local events (Obiozor,2008). There are various forms of art graffiti used in Igboland during conflict resolution session. They include songs, proverbs, stones, woods carved in human forms (known as Offor na Ogu), effigy, supernatural reference among others. Each of these graffiti is used depending on the nature of conflict and resolution intended. Some of these graffiti such as peace songs and chants are rarely referenced during conflict resolution session although the go a long way to reorient the people on the dangers of conflict and the important of peace. Proverbs and references to the supernatural are the continuous arts that are used from the beginning of conflict resolution session till the end. While the deployment of carved words, effigy and stones are mostly used at the last stage of conflict resolution session to administer oaths when languages persuasions fails to bring resolution. These graffiti for the purpose of this discussion grouped into three types namely Oral graffiti, visible graffiti and invisible graffiti.

Oral Graffiti

Proverbs: Proverbs are one of the oral graffiti constantly used in every conflict resolution session in Igboland. These phrases in marbles are crafted and aptly applied as discussions goes on during conflict resolution. Proverbs (*Ilu*) is a soft phrase or words full of meaning implanted in the people's daily language. It has the potency to command the attention of the ear. It is believed to proceed from a heart full of wisdom. In agreement with this statement, Kanu (2014), observes that "it is the wisdom and experience of people, usually of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression." Similarly, Arinze (2008, 42) avers that, "proverb crystallize that accumulated wisdom of a people handed down by the ancients from generation to generation." The uniqueness of *ilu* is that it was not ambiguous or jargon reserved for a particular exclusive group. Rather, they are known and understood by every member of the community. It is interesting to note that *Ilu* is encapsulated in beliefs, customs and traditions of the people.

In is a general belief that Igbo people enjoy hearing good Proverb and when such is used used at the appropriate time during conflict resolution had the capacity to soften the mood of the disputants. In respect to conflicts and peaceful co-existence *ilu* was embedded in the people's daily language usually expressed through phrases. Some of these conflict resolution *ilu* are:

i. *Mbata nwahahu Nde* ififie *ji ka uku* (how big is a small town with mad people more in number?). This connoted that a family or community should jettison prolonged conflict situation and that people should always play roles to reconcile differences in spite of the fact that the dispute was not of their making. And that the more people were torn apart, the less and powerless they become.

ii. Adigi *egbupu ekpuaka* (one cannot cut off the bone in the hand), this means that it is impossible to separate from your siblings and blood relations. In other words, dispute should be resolved with tolerance and forgiveness.;

iii. *Egburu gbuiri ururu, egburu gbuiri okpukpu* (fairness and equity). This entailed that in conflict resolution the verdict should be fair or equitable to all concern that there should not be miscarriage of justice.

iv. *Adighi agbaha ubi nihi oru effifia* (farm is not abandoned because it has grown weeds). This saying means that you cannot abandon a person due to the fact that he or she breaks the law or misbehave that goodness could still come from the person if treated accordingly. This made conflict resolution a communal venture.

v. *Kala imi kala onu* (The nose and mouth are very close). This means that individuals in conflict situation had a lot in common in terms of relationships that forbade one seeking revenge or huge compensation.

vi. *Ifere adighi eme onye ififie kama umunwaneya* (A mad man does not feel ashamed, rather his people). The family or a people should not allow conflict to bring shame to the entire family irrespective of the offence. All should resolve it.

vii. Similarly to the above, is *nkpisi nge rusa mmanu ya ette osugba mbou* (When one finger touches the oil it spread to the others). This connoted that conflicts be nipped in the board before it escalates. Afterall if it was for good all would benefit.

viii. *Onwegu Nde noni Adidi Emeta Emezi* (There is no group that exists without conflict and effort at resolving it). The import of this proverb is that since conflict is inevitable, let us always resolve it and not allow anything to disintegrate us.

ix. *Ukaa emelam ka mmasa obu gi* (This conflict has revealed your heart to me). It means that conflict served as a mirror that revealed the heart of man and helped one to moderate his/her behavour in inter-personal relations.

x. *Adighi Ėdėbė Oso Ibe Adi Agwọ Ọria Anya* (It means that pepper is not kept where eyes are cure). This means that any language or act that will not encourage reconciliation during conflict resolution should not be used or displayed (D. Uduma, U. Igbani, and K. Mba, personal communication, September 15 2018).

Proverbs are still used in all the processes of conflict resolution in Igboland.

Visible Graffiti

These are not abstract like oral graffiti but are physical. There are *Ofo* and (effigy) the symbols of truth, justice and authority. It is important to emphasize the fact that *Ofo is abstractly* accompanied by *Ogo* (which means uprightness). In other words, it means the popular aphorism which states 'he who comes to equity must come with clean hands.' The striking of the *Ofo* after the pronouncements during conflict resolution means the sealing of the agreement reached and all the people present affirms what is agreed by saying let it be in unison (D. Uduma, U. Igbani, and K. Mba, personal communication, September 15 2018, and Kanu and Kanu,2020). The *Ofo* is like the gavel used by a court judge or a presiding office. Others are sacred stones, pots among others. These items are used in conflict resolution to perform oath or blood covenant. The disputants are made to either use them to swear or step on them.

Conclusion

This paper explored the place of arts in conflict resolution in Igboland; it shows that although conflict is a hostile behaviour it can be managed or resolved through arts. The paper explained that art symbols like broom stick, palm fronds play significant roles to reconcile disputants or also help the conflict situation not to escalate by bringing the disputants to negotiation table. It also revealed that dramatization such as peace protest and graffiti such as effigy and proverbs are art used to resolve conflict. While graffiti are used to change the rigid mood of the disputants towards reconciliation posture, dramatization helps in bringing the disputants to resolution arena. The significance of these arts in conflict resolution is that irrespective of the issue that it is very easy to resolve, hence, the deployment of insignificant instruments in its resolution. It is worthy of note that the deployment of these arts under review is a general culture that is wide spread in Igboland

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