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THE IGBO CULTURE OF NIGERIA AND ASPECTS OF RITUAL PERFORMANCE PROCESS

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Abstract

Life is continually celebrated by the Igbo people. The Igbo people always want to celebrate life, therefore they constantly try to make the most of it, even though they contend that life is full of uncertainties and challenges that are only temporary. The Igbo would be contented with whatever good fortune delivers given that they know that tomorrow will definitely be different. The Igbo people celebrate life because they are aware of how fleeting everything is and that memories which are not honored might be lost to time. In this article, the Igbo culture, specific aspects of ritual performance and their contribution to Nigeria's development are examined using the critical analysis method. From the researcher's perspective, this work has succeeded in showing that rituals practices are just cultural performances, and that comprehending and learning about their aspects does not have to be a terrifying experience or require proof that they are the result of some unknown force. This work has demonstrated that a greater comprehension of ritual performance- which is a representation of life in action- can be attained by classifying and grouping these actions. Examining ritual performance also shows the genuine essence of Igbo culture and its



development. These divisions give rise to certain traits that help us determine which cluster each ritual performance is a part of.

Keywords: Nigeria, Culture, Rituals, Performance Process

Introduction

In Igboland, there are as many different dialects spoken in different locales as there are rituals. Studies of the rituals practiced in the various Igboland regions are therefore essential. We can better understand Igbo rituals and performance with the use of these studies. The dynamic, throbbing, and colorful elements that give rituals life are referred to as process in ritual terminology. This gives us a unique perspective on the actual nature of rituals, which are events that take place in a certain time and place with a complex web of interactions between the participants, places, symbols/ritual agents/icons, rhythms, etc. The performative requirements of rituals are, in a way, carefully restrained and flourish via processual analyses. It appears that Werbner (1989:1) concurs when he characterizes the "ritual passage" as:

A symbolic action approach that is body-focused. Ritual participants use their bodies to locate and resonate with themselves in cosmic space. Performers also personify who they are and what they hope to become in connection to the forces around them through their bodies. Sometimes the body is only theirs; other times, it belongs to someone else as well, like a domestic or wild animal, portions of which can be disassembled and reassembled. The way that people are presented varies; some like to reveal their true selves, both to the audience and to the performer directly.

Three elements of the rituals in the maternity/infancy cluster, for example, are easily noticed via process. The baby's (and the mother's) worldly spiritual and cultural requirements are to be satisfied, which is the primary reason for their existence. The majorities of rituals are purificatory in nature and establish social, economic, nutritional, and sexual abstinences for the expecting woman from the beginning of her pregnancy. The goal of this is to make delivery safer. These regulations are based on the Igbo belief that pregnancy and childbirth represent a journey in which the woman is suspended between the worlds of the living and the spirits, and are intended to shield the mother and the fetus from evil forces. That's why people will ask, "O lida go?" when they inquire about an expectant woman. Is she descending, in other words? When it's being cleared of the afterbirth, some people place newborns atop a mound of ogirisi leaves out of a need to protect the mother and infant. This is due to the myth that these leaves have a purifying power that shields the youngster from harmful entities.

Secondly, there could be variations in the names given to the rituals in the aforementioned cluster; however this is often caused by differences in regional dialects. The announcement of a child's birth serves as one example. However in every instance that has been examined, the celebration is started by the baby's father or aunt, and then more community members join them. Lastly, the Igbo are remarkably frugal in the way they arrange and oversee ceremonies. For instance, the woman's mother visits her for three months after giving birth, known as *ine omugwo*, and is scheduled during a period when the new mother needs all the emotional and physical assistance her mother can provide. Male children are also circumcised at this visitation, which may be a very difficult



moment for most moms. Prior to her mother's departure, she is also reintegrated into the community.

Ritual Clusters

Rituals are covered in further detail under the corresponding clusters and sub-clusters in the sections that follow, beginning with iwa oji.

Iwa Oji (Consecration of the Kolanut)

Like divination, iwa oji (consecration of the kolanut) are rituals that come before all other rituals and ceremonies (except from burial and separation). An act of gratitude and affirmation is the kolanut's consecration. Additionally, the leader of every home uses it during morning prayers, and throughout the day, it is said to greet guests. This ceremony is mentioned before others because of the paramount position of significance it occupies.

Chukwu-Okike, the gods, the spirit realm, and humanity all communicate with one another through oji, also known botanically as carpel or kola atrophora. This is why oji is so important to Igbo culture. Only those species having three or more cotyledons are allowed for use in Igbo ceremonies; these species are known as oji Igbo (Igbo kolanut). These entire cotyledons are called lobes by the use of ceremonial semiotics. Legend has it that the genesis of oji Igbo was prompted by the gods to select a fruit from their orchard when the Igbo founding fathers visited their house at a time when gods and humans interacted more closely. It is considered the king of all fruits since the founding fathers picked oji. It also has a special language that is understood by the gods, spirits, and ancestors and is utilized during its consecration.

In addition to being the first thing offered to a visitor, the kolanut symbolizes goodwill and is used to mark a clear mind and pure intentions when presented to a visitor. Its heart-shaped form is symbolic because, during its consecration, all words uttered are deemed to come from the heart. If it is not presented to a visitor, it indicates that the visitor is not welcome. Variations exist in the way the kolanut is presented. The majority of the time, it is offered with a basin of water so that the guest can wash their hands as a sign of welcome from the host and an insinuation that whatever illnesses the guest may have unintentionally brought with him or her will be purified and resolved. Moreover, it represents the physical and emotional dirt of the voyage being washed away. To demonstrate that they have been welcomed, visitors in most communities, like kolanut, are given money (the amount varies on what the host can afford). Wherever kolanuts are served, they may also provide nzu (local chalk), particularly to senior guests. The character Nzu represents innocence and a kind, open heart. As it is offered, the host takes it from the kolanut dish and uses it as a symbol for good intentions and personal accomplishments by making strange markings on the ground. So that he might leave his own imprint on the floor, he rolls it on the ground to the next man to his left. The floor markings validate and describe each person's success, and any striations, dashes, or drawings indicate different facets of the marker's work.



People who are extremely successful typically mark their numerous triumphs with the greatest number of strokes on the floor. Until every person has left their mark, the chalk keeps rolling in an anticlockwise direction. Then, in a gesture of complete mental purity, each participant would remove a small quantity of the powder from the markings created to identify different portions of their bodies. Upon sharing the kolanut, individuals make a vow to refrain from thinking or acting evilly toward one another.

The Igbo people celebrate the consecration of the kolanut, or *iwa oji*, as a unique ritual that may be tense and dramatic at times. For instance, it is forbidden for a man to accept or consecrate kolanut in front of his in-laws. People would have therefore secretly identified everyone else who is ineligible to consecrate or receive kolanuts before them when the sharing process starts, while the kolanut was being passed around. Different individuals are eagerly waiting for each other to break this rule so they may either scold each other lightly or not. Defaulting in-laws are occasionally given the amusing order to return their wives because they are unaware of the background of their spouses. Men visiting their maternal homes or villages, where they receive special treatment and are free to cause as much fun disturbance as they like, might likewise be the subject of the drama. Therefore, one of these "sacrosanct" *nwadiana* may gleefully grab them all from the dish when the kolanut is shown, hoping to pocket them.

To persuade him to reconsider, everyone would beg and give him affectionate nicknames. Laughter and applause fill the air as he places the kolanuts back on the platters. Consecrating the kolanut falls to the eldest individual present, which is often the head of the household. In mixed company, women never consecrate the kolanut. Nevertheless, if it's a women-only event (and there aren't any man there), they might. The kolanut is split according to clan or kindred lines during remarkably big gatherings of villages in a town. The eldest representative of the oldest clan receives and consecrates the kolanut on behalf of his clan or kindred. The distribution of the kolanut in locations like as *Isuikwuato* also takes the titles of those in attendance into account. For example, a considerably younger titled person may not accept a slice of kolanut before an old man with no titles. Furthermore, in order to show respect for the younger person's age, the older man who is married to her sister is not allowed to give kolanut to the younger person before the latter requests. Except in situations where a woman's age grants her advantages, women never ingest kolanut before a man. This has more significance among the riverine Igbo, also known as the *Igbo olu*, where older and postmenopausal women are viewed as male peers. For example, untitled males or *akaliogholi*, or irresponsible or insignificant people, will take a share before an *Iyom*, or woman, who wears the *odu* or elephant tusk.

When it comes to ritual structure, Schechner's (1995:229) significant classification of rituals and practices under the "Rite Tree" revealed three categories: "social to," "religious to," and "Aesthetic." This categorization aids in the comprehension of the ritual by providing a helpful tool for the establishment of ritual boundaries. All Igbo ritual has elements of all three types to some degree, hence it is important to note that there is no strict classification system for them. The social, theological, and artistic facets of a single rite are all included in the *ozo* title. According to Grainger



(1974), he characterizes rituals as "man's religious truth," which makes sense given that these processes lead to a state of isolation when people are able to perceive and comprehend reality as it is.

Arithmancy and the Kolanut

The amount of kolanuts offered and/or the lobes' natural orientation within the kolanut determine the kolanut's ritual significance. On the other hand, depending on the occasion, different regions of Igboland serve kolanut in multiples of two or three. "Oji lue uno, okwuo ebe osi" is how the Igbo say "that a kolanut will tell where it came from when it gets home."

The four market days are represented by this: Eke is the oldest day, Oye is Ada (or the oldest daughter), Afo is Ulu (or the child who comes after Ada), and Nkwo is the youngest member of the family. All of the lobes of the three-lobed type, known as oji Eze (king's kola), are offered to the guest as a sign of respect. Oji Igbo is always presented with the following protocol: it is declared, handed around for everyone to see, and then given back to the most suitable individual for consecration.

If the suitable person is not very expressive while quoting Igbo proverbs, he may be timid in some situations. In such a situation, he will be permitted to assign the work to more qualified individuals. Still, these individuals are usually urged to carry out the rituals themselves because people don't become comfortable with them until they are practiced. Everyone who saw the five-lobed kolanut, a sign of boundless benevolence, is invited to partake in the butchering of a chicken. Another kola is used in the libation after the meal. Then everyone present may enjoy the original kolanut.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Presented</u>
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2 kolanuts	to a titled man
4 kolanuts	at big ceremonies e.g. fixing of bride price or ozo title taking
7 kolanuts	at important ceremonies like igbu ewu ndi ichie
8 kolanuts	at marriages when the bride is about to leave for her matrimonial borne
Oji ugo*	to important personality, Symbolizes royalty and purity

Maternity / Infancy Cluster

The maternity/infancy cluster consists of a single lengthy ritual that has several distinct sub-sets that come together to form a whole. Take reincarnation divination, for instance. ini otubo, or the discarding of the navel end. Circumcision, for example, and other independent performances have a common goal and are performed in advance of the main ritual, which is the naming ceremony, where the child is given his own identity by the collective (friends, family, and kindred) who attend as participant-witnesses. Robert (1988:123) writes about the unifying power of divination: People remember, revise, rearrange, and reconstitute elements of history through divination and related rituals in order to comprehend and deal with current challenges and negotiate a better future. Ritual is similar to life itself in that individuals cannot begin to comprehend and manage challenges unless



they are given the opportunity (through counseling, for example) to focus on the reasons rather than the results.

In Igboland, the birth of a child is regarded as a unique gift from God. The Igbo people show their gratitude and appreciation for this special blessing by nurturing and caring for every child that God has committed to their care. Therefore, the children's physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing is the responsibility of the entire community. Prior to the invention of western-style baby formula, a child who survived a woman's death during childbirth was given to any nursing mother in the community who was willing to breastfeed the infant as well as her foster and biological children.

Most of the time, the foster child came to be in her care as well as her own. The Igbo would so bestow names like Nwora (child of everyone), Ifeora (thing that belongs to the community), Obiora (community will), Adaora (daughter of the people), etc. Pregnancy and premarital sex are taboo in many Igbo communities. In contrast, unmarried females live in their mothers' mkpuke or huts in circumstances when there had been time mkpuke/ime nkita, or pregnancies before marriage, which is literally translated as pregnancy in the mkpuke. Some parts of the State also use the term "ime nkita," which refers to a dog's pregnancy, to denote promiscuity because dogs do not have a single mate.

For embarrassing her family, the expectant mother is typically given harsh criticism. However, the infant is instantly accepted into its mother's family at birth and is shown all the proper rituals of passage. Compared to other infants in the household, she/he is always treated the same. Remarkably, the Igbo language does not have the terms "illegitimate" or "bastard." here is due to the fact that all children, including those created outside of marriages, have known parents; here is why. Thus, every child is a blessing, and that child widens the circle of friends, family, prospective in-laws, and other relationships, which is always expanding.

Male children are likely the subject of this additional ceremony done for the boys since, to the patrilineal Igbo, they represent motivation, growth, and continuity among families. Therefore, a boy's birth is more joyous than a girl's since the former will ultimately get married and starts a new family. Once the child's father is informed in his iba, obu, or obi of their impending delivery, /chi oga is done. The announcement of the birth to the community will then be approved by him, either through his sister or a well-meaning female relative. The authorized person exclaims, "It anyi erite oke n 'aka Eze Chutu Oke Obiama" (We are blessed by the God of creation). Neighbors in the area are responsible for relaying this signal. This clamor soon reverberates across the entire neighborhood. Typically, the ululation performer also notifies the new mother's relatives, or the in-laws, of the news. She starts ululating as soon as she gets there, and word of this is passed from one home to another. She will then go to the baby's maternal grandmother's house to tell her, and depending on how wealthy the new father is, she will bring a present with her. Regardless of the child's gender, it may contain some yam tubers, chickens, cash, etc.



The maternal grandmother confirms her attendance at her daughter's omugwo, the moment she has been waiting for. This is because she would have prepared for her daughter's visit and the arrival of her new baby while her daughter was still pregnant. She would have packed all the finest condiments and unique herbs (utazi and uziza) to cook for her daughter when she arrived at her son-in-law's house.

Owoo Owolo Anyi (In Isuikwuato)

The same ceremony is called owo owolo anyi in Isuikwuato, Abia State, and it is more complex. The ululating that announces a birth is the first sign of it. And the ladies who live and travel by recognize this for what it is, so they would gather from all over the area. The song and dance portion starts, with participants reenacting various scenes such as the sexual act of conception, pregnancy, delivery, and the hand-to-hand rocking and dancing of the newborn. All those present, men and children alike, avail themselves to the talcum powder that the new father is passing about in the meanwhile. The participants would apply the powder around their necks, signifying to onlookers that a baby had been born. Werbner (1989:136) characterizes this spontaneous act as anti-ritual in his explanation of Kalanga healing rituals:

The anti-ritual that, in perception and image, renews that which the ritual is unable to renew. It offers three essentials: informality and unofficial ideals; sociability without respect for elders' authority. Moreover, he goes on, saying that while satire, humor, and good times are important for the healing rebuilding, they have no right place. They are not accepted as just ritualistic activities or obligatory ceremonies. Rather, they are a part of the anti-rituals of play. These anti-rituals, which appear to be spontaneous but are always carried out in the same manner, take place as breaks between required rituals and suspend realities that the ritual would otherwise uphold. (Werbner 1989:109–110)

Owoo owolo anyi is considered an anti-ritual based on the description given above, as its representation of the sexual act involved in conception, pregnancy, and baby rocking is what the previous announcement made with joyful shouts was unable to reconstruct. Children, women, and men rarely dance together throughout the majority of Igboland. More importantly, however, lewdness is not tolerated in public among children and women. Participating in this song-and-dance sequence that contains explicit sexual details, therefore, signifies a violation of the social code. Even if the village elders are not present, they will typically observe with laughter or tolerance, even if they choose not to participate. More to the point, nobody is ever chastised for a transgression of social norms throughout this show. Usually, this kind of language would be considered impolite not occurs prior to the elders of the community. In addition, men in Isuikwuato would have laughed or made a joke if they had worn makeup, because Igbo men generally avoid it as it is considered feminine. However, on this particular occasion, men braved it.

No matter who is there, this dance honoring the birth of a newborn continues. Werbner's theory about the spontaneity of anti-rituals is also supported by this ritual. Some may contend that since the new father used talcum powder just on cue, the act of owoo owolo anyi is deceptively spontaneous. If the father was unaware of what was ahead or the role he would play once his child



was born, why would he preserve this? The researcher's stand is that, the performance is spontaneous by all measures since, to start, the new father just offers the background and part of the props and makeup. Furthermore, even though the ladies might have been anticipating the baby, many people are frequently taken off guard when the baby actually arrives. This act reinforces the preceding argument that rituals are culturally distinctive since the ululation would never have been understood as a call to celebrate by an outsider. And if this stranger had been able to accurately decipher the joyful yells, would he or she have been able to participate in the song and dance sequence as well? That is not very likely.

Iba Nwa Afaliputa Ifelikubata n 'uno (Naming Ceremony)

Women gave birth to their children in the old Igbo culture behind their mkpuke (hut), which was located behind their husband's iba/obu. After the infant is delivered, the mother and child are confined for a minimum of seven market weeks until the day of the naming ritual, when they are permitted to be inside and close to their husband's hut. There are two reasons they are placed under confinement. A woman required time to heal from the rigors of pregnancy and childbirth, in addition to the fact that she was considered unclean until she underwent the ceremonial cleansing. She is prohibited from going to public locations such as the local market, creek, woods, etc. in confirmation.

Her mother will be living with her for three months or more after the birth, so she has adequate support at home to be able to complete her confinement time without any breaks. The next ceremony is called the iputa ife (to come out into the day) or ikubata n 'uno (to be brought into the home), which is well titled to reflect the ritual's intention. Until that point, the mother and child are not fully integrated into their family and community. As a result, it is considered that they are "outside" of both the community and the family house, which is symbolized by the man's hut. During iba afa, the mother is re-integrated and the child is incorporated by his parents. On the eighth day, men would have undergone circumcision in between igba agu and iba afa. She will be busy getting ready for the child's name while she is confined; the infant is still known as "baby" to this day.

As the infant develops, every member of the community is there to guarantee his physical and spiritual wellness. The naming ceremony is the event when society assumes ownership of the child. In addition to serving as a head count, the naming ceremony brings the community together to observe and assume responsibility for the child's development. As a result, even if the mother may not be there as the child grows older, someone else in the neighborhood will take care of him or her when necessary, providing food, water, and shelter. As a result, the child's father will be busy purchasing palm-wine for guests on the morning of the naming ceremony. Earlier in the day, he would have sent out invitations to everyone who might be interested in attending, and his mother-in-law would have invited anyone she would like to invite as well. Depending on his financial acumen, he might prepare some food to feed the attendees; if not, it would only be drinks and light refreshments.



The event is held in the man's compound; it generally happens in the evening after everyone has returned from their markets or fields. Once there are sufficient numbers present. The family's eldest male will break the kolanut to greet the guests. Following that, the mother and child are shown outside, and she makes her way to visit everyone who has been invited. She will deliver the infant to the family's oldest male member, who will grasp him in both hands and hoist him up toward the sky, facing east, as if presenting him to the gods. He starts a particular prayer of gratitude to Chukwu for the gift of another child as soon as he is brought down, and he also prays for the baby's parents' well-being. Once he has announced the baby's parents' name, he either gives the child another name or supports them. On the other hand, he asks people to name the child after him while placing cash in a container that would be set in front of him. Additionally, they'll make gifts or cash offers. A child is named after a living or deceased relative in Isuikwuato.

When naming a child, if the namesake is still living, he or she will provide a hen for a girl or a cockerel for a boy as the naming token. When the namesake is still living, a unique bond forms between the adult and the child, with the older person taking the lead in providing care and support for the youngster and his family. Typically, namesakes serve as role models. People are having fun and drinking their palm wine while this is going on. The mother and the child are the recipients of any funds raised. The father does not participate. The child receives his own unique identity and the community officially recognizes him as one of its own during the naming ceremony, which makes it noteworthy. He is thought of as an anonymous individual up until that point. Everyone in attendance has a role in making sure the youngster has enough supervision as they participate in a social ritual of shared responsibility by identifying the child. In addition, it is the mother's chance to be reintegrated into the community, following which she is allowed to go to events and locations open to the public.

Youthful / Maturity Rituals

During the harvesting season, young ladies were initiated on moonlight nights. This was due to the fact that in traditional Igboland, nighttime illumination came solely from the moon. Other events were planned for such full moon evenings so that people may take advantage of the natural illumination. Young virgins are taught the mysteries of womanhood during these rituals so they are prepared for marriage. They are not eligible to get married until after this ceremony. The harvest season is when people take a break from their intense fanning, which takes place primarily in the rainy season. Additionally, these customs are planned to occur at this time to ensure that the families do not lose these crucial farm laborers. This was the only official sex education that these young virgins would receive in traditional Igbo society that was accepted by their communities. Community acceptance was crucial since, in the majority of Igboland even now, adults found it extremely uncomfortable to converse openly about having sex with younger people. It is important to keep in mind that throughout the relevant period, intercourse was exclusively done in private and at night and was done for the sole goal of reproduction.

Premarital sex was frowned upon in the majority of traditional Igbo communities, and if the bride was not a virgin, some families reportedly reopened talks with the bride's family to have a portion



of the bride money refunded. In severe circumstances, the girl was sent back to her family, voiding the marriage contract as a whole. For the bride's family, this was a cause of embarrassment, particularly for her mother, whose daughter was a mirror of her own values and upbringing. Not only was the non-virgin bride socially stigmatized, but her mother's marital fidelity was also questioned. When such incidents are revealed, the unhappy bride is sometimes forced to stay single or take an oath to guarantee her chastity in some traditional Igbo communities.

Ima Muo (Initiation into the Masquerade Cult)

The initiation of young boys into the masquerade cult is known as ima muo. In this patrilineal society, the masquerade is a male-dominated ritual that represents the ancestors to the Igbo people. During this ceremony, all initiated men swear an oath of secrecy. Young boys are taught the mysteries and secrets that will eventually grow up to be mature, fully formed Igbo men. Boys are inducted into the Igboland society as early as age eight in most regions. The ima muo ceremony in most of Igboland consists of a series of overnight festivities that begin with the young men gathering at the cult house in the village square. The exception to this is Imo and Abia States, where members of the masquerade cult are initiated as fully grown men. The framework of the performance is often graded according to the number of perilous interactions and confrontations that occur between the initiating masquerades and the initiands. These introductory masquerades, which go by the name "nwakpuluke" either individually or collectively, are scary figures meant to frighten those who are not initiated involve engaging in combat with the nwakpuluke, ascending the "hill of thorns," and handling shattered bottles. Initiating masquerades' physical prowess, size, and quantity are often determined by the size and quantity of the young males being introduced.

The idea is to ensure that every male gets the most attention and abuse possible throughout the competitive yet lighthearted games that comprise the initiation's framework. Such competitions include a shouting competition, a lie detector test, and a sequence of decision-making scenarios involving unappealing options, like selecting which family members to offer the masquerade in return for the resurrection of any nwakpuluke that may have been "killed" during the competitions. The purpose of each test is to evaluate the young initiate's moral rectitude, mental acuity, and endurance. The goal of the nwakpuluke is to scare the boys into wanting to flee the arena, which will disqualify them from carrying out the rest of the procedure. The boys typically survive the initiation because of psychological conditioning and the support of their families and friends. This is especially true because of the mix of encouragement and taunts they receive from the spectators/participants, who are made up of the village's adult males and other young boys.

The structure of the initiation is designed such that the initiand advances from one step to the next only after demonstrating his ability to defend himself against the intimidating initiating masquerades. As a result, children are exposed to a variety of masquerades over the evening, including the good and the evil, the beautiful and the grotesque, the kind and the irrational, etc. Many of them are encountering the grandest of all masquerades for the first time, known as ayaka / muo abani, or the night masquerade: Ayaka is distinct from daytime masquerades in that it only manifests at night, after people have gone to bed, and is renowned for its intolerance of light and



human presence. The only sounds audible from a distance are the ayaka's uncanny cries and spooky melody when it's in the wild. The harvesting season, known as the ayaka season, provides enough opportunity for leisure for the people. The ayaka is the most potent tool for social control as they are the last adjudicator in disputes between individuals.

For instance, the Igbo place a great value on mothers' roles in creating and maintaining loving, stable homes, where a mother's capacity to provide for her family plays a part in that stability. The assumption is that she will return home, no matter where she is, to make dinner and serve her family before it gets too dark. Some women, nevertheless, do not respect or share this sense of time, and they would continue to prepare the family's meals long after everyone else in the neighborhood had gone to bed. A lady like her is a social outcast, and the Igbo would label or refer to her as *ajo nwayi n 'esi ite abani* (the nasty woman that cooks late at night). Usually, their children who would have waited too long for the supper would fall asleep without eating. However, if she is unable to break her late-night cooking habit, a group of these night masquerades would visit the entire village while singing in her honor and making humorous remarks about her bad behavior. Talking about it in this manner is disgraceful, especially in light of all the wicked spirits that prowl around at night. The next day, the impact of the masquerades' performance is more noticeable as others continue to joke about and make fun of the men as well as their relationships. In the midst of the darkest hours, the Igbo people take advantage of any chance to celebrate life. This masquerade's telling is also indicative of Igboland's oral tradition, in which storytelling doesn't start until the storyteller tells the audience that there's a fantastic tale to be told. By doing this, you may make people ready and pique the curiosity of individuals who otherwise might not have listened. These young initiands are essentially exposed to the true meaning of Igbo dualism and manhood during their initiation into the masquerade cult, which is symbolized by the many masquerade forms that emerge at various periods. Above all, they learn for the first time how crucial the disguise is to upholding peace and order in the neighborhood.

Inwa Uwa In Isuikwuato: Reincarnation Divination

Among the Igbo, the notion of reincarnation is difficult to convey since, in reality, it differs from the Christian understanding of reincarnation, which describes it in terms of one body and one soul. Igbo dualism conveys the aspects of spirit and human, but it makes no mention of whether a single human becomes a single spirit at death. This is due to the Igbo people's belief in the concept of several reincarnations in various locations and generations. Additionally, it happens sometimes for a living person to reincarnate. In these cases, the Igbo people take great care to prevent interaction between the 'new' and the 'old' individuals.

The Igbo people have the belief that their gathering would result in the demise of the "old." human. While talking about the difficulty of trying to comprehend the idea of reincarnation among the Igbo people is supported by Arazu. He argues that since it is scientifically proven that all human cells are shed and replaced every seven years, the term "re-incarnation" becomes more difficult to accept as one struggle to put a name on what the Igbo believe happens to the soul after death. To provide one example, he contended that a person would have lost his or her cells seven times by



the time they died at forty-nine, and Arazu wondered rhetorically which of the seven bodies the soul reincarnates into. (Arazu 1981). The far-Eastern worldview, which holds that each individual has four bodies in total- the physical, mental, and spiritual-, is the best explanation for the Igbo reincarnation. The difficulties that arise when attempting to explain an ethnically and culturally unique conviction in a foreign language that does not share the ideology supporting the belief are part of what Arazu also draws attention to. In light of this, the word "re-incarnation" is employed here in lieu of a more appropriate one. The Igbo refer to positive spirit-souls that return after death by several names, including inwa uwa, ino uwa, and ibia uwa. The term "positive" refers to the existence of various groups of unsavory spirit-souls that continue to be born and die, causing great suffering to their individual families. Ogbanje is a phenomenon that describes a group of mischievous spirit-souls that come, die young, and return as often as they choose in order to cause their parents suffering. It is thought that they only cease when a specialized ritual (ibo iyi uwaliji ogbanje) is carried out to separate them from their kindred spirit.

However, the method of divination through which reveals the reincarnated spirit's identity is referred to as igba agu. This ceremony is often carried out in Isuikwuato by the child's father or another well-meaning relative after the child is born, and when it is not, the child always becomes ill. The majority of the time, the igba agu takes longer to complete than the birth is because there are no hard deadlines for its execution. As a result, some families would put off taking care of their child till later. One can determine the reincarnated soul's ancestry by looking at the child's maternal or paternal line. In the sense that the reincarnated spirit-soul need not have been dead for a predetermined amount of years before arriving again, time is thus irrelevant in reincarnation. In most cases, the child would also exhibit the reincarnated person's physical and behavioral characteristics. Any kind of sickness among the Igbo would need a trip to the diviner, who would utilize divination to confer with the gods and ancestors to determine the root of the ailment. As a result, when a child becomes unwell, the parents would go to the medicine man or woman, who would tell them that the infant's spirit-soul is upset because it hasn't been acknowledged and accepted.

Information about the individual who has returned and the kind of sacrifices they require in order to live a productive life on this specific journey will also be provided during the session. The gifts offered to the diviner's oracle are often presented as directed by the diviner and are typically tokens. The inquirer would typically describe his goal during divination by saying, "We have a child and we would want to know who has returned." A sort of atonement sacrifice known as igbo ota is advised in situations when the reincarnated spirit-soul was mistreated by a certain family in his or her previous incarnation in order to appease him or her and prevent them from inflicting disaster (illness and even death on the family). It is noteworthy, though, that igba agu was common practice in traditional Igbo communities where people held the belief that each child is a reincarnated soul. However, with the adoption of Christianity, many families no longer hold this belief and, as a result, do not perform this ritual for their children due to its "fetish" connotations. Following the divination, the parent would bring the information back home with him and join his friends, relatives, and neighbors to celebrate the child's identification. Gratitude and admiration would be



shown via elaborate greetings and tales of the reincarnated past life. Plans would be made as quickly as feasible to carry out any required sacrifices. Typically, a prepared meal is transported to the local shrine where it is enjoyed by the spirits and a few male relatives of the child's paternal family. The family and the guardian spirits make a covenant over this meal, which is prepared with the finest fish (azu akpakpa or azu eshu), to guarantee that the child is cared for. If the reincarnated was a male, a cock is also used in the preparation of the food; if it is a female, a hen. At the shrine, the food is consecrated by the priest, and everyone present will eat simultaneously.

Additional offerings that might be specified by the first divination include presenting prepared food at any significant intersection, close to the family home or further away on a farm, but in accordance with the diviner's advice. Putting the feast near a road intersection ensures that all the spirits receive their part, as these locations are common gathering spots for spirits. Typically, awu icheoku/ugo (the feather of a parrot or eagle) and nzu/odo (white or yellow chalk) are used for this type of sacrifice. Since the spirits are the only ones who can do it, humans do not participate in it. Osadaka, a feast for children, may also be required at other occasions. The characteristics the family desires for the reincarnated person determine the kinds of sacrifices, who makes them, and where they are offered. The ill child is anticipated to recuperate instantly when the procedure is finished. Finding and identifying the reincarnated ancestor is crucial because it provides the knowledge needed to ensure that the person receives a well-thought-out care plan that takes into account any goals they may have had for their rebirth.

Moving from the family's house to the diviner's house and return is how the performance will take place; it is not set in stone. The trail then continues to the village shrine, where it comes to an end. The more locations that the action visits, the larger the circle of performers gets. The ill child and its parents are first in line. In the third stage, when the parent comes home with the knowledge of the child's identity, a small group of family and friends assemble to greet the reincarnated spirit-soul are included. In the second stage, the diviner, the goddess Ite-ogene, and other ancestors are involved. Lastly, the family's male members and an unspecified number of other spirits join them for dinner at the shrine. Depending on the child's gender, a cock or hen, as well as feathers from eagles and parrots, serve as the ceremonial agents. Throughout the whole performance, there is simply invocation and incantation by the priest (dibia aja) and diviner (dibia afa). There is neither music nor dance.

Conclusion

The Igbo people's Ritual Performance Process clearly demonstrates their propensity to act out life. It's also clear that ceremonial procedures are not arbitrary; rather, the Igbo people have found meaning in the specific shapes and timing of these occurrences. The primary objective of this study is to better understand the techniques and forms that the Nigerian Igbo people adopt. We have accomplished this by analyzing the patterns and roles of the incredibly varied Igbo ritual performance. The universe in which the Igbo people live is multifaceted and modern, including the past, present, and future. Due to their ongoing efforts to maintain a harmonic balance through ritual performance, these cultures have a rich textural variation. They have so devised innovative



ritual performance to memorialize their interaction with the visible and invisible elements they cohabit with, and to symbolize their development through time and location in terms of biological and vocational advancement. Since the Igbo people believe that life is a gift from God, they use their rituals to respect and honor their ancestors, give thanks to God for the priceless gift of life, and ask for the assistance of both visible and invisible forces in order to live fulfilling lives.

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