

TEXTUAL ACCOUNT OF THE CUSTOMARY ORIKO LOVE FEAST AND REUNIFICATION RITES PERFORMED IN OGBAKIRI CLAN OF EMOHUA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA; MAY, 2002

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ABSTRACT

This study applied the reflective observation method on the video documentary of the customary Oriko- love feast and reunification rites of Ogbakiri to identify segments of the critical customary activities that reconciled and reunited the people of Ogbakiri after a period of four years conflict. A review of the interactions during critical customary activities served to identify particular customary peace revival activities and the performers while the interviews provided the perceptions of the people of Ogbakiri- Wezina concerning their new found peace. The study concludes that the customary Oriko- love feast is a cogent tool of conflict resolution and the enthronement of permanent peace in Ikwerre community or society.

Key Words: Competency framework, applying knowledge, practice, high school, teaching chemistry.

1. INTRODUCTION

Truly, experience, according to the great Roman leader, Julius Caesar, is the best teacher. This fact applies to an individual, community or the society at large. It is in this vein that Oliver Wendell Holmes remarked that “a mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions”. Thus Oprah Winfrey encourages that mankind should “Learn from every mistake, because every experience particularly your mistake, is there to teach you and force you into being more of who you are” (Lowe, 2001).

But when the opportunity of certain experience and the lessons derivable there-from are not espoused to posterity, history tends to repeat itself. No wonder, in the absence of the means and technologies for proper record and preservation of memorable events, African societies resorted to oral tradition in order to preserve the knowledge gains of such memorable events and also perpetuate the learning content to younger and future generations. Evidently, the oral tradition is fraught with limitations arising from the tendency of individuals to present the narratives of customary events to suit personal aggrandisement. It is for this reason that ethnographic researchers had to source and analyse information from several sources as to ascertain the authenticity of facts. This was aptly captured by Wilson (2015), when he noted that.

“the reliability of oral traditions cannot be probed unless there is some measure of agreement between various independent

accounts and unless the facts conveyed correspond with those postulated by cultural historical studies”

Advancements in information and communication technology (ICT) have however provided avenues of proper documentation of events for the experiential benefit of future generations, thus eliminating the potential for distortion. The ICT based audio/visual technology actually facilitates the documentation and preservation of the records of memorable events. It is therefore a cogent avenue that enables future generations to experience memorable events that occurred in prior decades and also gain the associated knowledge as well as the lessons derivable there from.

The communal conflict that engrossed Ogbakiri the Wezina kingdom from January 1999 to 2023 is one event that every Ogbakiri man or woman that lived to survive same, vowed never to experience again. This vivid manifestation of Oprah Winfrey’s encouragement to mankind to “learn from every mistake” as observed by Lowe (2001) was evidenced in the case of Ogbakiri conflict. Representing the voice of the people of Ogbakiri in a welcome address presented to the Governor of River State, Sir (Dr.) Peter Odili at the thanksgiving ceremony marking the reunification of the people of Wezina, Emeji (2002) stated,



“seeing is believing, Ogbakiri people passed through the civil war without felling a tree, not to talk of pulling down houses either by bomb or wilful devastating attack by soldiers. ... We pledge with effect from today Your Excellency that never again shall we the Wezina people inflict upon ourselves, either in this generation or in the ones to come, any destructive or violent attack by words or instrument of war”.

Obviously, the people of Wezina had deployed the oral tradition to perpetuate the knowledge of the conflict and the factors that precipitated it to the younger generations of Ogbakiri clan as individuals told the story to their children and loved ones. But like the Ikwerres would say “Let us ignore the footprints of the foul indicative of its entry into the bush and concentrate on the footprints of its exit”. By this analogy, this study shall concentrate on the customary Oriko love feast and reunification rites and the need for permanent peace in Ogbakiri, having considered same as the major concern of the people of Wezina and their loved ones. In this vein therefore, and in accordance with the visions of the “LEARNING FROM OUR LIVES PROJECT”, the researchers hereby culled this textual account of the Oriko customary love feast from a video documentary of the feast; a memorable event that mustered customary and Christian virtues to re-enact peace, unity and love in Wezina kingdom of the Ikwerre ethnic nation of Nigeria.

Aim of the study

The study seeks to espouse the concern and commitment of the people of Ogbakiri Wezina for permanent peace and peaceful coexistence as expressed during the Oriko love feast and thanksgiving service of 2002.

Objectives of the study

The study shall achieve the following specific objectives.

- 1) Identify the individuals that represented the respective towns/communities of Ogbakiri Wezina and the particular commitments they made on behalf of their communities as covenant to uphold peace ingbakiri Wezina kingdom.
- 2) Ascertain the procedural activities that marked the customary Oriko feast and the persons that performed the respective activities
- 3) Ascertain the perceptions of the people of Wezina on the journey to peace and the future of the Ogbakiri Wezina kingdom

Research Questions

The study shall provide answers to the following research questions

- 1) Who were the persons that represented the respective communities of Wezina during the customary Oriko reunification rites?
- 2) What were the particular customary undertakings that the representatives made on behalf of their respective communities.
- 3) What were the procedural activities and the tasks that constitute the oriko reunification rites and who were the performers of the tasks
- 4) How do the Wezina people perceive their journey to peace and the future of Ogbakiri

2.METHODOLOGY

The study applied the Goldman et al (2007) Narrative – evolving approach to the sampling of videos. This method facilitates reflective observation and consultation of sampled participants. It is also traditionally suited to documentary video programmes (Jewitt, 2012)

Video as information and data

The content of a video programme actually lends itself to different interpretations and analytic outcomes based on variations in research objectives (Goldman and McDermott, 2007). By this capacity of video for variation of outcomes, an analyst can mine different types of data from a given video programme. The researcher previewed the video documentary of the Oriko love feast and thanksgiving service and selected different segments that served different analytic purposes of the study. These range from narratives that suit the sequence of presentation to interview segments and information clips that constitute sample for analysis of aspects of the study objectives. Certain interactional relationships that were captured in the video also provide essential analytic data for different outcomes of the study. By this framework of formal analytic procedures, the avenue for

analysis of events can be expanded thus making video to become data rather than information (Goldman and McDermott, 2007)

This study therefore culled out the critical activities of the Oriko love feast and thanksgiving service, being the two major events that marked the return of peace and reunification of the people of Ogbakiri. While the Oriko love feast was studded with a number of customary rites that were performed procedurally in accordance with the customs of the Ikwerres, the thanks-giving service had the thanksgiving, sing-songs , praise and prayer sessions, the word(homily), the welcome address and the response of the governor as highlights.

4.THORETHICAL FRAMEWORK

This section deals with the theoretical frame work on which the analysis of this study is hinged. It also discussed two sociological theories and how these theories justify the function, significance and the efficacy of traditional reconciliatory rites as a means of settling conflicts in African traditional society in general and Ogbakiri –Wezina peninsular, a community in Ikwerre Ethnic nationality of River State in particular. This section also gives justification to the inevitability of conflict in a prismatic society like ogbakiri made up of six communities from different cultural descent. The educational implication of traditional rites as a means of settlement of conflict and dispute, and the symbolic interpretation of some of the sacrificial objects used in the reconciliation rites were also highlighted. The theories discussed here are

Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis ‘s Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels’s Conflict Theory and Herbert Mead’s Symbolic Interactionism.

The Conflict Theory

The main thrust of conflict theory is that before and up till now, the history of all human society has been that of class struggle. The struggle between the land lords and the tenants, between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have not, between the employer of labour and the employee, and between the oppressor and the oppressed. Sometimes this struggle is manifest in open confrontation, at times it is hidden which in most times end up in a revolution that produces radical change in a society. There are many varieties of the conflict perspective within sociology. Despite their different approaches to the analysis of the society as an organic structure, all conflict theorist agree to the fact that the society is made up of different groups and classes of persons with varying interest which clashes from time to time. In this respect conflict theorist believe that social arrangement tends to benefit some groups at the expense of others and because of the existence of different interest the potential and likelihood of conflict is always present in the society .(Haralambus and Halborn 2008). Different groups pursuing their separate interest are likely to clash and produce some degree of instability in the society. This does not necessarily mean that the existence of groups with different interest will lead to conflict all the time .There may be period of harmony and stability when it may seem that the interest of the different social groups in the society are not different from those of the other groups as they may be persuaded to believe. However, this period of harmony do not last forever and eventually, conflict will return

The conflict theory is relevant to this essay given its position on the conflict of interest between groups in the society. In this group conflict, the powerful are seen to gain at the expense of the less powerful. Conflict theorists maintain that education serves the interest of the ruling class in

that it maintains their power, justifies their privileges and legitimizes their wealth. Given the fact that the Ogbakiri –Wezina peninsula is made up six different communities believed to have migrated from different parts of Rivers State to coexist in the peninsula hence, the multiple interest and incessant conflict within the groups and the latest conflict that snowballed into a full scale war .

5.SYMBOLIC INTRACTIONISM

Symbolic interactionists are concerned with the interpretations and meanings individuals give to social actions and symbols in the society. Notable Symbolic Interactionists include : scholars like John Dewey, William I Thomson, Herbert Mead and Marx Weber. Mead (1939), Argues that human thought, experience and conduct are essentially social which owe their nature to the fact that they interact in terms of symbols and language. The interactionists maintain that symbols defines an event or object, imposes specific meaning on objects and events which make them distinct from others and enable human beings to interact meaningfully with their natural and social environment. The Intractionists argue that without symbols, there would be no human interaction and there would be no human society. According to the Interactionists, through symbols human interaction with the world of nature is made possible based on the meaning imposed on it

Symbolic interactionism subscribes to the following three principles: (i) human beings act on the basis of meaning that they give to objects and events, rather than simply reacting to external stimulus such as social forces or to internal stimuli such as organic drives. (ii) meanings arise from the process of interaction rather than simply being present at the outset and shaping future actions. In the process of interaction actors do not slavishly follow pre-set norms or mechanically act out established roles. (iii) Meanings are the result of interactive procedures employed by actors within interaction contexts. By taking the role of others, actors interpret the meanings and interactions of others. Interactionists argue that education helps to shape a person's self –concept, his view about himself, develops from interaction with others.

The interactionist theory is quite relevant to this paper given the fact that the interaction of the personalities from the six different communities in Ogbakiri –Wezina peninsular in the peace Orikor rites/festival in conjunction with other eminent Ikwerre chiefs and personalities symbolizes and convey a different meaning from the interaction within and amongst people of the Ogbkiri community that snowballed to a full scale communal crisis. In traditional African society, Initiation rites, cultural festivals, masquerade display, marriage rites, hunting expedition, religious rituals, folk tales/songs etc. are all means and avenues of communicating the values, norms, world-view and mythology of the community to the younger generation. Most of the objects used during the peace rites/festival convey greater meaning in the exercise than their general daily function. For example the slaughtered cow covey and represent greater meaning than mere a source of protein. In the traditional African society, most covenants and oat taking are usually sealed with the blood of an animal or any other creatures. The spilling of the blood symbolically connotes that any defaulter of the covenant will equally have his own blood spilled by the gods as that of the creature used for the rites/the oat. The creature suffers death in the places of the principal actors in the Ogbakiri crisis who in one way or the other must have spilled the blood of a kin's man ad needed to be punished by the gods. Gluckman in Onwuejeogwu (2007), maintains that rituals provide mystical sanctions which help to check the spread of conflict

inherent in a society. People believe in the causal linkage between the social and the natural order. Thus he maintains that a disturbance/s in the social order generates a disturbance in the natural order. To avoid this, he posits that the natural order is assured by the ceremonials in which the social order is re-enacted and symbolically adhered to. The hand shake by the community representatives symbolizes forgiveness, acceptance and welcoming every individual and member communities back to the Ogbakiri peninsula. In traditional African society the usage of symbols in communication, dressing, rituals, rites and in ceremonies had helped to maintain a stable peaceful society and coexistence; and that exactly is what the customary orikor-love feast /rite intends to achieve .

The Ogbakiri peace initiative

Reflective narratives at the Oriko love feast and thanksgiving service reveal that the Ogbakiri peace initiative is an outcome of the concern of the government of Rivers State for the wellbeing of the land and people of Ogbakiri. His Excellency, Sir Dr. Peter Odili, the Governor of Rivers State inaugurated a peace panel in early in the year 2000 with the mandate to resolve the conflict in Ogbakiri. The peace committee, being the council of Government recognised Ikwerre traditional rulers, led by HRM Eze W.W. Onunwo, Nyerisi Mbam Oropotoma immediately swung into action. The initial efforts of the peace panel were however aborted because some principal actors in the warring groups were not cooperative.

While the committee re-strategized on the way forward, the conflict took alarming dimension. Ogbakiri experienced large scale devastation and destruction of lives and properties. Ogbakiri clan was on the verge of extinction from the map of Ikwerre and the globe as a result of internal conflict. Eze Onunwo and his group soon reinvigorated the peace efforts. And with the cooperation of many well meaning indigenes of Ogbakiri, the coast became clearer for the reign of peace in Ogbakiri land. Realising the customary implications of resolving a conflict that has taken so much toll in terms of human lives and properties and wanton exhibition of ill-will, the peace panel inaugurated a customary rites sub - committee, headed by HRM Eze O. O. Oriebe, Nye Nwe Ali Akpor. Eze Oriebe outlined the customary requirements for lasting peace in Ogbakiri according to the customs of the Ikwerres. The council approved same and also agreed with the people of Ogbakiri that a thanksgiving service shall be organised to thank the almighty God for the return of peace to Ogbakiri clan. But in the words of Eze Oriebe, “the customary rite of land cleansing is a requirement for effective cohabitation and the worship of the almighty God”. And so the early hours of the 18th day of May, 2002, witnessed the performance of the land appeasement exercise and the customary Oriko love feast. Later in the day, an interdenominational service was organised to thank the almighty God for the return of peace into the land of Wezina. It all happened at the premises of Ogbakiri health centre [Ahia-Ezi], the ancestral central playground of the Wezina kingdom. Prior to this day, the customary rites sub-committee also performed a solemn aspect of the peace efforts which is the land cleansing exercise.

In the words of Eze Oriebe, the land appeasement exercise and the customary Oriko love feast constitute dual customary events that must take place before the people of Ogbakiri can reunite in love and also eat and drink together in confidence and peace. Although by the dialogues and the land cleansing exercise he noted, the mindset of conflict and war has disappeared and the youths have been making skeletal efforts to associate with each other, but the Chiefs, Elders and Titled

men [Owhor holders] have been living with care and isolation. The customary Oriko -love feast he noted, would cement the peace initiative by re-establishing confidence and peace in the association of kinsmen and persons from different communities of Wezina.

The customary peace revival activities

With utmost desire for peace, love and unity, the people of Wezina gathered in their numbers at the premises of Ogbakiri health centre-Ahia-Ezi. The customary peace revival activities was performed by Obakiri-Wzina people with cooperation and later participated in the thanksgiving service.

The customary Oriko love feast

The Oriko love feast is a customary event of the Ikwere thnic nationality which is usually organised to uphold love amongst a given kindred or members of a community. Its significance connotes the revival and sustenance of the union that exists amongst the kindred of a given lineage or community. This is especially as such group of persons obviously found their foundation and origin from the love of a foremost ancestor. By celebrating the customary Oriko love feast, the ancestral love on which the lineage is hedged is re-enacted for the unity, peaceful coexistence and general wellbeing of the living. The Oriko love feast is therefore a cogent customary tool for the resolution of conflicts. It also serves as arbitratve reassurance to warring factions that acrimony and ill-will had been erased from all minds.

But where atrocities have been committed against the god of the land, there is the need for customary restoration of harmony between the ancestors and the living, before the living can dine and wine with each other. The customs of the Ikwerre ethnic nationality stipulates that the spilling of the blood of a relative, kinsman, in-law, friend or visitor is an abomination and desecration of the land. Whenever such abomination occurs, the god of the land usually deserts her place of abode. It is also for this reason that the Nye Nwe Ali (Paramount ruler) of any Ikwere community usually deserts the town whenever such an atrocity is committed. One major outcome of the absence of the god of the land in a given community is that ancestral protection begins to elude the community. It is also believed that any attempt by the living to reconcile themselves by dinning and winning together without the consent of the gods, would prompt the gods to recall such violators to join the ancestors.

Community representation

Each community nominated and empowered one man to represent her in the performance of the customary land appeasement and customary Oriko rites.

The roles of community representatives

As representatives of the different communities, each person stood in the gap between the living and the ancestors of his immediate community. They were duly empowered to make pronouncements and vows on behalf of their communities as well as the undertaking to live in peaceful coexistence with neighbours and kinsmen in Ogbakiri- Wezina clan. The community representatives also joined efforts with Eze Oriebe in the traditional cow- slaughtering exercise that served as an appeasement to the god of the land of Ogbakiri- Wezina community. The representatives also took part in the distribution and consumption of the slaughtered cow during the Oriko feast.

The final stage of the customary reunification rites performed by the community representatives was the exchange of the handshake of peace and the Oriko dance.[a traditional dance in Ikwerre land that symbolises reunion after a conflict] On behalf of the respective communities of Ogbakiri-Wezina community, the representatives shook hands to reaffirm their love for each other, and to applaud the dawn of lasting peace in Ogbakiri- Wezina. They then expressed the joys of the peace of God in admirable dance steps as Eze Oriebe led them in a dance session in response to the lyrics and rhythms of Ikwerre traditional music –ogbudu.l

Activities of the customary Oriko love feast

The libation

The six community representative of the six communities that make up the Ogbakiri- Wezina peninsular stood by Eze Oriebe while he sought the attention of the gods of the land of Wezina by the offering of kola nut. In company of the six community representatives and in the presence of the generality of the people of Ogbakiri, Eze Oriebe then performed the libation phase of the peace revival efforts by calling on the gods and ancestors of Ogbakiri. In his words...



“Ali Ogbakiri, Ali Ogbakiri, Ali Ogbakiri; if the native doctor does not consult the god of the land, he cannot execute divination. Rukani Akpor, Ali Akpor, Ehni Akpor. You all sent me on this peace mission. Ali Ikwerre, Ali Ikwerre, Ali Ikwerre, Ali Ikwerre, please have your drinks. Ali Ogbakiri, please have your drinks.....

We had come previously to cleanse the land. Though the youths have started associating, but the chiefs and owhor holders still live isolating each other. We have therefore come today for the final cleansing and reunification rites so that the people of Ogbakiri would have confidence in associating with each other and also eat and drink together with trust. Having come to settle the people of Ogbakiri, they have listened to our pleas. We now pray, let the settlement and the peace we seek be established. Ogbakiri land, we have come to offer you this ancient gift, a giant cow. You will take it and eat. From now onwards, the chiefs of Ogbakiri, Owhor holders, elders, and youths will be collaborating as a kingdom. They will attend meetings and dialogue as a united people. Whatever they agree to do, they do same with joy.

Whosoever seeks to ignite conflict and war, such person's life is not protected in this covenant of life.

From today onwards, as the people of Ogbakiri dine and wine together, whoever tries to poison another, he or she would face the penalty of death. As they eat together, may peace of mind and body be their portion. Whosoever intends to instigate conflict, may you the land of Ogbakiri confuse and destabilise the person before he/she even acts out his intention.....

Ikwere anu meka, Diali. Ele Eze Wezina anumeka Diali”

Land appeasement

Eze Oriebe and the panel of government recognised traditional rulers of the Ikwere ethnic nation of Nigeria came on this fateful day with a cow that was slaughtered as sacrifice to the gods of Ogbakiri clan in appeasement for the atrocities committed on the land of Wezina. The cow was also consumed by the people of Wezina in a customary Oriko (Reunification) love feast.

The customary rites performed by community representatives



The representatives joined hands with Eze Oriebe in slaughtering the cow and spilling its blood on the soil of Ogbakiri Wezina as appeasement for the acts of desecration committed against the land. The six representatives then took their turns, rebuking the era of evil acts, renouncing every form of evil thoughts and actions and declaring for Ogbakiri, a future of goodness and wellbeing. Each representative would sip and store some drink in his mouth. Then facing backwards, he discharged the drink with ferocity and declared, “let evils remain a thing of the past”. Then taking another sip of drink and discharging same while facing forward, he declared, “let the future of Wezina be filled with goodness”

Declaration

The six community representatives then made declarative statements affirming the new found era of peace and thanking the almighty God for the development.

The rulers of Ikwerre have come and they have appeased the land of Ogbakiri. The people of Ogbakiri have also agreed to the reconciliation and for the reign of peace in Ogbakiri. This covenant of peace is truly of God. We also agree and believe that lasting peace has returned to Ogbakiri.

I am thanking the almighty God who created the land of Wezina and the people of Ikwerre for the peace we now have in Ogbakiri. I hereby enjoin the chiefs, elders, youths and generality of the people in the six communities of Wezina to uphold the mindset of certainty that peace has returned to Wezina.

No person should seek to witch hunt or undo the other. Let every indigene of Wezina surrender him/herself to God.



Let bye gone be bye gone.
Let all persons adopt
the mindset of peace, love and unity from now onwards

The wine of unity and peace

The six representatives then shared one cup of drink amongst themselves. Each person drank a little and passed on to the other in accordance with the sequence of the customary seniority clause of the different towns of Wezina kingdom. They then exchanged the handshake of love, peace and unity. Eze Oriebe also prepared the wine of unity for the chiefs, elders and the generality of the people of Ogbakiri. He poured several bottles of wine into one bowl, from which all drank with the same cup. The people of Ogbakiri also consumed the cow with confidence and in unity.

Penalty for violation of peace covenant

Nye Nwe Ali Akpor, Eze O. O. Oriebe who as chairman of the customary rites subcommittee, had functioned as the Chief Priest of the peace panel then warned the six representatives and the generality of the people of Wezina that in agreement with the terms of the vow of peaceful neighbourliness, “from today, any person who thinks evil or plans to kill another person shall die”.

The Oriko dance



The final phase of the customary Oriko love feast was the Oriko dance. Eze Oriebe led the chiefs, elders and the generality of the people of Ogbakiri in a joyous dance session. This phase aroused the women and different youth groups into dance sessions as they rejoiced for the return of peace into Wezina.

Celebrative songs

The Ogbakiri women peace forum led by Mrs Sibil Alikor (Ada Nyanyi) thanked the almighty God for ending the crisis in Ogbakiri. They applauded the miraculous work of God, noting that;

- the cries of the people of Ogbakiri have miraculously turned to laughter and
- the darkness of crisis has turned to the luminance of joy and peace.

The group then welcomed the different communities of Ogbakiri; Rumuoro,

The y Oduoha, Okporowo, Ahai, Rumuada and ressed their joyous state of minds in songs. They thanked the government recognised traditional rulers of Ikwere ethnic nation and also declared the communal conflict an event that will never occur again in the history of Ogbakiri



Interviews

A random sample of the opinions of the people of Ogbakiri concerning the Oriko reunification rites revealed that the reunification of Wezina people is a joyous experience to every son and

daughter of Wezina. They are now poised to live in peace and to abhor anything that could engender conflict

6.RESULTS

Research Question 1

Who were the persons that represented the respective towns of Wezina in the Oriko love feast and customary reunification rites

Answer One male indigene was selected from each of the six towns of Wezina, making a total of six persons that were mandated to represent their respective towns in the covenant of peace enacted during the Oriko reunification ceremony The persons and their respective towns are as listed:

- 1 Mr Monday (Sparrow) Egbulajor of Rumuoro.
- 2 Mr Obadiah Harcourt of Oduoha
- 3 Chief Wobo Chigeru of Okporowo
- 4 Mr Osere Owakah of Ahai
- 5 Chief Stephen Mmehiele of Rumuada
- 6 Chief Emmanuel Ngele of Rumuokani

Research Question 2

What customary undertakings did the community representatives make on behalf of their respective communities for the restoration of permanent peace and unity in Wezina clan

Answer:

- 1) Land Appeasement: The representatives expressed a communal will in land appeasement as they joined their collective effort with Eze O. O. Oriebe, Nye Nwe Ali Akpor to slaughter the cow and have its blood sprinkled on the soil of Ogbakiri in appeasement for the atrocities committed against the god of the land of Wezina.
- 2) The wine of unity and peace. The representatives also shared a full cup of dry gin [hot drink]. Each person drank a little and gave to another until they consumed the whole cup of the dry gin [hot drink].
- 3) Vows of peace and goodwill. The representatives made vows of peace and goodwill and decreed a future of goodness and the wellbeing of Ogbakiri Wezina.
- 4) Prayer. Each representative presented his desire for Ogbakiri and prayed the almighty God for a peaceful and united Ogbakiri Wezina
- 5) Handshake of love and peace. The representatives exchanged the handshake of peace and love. The chairman of the customary reunification rites committee then congratulated them with handshakes. The chairman declared that Ogbakiri land is duly purified and reunited in love and peace. Eze Oriebe then warned that any violator of the covenant of peace so enacted would face automatic death.

Research Question 3

What tasks constitute the Oriko reunification rites.

With the enormity of atrocities committed in Ogbakiri, the land of Wezina became so defiled that the gods could not tread on such abominable human soil. The people of Ogbakiri therefore

attracted the destructive anger of the gods. But they also knew that if they revert to normalcy of joyful coexistence without reconciling themselves with their ancestors and gods, many shall be called to join the ancestors. And so they gave their consent to the performance of the full customary reconciliation rites. These rites sought to revive the harmony between the gods of the land, the ancestors and the living, as well as revive a lifestyle of handshakes and embrace of love, and the collective consumption of foods and drinks amongst the living.

And so the tasks that constitute the reunification rites include:

- 1) The land appeasement
The libation and slaughtering of the cow were performed to appease the gods of the land of Wezina. This was also performed at the traditional central ground of Ogbakiri-Ahia-ezi
- 2) The vows of peaceful coexistence.
Vow in rejection of evil thoughts and actions. And vow of a future of goodness and the wellbeing of all.
- 3) The unity drink. Representatives of the six communities of Ogbakiri shared a cup of drink.
- 4) The sharing of the drinks of joyful hearts by generality of Wezina chiefs and elders.
- 5) Consumption of the cow by the people of Wezina
- 6) Prayer in expression of desire for permanent peace and a future of goodness and the wellbeing of every person
- 7) The Oriko dance
- 8) Praise and Worship, the word of God, thanksgiving and prayer sessions by the generality of the people of Wezina.
- 9) The pledge by the generality of Wezina people
“We pledge with effect from today Your Excellency that never again shall we the Wezina people inflict upon ourselves, either in this generation or in the ones to come, any destructive or violent attack by words or instrument of war”.
- 10) The dignified presence of the Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency, Sir (Dr.) Peter Odili, the architect of the peace effort and his wife, Her Excellency, Hon. Justice Mary



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The words of succour and encouragement from the governor and promises of Government actions in terms of provision of palliatives/aids to cushion the devastating effects of the conflict as well as quicken the development of Ogbakiri, were all instrumental in solidifying the hopes of a peaceful, united and more prosperous Ogbakiri Wezina clan.

Research Question 4

Perceptions of the people of Wezina about the new found peace in Ogbakiri

The general responses of a sample of the people of Ogbakiri revealed an enormity of joy that flowed like a river in the hearts of the people of Ogbakiri. They noted that the reunification ceremony is a reassurance that by the grace of God, WEZINA CANNOT BE A LOST KINGDOM. Describing the will to embrace peace that was exhibited by the people of Wezina as unprecedented, they condemned the conflict that made brothers resolve to kill each other and to destroy properties that cost them decades of hard work to acquire. They vowed to forgive each other, eschew bitterness, live peacefully with one another and embrace God.

7. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION OF THE CUSTOMARY ORIKO LOVE FEAST RITES

Man is a gregarious animal and as such lives and coexist with each other to form a community. Human interest and desire differs and conflicts with each other in attempt to meet their daily needs and self actualization. Interactionists argue that education helps to shape a person's self-concept, their view about themselves, develops from interaction with others. In traditional African society, Initiation rites, cultural festivals, masquerade display, marriage rites, hunting expedition, religious rituals, folk tales/songs etc. are all means and avenues of communicating the values, norms, world-view and mythology of the community to the younger generation. Children learn through observation, imitation, participation, mimicking and repetition; and in the process, relevant skills are acquired, self concepts are formed and the peoples world-view are communicated and preserved. Since education is not compartmentalized with regular time table in traditional African society as with Western education, therefore, every and any cultural activity in Africa provides the younger generation an opportunity to learn new roles, values and norms which sustain and identifies a people. Hence, the Orikor peace rites/festival which for decades; has not been

performed nor witnessed amongst the people of Ogbakiri –Wezina has provided the younger generation an avenue to learn new roles and mean of settling communal dispute of such magnitude of crisis devoid of the Western model of conflict resolution and arbitration. Thus performing, witnessing and participating in the Orikor peace rites/festival has helped to preserve the peoples cultural heritage rites which was not known to many of the participants and over time would have been extinct .

8.CONCLUSION

The Oriko love feast of the Ikwere ethnic nation of Nigeria is a cogent customary tool of conflict resolution and the enthronement of peace amongst the people of a given kindred, community or society. The comments made by the people of Ogbakiri in 2002 reflect their mindset for the end of hostilities in Ogbakiri. However, the comments of 2020 evidence an assessment of the extent to which the people of Ogbakiri were able to abide by the tenets of the Oriko feast. And so while the former comments evidence the joy of the people for the enthronement of peace, the later comments constitute the gains of the Oriko feast.

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