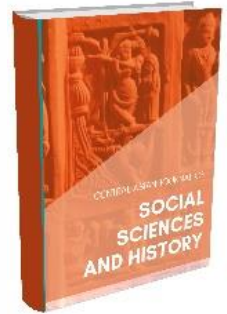




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Ikwerre Moral Values: A Panacea for Insecurity and Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

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Abstract:

There is a high level of insecurity everywhere in Nigeria at the moment as no part of the country appears safe enough for any human activity. In the Northeast are the Boko Haram insurgents that have been terrorizing the entire Northern Nigeria for more than a decade now. In the Northwest are the cows' rustlers and the bandits disquieting the society from the Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna axis. Around Plateau and Benue States were first to appear the Fulani herdsmen who started by destroying the lives and properties of their hosts and seizing their lands but are now to be found everywhere in Nigeria and they are also into dastardly armed robbery and kidnapping. Cultism, Advance Fee Fraud (419) and Internet scammers (Yahoo Boys) and their nefarious ritual killings pervade the Southeast and Southwest geopolitical spaces. The militants in their various sprinter groups are making life unbearable in the Southsouth and some Southeast and Southwest States. Kidnapping and armed robbery dominate the North central States, particularly Niger and Kogi. It, in fact, looks like there is no place in Nigeria that is safe to live in or do any form of business.

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Introduction

Governments at all levels appear to be clueless in curbing the insecurity devastating the entire country. Their efforts appear to be grossly inadequate and most ineffective to an extent that the very fabric of

the country's unity is now being threatened. When Nigerians at home are afraid to move freely in their homeland and those in diaspora can no more visit home in the light of the insecurity everywhere, how would foreign investors be attracted to come and invest in a country where their lives and investments cannot be guaranteed? Would this insecurity challenge not lead to gravitation towards a failed nation? Would Nigeria be able to hold itself together from disintegration where lives and properties cannot be protected? Could Nigeria survive the present insecurity challenge in the face of the lackadaisical approach to containing it by Governments that are constitutionally empowered to secure the lives and properties of the people? What is left of the hope of the Nigerian project? Where do we go from here?

The concept of morality is a universal phenomenon as it cuts across all religions, cultures and disciplines in the world. Like African traditional religions, Islam and Christianity among others, the Ikwerre religio-cultural system, upholds morality as a human value as it serves as a tool for the protection and promotion of peaceful co-existence in the society through its control of moral behavior. The moral issues in Ikwerre which include, humility, truth, kindness, chastity, loyalty, respect, protection, also recognize stealing, incest, justice, covenant-breaking and taboos, consist of moral sanctions. It is claimed that obedience to the moral laws brings blessings while disobedience brings catastrophes (Dime, 37).

Globally, Africans and indeed Ikwerres are well known for the maintenance and promotion of morality. The strong moral conduct is due to the strong ethical force of Traditional Ikwerre Religion, which permeates their lives. Moral degradation is currently a major concern in Nigeria. It was this concern that made Alhaji Shehu Shagari to set up a sixteen member National Ethical Revolution Committee under the chairmanship of His Royal Highness, Alhaji Umaru Sauda Ndayako, the Etsu Nupe of Bida on September 22, 1982.

The concern is paramount as it is geared towards the redemption of the unprecedented manifestation of moral gravitational force that emanated as a result of the following: refusal of those in authority to teach the customs and prohibitions of the society, the near collapse of the neat patterns of traditional life, the bastardization of other concepts such as duties, obligations, prohibitions and sanctions as well as the attitudes of some youths to moral teachings where such teachings apparently exist.

Definition of Terms

Morality: Morality is defined as the beliefs about what is right and what is wrong and about the behavior of people (Ayanlayo, 1981). It is an Instrument of society to control the behavior of members (Mbiti, 1975). It is believed that African morality emphasizes corporate relationship more than individualism as a result of the understanding that the existence of the individual is made possible through the existence of others. For this reasons, morality is developed to keep the society at peace (Mbiti, 1975).

Value: According to the theory of action, value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group of the desirable, which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action. It is an important component of behavior.

Moral Values: Moral values refer to the aspect of religion that deals with the ideas that safeguard or uphold the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the world-around them (Mbiti, 1975). It includes justice, love, truth, right and wrong, good and evil, decency respect for people and

property, praise and blame, crime and punishment, the right and responsibilities of the individual and his community character, integrity and so on (Mbiti, 1975).

Culture: According to Sowunmi, culture is the total way of life of an individual, particular human group. An integrated whole which touches every facet of life such as religion, language, philosophy, cosmology, custom traditions, laws, beliefs and practices, diet, architecture, kinship system, music, art, economy and technology, it ensures the continuous and harmonious survival and wellbeing of a community within a given ecosystem.

The objective of this work centers on how some African values especially the Ikwerre moral values can check or curb insecurity that is prevalent in Nigeria today. Having given the background of the work on insecurity in Nigeria above, we now discuss on the concept of morality and moral values.

The Ikwerre moral values and indeed African moral values are derived mainly from their worldview (cosmos), which are achieved through their gods, divinities, ancestors, rituals etc. as seen below.

Religions of Ikwerre in their Cosmos

Ikwerre cosmology comprises of the fusion of the physical world, which consist of human beings, plant, animals and the spiritual world consisting of *Chiokike* (God), *Ranwu* (divinities), *Indichie* (ancestors) and *Agbara* (spirits).

Concept of God: Belief in God in Ikwerre religious tradition is synonymous to other African societies. God is seen as creator, controller and sustainer of the universe. It is on this basis that he is called by several names in conformity with his character and nature such as “*Chiokike*” and “*Chuku*” These reveal God’s goodness, dependability and reliable protection for mankind.

Commenting further on the significance of God to the Ikwerre people, Olumati (2016) opines, “that the concept of *Chiokike* is crystallized in the symbol of his altar and the form of worship, which is given to him”. The pursuance of God in Ikwerre is represented by the symbols of a pole-tree called *Ukeni* and a tree by name *Ajah*. The *Chi* is constructed from a long tree or long plain bamboo, usually painted white with *Nzu* or *Odo* (kaolin) and erected at the entrance, middle or the threshold of the house. At the uppermost end of the pole is tied to a basket-like structure made from raffia palm. A white piece of cloth is tied to one of the basket downwards. The *Chi* on the other hand grows wild but becomes *Ukeni* – a symbolic representation of God’s abode or his presence. A platform in the form of an altar is built at the base of the *Chi* where all sorts of assorted items such as coconut, juice, kola-nuts and natural gin are kept.

In the Ikwerre religious tradition, God is worshiped in at least three ways, namely, the casual and perfunctory worship given to Him in an emergency; worship through the use of *Odo* (white chalk), and worship through *Chi* - personal guardian spirit (the gods of the compound). Each will be discussed. Worship by the casual and perfunctory worship comes when man is faced with an eminent danger such as a shipwreck; He cries to God for help. The cry may take his form: *Chim biko bienum* (God come and deliver us). As soon as the request is granted a special thanks is offered to God in this form *Chiokike menem* (God we thank you). The next form of worship is the worship with *Nzu* (native white chalk). In this pattern of worship, the head of the family takes an *Odo*, grinds it into powder form. In the process of grinding, he pours his heart desire to God as he looks steadily into the sky. After the grinding, he blows the powdered *Odo* into the air while standing at the entrance of his house.

In the third place, *Chiokike* is worshiped through *Chi oro* (the god of the compound) usually represented by a tall bamboo or raffia pole with a narrow but opening apex facing the sky. On the apex

is tied a white and red piece of cloth which hangs downwards. The base of the pole is decorated with coconut fruits, bones cowries, shrine materials and mirrors occasionally. In some places the bamboo or raffia pole is represented by an *Ajah* (new bouldia). In addition to the Orhen, kola-nut, palm wine and white chickens represent the inner purity. These three important ways of worshipping God are carried out through any of the intermediaries.

Agbara/Ranwu (Divinities): Divinities are believed to serve as mediators or intermediaries between God and mankind. It is part of the religious belief in Ikwerre that God is too high, big and too holy to be approached directly except in an emergency situation such as danger. Each Ikwerre polity possesses its own divinities known and called by different names with the belief that their powers are limited to members of their polity irrespective of their location all over the world.

Divinities in Ikwerre are classified into four main divisions, namely, the guardian and guide divinities, war divinities, prosperity and fertility divinities as well as ethical divinities. It is said that the settlement of the various polities is based on the sanction of the guardian and guidance divinities. The war divinities are those who are believed to have assisted the people to combat their enemies. The prosperity divinities are responsible for the pouring of blessings upon the people, while the ethical divinities are those with special power and assignment to maintain law and order in the society. As a result, they do not condone falsehood, stealing, misappropriation, oppression, bewitching and adultery. Examples of the guardian and guardian divinities include: *Chi*, *Ajokuji*, *Anwiligbo*. While the prosperity divinity is *Nyenku Ogbakiri* and ethical divinities include *Ali*, or *Eli*

Indichie (Ancestors): Mbiti defines ancestors as “the disembodied spirits of people who lived upright life here on earth, died good and natural death at ripe age, and received the acknowledged funerary rites”. In Ikwerre, *Ndam* refers to the father of children, while “(*Nnem*)” refers to mother of children. There is a strong belief in another realm of existence after death, especially on the part of those who lived well, died well, and were given befitting burial rites according to the culture.

The ancestors are bilingual as they speak the languages of the physical and the spiritual worlds. They are venerated in the form of *Ndam* (father of children) and *Nnem* (mother of children) and are believed to be re-born in new-born babies into the community. It is on this note, that Elechi states “among the Ikwerre people the traditional conceptions, as evident today, project the ancestral cult as next to God in the religious hierarchy of the people”. The ancestors make meaningful economic, social and political contributions to the life of the people. Economic contributions center on fertilization of the land for bumper harvest and the regulation of trading activities. Socially, they register their presence and oversee the success of festivals, marriages, and installation ceremonies of kings and chiefs, while their political contributions revolve round the legalization of all legislation. According to Wotogbe-Wenek; the *Ndichie* perform several functions, which include, provision of children, health, wealth and the punishment of evils, such as incest, adultery, murder and theft. In addition, they inculcate, mobilize and promote unity in the community or society. Their face is sought in times of sickness, death and barrenness; while they offer materials such as fish, goats, sheep, sacred chalk, kola-nut and palm wine.

Spirits: Like most cultures in African, the belief in different spirits is paramount in Ikwerre. Some of these spirits are believed to be good while others are considered bad or evil. While the good ones give protection and blessing, since they are believed to possess benevolent powers, the evil or bad ones inflict people with evil, such as misfortune and disease, because they are believed to possess malignant and malevolent powers. Tasié (2019), enumerated the types of spirits in Ikwerre to include, ghost,

Abiku or Ogbanje or born-to-die children, spirits of premature death, spirits of witches and abnormal children (30).

The Moral Values in Ikwerre Religion: An Ikwerre Cosmological Perspective

The concept of morality is very comprehensive as it embraces the religious, social, political and economic life of the people as a whole. In Africa and indeed Ikwerre, morality is regarded as the bedrock of the human society as it serves as a tool for the protection and promotion of peace and harmony in community life. It does this by enforcing its members to comply adequately with the acceptable norms of behavior, frowning at taboos and prohibitions which strengthen the fragility of life of relationship between the visible and invisible worlds.

The moral law which is believed to have emanated from the Supreme Being, is written in the conscience of the people. It is on this basis that the Ikwerre religious moral values give birth to the concept of evil which is broken down into three broad divisions of *Nwojuo* (sin), *Aru* (wickedness), and *Mmeyer* (iniquity). On one hand, *Nwojuo* comprises the acts of stealing, adultery, removal of land marks, and killing either by shooting, matcheting, or bewitching. *Aru* on the other hand, is the refusal of a person to render the needed help to a neighbor; when the person is in position to do so. A good example is the refusal to inform a neighbor of an impending danger that one is aware of. *Aru* is the full involvement in wickedness without restraints (Wotogbe-Weneka, 2018: 205-207). The moral issue of sexual immorality, murder, theft, cheating, oppression, coveting, and disrespect to parents and elders also constitute evil in Ikwerre religious tradition (Wotogbe-Weneka, 2018).

In Ikwerre cosmos, there is the belief that any person who commits evil will be arrested by the gods of the land and the spirit of the ancestors which is being referred to as *Nso*. The culprit usually falls sick in a mysterious way. For instance, if a person commits incest, his body will be mysteriously swollen, a mark of a severe punishment by the spirit of the ancestors. Moreover, if a woman commits adultery and refuses to confess, her husband and children may fall sick and die, she may have difficulty in delivery if she is pregnant (Olumati, 2012).

Another aspect of the Ikwerre cosmology is tradition about myths. The Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions defines “myths” as the true or untrue traditional stories of people with religious truth. Myths are found among all African people because of their importance. They give the account of the creation of the world, x-ray the relationship between gods and man, provide moral code for good human living and veneration of heroes who are morally upright, communication of religious ideals as well as the teaching of people to avoid certain evil practices. Among the Ikwerre, there is a popular saying that man does not come to make the earth his permanent place of stay. Therefore, it is compulsory for human beings to go back to their permanent home *Nso* (the home beyond). This saying is rooted in the myth of death (*Anwu*) in Ikwerre. This myth reveals that *Chiokike* (God), created death as an impersonal force Nabofa, (297 299).

The account of this myth around dogs and toads

It is gathered that originally God's intention for man was for him to live on earth forever. However, as life progresses the earth became over populated. As a result of the over-population, there was a discussion between human being and animals on what can be done to arrest the situation. On one hand, the opinion of the dog was that man should live forever with the suggestion that *Chiokike* or *Chineke* should try to increase the size of the earth to take care of the population. On the other hand, the toad argued for the death of mankind with the view that any who dies should go home. Its reasons were that

the earth is limited in size and there was no room for expansion. Again, the toad argued that the food on earth will be insufficient if man continues to live on earth. Both of them were said to have taken the matter to God in heaven who decided in favor of the Toad. As a result of this decision, *Nketa* came to settle among the people on the earth. Thus the Toad takes its name *Awor* (he who dies must go home). The role played by the toad about man's death has made him an enemy of mankind in Ikwerre till date. Ref: "When it is seen by children it is killed mercilessly with the words, "you die and go." (Nabofa, 297 299) When the Pains of death became unbearable for man, the Frog was sent back to God to reverse the decision but He turned it down saying, "first declaration cannot be altered." However, *Chineke* took into consideration the travails of his creatures and allowed reincarnation.

Moral sanctions in Ikwerre culture:

The moral sanction centers first on '*Chiokike*' (God), the omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. It centers on *Chiokike* because He alone rewards the good and the evil. Therefore, everyone is expected to be mindful of his or her action as reflected in one of the theocratic names of God namely, *Chinweikpe* meaning God is an impartial judge.

In the second place, moral sanction is a link to *Nso* the cult of *Ndichie* (ancestors and ancestress). Like in every African society, the dead are perceived as the active members of the family looking after the welfare of their living family members, by rewarding evil with evil and good with good. They are regarded as guardians of morality in their responsibility of moral enforcements. Moral sanction is enforced through the family and communal life of the people.

1. Family Perspective: Family in Ikwerre religious tradition is monogamous and polygynous as well as nuclear and extended. The nuclear consist of a husband, wife (wives) and biological children. While the extended is the combination of several nuclear families consisting of one's direct parents, grand and great grand-parents, uncle, aunts, nephew and nieces. The members of the extended families are bound together by strong unbreakable ties of mutual loyalty and helpfulness as it involves the relationship between the living-dead (ancestors) and the living. The relationship in the extended and nuclear family systems consist of well-defined beliefs and practices that govern the daily behavior and conduct of its members, respective duties, obligations and rights of each partner. Christopher Ejizu attest to this, when he opines:

The family was the basic component of the social structure. Within the family, there was a strict hierarchy of authority, according to which the males rule, and held responsibility for the females. Brothers ruled their sisters, and sons even their mothers when they come of age or succeeded to the inheritance. Women do not enjoy any ultimate authority or responsibility for the household.

The family serves as a medium for the transmission of the roles and rights of culture from one generation to another. It is in the light of this, that Olumati (2016) states: "the Ikwerre family is thus a composite of many roles since these roles pertain to the- procreation and socialization of the children, the social and physical welfare of family members and their economic prosperity". Mbiti upholds this view thus; in all African families, there is a hierarchy based on age and degree of kinship. The 'oldest members have a higher status than the youngest. Within that hierarchy there are duties, obligations, rights and privileges dictated by the moral sense of society (Mbiti, (1976). Since the action of an

individual affects the entire family directly, the moral values and sanctions are put in place to control any form of misconduct that could be detrimental to the individual and his family.

2. Communal perspective: According to Elechi Nduka, “communalism is an ascriptive type of identities, adherence to cultural norms and values, loyalties or obligations towards members of an identity/group which tend to be relatively diffuse rather than specific. Nigerians are known for their communal life. In the African communal life in the past, the existence of an individual or groups depends totally on the existence of others. It is on this basis that the individuals are subjected to family, clan, tribal, racial, religious beliefs and practices, morality and ethics. Furthermore, as part of effort to hold together the community holistically, spiritually, dynamically and communally, rules of behavior and relationships are put in place. The leadership of community, elders and kings are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the social ethics, rules and regulations as they relate to the wellbeing of the community are observed. The Ikwerre embraces and displays all the characteristics of the African communal life which necessitated the establishment of the Ikwerre progress union (Ogbakor Ikwerre) in 1961, to serve as an umbrella for her twenty-three polities as reflected in the words of Elechi Nduka.

The tendency (in the various Ikwerre sub-ethnic groups) has been to consolidate their separate political systems and social organizations. Their separate assertiveness is probably regarded in many respects as an obstacle to an all-Ikwerre unity in particularly vis-à-vis neighboring Bini or Itsekiri and Ijaw, other apparently more united large ethnic groups in Nigeria. The formation of the Ikwerre progress union in the 1930s was therefore an attempt to over shadow small or societal separateness with a comparatively wider all-Ikwerre cultural macro-symbolism. The Ikwerre communalism therefore calls for the enactment and enforcement of moral values in order to create a sense of responsibility accountability and orderliness in the society.

Sources of Morality: The Ikwerre Experience

There are numerous sources of morality in Ikwerre religion- cultural system. These include taboos, customs, proverbs, festivals, rituals and myths. They are detailed as follows.

1. Taboos: According to Olumati (2016), taboo is a “system engendered by cultural construct belief, by which certain objects and persons are set aside as sacred or accursed. It is also described as political, social or religious-prohibition webbed in cosmology. It is a sacred prohibition which marks certain people or things unbreakable, untouchable, unmentionable and as any social restriction resulting from convention or tradition. It assists in the maintenance of harmonious person to person, person to community and divine person relationships to the extent that the breaking of it attracts supernatural penalty against the individual and the community, Olumati (2016).

The penalty attached to it by the supernatural being, divinities and ancestors instills a great deal of fear in the minds of the people than even the fear of civic imprisonment (Olumati, 2016). Taboos which differ from one society to the others in Africa, inculcate spiritual and moral values that are the hallmarks of African traditional religion. This means that what is considered a taboo in one culture may be permitted in another one. In the Ikwerre religious tradition, taboos are referred to as *Nzo ali* something forbidden or prohibited. In the Ikwerre religious tradition, there are taboos that deal with cleanliness, good living, respect, matrimony, preventing evil, sexuality, birth, death and nutrition. In the light of these, the following are regarded as taboos in the Ikwerre religious tradition: marriage among relations such as brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces and near relations, Olumati (2016).

Upon the discovery of such relationship, it either attracts dissolution or the offering of a sacrifice to appease the gods, ancestors and other spiritual beings. It is a taboo for a wife in her menstrual period to cook for her husband, enter the husband's room or sleep on the same bed with him as a result of the belief that she is ceremonially unclean. Other taboos include the shedding of tears by a wife while cooking food or eat in the same dish with her husband, it is also a taboo for a woman who had just put to birth to enter into her husband's room or near any shrine before three months. This is because it is believed that her **lochial** discharge is unclean and capable of desecrating holy places of the household gods. And lastly, the act of sexual intercourse in the bush, the eating of clan totem animal, the burying of a person who died of an infectious disease and one who committed incest or one who died in the river or bush in the town or in the house are taboos, Olumati (2016). These are taboos because they are seen as offense against the gods, divinities, ancestor and other spiritual beings, there by causing desecration against oneself and the community. The remedy against the unpleasant reaction of these supernatural beings is confessions, sacrifices and offerings, Olumati (2016).

2. Customs: Olumati (2016), opines that “custom is all learned behavior which is socially acquired, that is, the material and non-material traits which are passed on from one generation to another. Customs enforce morality to the extent that negation attracts sorrows and other repercussions. It moderates man's behavior and actions, thereby putting him in an orderly manner. The act of stealing and adultery, for instance are condemned by the Ikwerre culture. Anyone who indulges in these acts is severely dealt with. Modesty in dressing is also promoted and enforced by the Ikwerre custom, Wotogbe-Weneka, (2018).

3. Festival: There are annual festivals all over Ikwerre. Most of these festivals are in honor of the divinities and ancestors. It is on this note that festivals are defined as occasions for mourning the dead, or relaxation, enjoyment, worship, (Olumati, 2019) and re-union after a long period of separation (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1989). The purpose(s) of festivals include to thank the divinity connected with the festival for its past blessings and protection and to ask for more blessings and protection from it, to renew the life of the community to assists in the repetitions and renewal of religious and social values, to promote the adequate utilization of artistic talents such as art, music, drama and oral communication and to renew the link between human beings and the spirit world among others.

4. Ritual: According to Mbiti, rite or ritual is a seal form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony. It is a means of communicating something of religious significance through word, symbol and action. The power of rituals lies in the constant repetition of the wordings every time the ritual is carried out. It serves as an avenue for both the practice of the religion and its communication to the younger generation. The type of ritual includes personal ritual, which are performed from birth to death of the individuals. Such as pregnancy, birth, naming, teething, puberty, circumcision or clitoridectomy, engagement, marriage, eldership, old age, death and ancestorship; agriculture rituals that have to do with the soil, rain making ritual-praying for rain when there is delay. All these are applicable to the Ikwerre religious tradition.

5. Proverbs: Proverb is defined as short words of wisdom that engineered a person to live upright and to succeed in life. Proverb cuts across every segment of life on earth and life here after. Proverbs possess some characteristics such as optimism, pessimism, inspirationalism, and some other traits, Mbiti, (1979). Furthermore, they summarize a great deal of religious truths, knowledge and ideas. Every tribe in Nigeria attached great importance to proverbs. According to Igbo, proverbs are

vegetable for eating words. The Yoruba say “proverbs are horses for chasing missing words,” (Keft, back cover) while the Zulu say ‘without proverbs, the language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without a soul.’” (Nabofa 61-62). According to Wotogbe-Weneka, in Ikwerre, proverbs are called *povents*, word, a wisdom ancient saying, Proverb among the Ikwerre refers to a short, memorable and often highly condensed saying embodying, especially with bold imagery. The Ikwerre proverbs lay much emphasis on community life, good conduct, good focus, and good character.

6. Embedded Ideology: Sex is an act mostly performed in secret, people scarcely see people in the act, though one can infer what a man and woman could do under certain circumstances, through their paralinguistic exchanges, mood and verbal exchanges, if observed. Since it is pretty difficult to apprehend a woman having an extra marital affair, the society goes beyond the physical and intellectual level in relation to the control of the sexual behavior of the female members of society. Sequel to that, it involves the extra mundane in order to instill fear in the female participant. Thus, it is the ancestors that expose and punish the woman who is involved in extramarital affair. The ancestors in the African mystical world are dead members of the society who were of good behavior during their life time. The Ikwerre refer to their dead elders as *Ndiechie* that is, the elders who have gone home (Olumati, 2016:75). It is a very strong belief among the African people in general and in Ikwerre in particular that the ancestors influence the fate of men and women. Therefore, if a man or woman finds favor before them, one’s labor would yield bountifully (Achebe 1958). By bringing in the discourse of the ancestors in the control of the sexual behavior of the female participant in the society, a very powerful approach is engaged in the social and psychological life of the woman. Subsequently, the Ikwerre patriarchal society employs all avenues within its reach to firmly control the sex life for the female participant.

7. Society: According to Peil, “society is a group of people with shared values, beliefs, symbols, patterns of behavior and territory” (45). Becoming a member of a society is by birth and incorporation or acceptance. That is, a person who is not a member of a community by birth can be accepted as a member if he or she requests for it. The Ikwerre society enacts rules that tend to guide the lives of her members towards good behavior and action. The rules center around murder, theft, sexual immorality, humility, kindness and hospitality, incest, loyalty, respect and protection and so on. Any offender is punished however, the degree of the punishment depends on the nature of the offense committed. For instance, sexual immorality in the form of adultery and fornication attracts the penalty of fine and compensation for both the family and the injured husband in case of adultery. Other moral sins attract one or all of the following punishments; capital punishment, flogging and ostracization. All of these punishments are executed by either the community as a whole, town head or the leadership of the community.

Moral Issues in Ikwerre Traditional Beliefs

1. Social Relationship: As already stated, the Ikwerre communal life offers companionship, protection, social interaction, provision and so on. It condemns gross irresponsible moral behavior, such as theft, murder, sexual immorality, incest, taboos and breaking of covenant are condemned, while sound moral uprightness like chastity, protection, respect humility, hospitality, kindness and others are applauded and rewarded positively. As part of measures to strengthen the moral behavior of the people, some laws are put in place to control human excesses (Amadi, 2011).

The breaking of any of these laws attracts penalties in one way or the other. As stated in the case of theft, the offender can either be put to death, flogged, fined or paraded round the town or community

naked or half naked, decorated with ashes and charcoal with a procession of men, women, boys and girls, singing, shouting, spitting and pouring abusive words with the belief that such treatment could serve as deterrent to others. Again, another step to avoid theft is the law against going to the farm on market days (*Ragbor*), with the belief that the gods are in the bush to get rid of anyone who does so. Furthermore, in both the nuclear and extended family and the community, the children, wives and husbands are expected to respect parents, elders and husbands. As a result of this, no child is expected to insult or abuse his/her parents. Wives are not expected to abuse their husbands at all. On no account should a woman fight her husband to the point of knocking him down. If it happens, she is made to sacrifice a goat, fathers are warned not to abuse or provoke their children into anger.

Furthermore, young ones in the community are taught to control their tongues to enable their utterance respect adults, visitors, strangers, dignitaries and constituted authorities. For instance young ones are not expected to make costly jokes that have to do with both women and men's private parts, such as *ahoo* (female private parts), *amuo* (male private part), (sexual intercourse) and abusive and derogatory words like (fool), *ara* (he is crazy). Another aspect of the social life is the mode of dressing which is a big wrapper about six yards and a long shirt, a cap, walking stick and footwear to match for the males and two wrappers of varied sizes and a blouse, head tie, earring, shoes and so on for the females. And lastly, the commitment of the members of the community financially, materially and personal involvement for the community development is another aspect of the social life worth mentioning, Nduka (1972).

2. Dignity of Labor: The history of Ikwerre upholds and promote dignity of labor which is in line with the biblical injunction, "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to with your hands just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thess. 4:11-12 NIV). The settlement of each of the Ikwerre polities is a proof of their promotion of the dignity of labor.

3. Environmental Ethics: Every environment or locality has its own ethics that all citizens and inhabitants must abide with. Adherence brings blessings and deviance brings disasters. Some aspects of environment that calls for ethical conduct include environmental sanitation, adapting to the way of life of the environment, protecting the natural resources such as land, water, culture and other artificial materials like things put in place by government and community effort such as Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCH), cables, transformers, pipeline, educational materials and environmental sanitation. Failure to do so is an express invitation to sicknesses and other social vices.

Again, environmental ethics also calls for the adaptation to one's environment by eating the available food, drinking the available water and the maintenance of the dress code etc. Furthermore, protection of the environment is yet another way of upholding the ethics of the environment. Protection in this context has to do with the protection of the land and water as well as other natural resources, such as the avoidance of over-cultivation of the land and unnecessary bush burning which exposes the soil to the direct heat of the sun as well as the addition of fertilizer and other nutrients to the soil to enhance fertility in case the land generally is not fertile naturally. When this is done, the individual and the community enjoy social orders and integration in the society, hence, social harmony and peaceful co-existence.

4. Medical Ethics: In Ikwerre religious tradition, medicine constitutes both liquid and solid materials which patients take. It includes all that are kept or buried in the house, car, compound, farmland, place

of work and carried about. Based on this definition of medicine, the Ikwerre view medicine as the heartbeat of mankind because it constitutes both curative, preventive and magical powers. Many of the medicines are aimed at enhancing economic ventures and innate capabilities. On one hand, the medicine of *Nmekwa ali* enhances good harvest while another causes one to be admired by his audience. On the other hand, the hunters and fishermen require the support in order to ensure good games and catches. It is believed that these medicines can only work with the support of the Supreme God divinities and ancestors are received. (Nabofa, 2016)

5. Human Dignity: According to Nduka, “human dignity is the qualitative value in individual persons and in groups resulting from right and adequate relationships with self, society, creature and God promoted through genuine respect and enforcement of human right” (Nduka, 1972) Ikwerre religious tradition, like other tribes in Nigeria, upholds the dignity of man through the establishment of social justice for the people, recognition of the worth of mankind and the prevention of injustice. This is done by giving appropriate punishment for any wrong done and a good reward for a job well done. Again, it helps in the protection of lives and property as well as eradicating or minimizing man's inhumanity to man. For example, killing of a fellow human being is prohibited among the Ikwerre people. Furthermore, if a person is sick, both the nuclear and extended families as well as the community do everything possible to heal him or her by seeking the face of God, divinities and ancestors and application of medicine to bring back good health to the sick person.

Conclusion

Ikwerre traditional religion is symbiotic with its moral values and these moral prerequisites are geared towards enhancing security, thus, peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Religion is central to the spiritual upliftment of humans. It unites man if its tenets are kept. It teaches humans to live harmoniously with one another and to shun greed and corruption.

From the work, the paper explored that the subject matter of moral values cuts across ever religious traditions in the world. This confirms and proves the proponents of the idea that morality emanates from God. The presence of the concept of morality in all religions and culture is a clear indication that morality is the heartbeat of human existence and true religiosity. For no one can be truly religious without the adherence to the ethical teachings of his or her religious founder. These ethical teachings found in the religions and cultures of the world reveal that morality is divinely oriented and anthropocentric. It is against this background of man at the center of divine moral standard that Ikwerre religious tradition is built. Morality in Ikwerre religious tradition serves as a tool for the peaceful co-existence of human beings as it promotes respect for human dignity, safeguard marriages and other aspects of human relations, abide in the environmental ethics, enforcement of morality and the encouragement of hard work.

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