

**Ika Ụta: A Value Orientation and Relationship Building
Tool for Omanne Grandchildren**

By

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Abstract

Omanne communities (Abatete, Ụmụoji and Nkpor) are cultural minded. Before the Igbo nation which Omanne is part of, was colonized by the Western world, they had their cultural values and equally devised informal measures through which they inculcate those values to their younger generations. Some of these values include brotherly love, respect for elders, respect for life, hospitality, *ikwunne*, kinship among others. *Ika ụta* is one of the avenues through which Omanne people achieved these cultural values orientation and transmission. Unfortunately, these cultural values and the means of acculturation had come into strong confrontation with the Western influence as a result of globalization. One major consequence of this obstruction on the people's way of life is incest because some blood relatives can no longer recognize themselves or trace their backgrounds . It is on this backdrop that this work deems it necessary to unravel how Omanne communities used *ika ụta* as a cultural value orientation and relationship building tool. The study reveals how *ika ụta* could integrate relatives for the purpose of identification. It is a descriptive and survey research. The theoretical framework will be anchored on Symbolic Interactionism. Data collection was by oral interview posed to randomly selected elders who

observed *ika uta* in their younger days. The interviewees' responses formed the data for the research. The literature review was carried out. Findings show that *ika uta* is not only on traditional feast days but can also come up on other occasions like traditional marriage ceremony. Another finding revealed that *ika uta* is a major tool for a consolidated familiarity not only among extended families members but also with their kins people, in Umuoji and Nkpor, there is a specific event for it known as *ime oma nne*. It also revealed that *ika uta* has been neglected which had resulted in many traditional discrepancies. This research recommends that Omani communities and the entire Igbo people should revive and retain this traditional means of cultural values transmission due to its cultural implications.

Introduction

Human to human relationship is a sine qua non towards ego boost and socialization. Socialization makes people into recognizable human beings. As a social animal, man cannot find fulfillment in a secluded world. There has always been need for him to interact with others. It is in this interaction and relationship with other people that a person's fulfillment lies. Regelski (2020) concurs with this where he posits that humans are most intensely human when engaged in acts of socialization. Igbo people understand this thus, the Igbo adage, *naanị otu onye nọrọ, odudu atagbou ya*, meaning that any man that is an Island of himself suffers. They understood the importance of socialization and carved out various means of building its solid bedrock and as well initiated certain avenue through which the proper inculcation and transfer of the values would be extended to their future generations.

Obviously, Igbo people in the precolonial era had an informal education system. They had informal procedures of training

their children that include various occasions and festivals which never come and go without the lessons therein. *Ika uto* in these various occasions, plays the role of socialization, value orientation and relationship building. The occasions and festivals include new yam festival otherwise referred to as *ilo mmuo*, *iri ede*, *uzo iyi*, marriage rites known in Igbo as *mmemme alumalu* especially traditional marriage *igba nkwu nwaanyi*, mass return, and so on. *Ika uto* is symbolic considering that it is not merely for merriment at the occasion but a means of family bonding and transmitting the cultural values. In all occasions, an attention is given to a person's family of orientation and the person's family of procreation.

The Igbo family is not simply concerned with child bearing. Child bearing involves transmitting to the child through training and examples the mode of behaviour and values which are culturally accepted, and ultimately preparing the child to become an adult who is an adjusted and effective member of the society into which he or she is born. Socialization plays some vital role in a child's upbringing and enhances connection from one generation to another (Cotgrove 1978:66). The most important features of culture is that it is learned and transmitted, and the young can acquire adaptive repertoires through the learning or socialization process. As a result, Omani communities utilize the crucial role of *ika uto* to assemble their relatives for the purpose of initiating the younger generations into their people's cultural values and their families' bond.

The ancestral father of Abatete, Umoji and Nkpor is Okoli Otie (Omani). He was believed to be an Arọchukwu man from present Abja State. He was a warrior and a farmer. Okoli Otie had four sons, Ezeogu, Ora, Ojiokodu and Dimudeke. The first son Ezeogu who according to Igbo tradition, inherited their

father's residential site, had nine male children, Nsukwu, Agbaja, Oḍida, Amaubulu/Owa, Isiuzo, Azu, Akwa, Mputu and Ogbu. In view of the nine children, Umuezogu was given the name "Mbateghete" (nine communities). In the interest of the colonial masters, they were named Abatete. Although five of these sons could not be accounted for today, the remaining four are the present clans of Abatete. Ora, the second son of Okoli Otie was not married. He died at his youthful age and had no inheritance.

Ojiokodu, the third son of Okoli Otie was believed to be the father of Umuoji. Oji had four wives who were said to be very fruitful. Because of Oji's fecundity, Umuoji was nick-named Igwulube Okodu meaning a swarm of locust. Dimudeke the fourth son, now known as Nkpor had five sons, Umusioma, Isungwu, Obuba, Amafor and Mgbacha. He was a great warrior and always ready to fight to protect his residential site and his people.

Another version of the history by Nwosu (2012:2) states that a man called Ezeogu came from Nri and settled at Abatete. Ezeogu begot three sons, Ezigwe, Okodu and Ideke. Ezigwe begot Omaliko, Okodu begot Oji and Ideke begot Dimudeke. They settled as peasant farmers to whom land was the main source of sustenance. When the population grew, the available arable land per individual family reduced, and it became imperative that some people would migrate to uninhabited virgin lands to settle and cultivate. Oji and his relations, and Dimudeke and his relations had to move out while Abatete as the first son had to stay put having inherited their father's abode. This research intends to unravel how these communities use *ika uta* to achieve value orientation, relationship building and transmit the mode of behaviour and values acceptable to society to their younger generations.

To arrange the research properly, concise history of Qmanne communities was given. Previous works of other scholars will be reviewed as they relate to this research. The research adopts the theory of symbolic interactionism to support the data. Analysis of findings will be given evaluative attention. Conclusion and summary of findings bring the research to a close.

Literature Review

The Context of *Ika Uta*

Uta means a feast, while *Ika uta* connotes invitation for a feast. In central Igbo, it is called *ikpo oriri* but many Igbo communities refer to it differently. For instance, it is called *ikpo okuka* in Agulu, *ikpo uta* in Umuoji, *ika uta* in Abetete and Nkpor. Therefore, *Uta* implies entertainment of all kinds. This implies that in every festival, ceremony and occasion, *uta* is involved. Ogbalu (nd:14) refers to *uta* as one of the entertainment and duties associated with festivals. Webmaster (2010) opines that "... in Igbo cultural setting, invitation to the festival is open to all and sundry – friends, neighbours, kin relations, acquaintances, in-laws, etc." *Uta* is not a festival per se but a feast in the period of celebration. This implies that there are different kinds of *uta*. Nwosu (2012:66) agrees with this where he states that,

When an Nkpor man gets a windfall, buys a car, completes a residential building, gets promotion in his job, gets government appointment or records any meaningful achievement, he organises a house warming party and invite relations, friends and neighbours to share his joy. He treats his

guests sumptuously with foods and drinks... A person blessed with a new born baby invites all and sundry to a party – call it naming ceremony.

There are other types of invitation for a feast like invitation to a traditional marriage ceremony or white wedding, age grade outing ceremony, among others. The type of the ceremony sometimes determines the level of involvement of the invited guests. There are some ceremonies that require the guests to or not to present their hosts with gift items. For instance, in a wedding ceremony, though not under compulsion but, courtesy demands the guests to make presentations of various kinds of gift items to the hosts after entertainment. Anyanwu, (2020:195) confirms this thus, “Members of all invited age grades appreciate the celebrant’s children with cash or other gift items as they approach their group to pay the traditional homage of welcome. Aside of this, these age grades also present gifts of cash to support the celebrant before departure.”

Explanation of Value Orientation

Value orientation means inculcating an attitude towards a number of things that have been identified as right actions and right attitudes. To talk of value orientation means there are values in existence and then a road map is set towards inculcation of those values. Stark (2004:39) observes that “Values of a culture identify its ideals, ultimate aims and the most general standard of assessing good and bad, desirable and undesirable.” When for instance, it is said that people need self-respect, dignity, and freedom or that people should always be truthful, it simply means invoking values. Stark (2004:39) maintains that “...values not only are lofty, but they are also quite general. Frequently, values are linked to religion which gives them a sacred quality.” Schwartz (2007:161) opines that

“Survey researchers view values as basic abstract motivations.” In practice however, they distinguished between values and attitude. Theorists had long considered values central to understanding social behaviour. This is because they view values as deeply rooted, abstract motivations that guide, justify, and explain attitudes, norms, opinions, and actions. Feather, 1985, Halman and Moor 1994, Rokeach, 1973, Schwartz, 1992 in Schwartz (2007:161).

Writing on values of Igbo traditional society, Okodo (2016:66) expresses that

The value of Igbo traditional society regulate the behaviours of the Igbo people. The people look out for their values in doing whatever they do so that their behaviour falls in line with standard of his society, he will feel at home, because his behaviour would be accepted. One guiding principles about maintaining values is morality.

Value orientation is the principle of right and wrong that are acceptable by an individual or a social group. It is the direction given to a person’s attitudes and thinking by his or her beliefs. Its earliest use in 1940s was found in *American Journal of Sociology*. Schwartz (2007:163) believes that basic value orientation serves not only as independent variables but also reflect the influences to which individuals and groups are exposed.

Not all values are transmitted directly. Cotgrove (1978:66) states, “The general orientation of the parent’s values may be conveyed by consistent patterns of response in a number of areas irrespective of the extent to which these values are overtly or directly expressed.” The value of consideration for others,

brotherhood or the subtle expression of one's social status in a hierarchical society, for example, may be learned by the child through a variety of behaviours, gestures and examples of which the parents may not even be conscious. Henslin (1988: 56) agrees that throughout childhood the parents, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, mould and direct the child towards acquiring the values and personality characteristics which they along with others of their class and group consider necessary for satisfactory adult life. Hoffman (1972) in Henslin (1988:56) poises that children are strongly motivated to imitate their parents, and to internalize their values and beliefs. This implies that children emulate and live the kind of life they learned from their parents and people they come in contact with. The parents may not specify that a particular process is meant for educating the younger ones but the learning takes place spontaneously.

The meaning of Relationship building

There are various definitions and types of relationship as perceived by different scholars. Types of relationships include family relationships, friendships, acquaintanceships and romantic relationships. The relationship meant here is the family relationship. Family, or relatives are people connected through some form of kinship, whether it is through blood (like with parents, brothers and sisters), marriage (like non-blood aunts (uncles' wives) and uncles (aunts' husbands) or step-parents), romantic relationships (such as a parent's girlfriend or boyfriend), or adoption. Relationship is the way by which two people, groups, communities, associations and so on behave towards each other. Webster (2021) views relationship as the relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship: such as kinship, a specific instance or type of kinship. Ezenweke & Nwadiakor (2013:63) concur that human relations are concerned with the ways of the people and their groups.

Writing on building relationships through marriages in Igbo land, Onwuzurigbo (1990:436) expresses that,

By a marriage certain existing relationships, particularly those of bride to her family, are changed. New social relations are created not only between the husband and the wife, and between the husband and the wife's relatives on one side and between the wife and the husband's relatives on the other side, but also between the relatives of the husband and those of the wife, who, on the two sides, are interested in the marriage and in the children that are expected to result from it.

These children are then nurtured in a manner that they would be able to trace their lineages, identify both their close and distant relatives. This in effect helps to deepen the intergenerational bonds. *Ika uto* is one of the major tools used to achieve this crucial objective.

Writing on the family as a very important institution in the lives of Igbo people, Alaribe, Alozie, Nwaiwu, Oko, Okoli, Okonkwo and Ujummadu (2018) posit that all relationships according to Igbo culture emanate from family. Every child born in any family begins to learn about human relationships from within the family. Ogbalu (nd:7) believes that "...when an Igbo man refers to his family (*ezi na ulo*), he means his wife or wives if he has more than one, children and whoever is dependent on him; he may also include his children's children, their wives and children." Ogbalu (nd:7) explains Igbo family as different from English concept of family in that it does not only apply to a man, his wife, and children but also includes

somewhat vaguely other relations such as in-laws, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews distant or near, or even maids and servants. The Igbo people believe that they owe a great deal of responsibility to all with whom they are related. A relation however distant has a moral claim for care and maintenance on the members of the family. This is more reason why the Igbo people devised some measures through which the cultural, traditional and family norms and values are transmitted to their descendants.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theory of symbolic interactionism. The theory was which developed from the work of a group of American philosophers who included George Herbert Mead, Max Weber, John Dewey, William James, and Herbert Blumer. Interactionism in sociology focuses on the way people act or make conscious choices regarding their behaviour that proceed from relating with others. Tischler (2002:21) states that this approach is primarily concerned with human behaviour on a person to person level. Schaefer (2005:16) observes that “...the interactionist perspective is sometimes referred to as symbolic interactionist perspective because interactionists see symbol as an especially important part of human communication. Members of a society share the social meanings of symbols.” Tischler (2002:21) agrees that “Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the meaning that people place on their own and one another’s behaviour. Human beings are unique in that what they do with one another has meaning beyond the concrete act.” Haralambos and Heald (1980:544) opine that “Without symbols there would be no human interaction and no human society. Symbolic interaction is necessary since man has no instinct to direct his behaviour. Man is not genetically programmed to react automatically to particular stimuli.” In

order to survive, he must therefore construct and live within a world of meaning.

Herbert Mead who is the major philosopher that contributed to the theory devised a symbolic interactionist approach that focuses on signs, gestures, shared rules, and written and spoken languages. From Haralambos and Heald (1980:544) point of view, “Mead’s view of human interaction sees man as both actively creating the social environment and being shaped by it.” This theory maintains that people give things meanings and act or react on the basis of these meanings. The individual initiates and directs his own actions while at the same time being influenced by the attitude and expectations of others in the form of the generalized others. Tischler (2002:21) expresses that according to symbolic interactionists, “...we go about our lives with the assumption that most people share our definitions of basic social situations. This agreement on definitions and meanings is the key to human interactions in general.”

Strength of Symbolic Interactionism Theory

- The theory recognizes the individuality of the individuals. It accepts the facts that people have their own choices, their own free will and their own understanding of things.
- Symbolic interactionism does complement functionalism and conflict theory in important ways and gives us important insight into how people react.
- Scholars of interactionism study how individuals act within society and believe that meaning is produced through interactions.
- The theory sees human as active, creative participants who construct their social world, not as passive conforming objects of socialization (Bulmer, 1969) in Creel (2011).

Weaknesses of Symbolic Interactionism Theory

- Symbolic interaction and its various offshoots have been criticized for paying too little attention to the larger elements of society.
- Symbols may be interpreted incorrectly or differently among different groups of people.
- The theory overestimates the power of individuals to create their own realities, ignoring the extent to which humans inhabit a world not of their own making (Goffman, 1974:21).
- Manis and Meltzer 1978 in Creel (2011) state that the theory neglects the emotional dimension of human conduct, focusing strictly on logical behaviour.

It seems adequate to base this study on the theory of symbolic interactionism because this theory concerns basically on the meaning people place on their own and one another's behaviour. Human beings as unique as they have meanings beyond the concrete act attached to what they do with one another, likewise, *ika uto* by Omani communities is symbolic as it conveys meaning beyond assembling people for merry making during divergent celebrations. These meanings could be interpreted differently by different groups.

It is obvious that new yam festival in various communities in Igbo land has gained wide attention and documentation by scholars and journalists such as Nwosu (2012:72), Akuma (2008) and Igbere Post (2017) in Anyanwu (2020:185), *ika uto* in Omani communities lacks adequate documentation and publicity. Works done on feasting or entertainment especially on new yam festival see the feasting as merriment that accompany the festival. None of the scholars to the best of the knowledge of the researcher sees *ika uto* (invitation to a feast) as a tool for achieving value orientation and relationship

building. It therefore proves that this topic should be given attention.

Methodology

There is normally a procedure to achieve a set goal, thus this research follows a certain method to achieve the purpose of the study.

Area of Study

The area of study of this research is the three communities (the sons of Okoli Otie) that constitute Omanne. The three communities are Abatete, Umuoji and Nkpor in Idemmili North local government area of Anambra state.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was by oral interviews posed to randomly selected individuals mainly four elders from each of the three communities which were done at the interviewees convenience and at different times. The interviewees responses, formed the data for this study. They were therefore collected, translated, transcribed and analysed. Scholarly texts were also reviewed to gather the opinion of other scholars that have written on topics related to this research work.

Data Analysis

When *Uta* is called or Avenues for *Uta*

As *uta* means *oriri* that is a feast, it means that for someone to invite others for *uta*, there must be a festival or ceremony to that effect. As stated earlier, *ika uta* is not only during traditional festival like new yam festival and *oriri ede* but could also be on a traditional ceremony like traditional marriage via *ime ego* or *igba nkwu nwaanyi*, celebration of achievements, among others. *Ika uta* meant in this research is specifically *ika uta* on new yam festival. Mr. Emmanuel Okoye 68 years believes that women are very important in each of the celebrations because of the role they play regarding cooking

and making necessary arrangements prior and during the occasion.

Hosts and guests of *Uta*

Any body can be a host but in most cases it is the grandparents who invite their children (especially their daughters married in and outside their communities) and grandchildren, nieces, nephews and cousins both within and from other communities. In cultural festivals like the new yam festival, *ilo mmuo* christened *iri ji*, it is the grandfathers that are the hosts while grandmothers play the hosting role during *erim ede* in Abatete as Umuoji and Nkpor communities do not celebrate *erim ede*. The grandfathers host during the new yam festival because yam in Igbo land is the king of all crops. The mothers take charge during *erim ede* because they plant cocoyam as it is in Igbo belief system.

Iri ji is usually on the eight month of the year according to Igbo traditional calender. Abatete community celebrates *iri ji* on *Eke* market day while in Umuoji and Nkpor, it is being celebrated on *Afo* market day. Though the men are hosts, women still play important roles. Married daughters and their children referred to as *ndi nwadiala*, friends and relatives are invited. The married daughters and their children come from wherever they are married to and honour the invitation. The invitation may be given to the guests seven or more days ahead of the date. The relationship is symbiotic in that these married daughters as well, invite their relatives during their own festivals and ceremonies. By virtue of this, their children and grandchildren get to know one another. This helps a great deal to trace and identify relatives especially when choosing marriage partners as Igbo people do not intermarry up to fourth to sixth generation. New yam festival in the modern time does not only provide the platform to call home sons, daughters and relatives

abroad to reaffirm and renew the brotherhood bond, it also brings to mind a sense of belonging and avails the opportunity to plan for family and community development.

Ika uto can as well be among friends. This implies that friends can host one another in the period of different celebrations. For instance, Mr. Samuel Okoye 81 years from Umuoji explained the symbiotic relationship between him and his friend; how he used to invite his friend from Abatete during *iri ji* Umuoji and his friend in return invites him during *emume Omaliko* Abatete. Moreso, a man or woman who plans to give out his or her daughter in marriage invites his or her friends to the marriage celebration. This invitation is equally *ika uto*. Obviously, one will attend a friend's invitation differently from that of a blood brother or sister. In case of a blood relation, for instance in a woman's family of orientation, she may have to go a day or two days earlier to enable her participate in proper and necessary arrangements. Sometimes, the woman may have to go with her children who equally contribute their own qota to the success of the occasion. Here again, *ika uto* plays the role of value orientation and relationship building as those children by virtue of spending days in their mother's natal home are more exposed to learning their family values. This also avails the children the opportunity to understand their mother's parentage and family of orientation.

Apart from *ika uto* (invitation for a feast) which can come up in any occasion for celebration, Umuoji and Nkpor communities have an event known as *ime oma*. It is a meeting specifically of all blood related individuals for the purpose of integration and spelling out their relationships. The eldest daughter of each family is obliged to convey the meeting for her blood relatives. Where the eldest daughter is deceased, the immediate younger sister in the family lineage is taken as the

eldest and will then be in the position to convey the meeting on an agreed date. Attendees will include her children, children's children, brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles. Nwosu (2012:79) affirms that "Daughters of the same mother get married and dispersed to different towns, some not even neighbouring towns." These cousins use this ceremony of *ime oma* as an opportunity of meeting, knowing and interacting with one another. For the *ime oma nne* ceremony, all of them travel from far and near to their grandmother's home or to the house of whoever is *isi oma*. They develop intimacy and think home philosophy. Mr. Izundu Akubue 67 years from Dimeche Umuoji said that the convener of the *oma nne* meeting schedules it conveniently in her house and she is called *isi oma*. Every effort is made to make sure that every supposed attendee is in attendance. She is obliged to prepare either pounded yam or cocoyam but never fufu for the meal. The host provides the entertainment as she can afford. Nwosu (2012:79) agrees that *ime oma nne* custom is dying out but it is not only worth reviving but should be extended to *ime oma nna*. With high level of urbanization and modern development, it is the men who leave their family of orientation and disperse in diaspora in search of greener pasture. Their children hardly ever go home and consequently do not know who their relatives are. Nwosu (2012:79) opines that it is fit and proper that *ime oma nna* be introduced. The father should from time to time send the children home to interact with their relatives, know them and strike up intimacy. In this way, the value of visiting home people is inculcated and abomination of relatives hooking up in marriages averted.

There is a clear distinction between *ika uta* and *ime oma* though, they could be used to achieve the same purpose. In *uta*, relations both close (blood) and distant, friends, and wellwishers are invited, but *ime oma* is meant specifically for

blood relations. Again, anybody can play the host role in *ika ụta*, but in *ime oma*, it is only the eldest surviving daughter in the family lineage that convene it.

Preparations for Ụta on New Yam Festival

Prior to the festival day, the women would prepare oil beansed salad *ukpaka* which they prepare and arrange it in a way it will be ready on the feast day. Every family would make sure they clear and clean their compounds and also scrub their houses. The children eagerly look forward to the feast day and zealously fetch enough water and firewood in anticipation. Some host used the period as an opportunity to provide some of the things they needed in the house. For instance, a household that needs mat may be making due with the ones available to them and planning on when to buy more; but as soon as the feast day approaches, the household would have no option than to buy as many as would be enough for their guests. This is because some guests usually sleep over after the feast day. Also, there are some celebrations that last for days in which case there must surely be guests that will spend a night or two in their host's house.

Guests especially *ndi nwadiala* (the daughter's children) on their sides have a role to play. Sometimes they may come with whatever valuable or gift items their hosts may need like fish or any food stuff. They will present those items to their hosts as what they used to support the hosting. According to Mr. Emmenuel Okoye, during the new yam festival, *ndi nwadiala* are obliged to also come with items like kegs of palmwine known as *mmanya nwadiala* and kolanuts. Some will also come with tubers of yam and cock which they preferably use to prepare the meal on that day.

On the new yam festival day, most families would either roast yam or boil the yam, then blend red oil, the oil beanseed salad, fresh pepper and salt to make a delicious meal for the entire family. It is the duty of the grandfathers to provide enough yam and money to buy other things that the family might need. The grandmothers dutifully go to Eke market to buy food items they may need. The Omanne grandfathers would also go to the market very early and buy palmwine. Sometimes, people make demand directly from the palmwine tappers who they believe are honest and professionals. The tappers would prepare the palmwine and deliver according to demand. When the meal is ready, every head of the family would be served in his *obi* (ancestral homestead) from where he proceeds to the kindred's *okpesi* (ancestral cult symbol). There each head of the family will offer their ancestors their own share of the drink, kolanut and roasted yam in worship and thank them for a successful and bountiful harvest. After this, the feast starts in earnest.

The second day is for *anyam okuko* meaning smoking the chicken and there is usually a part that solely belongs to *ndi nwadiala* and is called *nsọ okuko*. This part of meat together with the whole meat must that have been boiled the previous day, is kept in the *ngiga* or *oku*. Then, on this second day, every family makes fire in their hearth to smoke the chicken before they share it among themselves keeping the *nsọ okuko* for the daughter's children. They gather the meat and food kept for them in evening and go back to their homes.

The grandchildren always look hopefully forward to the merriment the celebration offers. It also features Igbo cultural activities including cultural dances by men and women, and masquerade dances. The children enjoy this aspect of the festival most because it avails those of them from other communities the opportunity to watch different scenes.

The new yam festival *iri ji* or *iwa ji* is a christened name for *ilo mmuo* festival, an ancestral feast that has been with the Igbo from the time of Igbo first ancestor. Though in the olden days, every part of Igbo land has a name for it. For instance, in Nkpor, it was referred to as *Udo na Ajana*. It changed to *iri ji ohuru* when the early Christian converts started developing cold feet to partaking in the festival which they argued had traditional religion undertone and links with deities. The change of name then became necessary to accommodate the Christian converts and their new faith. Presently, some Christians rather than going to their families *okpesi*, they take their yam harvest to the church to bless before they eat on the new yam festival day. Some other Christians do not care whether they take their first harvest to church or not before they start consumption. However, the question here is, are the Igbo Christians right to move from the essence of the feast having been involved also in celebrating sainthood of Christendom? This study believes they have no right since “*ihe di be odu, dikwa be ogini.*” Ancestral feast is peculiar to Igbo nation. Among the Chinese according to Anedo and Anedo (2019), it is called “tomb sweeping” which takes the diaspora Chinese home for bonding with the local Chinese and their ancestral spirits.

Social Implications of Ika Uta

Ika uta helps not only Omani people but Igbo communities in general to identify and trace their genealogies. The children particularly enjoy it most as it avails them the opportunity to visit new environments. Mr. Emmanuel Okoye 68 years affirmed that as children, they did not pay much attention on the food offered them during *ika uta* but they were more interested on things like going to the stream to play because their maternal grandparents lived in the remote area. They had many fruits especially mangoes which they enjoyed more than any food given to them. Mr. Emmanuel Okoye also stated that what their

children guests enjoyed most was to admire big and modern houses and to watch moving vehicles because their house in Agbaja Abatete was situated in a more developed area. Webmaster (2010) confirms that “Guests of the celebrating community pour in large numbers to appreciate their hosts with excitement and applause as dances and songs, shooting of guns by young and old, drumming and sounding of the big wooden gong and indeed all else provide a vibrant social ambiance.” This socialization is very important and symbolic to the Omanne communities and Igbo nation at large. Indeed, it cultivates lineage, kinship, neighbourhood, workplace, school, business and friendship connection.

Moreso, *ika uto* was used to indoctrinate the seriousness of blood relationships in Igbo land. It enhanced good and lasting relationship. Mr. Emmanuel Okoye narrated that their parents (his maternal grandmother and her siblings) used to utilize the symbiotic nature of *ika uto*. Now their grandparents are dead but the relationship they built still exists decades after their deaths. He believes it is more pronounced and grounded when mothers are seriously involved in building the relationships noting that most fathers are not usually as keen as the mothers to foster the age long relationships. *Ika uto* is essentially symbolic in that it is not only for the sake of the celebration instead as the theory of interactionism states, there is a shared meaning attached to the meeting together of the relatives. This meaning is indoctrinating brotherhood bonds which the families share and try to inculcate in their younger generations through *ika uto*.

Reasons Why *Ika Uta* is Presently less Influential

There are some factors that contributed to declined sway of *ika uto*. They are as follow,

Western Culture Influence

Western culture has always be in contrast with most of the Africans' ways of life. Omanne communities like other Africans presently prefer Western life style to their African life. Worst of it all, the Western influence has eaten deep into the lives of modern Omanne people that they hold virtually all Western life style superior to Africans'. Mr. Emmanuel Okoye narrated that some modern Omanne parents and grandparents have failed to train their children on their indigenous values, institutions and heritage. Mr. Emmanuel Okoye believes that the modern Omanne children are the product of Europe, not Africa. He cited an example on how most Christians neglect and disassociate themselves from the local masquerades that are meant for entertainment during *ilo mmuo* and other traditional festivals while the same Christians have their own father Christmas equally used for entertainment during the Christmas period.

Again, urban proletariat and creation of new social groups as a result of industrial revolution also contribute to less influence of *ika uta* especially during traditional festivals like the new yam festival. Many urban dwellers presently find it difficult to travel to their villages either because such people consider life in villages boring or they are simply afraid of some of their kinspeople who are believed to be diabolical. Moreso, some grandparents to host the feast during traditional festivals reside at the cities and some may not care to travel home for the festival. In this case, both the hosts and the supposed guests are city dwellers. Mingling with other people with divergent norms and values has affected some members of Omanne community that they consider the festivals fetishious and waste of time.

Exposure to Western education has exposed Omanne people greatly to the Western culture. Also, most Igbo people usually

underrate what is indegneous to them. Consequently, some litrate population no longer deem it necessary to engage in such traditional adventure as *ika uto*. They rather believe it is a waste of time and obsolete.

Christian Religious Influence

The advent of the missionaries that brought Christianity had jeopardized African cultural values. Those cultural practices that helped Omani people to inculcate and transmit values on their younger generations are neglected. *Ika uto* is now seen either as an outdated or impure practice which the Christians must not partake in order not to contaminate their Christian faith. This belief holds as values are linked to religion which gives them sacred quality. The Christians believe that cultural festivals are tools for African traditional religion propagation, hence, the Christians should never partake in it. Prof. Ikechukwu A. Okodo and Mr. Izundu Akubue (in oral interview) opined that one cannot pay quality and meaningful attention to a belief he or she does not share. Unfortunately, most Christians who could have used *ika uto* during their Christian celebrations like Christmas to replace that of cultural festivals, are seen taking their children to eateries, event centers and places that add no quality cultural values in the children.

Globalization

As societies evolve, they become larger and more heterogeneous. Most communities which include Omani people (Abatete, Umuoji and Nkpor) are now heterogeneous. They presently interact with foreign cultures as a result of migration and tolerating other cultures in their domain. Socialization with alien cultures presently contribute to the abandonment of African olden ways of life. Gelles & Levine (1999:109) confirm that one of the three major sources of large-

scale cultural change is contact with other groups whose norms, values and technology are entirely different.

Again, due to industrial revolution, family members are spread across the nations of the world. Many grandparents presently live in various cities abroad very far from their children and their children's children. Some of these families hardly remember when the cultural festivals in their communities hold. Even when they do, they do not consider travelling home. Either because for them it is archaic or fetish, or it is not a worthy task. Though there are few families that still endeavour to grace the occasion but they are in the minority. For these kinds of families, Mr. Izundu Akubue lamented that the symbolic feature of *ika uta* has been lost.

Degrading Interest in African Traditional Values

All the above mentioned factors that is Western culture influence, Christian religious influence, and globalization contribute to degrading interest in most African traditional values. This lost of interest especially in *ika uta* during traditional festivals celebrations undoubtedly have led to marriages between blood related individuals. Most modern parents have failed to propagate these traditional valuables tools thereby mortgagging the intentions of the progenitors. Some families hurriedly go into marital union without the proper investigation *iju ase* obtainable in Igbo culture. Mr. Samuel Okoye 81 years from Umuoji explained that Igbo people do not intermarry up to four generations but from four to six generations can marry after a particular separation process called *ita nzu* or "*ini onuigbo*" in Ikem, Anambra East. Mr. Samuel Okoye maintained that after *ita nzu*, the couple can proceed with the marriage and procreate while failure to undergo the *ita nzu* may lead to catastrophes in the marriage

like unfruitfulness. cases of stillbirth, lunatics or even death of either of the couple.

Summary of Findings

Findings revealed that though Abatete, Umuoji and Nkpor are brothers, Umuoji and Nkpor do not celebrate *erim ede* like Abatete. These communities observe *uta* generally but Umuoji and Nkpor had *ime oma* or *ime oma nne* specifically meant to bring blood relatives closer.

This research has been able to disclose that *ika uta* and *ime oma* are now less influential because of changing time. Consequently, there has been some traditional discrepancies such as marriages between blood related individuals which most times result in cases of unfruitfulness in marriages, sudden death of either of the couple, and still birth among others.

Ilo mmufo is celebrated on Eke market day in Abatete while in Umuoji and Nkpor, it is on Afọ market day.

Conclusion

Cultural celebrations in Igbo land are not just for merriment instead they are symbolic. For instance, *ika uta* which means invitation for a feast is equally meant to bring relations together for socialization. Through this, Igbo people achieve traditional values inculcation in the children and relationship building enhancement. Already existing relationships are also solidified in such a way that it will be transgenerational. This research has elucidated (the whole process of) on *ika uta* as a tool for value orientation and relationship building. As enumerated above, this interaction among (Omanne) Abatete, Umuoji and Nkpor grandchildren is not merely for the sake of merriment but at the same time symbolic in that its meaning goes beyond just coming together to feast. Just as the symbolic interactionism

reveals that individuals interpret the social world in which they participate. Adopting the survey research method, the researcher interpreted and analyzed the data which was collected through in-depth oral interviews. In the analysis the research noted the roles of hosts and guest of *uta* particularly the grandparents, children and grandchildren. The research revealed that *ika uta* among Omani Communities is presently less influential as a result of Western culture influence among other factors. *Ika uta* and *ime oma* could be used to curtail incest occurrences and its implications among modern Omani children. The research recommends that *ika uta* should be revived and taken more seriously. Christians and all parents in Igbo land can employ Christmas period to bring their families together to facilitate cultural and traditional value orientation in the future generations. Anthropology scholars are encouraged to document on the tools for Igbo cultural propagation like *ika uta* which seem neglected so as not to go extinct.

Unstructured Interview Questions

- (a) What is *ika uta*?
- (b) Who is the host and guest of *uta*?
- (c) Is there any particular occasion for *ika uta*, or is it whenever one desires?
- (d) How does the host prepare for the feast and does the guest have any responsibility?
- (e) Does *ika uta* help relatives in any way to identify one another and renew bonds?

Some of the Interviewed Persons

Prof. Ikechukwu Okodo from Abatete 64 years, interviewed in his office at the faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka around 12:30pm on July 2 2021.

Mrs. Cecilia Chukwurah 67 years, interviewed in her house around 11:30am on August 17 2021.

Mr. Samuel Okoye from Umuoji 81 years, interviewed in his house around 4:00pm

Mr. Emmanuel Okoye from Abatete 68 years, interviewed in his house around 11:25am on 15 September 2021

Mr. Izundu Akubue from Umuoji 67 years, interviewed in his house around 6:08pm on September 22 2021

Mr. Jerome Okagbue from Nkpor 71 years, interviewed in his house around 6:24pm on October 3 2021

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