

Achieving Global Peace through the Igbo Concept of Justice in Language and Proverbs

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ABSTRACT--- *Achieving and sustaining global peace has been the most human challenge, and strive of all functions of world bodies including the United Nations. In short such bodies like the UN came into existence in search for world peace but this has remained elusive owing largely to misapplication of power and justice by some world leaders. For the Igbo nation of Southeast Nigeria, just as a man is considered impotent if he cannot impregnate a woman by sexual intercourse, someone's power is deemed impotent if such is unjust and so cannot ensure peace. Hence the proverb Egbereugoberenkesiribeyaebelankukwaaya (let the kite perch and the eagle perch, whichever refuses the other to perch may her wings break). This study examines how the world can achieve peace with the Igbo concept of justice in language and proverbs, and evidence of this in some events of their history with the Nigerian state. Proverbs are the heart of Igbo language and culture but have yet to receive needed academic attention and so have remained under-researched. Thus the importance of this study. Research method is descriptive qualitative with Igbo proverbs as source of data from observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. The data were analysed qualitatively using Interactive Analytical Model. Results show that Igbo language and proverbs on justice form the people's worldview in response to Nigeria's injustices especially following the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. A worldview that has made the region more peaceful and resilient despite the odds. This study recommends adherence to the Igbo concept of justice by world powers for achieving global peace.*

Keywords—Global Peace, Igbo Justice, Impotence of Power, Proverbs

I. INTRODUCTION

Justice in Igbo is *ikwubakaotọ* or *ikpenkwumotọ*. The word *ikwubakaotọ* is itself made up of different words: *ikwuba* (to stand), *aka* (hand) and *otọ* (straight, up). Put together, this literally means: to keep one's hands straight up or to keep hands upright. The second word *ikpenkwumotọ* is made up of *ikpe* (judgment), *nkwumotọ* (upright standing, straightness). Contextually, taken together, both *ikwubakaotọ* and *ikpenkwumotọ* respectively imply being upright, straightforward and just in one's words, deeds and judgment[1]. In particular, *ikpenkwumotọ* means upright judgment. In other words, for the Igbo (Ndigbo), justice means uprightness/straightforwardness or justness in one's dealings with others. And that is the basis for which a leader is regarded; the absence of which results to chaos as peace eludes. This is well expressed in the proverb *let the kite perch and the eagle perch, whichever refuses the other to perch may her wings break*[2]. Not only does this

worldview ensure uprightness and equality, equity and truthfulness, it guarantees non-delay and non-denial of justice especially for the oppressed. This is unlike the global (western) sense of justice which has pursued (or pretends to pursue) peace through slavery, colonialism and war as evident from the transatlantic slavery, balkanisation of Africa and the daily bullying of the rest of the world by the global west like the US and Russia. In truth, in Igbo language and proverbs, lies a better understanding of justice needed to quell all the global injustices and enthrone peace. Because for the Igbo, injustice to one is injustice to all. And so those privileged with the levers of power ought to be cautious using them on those not so privileged.

Igbo language is a very important part of Igbo culture. Although it is predominantly spoken by the Igbo (Ndigbo) of Southeast Nigeria, it is today the language of over 70 million people around the world. The CIA World Factbook allotted 32 million of this number to the indigenous Igbo (one of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups)[3]. Not only is this number controversial but it is also an unjust fabrication by Nigerian authorities to deliberately deflate the official population of Ndigbo just to give especially the rest of the other major ethnic groups—Hausa and Yoruba—a numerical superiority.

For its importance, Igbo language is highly stylised by the use of fanciful and didactic proverbs so that points are made without inflicting pains on the listeners during conversations. Unfortunately, this is yet to receive the needed academic attention, hence the importance of this study. Proverbs are defined as short witty sayings in general use; stating a general truth or piece of advice. Evident in Igbo language and literature, proverb does more than advise or tell general truths. They form the fulcrum around which the people live and sum up life experiences[4]. This attests to the irrefutability of the bond between language and literature. Hence the concepts of power, justice and peace find themselves well expressed in proverbs as they importantly determine the peace or otherwise of a society. These concepts mean different things to different people but in the context of this paper suffice it to say that while power is the ability to influence, justice is exerting that ability fairly, righteously, equitably, truthfully and indeed with equality. To this extent, peace is the result or expected outcome of applying the said characteristics of justice by a leader or holder of power.

And so unlike the global sense of justice; equality, equity and truth are the hallmarks of Igbo concept of justice both in thought and in deed. Thus, justice takes the centre stage as the central argument of this paper because for the Igbo

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and in reference to the meaning of power above, a leader is as powerful (influential) to the extent he is just. But beyond conventional meanings, as reflected in their proverbs, the Igbo notion of justice in relation to peace and power, also stems from the fact that without justice there cannot be peace or at most there will be a 'restless' peace[5]. In short, the Igbo believe that those (the leaders) who turn blind eye to injustice will sooner or later be located by the searching eyes of justice. On this, they hold that all the agitations and secessionist tendencies like the Igbo do through Biafra are all reactions towards government's skewed policies which are systematically anti-Igbo.

Having established that proverbs are core part of Igbo language and culture which define a people, for the Igbo, not only are proverbs used to convey serious messages in simple manner, they easily make lasting impressions on one's mind for lasting code of conduct about serious matters like power, justice and peace. That was why Achebe—an Igbo and one of Africa's most famous literary giants—said that "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten"[6]. Indeed, in Igbo language and culture, proverbs are both highly symbolic and are the only strong weapon used to convey important information on such matters as justice as in *egbebereugoberenkesiriibeyaebelankukwaaya* (let the kite perch and the eagle perch, whichever refuses the other to perch may her wings break). This proverb captures the totality of Igbo sense of justice which protects the poor from the rich and saves the weak from the strong. It gives everyone a level playing ground, making all equal before the law. Focused on language and culture—the people's way of life—this study offers a unique and richer understanding of Igbo concept of justice because earlier studies had looked at the concept from traditions, customs and rituals of the people. Equally of note is that this is the first study using phenomenological method and purposive sampling. Phenomenological method entails giving a meaning to human experiences (phenomena). The fundamental principle of the phenomenological approach is that the researcher must remain true to the facts and how they reveal themselves[7]. Igbo is just one of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups. But Igbo is chosen for this study because it is the only ethnic group suffering government's sanctioned hate and institutionalised injustice especially since after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. No doubt the injustice has always been there but it worsened following the war.

"Carved out of the west of Africa by Britain without regard for preexisting ethnic, cultural and linguistic divisions, Nigeria has often experienced an uncertain peace. Following decades of ethnic tension in colonial Nigeria, political instability reached a critical mass among independent Nigeria's three dominant ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the Southwest, and Igbo in the southeast. On January 15, 1966, the Igbo launched a coup d'état under the command of Major-General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi in an attempt to save the country from what Igbo leaders feared would be political disintegration"[8].

A. The Event of Nigeria-Biafra Civil War

Historically, the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Nigerian-Biafran War, was a three-year bloody conflict with

a death toll numbering more than one million people. It was seven years after Nigeria gained independence from Britain that the war began with the secession of the Southeastern region of the nation on May 30, 1967, when the region declared itself the independent Republic of Biafra. It is worth noting that the then Southeastern region comprised Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Calabar, Enugu, Anambara, Abia and indeed all the communities in the South-South and Southeastern parts of today's Nigeria. As reports have it, the ensuing battles and well-publicised human suffering prompted international outrage and intervention[9].

So the question is: How have the Igbo (Ndigbo) related with the Nigerian state through their concept of justice in proverbs, and how can the world achieve global peace via same? For the purposes of this paper, a little bit of history is important for Igbo proverb says "that those who do not know where the rain started beating them will not know where it stopped"[10]. The story of Nigeria's injustice and envy against Ndigbo (also known as Biafrans) has always been there even pre-independence but it worsened immediately after the independence which then led to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-1970), culminated with the war and persisted till this day.

It was reported that in 1966, anti-Ibo (Igbo) rioting, largely by Hausas, killed about 30,000 Ibos (Igbo) and created about a million Ibo refugees. According to one of the war accounts, it was fear of renewed killing that kept many Ibos fighting. Consequently, it was almost inevitable that in 1967, the Ibos (Igbo) broke away from Nigeria largely because they feared massacres at the hands of their ethnic rivals - the Hausa in the North and Yoruba in the South. Though all three groups are Nigerian, they are about as similar to one another as the French are to the Germans or the Italians [11]

It is on record that between 1966 and 1969, millions of the Igbo were burnt and buried alive, laid on rail tracks and crushed with speed-moving British trains. Wombs of pregnant mothers and wives were ripped open after being systematically raped; Biafran kids were beaten to death with cudgels; Russian and British tanks rained bombs on the Igbo and old men and women together with children twitched to ashes. Brave men who confronted western tanks with locally made war technologies had their bodies riddled with bullets supplied to Nigeria by nations who gave same people the Bible and taught them the way of the Cross. Indeed, Ndigbo have become so endangered in Nigeria that their condition could only be likened to that of the Rohingya and Uyghur Turkic Muslims in Myanmar and China respectively. And why did the war happen in the first place? Because the Biafrans wanted a just and equitable treatment from the Nigerian state but were shunned and killed in the process. For as it is, despite the fact that it is the Biafran resources that sustain Nigeria, the Biafrans get little or nothing from the commonwealth. Therefore apart from the immediate preceding proverb, the Igbo's response to the push of war by Nigerian state was based on this proverb: *o bilaraegbu m gbu o onweya* (may he die, who wants me dead)[12]. In truth, the average Igbo does not cower in the face of tyranny



and injustice. In short, he would rather die than succumb to unjust treatment. The historic heroism of Igbo landing at Dunbar Creek during the transatlantic slavery and Aba Women Riot of 1858 and 1929 respectively.

So the Igbo have always been opposed to injustice and so would have ordinarily preferred dying in the war to being unjustly treated like slaves in their own country.

It is equally on record that despite the lack of resources and international support, Biafra stood firm refusing to surrender in the face of overwhelming Nigerian military superiority.

Among the war prosecutors and their kin is a feeling of triumphalism. As Akam observes, "An average non Igboon the [Nigerian] street feels more important, and bet me he is, in the Nigerian project than the most successful Igbo man. With a feeling of inferiority, the Igbo leaders leap northwards in search of political relevance"[13]. Among others, it is experience as this that has made justice the core of life for Ndigbo dating back to pre-colonial days.

The year 1914 saw the amalgamation by the British of the Southern and Northern protectorates that make up what is today called Nigeria. From that time to 30 September 1960—46 years marked the British colonisation or rather occupation of the Nigerian territory—their 'selfish' forced marriage of a people more divided than they are united. While the Christian majority of mainly Yoruba and Ndigbo share the Southern region, the Muslims of predominantly Hausa-Fulani reside in the North. Because of the scope of this paper, the Igbo who at the dawn of colonisation embraced Christianity were almost 100% Christian until recently due to political convenience; are ontologically egalitarian and republican unlike their Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani neighbours. Whereas both the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba could do with government by fiat or imposition through their *Emirs* and *Obas* who wield almost absolute authority, Ndigbo on the other hand are completely averse to that kind of rulership as clearly stated in the popular saying that *Igboe nweeze*[14]. Though this literally means that Ndigbo have no king, it actually implies that Ndigbo unlike their other ethnic neighbours are averse to leadership by imposition, oppression or mere succession devoid of merit. For their love for excellence in place of mediocrity, they engender debate and search for meritocracy in leadership choice.

This therefore, runs contrary to the popular Western belief that prior to colonisation, Africans had no organised functional power and justice system. But the Igbo nation of Southeast Nigeria as seen from their worldview in proverbs not only had an organised and functional power and justice system but equally one that dwarfs that of the West and should be adopted by all for a sustainable peaceful world. But the West's deliberate misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the African and the attendant negative effects on the latter is not at all surprising as it corroborates what the famous Igbo author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls the dangers of a single story. This, she says, dispossesses from the people their worth and dignity while at the same time imposing on them a convenient tag of worthlessness and poverty of values. In one of his writings, a fellow compatriot Chinua Achebe captures this via a popular Igbo proverb that "until the lions have their own

historians, the story of the hunt would always glorify the hunter"[15].

Unfortunately, this has been the story of the African because like in the hunt, his story has been told by his hunter, the West.

A tap into the Igbo justice thought system and power as housed in their proverbs, will go a long way in achieving and sustaining the global peace which everyone sorely desires.

B. Research Objectives

1. To examine the importance of justice to the Igbo as shown in language and proverbs
2. To explain the three make-up qualities of Igbo concept of justice
3. To show how the Igbo concept of justice in language and proverbs can help to achieve global peace

C. Research Questions

1. What is the implication of the Igbo concept of justice as equality in the proverb *anaesin'okeamataonyebu di opkara* (It is when siblings take their shares individually that the favoured child is known)?
2. How have the Igbo applied and responded to the Nigerian state through the proverb *Nkitaanaghia bunwatan'anu o gburu* (the dog should not be relegated or ignored in deciding how to enjoy his own game he killed)?
3. Through the proverb *Ikpemaraeziokwu aka azudiya*, how have the Igbo coped with the non-Igbo who turn blind eye on the injustices done against Ndigbo by the Nigerian state?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In describing the concept of justice, earlier authors and researchers had taken to traditions, customs and rituals as instruments through which the people ensure justice and peaceful coexistence. In short, as it was then, swearing to *arusi* (deity) to ascertain someone's innocence in a case was and is still common among some Igbo communities. In Nsuka for instance it is believed that "deities possessed a vast array of spiritual powers – both friendly and hostile, according to whether a person was good or evil" [16]. Among the consequences is death. To achieve this, a window period of a few market days is given and if the accused dies in any of those days, then he/she is guilty as accused but if not, then is set free. When one is proven innocent, it is referred to as *iji ofo*. *Ofo* is usually represented with a wooden effigy which generally symbolises uprightness, justness and state of being undented by guilt especially when one is accused. *Ofo* – the branchlet of the *Detarium senegalese/elasticum* or *Detarium guiniensis* has different classification and usage in Igboland. Its consecration and ritualization make it a sacred object. It signifies a symbol of authority, justice and decorum in the Igbo societies and culture areas[17].

Sometime in the year 1890, in Asata village, a member in the cabinet of the onyishi (village head) Ugwuoke Ona was accused of unjustly taking over the land of his



neighbour (Chiogbenye). To prove his innocence, the expected thing is for the accused to swear with *Api*, the village deity believed to be as powerful and justice deliverer especially in such matters of adjudication. But for being among the influential members of the village and one of its financiers, the onyishi did all within his powers to shield IchieOna from any form of prosecution. And this left the poor neighbour whose land was taken not only devastated but hopeless.

However, his hope was restored when his wife reminded him of the fact that *Api* delivers justice unconditionally to whomever seeks its justice provided one's hands are clean. On this, Mr. Ona approached the deity bearing the name of IchieOna. Among his requests to the deity was that before the next Eke market day that the accused if guilty be made to run the village naked and do *isaasa* (death-bed confessions of one's atrocities) or himself, Chiogbenye dies. As it turned out, not only did the accused run naked doing the *isaasa* but the onyishi also became suddenly and mysteriously deaf and dumb. The reason being in the Igbo proverb that *nkwaataonyeohibukwaazonyeonyeohi* (one who protects or supports a thief is equally a thief).

Apart from the above scenario, other forms of ensuring justice exist. For instance when one is being fingered as having a hand in another's death, the accused could either be forced to sleep beside the dead person's body or made to drink the water washed off from the corpse. If the accused dies from either of the rituals, then it is believed he or she was responsible for the death but if not, the accused is set free and possible fine is imposed on the accuser as restitution for wrongful accusation.

No doubt the few cases painted above have been veritable ways through which the Igbo people ensured that justice is not only done but also seen to be done no matter whose ox is gored, and so ensured a just and peaceful society, they are all rooted from the people's language and proverbs which are the vehicle through which all cultures are expressed. But then this aspect has not been researched and studied about, hence the essence of this study.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive and analytical qualitative method because it deals with one of the most precious heritages of Ndigbo's culture and language, the proverbs. In the preliterate period, Igbo proverbs were transmitted merely by oral tradition from generation to generation. Using a purposive sampling, Phenomenological method was adopted to elicit the experiences of the Igbo on justice in relationship with the Nigerian state. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon [18]. Hence the data for this study were collected from oral sources through observation, in-depth interviews, and documented evidence (thanks to Western mode of writing embraced by Igbo writers following western influence). And while no one or community can authoritatively lay claim to the authorship or originator of the proverbs, the proverbs have never lost their strong impactful and influential place in Igbo thought. With a 15-member informants (representative of the Igbo population), my primary source of data come from the oral tradition as heard and learned from elders including my

parents, while the secondary source of data come from the documented evidence in terms of books and the like. Across the interviewees are five key and 10 supporting informants respectively.

The key informants were elderly and cultural custodians who not only have in-depth knowledge of Igbo culture, language and proverbs on justice but have experience of Igbo travails with the Nigerian state especially following the civil war. They were aged 40-70 while the supporting informants aged between 35 and above were professionals, academics and elite who have both academic and professional experience as Igbo relating with the Nigerian state. The interviews comprised of key Data analysis technique for this study is interactive analysis model involving: data collection, reduction, presentation and drawing conclusion.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A review of the facts presented show that the Igbo believe that there cannot be peace without justice. Unlike the global concept of justice that exerts justice and pursues peace through conquests of slavery, colonialism and war; Igbo concept not only protects the oppressed but determines the extent of a leader's powers. And so it seeks peace through **equality, equity and truth**. From in-depth interviews, observation and documented evidence, these features have characterised interaction of the Igbo with the Nigerian state as reflected in the following proverbs:

A. Justice as Equality

1. **A na-esin'okeamataonyebudiokpara** (The favoured child is easily identified when inheritance is being shared among siblings).

The implication of this proverb is that the favoured one in a group is easily known when things are shared individually. This particular proverb has been evident in the Igbo life in Nigerian state at least since post-independence and especially after the civil war after Ndigbo wanted to secede from Nigeria, coincidentally also because of government sanctioned injustice against them. This was predicated on the pretext that the 1966 coup d'etat that toppled the first republic killing of mostly Hausa-Fulani leaders, was masterminded by military officers of Igbo extraction to further Igbo interest. But as records show, that is untrue. At the end of the war in 1970, the then federal military government headed by Gen. Yakubu Gowon, a northerner, declared 'No Victor no vanquished'. That is, that neither of the sides won or was defeated. He went on to establish the now 'infamous' project of three 'Rs': Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction [19].

According to this policy, the Igbo are to be reconciled with Nigeria, rehabilitated from the war trauma, and their battered land reconstructed. The billion dollar worth of Igbo properties looted and abandoned in various parts of the country including Port Harcourt and Lagos respectively during the war were also to be returned to Ndigbo according to this plan but unfortunately and unsurprisingly too monies realised as a result went into private pockets of the Military, Nigerian politicians and to other projects not of



common Igbo interests. This further clarified the post-war phrase 'No victor no Vanquished' as simply a mere propaganda to assuage the frayed nerves of Ndigbo and coax them into thinking that they are part of the one Nigeria-ish while being unjustly and systematically schemed out of Nigeria at the same time. This is well captured by Igbo proverb *ata m aruafu m onu*. This means one who bites me but fans me at the same time to soothe the pain. Added to this, to deepen the economic and financial hurt for Ndigbo, the federal government—still casting Ndigbo in the role of treasonable felons and wreckers of the nation—through the directive of the then Federal Finance Commissioner Chief Obafemi Awolowo, adopted a banking policy which nullified any bank account which had been operated during the war by Biafrans, Ndigbo. A [paltry] flat sum of twenty pounds was approved for each Igbo depositor of the Nigerian currency, regardless of the amount of deposit. This has been the lot of Ndigbo especially post Nigeria-Biafra war. And as Achebe put it in *There Was a Country* that if there was ever a measure put in place to stunt, or even obliterate, the economy of a people, this was it [20].

But the chronic injustice and hate did not end there, because after that outrageous charade, the leaders of the federal government of Nigeria sought to devastate the resilient and emerging Eastern [Igbo] commercial sector even further by banning the importation of second-hand clothing and stockfish, two trade items that they knew the burgeoning [Igbo] market towns of Onicha, Aba, and Nnewi needed to emerge. Their fear was that these communities, fully reconstituted, would then serve as the economic engines for the reconstruction of the entire [South] Eastern region [21].

Today, with over sixty eight political parties in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), are the two most popular ones. The PDP—regarded as more nationalistic with some liberal ideals until 2015—has been the ruling party since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic experiment after a lengthy military rule, before losing to APC in 2015 presidential elections. The APC on the other hand leans more to the non-liberal ideals more akin to the Northern Muslims that most people regard it as a Muslim party. Even though Ndigbo have suffered and continue to suffer all the government coordinated injustices, the injustices seem to have worsened since the present administration of Muhammadu Buhari, the current Nigerian president [22]. Buhari is both Hausa-Fulani and Muslim. As one time military head of state in the early 1980s, Buhari jailed Igbo leaders on trumped up charges. Just as the jail terms were unjust, they were equally weird and inhuman. Some of the people he jailed then included Chief Jim Nwobodo, former governor of the then Anambara state who he handed down a 100 year jail sentence. Others were Chief Sam Mbakwe, former governor of the then Imo state, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, former Vice President in Nigeria's second republic which by the way Buhari toppled in a coup d'état to become military head of state. Now as a civilian president, people thought and rightly so that the former stern ethnic and religious bigot was going to be positively different especially given how he carried on with his campaigns attending church programmes and bragging openly of being a reformed democrat.

But like most politicians who promise to build bridges even where there is no river, three years down the line, it is now very obvious that Buhari like the leopard has not changed its spots. As the Igbos say in their proverb, the thing responsible for the bad odour of the shrew is in its bone marrow. This means that the thing responsible for the malodorous smell of the shrew is in its marrow not on the skin.

We must state here that Ndigbo and Nigerians generally do not care about the tribe or religion of their leader if the said leader leads with justice, equity and fairness for all. This is evident from the past country's leaders who were by the way mainly Hausa-Fulani, Northern and Muslim. A very recent example is former president Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua who died in office in 2010. Even though an Hausa-Fulani and Muslim, he is loved among Ndigbo just as much he is among his own ethnic group. And by the way, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, the military head of state that supervised the ethnic cleansing of Ndigbo during the civil war was a Christian like most Ndigbo themselves. So, it has nothing to do with the leader's ethnicity or religion. By the way, Yar'Adua like Buhari was also from Katsina state.

Besides the incessant killings of farmers by Buhari's ethnic Fulani herdsmen, Ndigbo have been especially and serially targeted and marginalised unjustly in so many ways. A recent report of the National Cash Transfer Programme meant to disburse funds to the country's poorest of the poor, shows that not only is the Ndigbo's Southeast geopolitical region the least of the beneficiaries with just 3,253 beneficiaries, it also shows that Katsina which is the president's home state has 41,243 beneficiaries; that is about 12 times more than all the Igbo states put together.

Meanwhile, Nigeria with its huge population, largest in Africa, most of the key federal positions in Nigeria today are held by the President's ethnic group. The Federal Character Commission Act of 1995 provides that there should be a balance in federal government appointments but this has always systematically been made to work against the Igbo even when they are the most qualified for such positions. Of the 67 federal security agencies in Nigeria, none is headed by an Igbo [23]. This is even as the country's security situation is among the worst in Sub-Saharan Africa since it is home to at least two world's deadliest terrorist sects namely Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen. And as history has shown, the situation may never improve and will even get worse unless the Igbo are brought on board.

According to the President, he appoints only those he knows. That is, he selects only people of his region and religion. This is actually unsurprising because he had earlier boasted openly in his infamous Aljazeera interview soon after his election that it was natural for him to favour his people who gave him 97% votes against the rest [Ndigbo] who gave him 7%. But ironically, during elections, like every other politician and as he did in 2015, he seeks votes even from outside his region and religion. Indeed, save during the civil war, Nigeria has never been divided and at war against itself as it is now. This is the unfortunate and sorry state of today's Nigeria that it is most evident that the only workable solution in sight, is separation into

various regions as being advocated strongly by Ndigbo.

B. Justice as Equity

1. **Nkita a naghị a bunwatan'anụ o gburu** (The dog should not be relegated to the background in sharing the game he killed).

This proverb means that one should not be disregarded or made to play a second fiddle when it comes to enjoying one's sweat else it amounts to injustice steeped in equity. There is no gainsaying the fact that Ndigbo were largely responsible for the evolution of Nigeria as an independent country and equally for its sustenance as a one united nation till date despite all the government sanctioned injustices, indignities and antagonisms they suffered and continue to suffer. Apart from a few names like Herbert Macaulay, Awolowo, Anthony Enahoro, Ahmadu Bello, TafawaBalewa, the main proponents and champions of Nigeria's nationalism and subsequent independence were Ndigbo. Prominent among them was Dr. NnamdiAzikwe. Zik as he was famously called is credited as the father of Nigeria's nationalism and independence, and rightly so[24].

Not only was Zik the most educated and experienced of the whole lot, he also arguably towered as the most qualified of all to head a post-independence Nigeria, having contributed more both intellectually and resourcefully than the rest in securing the country's independence. Prominent among these were his nationalistic and emancipatory inroads for the African and the black man in general in journalism from African Morning Post in Ghana to The West African Pilot in Nigeria, among others. Through those and more, Zik fought relentlessly for the liberation of Africa nay Nigeria from the colonial chains of European imperialists like the British in Nigeria, Ghana, and other colonisers elsewhere in Africa at the time. It is noteworthy that for the first time, it was Zik who while in Ghana through his journalistic crusade, advanced the idea of a New and independent Africa, a black pride philosophy that was later expanded in his published book, *Renascent Africa*.

It is therefore not out of place that besides being referred to as the father of Nigeria's nationalism and independence—of all the Nigerian and African nationalists—Zik is the only one officially revered and deservedly so, with the title: Zik of Africa. Deservedly, he was to be Nigeria's post-independence leader being the most qualified and experienced. But sadly, as has become the fate Ndigbo till date, he was unjustly schemed out by the British-Hausa-Fulani machination and made to play second fiddle as ceremonial president to the Prime Minister TafawaBalewa of Hausa-Fulani extraction. That was one naked injustice against Ndigbo.

I have done this historical excursion to show how an Igbo almost single-handedly handed independence to Nigeria on a platter but at the end of the day, the question remains what was his reward or that of Ndigbo as a whole for the sacrifices? Not only was our proverb of making a dog a puppy in his own game, come alive but also making it a new normal as it has become the lot of Ndigbo in Nigeria.

It is this sorry situation; the agony of being treated as puppy in sharing the game they hunted and killed, of being treated as slaves in their own home, that has perennially made Ndigbo Nigeria's second class citizens and the target

of ethnic cleansing and government's unjust policies and programmes that pushed them in the 1960s to demand for Biafra, and have continued to push them even more at the moment in demanding for a country of their own to decide their fate by themselves. This is to the extent that even when a squabble occurs between South western Christian and a Northern Muslim, the targets of reprisal attacks are usually Ndigbo. They are maimed, decimated and properties looted, and government looks on or even openly encourages and justifies the usually horrendous attacks on the innocent. The hate is so deep rooted and ingrained that many Ndigbo have gone to the extent of either changing to or adopting non Igbo identities just to be able to for instance secure federal employment, gain admission into federal institutions of learning, or have a shot at a federal political or economic position. In short, a few Ndigbo who have managed to hold onto certain national political positions especially those positions usually seen as 'juicy' and reserved for the non-Igbo, usually paid allegiance and maintained some sort of worshipful obeisance to their Northern or non-Igbo oligarchs to retain their positions. Even some governors and politicians of the region afraid of suffering the anger of the federal government for one reason or the other have had to switch political allegiance to a political party that represents non Igbo interest. And it does seem and sadly so that the definition of patriotism and being non-tribal by some Igbo people is just to be anti-Igbo at all costs.

To some people, Buhari, the current Nigerian president, appeared to hold some hopes of turning a new leaf towards Ndigbo especially after claiming to belong to nobody at his inauguration. But like his predecessors and most politicians who promise to build bridges even where there is no river, three years down the line, it is now very obvious that Buhari like the leopard has not changed its spots. As the Igbo proverb says, *ihena-esinkapiisidiyan'okpukpu*. This means that the thing responsible for the malodorous smell of the shrew is in its marrow not on the skin. This is evident in his bigoted and lopsided appointments but more saddening in his bare faced hatred of Ndigbo leading to his unjustifiable proscription of IPOB—Indigenous People of Biafra—a non-violent and peaceful Igbo group agitating for the peaceful separation of Ndigbo from Nigeria, a terrorist organisation[25]. This is even as herdsmen (who are Fulani and rank as one of world's most terrorist group) are not only left to roam and kill people unhindered but are even compensated by the government in billions of naira. Just recently, a report emerged that Nigerian government had earmarked about 100 billion naira as 'bribe' for the Fulani herdsmen to stop killing innocent Nigerians. What a shameless display of nepotism and injustice!

It is worth stating that Ndigbo and Nigerians generally do not care about the tribe or religion of their leader if the said leader leads with justice, equity and fairness for all. This is evident from the experiences with some of the former country's leaders who were by the way mainly Hausa-Fulani, northern and Muslim. A recent example is late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua who was president from 2007-2010. Yar'Adua was not only Hausa-Fulani and Muslim like Buhari, he hailed from the same state of Katsina, like



Buhari. Even though he is late, Yar'Adua seems to be loved more by Ndigbo than even his own people simply because he was seen to be just and to have ruled with justice while he was president.

But despite all the hatred and injustice, Ndigbo have been the most patriotic. And if patriotism is to be defined by how Nigerian a people are, then Ndigbo are the most patriotic of all Nigerians. Described as ubiquitous, Ndigbo are the only ethnic nationalities in Nigeria that are not only found in large numbers everywhere in Nigeria, but are also the ones who use their own resources to develop and make any part of Nigeria and make it a home. It is a common saying that if one travels to any part of Nigeria and does not find an Igbo there that the person should vacate such a place immediately because it shows that it is not habitable by humans. This shows how nationalistic the average Igbo is. Outside Igboland, Abuja, Nigeria's capital is today arguably the fastest developing city capital in Africa. And so by implication, the feat achieved by Abuja as Africa's development capital is thanks to Ndigbo[26]. One time minister of the territory, Mallam El-Rufai, an Hausa-Fulani, once corroborated this fact that over 70% of the property of the city belong to Ndigbo.

C. Justice as Truth

1. Ikpemaraeziokwu aka azudija (Any judgement against the truth or justice must have been bought).

Most non Igbo who should defend the systematic injustices being meted against Ndigbo are usually and notoriously silent in doing so but only speak out against such injustices when they come knocking on their own door.

Given the recent constant blood-letting caused especially by the Fulani herdsmen-farmers clashes, there have now been renewed calls for either restructuring of the country into regional lines as it was in the first republic or outright separation into different sovereign entities of cultural affinities. So, it is clear that the others just joined in the struggle because they are now suffering what Ndigbo have been suffering for ages.

But from day one, this has been the agitation of Ndigbo which has taken lives of so many of their loved ones. Apart from the 1967 Biafra independence declaration that led to the civil war, through such non-violent groups like IPOB and MASSOB- Mobilisation for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, Ndigbo have been agitating and asking that the entity of Nigeria as one country should be negotiated and renegotiated. Soviet Union is today fragmented into several independent nations including Russia. And freedom of association entitles every human to choose who or who not to associate with. United Kingdom in 2016 voted to leave the European Union and heavens did not fall. But ironically, the same Britain is one of the most ferocious opponents against the separation of Nigeria for just and more peaceful coexistence among the people. But as Nigeria continues its institutionalised injustice against Ndigbo, it is evident the latter will also continue to peacefully keep the former on its toes through various means of just and peaceful agitation for fair, equal and equitable treatment. For as Igbo proverb says, the child who denies sleep to its mother will not also be allowed sleep[27]. That is justice!

V. CONCLUSION

The main points of this study show that justice is the life of Igbo culture and language as reflected in their proverbs. Leaders are only powerful to the extent they are just, for it is justice that guarantees peace in a society. Nigeria has been at loggerheads with Ndigbo because the former has continued to treat the latter unjustly. Unlike the global concept of justice (which Nigeria somewhat operates with), that of Ndigbo thrives on equality, equity and truth. Accordingly, the practical implication and contribution of this study is that it provides much needed empirical data on the Igbo concept of Justice as evident in language and proverbs and the basic issues of Igbo agitation for secession from Nigeria[28]. These issues as shown here are tied to the people's culture and identity which is their way of life. This is important given that other studies and issues adduced for the continued bad-blood between Ndigbo and Nigerian state have been more political than cultural and so have less to do with the people's way of life. Thus hold little or no solution to the problem, thereby leading to unending loss of government's power control of the people. Nigeria became independent and blossomed through the ingenuity of the Igbo but it is today a shadow of itself. It is only the just treatment of Ndigbo by the Nigerian state that will ensure the return of the glorious days. So, this study would help the government and its agencies in righting the many wrongs of injustices done to the Igbo.

We might have different interpretations of justice but the fact remains that everyone desires to be treated justly one way or another. Globally, peace has remained elusive for lack of justice. The near-Hobbesian world brewing between the west and lesser nations is a consequence of injustice. World powers adopting the Igbo concept of justice as reflected in the proverbs is the panacea. Or else their powers like those of the Nigerian state, would remain impotent. The same applies to the global west like the US to end its bully of the lesser nations as a way of eradicating global terror and preventing a possible third world war to enthrone global peace. Or else its powers like those of the Nigerian leaders on the Igbo, would remain impotent. And in the years to come, would remain and be always addressed as a country under the moral burden and witch-hunt of history for her institutionalised injustice on the Igbo. Because except injustice, every other means deployed at fighting injustice, is just. Given the limited scope of this study, apart from the notion of the West, there is the understandable concern for the various perceptions of justice in the multi-ethnic Nigeria. It is a concern as such that this study hopes can form the focus of future research aimed at striking a balance for a just peaceful Nigeria and the world.

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