

IGBO ETHICS OF CARE: A META-ETHICAL DESCRIPTION

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Abstract

Some thinkers believe that the Igbo do not have in their world an ethics that is universal. The major reason for this position is moored on their belief that the earth goddess punishes only the offences that are committed within her jurisdiction. Though justice is recognised and emphasised by the Igbo, the application of appropriate punishment for its violation is not the same. This lack of uniformity in terms of moral practice has given rise to the belief that the Igbo did not believe in the Supreme Being prior to the advent of the missionaries. This conclusion is faulty. The Igbo have an ethics that is valid in the entire Igbo world. This ethics is not normative but rather metaethical. This is particularly evident in their ethics of Care. They consider an action that is motivated by Care as good. They value Care. Any action that manifests it is good. This is a belief that cuts across the length and breadth of the Igbo world.

Keywords: Igbo, Ethics, Crae, Meta-Ethical

Introduction

The introductory part of this paper is aimed principally to distinguish the Igbo Ethics of Care from the normative justice theory of Lawrence Kohlberg, and the Ethics of Care of Carol Gilligan. The ultimate objective for the distinction is to announce the distinctive method in Igbo Ethics of Care and also to set agenda for this paper. Lawrence Kohlberg (1976) presented a justice theory in which he detailed out six moral development stages. A child, he says, passes through these stages as he develops in his logical stages. The first stage is lowest stage in terms of moral judgement. This is because, at this stage, what a child considers to be a good action is dependent on whether the performance of the action is going to be rewarded or punished. The sixth stage is the highest of the moral development. Someone at this stage acts according to the universal principles of justice. He acts strictly on these principles, even when they are in conflict with the laws of social contract. This is because, at this level of moral development, right and obligation coincide. If one has right to life, this right imposes duty on every other person to protect it. The six moral stages are invariant and universal. This implies that the

theory of the moral development stages has universal validity.

Carol Gilligan in her Book, *In a Different Voice*, gave a scathing criticism against Kohlberg's theory. She noted that women appeared to be dominant at the third moral stage, a stage characterised by Care for which women are known. By implication, it means that women can hardly attain the sixth moral stage. She observed, nevertheless, that Kohlberg had conducted his research which lasted over 20 years on 84 boys alone; girls were excluded (Gilligan, 1993). She argued that the reason the women did not appear well in the theory is because it is a theory that was formulated from men's moral experience. She averred that a different result would emerge if a moral theory is developed from the women's sentiment of Care. If this is done, we would see women making moral decisions that are akin to those in the Kohlberg's sixth moral stage; we would see a resolution of moral problems that would be contextual and concrete and not abstract as in Kohlberg's theory of justice. By implication, Gilligan was giving impression of two voices in Ethics, one representing the men, and the other the women; the one is the Ethics of justice and the other, the Ethics of Care. Habermas (2007) criticises both Gilligan and Kohlberg. He argues that the two voices ought to be united through consensus Ethics otherwise known as discourse Ethics (White, 1989).

The above discussion belongs to normative Ethics. The normative Ethics concerns itself with setting standard for human behaviour. But this is not the only way of doing Ethics. Ethics can be descriptive in its method in the sense that it can try to find out how people actually behave morally and not simply how they ought to behave. This is indeed how David Hume presented his Ethics. According to Omoregbe (2003, p.80), "He (Hume) was not concerned with telling us how men ought to behave but rather how they do in fact behave. Hume was concerned with the is and not with the ought, with facts and not with value judgments."

The discussion of the Igbo Ethics of Care in this paper is not normative. It can be described more appropriately as Metaethics, for it is descriptive. It describes what the Igbo consider to be morally good - a good action, a good man or woman. It does so by describing how they actually behave to merit the moral term 'good'. The Igbo Ethics of Care is not concerned with how the Igbo ought to behave with regard to taking Care of others but how they actually behave in this regard. Because the Igbo Ethics of Care is descriptive, there is no such conflict as

found in the respective gender-based justice and Care theories of Kohlberg and Gilligan. In Igbo Ethics, both justice and Care rather exist side by side. Justice occupies an important place in Igbo morality. It is emphasised in all strata of Igbo life. Care is also emphasised.

Care is understood in this paper as love, which implies, giving assistance, protection, compassion and promotion of the welfare of the other. The meaning of Care comes out much more clearly when it is compared with justice. In justice, one is given what is one's due. But in Care or love, one is given what one does not deserve. Justice is *ime ihe ziri ezi* (doing the correct thing). Something that is just is "*Ihe ziri ezi*" (Okere, 2018, p.11). A just man is called in Igbo- *Onye n'eme ihe ziri ezi*. Care, on the other hand, is *Ogo* (doing good or showing Care to another person). The man who shows Care is called - 1. *Onye ezi omume* (one who does good, a good man, a good woman), 2. *Onye obi oma* (one with a good heart), 3. *Onye n'eme Ogo* (One who helps others). While someone who acts, in accordance with justice, is not seen as doing something extraordinary after all, someone who shows Care, is recognised and applauded. The trust of this paper is to demonstrate that the Igbo praise a caring person more than a just person; that an action done with Care has moral value and can be described as a good action than the one done with justice; Care is esteemed more and receives more approbation than justice.

To this end, this paper will examine the justice in Igbo Religion and Morality. Here, it will be seen that an individual is not at liberty to be just or not to be just. This is, perhaps, why a just person is not lauded. Care, on the other hand, is laudable for it is exercised at liberty. This paper will illustrate in different ways the high premium that Igbo place on Care. This is perhaps why an action that manifests Care is said to be good.

The Place of Justice in Igbo Religion and Morality

In Igbo world view, the material world and the spiritual world are not separable (Metuh, 1985; Okere, 2005), they are inextricably interwoven. The spiritual world forms part of the material world, and plays significant role in its affairs. The two worlds give analogical image that is similar to the image of man, where the soul and the body exist together and form a union in which the soul plays a dominant role. This unity of the material and the spiritual is particularly evident in Igbo traditional religion and morality. The latter are intertwined; they are indistinguishable (Okafor, 1992).

Some African thinkers do not share this belief. They maintain that, for the Africans, morality and religion are distinguishable and separable. Those of them that subscribe to this belief include Kwasi Wiredu, Sophie Oluwole, Claude Summer and Placid Tempels (Omogegbe, 2003). Earlier in the West, Kant had similarly espoused the idea that morality is distinguishable from religion, that both are separable. Indeed, Kant had used morality to prove the religious beliefs, such as, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the freedom of the Will (Omogegbe, 2003). This shows that, for him, morality is independent of religion; that the source of the moral laws is not anything external to individual's will. This position is different from Igbo belief. For the Igbo, religion is the source of morality; there would be no morality without religion.

The above is true, because in Igbo traditional religion, there is a belief in the Supreme Being (Arinze, 1978; Umezina, 2014). There is also belief in the minor deities and the ancestors. These are subordinate to the Supreme Being and they help him in the governance of the world. Among the deities, the earth goddess, *Ani*, is very prominent. She is a female deity and occupies a high position in Igbo pantheon. Hierarchically, she is the deity that comes after the Supreme Being. The moral laws emanate from the Supreme Being but pass through *Ani* to the Igbo. The *Ani* is not only the proximate source of Igbo moral laws but also regarded as the guardian of these laws. When, where and how these laws were passed over to the Igbo is not clear. In this regard, J. Ekei (2001, p.7) asks "when did the earth goddess ever formulate the moral laws as to become its guardian? Again 'when' calls to mind the question of 'where' and 'how' such laws were handed down to man and through 'whom' precisely?" These questions, however, are superfluous. These are scientific questions. One should not apply scientific approach to religion which deals with the invisible realities. Each branch of study has its method and the expected result. Aristotle (1994, p.7) says "The same exactness must not be expected in all departments of philosophy alike, any more than in all the products of the arts and crafts."

The violations of the moral laws are regarded as offences against *Ani*. These offences include murder, adultery, stealing, killing of sacred animals, etc. These are called abominations, *Aru*. They must be expiated through sacrifice. The community usually brings pressure to bear on the recalcitrant offender in order to cow him to perform the sacrifice of expiation. The reason for this is to prevent him from polluting the entire community with his offence. The community can

be punished by the Earth goddess because of the failure of any of its member to perform the expiatory sacrifice required for his offence. This belief is supported by deductive proverb – *Ofu mkpisi aka ruta mmanu, o rue ibe ya* (If a finger is soiled with oil, the oil spreads to other fingers).

Apart from *Ani*, the ancestors also play significant role as well in Igbo morality. They act as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and man. Together with *Ani*, they are guardians of Igbo morality, customs and tradition. The ancestors are regarded as invisible members and heads of different nuclear families, the extended families, kindreds and other strata of Igbo society. The visible heads of these units are simply the representatives of the ancestors (Nzomiwu, 1999). The breach of any moral law is visited with punishment as well by the ancestors.

The Igbo moral laws which are believed to have been issued proximately by the earth goddess are concrete expressions of justice. There are many proverbs that lend credence to this. The best among them seems to be *Egbe belu ugo belu, nke si ibe ya ebena nku kwaa ya* (the kite should perch, the eagle should perch. Whichever says that the other should not perch, let its wing break off). All men and women, the poor, the rich, the beautiful, the ugly, etc - should be allowed to live. Whosoever says that the other should not live, let him suffer, the Igbo imply. The proverb is encapsulated in the saying 'live and let live'. Murder, for instance, is a pervasion of justice, because it is a denial of one's right to life (Okafor, 1992). The punishment for murder is suicide. Adultery is also a miscarriage of justice, for it involves interference in that which belongs to another. Stealing is the same; it is taking ownership of something over which one has no legitimate right to possess. Now, while those who commit these and many other grave moral offences are said to be wicked or bad people (*Ndi ajo mmadu*), those who keep the moral laws are neither praised nor called good people (*Ndi ezigbo mmadu*). The latter are doing what they are supposed to do anyway. Punishments are attached to moral infractions, and these are appropriately applied whenever the moral laws are violated. *Ani* and the ancestors are there to enforce compliance to the moral laws and dish out proportionate punishments to defaulters.

Now, those who keep the moral laws are not praised or described as good people, because they are expected to keep the laws any way or face the wrath of the earth goddess and ancestors. If this is the case, what is it then that makes an action or its agent good? It is an action that demonstrates Care.

What Makes an Action or its Agent Good

In his book, *Justice in Communalism: A Foundation of Ethics in Africa*, John Ekei (2001) describes the different dimensions of the Igbo understanding of justice. The ones that are relevant to our present topic is where he describes justice as Care, and justice as Concern, that is to say, where he identifies justice with Care, and Justice with Concern. *Prima facie*, one can say that justice and Care, justice and concern cannot be identical. If justice is understood as giving someone what is his due, it will be incongruous to understand it as Care or Concern. However, Ekei's discussion of justice is within the context of a community. Within this framework, justice as Care or justice as Concern has significance. Justice as Care is where the community members undertake common projects or undertake to help individuals carry out tasks which ordinarily, they would not be able to accomplish if left alone. This may include building a house, training a member of the community overseas, etc. The last example calls to mind how the Umuofia people, Lagos branch in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* sponsored Obi Okonkwo's further studies in England (Achebe, 1999). These common projects that manifest Care for the individuals are carried out through joint efforts or by contributions. In either case, some do much more than others in the execution of the common projects. In these joint projects, the individuals are not at liberty to take part or not to take part. Nevertheless, those who take part are not said to be good people just because they participate in the common projects. They do not have the liberty to abstain from the common projects. So, there is no need to praise those who take part in them.

The same is true with justice as concern. This is where the community members come together to help the less privileged members, such as the physically challenged, the sick, the poor, etc. They may decide to help a man marry a wife if he is unable to do so for himself on account of financial constraints. They may offer financial assistance to a member to prevent him from being a street beggar. All these communal efforts to help the less advantaged do not make the individual members of the community to be judged as good. One is not said to be good (*Onye ezi omume*) because he joined other members of the community to render help to their less privileged members.

What makes someone good is that individual's personal Care or love for others. It is not the Care that an individual displays when he joins his community to execute a project for the benefits of others or their community. We can illustrate this with the story by Chinua Achebe in the *Things Fall Apart* to show that it is the

Care that an individual shows freely outside the demands of his community or the gods that makes him good. In the book, Achebe narrates that a daughter of Umuofia was killed when she went to a market at Mbaino. Umuofia sent a powerful delegation to Mbaino with a message of demand for a compensation. A young girl and a young boy, Ikemefuna were handed over as compensations. Okonkwo was asked to take Care of Ikemefuna on behalf of the community. The boy grew up well and in a couple of years got integrated into the family to the extent that he called Okonkwo 'father'. Later the gods gave orders that Ikemefuna should be killed. This is the justice of the gods. Okonkwo joined others to kill the boy in compliance with the wishes of the gods. When that had been done, he was devastated, broken down by his conscience for taking part in the execution of a boy that called him 'father'. He went to his friend, Obierika, and narrated his feeling of guilt to him. The latter chastised him for participating in the crime. He told him "If I were you, I would have stayed at home." (Achebe, 1994, p.67). Obierika wanted him to defy the gods and to have nothing to do with the death of the boy even when obedience to the gods was in the interest of the community.

We can extract three points from the story. First, Okonkwo was not praised for taking part in an action done for the interest of the community (This is Ekei's justice as Care). He was rather lambasted and condemned by Obierika. Second, if Okonkwo had disregarded the interest of the community and stood by himself as an individual and showed concern for Ikemefuna by sparing his life or at least by not taking part in killing him, Obierika would have applauded his courage as a demonstration of an action of a good man. This goes to confirm that it is the individual's Care of the other that makes one a good person. Third, it is not the loyalty to the gods that makes one good. It is simply the Care that one shows to another. In the course of his discussion with Okonkwo, Obierika told him plainly: "But if the Oracle said that my son should be killed, I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it." (Achebe, 1994, p.67). The reason is certainly because he has a duty to care for his son. This duty is natural; it is a natural affection. And for Obierika, this natural affection takes priority over the loyalty to the gods. This was lacking in Okonkwo's action; the natural care to protect Ikemefuna *in lieu* of obedience to the gods. That is why his action was not that of approbation but condemnation. Even the feeling of guilt he felt after taking part in the killing is indicative of self-condemnation for not taking steps to protect the boy. A good action is a source of joy, while a bad one is a source of sorrow, guilt and self-condemnation.

A person who does not take care of or show concern for another is described by the Igbo as a bad person. This is clear from the following Igbo folksong.

O nwa mụọ ka m kaara gi, *inine* (R)
Nwunye dim di njo (R);
M gara kuru miri m na-enye nwa (R);
Ọ si mụ kwuọ ya ụgwọ miri, miri nwa (R);
M si ya echuo m Ọgba, ọ si m echuna Ọgba (R);
Eze Ọgba; Miri sere amụma k' ọnwa na-eti (R);
Miri sere amụma naa n'enuigwe (R);
Ee-wo, nne-nwa ndo (R); Doo, do (R), Doo do do (R)

The literal translation of the above is:

O spirit, let me tell you, *Inine* (R);
My co-wife is bad (R);
I went and collected water to give a child (R);
She said I should pay her back the water, a child's water (R);
I told her I would want to go to Ọgba to fetch water, she said I should not fetch it (R);
King Ọgba; The rain that came with lightning during the moon light (R);
The rain that went up with lightning to the sky (R);
O, child's mother, sorry (R); Sorry, sorry (R), Sorry, sorry, sorry (R).

In this folksong, a woman complained to a spirit about her co-wife. She described her as a bad woman. What was her offence that merited her this description? Her offence was that she lacked a caring spirit; she lacked the milk of human kindness. The complainant had collected her co-wife's water, evidently without her permission, and given to her child to drink. She did not expect blame from anyone for she believed that her action was in line with acceptable best Igbo moral practice. But her co-wife was of a different opinion. She demanded for a pay back.

The two women were at different levels of moral judgement, the complainant at the level of Care and her co-wife, at the level of justice. The complainant's action corresponds to the general belief of the Igbo on Care. Her action was justified within the Igbo context. That is why she went to lay her complaint to the spirit.

The spirit sympathised with her and encouraged her to bear the unacceptable behaviour of her co-wife. This folksong confirms that an action that is motivated by Care is good. The agent of such action is said to be a good man or a good woman. The agent of an action that lacks Care is tagged a bad man or bad woman. The Igbo use various uncomplimentary expressions to refer to such people. These include: *Obi di ya n'azu* (his heart is behind him), *Obi kpọrọ ya nku* (His heart is dry), *Afọ tara ya mmiri* (His stomach is without water) - all meaning: "he or she is wicked".

The Premium of the Igbo on Care

The belief, by the Igbo, that an action that is motivated by Care is good is as a result of the value which they attach to it. The hope, for example, that is generated when one is assured of Care makes one feel some sense of security, particularly the social security. Care generates in its recipient an inexpressible joy. This joy is followed by spontaneous expression of gratitude. The value of Care, for the Igbo, is inestimable. On account of this, they regard the beneficiary of a benevolence who fails to show appreciation as an ingrate. They condemn ingratitude as something that is inglorious. Care is so valuable that it can be used as a tool to win over someone to one's side; it can be used to initiate and influence a process of reconciliation. The value that Igbo attach to Care is couched in wise sayings, proverbs, Care-bearing names as well as in their attitude.

The sense of security that Care facilitates is expressed in the wise sayings, for instance, *Mmadu ka eji aka* (a person is greater because of another person). The meaning implicit in this saying is that if you have someone who provides you with Care, support and assistance, you will prevail with certainty in any endeavour. *Mmadu ka eji aka* is addressed to someone who has just shown an act of kindness. Another wise saying that is directed to somebody who has shown Care is *Onye nwere gi nwere mmadu* (literally: whoever has you has human being). *Mmadu* is made up of two words, namely, *mma* (beauty) and *ndu* (life). Therefore, *mmadu* is *mma ndu* - the beauty of life. The beauty of life is in caring, loving and supporting. If one has someone who cares for him, loves and supports him, he has the beauty of life; life becomes enjoyable to him.

Care is so precious that the Igbo would want a beneficiary of Care to show

gratitude for what he has received. They express this in proverbs: *Etoo dike na nke o mere, o mee ozo* (if you praise a large-hearted man for what he did, he is motivated to do more). This is a truism. Acknowledge, appreciate and praise someone for the little Care or help he rendered, he would be inspired to do even more. This means that Care is a morale booster. And this is why the Igbo also say *Etoo onye gburu okuko, o fu Efi o gbue* (If you praise someone who killed a fowl, he kills a cow if he sees one). And those who appreciate the value of the Care they receive, express their gratitude by saying: *Okuko anaghi echezọ onye foro ya odudu n'udu mmiri* (A fowl does not forget someone who trims its feathers during the rainy season). This is because *Okwa si n'obu onye ya tara ji ya ka ya ma* (The Partridge says that it knows only those whose yam it ate). It is from those whom one has benefited, those who have impacted positively in one's life through their Care, that remain evergreen in one's mind.

Someone who fails to show gratitude, that is an ingrate, is criticised harshly in proverbs: *Oya naa ofeke, o chezoọ onye gworo ya* (If a foolish man is cured, he forgets the person who brought about his cure.). This is uttered with a high level of cynicism. A much more denigrating criticism of an ingrate is expressed in this proverb: *O bu nkita ara n'ata onye nwe ya* (He is a mad dog that bites its owner). Here is a very powerful image. A sane dog follows its owner, it is loyal; it is at the beck and call of the owner, because its daily maintenance is dependent on him. A mad dog is not simply the opposite of a sane dog, it is much worse, for it bites its owner instead of protecting him. That is the image of the ungrateful for the Igbo. The ingrate receives further bashing when the Igbo say: *Nwanza rijuo afo, o chefuo chi kere ya* (When the wren has eaten to its satisfaction, it forgets its creator). The ungrateful forgets him who has made him what he is.

The Igbo believe that a person that shows Care to another should not suffer unjustly on account of this. They express this belief in the name - *Ogomegbunam* (let my caring not bring about my death or bring about my suffering of any inconvenience). The Igbo are prepared to take back whatever they had given out gratuitously if they suffer any inconvenience for the Care they have shown. For them, it is rather the ungrateful who ought to suffer for his ingratitude and not the benefactor. This idea is represented in an Igbo folklore. Once all the birds were invited for a banquet in the sky (Achebe, 1994). They began to prepare for this by tattooing and decorating themselves with camwood. The tortoise, who was not invited, desired to attend the banquet. His handicap, however, was that he had no wings. He requested the birds to donate feathers to him to make up

the wings that would enable him to join them to honour the invitation. They refused, because they knew him to be a very ungrateful being. The tortoise was able to convince them that he had changed from his disagreeable and uncomplimentary behaviour. So, they contributed their feathers to him to make up the wings. The tortoise looked special and gorgeous because its wings consisted of feathers of different colours and shapes.

On the day of the appointment, all the birds and the tortoise arrived at the designated arena, from where they would set out to the sky. As they were flying to the sky, they were conversing. The tortoise told them that on an occasion, such as the one in which they were invited, each would take a new name. They did. The tortoise itself adopted the name: "All of you". On reaching the sky, they were warmly welcome by the hosts. After the exchange of pleasantries, the hosts brought out all the delicacies prepared for the occasion. The tortoise asked the hosts, 'For whom did you prepare this food?' They answered 'All of you'. Once his special name was mentioned, the tortoise began to eat and he ate the best part of the meal. The birds ate what was left over. In annoyance, they took back their feathers, and flew home. The parrot, who accepted to inform the wife of the tortoise to bring out soft materials in the house, and display them in the compound for his landing from the sky, did the opposite. He told her rather to bring hard objects. The tortoise threw himself from the sky, and landed on the hard objects, and broke his shells. They were gathered and fixed together by a medicine man. That is why his shell is in bits. The tortoise wears the badge of ingratitude. The Igbo will fight back whenever the Care they have shown brings them inconvenience.

Care is so valuable that it can be strategically deployed as a means of stimulating reconciliation. In the *No Longer At Ease*, Chinua Achebe told the story of the friendship and the feud between Obi Okonkwo and Joseph Okeke. Both were friends. Their relationship became frosty when Obi told Okeke of his intention to marry a woman who was an outcast. As a friend, Okeke advised him to drop the idea. But he ignored it. Okeke went and informed the president of Umuofia town union, Lagos Branch, of Obi's intention. He had thought the president would call Obi privately and discuss the matter with a view to dissuading him from marrying the outcast. That did not happen. He announced Obi's intention rather publicly in their meeting. This infuriated Obi tremendously. As a result, his relationship with Okeke became strained. He stopped going to Okeke's house as he used to do. Okeke apologised, but that did not bring visible change. However,

Okeke wanted their relationship to remain. On the day that Umuofia people came to pay Obi condolence visit on the death of his mother, Okeke went and bought bottles of beer with which Obi entertained his visitors (Achebe, 1999). He accepted the gifts and used them accordingly. Okeke was using Care to assuage Obi's anger and stimulate reconciliation.

The premium that the Igbo place on Care is particularly evident during burial ceremonies. The avalanche of accolades that the dead who distinguished himself in caring for others receives during the obsequies is an eloquent testament of the high esteem that the Igbo hold on the virtue of Care. That the dead was a just man, who gave each his due while he was alive, is not what usually induce many to attend a funeral. It is rather the many lives he touched directly or indirectly. This is also the cause of the adulations that he receives. During the funeral orations some of the obvious deeds of kindness of the deceased are detailed out for admiration and imitation. The beneficiaries of the dead man's good deeds sometimes weep and mourn uncontrollably.

The importance that the Igbo attach to Care is such that they extend it not just to the living alone but also to the dead. The main thing that facilitates one's admission into the land of the ancestors is a befitting funeral ceremony (Arinze, 1978). Without it, the dead will not be permitted to join the ancestors. The ceremony consists of sacrifices, dancing, singing and entertainments of visitors. It is a ceremony that is capital intensive. People freely make personal contributions to the bereaved family, to enable it to organise a burial ceremony, that is adequate to obtain for the dead, an entrance into the land of the spirits. By making these supportive contributions, the Igbo demonstrate their concern for the spiritual wellbeing of their dead in the spirit land. The practice of helping the bereaved family is still *à la mode*, even though the intention is no longer to assist in the ostentatious burial rites that make the ancestors admit their dead members into their midst.

Igbo's Care for the dead is particularly expressed in the burial rites of women. The Igbo believe that the structure of their world here on earth is similar to that of the land of the ancestors. Any member of a family remains in the same family in both worlds. And so, when a woman gets married, she does not cease to be a member of her paternal family. This is why, when a married woman dies, the news of her death is communicated formally to her paternal family. The latter would then grant the permission for her to be buried on a date agreed upon by

both families. If this permission is not granted, the burial ceremony cannot go on. Again, as a sign that the late wife still belongs to her paternal family, her corpse is brought back to her father's compound and displayed for final respects before she is carried to her matrimonial home for burial. After her burial, something is given to her paternal family, as a symbol that she is back to the paternal family, even though she is buried in her matrimonial compound. Some bereaved families give cow or any other object to the paternal families as a symbolic exchange of her return to her paternal family. It is believed that if these rituals are not done, the dead woman would not be able to recognise her rightful family in the spirit world. The Igbo show all these concerns and Care to ensure that their dead do not experience difficulties in the land of the ancestors.

There are Igbo Care (Ọgọ) bearing names that showcase their appreciation of Care. Such include:

Ọgọchukwu - The Care or the love of God

Chinemeọgọ - Chi shows Care

Chidiọgọ - Chi is caring

Ọgọamaka - Care is good.

Ọgọmma - good Care

Ọgọnwa - The Care of a child

Ọgọnna - The Care of a father

Ọgọebuka - Care is very great

Omeọgọ - Someone who helps or provides Care

Ọgọegbunam - Let caring not bring me death or disaster

Ọgọmegbunam- let my caring not bring about my death or bring about my suffering of any inconvenience

Names, for the Igbo, are not arbitrarily given or taken. The adoption of one name or another depends on the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. Names are used to express those circumstances that are significant to the families at the birth of their children (Ezeanya, 1967). The Care-bearing names which the different Igbo give to their children lend support to the idea that Care is very important for the Igbo.

Care is also implicit in some title names such as:

Ọnwa na etiri ọha - The moon that shines for all

Miri na ezoro ọha - The rain that falls for all

Akụ rienné - When wealth increases

The importance of Care in the success of the Igbo

The Igbo are found in every nook and cranny of Nigeria and in different parts of the world. Wherever they find themselves, the Will is always to succeed. And indeed, they do succeed in the different departments of life. In politics, economics, education, science, technology, commerce, industry etc, the Igbo excel in all these. This has attracted to them sometimes admiration and often outright hatred. Some writers have written on the Igbo personality traits, which in their considered opinion, are the reasons behind the Igbo success story. Obi Oguejiofor (1996, p.31) mentions some of these traits to include “egalitarianism, individualism, competitiveness, taste for achievement, hard work and clamorous democracy.” According to Oguejiofor (1996, p.39), when the Igbo migrate to a place “they arrived with nothing except their determination and their readiness to work.”. Oguejiofor does not see caring as Igbo personality trait, he does not mention it as something fundamental to the success of the Igbo nation.

Oguejiofor says that the Igbo migrants come to their host communities “with nothing except their determination and their readiness to work”. What is this in concrete terms? I believe these are their strategies and personality traits. Prominent among them is the expression of Care. Showing Care creates friendly and peaceful atmosphere within which to work. It creates the enabling environment, which enhances the full deployment of the personality traits. So, Care is fundamental to the success of the Igbo migrants. They use Care to win the confidence and trust of the host communities. By this, they minimize the distractions that can easily scuttle their ambition to translate their dreams of success into reality.

Chinua Achebe surmises that the common resentment, which the rest of Nigeria has for the Igbo, is as a result of their cultural traits which help them achieve greater heights than the Hausas and the Yorubas. Emphasising the role of culture in the success story of the Igbo, Achebe (2012, p.74) says “The Igbo culture, being receptive to change, individualistic, and highly competitive, gave an Igbo man an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots in securing credentials for advancement in Nigerian colonial society.” And because they excel in different areas of life, they were appointed to head different institutions, offices and parastatals in the colonial days. The other ethnic groups saw this as threat and resented it. Nevertheless, Achebe does not include Care as a cultural trait that

stimulates and enhances the success story of the Igbo.

In Nigeria, the Igbo are hated. This is clear. They have been removed as heads of institutions which they occupied in the past. This is part of the reasons why, perhaps, Nigeria is not making significant progress in terms of development. But the Igbo can do a lot more to help Nigeria in her development drive. They can do this by expanding their areas of Care. As much as they use Care to attain positions of authority, acquire fame and wealth, so should they use it to maintain them. Their Care should extend to other ethnic groups. By so doing, the resentment and hatred against them will reduce or even fizzle out.

Conclusion

This paper began with the distinction of the normative Ethics of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan from the Igbo Ethics of Care. The latter is descriptive; it describes how the Igbo relate morally with others. It is a relationship in which Care is approbated. An action, which is a demonstration of Care is extolled and eulogised; it is said to be good while the converse is said to be bad. This understanding is part of the cultural behaviour of the Igbo; it is their way of life. The actions of the two women presented earlier in the Igbo folksong are unimpeachable demonstrations of this fact.

The actions of the two women can be compared within Kohlberg's description of the actions of the individuals in the 5th and the 6th stages of moral development to show not only that Care is irrefutably an important virtue for the Igbo, but also to show that the Igbo Ethics of Care is different from Kohlberg's justice theory of moral development. The co-wife can be said to be at the 5th stage of Kohlberg's moral development, where there is strong emphasis on obedience to the law of social contract. This explains why she was demanding that her water, which was taken without her permission, be given back to her. The other woman, the complainant, belongs to the 6th moral stage. She broke the law of social contract by taking her co-wife's water, without her permission, to provide drink for her child. At the 6th moral stage, right and duty are indistinguishable. If the child has a right to life, everyone has a duty to protect it. The complainant felt that what she did, was not simply a duty, but done in total compliance with the traditional practice. That is why she had to complain to the spirit about the action of her co-wife. Usually, when one violates a moral law, one tries to hide away his infraction, from being discovered, in order to avoid punishment. But this woman, because she felt that she had not broken any known law, went on her

own accord to lay before the spirit, her complaint against her co-wife. The spirit consoled her to bear the untraditional behaviour of her co-wife. In the theory as presented by Kohlberg, this woman, that is, the complainant, would be punished for breaking the law of social contract. But in the Igbo traditional moral practice, she does not deserve any punishment. Here lies an important distinction between Kohlberg's justice theory and the Igbo Ethics of Care.

Care is an important factor that plays a significant role in the success stories of the Igbo. This traditional trait should not only be maintained, but should be made to embrace as many people as possible in order to consolidate the successes that Care attracts.

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