

# **TRADITIONAL METHODS OF PROMOTING PEACE IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA**

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## **Introduction**

In African settings, mechanisms are put in place within society to ensure that its members conform to its norms and values. The cultural and religious practices of a group of people have significant bearing on their behavior and peaceful coexistence. Acts that can breach peace are abhorred while peace is entrenched in most African cultures through various methods of promoting peace. The current chapter focuses on Nigeria, which is known for its multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic diversity. We focus mainly on the Igbo ethnic group in southeast Nigeria.

Nigeria is a pluralistic nation, and it prides itself as a nation with vast mineral and human resources. Nonetheless, competition over resources is one of the immediate and or remote causes of crises among various ethnic groups. Some crises within the Nigerian traditional context are resolved through conventional methods such as adjudication, and some are resolved through unconventional (traditional) approaches to conflict resolution. Different ethnic groups in Nigeria have ways through which they promote peace and ameliorate conflict in the family and the community. In this chapter, we, first, discuss three disciplinary perspectives used in peace promotion. Then we examine multiple traditional approaches to peace promotion used in southeast Nigeria.

## **Disciplinary Perspectives on Peace**

### **Cognitive Psychology**

Cognitive psychology with its empirical work on thinking and the operations of the mind provides a framework for understanding peace. We apply cognitive psychology in relation to the mind, meaning making, and the role of insight in conflict analysis and resolution. When people encounter information, they interpret the information within the context of their past experiences. This means that human perceptions are generally subjective. For example, people who grow up in cultures where mothers carry babies on their back are more likely to understand this practice than those in cultures where babies are usually carried in strollers. More technically, cognitive psychology has shown that humans develop schemas that guide their thinking and responses to stimuli they encounter (Klausmeier & Prayer 1970; Kool, 2008; Stagner 1965).

Schemas are mental frameworks we develop from experiences and which we use for interpreting new information. Cognitive psychologists have found that use of schemas in interpreting new information usually occurs automatically without conscious effort (Fiske 2002). The way we perceive and interpret information depends on our previous experiences. This cognitive framework can be used to understand how specific individuals or groups choose to resolve conflict and promote peace. In the Nigerian context, certain indigenous methods of promoting peace are commonly practiced. Some of these methods are associated with traditional religious practices and some with local practices in specific communities. We believe that the schemas people have developed about peace promotion contribute to effectiveness of their traditional methods.

## **Cultural Psychology**

In the past, some researchers had proposed universal laws that govern our behavior. In more recent times, however, cultural psychologists have found that behavior and mental processes are interconnected with culture in systematic but complex patterns. In a never-ending cycle, people shape culture and culture shapes people. Research in cultural psychology has shown that values, logical reasoning, and cognitive and motivational processes are contingent on context, and, as such, much variation is seen across cultures. We therefore perceive the traditional practices in areas of Nigeria as specific approaches that are consistent with the needs and experiences of the specific indigenes and residents in different regions.

## **Psycholinguistics**

Psycholinguistics is also helpful for the purpose of understanding the role of the traditional methods of peace promotion different places. Psycholinguistics is the study of the mental components of language and speech. It focuses on the way the brain processes and represents language. Psycholinguistics, as part of cognitive psychology, can help in explaining the language of different places/regions and how language shapes the traditional peace promotion methods in particular places.

## **Traditional Methods of Peace Promotion**

The inevitability of crisis makes peace promotion a vital discourse. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC 2011), the promotion of a culture of non-violence and peace is not just about the absence of war. It is about creating an enabling environment for dialogue and discussion, and finding solutions to problems and

tensions, without fear of violence, through a process in which everyone is valued and able to participate. This is the hallmark of the indigenous approaches to peace promotion which this chapter is devoted to. Traditional methods of promoting peace seek to maintain an environment that facilitates dialogue in the midst of palpable tensions by ensuring that parties in conflict are given fair hearing while explicitly indicating/stating possible consequences for not giving peace promotion a chance. There are several indigenous approaches to peace promotion employed in Nigeria. They include but not limited to oath taking, swearing, the use of fines/sanctions, elders acting as arbiters, umuada (women groups), age group institutions, etc. We now review these approaches as used in southeast Nigeria.

### **Traditional Methods of Promoting Peace in Southeast Nigeria**

In the Igbo society, the ultimate goal of conflict resolution is to restore the harmonious status quo ante between conflicting parties. Restoring this status quo implicates the resolution of the matter at issue as well as the removal of suspicion and distrust. The Igbo say that when two relations are eating in the darkness, there is no need to bring in a taper (Nwanne na nwanne libe nni n'ochichi, na a na-amunyeru oku). It is also an axiom among the Igbo that when two people are engaged in a quarrel, it is the duty and right of a third person (a relation or any person of goodwill, particularly an elder) to intervene in order to help resolve the conflict. As a part of the rites of accession to Igbo high titles, the title candidate has to swear that he would never see two persons in a conflict and pass by unconcerned. He also swears to tell the truth without fear or favor.

When there is a dispute between two persons, their relations and very close associates regard it as their right and duty to intervene and help resolve it. This position extends even to

intra family disputes. It is an age-old custom of the Igbo that an accused person shall state his case before judgment is given. Judgment is not given by hearing one side only, and when the due process is followed, no party feels oppressed or cheated.

### **Elders and Promotion of Peace**

There is great reverence for age in the Igbo society, as well as in other Nigerian ethnic groups. When there is a conflict, the elders are expected and enjoined by tradition to tell the whole truth as they know it, no matter whose “ox is gored.” Any decision or action they take must be based on the truth.

For example, in Igbo society, an aggrieved person begins by reporting the matter to the eldest person in the family, group, or community. He presents some kola nuts. The elder will then call a meeting of the elders (elders’ council). The elders set a date for a hearing and send an emissary to invite the other party, the defendant. Both sides are given ample opportunity to state and explain themselves. The Council produces the decision together, but the oldest person pronounces the judgment. Thereafter, the decision is enforced and protected by the family, group, or community. It is important that the relations of both parties are present at the time of the judgment and are taken to be parties to it. So, even if a person has lost the case, the feeling is cushioned by the presence of his relations (i.e., *ikpe umunna so kpe*). This method could be compared to “trial by jury” (of one’s peers), which became part of the English judicial system in the 13th century. This position of the elders among the Igbo of Nigeria is in synchrony with the following observation of Oluwabamide (2003):

*The announcers of decisions are always prominent personalities at councils or trials. They are usually men of good address and of a sound knowledge of the*

*customary procedure. They are commonly the holders of the senior ofo. A man of outstanding wealth might in any group attain for himself a measure of chieftainship, if he is able and generous. The group of titled people dares the richest men in the community. They take prominent part in control of the community. They include in their ranks the heads of the most important extended families. They are, in some communities, the principal judges and principal executive officers, who enjoy numerous privileges. (p. 114)*

### **Political Organizations and Promotion of Peace**

The principal political organization, among the Igbo, is the umunna, the agnates, comprising a number of families and extended families with a common or related ancestry. A number of umunna comprise the village, also supposed to be linked by a common ancestry. Every umunna guards its internal harmony and solidarity as well as its corporate image. It is a very important factor in social interaction and cohesion. The Igbo, as a whole, have a great respect for age. The oldest male in a family or family group heads the unit and holds the ofo (ritual staff) of the group. In many cases, he equally is the chief priest of the family or the village earth shrine, which is probably the most potent force in the establishment and maintenance of social order in the Igbo culture. In very serious cases, conflicting parties may be asked to go before the appropriate earth shrine and protest their innocence or be purified of their guilt.

A number of villages comprise a town which is the best-known political unit in the Igbo system. Traditionally, the Igbo have a few places with centralized authority at Agbor, Onitsha, Aguleri, Nri, Uguta, and Arochukwu. In the other places, the headship of the town derives from a rotational arrangement among the villages, village groups, and family groups. It is interesting

that Igbo villages go to their town meetings primarily as members of their villages in the same way as family groups go to their village meetings as members of their family groups. Each of the units - family groups and village groups - insists on having its voice heard as the voice of their group. This is the famed Igbo republicanism.

Where a number of towns have a historical, cultural or mythical link, they constitute a clan. The unity among the constituent members of a clan reflects in their customary, cultural and dialectal closeness and homogeneity, which are sometimes cherished by the Igbo more than the political authority of the towns. In the Igbo traditionally, unwritten political arrangements and customs are the main mechanisms of social order. A custom in breach has a built-in mechanism of imposing sanctions or extracting reparations. The elders are the guardians of norms and wrongs, and provide the traditional system of restoring equilibrium.

### **Social Organizations and Promotion of Peace**

Among social organizations, which are very strong in the Igbo socio-political arrangement, are the age-group organizations, the classificatory sisters, the classificatory co-wives, agnates and cognates, title groups, and the marriage lines.

#### **Ogbo/Ogba (Age Group/Set)**

The Igbo generally regard persons born around the same important event or within a locally specified period (generally two to three years) as sharing a common mystical bond. Such united persons are called members of an age group. The community, at a certain time, bestow a name on every age grade (ogbo/ogba). There are thus such names as Ogbo Agha German - those born during the Second World War; Ogbo Fluenza - those born during the 1918 Influenza

Epidemic; Ogbo Eklus, in the year of the Total Eclipse of the Sun on Wednesday, May 20, 1947; Ogba Igwe - those who were the first to ride bicycles in their communities; and Ogba Udo - peace makers.

The progress of individual members of an age group is monitored by the society (as is done for members of a class in the modern school system). Each age group usually decides and acts to contribute something to the good of their community. Age groups become instruments of social order, solidarity, and action. Age sets are usually assigned specific duties in the government and functioning of the communities. Age-set organization provides the mechanism for extending relationships from the narrow confines of the patrilineage to the wider society. Apart from serving as mechanisms for extending putative kingship relations, these organizations provide useful mechanisms for social control. For example, to avoid jeopardizing their amicable relationships, age-sets are neither allowed to have sex relations with one another's wife nor take one another's daughter as a wife.

### **Umu-ada/Umu-okpu (classificatory sisters)**

Even though the Igbo are predominantly patriarchal, they have specific roles and deep respect for their women's social organizations. The umu-ada or classificatory sisters are probably the most powerful Igbo organ for conflict resolution. They bond themselves into an association usually named after the village of their birth, e.g. Umuada Ogwofia of Ogwofla Autonomous Community in Ezeagu LGA of the Enugu State. They step in to resolve, even the most intractable conflicts, and no wise leaders or elders dare disobey them. The conflicts, which the umu-ada step in to resolve, include the following: (a) intra-family disputes, where they threaten the peace and solidarity of the family, the family groups, the village, and the community; (b)

boundary disputes, non-conformity with the norms of the village or the community; and (c) breach of peace and of customs.

### **Umu-nwunye-di/Otu-nwunye-di/umu-inyom/Ikporo Ogbe(Classificatory Co-wives)**

All women married into the families in a village are customarily regarded and respected as having a common husband and are called *umu-nwunye-di*. These classificatory co-wives bond themselves into an association usually named after the village or the family of their marriage. They work hard and are fierce protectors of women against matrimonial maltreatment. They are also agents for peace and the resolution of conflicts within the family and the village. They devise or maintain a basket of sanctions and punitive measures, which they impose on the guilty in a conflict.

When a communal problem has become intractable and, as a consequence, an even greater disaster looms, the women band themselves together into a peace march, customarily called *ishue elimagwo* in Imezi-Owa in Ezeau LGA of the Enugu State, at a time and day appointed by them. They tie some creepers around their waists, their trunks almost bare but painted with cam wood, and march to the compounds of the important factors in the problem, where they could freely defecate. Everybody runs behind closed doors for it is customarily believed that none who meets and looks at them in such a state of emotion and dress will live. In all known cases, where this rare and most stringent measure had been taken, the conflict was stopped in its tracks, and peace was returned and prevailed.

When peace is in maintenance, the *umu-nwunye-di* have music and dance groups, and they function during festivals and ceremonies. Very often, they are mini cooperative groups,

bringing a certain level of economic and social development to the village. Consequently, they attract respect and goodwill.

### **Ikwu Nne/Ibe-nne/Umere-nne (Agnates)**

In the Igbo system, children of a marriage union have freedom of action tantamount to immunity in the village of their mothers. They are regularly called home from wherever they live to participate in the resolution of problems and conflicts. Their views are respected since they are known to speak or act without fear or favor. This right of intervention, which is guaranteed by customs and traditions, crosses the gender line and is applicable to males and females alike. A person's public esteem in the community is diminished if she or he has done nothing to intervene and resolve a conflict raging in his *ikwu nne/ibe-nne/umere-nne*.

### **Umunna**

The Igbo social system is patriarchal and a lot of authority and power reside in the *umunna*. The *ofo* is domiciled in the local community, and customary power over communal lands is usually vested in an elder in the *umunna*. More importantly, members of the Council of Elders are drawn from the *umunna*. Primogeniture, which prevails among the Igbo ensures that seniority is based on age. When there is an altercation or dispute, it is reported to the head of the *umunna (diokpala)*, who enacts the machinery for its resolution as stated supra. The *umunna* is one of the important republics in dealing with town affairs. When a town or a community council is summoned, individuals from an *umunna* attend and speak as voices of their respective *umunna*. This ensures that any decision taken has broad-based, support. Consequently, a conflict resolved at the Council brings everybody and every section of the community along with it.

## **Marriage Lines**

Traditionally, Igbo people marry or give out their children in marriage along the business or other social lines already explored by the elders, who then give testimony about the pedigree (*agbo*) of both parties in the projected marriage. In olden times, when special markets (e.g., markets for specialized products like pots and goats) were few and far between, people made friends in the communities on the routes they traveled. They stored whatever they were carrying with their friends and returned for them later. In this way, friendship supported business. From that, marriages often sprang up. If there was any conflict in any community on a trade route, all the friends had a stake in resolving it and all contributed.

In the course of human history, marriages have been used as instruments of constructive diplomacy, in the 16th and 17th centuries, when secular things, dressed in religious themes, were tearing Europe into warring countries and regions. Austria, which was at the head of the Holy Roman Empire, regularly proclaimed to her peoples, “Let others wage war but you ye lucky Austrians marry.” They even had an acronym made out of the five vowels of the English and Romance languages: AEIOU stood for Austria Est Imperare Orbis Universae, which means “Austria is to rule the world.” Marriage took the Austrians into the dynasties of England, France, Spain, Portugal, and other powerful countries. This helped secure peace for her people and brokered peace among the warring powers of Europe.

Marriage lines have also been important lines of cultural diplomacy in Igboland. In the past, potentates or other powerful people married into the families of other potentates or potential rivals. This helped stabilize emotions and secure peace among the different peoples. Marriage lines are still very important factors of cultural diplomacy in the Igbo society. The following Igbo proverbs underscore this point: (a) *Ogo bu chi onye* - One’s in-law is one’s personal god;

and (b) *Ogo eyighu ogo, n 'ogo a naghu* - Until one has buried one's in-law, the marriage relationship subsists.

Of course, when there is offspring from the marriage, the relationship can last beyond a life time into new generations, with the children and their children's children carrying the rights and obligations of having their *ikwunne* and their *ikwunna*, which the communities and families use effectively to douse or resolve conflicts.

### **Title Groups**

Title groups such as Ozo, Nze, Oba, Ichie are generally honorific. Freeborn members of a community can accede to these titles if he has attained some level of property and enough money/ownership to pay for the various accession fees. Titled persons are well organized and have the ability to do something effective and good for their communities. Indeed, it was people like them, though they were not educated, that led development agents into rural Igbo communities. The achievement-oriented spirit of the average Igbo person guarantees the continued existence of titles. Everyone hopes to accede to the titles sometime, someday. When peace is under threat or in breach, titled members, with their strong connections to the economic base, can work for the good of the community by identifying proposed actions designed to lay a conflict to rest.

### **Mechanisms of Conflict Resolution**

In traditional Igbo society, which had no statutes, customs and tradition were the principal mechanisms for social order. Part of the traditional education of Igbo children was knowledge of what to do and what to avoid, the reward of doing good, the consequences of

violating the norms and values of the community, and how reparations are made in cases of breaches of custom. The following represents the predominant mechanisms of conflict resolution and peace promotion in southeast Nigeria.

### **Ighu Iyi (Oath Taking)**

Some of the socio-religious rituals installed in the Igbo mechanism of conflict resolution include oath taking. The animist religion of the Igbo implies that there is a life-force in every inanimate object just as there is in a living object. Swearing by an object is, under this system, invoking the life force to witness. Since the life-force knows the true facts of the matter, it is dangerous to take a false oath because it would only be a matter of time before the powerful life-force strikes. When a matter is in strong dispute or contention, a resort may be made to oath taking. Each party swears to a deity that his own statements are right. Those who swear to it customarily make some small offering to the deity. If, after oath-taking, new facts arise or the parties agree to settle out of shrine, the religious priests can conduct a ceremony of abrogation of oaths (*ibubo iyi*).

The Igbo approach oath taking cautiously because no one is sure what the 'Powers' will do in the end, not only to the contending parties but also to their dependents and relations. Although the elders might agree that the oath be sworn to, they prefer that humans handle the matter at issue. The most serious cases, especially those involving lives, are resolved by the dreaded *igba ndu* (blood oath/covenant) or *idu n 'iyi/ighu maa* (summoning somebody to the shrine for oath taking). The cases that most often demand oath taking for resolution are claims and accusations, and serious defamation.

### **Igba Ndu/Iwa Ataka (The Blood Oath/Covenant)**

The blood oath (*igba ndu*) or *iwa ataka* in Isu-Awa in Awgu LGA of Enugu State is dreaded and regarded as a last resort in extreme cases only. The parties consult the elders of the community and their relations. The consequences of a misdemeanor can stretch beyond the parties to their relations. Where one of the parties fears for his life either through violence or the use of psychic powers, each of the parties swears that (a) "I will not cause death or harm to the other person either by myself or through a proxy"; (b) "Nor will I see any danger lurking for him and be silent." The palm of each person is lacerated and each of the parties licks his own blood as well as that of the opposition. The affirmations are then repeated, and the ritual is over.

### **Iko Mmee ("Scooping up of Blood")**

After an armed conflict between two communities or where a man from one community has murdered a person from another community, the two communities usually engage in an oath cleansing ritual, which some parts of Igboland call *iko mmee* (literally, scooping up of blood). The philosophy is that bloodshed pollutes the earth and is abominable to the earth-force. So, after a conflict, the blood-soaked soil must be cleansed by scooping away the blood-sodden earth. The ceremony puts a seal on the peace agreement between the erstwhile warring parties. The ritual is not punitive because both parties (the victors and the vanquished, offenders and victims) fully participate. In some parts of Igboland, if this ritual is not performed after a war or in some cases where blood had been shed violently, it is taken that the conflict is not over and could erupt again.

### **Divination (Igba Afa/Ije N'Afa)**

Among the Igbos, it is believed that every suffering or sickness is the effect of a wrongdoing somewhere in the cosmos. Therefore, to resolve the problem, people trace it to its cause through a system of reading the minds of the 'Powers' called *igba afa* or *je n 'afa* (divination). They also believe that some people can use their psychic powers to do evil to others. It is unfortunate that where there is such a problem, an individual may be accused of bringing about the evil through witchcraft. When such an accusation has been made, the suspicion can tear a relationship apart. Members of a family might refuse to eat any food cooked by or remotely associated with the accused person. It is in such a case (e.g., unexplained deaths in a family, malignant disease, or habitual failure of business or enterprise) that the family or the community decides to go to a diviner or seer (dibia/dibie), often outside the community, to trace the root of the problem. Although the diviner sometimes hits the nail on the head, he also discharges and acquits the main suspect in a case, sometimes tracing the problem to a wrongdoing in the distant past. To the animists, who believe that divination is a revelation from the 'Powers,' much bad blood is not left after the consultation, especially where the diviner is of high repute. As the diviner often prescribes a propitiatory offering or sacrifice, everybody is content to let the matter die. Usually, once the offerings have been made, there are no bad feelings left. Divination is a mechanism of conflict resolution that is very much acceptable in the animist Igbo society.

### **Mmanwu/Mawu/Mmuo (Spirit Manifests)**

Mmamvu, mawu or mmuo is a widely accepted manifest spirit in Igbo socio-cultural life, often seen in music, dance, song, entertainment, social control, and community mobilization or

exhibition gallery (e.g., the *ijele*). Regardless of its specific role or character in Igbo culture, there is an underlying principle to which every Igbo person is meant to subscribe. The fathers and founders of Igbo culture taught that *mmanwu/mawu/mmuo* is a manifestation of a disembodied spirit (e.g., like a dead person, a deity, or a power) which comes from the land of the spirits and, after due rituals, emerges from an ant hole to interact with the living in the land of humans (Emeka, 1991, 1993; Enekwe, 1987; Okafor, 1992, 1996). It is in this spirit-rooted philosophy that the importance or significance of *mmuo/mmanwu/mawu* lies.

Since *mmanwu* is spirit, everything it does or does not do is an action or non-action of the spirits. The result of an Igbo person openly denouncing this doctrine can result in pain and severe sanctions, including death. Igbo customs have applied the doctrine of *mmanwu* to some very important situations outside entertainment. They have granted *mmamvu* a virtual immunity. Therefore, whatever harm (physical or non-material) that *mmanwu* may cause one, one must not retaliate. For any retaliation or hint of retaliation is tantamount to desecration of *mmanwu* or denouncing its spirit nature. Some village communities have invoked the most powerful *mmanwu* in their localities, that is, those with magico-psychic powers to intervene in and settle or decide on a malignant issue or dispute. When they appear and pronounce on the matter, everyone submits, for to do otherwise would tantamount to *ita/ika mmanwu/mawu*.

In general, the Igbo regard the construction of the post-conflict environment as just as important as resolving the conflict itself. Therefore, the end of a conflict or crisis in a community includes concomitant celebrations, including music, dancing, feasting, and, of course, performances by spirit-manifestations in the community. The locals can then say that their happiness has reached the land of the spirits—which is the ultimate.

### **Ikpu Alu (Cleansing Ritual/Propitiation)**

When a person has breached a customary taboo in the Igbo traditional community, he is taken to have offended the earth-shrine, which, in the Igbo system, is less powerful than the Great God (Chukwu). The taboos are classified into alo (abomination) and nso ani (sacrilege against the earth-force). The person who has breached such taboo customarily excludes himself from some of the rights and privileges in the community until he is cleansed through the ritual of ikpu alo conducted by the priests from Nri. Okafor (1994) states:

*In the case of alit, propitiation can be very demanding. it usually includes cleansing rites performed by Nri priests, or priests of the principal En clans, or sometimes by priests from Arochukwu. One ritual requires a goat to be dragged along village paths prior to killing or throwing it into the evil forest (njom or ajoofia); this has given the cleansing rites the appellation ikpu alu ('dragging an abomination') (p. 109).*

The cleansing ritual is meant to have set the minds of the 'Powers' at ease. And so, there should be no hangover or carryover by humans. The stigma attached to the breach of the taboo lasts only till the propitiatory ritual is done. Nobody likes to be a habitual performer of the cleansing ritual and, therefore, the ritual restores the equilibrium and checks future behavior as well. Some of the taboos that invoke the cleansing ritual include such as making overtures to a family wife (nwunye uno), that is, the wife of a father, grandfather or any close relation; making love overtures or having intimate discussions with a daughter of the family group or of the community within the degrees of kindred in which marriage is forbidden; making overtures to any other person's housewife in the community. Incest is a sacrilege (nso ani), and demands more extensive ritual or propitiation since it involves a blood relation. The following are also

regarded as nso ani desecration of a spirit-manifest (ika/ita mmanwu/mawu); stealing effigies from a shrine (izu umu alushi); and cold-blooded murder (igbu ochu).

### **Distrainer**

If a person commits a misdemeanor in an Igbo community, it is customary for a fine to be imposed on him or her as a way of making reparations. In some cases, ostracism (ilifu madu, iwupu madu, isupu madu, itochi madu) was decreed against the offender. If the person pays the fine, the matter is allowed to stop at that—he has made peace with the community. But, if the offender is recalcitrant or is evading opportunities to make contact with the community and will not pay the fine, the elders of the community can levy distraint (ida nha/ida nra/ili oshi/ize iwu) upon him. On the appointed day, the youths of the community surge to the offender's compound singing action chants. On getting to the compound, they can seize any property, which the man could redeem upon payment of the fine. The youths can also seize stray animals from the neighboring compounds, and it is obligatory on the offender to pay for their redemption and return to the owner.

### **Eating Together (Commensality)**

The Igbo use what they eat and what they drink not only for maintaining life and good health but also for the expression of the innermost feeling of love and hate. Therefore, just as hospitality in Igboland is partly social and partly spiritual, so is the sharing of kola nuts, the drinking of palm wine, the eating of coconut, and eating any meal from the culinary science of the Igbo. When there is a conflict, there is no room for eating together or for drinking together (commensality). However, after the conflict, as a process of conflict resolution or of putting a

seal on the peace terms, a lot of kola nuts and food and drinks are shared by the erstwhile contending parties to symbolize the restoration of fraternal relationship. Both parties contribute in cash and in kind (Anigbo, 1987).

## **Meetings**

Traditional Igboland has no absolute authority. Even in the few areas with centralized authority, there are various built-in mechanisms for consultation, discussion, and collective decision-making. Many Igbo communities have in this regard skillfully separated the traditional stool from the office of the chief priest. Under this arrangement, meetings are inevitable. The elders, the families, the women's groups, the age-grades, the youths, and the guilds fix their own times and set their own procedures for meetings. Every member's right of speech is guaranteed. Every person attends the meeting and contributes to the deliberations both in his own right as a member and as a member of a family group or quarters. These regular meetings ensure an easy flow of information between and among the people. They also enable the people to sense and, if possible, preempt brewing problems, and be participants in proactive or preventive action. Attendance at these meetings is mandatory for members. There are various degrees of sanction imposed on a person who fails to attend without permission. However, the members use their commonsense to decide on the merits of the matter. The meetings serve multiple purposes—social, cultural, political, and economic. The meetings provide a mechanism for keeping all the units together and for creating a conducive environment for the resolution of conflicts and promotion of the welfare of members. They can deliberate on any matter, but, when it is time for action, they know the limits of their ability and they deliberate on the obstacles to achieving their common goal and the manner of overcoming those obstacles.

## **Reparations**

The Igbos take the victim, the offender, and the community into consideration in disposing of matters of reparations. Their philosophy is that where, for example, Okoye has stolen Okeke's yams, he has wronged Okeke by so doing. Nevertheless, and more importantly, he has offended against the whole community by implying that the community is a thieving one. Therefore, when Okoye has paid in cash or kind to Okeke for stealing his property, a portion is left for the victim, Okeke, while another portion is retained by the community and shared or kept in a pool.

The same principle is followed in a case of false accusation. The false accuser pays a fine for *born bofie* (false accusation), a portion of which goes to the falsely accused and the other portion to the community. The false accuser does not partake in benefiting from the fine. On the other hand, neither the accuser nor the accused can proceed against the other again in the matter once it is regarded as closed by the community. Peace has been restored and guaranteed by the community, which continues to monitor the post-conflict situation.

## **Sanction/Fine as a Means of Promoting Peace**

The fourth author had a series of experiences in which the consciousness of being sanctioned/fined served as a guide to appropriate behavior. For instance, when individuals become confrontational, they are reminded of the fine that Eke Obinagu villagers in Enugu state of Nigeria can impose on them for breach of peace in the neighborhood. It appears that the sanction/fine serves as a powerful tool that prevents violence from erupting within the community. The implication of this is that verbal aggression between parties in conflict rarely results in physical aggression among inhabitants of Eke Obinagu in Enugu state. This is a major

strength in using the traditional method of promoting peace among dwellers of Eke Obinagu, Enugu state. A barrier to the use of this approach is favoritism as a way of settling scores.

### **Case Sample: Umuada Orba**

Umuada Orba plays a profound role in ensuring peace among the Orba people in Enugu North senatorial district of the Enugu state. The umuada Orba is comprised of women drawn from the seven clans of Orba. The members of umuada represent other indigenous women/daughters in their clan and report to them on decisions taken at the apex. Umuada Orba are highly recognized, respected, and feared, and no one would like to contend with them on any issue.

### **The Process of Peace Promotion by Umuada Orba**

When there is an intra-family, inter-family, inter-person, or inter-group misunderstanding, the aggrieved reports to Umuada Orba with kola nuts and gallons of palm wine or cartons of beer or nonalcoholic drinks that he considers appropriate. The Umuada Orba then invites the party that was reported through their messenger called ori. The duty of the messenger is to inform the party that a case was brought against him/her before the Umuada Orba. The person is expected to appear before the Umuada Orba with the palm wine or cartons of beer or nonalcoholic drinks on a particular date. The party in conflict is also expected to honor the invitation with the exact amount of items brought by the aggrieved person. At an appointed time, both parties explain the reasons for the misunderstanding, after which they are excused from the group. The Umuada Orba deliberates on the case and passes their judgment. The judgment is made known to the parties in conflict. The party found guilty is required to pay in

cash the entire amount spent on drinks by the other party in conflict. They are advised to maintain peace and ways for achieving peace are suggested to the parties in conflict.

In extreme cases such as threat to life, conflicting parties are instructed to engage in a covenant called *Igba ndu*. The *Umuada Orba* ensures that their instructions are fully obeyed. The *Umuada* at the grassroots level are expected to monitor the parties and report the progress of the peace building to the *Umuada Orba* through their representatives. In situations where the parties flout convention or take a non-conformist disposition, the *Umuada Orba* must summon the entire *umuada* in the seven clans and march to the person's house while singing and wailing. They usually carry green leaves with which they use to litter the compound of the deviant. The person is expected to appease them and amend his ways, but if still adamant, the *Umuada Orba* will then report to the Council of elders who can ostracize the recalcitrant party in conflict. *Umuada Orba* always give its unanimous verdict after much deliberation, and it is generally considered to be fair and sacred.

### Conclusion

We have summarized the traditional methods for promoting peace and resolving conflict in the Igbo ethnic group in southeast Nigeria. We use the perspectives of linguistics, and cognitive psychology, and cultural psychology, emphasizing, respectively, examination of local and historical language practices, individual belief and behavioral schemas, and local shared beliefs and traditions and sub-group structure in Igbo society. Examples of traditional

mechanisms or institutions for peace include oath taking, swearing, the use of fines/sanctions, elders acting as arbiters, umuada (women groups), and age group institutions.

Some/many of the practices identified here may generalize to other contexts, but they will take on different forms and instantiations. The findings provided are relevant for theory, but that theory will need to be contextualized and particularized. For those attempting to promote peace in different regions and places, we recommend that they always first attempt to deeply understand the traditional beliefs, practices, and approaches that are already available to work with. This will require extensive participation by diverse community members and multiple community leaders which, taken together, represent a complex but interrelated social/political/cultural network. Attempts at peace promotion must start with a deep understanding and respect for current ethnographic realities. “Outside approaches” can also be helpful, but they will have much to overcome until they are tailored to “the local.”

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