

'OJE-MBA-ENWE-IRO' - THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE AFRICAN IGBO AS A PEACEFUL SOJOURNER.

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Abstract

This research has its focus on the African Igbo people of Southeast Nigeria. The African Igbo, through their pithy sayings, proverbs, etc lend credence to who they are within the comity of cultures. It is noteworthy to reflect on why the Igbo travel widely, dwell harmoniously with their host communities, while promoting public order, peace, unity, progress, and tranquility. Studies have shown that there is hardly any part of the world where one cannot find an Igbo person. The Igbo are believed to have the largest population only to the indigenes. A major factor behind such mobility and peaceful settlement is the Igbo philosophy/concept of 'Oje-mba-enwe-iro' (a sojourner makes no enemies). The research makes a finding that because the Igbo are basically entrepreneurs by nature, combining trade, education, and commerce, seeking greener pastures outside the land of their origin becomes inevitable. Further, it is imperative that the traveler who is more informed than the person living within his/ her place of birth must ensure peaceful coexistence with his/her host communities if he/she must succeed in his/her life endeavors. This is the crux of the philosophy/concept of oje-mba-enwe-iro. The work makes use of the documented and structured observation sources as primary data collection methods while deploying the hermeneutic approach in its data analysis.

Keywords: Igbo Person, Sojourner, Hermeneutics, Peaceful Coexistence

Introduction

According to Onyima (2020), to understand the culture and values of a people, you need to listen to their adages. In Igbo cosmology, philosophy and thought, 'Oje-mba-enwe-iro' is one of such adages that establish this reality amongst the Igbo. It literally means he/she that sojourns in foreign land should strive not to court enemies. The meaning could be different in the many dialects of Igbo but the concept and philosophy remain the same. It explains the Igbo adventurism; their capacity to adapt, patiently understudy, acclimatize and carve a **niche** for themselves in foreign host communities. Mbaegbu and Ekienabor (2018) posit that as entrepreneurs, many Igbo find markets all over Nigeria where they carry out their businesses. In West Africa, from Cameroon to Ivory Coast, there are good population of Igbo taking advantage of profitable business

opportunities. They are in Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon and South Africa. They are in Malaysia, Singapore, China, Japan and Dubai. They are located in all the States of USA and Canada as well as UK and Western Europe. Wherever they migrate to, they receive help including finances from the local branch of Igbo union and the Eze-Igbo of the locality. The Eze-Igbo is an Igbo King in diaspora who often is very successful entrepreneur offering protection to budding entrepreneurs and relating them to indigenes and citizens of host communities and States who could be of help as a brother in such distant land.

It becomes imperative therefore, that as a people with such inherent nature and nurture, they must be lovers of peace, who must seek peace in any environment they locate themselves. They cannot afford to stirr quarrel or conflicts in such places as these are sure ways of destroying their investments and sources of their livelihood. As captured in some of Igbo pithy, 'no human pursues rat when his/her house is burning' (madu a naghi a chuoke, ebeuloyana ere oku); 'nobody uses a cotton bud meant to clean the ear for the cleaning of his eyes' (anaghi e jiihe e jiagbanantiagban'anya); 'nobody spits where he puts his pillow or head' (maduanaghiagbuasu, ebe o na e debeisi); 'the degree to which a mad person disturbs the peace of the market, same is visited on his head with clubs' (kaonyearakwurumesu o ahia, kamgbagburukwuagayan'ishi); 'anybody who fails to go with his sleeping materials or destroys same will have to contend with sleeping on the bare floor' (onyegbara aka uteya, o hien'ala). The list is endless. These pithy sayings and proverbs support the need for the Igbo sojourner to maintain peace and a harmonious relationship wherever he/she resides.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is anchored on the theory of hermeneutics, otherwise known as the theory of interpretation. Its appropriateness to this research is based on the fact that hermeneutics accommodates a broad range of area of study. As the art of interpretation, hermeneutics in general terms has a rich history which refers to the theory and practice of interpretation involving an understanding that can be justified. It describes both a body of historically diverse methodologies for interpreting texts, objects, and concept which directly accommodate the focus of this research and the theory of understanding. As such, it concerns making the unintelligible both intelligible and communicable (Dyer, 2010).

In this regard, the concept of human being as an object in African Igbo world-view would be interpreted to appreciate the meaning and influence they exert on the people and which make them behave the way they do. As a preferred tool of interpretation suitable for this work, Magee (2011) observes that hermeneutics etymologically is derived from the Greek word to 'translate' or 'interpret' and similarly dealing with meaning in a very general sense. For Berk (2015), this theory allows the understanding

of human action within context. This theory is therefore very apt for this research/work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This work is a qualitative and ethnographic research, which deals with non - numerical data like concepts, opinions and experiences. It is used here to gather in-depth insights into the concern of this research (Oje-mba-enwe-iro). The researcher relied on documented and structured observation as sources/methods of data gathering. The documented sources availed the researcher numerous literary works by many authors, while structured observation (focused observation) was based on the Igbo living in locations outside their traditional homes and their relationship with the host communities. The structured observation further covered the Igbo economic/educational engagements and interactions within their host communities in some studied areas that were randomly selected based on proximity and accessibility. These two methods availed the researcher of sufficient materials to draw conclusions on the focus of the study.

LOCATING THE AFRICAN IGBO

Afigbo (1981) argues that Igbo history is comparable to the hot soup, which is better eaten or licked from the sides of the container or plate as it were. This is due to the complexities surrounding its tracing. Floyd (1969) shares in this view that it is a well-nigh impossible task to trace the history of the Igbo or the origins of their nomenclature. Both have been lost in the vicious circle of tradition. Migration to their present home in South-Eastern Nigeria from a distant land must have taken place many years ago. Afigbo argues further that since their domicile in the region, villages have become villages to the extent that the tradition of the offshoots has beclouded the original Igbo tradition of their beginning. Few historians aware of this would yet undertake to write a comprehensive history of Igbo-speaking peoples. African Igbo are among the few African people who probably require little introduction to the outside world. Igboland is the indigenous homeland of the Igbo people. It is a cultural and common linguistic region in southern Nigeria.

Geographically, the area is divided by the lower Niger River into two sections: An Eastern part and a Western one (Slattery, 2016). The people are primarily found in the Nigerian states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The area has an estimated population of thirty-five million, eight hundred and eleven thousand (35,811,000) people (Ibile, 2022). Their language is known as Igbo with significant and observable variations in dialect, with a central dialect spoken around areas mostly within parts of Imo, Abia and Anambra states.

THE IGBO HUMAN BEING/PERSON

The Igbo, like other human tribes, have always had the quest to unravel who the human being is, beginning with their origin or the origin of man. Going by the numerous myths of creation that abound in Igbo cosmology, the human being is always placed at the centre of the universe. The Igbo sees the universe from that perspective and considers the universe and everything in terms of its usefulness or otherwise to humans. For this reason, according to Onyeocha (1997), things in the universe are seen in terms of what purpose they serve to the human being. The ones they could eat or not eat, the ones that help or harm. The ones that serve or threaten.

This conception of the human person or being by the African Igbo tallies with Mbiti's (1969) view of African ontology as highly anthropocentric, revolving everything around the human being. Mbiti goes further to posit that it is an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man (and deducing from the five categories). God is the originator and sustainer of man; the spirits explain the destiny of man; man is at the centre of this ontological hierarchy. The animals, plants, and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provide a means of existence, and if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them.

In the conception of the Igbo, a person is born into this world first of all through his or her parents and into his or her community of many ancestors, some of whom are said to have reincarnated in him or her. He or she then grows into the lineage unit, into the village, town, country, and world communities (Onyeocha, 2007). The Igbo human person is by nature not simply a social being in the gregarious Aristotelian sense but is emphatically communalistic. We shall later see how this factor of communality adds to the fulfilment of his destiny on earth. He is not an individualistic human as found in the industrialized West. Yet, the individual Igbo human being has no personality and no rule unless as a community person, like a part of an engine, his prosperity being the prosperity of his kinsmen, near and distant, and of his society (Onyeocha, 2007).

The scientific view of man or the human being contrasts sharply with the Igbo concept in two major ways. The essence of this distinction at this moment is to draw attention to a more coherent understanding and appreciation of the Igbo man's inclusion and recognition of the 'death' phenomenon as a solid component of wealth. In the Igbo conception of the human being, he is partly material and partly immaterial. That is, the human being is both a biological as well as a spiritual being, in the concept of the Igbo world-view. The human being is an organic whole (Quarcoopome, 1987). This rules out the idea of a split personality. His physical part relates him to the family, lineage, clan, and tribe, hence the idea and the practice of the extended family system in the Igbo marriage setting. It becomes obligatory, therefore for man to keep to the rules of society for cohesion and solidarity. Spiritually, the human person depends on God and other

spiritual entities for his life force, his essential being (wealth), or personality soul, in addition to his destiny. Good destiny is promoted by good character, always calling out the soul to be conscious of moral and ethical demands.

To this end, Anyanwu (1999) posits that the human being is as mysterious as the earth in which he lives. Drawing from numerous Igbo myths of creation reveals that the human being is created by 'Chineke' (the Creator God), but the exact moment of creation is unknown. The human being's psyche is open to 'Chukwu' (Great God), the divinities, and the spirits, as well as the vital forces on the earth. One major characteristic of the African Igbo is that they are capable of entering into relationships with supernatural forces; they are also vulnerable to the influence of these forces, either for good or for bad. The human being, therefore, tries to use the universe or to derive some good (wealth) from it, in physical, mystical, and supernatural ways. In reality, the Igbo do not conceive of the human being as the master of the universe; he is only at the centre.

According to Nwala (1985), the human being is not only regarded as the most important aspect of creation, but he is also regarded as being superior in natural intelligence to other beings. The Igbo human person is typically threatened by famine, disease, and war, some of which fall into the capricious potency of forces that must be channelled correctly. What happened to Achan in the bible is a good illustration of the sense of solidarity of the Igbo human being and his existence. The whole community suffered in consequence of Achan's sin until Achan and his family had been executed. Thus, for the well-being of the African Igbo and his society, he must regulate his conduct and what (s)he does to uphold the well-being of the society (Onwubuariri, 2011).

THE IGBO WORLD OF HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

The African Igbo lives his/her life in search of wealth/fulfilment. This wealth or fulfilment is to be understood in the context of its three components or elements: properties, human beings and death, and not just property or monetary value. These components ensure good name (aha-oma) which is better than just money (*ego*) or financial stability. This thought is aptly captured in one of the Igbo pithy sayings 'ezi aha ka ego' (good name is better than money). A critical look or appreciation of the elements is important for a proper understanding of why the Igbo seek wealth or fulfilment. In relation to money and property as elements of wealth, the Igbo supports this desire because it encourages one not to be lazy or slothful. One of Igbo idiomatic expressions dictates that "dimkpagaagbambona-okorobia" (a human being should struggle or work hard in his/her youth). This is a direct interpretation that Igbo abhors laziness and slothfulness in all ramifications or shades. This is why the Igbo family unit begins early to tutor a child to imbibe the tenets of hard work by taking him/her to the farm, making him/her to learn a craft or a trade depending on what is obtainable within the cultural area. Traditionally, the Igbo youth were quick to learn blacksmithing, farming,

especially yams, cutting of palm fruits, and tapping of palm wine, making of baskets from bamboo, or even fishing for those living around the riverine areas. The Igbo believe that there is dignity in labour. (S)He works hard to maintain his dignity and nobility.

Achebe (1959) portrays Unoka, the father of Okonkwo, as a derisive scorn of the community for being lazy, poor, and a disappointing failure in life. He was not a courageous man. He was a coward and could not bear the sight of blood. As a result of the disappointing life of his father (Unoka), who could barely fend for his small family, Okonkwo, his son, was patently ashamed of his father and wanted to be an entirely different man. In order to live a life different from that of his father, Okonkwo worked hard to be rich, married many wives, and became prominent. The picture of Okonkwo here depicts the true nature of the African Igbo person. The philosophy of the Igbo about life further encouraged the people to embrace the development of entrepreneurial skills, the *Igbaboi* (apprenticeship) system, which has become a major procedure in Igbo society. Today, the 'Igbaboi' system is an organized procedure recognized as a legitimate educational method for entrepreneurial development (Nwanegbo-BenOzoigbo, 2021).

It is also against Igbo morality to be lazy. Amaegwu (2013) posits in support that laziness, amongst other socially disapproved habits, is generally condemned in Igbo society. The understanding being that a human's moral life is paramount in keeping the cosmic equilibrium. The moral heroes of the Igbo world are therefore picked from the animal world to reflect this. According to Nwoye (2011), this includes a tortoise that is admired for its capacity to deploy its creative ingenuity in the direction of finding solutions to the problem of living. Thus, the Igbo seek wealth to find solutions to the problems of living for themselves, his family, his neighbourhood, extended families, and the society at large. He cannot comfortably do this without acquiring wealth. Wealth in Igbo cosmology is a repellent of attackers of any form or magnitude, be it sickness, hunger, safety, group relations or socialization. The tortoise as a moral totem in this regard, is also believed to know when to open and close its amour in keeping with the sensations of safety or danger. It is believed among the Igbo that the tortoise exudes an odour that repels potential attackers.

In search of or gathering of this wealth or fulfilment, the Igbo is never in a hurry like the proverbial tortoise. The Igbo moves slowly in pursuit of wealth. He/she is never in a hurry to get rich over night nor to acquire wealth overnight, for such is a fast lane to premature bad feat (*Onwumgbabichi*), which will cause him permanently poor while fulfilling his life essence, as he cannot reincarnate nor join peacefully the ancestral world. For the Igbo, these qualities (as a path of wealth) reflect an imaginative deployment of intelligence for personal and communal safety and well-being.

The Igbo wealth or fulfilment focuses on making progress, championing a cause, fulfilling a mission or reaching a destiny (Bowen, 2012). These cannot be achieved in a rancor-filled society or community. In the Igbo worldview, you are only prosperous if you have wealth/fulfilment - a feature of all-encompassing meaning - old age, good life, good name, riches, offspring, good death, burial, second burial, all the rites and rituals. Here lies the need to be peaceful. Prosperity here is likened to the accomplishment of tasks and making the desired difference in life. To seek wealth/fulfilment is to seek the path to true living and existence in harmony with neighbors and nature. The Igbo does not find the answer for true existentialism only in his religious faith (the supernatural), but also in his humanistic approaches and convictions; in the ways of dealing with his neighbours as belonging to the committee of people in need of one another. This is achievable not by remaining in one's place of birth till death, but by travelling outside one's locality to acquire knowledge, in cohabitation with people of different cultures and origin.

THE PHILOSOPHY/CONCEPT OF OJE-MBA-ENWE-IRO

The Igbo people take pride in being referred to as world travelers. It is speculated that there are more Igbos in other parts of Nigeria and overseas than there are in their ancestral homelands. There's a joke among some Igbo peers: if there are up to three black people in The Galápagos Islands, there's the likelihood that one of them is Igbo. I don't know how true it is. It might after all be just an anecdote, embellished by the Igbo's propensity for hyperbole. What is true, though, is the average Igbo person's belief that Igbos can survive wherever humans do. Again, this is not to say that the Igbo have genes that other Africans lack; it has to be understood within the context of Oje-mba-enwe-iro, a philosophy that the Igbo have woven into the fabric of their culture (Ilo, 2023).

Ibilie (2022) puts it succinctly that the OJE-MBA-ENWE-IRO is the philosophy that compels the Igbo to plant roots wherever they go, but also to never cut the umbilical cord to their natal home. To be sure, the expression does not imply that some wayfarers do not make enemies. It is rather that wayfarers cannot afford to have enemies, precisely because their survival depends on the generosity of strangers. Wayfarers must of necessity, adopt friendship as a political principle of survival and thriving. Since the average Igbo believes that he can survive wherever humans live, he must philosophically prepare himself. It has to be, therefore understood within the context of the philosophy that the Igbo have woven into the fabric of their culture and world-view.

Oje-mba-enwe-ro, which translates to "the traveler who encounters no hostility," is a profound element of Igbo cosmology and thought pattern. It encapsulates ideals of peace, respect, and harmonious coexistence within and outside one's place of origin and habitation. It is central to Igbo philosophy and reflects the values and practices that underpin conflict resolution and communal harmony within this vibrant cultural context

(Okeke, 2010). Oje-mba-enwe-iro functions as a crucial instrument for promoting peace in African Igbo life, delving into its historical, cultural, and practical implications. The African Igbo cosmology is deeply rooted in the traditions and spiritual beliefs of the people predominantly located in the southeastern part of Nigeria. This philosophical concept is deeply characterized by its emphasis on social harmony and communal values (Achebe, 1994). It symbolizes a non-conflict and peaceful interaction of the African Igbo within or outside their area of origin, highlighting the cultural significance of maintaining amicable relationships both within and outside the community (Iroegbu, 2003). This concept/philosophy serves as a guiding principle, encouraging individuals to foster peaceful interactions and resolve conflicts amicably, thus reinforcing social stability. Onyima (2020) argues that it has been said, and rightly too, that to understand the culture and values of a people, you need to listen to their adages. In Igbo cosmology, 'Ojembaenweilo' is one of such adages. It means 'he/she that journeys to a foreign land should strive not to court enemies'. The meaning could be different in the many dialects of Igbo, but the concept remains the same. It explains the Igbo adventurism; his capacity to adapt, patiently understudy, acclimatize, and carve a niche for himself or herself in a foreign land. It is to be further observed that the Igbo communication style, known for its indirectness and use of proverbs, plays a crucial role in conveying these philosophical insights (Aka 2024). By employing such expressions, the Igbo emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability, which are essential for maintaining harmony in a diverse world.

Historically, the African Igbo have employed various mechanisms to address conflicts and maintain peace, with Oje-mba-enwe-iro being a reflection of these practices (Nwankwo, 2009). Traditional Igbo conflict resolution processes often involve mediation and reconciliation, grounded in the belief that maintaining social harmony is essential for the well-being of the community. Oje-mba-enwe-iro thus reinforces these practices by underscoring the importance of approaching others with respect and avoiding hostility (Okonkwo, 2007). This approach is evident in the community's emphasis on dialogue, collective decision-making, and restorative justice, which all contribute to the maintenance of peace wherever the African Igbo funds himself or herself globally.

In contemporary contexts, the principles embodied in Oje-mba-enwe-iro offer valuable insights for modern peacebuilding efforts. As conflicts and tensions increasingly impact various societies, integrating traditional wisdom like that reflected in concept/philosophy can provide innovative approaches to conflict resolution (Ezeani, 2015). Oje-mba-enwe-iro not only offers a framework for understanding conflict dynamics, but also presents practical strategies for fostering reconciliation and promoting long-term peace amongst the people and also with their neighbors or host communities.

Oje-mba-enwe-iro provides the people with an openness as a means of survival wherever they may find themselves. ChielozonaEze to this end writes

I was five years old when the Nigerian civil war broke out in 1967. When it came to an end after close to thirty months, we were happy to be alive and to return to our ancestral homes. Despite incalculable losses in lives and property, we brimmed with the joy of life—and an unparalleled desire to rebuild our lives and catch up with the rest of the country's residents whose lives weren't interrupted by the war. That was at least as much as my eight-year-old self could observe. I thought that every person I met was happy; the village always had a reason to come together to make music and to celebrate with whatever people could bring. Our desire to rebuild our lives was reflected in most of the popular music of the time, from Eddy Okwedy's Happy Survival to village songs. I used to go watch a women's dance troupe practice their art before they presented it to the village. I was fascinated by the voice of the lead singer, and in particular one of the songs called OjembaEnweIlo—“A wayfarer has no enemy..

It is instructive to note that after the Nigerian civil war, which ended in the year 1970, during the rebuilding period, Igbo people had to travel to other parts of the country in search of opportunities that did not exist in Igboland. The importance of the expression/concept became most valuable in the rebuilding process. In this rebuilding period and struggle for survival, openness and friendship are virtues that must be cultivated by the people. They are essential not just for the survival of every Igbo wayfarer, but for his or her flourishing. African Igbo need strangers. He or she must reach out to them in a gesture of peace and love with the hope that strangers are those who have not yet become friends. Stepping out of one's comfort zone, leaving one's people to establish one's life elsewhere, is always full of risks. It can also be rewarding, as one encounters hitherto unknown possibilities. It is like reaching out your hand for a shake. Open palms are vulnerable, but they can be enriched by the warmth of another open palm. The truth of every encounter, though, is that one gets out of every encounter only as much as one is willing to give. This is as true with God and humans as it is with nature, or even literary texts. This seems to suggest that the African Igbo encounters oneself in strangers. But to discover the new world and befriend it, the African Igbo wayfarer must render himself/herself to be discovered and befriended. He/she must first give what he/she hopes to receive, and treat the world the way he/she expects to be treated. This is a non-negotiable starting point of every rewarding encounter, and this is particularly true for the African Igbo wayfarer, given his/her position as a mendicant. The Igbo in this regard must be an open text to be read by strangers as much as he/she

readit. The Igbo is by nature incomplete, a typical romantic figure who knows that nature has what he/she needs to be happy; he/she must go into it, and allow it to invade his/her senses. Indeed, openness is a confession of vulnerability, of incompleteness and the cry to be completed by the unknown. It is the readiness to learn.

Nonetheless, the African Igbo appreciate that being open to strangers does not mean laying oneself bare to be exploited by scammers and swindlers, which are found in every society. An open book can never fully give up all it has to offer; something new is to be discovered at each reading. In as much as the African Igbo is a journeyman, remaining open, but also deep, and always ready to offer something new from his heart—that simple organ, as limited as the owner's fist, but infinitely rich and always in some motion day and night. The heart is what it is to the rest of the body precisely because it is open, and gives as much as it receives. In concrete terms, though, the Igbo must learn how the citizens of a place of his sojourn live. This is the first rule of survival. Know the people's stories, their language, what they worship, what makes them happy or afraid. The first act of survival lies in literally asking the people: “tell me your story.” Humans are their stories, and to listen to those stories is to take them seriously; it is to immerse oneself into their horizons of meaning. To be able and ready to listen to people's stories is a conscious gesture of friendship. By the time you have heard a people's stories at least three times, they will surely ask you about yours. They will be more disposed to hear yours because you have already shown them respect and affirmation. That is the true moment of intercultural communication, which is essential for the thriving of immigrants. This communication is usually blocked if you are more interested in telling your stories than you are in hearing other people's stories, if you are more interested in the world understanding you than you are in understanding the world. But this is self-evident. The citizens of your land of sojourn are not there waiting to spread the red carpet for you. You have to earn their friendship. You earn other people's friendship by being friendly.

This concept of being and existence in African Igbo further finds its route according to IheonyebuokwuezeIlo(2023) in Menkiti's core philosophy of personhood, which is that community allows us to become persons, and this community is not necessarily defined by blood. Its constitutive element is the interaction between humans, which is defined by openness. Community is where an individual feels accepted and finds a conducive atmosphere to flourish. The individual must also actively contribute to that. And this leads to the next important expression associated with this concept- 'you protect where you live'. Your home is where you have settled. Contribute to the development of the place of your sojourn. Your community is where you are (Ilo, 2023). The African Igbo, through Oje-mba-enwe-iro appreciate the incalculable value of cultivating a cosmopolitan vision of the world. If one steps out of his/her village to settle—even if for a day—in another person's village, one must also accept the fact that a

total stranger from even the furthest part of the world has the right to settle in the village of one's birth. This seems to be the description—if not the definition—of the cosmopolitan worldview.

In addition to its philosophical implications, "Ojemba Enwe Iro" has practical applications in the lives of Igbo migrants. As they navigate new environments, the principal encourages them to be open-minded and receptive to different cultures. This adaptability has been a critical factor in the success of Igbo individuals in various fields, from business to academia, as they integrate into different societies while maintaining their cultural identity (Udenze, 2022). The phrase underscores the importance of building networks and forming alliances, which are vital for personal and professional growth in a globalized world. The concept of "OjembaEnweIro" is reflected in Igbo literature and art, where themes of migration and coexistence are prevalent. For instance, in Chinua Achebe's works, the idea of navigating between different cultures and the challenges of maintaining one's identity while adapting to new environments are explored (Baloubi, 2020). These narratives highlight the dynamic nature of Igbo culture, which has evolved through interactions with various peoples and cultures over time.

"Oje-mba-enweIro" is more than just a phrase; it is a reflection of the Igbo's historical experiences and philosophical outlook. It emphasizes the importance of adaptability, diplomacy, and peaceful coexistence, which are essential for thriving in a diverse and interconnected world. This expression continues to guide the Igbo people as they navigate the complexities of modern life, serving as a reminder of the enduring values of respect and harmony that are central to their cultural identity.

THE RELEVANCE OF OJE-MBA-NWE-IRO PEACE CONCEPT

The concept is a rich cultural heritage that offers a unique conceptualization of peace, deeply intertwined with social structures, religious beliefs, and philosophical outlooks. This understanding of peace transcends the mere absence of conflict; it embodies a holistic state of harmony, balance, and well-being within the community and the natural world. To grasp the full scope of this conceptualization, it is essential to explore its historical context, underlying principles, and contemporary relevance to the global community. The peace part herein has been shaped by the people's experiences and social organization. Arising from the Igbo traditional society structure of autonomous communities governed by a system of elders and age grades, this decentralized structure emphasizes consensus-building and collective decision-making, reflecting the Igbo's commitment to communal harmony and social justice (Okafor, 2018). The historical interactions with neighboring cultures and colonial forces have also influenced the Igbo's understanding of peace, leading to a dynamic and adaptive conceptualization that integrates traditional values with contemporary realities (Mokgobi, 2014). This concept

presents peace as intrinsically linked to communal harmony and social cohesion. Peace can only be achieved when individuals live in harmony with one another and with the community as a whole. This principle is encapsulated in the Igbo concept of "Igwebuike," which means "there is strength in unity." Igwebuike emphasizes the importance of collaboration, mutual respect, and collective responsibility in maintaining peace and preventing conflict (Kanu, 2019).

The Oje-mba-enwe-iro concept of peace also involves a sense of balance and reciprocity. This is evident in the people's interactions with the natural world, where peace is seen as a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. The Igbo practice rituals and customs that honor the earth and seek to maintain ecological balance, reflecting their belief that peace is interconnected with the well-being of the natural world (Okafor, 2018). Spiritual and moral integrity are central to the understanding of Oje-mba-nwe-ro peace. This peace is achieved through adherence to moral values and spiritual principles that guide individual and communal behavior. This includes honesty, integrity, and respect for others, as well as reverence for the spiritual realm and the ancestors. This peace concept adopts the performance of rituals and ceremonies to seek spiritual guidance and ensure moral alignment, reinforcing the connection between peace and spiritual well-being (Mokgobi, 2014).

The Igbo approach to conflict resolution and reconciliation is another key aspect of their conceptualization of peace. Traditional Igbo society employs various mechanisms for addressing disputes and restoring harmony, including mediation by elders, dialogue, and restorative justice practices. These methods prioritize healing and reconciliation over punishment, reflecting the Igbo's belief in the potential for transformation and renewal. The Igbo conceptualization of peace remains relevant in contemporary society, offering valuable insights into conflict resolution, community building, and sustainable living. As Nigeria and the world face complex challenges such as ethnic tensions, environmental degradation, and social inequality, the Igbo's holistic approach to peace provides a framework for addressing these issues with empathy, wisdom, and collaboration (Okafor, 2018). Despite its enduring relevance, the Igbo conceptualization of peace faces challenges in the modern world. Urbanization, globalization, and the influence of Western values have led to changes in social structures and cultural practices, impacting the traditional mechanisms for maintaining peace. However, the resilience of Igbo culture is evident in its ability to adapt and integrate new influences while retaining core values. Community-based initiatives and cultural education programs play a crucial role in preserving and revitalizing the Igbo's conceptualization of peace for future generations. The conceptualization of peace in Igbo culture is a testament to the richness and depth of their cultural heritage. It encompasses a holistic understanding of harmony, balance, and well-being that transcends mere conflict avoidance. As the Igbo navigate the complexities of the

modern world, their unique approach to peace offers valuable lessons in community building, conflict resolution, and sustainable living. By embracing both traditional values and contemporary realities, the Igbo continue to contribute to the global discourse on peace and harmony (Osaghae, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The interpretation of the concept of OjembaEnweIro reveals its profound significance as a vital tool offered by the African Igbo in the promotion of peace within the global community. This principle emphasizes the importance of dialogue, communal harmony, and ethical living, fostering relationships that transcend conflict. By integrating Ojem-ba-enwe-ro into contemporary global conflict resolution strategies, we can enhance understanding and cooperation among individuals and communities. Ultimately, revitalizing this cultural ethos not only preserves Igbo heritage but also contributes to broader efforts in peacebuilding, showcasing the enduring power of traditional wisdom in addressing modern societal challenges. Embracing such values is essential for a harmonious coexistence both in micro and macro communities.

For the continuous and effective promotion of peace through the concept and philosophy of Oje-mba-enwe-ro, it is recommended that scholars should deepen research in this area while community leaders and educators incorporate this philosophy into local conflict resolution frameworks and educational curricula. Workshops and seminars should be organized to raise awareness about its principles, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding among diverse global groups. Additionally, partnerships with cultural organizations can help revive and disseminate traditional practices that embody Oje-mba-enwe-iro and its principles. Engaging youth in these initiatives will ensure the continuity of these values, ultimately strengthening community bonds and enhancing peace efforts within the Igbo society and by extension, globally.

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