

Our People Our Dreams

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OGBARU PEOPLE

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There is one attribute of the Ogbaru person that deserves to be treated separately, and that is related to our philosophy of life. The Ogbaru person is easily satisfied and easy to satisfy. That disposition has considerable implications for how we approach work and life generally. The Ogbaru person has an innate pride in himself and his self-concept is very strong. While the Ogbaru person will work hard, he usually does not aim to own excessive wealth. The Ogbaru person does not think 'rich'. He is satisfied with having enough to eat and to feed his family. As a result of this disposition, the Ogbaru person is lost in a world in which a person is defined solely by wealth rather than by their human self. Our summary of our understanding of the Ogbaru person would therefore be that the Ogbaru person is embarked in a rich culture, is concerned about family and community, is concerned about personal and social prosperity, and is concerned about posterity - that is, the Ogbaru person is concerned about his community and family even after he is dead and gone. The Ogbaru person is kind, and has a generous disposition. He is hardworking, is truthful and joyful about life, is concerned about equity and how his actions affect other persons. The Ogbaru person usually prefers to settle disputes through arbitration and dialogue. The Ogbaru person is not overly concerned with wealth and his self-concept is quite high, even though he is not rich. That is my assessment of the Ogbaru person as our culture programs him or her to be or, should I

say, as our culture used to program the Ogbaru person to be. It is obvious that these are very good attributes, and yet these very attributes are also part of our problem, part of the reasons why we are unable to fit into the general pattern of the behavior of our neighbors or the general pattern of behaviors that now characterize the Nigerian society.

THE OGBARU DILEMMA

Now that we have some framework and I believe some consensus about the people we are talking about, it is possible to address what the dilemma of Ogbaru people is in the present dispensation in the country. Our first difficulty is our dispersal in four states in Nigeria, namely, Anambra, Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers. The dispersal has clear consequences. The major one is the present lack of focus and concerted effort by our people in seeking developmental goals. Notice, for example, that the two road networks in Anambra and Delta are among the worst roads in the country. The road from Odekpe (Okpoko) to Ogwu and beyond, and the road from Utagba (Kwale area) to Onya through Abor are both in deplorable conditions, with the roads in neighboring areas receive more surfacing or maintenance efforts. This dilemma is likely to continue for some time since we do not have the significant population that will permit us to fight for a separate unified entity. The important point then is to determine how we may achieve development for our peoples even though we may be placed in different states. A second dilemma of note is the high degree of poverty of our people. Rural poverty is of course the bane of Nigerian society and a consequence of so many years of poor governance, but it would appear to me that the level of poverty in Ogbaru is palpable. Beyond governmental causes, we must look inwards to seek some answers. Our poverty is caused also by our disposition. We, as a people have not been able to move into the productive areas of the Nigerian system because of the Ogbaru orientations we discussed earlier. For example, because of our penchant to be truthful, to fear (and perhaps, at least, fear of the Alusi), our people have not been successful as traders. I am sure we all have relatives who tried their hands at trading (the Onitsha style) and failed, because our culture has not orogramed us to deal in the market place as the current culture of trading demands. The business culture in Nigeria now demands lying, cheating, subterfuge and dissembling. The Ogbaru person will either fail in all of this or will be easily caught. Recall that Ogbaru had produced great traders including the Madams Izadi, Nnoruka, Oyolu, Okwei, etc. But as I indicated, the current trading culture is totally alien to the Ogbaru mentality. Also, the Ogbaru child is usually not trained to endure the hunger and deprivation which our neighboring Igbos go through. So while the little Igbo boy may survive on abacha and ugba, our Ogbaru child will invest his little income (or pocket money) on good pounded yam and fish (ikele) soup. Clearly, his upbringing is at work. Another serious problem is the increasing level of illiteracy among our people, especially among the up-coming young generation. Our people have placed education on the back burner, and, unless we act now, we will pay the price of this attitude for generations to come. In addition to above, we have several other traits that incapacitate our people, not the least of which are our intense commitment to the land, our social customs and even our eating habits. It is true that the Ogbarus are good farmers but because of their culture, their farmings is one-crop based, namely, yam, in fact, yam specific kind- Aga! It is well-nigh impossible to convince the Ogbaru farmer to examine the economic possibilities of a different economic crop. Or even to eat them! If you were home recently, you would have noticed that our women have gone into vegetable farming in a big way. But getting the Ogbaru person to eat vegetable is a big problem. That is why in addition to the loss of fish (due to the effects of the dams up the Niger) we have dietary deficiencies in Ogbaru because they refuse to eat any vegetable as supplement in the absence of fresh fish- Mady o bu Ewu na ta afifa? I recall, sadly that I lost the last of my maternal uncles largely because he refused any change in his diet, Let me also mention the loss of fishing facilities as one of our problems. The damming of the Niger in several spots has meant in practical terms that our peoples'livelihood has been greatly tampered with. Access to even the breast of fish as used to be the case has but gone. For most of the year, our people now depend on the ubiquitous Azu-fridge to survive and even that is increasingly difficult for most families to buy because of the high degree of poverty that is prevailing right now Ogbaru people are buffeted by change all around them. Their neighbors around them are embracing the changing culture more rapidly than they are. What are the options? How do we maintain some of the things and tenets that are dear to us while taking advantage of the innovations that are engulfing the world, not just Nigeria, but also internationally. As we often hear, the world is becoming a global village and while we cherish our culture we should, of our own, move into the twenty-first century or we will be moved along without a direction chosen by us!

OGBARU DREAMS, OGBARU OPTIONS

My dreams and I know, your dream too, are to advance our people, to move our people forward in development so that they too may begin to enjoy the good things of life. Our people need to be empowered politically and socially so that they may be a vibrant part of the Nigerian nation. Our dilemma is how to do this and still remain some of our cultural heritage, particularly those that are still functional and those that we still cherish, as well as, how to evolve the tools (political and otherwise) with which to effect changes in our condition. That is a task that should be all consuming for all of us. What should we be doing at home and abroad?

Leadership Role of Ogbaru Diaspora

A second objective is to establish an agenda, a program of work that will foster growth and development. This requires the evolution of both short and long term objectives and the creation of priorities of action. In doing this, when your positions are worked out, you may then wish to liaise with people at home to explore the practical implications of your programs and proposals.

Educating the Home Front

A top priority action, initially, is to galvanize our people at home and educate them on the program of activities you are proposing. This is particularly important because your input carries greater impact than efforts made by those of us at home. Perhaps, once a year or every two years, your ambassadors may visit our communities for this educational process and bring to them your message for the re-vitalization of our homeland.

Education As Priority

A major objective for action which I suggest for your consideration is education. You will be giving Ogbaru communities a great boost if you promote education. Name all the towns in Ogbaru and offer one scholarship per year to one child in each town. You can do it. If some of us can do so with our naira based income, then each one of you can, infact, give a scholarship a year. Only \$100.00 (one hundred dollars == ten thousand naira) can sustain a child in secondary school. Such action will not only sustain the recipient child, but will enhance the culture of education among our people. This effort will re-focus the attention of our people on education. At present, the number of Ogbaru children going to school is deplorable. And we cannot hope to keep our people in contention for positions in the country and for individual progress if they remain un-educated. We must move beyond our immediate families and strive for the survival of the clan. That is, infact, the real basis for our personal and family survival.

Establishment of Small and even Large scale Industries

A major component of your activity which should help to lift the condition of Ogbaru is to plan to establish industries in Ogbaru. Fortunately, and by the special patriotism of one of our daughters, the Ogbaru on the Eastern flank now have national grid electricity, and we are hopeful that this will also be the case for the western flank. We need industries in Ogbaru to help the employment situation of our people. The factory established by Igwe Onunuju of Umunankwo is clearly one good example. We need more of this to bring work to our people.

Child Rearing

There is need to re-educate our people on the matter of raising our children. In the context of the current circumstances, and especially in Nigeria, we need to raise our children to be more hardy and to be able to delay gratification, that is to be able to ignore present gratification in favor of long term goals and objectives. That is, the capacity for endurance. I do not propose the abandonment of our cherished traditions, but if our children are to survive in this increasingly competitive world, then we must imbue them with more survival skills, and endurance is perhaps the most critical.

Promotion of Social Cohesion and Ogbaru Unity

We need to promote social cohesion among our people, by creating an atmosphere of accommodation and tolerance even in the face of necessary disagreements. No group can make progress if it is mirred in internal dissent and harsh controversies. There is need to create social harmony among yourselves, and among those of us at home.

Advocacy for Things Ogbaru and for Ogbaru Goals

One major thrust of your activities should be to promote advocacy for things concerning Ogbaru in both governmental and non governmental circles. We must fight always to bring to government awareness the needs of Ogbaru in the different states in which we are located. Also, we must promote Ogbaru culture wherever we are. Ogbaru dances, Ogbaru food, Ogbaru language, Ogbaru philosophy. Nigeria can certainly benefit from the adoption of Ogbaru attitudes about life. We should do so through precepts, as well as, through publications and public speeches. Ours is a culture we should be proud to challenge Nigeria and indeed the world with.

Creation of an All-Ogbaru Assembly

We need to generate and sustain regular social and political dialogue among Ogbaru people in the various states in Nigeria - Anambra, Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa. This will help create a common focus for the prosecution of the Ogbaru agenda. The proposed Assembly would comprise representatives from the various states, and Ogbaru indigenes in Diaspora. The Assembly should help in creating political awareness among our people and ensuring cohesion in the pursuit of relevant goals. Finally, let me thank you all for your attention and once more express my conviction that in evolving this assemblage of Ogbaru in Diapora you have taken the first step in bringing prosperity to our people and laying the foundation for a bright posterity as we enter the new milenum. Thank you, Mbona, and God bless.

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