

OHAFA CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE CHALLENGES OF WESTERNIZATION

Ezichi Anya Ituma
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Enugu State
+2348063465010

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is the identity of any society. There is no society without culture. The fluidity of culture is a global character and abhors a vacuum. The rate of cultural assimilation is a function of the strength of knowledge backing an acclaimed superior culture. Culture is the sum total of people's way of life. This includes how they prepare their food, their language, their way of dressing, their values, their type of houses, the names, religion and other social institutions.

Ohafia is a society within the Igbo nation of Nigeria. Ohafia, like every other Igbo society has her culture that identifies her indigenes. The culture of Ohafia was clearly defined until the coming of the Whiteman. With the coming of the Whiteman in the early 19th century acculturation advanced rapidly to a point where it became very difficult to define the culture of Ohafia. The coming of the Whiteman affected the dressing of Ohafia people. It affected their language, dressing, housing, food, and every other form of lifestyle. Changes in cultural heritage are normal and universal. However, the rate of change can cause untold damages and hardship, especially where the primary culture has no reception control. Reception control could be in the form of charismatic or traditional leadership.

Culture defines why a people do whatever they do quite differently from some other people. It takes an insider to explain a people's culture as against a mental or religious intruder.

CULTURE AND WORLDVIEW

Worldview defines the way any society sees the world and the spiritual beings. It is the sum total of the people's beliefs about the world. How a people sees the world will usually control how they relate with the world around them. It controls how the people see themselves and how they interpret their daily experiences. Ohafia, like other Igbo societies, see the physical world as interwoven with the spiritual world. The ancestors are always around and watching over the affairs of the family they left behind. This belief informs the type and place of the burial of any person. People are careful how they live their lives because the ancestors, who see in secret are always around to reward those who behave well and to punish those who behave wickedly. As a result of this worldview the Ohafia person is always careful to do the right thing. The way a man is buried is different from the way a woman is buried. This is because both genders play different roles in the world beyond and must be given the cultural requirements that will enable them to perform their ancestral roles.

In the burial position of the man, for example, the face is positioned as if he is to look outside the compound, perhaps to be vigilant to attack any intruder while the woman faces inside the compound as if her place is to run inside the compound, either to hide or protect the family members. So, while the man prefers to fight outside, in protection of the family members, the woman does her protection and supplies within the house. There are spiritual and mundane roles for the different genders.

In Ohafia worldview, the world was created by God. The creator God, Chineke, is both withdrawn and immanent. There are deities who work for the Chineke. They include the major divinities and minor divinities. Both major and minor divinities are respected and given different degrees of worship. Their worship is expected to be received by God because they are intermediaries. The concept of worship has been grossly misunderstood in view of the lopsided definition of Western Christian missionaries.

In Ohafia, the divinities form a path on the theocracy of Chineke. Each divinity has a jurisdiction which is assigned by Chineke. There are arch-divinities (major) that are believed to be closest to Chineke. An example is Ali. Ali is a major divinity that must be revered because it carries the sacrifices and petitions to Chineke. The second class of divinities includes the divinized ancestors, who are very close to Chineke in view of their legendary exploits while alive. They form the characters represented in the masquerades of Ohafia. The third, in the pantheon, are the divinities of nature which include rivers, trees or thick forest, the thunder etc.

The manner that Ohafia people approach these divinities is a function of their closeness to Chineke and their human affairs. Worldview defines how the Ohafia people approach both fellow human beings, divinities, sacred animals, and the entire ecosystem. An understanding of the basic worldview of Ohafia, which defines human relationship between the living and the dead, will furnish a sincere enquirer with the reason behind how Ohafia person conducts himself both at home and abroad.

THE FLUIDITY OF CULTURE

There is no single culture on earth that is not open to acculturation. This concept defines the cultural changes in view of assimilation of other cultures and the adaptation that is witnessed in the diverse cultures of the world. It has been said that culture is dynamic. There is no culture that is static. Going through the English dictionary, one finds abbreviations, and initials, as Fr (French), Gr (Greek), L (Latin), etc. These abbreviations indicate cultural assimilation. English culture borrows from other cultures and domesticates them. Western culture borrows from other cultures and domesticates them. Western culture is open to borrowing to domesticate. Incidentally Ohafia replaces her culture with the exotic cultures. The emphasis is;

borrow to domesticate and
borrow to replace

accept to domesticate and
accept to replace

This is the difference between Ohafia culture and Western culture. Every culture undergoes changes by accepting to domesticate, while others accept to replace. The rate of acceptance to domesticate or acceptance to replace is another issue that merits attention. While the western culture accepts to domesticate very slowly, Ohafia accepts to replace very fast. The rate at which Ohafia culture is replaced with Western culture is very worrisome and depicts the Ohafia person as one that does not have identity. The worrisome rate will be discussed under the Western Christian influence and western colonization influence.

THE EVAPORATING CULTURE OF OHAFIA

Each time culture is mentioned, people condition their minds for masquerading. This is a lopsided mindset that gives the impression that culture means masquerade and masquerade defines culture. This is not correct assessment of Ohafia culture. Ohafia culture

includes the language, dressing, eating, food, values, institutions, totems, taboos, sacred beings etc. like every other Igbo society; Ohafia is very rich in culture. It has already been said that the culture of Ohafia is a function of her worldview. The religion, language, naming, dressing, values all speak volumes of what Ohafia people believe. Everything that Ohafia person does has a meaning and is explained within the worldview.

Recently, the rate at which the cultural replacement occurs is alarming enough to be called cultural evaporation in the whole Igbo society. For example, Ohafia people were known to refuse English names. Most of the adults that bear Western names in Ohafia adopted the names without the consent of their parents. Ohafi people are now at home with such Western names as *Leo for Leonard*, *Barth for Bartholomew*, Wilson, Robinson, Julius, Lawrence, Kingdom, Felicia, Johnson, London, Febista, Florence, Edna, Edith, Anita, Alexandra, Charlene, Ethel, Patricia, Peggy, Stone, Gilbert, Anthony, Bernard, Charles, Clark, Kenneth, Herbert, Donald, Arthur, Billy, Kingsley, Bush, etc

Statistics show that 95% of those above forty, with Western names, adopted the names by themselves or given to them by the Church. The high percentage shows that Ohafia parents were never at home with western names. Why this is called evaporating culture of Ohafia is because 90% of those who were born from 1980 have English names, given to them by their parents, which is an anomaly. Note that Western and English are used to refer to all exotic names.

Moat Ohafia families use English language to communicate at home. This practice includes those at Ohafia and those outside Ohafia but within Nigeria. It will be one of the most outrageous cultural rapes to find this practice among those Ohafia families that live abroad. Some of the children abroad visit Ohafia very rarely. They bear Western names and speak Western language. It should be noted that these are the ones that will become elders and custodians of Ohafia culture after the present generation. One should imagine what the situation will be if the aberration is not put on check.

The rate and level at which the cultural heritage of Ohafia is being misunderstood by Ohafia indigenes is even more worrisome. The castigation against Ohafia cultural heritage is, most time, by freelance preachers and peddlers of Western hegemony. There are too many ignorant persons who claim to be interpreting Ohafia heritage. For example, in the ancient, Ohafia names, for example, were not a single word. Names were full sentences that conveyed positive ideas and values, representing what Ohafia people cherished very dearly. There is no Ohafia parent, however stupid, that will give his child a negative name. So, changing of names on the premise that such names are negative is expression of ignorance and ineptitude.

Over the years, Ohafia names have been shortened and abbreviated in such a manner that it is difficult to recover their full expression and meaning. The practice in the coming years is even going to be more disturbing, considering the rate of cultural rape ongoing in Ohafia.

WESTERN APPROACH

Western approach refers to the approach of cultural rape and wrong interpretation of Ohafia cultural heritage. The destruction of Ohafia heritage, both name and language, by western influence is unprecedented. The Europeans left Ohafia but the locals took over and became more destruction than the Whiteman. Western cultural rape of Ohafia culture is a direct affront from double-barreled weapon. It is a result of the work of hyper zealous individuals who are driven by racial inferiority complex. Some of them think that the more they align themselves with the Whiteman the closer they are to paradise. The double-barreled weapon includes Western colonial influence and Western Christian influence.

Western Colonial Influence

The Ohafia man, by nature is a warrior. He believes that his ancestors and the divinities are so protective that he himself, the Ohafia man, is indomitable. He goes to war and returns gallantly victorious with the resounding roaring welcome of the *Ikoru*. Things changed when the Whiteman, with superior firearm, was able to subdue the Ohafia communities, installed the hegemony of the colonial District Officer (DO). The hegemony of the District Officer was sustained by the Royal Army of the Queen of England. The Portuguese had control over Africa before the coming of British government. In this paper, all foreign Powers are referred to as Western or White.

Having subdued the Ohafia society, by superior firearm, many Ohafia men began to see the Whiteman as a God. It was not too long when everything about the Whiteman began to be seen as superior to the heritage of Ohafia. This is the mentality that has advanced unabated. The average Ohafia sons and daughters perform better than the Whiteman while abroad in the Whiteman's home, yet the Ohafia mental disposition about the Whiteman is still not changed. Mental subjugation, with slavery, is the biggest problem of Ohafia man today. Even the educated ones, who know very well that the Whiteman is not a God, is still very much at home with the names and language of the Whiteman as against Ohafia cultural heritage.

In Ohafia, the Whiteman superiority complex started when they forced Age Grades to carry them on the shoulder from one village to another, including introduction of English

names and language. They unilaterally changed the names of some Ohafia influential persons. However many of these early first acquaintances rejected the English names and continued with Ohafia names. They gave wrong interpretation of so many aspects of Ohafia cultural heritage with the mindset of a conquered people, it was easy, with time, for Ohafia people to accept the superiority of the Whiteman. The inferiority complex is well observed in the names the Ohafia parents give their children as well as in the English language which is made compulsory at home and in schools. Incidentally, expressing oneself in English language is now a sign of status elevation and social status recognition in Ohafia.

Western Christianity

Christianity did not get to Ohafia in the exegetical principles guiding interpretation of biblical passages. The Whiteman got the gospel from Rome, in the Roman gab. Romans got the gospel from the Jews and domesticated it in Roman cultural milieu. The Latinized form of Christianity was transported to the British society and other Western nations. These Western nations domesticated Christianity before transporting it to Ohafia and other parts of Igboland. The Ohafia man will therefore happily accept St Agnes and St Mulumba as biblical sacred names but declare Oguelu or Udonsi as fetish. Kalu, itself has been translated to mean a wicked spirit. The Western Christianity will readily destroy masquerades as fetish but happily accept Santa Claus and Father Christmas as heavenly spirits and sacred messengers. Incidentally, both masquerades and Santa Claus mask themselves in a similar manner. The concept of masquerading should be understood from the standpoints of the people that own the concept rather than from the standpoint of the overzealous preacher who has taken over from where the White missionary stopped. The level of ignorance of masquerading among many Ohafia adults is very unprecedented. The generations to come will have nothing left because their fathers have taken a destructive posture in their bid to enter heaven.

Even the Whiteman himself is surprised at the level of ignorance and interpretation of Westernization and Christian ideologies by many hyper zealous preachers. Many of these interpretations have nothing to do with the Bible. It is a surprise that a Roman Catholic priest gives a Latinized name to child at baptism only to add another one at confirmation. There are some Ohafia hyper zealous persons that bear Margaret Clementine Cletus. So, their surname is Cletus, first name is Margaret and middle name is Clementine; and they are very happy with that.

STRUGGLE FOR THE HEART OF OHAFIA

The struggle to free the Ohafia society from Western filths and shackles is not an easy task. It requires a change of mentality. It requires a very drastic and holistic approach. The struggle for the heart of Ohafia does not mean being repugnant to every Western culture and ideology. It means to domesticate every valuable way of life in such a manner as to retain the identity of Ohafia. It means to embrace cultural change in line with advanced technology without losing sense of the values Ohafia people hold very dear. There are values that are better than the Whiteman way of life. There are cultural identities that mark off Ohafia person as a proud warrior. Ohafia leaders should isolate such ways of life that define Ohafia and design strategies to sustain them. For example, there is no reason to throw away Ohafia language and Ohafia names in search for the Western ones.

RESILIENCE OF OHAFIA CULTURE

It is a surprise that, in spite of the Western Colonialism and Western Christian influence, the Ohafia Cultural heritage has remained resilient. The resilience of Ohafia cultural heritage is observed when a typical Ohafia person faces situations that he believes to be terminal. If he is sick, for example, after fruitless efforts with orthodox medication, he tries the Ohafia herb as alternative. If there is a situation that is bewildering, he consults diviners and native specialists to understand the root of the problem. Ohafia cultural heritage encourages the Ohafia man not to give up in despondency.

In spite of Western influence, many Ohafia persons still insist on Ohafia names and language. Certain values are still promoted, though the Western forces from within, are not helping the resilience.

REAWAKENING

What Ohafia elites are required to do is to create forums for cultural enlightenment much regularly. There should be no pride in leaning on the errors of the Whiteman. It is not late for Ohafia parents to start replacing their English names with Ohafia names. The young ones in the families should be given Ohafia names rather than Western ones.

Primary Induction

Ohafia indigene abroad should build schools where Ohafia children spend their holidays to learn Ohafia language and culture. Some of these schools could be formal or informal, depending on the educational and legal requirements of the society. There should

be short term and long term schools for advancement of Ohafia cultural heritage. Associations, individuals and Ohafia unions abroad should sponsor such cultural institutions. At home, Ohafia language should be made compulsory in nursery, primary and secondary schools.

Ohafia people should encourage themselves to take native names. Ohafia names should be made compulsory when completing the common entrance and secondary school forms. Town unions should have regular meeting with Headmasters, Principals and education stakeholders to advance Ohafia cultural heritage. Competitions in Ohafia language and cultural heritage should be regularly conducted with handsome awards so as to arouse interest.

CONCLUSIONS

The Indians and other strong nations were colonized yet they are very much attached to their culture. Culture is the pride of any society. The Chinese will do everything to retain their culture. Japanese, Polish, and others jealous guard their culture. Rather than replacing his culture with others, the Whiteman prefers to domesticate the foreign culture. If God would accept St. Agnes and St. Mulumba, there is no reason why Kalu or Okoro or Uduma cannot be accepted by God. Inferiority complex is not a show of enlightenment but a show of colonized mind and slavery. Ohafia people should recover their culture. The change should start from you.