

Quest for Peaceful Coexistence among the Igbo in the Contemporary Society: Study of Agbachaekurunwa songs of Mbaise Women

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Abstract

Agbachaekurunwa is a tradition dance popular with Mbaise women of Imo State. It is the female counterpart of Abigbo Mbaise which is the dance for men. This dance of the Mbaise Igbo is rendered by women to address some contemporary issues that do not allow peaceful coexistence among the people from time to time: non conformity between a woman and her husband that mostly results to divorces; abject hardship that plunges young ladies into prostitution which in turn leads to child trafficking and other themes. The study applies a combination of functionalist and sociological approaches. Data in this work comprise some selected songs which were performed during some sessions of *agbachaekurunwa* performance of Mbaise Igbo, where women of Mbaise exhibit their feministic prowess. The study identified the extent to which *agbachaekurunwa* songs perform the function of peace enhancement, and how the *agbachaekurunwa* songs carry out the functions of entertainment, education and information from our findings, the themes, childbearing, rumour mongering, unemployment among others are prevalent in the songs. The study concludes with a suggestion for more studies on *agbachaekurunwa* with a view

to determining further, the nature, form and content of *agbachaekurunwa* songs.

Keywords: Quest, Peaceful coexistence, Contemporary society, *Agbachaekurunwa* songs.

Introduction.

Peaceful coexistence is an existence that is devoid of conflict, war, rancour. It is a joyful staying together of people in the family, in the community, state, country and the world. According to Yusuf (2013), peaceful coexistence to many scholars like Burns (2005), Afidal (2006), Peterson (2012), is essentially about understanding the nature of conflict at various levels from personal to global, studying the case of war and human aggression, exploring a range of awareness of the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups in the world.

Peaceful coexistence implies the capacity of living together in harmony, this calls for non-violent ways of resolving conflicts. Members of every society need to be given good orientation towards peace and tolerance rather than towards violence. At the same time, social, economic and political systems have to be re-orientated for peace and tolerance. The *agbachaekurunwa* women dealt with these

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systems in the various themes in their songs as seen in this work.

Agbachaaekurunwa in its broader sense.

Agbachaaekurunwa is in the genre of oral literature. Literature generally has been seen as a veritable tool for cultural transformation such as occupation, ritual, social attitude and relationships. As literature is considered from its function in the society, it is a social phenomenon constantly sensitive to the expression of new aspects of life, current demand and hope giving rise to new social attitude and relationship which have been unnoticed before now.

Again, literature is a special field of studies which may be argued, could civilize not just the lower classes but also the aristocrats and middle classes. Literary artists like soloists of *Agbachaaekurunwa* can be seen as women and men of many parts. To this point, they are at one point and sometimes visionaries, satirists, praise-singers, political or socio-cultural watchdogs, chroniclers of events, teachers and people's spokespersons.

The highlights about literature and artist above point to the fact that literature is meant to move with the society in which it operates in the advancement and development of all spheres of human endeavour. It is well-known that a solution to a problem some years ago may not be applicable to the same problem today because of the dynamic nature of the society.

This research is focused on women and their contributions to the development of the society. They do this through their folksongs where they exhibit several themes among which are themes on peaceful

coexistence. They showcase that apart from their wifehood: rearing children and taking care of their homes generally (which make them *oriaku* as against *okpaku* – loosely translated as one that enjoys the wealth as opposed to one that generates the wealth) which is a nomenclature which the writer is proposing for working class women)

To lend credence to the above, Mulamba (2013) in her work titled *Luba Folklore and women's ethno-gendered discourse of wifehood* has this to say:

As with any collective cultural product, a folksong plays a socializing role among community members. It expresses the experiences of the group and can be seen as setting social norms for the communities (Mulamba 2013: p. 47.

The *Agbachaaekurunwa* group has always used its songs to address some social issues ranging from harmony in the homes, good child upbringing, among others. With some of their songs, conflicts are managed and eventually brought to the barest minimum levels and this counts for good societal development and productivity. Without peace there is conflict and the sole job of the women through the *Agbachaaekurunwa* songs is to demonstrate how these songs could make peace and peaceful co-existence among people of the said society it and globally as well.

To support this assertion, Tafese (2016) has this to say "... the essence of conflict management in traditional African communities, states and region include: to remove the root cause of the conflicts, reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely, to preserve and ensure harmony to set the right setting efforts for societal production

and development.

Mbaise People: Their Origin

There are many oral traditions of origin for the people of Mbaise. There is the Nfunala tradition of origin which is a claim by today's Ekwerazu and Ahiara in Mbaise that the people of Mbaise did not migrate from anywhere. Instead that their ancestors were created in the present location where they live. To Oboama and Umunama in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Orie-ukwu was where God (Chineke) came down to the earth and created the first man and woman that later populated the entire world today. There is another myth that suggests a relationship between the Ngwa people and the Mbaise people. According to this tradition, where the duo were migrating, they stopped to drink water and eat yam. It happened that as they were eating and drinking, the Imo river overflowed, the Ngwa people (Ndi ngwa ngwa - fast people) picked up their yam and ran across the river to the other side leaving the people of Mbaise Ndi Ohuhu (the roasters).

The Creation of Mbaise

In the, early 1940s, precisely on June 1941, Mbaise was created from the original five communities or clans which emerged from the British colonial courts. These five clans that harbour these courts are Agbaja, Ezinihitte, Ekwerazu, Ahiara and Oke-Uvuru. These five clans formed the three local government areas which Mbaise has today. These local governments are: Aboh Mbaise LGA with its headquarters at Aboh; Ahiazu Mbaise LGA with headquarters at Afor-Oru and Ezinihitte L.G.A. with

headquarters at Itu. It is interesting to note that Mbaise people are so united that they share a lot of commonalities in the three local government have a lot of things in common, especially peaceful coexistence. This study covered the three local government areas.

Mbaise Culture

Mbaise culture is rich in music and Igbo dance appropriate for each social occasion. According to Nwoga (1978):

The peak of Mbaise cultural achievements is in its music and dance in its songs and literary skills. Every form of native Igbo dance ensemble is to be found in Mbaise: Whether it has its base in the wood xylophone, hand piano, long drum, short drum, pot, gong, bamboo, horn or calabash horn.

There are various forms of dances/songs in Mbaise. We are going to briefly talk about them under male dance/songs and female dance/songs.

The Male Social Songs/Dance:

In Mbaise as we have pointed out above, they exist in music, in other words, the Mbaise people do all their activities with music. The males have their songs which include, *agbargwu*, *Ogbanangu*, *ese*, *nkwaike*, *ekpe*. All these dances/songs are male specifics and are similar song/dance but one which is context based. The *ese*, *eseike ekwenkwe mgba* are all performed for the old dead. It must be played for the old dead that made a good death in Igbo land (Mbaise specifically). There are two types of death: good death and bad death. The good death is the one that involves the old man who was able to pass his will and prepare

himself and his family members for his passage. This is the man that qualified to have *ese* played at his funeral. On the other hand, the bad death (*Ọnwu ojojo*) is that which occurs to a young person, whose children are still very young. This man did not die a good death, therefore, there is nothing to celebrate and moreover who would play the *ese* for him when his children would just be running around playing at the funeral of their father. Included in this category of bad death are those that suffered deadly diseases before death. These diseases include (*Ukwara nta*) Tuberculosis, (*Afo otoro*) Cholera, (*ntuhi*) whooping cough, (*Ikpechi*) Small pox. Any man that got himself attached with any others *orja ojojo*, deadly diseases, does not expect any celebration at his death.

A special mention must be made of Abigbo which is the most popular of the male social dances of Mbaise. According to Nwoga (1978), "the music and dancers philosophize, criticize, admonish or praise in language expression which not only makes its point but also pleases while it hurts.

The Female Social Dance/Song

Under this category, the women have a number of dances/songs just like the men. There are the *alifa*, the *ikorobechi*, (for young girls). *Obiwuruotu*, *Dibugwu*, *Agbachaaekurunwa* and others. Also worthy of mention is the *Uko* which is the female counterpart of *Ese*. It is played for the old woman that made a good death. The features of the good and bad death in the men are similar to those of women but at times, few things that constitute the bad death in

women: A woman that dies in pregnancy and a woman that dies at childbirth. A woman died an evil death is not buried in her husband's compound but in a forest or at the back of her husband's house.

We should note here that both the *ese* and *uko* are danced by the children of the deceased and any other person or persons who have been bereaved of their mothers and fathers as the case may be.

Brief on Agbachaaekurunwa

The folksong we are talking about in this research is known as *Agbachaaekurunwa* and the performers are known as *Agbachaaekurunwa* group. The literary meaning of *Agbachaaekurunwa* is begetting a child after dancing. In other words, it is a fertility dance. Coincidentally, it is the real meaning. According to the oldest member of the dance group mama, *Luwisa* (Luisa) *Oyiridie Ikeagwu*, in an interview, *Agbachaaekurunwa* is the dance that unites every newly married woman that really wanted to have children together. That they believe that the goddess of fertility is appeased by the dance night after wedlock and subsequently the woman (newly-wed) will conceive. From the findings of the researcher, there was not any woman among the 75 members of the central *Agbachaaekurunwa* of Mbaise who is barren. They all have children ranging from 5 – 15 children. The number of children that each one has will graduate her from an ordinary member of *Agbachaaekurunwa* to *Ndi nkwa di kwere nwaanyi* group. The *Ndi nkwa di kwere nwaanyi* level are the highest of the group. They are *Ndomi a luru alu*. (those that are married) as against *ndi oso di* (those that

were not married in the customary way).

The '*Ndi nkwa di kwere nwanji*' group are those that have ten children and above whose husbands have also performed the *Eghu ukwu* festival (*Eghu ukwu* festival is performed for any woman that has given birth to as many as ten children and above. During this ceremony, a goat (*eghu*) is slaughtered in honour of the woman in question. Friends and well-wishers are invited for the celebration. This is a promise a husband made to his wife (*nkwa di kwere nwanji*) though in some cases, some husbands may not perform this honourable ceremony for their wives especially when such husbands are not happy with their wives. So in Mbaise, every woman strives to keep her husband absolutely happy for two basic reasons: namely, for her husband to keep the sexual relationship between them alive for the woman to keep conceiving and subsequently giving birth to children so as to attain the *eghu ukwu* level and for her husband to be happy so as to perform the *eghu ukwu* for her on getting to the level.

The women in this cadre (*ndi nkwa di kwere nwanji*) are treated with respect. Be that as it may, every member of *agbachaekurunwa* aspires to reach this height in due course. There is the high fecundity in Mbaise and this is attributed to the existence of the *agbachaekurunwa*. We should note that there is a group of women in Mbaise who can never be admitted into *agbachaekurunwa*. They are known as *ndi oso di*. This is the category of women not married in the customary way at all.

Although the *agbachaekurunwa* women have great conviction and confidence that belonging to their group

assures members of fertility in child birth, their folksongs cut across other social and societal issues affecting the women, children, good governance, unemployment, etc all together knitted to make for peaceful co-existence of the Igbo people and the society.

Theoretical Framework:

The theory used in this study is the functionalist theory which contends that literature is and ought to be relevant to the society that has given birth to it as well as nurtures it. This theory is psychological in nature in that it examines mental processes and how they relate to human behaviours. In doing this literature plays an important role that affects social changes within its community.

According to Onyejekwe and Ikeokwu (2013), literature becomes a potential weapon used to bring about positive changes in the community that engenders it. The functionalists also believe that any cultural phenomenon that does not have any use in the society will not endure.

According to Ude (1994) as quoted by Ikeokwu (2007), functionalism is an approach of literary study. He goes on to say that functionalist approach is used to press the point that literature is and ought to be relevant to the society that has given birth to it and nurtured it as well.

Functional literature to the researcher in this study is that particular literature that uses advocacy devices to sensitize individuals or groups in fighting or struggling for a common cause in order to achieve social justice which in turn will usher in peace and when peace is achieved

there will definitely be peaceful co-existence among people in the society starting from the home. *Agbachaaekurunwa* as an oral literary mirrors the society, bringing out all the activities of the people, those that will bring peace and joy are commended and those that will promote conflicts are denounced it. To lend credence to the above assertion, Onyejekwe and Ikeokwu (2013: p. 47)

In Igbo traditional communities, oral poetry or song is accorded a high position because it is a part of everyday living which they said accounts for why the oral art forms have persisted over generation while new ones in terms of composition, performance and entertainment are evolving and enjoyed by the people.

Empirically, we reviewed some works on oral poetry by some scholars. They include Beier (1956), Fabb (1997), Njoku (2002), Mbunda (2002), Chiluwā (2009), Onyejekwe and Ikeokwu (2013), Nnamani (2014), Khen (2017), and Ihedigbo (2017).

Beier (1956:23) *as he talks about the Oral Poetry of Yoruba people, he says that there is no occasion in Yoruba life that is not accompanied by song be it birth, marriage as well as funeral. He maintains that the lyrical songs are for beautification of such occasions. All the above scholars have one thing or the other that deals with the oral literature and the society that bears it and the human being that live in the said society*

Thematic Analysis

Theme I: Rumour Mongering

We have noted above that the theme of the *Agbachaaekurunwa* women stems from the homes. First we have marriage between

the man and his wife. So this peace will have to start from the home for the husband and his wife to procreate. For there is an adage in Igbo that says, *e mede obi, a mụọ nwa dim ma* (if one cools down, one gives birth to a good child).

The Mbaise women through this song strive so much to harbour peace in their homes. They try so much to avert rumour mongering and gossips. These two, if not well checked, bring about divorce. The following song speaks volume of what we are stressing:

Song I: Onye Agbugba : (*Rumour Monger/Peddler*)

Onye agbugba rie re lawa e a a

(Rumour peddler eat and leave)

Onye agbugba rie ri lawa ngwa ngwa

(Rumour peddler eat and get going quickly)

Ezi onye agbugba biara ije

(Any home in which the peddler sets foot)

Ezi nga ahu anaghi adi mma lee ee yi wo

(That home is never good at all)

The *Agbachaaekurunwa* group sang the above song to ward off the rumour mongers that would come into their peaceful homes and break such homes if not checked. They warn against laziness in women which is the sole cause of rumour peddling.

This song is meant to keep in check the rumour monger in her house. In this case the rumour which would have brought disunity between the husband and wife will be averted, giving way to peaceful co-existence between husband and wife.

The women also sang and said that they knew the minds of their husbands. Marriage in Mbaise is a serious business as they do not marry and return home again as in divorce;

that is why they strive so much to protect their marriages. They sing to announce that they know and understand the minds of their husbands. The following song reports this:

Song II: *Amarala m obi di m (I know my husband's mind)*

Amarala m obi di m lee aaa ee

(I know the heart of my husband)

A hiwe kpawa m obi uhwa

(The reason why I am happy is)

Amarala m obi di m lee aaa

(I know the heart of my husband)

Mgbe di m kpa akhu mu erie ya suo ude

(When my husband has money I enjoy it to the fullest)

Mgbe na o di kee o kpa

(But when he has none)

Mu ewere obi nwanyo sowe ya lee

(With a gentle heart I go with him)

Since they know the hearts of their husbands any act or action inimical to peace and unity of the family is strongly condemned by the *Agbachaekurunwa* dance group. It also follows that as much as possible, they will work towards avoiding anything that will trouble the hearts of their husbands. They condemn the laziness of those women who would expect their husband to provide almost everything in the home. In the above song, the women sang that they cherished their husbands and understood their temperaments. When there is affluence, they both enjoy and when there is lack, they also bore it together.

This song totally invites peace into the home. On the contrary, some women do not want any flexibility in marriage; they want it rosy all the time and as soon as their husbands show any sign of inability to

provide for the household, the woman will flay up and peace of the home will be punctured. We see that in inculcating the way of life of the *agbachaekurunwa* women which they have exhibited in their songs, there should definitely be peace which enhances cordial relationship.

Another theme which the *Agbachaekurunwa* women sang is the theme on family planning. According to the World Health Organization Report (2010), family planning allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the spacing and timing of their births... family planning prevents about one-third of pregnancy related deaths as well as 44% of neonatal deaths. Family planning is seen as detrimental to the health of women. The *Mbaise* women through their *agbachaekurunwa* condemn family planning. They want to be allowed to have as many children as God would want them to since procreation only comes from God (*Chi na-enye nwa*) God gives children.

Song III: *Family planning*

Ndi onye si umunwanyị amukwala nnwa

(Who is he that asked women not to give birth anymore?)

Ya jee guo akwụkwọ nsọ

(Let him read the Bible)

Ọ sị anyị gawa eee

(It says we should go)

Ọ sị anyị gawa mba niile jee mubawa

(It says we should go into the universe and multiply)

Onye ga mụta otu, a si ya zuru ike

(Then when one gets one they said tell her to rest.)

The *Agbachaekurunwa* women are also

evangelists. They quoted the Bible where Adam and Eve were asked to increase and multiply. So they argued that those talking about family planning should study the Bible. Their song also ensures peace in the home. If the man denies the wife sex for fear of giving birth to more children, the woman will not be happy – since all the efforts to have more children gear towards reaching the apex of *Agbachaaekurunwa* membership, the Ndi nkwa di kwere nwanyi that promises Eghu ukwu and when it happens like this, there will not be peace in the home.

Theme on Proliferation of Church

The *agbachaaekurunwa* women also sang songs that condemn the proliferation of Churches in the society. They reasoned that these Churches instead of making the homes and families, they rather mar the families. There are now false prophets that will give false prophecies for instance, a “Prophet” can give prophecy to a woman telling her that the cause of her inability to have children is her mother-in-law. That the mother-in-law is a witch. This woman will come to the house and urge her husband to send her mother away that her husband's mother is a witch. In most cases, the men do not accept this, rather they would accuse their wives of disrespecting their mothers. In this case there would be trouble in the house, insecurity may set in, the man may stop eating the wife's food, etc. In some other cases the man of the house would accept all that the wife brought from the prophet, then agreeing to send his mother away, the villagers will gather for this man and his wife. Peace will elude this family. The song

goes this way:

Song IV: *Oke amuma Chọọchi akariala*
(Proliferation of Churches is on the increase)

Unugwadi ha lee

(Let them know)

Ebe na ebe ha hụrụ Chọọchi

(Wherever they see any Church)

He evuru akwụkwọ nsọ

(They carry the Bible)

Mgbe a na-ekpele onwa nabọ kpee keato

(After attending these Churches for two or three months)

Amuma adawa

(Prophecies will start coming)

Ihuna si ezi na ụlọ agbawa la ọkụ

(Have you seen that the family is now in disarray)

In real life story, this kind of prophecy has broken homes. They even go as far as telling a woman or a man that her husband or his wife is a wizard or a witch respectively. One wonders which wife/husband will condone the idea of leaving with a wizard or a witch. These prophets have also told a woman who always has incessant deaths of her children that her husband belonged to one occult kingdom or the other and that her husband was eating up those children. In this situation, there would be no peace between the woman and her husband.

Therefore, the *Agbachaaekurunwa* Women of Mbaise sing songs on the theme to dissuade women from belonging or attending such Churches that would not allow peace to reign in their homes. Meanwhile, it is good to note, here that the Mbaise people are predominantly Catholics and any woman that takes her husband to “Chọọchi ọkụaka” (*Church that claps*) is not

regarded as a good woman in Mbaise. The song has been a serious check towards any movement that is spiritually suspicious.

Theme on Unemployment

One of the major problems in the country Nigeria today is the rate of unemployment, especially among the youths who have completed their education. Singing about this pathetic situation, *Agbachaaekurunwa* women lament and sing:

Song V: *Ọchịchị Najiria esiele ike (Nigerian government is hard now)*

Si hi lekwe umuokoro na agboghọ anyị

(Let them see our young boys and girls)

Ndeke gụchara Kọleji enweghị he ọrụ

(Those that finished their secondary education and do not have jobs)

Ufọdụ efechaala alanna ya

(Some have finished their national youth service corps)

enweghị ha ọrụ

(They do not have jobs)

Ufọdụ arụchaala ọrụ akwughị ha ụgwọ

(Some have even worked without being paid)

Their song indicates that those of them that were lucky to secure jobs are not even paid. *Agbachaaekurunwa* songs also express the evil effects of unemployment such as poverty and hunger which also have their own attendant consequences such as armed robbery, kidnapping, human trafficking, promiscuity, unwanted pregnancies and abortion, prostitution, sale of babies, cultism, ritual killing, etc.

When the government hears about these evils that are associated with unemployment, a sensitive government will try to do the needful to avert the troubles/evils, thus contributing to peace

and peaceful coexistence among the people in the society.

Theme on Occupational Complementary Role:

The Mbaise women through the *Agbachaaekurunwa* songs portray the fact that they also complement the efforts of their husbands in taking care of the family (the children). An average Mbaise woman is industrious, she does not want to sit in the house and be answering "Oriaku" (*ori ma di yọ ahịa ori ma di yọ ahịa* 'She that eats when the husband returns from the market). No, the Mbaise woman abhors this situation. She does not want the entire burden of the family and the extended family upkeep to be on her husband alone. So she is up and doing. She is involved in trading as well as farming. These two songs speak volumes to the claim above.

Song VI: *Ndomi lbe m*

Ndomi lbe m lee

Owo a a a e e

(My fellow women ooo)

Owo a a a e e

Obi na-achọ mụ

(My heart is usually merry)

Ma m sinu Ahia n'a-ayo

(When I return from the market)

Bia nuru ube nnwa m

(And hear the voice of my child)

Song VII: *Mma na ọgụ*

Anyi ji mma na ọgụ arughā ọrụ e e

(We use our matchetes and hoes for farming)

Anyi ji zuma umu anyi a a e e

(So that we can train our children)

Amama Heline si anyi ga wa oru ee
(Helen's mother said we should go farming)

Anyi ji nyere nde di anyi aka o o o
(So that we help our husbands o o o)

The women show their joy in their hard work with which they can contribute meaningfully towards the provision of food to ensure the economic wellbeing of the family. Every man loves a hard-working wife. No matter how meagre the income of their wives are, the Mbaise men cherish hard-working wives.

There is absolute peace in any home where there is complementary effort of the wives towards their husbands' occupations in terms of giving birth to children and training them adequately. Therefore peaceful coexistence exists in this kind of home. The children that are jointly trained by both parents would always be happy and in turn take care of their parents at old age.

Conclusion

We have been able to x-ray the functional aspects of the oral literature of the Igbo people using the *Agbachaekurunwa* songs of Mbaise women as an embodiment of such functions. Every oral literature is a functional literature in that it talks about the society, the activities of such society and the performers of such activities in the society. The *Agbachaekurunwa* song dance has been used as a tool for ensuring adequate peace and peaceful coexistence among the people. This peaceful living starts from the home; when the rumour monger is chased away, the husband and the wife keep staying together in good times and in bad times; there is tolerance. The children that are born

out of this harmonious relationship need education both formally and informally. At the end of the formal education there must be a job for him so that vices that come from unemployment likes stealing, kidnapping, child trafficking, prostitution, armed robbery and a lot more others will be averted thereby ensuring peace, harmony and peaceful coexistence in the home. When there is peace in every home, there would automatically be peace in the society because one can only give what one has.

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