

# **OMENALA AND OMENACHUKWU IN IGBO WORLD VIEW: A PHILOSOPHICAL EQUIPOISE**

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## **Abstract**

*Omenala* and *Omenachukwu* are wings of basic and fundamental human trado-religious activities and interactions in Igbo society. *Omenala* as basic *human culture* can be defined as shared pattern of behaviour and interactions, cognitive constructions and affective understanding that are learnt through a process of inter and intra socialization. *Omenachukwu* translates essentially as *Divine Culture* and in a large sense, Christianity and by extension, inculturation. *Omenala* and *Omenachukwu* are basic human activities within human society in relation to a patterned way of life as well as to a *being* of a sort. In this paper, the researcher using the method of unaided critical analysis finds out that in Igbo Society, between *omenala* and *omenachukwu* is a vital activity seen in 'ome' and the conjunction 'na' relates the activity either to culture as expressed in the concept of *ala* and *Chukwu* as to a supreme being.

**Keywords:** *Omenala*, *Omenachukwu*, Tradition, Religion, Culture, Socialization

## **Introduction**

The Igbo is an ethnic group native to the present-day south-central and southeastern Nigeria. Geographically, the Igbo homeland is divided into two unequal sections by the Niger River; an eastern (which is the larger of the two) and a western section. The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. They are socially and culturally diverse. Igbo culture (*Omenala*) includes the customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo people. They have a dynamic and fascinating cultural heritage that says much about them. It

comprises archaic practices as well as new concepts added into the Igbo culture either by cultural evolution or by outside influence. These customs and traditions include the Igbo people's visual art, music and dance forms, as well as their attire, cuisine and language. Because of their various subgroups, the variety of their culture is heightened further. The foundation of these customs is laid through the *Odinala*.

*Odinala* comprises the traditional religious practices and cultural beliefs of the Igbo people. *Odinala* has monotheistic and pan-entheistic attributes, having a single God as the source of all things. They believe that the divine pervades and interpenetrates every part of the universe and also beyond time and space. God is the soul of the universe; the universal spirit everywhere, which at the same time transcends all things created. Although, a pantheon of spirits exists, these are lesser spirits prevalent in *Odinala* expressly serving as elements of *Chineke*, the Supreme Being or High God (Alulezy, 2010).

When two different religious systems exist in one community, the tendencies of conflicts of socio-religious, ideological, physical, and even political characters will arise between them. The Igbo community is not an exception. Although, many Igbo people are now Christians, traditional Igbo practices still abound. The traditional Igbo religious practices includes an uncontested general reverence for Ala or Ana, the earth goddess or mother earth, and beliefs and rituals related to numerous other male and female deities, spirits, and ancestors, who protect their living descendants. Revelation of the will of certain deities is sought through oracles and divination. The primordial earth goddess and other deified spirits have shrines and temples of worship and affect the living in very real and direct ways. Ala encapsulates both politics and religion in Igbo society by fusing together space, custom, and ethics

(*Omenala*); some refer to Ala as the constitutional deity of the Igbo (Okeke, Ibenwa & Okeke, 2017).

*Ndigbo* (The Igbo people) are very religious people as man is naturally *homo religiousus*. They mystify a lot of things even when a mystery is not part of it and not needed. So many mysteries that have to do with *Odinala*, *Omenala* and *Nso Ala* (abomination) abound in the Igbo society today breeding conflicts even between brothers and kinsmen. Many adherent Christians do not want to partake in some rituals which they consider idolatrous. In a family at Achalla in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State, a family is said to have buried three of their members in one year because they refused to conform to burying of the first in the evil forest 'Ajo-ani' nor refuse to bring a goat "Ewu Aja-ani" to the shrine to appease the mother earth for burying her children in a family compound because they termed it idolatrous. They insisted even after the third person has died.

The fulcrum of Igbo customs and traditions is centred on eating and drinking and possibly on how to handle their women. When they execute this, they try to attack a little mystery behind it with some human agents; diviners and seers, whose sole responsibility is to bring the culprits to book if they refuse to comply. To a very good extent, these laws lack charity and some basic consideration that enhances belongingness. If not, how can an orphan who can barely feed himself be asked to buy a goat to bury his dead father and be watched to sell off the only piece of land left to execute this. This eating and drinking is good when one can afford it but becomes a wicked act when one is forced to go out of his way, possibly sells valuables and borrows with huge interest to be able to do it.

Even though this paper does not wish to examine the cause of those deaths but that we, as Ndi Igbo, should come to an agreement and bring to a balance some of those things that we benefit from as a community and not try to mystify them nor use them as strong source of conflict among our own. The problem may not be in the activity nor with the spirit 'Alusi' but with us the living who would wish to stand between the accused and the gods "Alusi" possibly because of some fringe benefits attached to them and in the above case, a goat "Ewu Aja-ani" which will be slaughtered and eaten by the kinsmen. What we refer to as Christian tradition today were some Jewish and Romans customs and practices that were Christianized. The Christians adopted and Christianized it, today, the whole world has accepted of it as a universal norm. All the months of the year except August which was given after Caesar Augustus are the names of Greek gods. Some of the days of the week were given in honour of Greek gods. eg. The day of the week "Sunday" was given after the sun god.

### **Tradition, Culture and Religion: Unhealthy Misinterpretation and Mélange**

Culture is the general social practice and habits in a region. It includes social behaviour, communication code, respect, etiquette, business commitment, dressing, food habits, importance to law and order, respecting civic sense, relationships etc. Usually culture is limited to regions and province. Tradition is the crude belief and following one's practice which is the culture or sectarian beliefs, rituals or folklore. Usually, tradition spans regions, provinces and languages. Religion is the grouping of people with a similar supernatural or surreal belief irrespective of their languages, nationality, tradition and culture. Unfortunately, tradition, culture and religion are often misunderstood and juxtaposed for each other. This mixture is what has contributed to so many

Onebunne *Omenala* and *Omenachukwu* in Igbo ... religious and cultural crises in our society today. Even though we must agree that there is a thin line difference between them, they relate to each other yet, they are not the same.

When a cultural practice covers a geographical location over a period of time, it becomes a tradition and when part of our culture and tradition that has to do with God or a god, then it becomes a religious practice or the practice of religion. This paper advocates that we bring to the equilibrium some rituals and traditions, give options where necessary and make some activities optional. If one declines, let us live him in the hands of the gods (If we so believe) and not go out of our way to hurt and chastise them even in their challenge. Let us preach belongingness and communalism. Let us modify some to suit the dispensation and era we are in that we may be one people in mind and heart.

## **Conceptual Definitions**

### **Meaning of Equipoise**

Equipoise, as defined by the Merriam Webster online Dictionary, simply means a state of balance or equilibrium. It was etymologically coined from the two words equal and poise. It means having a gracious tact in coping and handling matters that has to do with two concept often related but are treated differently. It is also defined as pleasant and tranquility in dealing with two notion, ideas and perceptions often of the same rank but treated unequally because of poor value system and lack of understanding.

### **Concept of *Omenala***

*Omenala Ndigbo* are the customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo People. It comprises archaic practices as well as new concepts added into the Igbo culture either by cultural evolution or by outside influence. These customs and traditions

include the Igbo people's visual art, music and dance forms, as well as their attire, cuisine and language dialects. *Omenala* is synonymous with culture which can be generally summarized as people's way of life. It incorporates their language, belief system, moral obligations, statutory rights and responsibility, music, dressing, feasts and festivities. Avruch (1998) as cited in Schwartz (1992) culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves (p. 17).

Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another (Hofstede, 1994, p. 5). It is the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next' (Matsumoto, 1996, p. 16). 'Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour' (Spencer, 2008, p. 3).

### **Concept of *Omenachukwu***

*Omenachukwu* is a new Igbo philosophical concept adapted to Christianize basic Igbo cultural practices, shaving it from idolatry and the worship of the earth god "Ala" because the earth was made for man's use and not to be worshipped by man. *Omenachukwu* involve the application of some level of liberality in all our cultural practices, such that everyone will be well incorporated and it will stand the test of time. It involves the practice of *Omenala* such that it will reflect what

is acceptable in the contemporary society. It may also involve the creation of options where necessary and the idea of redressing it when necessary to stand the test of the moment.

### **Concept of Religion**

Religion is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, and involve devotional and ritual observances. They also often contain a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. Ever since the world began, man has demonstrated a natural inclination towards faith and worship of anything he considered superior/difficult to understand. Man is a *homo religiousus* that is a religious being. Man therefore is religious by nature since he is *homo cogitans* (thinking being) and *homo sapiens* (wise man). He is therefore conscious of a supreme being. There is this innate push to worship something. However, if religion does not exist, if there is nothing like religion, man must have created one. This is because man must worship something. His religion consisted of trying to appease and get favors from the Supreme Being he feared. This resulted in performing rituals (some of them barbaric) and keeping traditions or laws to earn goodness and/or everlasting life.

### **Basic Components and Cultural Practices of the Igbo (*Omenala Igbo*)**

#### **Language**

The relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted. Language is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Different ideas stem from differing language use within one's culture and the whole intertwining of these relationships start at one's birth. When an infant is born, it is not until the child is exposed to their surroundings that they become individuals in and of their cultural group. The

understanding of a culture and its people can be enhanced by the knowledge of their language. This brings us to an interesting point brought up by Emmitt and Pollock (1997), who argue that even though people are brought up under similar behavioural backgrounds or cultural situations but however speak different languages, their world view may be very different. Different thoughts are brought about by the use of different forms of language. One is limited by the language used to express one's ideas. (Emmitt & Pollock, 1997).

The first and most important factor in *Omenala* is the language. This is the first inheritance of the child as soon as he is born. All other forms of culture and religious practices depend to a very good extent on the language with which it will be transmitted to the people and to be adopted by the people as a way of live. Speaking a language breeds trust and acceptance. It gives man a sense of belonging with the society. If the church must transform or Christianize the society, so much need to be done on the area of language. Our language must to a very large extent be the language of the community. This is a major reason most people in the villages identify with only the orthodox churches because they have a language that understands them, identifies them and makes them belong. You might be saying very wonderful things, with a very sweet ascent and correct grammar, if your language is not understood, then you have not communicated. To communicate and preach the gospel effectively, you need the language and language here must be the language of the people

### **Belief System**

Igbo religious belief distinguishes between three types of supernatural beings: God, the spirits, and the ancestors. Ndigbo believe that there is only one Supreme Being, who is variously known in different parts of Igboland as *Chukwu*, *Chineke*,



Onebunne *Omenala and Omenachukwu in Igbo ... Ezechitoke, Osebuluwa or Obasi di n'elu.* Each name privileges certain attributes. He created the world and sustains it from above, and one of his praise names is (Ama ama amasi amasi) "The one who is known but never fully known." Igbo parents honor *Chukwu* by naming their children in praise of his power: Chukwudi ("God lives"), Chukwunyelu ("God gave"), Chukwuneki ("God creates"), Chukwuka ("God is greater"), Ifeanyichukwu ("Nothing impossible with God"). (Uzor, 2004).

*Chukwu* is seen as a powerful, munificent God, the one who holds the knife and the yam and provides people with wealth, rain, and children, and who is merciful towards the rich and poor, male and female, child and aged. *Chukwu* does not intervene in the minor details of human existence, however; such matters he leaves to the spirits and ancestors, who are often described as his messengers (Mbiti, 1970).

The spirits "Alukwusi" shortened as "Alusi" are powerful beings who inhabit the three dimensions of space—sky, earth (land and water) and ancestral world. As the name implies, it is a being erected to bring an end to evil in the society and strikes or manifests whenever there is one. It judges between brothers to bring an end to conflict. There are several categories of spirits. The guardian spirit of the earth is *Ani/Ala*, the earth mother. There is also a spirit associated with each day of the Igbo four-day week: *Eke, Ori, Afor, and Nkwo*. Patron spirits serve as guardians of hunters, farmers, fishermen, medicine men, and other professional guilds; the matron spirit is called *Nne Miri*. Marine spirits inhabit rivers and streams (Uzor, 2004).

The Igbo believes that everything revolves around *Ala or Ani* because it is viewed as the sustainer. Everything came into

existence through it including man and to it shall all return none can fully exist without having regular contact with it. Because there is a life after here, one who commits an abomination “Nso ani” cannot have peace here and hereafter if he does not appease Ala by performing some rituals to appease the mother earth. Human spirits, called chi, determine each individual's destiny. Spirit forces energize medicine that individuals can conjure and deploy for strength, protection, or to harm enemies. Ancestral spirits are the living dead who inhabit the spirit world but are involved in the lives of progenies in the human world. During festivals, they visit the human world as guests in form of masquerades. Evil spirits live in both human and spirit worlds. Only those who lived honest lives, did not die from inexplicable diseases, and had full burial rites can be ancestors or reincarnate. The spirits of evil people wander as “Akalogolu” who appear on lonely farm roads to frighten people. Among the most dreaded evil spirits are *Ogbanje*— spirits who manifest as children, covenanted to return to the marine world after a brief sojourn among human families. Their mission is to participate exuberantly in life events, tantalizing parents with their excessive beauty, friendliness, joy of living, and precocious habits. Near the appointed time of return, they develop unusual illnesses and die very suddenly. Body marks at birth may betray an *Ogbanje* child (modern medicine suspect sickle cell anemia).

Benevolent spirits have shrines, priests, and religious festivals as part of their worship. The wicked spirits receive no regular cultic activity except the occasional offering made with the left hand as the supplicant asks to be left alone. Major ancestors have statues, which recall their spiritual power, located at a family shrine. Before drinking palm wine, the Igbo pour out a few drops in honor of the ancestors. The ancestors are believed to help the living reap a good harvest, have many children, and

protect the family from misfortunes. Ancestors may also be reincarnated among the children of their descendants (Oborji, 2002).

Sacrifice is central in Igbo religious life. Sacrifices are offered for the expiation of sins, for protection from misfortune, to petition for assistance, and to offer thanks. Most are offered to spirits and ancestors, but in certain cases sacrifices of white chickens are offered directly to Chukwu. Sacrifices at family shrines are performed by the senior man of the family. Each spirit has its own priests who perform sacrifices at the shrine. Offerings include eggs, chickens, fruits, goats, cows, and (in a few rare cases of community sacrifices) human beings. Sometimes the victim—animal or human—is offered to a spirit and a little of its blood is shed as a sign of an offering, but the victim is allowed to live as a devotee who is consecrated to the spirit. Human sacrifices are sometimes connected with adjudication of disputes at oracular shrines. Oracles are graded according to purview. The eight with the widest geographical patronage that extended beyond Igbo land were *Ogbunorie*, *Igwe-ka-Ala*, *Kamalu*, *Ogwugwu*, *Udo*, *Arobinagu*, *Amadioha* and *Ibini Ukpabi*. (Alulezy, 2010).

Healing is central to Igbo religion. *Ndi dibia ogwu or Dibia Mgborogwu* (Herbalists) and Ezenwanyi employ a variety of techniques to discern the spiritual cause of a particular malady or misfortune: a violation of taboos/prohibitions, moral failure, an offense against a spirit, or a bad personal fate (*chi*). A spirit, *Agwu*, possesses the herbalist after he recites incantations, and it identifies the herb for the cure. Social control models include socialization into acceptable values (*Omenala*), restriction through satires and peer joking relationships, punishment for those who flout the salient values, and reward for those who uphold them. Each control is legitimized with religion. For

instance, theft from a farm threatens the food security of the community, so the elders invoke the spirits of *Ahajioku* (The god of the yam who also guards farms), *Ani/Ala* (the earth mother), or ancestors to detect and punish the thief. The earth spirit and ancestors serve as guardians of morality. The most serious crimes are abominations committed against the earth spirit, such as patricide, suicide, incest, theft of crops or livestock and killing sacred animals. Itinerant priests conduct the expiation of such abominations. Ndigbo employ covenants with the gods of their fathers to preserve social order, enhance the well-being of individuals and communities, and preserve the highest values, *nka na nzere* —long life and prosperity. They sacralize the whole of life (Ene, 2010).

The Igbo believes that it is only spirits that is worthy of our worship. God is a spirit and so they believe in God and they worship him as such. They believe that Jesus is a good man or a prophet who by the life he lived can be an “Alukwusi” because he lived a life that desires to bring an end to evil. They disagree with the Christian notion that Jesus is God and should be given equal worship with the maker of heaven and earth because he was not a spirit; he was seen with human eyes, he dined and wined with men. It is wrong to refer to an Igbo man who practices African Religion as a heathen because they believe in God. An ardent Igbo Traditional believer believes that life is in the blood and so animals should neither be killed for no spiritual purpose nor just for meat sake. Such blood, they say is a wasted blood. Animal, as in the Old Testament before the flood (Genesis 9:3), is meant primarily for sacrifice so also they believe that animals should not be killed for no sacrificial purpose.

### **Igbo Family Ceremonies**

Birth, marriage and burial are considered the three most important family events in Igbo culture. Birth is considered the only process of bearing or bringing forth offspring. The human species cannot possibly regenerate without the process of bearing children. If the Igbo species must continue, then they must procreate their kind. Again, reincarnation, which is their major religious believe, is not possible without the breeding of new species. For these species to come about they need a home fathered by a man and mothered by a woman which is made possible through marriage. When a good man lived to a ripe old age, he is expected to go and join his ancestors in their protective job for the living. He also has the privilege of reincarnating if he lived a just and fair life, then he must have been accorded his full burial rights.

### **Childbirth**

Jannah (2015) said that the significance of childbirth to Igbos is reflected in the kind of names Igbos gives to their newborns. For example: Nwakaego means “Having a child is greater than having money,” Ginikanwa means “What is great than a child?” Nwaamaka means “Childbirth is beautiful”, Nwabueze means “Every child is a king,” Ifeyinwa means “Nothing can be compared to a child” etc. They believe that it is not just the parents of a child that own the child. Again, names reflect this belief. Take for instance; Adaora means “Daughter of the community,” Obiora means “Aspiration of the community” etc. Another deep-rooted belief Igbos have concerning childbirth is that Childbirth unites families, streets, and communities through marriage and the institution of the home.

To further indicate how important childbirth is to Igbos, let's mention four (4) customs and traditions of the Igbos that revolve on childbirth. They are: Omugwo, Circumcision, Child Naming Ceremony and the Payment of homage to newborn.

**Omugwo:** Dimeji-Ajayi (2018) said *Omugwo* is a traditional Igbo custom for postpartum care by the mother of the couple. The importance of this practice is that it helps the new mother to ease into her new role through the experience of the mother (husband or wife). After childbirth, the grandmother helps the new mother with hot water therapy and sitz bath. Hot water therapy involves soaking a cloth in hot water and using it to massage the new mother's belly. Sitz bath is a necessary practice if the new mother gave birth vaginally so that blood clots in her womb can come out so she can heal properly internally.

The new mother will be given spicy foods such as pepper soup to help flush out unwanted blood clots in her body and help to boost breast milk production. Pap is also another food option given to the new mother as it helps to boost her breast milk supply. After-birth care, *Omugwo*, is necessary so that the new mother can rest well to regain her strength and in the good supply of the necessary ingredients for breast milk.

**Ibi Ugwu:** *Ibi Ugwu* (male circumcision) is the removal of the foreskin covering the head of a penis. It is an ancient Igbo tradition and practice that has its origin in our traditional religious rites. *Ibi ugwu* is done on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after birth, which incidentally is same as two weeks in Igbo calendar. Our forefathers recommended *ibi ugwu* to prevent and treat the inability to retract the foreskin of the penis or to treat an infection of the penis in older boys and men. There is a decreased risk of Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) and sexually transmitted diseases in men as a result of this. It protects against penile cancer and cervical cancer in female sex partners. It helps in the prevention of inflammation of the head of the penis and the foreskin and makes it easier to

keep the end of the penis clean. By and large, it is shameful for a male to be uncircumcised in Igbo land.

**Naming Ceremony:** Naming ceremony of a child takes place on the eight day after delivery depending on the health of the mother and child. The Igbo tends to name based on observation, birthmarks, or some other remarkable characteristic—for example, Ogbonna (Image of his father). Igbo also commonly name children for the market day on which they were born—Nweke, Adafo, or Okorie. Of the names the Igbo give to a child, the father or a family elder gives the child the name the community will use most often.

In traditional Igbo life, there is a lot in a name. The name is more than just a tag or a convenient badge of identity. Igbo names always bear a message, a meaning, a history, a record or a prayer. This is also to say that they embody a rich mine of information on the people's reflection and considered comment on life and reality. They provide a window into the Igbo world of values as well as their peculiar conceptual apparatus for dealing with life. Their range of application spans the whole of life itself. In this society, name-giving is a significant ceremony performed on the occasion of circumcision. The privilege of name-giving is generally reserved to the parents and grandparents whom it gives an opportunity to express the importance of the child in their lives or in general, to make a significant statement on their life experience, and to express deep-felt wishes or their future hopes and expectations for the child.

**Payment of Homage to Newborns:** Paying homage to a new born child “Ilete nwa ohuu” is one of the things the Igbo does which expresses the quality of regard they have for their children and childbirth. This is a way of welcoming the new

child to the world at large and the family. It is a way also of praying for such blessing from Chukwu. A woman who is looking for the fruit of the womb will use such opportunity to ask God for the blessing of the fruit of the womb and believes that through such her blessings will manifest. A new child is seen also as a sign of peace. His arrival into the family reconciles some family members who have not been relating peacefully as everyone is expected to be part of this welcome and homage paying. “Nwa bu nwa ora” meaning a child is for all.

Paying homage is not like any visit. A man may have been to the family of the new child several times and still knows that he has not done the needful. He will prepare for this and possibly come with all her family members on a scheduled time for it. A man is expected to come with tubers of yam, a live animal and some money which will be used to prepare the necessary delicacies needed for the woman to recover and regain her full strength and for the production of breast milk. The woman is also expected to come with dress for the baby, some local spices, nappies, washing soaps and detergents and some wrappers for the woman and the baby.

### **Traditional Marriage**

Okigbo (2015) said Traditional Marriage in Igbo land is the act of giving out a girl that has matured to marry, to the suitor when the suitor comes to the parents and the father and mother of the bride will hand the girl over to the suitor who is always accompanied by his parents and well wishers after doing all that tradition requires of you. Traditional marriage cannot be neglected in Igbo land. If you do not perform all these rites of marriage, it simply means that she is not married to you even though you are living in the same house with her. Other suitors can come for her yet you have made your intentions known to



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the parents. The implication is that if she bears a child, that child belongs to her father's home, any child she bears does not belong to the man, but when he pays, the child can now belong to the man. Paternity is as such derived from this transaction rather than the biological act of conception.

### **Burial Rites**

Nwaubani (2013) citing the Igbo tradition said that death is not an end to life but a transition to a new world. And without the rites of passage performed during a ceremony called "Ikwa ozu", which means "Celebrating the dead", the deceased will be forbidden from taking his rightful place among his ancestors. No matter how accomplished he was in this life, the literary icon would not be accorded an iota of respect in the next world. "Ikwa ozu" rites differ from community to community. The one commonality is that they occur after the elderly deceased is buried. (Ikenga-Metuh 1987 p. 262, Oborji 2002 p. 23, Ikenga-Metuh 1987 p. 263) .

### **Oji (Kolanut)**

Oji is a highly valued symbol among the Igbo people. It is a symbol of love and hospitality. Kolanut is the basic thing in welcoming a visitor. If you do everything for a visitor without kolanut, he will deny that you did something. It is the host that offers kolanut to the guest in Igboland. On the significance of the kolanut in Igbo culture, it is when one has the kolanut in the hand that one can pull the ears of the Earth goddess", that is, approach the Earth goddess with confidence and assurance that one's request will be granted. To most people, oji ugo is the preferred specie for social and ritual purposes. Ugo actually means the eagle bird. To the Igbo, the eagle bird symbolizes beauty, fortune and outstanding. This species of kolanut connotes fortune, prosperity and good omen. The number of lobes in a kolanut is significant. Thus, *Oji gbara ano* (kolanut

with four lobes) is most sought after for religious and ritual purposes. The number four represents the four market days and four-calendar week of the Igbo that is *Eke, Oye, Afor* and *Nkwo*. This makes a four-lobed kolanut significant as a means of exchange, a symbol of interconnectedness that also guarantees the solidarity of the community.

*Oji gbara ise* (a five lobed kolanut), a rare species, is assumed to be very special and when broken by a young man it is believed that such an individual will do great things in future. A male elder performs the kolanut rituals among the Igbo people. Such an elder is a symbol in itself and represents the voice of the community. In any social gathering where the kolanut is presented, there are three stages of rites that follow before it is eaten. These are *igosi oji* (the presentation of the kolanut), *igo oji* (performing the kolanut ritual), *iwa oji* (the breaking of the kolanut), and *ita oji* (eating of the kolanut). The first stage is the *igosi oji* (presentation of kolanut). In a family gathering, it is the duty of the head of the family to present the kolanut. In presenting the kolanut to the visitors, the host could say '*Ndi b anyi oji abia nu o o o*' meaning 'Our people, kolanut has come o o o'; a statement, which implies that the symbol of solidarity is ushered in, all restiveness should stop, all attention should be focused on the symbol.

The kolanut is, then, handed over to the eldest person in the gathering, in whose hands lies the power to communicate with the cosmic forces the peoples need for peace, progress and development. The elder, thus, has the power to determine peace and progress. The eldest person approximates the ancestors, the continuity and essence of the community. Just like the entry of the kolanut, the handling of the kolanut by the eldest, represents a passage of authority to the one who

Onebunne *Omenala and Omenachukwu in Igbo ...* embraces the collective identity and integrity (Ukpokolo, 2017).

However, if the gathering is a large one comprising various patrilineages or communities, the oldest man in the hosting patrilineage or community is the one that presents the kolanut to the oldest man in the gathering who may also be in a leadership position. The kolanut then passes on to the various kindred represented after which it goes back to the man that started the presentation. If there are titled men in the gathering, the kolanut is presented to the oldest titled man from where it passes on to others to see. The essence of this stage of kolanut presentation is for everybody present to see the kolanut, have a sense of personal recognition, have a sense of collective identity and become integrated into the meeting. The shift from the eldest to the youngest, from the titled to the non-titled, is a movement towards the integrative which recognizes the individuality and the collectivity of the person. The intricate web so constructed represents a bond, a contract, which ensures that obligations are properly carried out, and that the possibility of dissent is minimized.

There are certain taboos associated with the kolanut in Igbo land. The first one is that the kolanut is not presented to women in any gathering at this stage of ritual performances, except that after the ritual performances when the kolanut plate is passed round for people to take a piece, women too will also take from it. Also, a woman does not climb the kolanut tree. A woman has nothing to do with kolanut". In fact, it is culturally unacceptable for a woman to pray with the kolanut in her hand in the ritualistic way a man does. If a visitor comes into a polygamous home and the head of the household is not around, the women must look for any male, no matter how young to present the kolanut. This seems to paint an image of female

subordination. This does not in any sense mean that women have no value in Igbo culture. The reason is based on the fact that ...Igbo kolanut is accompanied with the symbolic act of communicating with the spirits of the ancestors. In the Igbo culture this cultural and religious office belongs only to the male sect.

Kola nut offerings and prayers can be performed personally between one and his spirit or in a group in a form of a prayer or chant. The saluter addresses their personal god or chi as well as *alusi* (deities) and their ancestors. These kola nuts are held in a special round bowl called *ókwa* with a compartment at the centre of the bowl for condiments for the kola nut such as alligator pepper and ground peanuts. The bowl and kola nut rite is used to welcome visitors into a household. After the prayer, the ceremony ends with the saluter sharing pieces of the kola with the group, known as *íké ójì*. The kola is supposed to be cut by hand, but more recently knives have become acceptable. When the cola has three cotyledons, or parts, it is considered an *ójì ikèngà* in some northern communities (going by other names in communities Ikenga doesn't operate) and is considered a sign of great luck, bravery and nobility. *O wetalu oji wetalu ndu* — 'one who brings kola brings life' is a popular saying that point to the auspiciousness of the kola rite.

### **Mmanwu (Masquerades)**

Okigbo (2015) The Igbo regard masquerades (Mmanwu) as the means for maintaining peace and order within our communities, and they played the role of law enforcement agents. While entertaining through dances and exhibiting extra-human feats, most masquerades (Mmanwu) would walk up to certain individuals and loudly expose any bad habits, crimes or misbehaviors linked to such persons. As people would always take corrections from these exposures,

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masquerades (Mmanwu) were also effective in keeping up with traditional norms and values in the communities.

With colonization of our people in the 20th century, masquerades (Mmanwu) in Igboland have become more relevant as an institution for cultural entertainment than law enforcement agents. Nowadays, they are used more for tourist attractions when they come out in colorful robes accompanied by traditional dancers and music during festivities and celebrations like Christmas. Be that as it may, it is generally believed by our people that masquerades (Mmanwu) are spirits which spring from the soil. Depending on your point of view, this may be true or merely a myth. However, according to Igbo traditional beliefs, some masquerades (Mmanwu) are linked with spiritual elements. They represent images of deities or sometimes even dead relatives. Masquerades (Mmanwu) embody the union between the spiritual and human worlds. The mystique surrounding masquerades (Mmanwu) is one the key components of our culture that has survived Western influences. The identity of masquerades (Mmanwu) is a well-kept secret exclusively to men. The masks worn by masquerades (Mmanwu) are usually determined by local customs and traditions.

Every cultural practice is unique in its own way. No culture can be out rightly criticized because they served a purpose at the time of their initiation and may still be even now. Some, because of technological advancement are termed archaic and mundane. They are out dated and should be refurbished. Indeed, all the Igbo beliefs, customs and traditions cannot be penned down but these ones are written to serve as x-rays through which we see these cultural practices and possibly bring a balance to them.

**Philosophy of Inculturation: From *Omenala* to *Omenachukwu***

If there is one thing which is not detachable from society, that would be the culture. Culture is considered one of the most important entities that a society possesses, because it shapes the future and contains the society's pasts and presents. Culture plays a crucial role in terms of building communal peace and keeping individuals away from disrespectful behaviours.

The Igbo land is beset with myriads of culture crises. This is evident in the ubiquitous presence of syncretism and the church/culture conflicts that prevail in many parts of Igbo land. It is through being part of our cultural practices and welcoming others to it that we show that we truly belong to a community. We cannot share things together if we do not love ourselves, so, let love be shared among us especially in the practice of our culture. Practices that encourage positive civilization should be encouraged and Christianity is the foundation of civilization.

Language is the first tool of inculturation. Let every Christian assembly make the native languages a tool for evangelism. The idea of interpreting is not yet welcomed by some churches. Let there be at least one native service in every place of worship so that men and women who are not yet fully acquainted with the English language and its flow will take time to worship in a place where they truly belong.

With the drawbacks of technological advancement in the moral development of the society, technology still facilitates our lives. Beliefs are part of culture and they have always been there. Let us Christianize our cultural practices first by adding a lot of love to it. *Chukwu* is the God of love and so if we must worship him, we must do so in love. If our rituals and practices

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are made to worship and honour *Chukwu*, then, we must do so in love. It is the Igbo who rightly acclaims that “Onye kwe chi ya ekwe” which means “If one agrees his chi affirms”. This is a personal thing and by implication “If he declines, his chi declines”. We should organize our cultural practices such that it incorporates all and is practicable by all. All religion, the world over abhor all form of abomination, the Bible detest it. To be a Christian means to live a life worthy of its calling. Christianity is not just a church; it is a religion, a way of life. Therefore, every man should live a life free of abominations. Abominations are not just sins; they are the repugnancies and eyesores of our times. Committing an abomination is simply handing yourself over to abominable acts. Abominations are outrageous in virtually all the religion in the world; none accepted of anything close to an abomination.

Also, practices like *omugwo*, circumcision, naming ceremony and payment of homage are so far Christianized in almost every town and village. They are welcomed practices by all. With the advent of the court; traditional and public, as a place of settlement, our ‘Mmanwu’ masquerades should be made to be objects of entertainment and not objects of destruction as some youths have made it. Measures should be taken to ensure that our practices have some civility in it, not an object of chaos, rancor and resentment. Marriages and the payment of bride wealth is a practice of every religion the world over. Let us give our daughters’ hand in marriage with love and understanding knowing full well that our sons will go out to marry some day and our grand children will come to their maternal homes with love and be accepted in love.

More so, belongingness is the essential bridge that supports self. Belongingness can provide people with considerable social support, which directly promotes happiness and health.

People with greater perceived social support enjoy greater self-esteem, fewer illnesses and longer lives. We are happier when we discover that what we do make others happy. One love, one heart, let's get together and feel alright.

### **Conclusion**

Promoting our culture, making it blend with Christian worship and bringing some element of Christianity in love to our culture is the responsibility of all. Being involved in progressive, necessary activities is not against the word of God. We should share brotherly love. One of the ways to do it is by adding love to those things that bind us together as our cultural bonds. In the exercise of our cultural practices, let us add love and remove everything that breeds discord among us. This is a way of exercising our Christian duties and showing that we truly belong to our own.

Let our constitutions be liberal such that it will incorporate all and sundry; the Christians and traditional worshippers. Practices and innovations that encourage positive development should be motivated no matter where it is coming from and who is involved. Peace is the beauty of life. But let there be spaces in your togetherness and let the winds of the heavens dance between you. God's dream is that you and I and all of us will realize that we are family that we are made for togetherness, for goodness, and for compassion. *Love* is a strange emotion.

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