

THE IGBO JUSTICE SYSTEM: PARADIGM FOR TRUE JUSTICE AND PEACE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Igbo justice system is a relational one and person-centred, focused on doing justice in the human society while at the same time holding that relationships go beyond the here and now to involve also the world beyond. This idea brings into focus the involvement of the Transcendental in human affairs. This type of justice is seen as having the capability of influencing the Nigerian person deeply inasmuch as it is generally accepted that Nigerians are deeply religious persons. The aim of this paper is to establish the feasibility of Igbo justice system influencing the lives of Nigerians to such an extent it will bring about true justice and peace in Nigeria. The method of gathering of information for this paper is through library research and the tools of analysis and synthesis are by critical reasoning. The theory of resource curse otherwise called the paradox of plenty was employed in this work to show how lack of justice has kept the vast majority of Nigerians in squalor with the attendant strife. The Igbo type of justice is seen as capable of changing the trend. Recommendations: there must be employment of the principle of non-segregation, children should be taught justice in their formative years in schools and worship centres, and truth (which is equivalent to justice in Igbo understanding) must always be told and done.

Keywords: justice, non-segregation, truth, harmony, development.

INTRODUCTION

By the nature of the Nigerian composition, which manifests amalgamation of many peoples, the appropriate system of government is the federal system and a very important aspect of the federal system of government is the provision of a level of autonomy to the constituting parts- regions or states which must have a very high level of financial independence. Thus Kapur cited by Okolo and Akpokighe (2014) insists that in a federal system of government the component units must be allowed adequate economic resources to handle administrative functions at their disposal in a satisfactory manner without being dependent of a national government that doles out finances to them. It is unfortunate we must note that the exact opposite is what has been happening in Nigeria and which smacks of injustice as those in charge do not do so for the sake of the national interest but for the interest of the select few and their ethnic interest. This is responsible for the inadequate development of Nigeria.

The author is drawn to write this paper being fully aware of the perception in many quarters in Nigeria of the absence of justice in the system in general, but with the conviction that the project of instituting it in the system is a possibility. Thus Kukah (2011) holds, "In the name of our collective humanity, we have to push on, believing that the portals of justice are never permanently shut and that the future belongs to those with hope not those with power" (p. 380). The Igbo system of justice is proposed in this paper as a possible way of bringing peace

and harmony and therefore development in Nigeria inasmuch as it is a system that is non-segregational and accommodating of all and sundry.

CONCEPTS CLARIFICATION

Igbo

In Nigeria, there are over 250 ethnic groups, but there are basically three major ethnic groups which are the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and the Igbo. Igbo stands for both a people and a language. The Igbo are considered as one of the largest ethnic groups, not only in Nigeria but also in Africa. Geographically, the Igbo homeland is divided into two unequal sections by the River Niger- the Eastern section (which constitutes the larger part) and the Western section (Slattery, 2016 and Chigere, 2000). The Igbo are a vibrant, industrious people currently spread throughout the world. In their homeland, however, they are chiefly in the five South Eastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. But the Igbo also indigenously make up large parts of Delta and Rivers States. They also make up parts of Benue, Kogi, Cross River, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Edo States (Azuakor, 2022, Obinelo, M., 2019). The Igbo are also currently indigenous to some African countries; to be particularly taken note of are the Bioko people of Equatorial Guinea. The Igbo are predominantly Christians today but originally practiced African Traditional Religion (ATR) which is currently having a resurgence and still exerts influence on the people's way of life and thinking including its concept and practice of justice.

Justice

Justice has been defined from many perspectives right from antiquity. The Greeks had concepts of justice as well as the Romans which we can regard as classical ideas of justice. We also have different ideas on justice by philosophers as well as the Igbo concepts of justice. Nzomiwu (1999) quoted Thomas Aquinas as defining justice as “*Constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuendi*”, that is, “the constant and perpetual will to render to another his due” (p. 26). There is essentially no difference from this and the Platonic and Aristotelian conception of justice as rendering to each person their due apart from adding “constant” and “perpetual will” for emphasis. This emphasis is never to be taken for granted, though, for it denotes that it must always be willed and done, which indeed makes a phenomenal demand.

Justice for Fagothey (1963) is “one of those chief virtues and that regulates man's will so that he wills for others what belongs to them”. First it is a virtue, second it is among the chief virtues, three it involves a will or willing as in Aquinas above, four it wills or desires for what should be others' to be really theirs. We add that for there to be order and peace in society, it will not stop at this willing but must actually be seen to be executed.

Peace

Among other things, the Webster's Dictionary defines peace to mean “ **1**: a state of tranquility or quiet: as **a**: freedom from civil disturbance **b**: a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom **2**: freedom from disquieting or oppressive

thoughts or emotions **3**: harmony in personal relations **4 a**: a state or period of mutual concord between governments **b**: a pact or agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war or in a state of enmity” (p. 865). Peace in this paper, while having some shades of the various concepts of the word, will chiefly be regarded as a state of quiet, tranquility, security and order in a community guaranteed by the law and customs and thus leading to harmony in interpersonal relations.

Dwyer (1999) holds that in contemporary theology “peace” takes into consideration biblical insights, ethical norms such as justice, the inputs of the social sciences, empirical data and the assessment of the signs of the times; and that in an interdependent world, the Church is insistent on the centrality of justice in order for peace to reign. This position further lends weight to the exigency of our topic of discussion.

Nigeria

Nigeria, a West African country often regarded as the giant of Africa mainly because of its population of an estimated over 200 million people is bounded by Niger to the North, Chad and Cameroon to the East and Benin Republic to the West. Its coastal boundaries are Lake Chad to the North East and the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean to the South. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups and languages. Some hold the ethnic groups are about 350 while some even postulate higher figures. According to Nnoli (2008), those who use the linguistic parameter for designating the ethnic groups hold that Nigeria has about 394 ethnic groups while others put the figure at between 550- 619. However, the major languages are the Yoruba in the South West, the Igbo in the South East and the Hausa/Fulani in the North. The Middle Belt region consists of some multi-ethnic groups such as the Tiv, the Idoma, (again the Yoruba) and the Igala, etc. What in Nigeria is termed the South-South region is also made up of such tribes as the Edo, the Ijaw, (again the Igbo), the Urhobo, the Efik and the Kalabari, etc. In general the North is predominantly Moslem and the South predominantly Christian. The vagaries of tribes and religions have contributed to ethnicism, religious intolerance respectively, and disharmony because of the improper handling of the differences especially by the government not often adhering to the principles of justice in its overall dealings with the varying populace. What were called the Northern and Southern Protectorates of the Colonial British Empire were independently existing peoples but which became amalgamated by the British colonial powers for the British economic and political interests as well as for administrative convenience in 1914. This amalgamation continues to cause nagging problems for Nigerians because of the feeling of injustice and which still causes agitations of self determination in some quarters (Cf. Azuakor, 2021; Azuakor and Onnebunne, 2016). It is in this connection that C. J. Emele notes: “In the world today, it is commonly known that what prevents Nigeria from being a real ‘giant’ of Africa and the world, is our weak national identity and lack of unity” (p. 158). However, Nigeria got political independence from Britain on October 1, 1960 with a parliamentary system of government after the British model. But it soon became a Republic in 1963 with a bicameral legislature after the American model in a bid to realize the most workable structure for her integration, harmony and development. Today Nigeria has 36 states with a federal capital at Abuja and runs what is clearly a unitary system of government with a garb of federalism, which oversees copious injustices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of Resource Curse otherwise called the Paradox of Plenty is adopted in this paper as it believes that a major cause of injustice in Nigeria is the unjust scramble for and unfair sharing of the abundant crude resources of Nigeria at the neglect of the other abundant mineral, agricultural and especially human resources; the injustice was at the root of the civil war and influenced the state creation at the time that focused on dividing a particular ethnic group into minorities in other states inasmuch as those communities constituted the loci of the major oil deposits and making them believe they were different from their original stock. One major proponent of this theory of resource curse is Paul Collier. The central thesis is that “countries and areas that are richly blessed with an abundance of resources like oil and gas turn out to have poor economic growth than countries and regions with fewer natural resources”. This paper holds that this theory is only true if the resources are not handled with justice inasmuch as there are some countries today with abundance of oil and gas and they are very well developed, for example United Arab Emirates and Qatar. For Karl (2005), for most countries with rich natural wealth, this abundance does not translate to prosperity for most of the inhabitants rather it begets environmental degradation, economic devastation and democratic woes. This paper holds that Nigeria is a clear example and the causes are often tied to corruption, dearth of competitiveness of other sectors, injustice, overdependence on one source of revenue (oil resource in our case), mismanagement of resources, theft of the resource, structural imbalance, etc.

JUSTICE IN GENERAL

Justice has divergent significations from various cultures, philosophers and epochs. Some see the concepts of justice as sometimes opposing and this gives room for the analysis of the different conceptions and a synthetisation of these via the crucible of rationality in order to arrive at an agreeable and functional idea. This in essence opens the door for the analysis and possible adoption of the Igbo paradigm of justice for Nigeria as a workable option. In fact for Curran (1973), “Every man and every nation in the world does not share a common understanding of justice, but each has only a partial view of the universal and not a universal view. There will always be disagreement and discussion on these matters” (p. 21).

The socialists of today regard justice as social equality and by this they mean that everybody must be regarded as essentially equal before the law otherwise political equality will just be a mere *flatus vocis*, that is, empty phrase. Among the pre-literate peoples the lack of documentary facility has always been a problem in trying to study or document their moral, ethical and philosophical thoughts. The traditional Igbo society belongs here but it is all the same possible to glean their moral and philosophical positions on issues, including the issue of justice from oral traditions, lores, wise sayings, proverbs and anecdotes.

The idea of justice has played and will continue to play a crucial and fundamental role in the history of mankind. For Nzomiwu (1999) among the problems that preoccupy moralists and ethicists there are few that are as acute as that of justice. All mankind, no matter their orientation, clamour for justice and war against injustice. Justice is among the early instinct of a child. For Griffith (1974), “They begin as early as the child’s ‘It’s my turn’, the sense of injustice when brother’s piece of cake is larger than his” (p. 48).

There is this understanding that the concept and definition of justice is coloured by the milieu, the environmental, cultural, geographical, social, political, economic and historical conditions and limitations of those involved. And for Nzomiwu, (1999), the concept of justice is both progressive and complex. Tracing history, many dimensions of the concept are discovered and it has been found to be indeed complex. According to Azuakor and Nwankwo (2020), “Justice is fairness, evenhandedness, impartiality. The Greco-Roman philosophers conceived justice as the principle which coordinates man’s relations with fellow humans and as being responsible for harmony, equilibrium and tranquility in society”(p. 208).

Many philosophers and thinkers have given their perspectives on justice. For Aristotle, justice is the queen of all virtues and even the morning Star (Lucifer) and the evening Star (Hesperus) cannot compare with her beauty. The just man abides by the law and so justice entails conformity with the law (See *Nicomachaeon Ethics* Trans. by Peters, 2015, 1891). Plato, speaking through Socrates, in his *Republic*, regarded justice as giving each person what is fitting; whereas Thrasymachus, the sophist saw it as the advantage of the stronger. For Okeke (2001), Thrasymachus buttressed his point by stating that states were ruled in various ways, democratically, tyrannically or aristocratically as it suits those who are in charge, and for him that is justice. It must be stated that in the understanding of justice, for Plato, it meant each person doing what they were best fitted under the guidance of the wisest.

The Greco-Roman world recognized justice in general as giving each person what is his due. And it must be pointed out that what is a person’s due may not really be the same as what is due another person. It is really what happens to be most fitting for the person. The “due” of a governor cannot be the “due” of a taxi driver, but it has to be such that provides maximum satisfaction and happiness for each person given their states in life as the law of distribution should also take into cognizance the responsibility of contribution and this leads us to such issues as contributive justice and distributive justice. We have various other forms of justice-commutative justice, legal justice, social justice, and vindictive/retributive justice, but their discussion does not form part of this discourse for want of space and time. We shall, however, deal a little bit with social justice which is crucial for harmony in modern society such as Nigeria. This type of justice has been the subject of many a papal encyclicals. Nzomiwu, (1999) quoted Paul VI, on social justice as “the transformation of the classes which constitute society towards a more equitable distribution of riches and culture, in such a way that nobody lacks what is sufficient for life and nobody is allowed an exaggerated and egotistical enjoyment of temporal goods when others are painfully deprived of them” (p. 26-27).

THE IDEA OF TRUE JUSTICE

True justice is justice for justice sake, justice without trappings of sentiments, that which will do good to all and give each and everyone their due without attachment to primordial sentiments of say religion, tribe or political affiliations. It is that that allots to each and everyone what is due to them without selfish considerations. For Hooks (2016) true justice is achieved in the ambience of forgiveness. It involves empathy and the realization that in the face of injustice both the offender and the victim are hurt. When forgiveness combines with justice then healing is easier and human interrelationships are enhanced. In true justice the offender is not isolated, rather it figures out ways in which everyone is involved and connected. By this the one that has done harm is found to also be in pain and only when they

are reintegrated can they begin to be responsible, accountable and empathetic. These conditions are crucial for ameliorating the hiccups in intertribal and interreligious conflicts in Nigeria that have bedeviled peace and progress in Nigeria.

Noyes (2022) holds that true justice requires the existence of an objective standard and flows from the character of God. He gives four requirements or characteristics of true justice based on the scriptures and right reason but we state only the first here for our purpose, that is, **true justice is impartial**. In Deuteronomy 1:16–17: we have: “Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen and judge righteously between a person and his fellow countryman, or the stranger who is with him. *You are not to show partiality in judgment*; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You are not to be afraid of any person, for the judgment is God’s.”

JUSTICE AMONG THE IGBO

Justice in traditional Igbo society is relational. It is not conceptualized in the classical fashion but implied in observable workings of the practices and institutions of society. It is person-centred including the person here and yonder and their relationships. For Okeke (2001), “Justice in traditional Igbo society is said to be relatively person-centred as well as community-centred” (p. 138). In the theft of yam for example, the person is seen to have committed abomination and an offence against the ancestors and the earth goddess, *Ala*. Consequently, the offence is against the entire community and not simply against the individual whose yam has been stolen and this community includes the ancestors yonder.

Among the pre-literate peoples the lack of documentation has always been a problem in trying to study or document their moral, ethical and philosophical thoughts. The traditional Igbo society belongs here but it is all the same possible to glean their moral and philosophical positions on issues, including the issue of justice from oral traditions, lores, wise sayings, proverbs and anecdotes. We shall therefore glean the meaning of justice among the Igbo from popular notions which will come from such sources as given names, idioms, parables and sacred items. For Nzomiwu (1999), “Igbo thought and vocabulary tend to be concrete rather than abstract” (p. 30). When an Igbo man feels wronged, he is most likely to make an appeal to justice and justice is conceived as protecting the innocent while punishing the offender. Above all, justice is viewed to maintain order and harmony in the society. “The Igbo feel sore and terribly bitter about miscarriage of justice” (Nzomiwu, 1999, p. 30). In an interview by Nzomiwu, C. Nworji of Enugwu-Ukwu described justice thus:

Justice (*Akankwuoto/Ikpenkwuoto*) embraces a number of virtues. In Igbo land a just man is one who speaks the truth, without any fear or favour. He is a man of the community. He is kind, merciful, sociable and upright. In precolonial days a just man was an excellent arbitrator, who spoke and judged according to *Ofo*. Justice is truth in action. (p. 31).

This definition of justice by the Igbo elder is in agreement with the definition above of justice by Azuakor and Nwankwo (2020, section on Justice in General) as “evenhandedness, fairness, impartiality”, for “Akankwuota” means straightness of the hand, that is, not bending the hand/rules no matter whose horse is being gored (thus, it is fairness, impartiality) while “Ikpenkwuoto” means straightness in judgment, that is maintaining the truth no matter who is

involved, that is, fairness, impartiality and evenhandedness. In equiperating justice with truth, the elder is already implying doing the right thing, presenting matters as they are without any hidden agenda for truth as in Greek *alitheia* means leaving nothing uncovered or hidden, but rather making them stand naked without any hidden agenda. It also agrees with the notion of justice by Aristotle who held that justice summed all virtues in itself by saying that the just man is kind, merciful, sociable and upright. In fact, this Igbo idea of justice as given by C. Nworji is so complete and rich. The *Ofo* is the symbol of justice among the Igbo and the holder must act in truth, fairness and equity or face the disastrous consequences. If he abides by the rules of the *Ofo*, he instills order and harmony in society.

A liar among the Igbo, on the other hand, is seen as a person with two tongues and so unreliable, he is not a just person and causes commotion and disharmony in the community. Writing on *Ofo* Ilogu (1974), notes that *Ofo* “is spoken of in Ibo proverbs as the means by which the community is ever reminded that *ndu* (life), the supreme value, requires justice so as to even this *ndu* out to all members of the community” (131).

Personal names are often used to express something real in the life of the bearer. In the bible for example, Nabal is well named for being a fool (1 Sam. 25:25). Jacob means usurper (Gen. 27: 36) and we know how he usurped Isau’s position. Benjamin means son of the right hand (given by Jacob) in replacement of Benoni - son of my grief - that Rachael had intended for the son whose birth took her life. Now in Igbo language, many names are used to express the concept of justice especially in the context of the births or happenstances in the lives of the bearers. *Ofoka* means *Ofo* (Justice) is greater or superior; *Ofodile* means justice is efficacious, *Ejimofu*, means I have justice on my side because of the truth and justice in the case; *Ofoegbu* means justice does not kill, *Ofoma* means justice knows- a person who has been unjustly accused may give his child the name in anticipation that he will be vindicated. All these names indicate that once justice is done all will be well. The Igbo who originally had no kings or chiefs in contempt of those who had would bear such names as *Ikpeamaeze* (the king is never in the wrong) to castigate those who had to indicate that the king would always get justice by hook or crook after all he has all the might (remember the idea of right is might in the context of justice) (Cf. Nzomiwu, 1999).

In the Igbo traditional milieu customary law was expected to render justice or else the gods will do so for maintenance of harmony and order in society. For Iroegbu (1994), “if man fails in rendering justice, the gods will render it. Societal cohesion rested on justice and any injustice or grave unfairness destroyed confidence and communality” (p. 92). Justice is however seen in Igbo culture to be ultimately dependent on God. Other forms of justice are seen to be relative to man, to the ancestors who would often appear in difficult cases in the form of *mmuonwu* (the spirit of the dead ancestors who manifest in the form of masquerades) - these masquerades in arbitration of difficult cases are seen to be capable of rendering true justice inasmuch as they come from the spirit world, are closer to the deity and capable of dispassionately rendering justice. But ultimately real justice lies with God and the person who is truly human and has affinity with God will render justice. The Igbo would always express this through their prayers. For Nzomiwu (1999), “They call God: One who metes out justice upon man and removes the curse when it is unjustly invoked upon someone; One who helps the oppressed. These prayers are usually said before breaking kola nut” (p. 77). Nigerians are very religious; it is left for this religiosity to manifest in true spirituality because the really religious person is expected to be spiritual and the spiritual person will do justice. If this be

the case in Nigeria, tribe, religion, ethnicity, religious affiliation will not hinder the giving to everyone what is their due because they will be seen as secondary elements while justice is primary.

Ala (the earth goddess in Igbo cosmology and spirituality) is the most powerful of all the minor deities. She is second only to Chukwu (the Supreme Being) and is considered to have compiled and handed down the Igbo moral code- *Omenala*- to the ancestors from time immemorial. Chief among the contents of the moral code is the maintenance of justice and any failure to abide by the code is viewed as offence against *Ala – Aru, Nsoala*- which must need purification of the land – *Ikpu aru*- in order to appease the earth goddess and restore order and harmony in society. For Nzomiwu (1999), the sins against *Ala* needing appeasement and purification will include homicide, incest, adultery, stealing seed yams, suicide and poisoning. Where the community is complicit in the offence of an individual either by commission or omission *Ala* punishes the entire community unless propitiations are done by the entire community. (This should point us to the need for corporate responsibility- when people of our tribes commit evil or when injustice is done and certain segments of society keep quiet because they have something to gain, they should know that the punishment of the divine will not exempt them. Consider Nigerian politics with regard to the unjust allocation of resources and positions and some people just keep quiet when they know it is not well; the reason for so many agitations and taking of lives in Nigeria today and nobody is really safe. Unless this is corrected and appeased, we will all continue to suffer). Apart from perhaps incest, it is clear how all the sins/infringements thus mentioned have to do with contravening of another's right to justice.

Ala fulfils the need of a 'feminine touch' in the concept of God. She is the nearest and dearest of all the minor deities (Parrinder, 1969). But while she is so kind and loving, she punishes offence with the gravest severity.

Crucial to Igbo justice sense is the dictum of "*Egbe bere ugo bere nke si ibe ya ebela nku kwaa ya*" (what has been called the EBUB principle, that is, *Egbe bere ugo bere*). The dictum means, Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch, whichever refuses the other to perch, let its wings break. This simply means that all should be accommodated, that what is good for the goose is good for the gander. By this there should be no dichotomy of any kind, no discrimination; and this means opportunities are open to all no matter their background or cleavages. Nothing could better guarantee justice for all than this principle.

JUSTICE SITUATION IN NIGERIA

The second stanza of our national anthem reads:

Oh God of creation,
Direct our noble cause
Guide our leaders right
Help our youths the truth to know,
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace and justice shall reign.

But the truth is that we have not been growing in love and honesty. Injustice has been the order of the day and that means no love as envisioned by the lyrics of the anthem nor is there honesty and living just and true. As a result of this the hunger to “build a nation where peace and justice shall reign” has remained a mirage. Benezenwa (2008) rightly noted that the people of Nigeria in their diversity are not treated in any means and manner as equals and the leaders have done everything but build a nation where peace and justice would reign supreme.

In Nigeria many times, justice has been bought by those with wealth and influence, it has become the possession of the powerful as though in affirmation of the definition of justice by Thrasymachus as the advantage of the stronger. This is so not minding the constant affirmation by the law books and the attorneys that the law is no respecter of person, that everyone is equal before the law. According to Ezenwa (1993), “The only occasion when the law is no respecter of individual sentiments and peoples in this country is yet to be named” (pp. 31-32). The prison cells or rather what is now called correctional centres bear eloquent testimony to unequal treatment of the rich and the poor in Nigeria today indicating that the law has rather become a respecter of persons. The centres are filled mainly by the poor not necessarily because the poor only are the ones who commit all the crimes but because they are too weak to protect themselves while those who commit the greater crimes and should really be held behind bars are walking freely in society. Now and again we hear about embezzlements of billions and trillions of naira by well-placed individuals or those having high positions of power. Many of them are not prosecuted, those prosecuted spend little time in prison custody and are soon released and at times granted state pardon without paying back a reasonable chunk of what they have stolen when they should actually be paying back all. At times they are made to pay back very ridiculous amounts of money in plea bargain that it seems that it pays to be criminal if you are highly placed; this so, especially if you belong to the current ruling party. We have not forgotten the very offensive slogan attributed to a former chairman of the ruling party that made waves not too long ago: “If you belong to the APC, your sins are forgiven you.” We actually saw criminal offenders joining the party and getting free while those who did not join continued to be selectively punished. The populace continues to suffer as a result of the fleecing of our common patrimony because of this misplacement of justice.

We equally recognize the miscarriage of justice in appointments to public positions and in the allocation of resources. Another area is the fiscal structure of the country. APC during her campaigns prior to winning the election and assumption of office in 2015 made restructuring a key element of their manifesto; and at the assumption of office instituted a committee on restructuring headed by the current governor of Kaduna State, Mallam Nasir El Rufai. The committee came out with beautiful proposals for restructuring which were swept under the carpet, only for the ruling party to start telling Nigerians that they do not know what restructuring means. Such idiotic pretences and dishonesty will never do anybody any good, and will never generate peace that is necessary for progress. Some campaigners for the February, 2023 general elections also kept telling Nigerians that restructuring was a crucial part of their agenda if elected into office. Should we be able to trust them?

The things that impede access to justice in Nigeria, according to Okogbule (2005) include undue delay in the administration of justice, reliance on technical rules, high cost of

litigation, locus standi, and illiteracy. For Okogbule, the introduction of judicial reforms and resort to alternative means of resolution of conflicts could aid in bettering the situation. Because people are poor they cannot approach the courts and also because they cannot approach the courts and added to some of them not being so educated, they do not even know their rights as to defend them.

For Banu az-Zubair (n.d.), there are recent reports suggesting a deliberate attempt to marginalise a particular segment of the Nigerian society in the areas of employment into certain critical government parastatals and security agencies; while at the same time a particular segment enjoys monopoly over economic resources, controlling the legitimate use of political power and violence. The government must ensure that, for the sake of social justice, no group or segment has full control over these means of power. This paper would rather hold that all segments must be enabled to participate fairly in all the means of power control inasmuch as they are qualified and willing.

Perceived injustice in the distribution of natural resources in Nigeria has led to some crises in Nigeria, for example the call of the Ijaw Youths Council (IYC) for resource control where the principal concepts of their agitation include the terms: “absolute” and “principal” resource control and increased derivation. Proponents of the “absolute” control hold with the Kaiama Declaration position that every region or state should have total, 100%, control of the resources found in their areas, whereas those who hold to the latter state that the Niger Delta region should have direct and decisive role in the exploration, exploitation and refining of the crude oil found in their domain (Ako, 2012). While there are many perceptions of the meaning of resource control, this paper is in agreement with Henryik, (2009) on what resource control in a federal system of government should be which is, the local governments and states under whose jurisdiction the resources are extracted having control and management of the resources in those territories but under the guidelines of the federal government (especially as relating to the environment), and then remitting prescribed percentage to the federal centre.

Resource control in Nigeria is rightly presented by Ako (2012) as “a term that represents the agitation of the impoverished, politically and socially excluded and environmentally devastated Niger Delta region to control its environmental resources and enjoy its benefits”. This is especially so when the practice in Nigeria is to allocate oil wells to those who have the resources to exploit them often without care about the environment. And the great majority of these are not even people from the area; they are often the allies of the ruling class.

Dickson and Asua (2016) hold that the situation in Nigeria where the oil resources are controlled from the centre in an effort to fast-track development makes the utilization of the revenues thus derived to mainly serve the interests of the majority ethnic groups rather than those of the minority ethnic groups from which the oil is exploited. He advocates for the rethinking and restructuring of the nation’s federalism in such a way as to have better management of the resources and then mutual coexistence. Still for Dickson and Asua, “The contending issues in the Nigerian federalism include but are not limited to resource control, revenue allocation, State creation, federal character question and leadership crisis” (p. 3). In these itemized contending issues are the miscarriage of justice because of the lack of equity and fairness in their determination. Continuing, Dickson and Asua contend that “the continued agitation for resource control by the Niger Delta region is, perceived as one of the

manifestations of the struggles to redress perceived injustices and inequalities in fiscal relations among ethnic nationalities, regions and political units within the Nigerian federation” (p. 8).

For Okolo and Akpokighe (2014), “The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region in commercial quantity triggered a chain of events that has led to the political and economic marginalization of the inhabitants” (p. 106). This is injustice. It looks as though the discovery has become a curse to the people from whose land this all important resource is generated. Successive administrations have not been sincere in collaborating with the state governments to develop the Niger Delta Areas.

IGBO JUSTICE: INTERFACE WITH JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

Igbo justice system as already discussed is person-centred including the person here and the person beyond/yonder and their relationships. So justice has a pervading repercussion; if we are Christians, Muslims or African Traditional Religionists who have a sight into the world beyond, then we should be careful not to offend since there must eventually be an eternal recompense for the good and punishment for the bad. We must remember that if man does not do justice, God will enforce it.

In Igbo society, appealing to justice is perceived as a means to protecting the innocent and punishing the offender. If this is done in Nigeria, Nigeria will be a better place to live where the guilty are not left to walk free and the innocent condemned. Rather, the guilty, no matter who they are, will be brought to book and the innocent set free.

Justice in Igbo society is for maintenance of law and order. In the recently concluded Presidential, Gubernatorial and other elections for example, a lot of people are convinced that justice was not done and hence there is palpable tension in the land. If the independent National Electoral Commission can conduct elections with *akankwuoto* (straight hand) and *ikpenkwuoto* (straightness in judgment) as discussed under the section on Igbo Justice, there will be cause for such palpable tension. This will also apply to the election tribunals and the law courts.

The Igbo feel sore and gravely bitter in the face of miscarriage of justice. Today in Nigeria a good number of people never really care if there is justice or not inasmuch as they have something to gain from the injustice perpetrated, hence you hear political parties and their supporters hailing and praising apparent injustices and even canonizing them. Like in the last elections that were evidently marred by impunity of all sorts, you still see people saying they were the fairest and most credible ever had. It is precisely for this reason that progress in Nigeria will continue to be a mirage.

In Igboland a just man must always speak the truth. This is lacking among many Nigerians today. The just man is merciful, kind and upright too. In this regard we must hail the courage of such eminent Nigerians as the former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, Pa Ayo Adebajo of Afenifere and Chief Edwin Clerk of the Niger Delta for insisting that there must be the doing of justice by allowing the Presidency to move to the South East especially as the region presented a most qualified candidate via the Labour Party in the person of Mr. Peter Obi.

Justice among the Igbo implies fairness, equity, truth. In Nigeria this is lacking in practice; in unitary schools and universities in Nigeria, for example, the scores for admissions are skewed against the South, but especially the South East, yet the so-called educationally backward Northerners are the ones who end up securing all the jobs and appointments; thus mediocrity is glorified while excellence is ridiculed.

Just as in Igbo traditional setting injustice is seen as *Aru* (abomination), an offence against the earth goddess, *Ala*, which must be appeased, doing injustice in Nigeria through such things as ballot snatching during elections, mutilation of election results, or appointing unqualified persons into office just because of their tribes and religion must be seen as *Aru*, abomination that must be stopped. Nigeria is so rich yet the majority of the people are living in squalor and penury and those in charge are only interested in enriching themselves and their ilk and controlling the vast wealth of the land while the citizens languish.

Egbe bere ugo bere nke si ibe ya ebela nku kwaa ya, the EBUB principle discussed earlier, means that one or some sections of the country must not continue grabbing and using power even illegally at the detriment of the others. The South East zone has never been allowed to wield power at the Presidency electively just because they are not expected by some to share in the “lucrative” venture of managing Nigeria’s affairs and the distribution of its vast resources in spite of being eminently qualified and contributing enormously to the said resources. No wonder such groups as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) have arisen in an attempt to right the wrong. Discrimination against Christians who form nothing less than about 50% of the entire population has been on and even gaining momentum; some see this as of no consequence while indeed it is a very dangerous scenario capable of rocking the boat of this country if unchecked. Justice as advantage of the stronger which we have noticed in Nigeria must give way to fair play so we can have a society where love, peace and harmony thrive. It must be EBUB.

CONCLUSION

Justice in general has to do with fairness, giving to each and everyone what is their due. It is necessary for harmonious coexistence of human beings in society. In Igbo worldview justice which also entails fairness is not only seen from the conceptual standpoint but rather from the relational standpoint. It is person-centred and relates to the society here and now and the society beyond. This justice has not been seen to be really done in Nigeria especially as the relationship among Nigerians has often been marred by the negative undue attachment to primordial stereotypes of tribal affiliations, religious affiliations, cultural attachments, language differences and connectedness to persons that matter. As a result, while Nigeria is so richly blessed, yet its peoples wander in abject poverty, insecurity, strife and corruption. The Igbo understanding of justice is seen by this paper to be capable of saving the situation in Nigeria for since Nigerians are a very religious people, the relational nature of justice in the Igbo worldview implies that the world yonder is involved and if man does not do justice, then God will see it done, and since there is eternal recompense for men’s behaviour, then people who want to live in eternal bliss must begin now to do justice. Again the EBUB principle means too that justice must be done to all irrespective of their affiliations. If this is done, all Nigerians will be happy, live in harmony and peace having relatively been served justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigerians should see and treat each other as brothers and sisters no matter their differences in tribe, religion and language. This will aid in the doing of justice.

From the Igbo perspective, truth is same as justice. Truth must always be said and done in all circumstances if Nigeria really intends to develop.

Right from primary schools, Sunday schools and Koranic schools children must be taught the value of justice and how its doing should be all encompassing.

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