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The Okonko Ethos in Igbo land and the Issue of Poverty: An Overview

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Abstract

In Southeast of Nigeria are the Igbos who maintain their existence through culture and traditional institutions embedded in Okonko Society. The Igbos over time have developed stable and independent economic ties and cultural contact with their neighbours. Gradually they aspired for a corporate status that would guarantee justice, equity, fair play and peace. This was aimed at reducing poverty to the minimum. However, the challenge of social change, emergence of modern democracy in Nigeria and increasing rate of corruption tend to destroy the institution and ethos of Okonko Society in Igbo land, Nigeria. In the present study, an attempt has been made to grasp the nature of Okonko ethos within the context of the greater good of the greater number of people. This paper also focuses on the reality of poverty as it affects majority of the people in Nigeria today.

Introduction

The common nature of people, regardless of culture, and the universal character of God point to a common goal and purpose. That is to say, they point to one destiny. In this regard Aristide correctly observed that, there is only one history: that of human beings, that which helps us to explain the struggle for humanity.¹ Those human actions are good which contribute to the realization of the common good; and those actions are bad which lead man away from the ultimate good and obstruct its realization.

In the light of the above, the emphasis about tackling poverty is based on intellectual capital and technology. Natural resources such as gold and oil are no longer the basic determinants in addressing the issue of poverty. The present technological era is based upon oneness of science, on the global character of communications, and on the sustained interrelatedness of the economic world. Above all, people of all cultures are waking up to the reality of a new and more radical dimension of unity;

for they perceive that their resources; as well as the precious treasures of air and water-without which there cannot be life-and the small delicate biosphere of the whole complex of all life on earth, are not infinite, but on the contrary must be saved and preserved as a unique patrimony belonging to all mankind²

However obvious this observation maybe, it does not seem to hold wholly true for the Nigerian situation. The forces of discrimination and corruption seem to be increasing on a daily basis in Nigeria today. Poverty here is seen as the social situation personal to the human being or group in which one cannot afford the funding of essential services to self or group. In this case, participation in social development is systematically lowered if not aborted due to a lack of economic power. Ancestral stereotypes between tribes and regions, between states and classes, now possess a new face of destruction. Arms trading and kidnapping flourish as threats to man's highest good, which is abundant life. Insecurity of life makes the

¹J.B Aristide, *An Autobiography* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993) p.48

²O'Brien & Thomas, *Catholic Social Thought: Documentary Heritage* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992) p.89

poor even more miserable, while making the rich even richer and powerful. Life is constantly threatened from the face of the earth.

The thrust of this study is therefore, to examine the ethical contents of Okonko Society that is meant to enhance the greater good of a greater number of people in South Eastern Nigeria. In doing this, attention is paid to the issue of poverty as a phenomenon and some of the factors that enhance its prevalence in Nigerian Society. The study concludes with a summary of the salient arguments raised in the body of the work.

Theoretical Framework of Social Change

Written materials on society and change in ancient Africa usually centre on the influence of external forces in the elimination of socio-cultural institutions considered as nasty and the enthronement of new ones, seen as dynamic and progressive. Augustine of Hippo, born in 354 AD was among the first scholars to articulate the idea of social change and what propelled historical change. As the proponent of the concept of divine providence, Augustine argued that the trend of human history is directed by beings rooted in the spiritual realm. The crux of Augustine's argument is that God is the cause of all changes. This line of thought ruled the world till the 18th century when the era of enlightenment was ushered in.³

The outstanding minds of the enlightenment period were Immanuel Kant and George Hegel. Kantian-Hegelian theory emphasized the shift from spiritual agency to humans as the agents of historical change. Karl Marx and Frederick Engel stepped in and gave economic interpretations to the Kantian-Hegelian theory of change. As noted by Marx and Engel, any change in society is propelled by the conflict between different classes in society, and the most essential factor in this conflict is group economic interest.⁴ Furthermore, Arnold Toynbee saw historical change within the context of challenge and response.

However, a number of scholars of African studies attribute socio-cultural changes in traditional African settings to colonialism and missionary expansionism. Therefore, the two basic perspectives of change in Africa are: the neo-Marxist school and the orthodox school.⁵ Nwabughuogu in his examination of change, particularly in Igbo land saw responses and initiatives as important factors of change in pre-colonial and colonial Africa.⁶ Thus, this study bases its assumptions on the framework that external influence contributed significantly to the changes that have made Okonko Society to lose grip of social control in Igbo land. The consequence of this socio-cultural change is corruption and wide spread poverty in Africa.

The Igbos and their Land

Igbo civilization as embedded in its conscious efforts to overcome poverty is a gift of the Niger in the same context in which Egypt is said to be a gift of the Nile. As the earliest world civilizations developed around river basins and deltas, so did there develop a vibrant and dynamic cultural heritage around Niger Delta.

The people now known as the Igbos or southeasterners in Nigeria thought of themselves as Awka, Bende, Aro, Ngwa and Ibeku. The word "Ibo" was perhaps derived from "Heebo" which, according to some European traders of the 19th century, was the name given by Biafran traders on the coast to the hinterland

³ P.U. Mbakwe, "Change & Continuity in an Igbo Polity" (A Ph.D Thesis submitted to the University of Calabar, Nigeria, 2005)

⁴ M.L. Tingan, *The Economics of Development Planning* (New Delhi: Delhi Press, 1981) p.82

⁵ Mbakwe, "Change & Continuity" ...p.7

⁶ A. I Nwabughuogu, *The Dynamics of Change in Eastern Nigeria 1900-1960* (Owerri: Thompson Press, 1993) p.5-18

between the "Ibo" in the hinterland and the "Kwa Ibo", that is, Ibos living on the kwa river. The latter are now known as Ibibios. The merchants, of course, were merely using the word "Ibo" as a general nomenclature for people living in the hinterland rather than for a tribe in the modern sense of the word.

Again, the riverine groups on the banks of lower Niger, Onitsha, Osomari and Oguta, refer to their hinterland neighbors as "Igbo", a term which they do not apply to themselves. Thus, it would seem appropriate to say that, modern tribal consciousness, represented by the application of the term Ibo, Ibibio, Ijo, Ogoja in Biafra, was fostered not by the people themselves but by foreigners who were ignorant of the intricate bonds which held the country, Nigeria together.⁷

According to Ilogu, from where the southeasterners (Igbos) came and when will remain a matter of conjecture for a long time because of the absence of helpful records.⁸ However, it can be asserted that Igbo land has been under continuous human occupation for at least 3,000 years. Her people are said to have developed an ancient civilization, about half a millennium before the emergence of the kingdom of Benin. Linguistic information also confirms the antiquity of the main languages spoken in the area. Therefore, the main groups of southeastern Nigeria were indigenous to the territory and contact among them has existed, through Okonko Society, since primeval-times.

Igbo land is, demarcated to the west by the lower reaches of the River Niger and its Delta, to the East by the Obudu plateau and the High lands of Oban and Ikom, to the south by the Bight of Biafra and to the North by an administrative boundary following, approximately, the 7° N latitude. The total area is over 29,400 square miles.⁹

This means that Igbo land is almost as big as Gambia and Sierra Leone put together. The region is bigger than Togo or Rwanda and Burundi combined, and is twice the size of the Republic of Israel.

The Igbo land, in terms of natural endowment, is well-vegetated throughout the year, lying to a large extent in the basins of Niger River, the Cross River, the Kwa River and the Imo River. Three quarters of these river basins are low land less than 400 feet above sea-level. Today, with a very high population density in some Ibo areas (about 711 persons per square mile) resulting in the difficulty of finding enough food through agriculture to support the population, many Ibo people migrate to different parts of the world.¹⁰ With this physical mobility goes the spreading of the Okonko ethos in other parts of Nigeria as well as inculturating the Ibo way of life through influences from other parts of the nation. This phenomenon was dangerously affected by the recent Nigerian-Biafra war. Yet in the study of perspectives on poverty in Nigeria, one clearly notes the effects of such human movements and contact upon those who stay behind at home and those who are in the Diaspora. This paper is concerned with the influence of Okonko ethos in Igbo land which definitely addressed the influence and reduction of poverty at a certain time in history.

It was not only natural resources and trade that gave birth to a homogenous Igbo race in the pre-colonial era; there was also the contribution of intellectual capital enhanced by Okonko values or ethos. The consequence of this was the prevalent division of labour within Igbo land aimed at tackling poverty. Individual communities were noted and relied upon for specific skills. This encouraged their movement from one place to another, bonded together by Okonko, during which the peaceful coexistence of all the communities was emphasized. For example, the people of Awka were famed throughout Igbo land as

⁷ Biafra, (Enugu: Republican Publications, 1967)

⁸ E. Ilogu, *Christianity & Igbo Culture* (Enugu: Wok Publishers Ltd, 1974) p.1

⁹ Biafra, p.4

¹⁰ E. Ilogu...p.4

wood carvers and sculptors, while the Nri people supplied the priestly class which was essential for the social and religious cohesion of the region. Southwards, there were the blacksmiths, of Nkwerre, the Irem and Ibibio doctors, the warriors of Ohafia and Abam and the priests of Okonko from Arochukwu.

Thus, it came to be generally accepted that one community supplied the wants of another and the tradition of mutual reliance and support, rooted in Okonko Society, became established. This also became a general distinctive note of the social teaching of various families in Igboland, stressing in particular the absence of poverty in the land. The welfare of all the citizens was safeguarded. Hence, in Igbo land poverty is termed, "Ogbe enye" (inability of neighbour giving) and of course, this was not possible except if one was or is an out-cast. This context may no longer exist presently, yet attention must be paid to it in today's global efforts to eliminate or reduce poverty to the minimum.

Okonko Society and Ethical Theories

The ethical theory of Okonko Society in Igbo land can be designated as science of meanings for the Igbo race. It is concerned with the common good of people, especially people related to the South Eastern Nigeria in any way. Okonko Society is the most prominent society of the Igbo that has "mma" as a form of greeting. It is the association of free born male adults in Igbo land. It is primarily a social, political, judicial, and religious organization established for the purpose of justice, peace and order in the land. Okonko Society exists and functions in Igbo land for the well-being of, not only the initiates, but the entire community. The Society originally enforced and maintained traditions, customs and beliefs, determined ritual behaviour and regulated social attitude.¹¹ It still plays an important role in the life and culture of the Igbo race especially in the areas of social behaviour, and morality.

Recently, Onyejekwu (2003:15) in an article, with an apt caption "Okonko Society in Igbo land", tried to lend credence to the relevance of this society. According to him,

Okonko was a powerful institution, which dominated the government of the community. During the pre-colonial and colonial era, Okonko promulgated laws, enforced law and order and performed the function of social control. It employed different techniques to its rules and regulations.¹²

This means that Okonko society had the effect of preventing crime and checking corruption in the community. It was a vital society that reassured the rest of the populace concerning the enforcement of customary laws, especially in land matters, marriage cases and trade transactions.

Tamuno (1998:181) aptly described Okonko and its vital role thus,

the head of a family (no less a staunch Okonko member), among the Olokoro Ibo of the Bende division, used his Ofo stick (believed to represent the Spirits of ancestors) to prevent strife within the ezi (family) and especially the poisoning of one member by another member of the same family. A palm leaf over a debtor's door indicated that the Okonko Society was attempting to enforce

¹¹ J.O Awolalu & P.A Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Macmillan Publishers, 2005) p.243-244

¹² U.N Onyejekwu, "Okonko Society in Igboland," *The Guardian Newspaper*, Vol 20 (11-11-2003) p.64

the payment of a debt. No one could pass through an entrance guarded by the leaf signifying Okonko Operations.¹³

Okonko Society has influenced and still influences the social and community lives of the Ibos despite western culture and Christian religion. Heads of various families of Igbo traditional settings are still proud and staunch members of Okonko Society. Like some societies in the world, the origin of Okonko Society is shrouded in mystery and obscurity. The exact period and date that the society originated in Igboland is not known. Most heads of families and elders in South Eastern Nigeria today cannot give the historical origin or the beginning of Okonko in the land. They are content with saying that the society was in existence even before their forefathers.

Some elders argue that Okonko Society came into being in an attempt to put a stop to community conflicts, inter-tribal wars and also to create a peaceful coexistence among people and neighbours as a way of eradicating poverty and enhancing trade. According to Jones, realizing that warfare was incompatible with trade, the Aros used the Okonko society to win the co-operation of different communities.¹⁴

From another angle, prominent elders from Ohafia, Bende and the Ikwuano areas of Abia State strongly opined that Okonko was derived from the Epe society of the Efik-Ibibio.

In the light of the above, Ekpe Secret Society migrated into Igboland as Okonko, spreading to almost all communities in Igboland that have "Ndee wo" and "Mma ma" as their form of greetings. It is important to mention at this point that early members of Okonko were associated with the Long-juju of Arochukwu. According to Offenbergs pilgrims visited Arochukwu so that the oracle would solve such problems as "poor harvest, continued illness, epidemics and lack of children."¹⁵ In addition, the long-juju was recognized in the southeast and in some parts of the south-south Nigeria as a court of appeal. Communities referred difficult cases which might threaten their stability to the oracle for arbitration.

Before a case was referred to the Long-juju, leaders of a community usually appointed a few local traders who had gained some experience in traveling to accompany litigants to Arochukwu. The traders were expected to inform their leaders about the decision of the oracle when they returned home. In order to strengthen their relations with the local traders, the Aros received them cordially. They gave their leader a symbol of the oracle (Ihu-Chukwu) so that he could act as its agent in his area. A local agent of the Long-juju received fees from people of different communities who wanted him to accompany them to Arochukwu. Again, those who had minor problems gave him gifts such as yams, chickens, and goats so that he would offer sacrifices to the oracle.

A middle stance opinion on the origin and history of Okonko Society claims that the local agents of the Long-juju of Arochukwu were pioneers of the Okonko Society. They were called "friends of the Aro" (Enyi Ndi Aro). It is claimed that the Aro gave them a secret symbol of Okonko (Ngbara) which empowered them to found the society in their localities.¹⁶ The founder of Okonko in each Igbo community was recognized as the president or "Eze Ngbara". The President presided over the weekly meetings of the society and regulated its affairs with the multi-title holders (Ndi Ochi akalabu). The multi-title holders constituted the second rank in Okonko Society.¹⁷

¹³ T.N Tamuno, "Traditional Police in Nigeria," in E.A Adegbola (ed), *Traditional Religion in West Africa* (Ibadan: Sefer Books Ltd, 1998)

¹⁴ J. Jones, *The Trading States* (Nairobi: Heineman Books, 1976) p.19

¹⁵ Offenbergs, *Ibo Oracles* (Port Harcourt: Newsman Press, 2004) p.204

¹⁶ Abadsit, "Long-Juju of Aro & Okonko Society" (National Archives, Enugu, 14/10/20, 1954) p.12

¹⁷ Abadsit...p.20

Talbot noted that people of Igbo stock invested their wealth in Okonko and other titled societies. According to him, since initiation fees were shared in relation to the number of titles a man had purchased, the multi-titled holders were among the richest members of Okonko.¹⁸ This means that Okonko Society in Igboland placed more emphasis on achievement than on ascribed status and this must have contributed and heightened the development of democratic values, handwork and industrial advancement among the Igbos.

So, in respect of the origin of Okonko Society in Igboland, the consensus of opinion is that the society sprouted from among the free-born as a platform of social, economic and religious metamorphosis. It existed and still is a formal society in Igboland permeated by a sense of mystery. Just like the description Camara Laye gave to a coherent society with a consistent manner of life, Okonko Society is a society whose origins "are incapable of explanation."¹⁹ This brings up the issue of ethics.

It is generally accepted that ethics is concerned with right and wrong of human behaviour. Adhering to ethics brings stability and cohesion in the society, but violating ethics breeds corruption and crises. According to Akanmidu, the word "ethics" derives its origin from the Greek word "ethos". The idea in the word ethos connotes the rules of a people or community. From this angle, ethos, in meaning, relates to character or to a person's nature or disposition.²⁰

Recent ethical discussions pay increasing attention to poverty and just distribution of natural resources. Given the disparate environments in which the discussions arise, their articulation of poverty too differs from context to context. In this study, the interest is centered on the influence of Okonko Society on a people's way of life and the search for meaning in life. All ethical systems have the meaningful life as their goal. This was the stabilizing role Okonko Society played in Igboland through its ethics and values. In other words, Okonko ethics gave focus to Igbo anthropology as the focal point for influencing values and judgments.²¹ The different values and judgments about the ultimate goal of human life are embedded in ethical theories. Akanmidu classifies them into three: utilitarianism, consequentialism and the futurist moral theory.²²

Akanmidu also notes that the essence of utilitarianism may be looked for in temporal happiness and welfare. That is, pleasure and happiness are the only things good in themselves, while evil is what causes pain and sorrow. Ethically, a right act then, is what is useful and profitable for achieving the goal of temporal well-being and success. Utilitarianism may as well be a typical instance of consequentialism, "... on the grounds that utilitarianism is used to refer to any outlook which holds that the rightness or wrongness of an action always depends on the consequences of the action."²³ However, the consequentialists cannot be dissuaded by an action that is good in itself without having to wait for the consequences that such an action will elicit.²⁴

In the light of community living, Okonko Society never admitted and cannot admit the principle of unrestrained, private happiness or prosperity. Individualism and selfishness had no place in Igbo community, no matter how much pleasure they bring to the person. Okonko Society condemned and punished criminal recklessness perpetrated on grounds of utilitarianism and consequentialism. The greatest happiness of the larger community was encouraged through community values and judgments. And this can be described as modified utilitarianism and moderate consequentialism. The futurist moral

¹⁸ P.A Talbot, *The People of South Eastern Nigeria* (London: Newman Press, 1926) pp.755-756

¹⁹ Camara Laye, *The African Child* (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1981) p.

²⁰ R.A Akanmidu, *Ethics & Poverty: Enquiries in Moral Philosophy* (Lagos: Balifik Educational Publishers, 1995) p.4

²¹ P.U Nwosu, "The Ethics of Okonko & Christian Expansionism in Igboland" (An Unpublished paper, 2008) p.4

²² Akanmidu...p.4

²³ Akanmidu...p.35

²⁴ Akanmidu...p.36

theory holds that an action is moral when it justifies and motivates the recipient to show appreciation in the future.²⁵ This concept belongs essentially to the religious domain. The attitude of the ingrate is jettisoned and deemed inappropriate. Okonko Society presents ultimate morality that centers on the community and union with God through the ancestors. This accounts for the reason why the Igbos agree on the real world of meaningful existence, the need to sustain it while dealing with poverty eradication.

For the traditional Igbo man, who is always related to Okonko, the community is basically sacred with religious, economic, social and political dimensions. This warrants the frequent use of the first person plural "we", "ours" in daily interactions. People generally return to their villages to celebrate important traditional events. Mbiti (1982:704) underscored this point and the sacredness of the community when he wrote that, the individual can only say "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am..."²⁶

Another important value is the family. Families and members of different kindred from minimal to maximal lineages commonly live together and form communities. They share life in common. And like the Israel of old, they believe that their existence in the community is within the context of the divine. Daniel-Rops described it succinctly when he said that, "...they were certain that their presence ... had a meaning under providence and that God Himself had set them in their land."²⁷ There are communal farm lands, economic trees, streams, bans, and markets. For the Igbos and by extension, the Africans, community and family are more than simply social or biological groupings of people bound together by reason of origin and values. It is both a family, society as well as a unity of visible and invisible worlds in which the issue of poverty in today's context did not exist.

The Influence of Okonko and Poverty in Nigeria

Poverty, in its real sense, is the state of lacking the means to exist adequately. This lack of means to exist adequately is often hinged on certain factors. O'Neill makes reference to such factors by noting that,

at one time it may be a poor harvest, lack of work or cash to buy food, or payment due to a landlord or a money lender, at another an essential or unavoidable expense: for a funeral, money to buy seeds or tools.²⁸

A few hundred years ago when Okonko controlled human affairs, the different regions of Nigeria were largely self-contained, self-sufficient, and linked to each other only through a relatively small amount of trade in luxury goods. Then came the imperialist expansion of four or five European countries. They set up colonies in most of what we now call the Third World; and the economies of the colonized areas were reorganized to serve the interests of the imperial powers. Colonialism is almost gone, but it has been replaced by a neo-colonial system. This means that control over poorer countries is not usually exercised now by undue gun and political power but mainly in economic ways. This economic control can create even greater hardship than the old-style colonial rule because it affects every sphere of life. This has resulted in the restive situation in the Niger Delta area of in Nigeria.

Webster's Dictionary of English Language considers poverty in two major dimensions: unproductiveness or in adequate supply (that is lack in the face of need). It also gives a format of the ideas section of poverty, which is defined as the monastic renunciation of the right to own. For the international conglomerate of civil societies these perspectives get proper definition in the reduction of the person to the margin below what is called the poverty line, which, on its own, is defined as the

²⁵ Akanmidu...p.37

²⁶ J.S Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Press, 1982) p.704

²⁷ H. Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Times of Jesus* (Michigan: Servant Books, 1980) p.29

²⁸ O'Neill, *Faces of Hunger* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986) p.11

The term poverty designates in the first place material poverty, that is, the absence of economic strength necessary for a human life worthy of the name. In this case, poverty is considered degrading and is rejected by the governments of the world. Even those who are not aware of the remote causes of this poverty believe that it should be eliminated. To affirm the reality of poverty, Gustavo wrote that,

what we mean by material poverty is a subhuman situation. Concretely, to be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person.²⁹

The typical poor country is dependent for foreign earnings on the export of one or two agricultural products such as tea, coffee, bananas, sugar-cane, or beef. In Nigeria it is crude oil export. Trade in these products is grossly imbalanced in favour of the rich countries in America and Europe: the prices are low and unstable at the expense of the poor countries. The market is controlled by multi-national companies. A country in this situation sinks ever deeper into debt; and so it is no longer in a position to make important decisions about its economy – these are made by the foreign countries and banks to which it owes money. Locally owned industries are largely replaced by euro-dollar companies which have no interest in the long-term welfare of the country: their only concern is to make as much profit as possible and as quickly as possible. The country does not have the money to extract and process its own mineral and energy resources. So, mining corporations and oil companies are invited in to exploit these resources. In most cases even the agriculture of the poor country comes to be controlled by foreign interests: land that could produce food for the poor is given over to growing crops for export at very low prices.

The result of all this is that poor countries are trapped in their poverty. No matter how richly endowed they are with natural resources or how hard people work, it is highly unlikely that they can ever catch up with the rich countries, so long as the present system continues. According to Dorr

The poverty of the Third World is not due to a lack of resources. Neither is it to be explained by saying that the people are lazy, or not interested in work, or not good at looking after machinery. These accusations may be true in some cases but they are not the crucial issue.³⁰

This poverty in Nigeria has to be explained in terms of structures and in terms of moral behavior. If the poor are apathetic, that is the result of their poverty rather than its basic cause. The failures of government in Nigeria and development plans since 1960s to date have widened the indices of poverty. And the complacency with which policy makers of the time overlooked this reality has made scholars to re-articulate poverty as a systemic issue. As Sugirtharajah noted, poverty is a by-product of society and economic systems, rather than the fault of the poor themselves.³¹ It is the State that caused the poor themselves to lack the means to exist adequately. On his part, Gutierrez defined poverty as, "a subhuman existence without the basic necessities, a scandalous state incompatible with the Bible."³² In their views, poverty is not the fault of the poor. It can and should be eliminated through structural and behavioral change. It is only by this will to change that any intellectual and technological effort put into poverty eradication would become result oriented.

²⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics & Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996) p.164

³⁰ D. Dorr, *Spirituality & Justice* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1986) p.54

³¹ R.S Sugirtharajah, "Poverty" in *Dictionary of the Third World Theologies* (ed) Virginia Fabella (New York: Orbis Books, 2000) p.170

³² Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Well* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984) p.84

In Nigeria, the common people confront socio-economic poverty as well as anthropological poverty. This is caused by the rape of communal living and cultural heritage. Agunwa puts it thus, "there is a collapse of the social control system. Western education has replaced traditional socialization process which inculcated wisdom and salient values."³³ The ethical norms and hold Okonko Society had on people and communities are no longer strong enough. Sadly, the resulting effect has caused majority of the ruling class and policy makers to internalize the values and models of selfishness, individualism, thus falling victims of mammon (organized consumerism and greed). The major problem in Nigeria today remains the prevalence of poverty. Political office holders are enjoying vastly enhanced packages along with entertainment and other allowances while workers wages have remained poor over many years, with worsening inflation.

Awuzie captured the situation when he said that, "what is happening is that a small percentage of people in this country, less than one percent, have garnered 90% of the resources of this nation and they put others under perpetual penury and hardship."³⁴ This organized greed and consumerism have weakened the power of restrictive modes of societal control embedded in Okonko society. The society can no longer effectively punish greedy politicians. Banality has taken over the whole country.

Conclusion

We have attempted in this study to discuss the reality of Okonko Society in Igbo land and ethical theories. The basic universal ethical theories have been identified; utilitarianism, consequentialism, futuristic and modified utilitarianism are highlighted. Poverty and some factors that enhance its prevalence have been discussed. Behavioral change and the revival of cultural values have been suggested as the starting points of tackling the issue of poverty. It is argued in this paper that the core values of Okonko Society, the native cultural integrative elements have been watered down by western influence. Organized greed, individualism, characterized by the politics of the belly and accumulation of interest by the ruling class are strongly entrenched to perpetuate poverty. All these sent a disruptive force unto Okonko Society in Igbo land that has rocked it to its foundation.

Deliberate efforts must be made to reestablish the regulatory role of Okonko Society in Africa and Nigeria in particular. This can be started by including the basic Okonko ethics in Nigerian school curriculum. The implementation of this would be a good foundation in a long term effort at rebuilding the structures of poverty alleviation and policy formulation. This is urgent because even though Okonko Society is no longer politically strong, it still performs certain functions in South Eastern Nigeria. As individuals, unprecedented choices must be made in our daily lives to subordinate self to the good of the greater number of people. Okonko ethos teaches people to put humanity before self and realize that leaving one's country better than one found it is the greatest mark of a life of fulfillment. As people of the emerging economy we have a great load to topple over. And we need to avail ourselves of the lever which would multiply our strength a hundred-fold. Education, discipline and culturally tested ethos combined with self-reliance should form the basis of this new disposition to face the challenges of reducing poverty in the land. This paper advocates that Nigeria begins to seek original solutions to our systemic problems of poverty and corruption. This begins by dispelling the facile glory we have built around economic growth. Our laws in Nigeria in respect to corruption, so far, are benevolent. Therefore, the issue of corruption that has created a lot of problem for Nigeria has to be taken into account while tackling poverty. Corruption has killed creativity in Nigeria and discouraged entrepreneurship. Okonko ethos has within it a traditional way of dealing with corrupt practices and persons. Nigeria ought to exploit it.

³³ J.C Agunwa, *Ethical Values in Igbo Tradition* (Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1993) p.6

³⁴ U. Awuzie, "Poverty in Nigeria" in *Sunday Punch* Vol 11 (15-10-2009) p.11