

## **UTAGBA-UNO FESTIVAL AND CULTURE IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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### **Abstract**

Utagba-Uno culture and festivals in the 19<sup>th</sup> were very unique and well organised. Some of these festivals and the way of life of the people of Utagba-Uno remain a long term legacy in the community that can never be easily erased in a hurry. The festivals and culture of Utagba-Uno in the period affected and influenced the entire populace of the community. The Paper using an analytical and descriptive methods of research argues that the contributions of festival and the unique culture on the people impacted on the community politically, economically and socially etc. It was noted that the community has a well- organised and well-structured festivals that attracted people from different villages across the quarters of Utagba-Uno. On the aspect of the culture, different classes of people in the era in question coordinated themselves very well because of the punishment and the consequences meted for violator of the laws of the land. Crime like adultery and stealing were regarded as a sheer abomination. Those involved in such aspect of crime were severely punished. The work finds and conclude that the people of Utagba-Uno should discard and do away with culture and festivals that are inimical to the social-economic development of the community. Some of such festivals include the Ikenga festivals that encourage the use of dangerous weapons during the celebration. In addition, the people of Utagba-Uno should uphold the good aspect of culture that encourages development and growth of all kinds.

**Keywords:** Culture, Festival, Utagba-Uno, Ikenga, Crime

### **Introduction**

Utagba-Uno is the largest clan in Ndokwa West Local Government Area and the largest of all the clans in all the Local Government Area in the deformed Aboh Division. ( C.I.Egwuenu, 1998),1). The clan is made up of the following seven quarters, namely by alphabetical order: Etua, Ikilibi, Isumpe, Umusadege, Umusam, Umusedeli and Umuseti. Each of these quarters has a daughter settlement called Ogo or Iku outside Utagba-Uno. Which include Etua Ogo, Ogo-Ikilibi, Abam Ukabi, Akpu-Afo, Ndemili, Umuseti-Olieogo, Ulogwe Isumpe, Iku Umusam and Akakpani (Ikechukwu Izuegbu, 2003, 1). The area covers an approximate land proportion of (300sq. km) three hundred square kilometres. It also has one major river called River Adofi. Wells are also found because of the low water table which provides the inhabitants with the source of drinking water and fresh fish ( V.I.Ododo, 2003,10).

### **Origin of Utagba-Uno**

The origin of any group of people cannot be said with certainty. Utagba-Uno people believed to have the same descent with the present Onitsha people. The people who founded the present Onitsha were believed to have migrated from Benin to seek a new place of settlement.

According to Ogwezi Ajieh, Utagba-Uno migrated from Benin as a result of the Kingship struggle which took place in Benin at about 1550-1580 A.D (Ogwezi Ajieh, 2008). The development forced the people to flee. The kingship struggle over the succession of the Oba's throne led to a total uprising and mass killing of people to appease the gods, this made many people flee from Benin (Ogwezi Ajieh, 2008). Diokpala Ojubeli also opined that Onitsha people fled from Benin as a result of an assault on the mother of the Oba of Benin, Oba Esigie, in 1504-1550 (Diokpala Ojubeli). The Oba sent his military to attack Ahime (Chime) and his people who were the ancestors of Onitsha people, and to avoid this, Ahime and his people had move far eastwards and some of his people were said to discontinue as a result of weariness. Those who discontinued were said to have founded towns like Onitsha-Ugbo, Olona, Illa etc ( Diokpala Ojubeli, 2008). Ahime and his group eventually got a new place at the east of the bank of the River Niger and established diplomatic relations with the Igala fishermen. When they

got there after a series of obstacles, there arose a dispute among his children Dai, Oreze and Ogwezi, over who should reign. In the course of the struggles, many people lost their lives. In the end, Ofeze the second son through the wives of the people became their leader (Obi of Onitsha) and Ogwezi and Dai vowed never to be subject to their brother. Dai and his followers left Onitsha and settled in a place known as Aforigwe in Anambra State, while Ogwezi and his followers left for a new settlement at a place known as Aboh. However, the ancestor of Utagbas can also be addressed as “Ebologu”. He felt he was not satisfied with the administration of the town. He left and founded a new place for himself Uta-Igwala-Idu-Ejeka Agbam and the word 'Utagba was coined from it. He thus founded a place known as Uno-Utagba (Oguzi Ajieh...2008). In this vast territory the Children of Utagba met an old man who occupied the river's bank (Adofi River) known as Eziza waani later Ikilibi and his younger brother Etua. Another myth claims that Ikilibi was, in fact, the first son of Utagba.

According to Omede Omenogor, Etua people migrated from Atuma. The founder who came, to be called Etua, had five male children namely Umu-Adelege, Ogbuzo, Edeminya, Osele and umenem. These five children make up Etua clan (Omede Omengor...2008) Umu-Nsukwa according to Wincu Ebinum migrated from Benin, of which they settled in Nsukwa in Aniocha local government area of Delta State. From Nsukwa, a man called Ossai gave birth to four children namely Umusam, Umusadege, Umusedeli and Ogbe Nsukwa of Isumpe. Later the four children of Ossai went to Ejeme-Uno to settle. Finally, they settled in a place located beyond the Adofi River, from there they dispatched to what we know in Utagba-Uno as Umusadege, Umusedeli, Umusam and Ogbe Nsukwa of Isumpe (Wincu Ebinum, 2008). Umu-Onicha according to Ajieh Ogwezi are made up of Umuseti and Isulamani Isumpe. It was believed traditionally, that they migrated from Benin as a result of the war of Benin giant (Agha Igwala), Adamgbodongbo who fled old Benin to Onicha Olona from where they went in search of a settlement, later he arrived at Utagba-Uno with his four children, Ezeti, Ezeodu, Ezemu and the minor, Isulamani. It was believed that several alligators help them in crossing the River Niger. The section that was helped by the alligators were the Umu-Onicha, Umuseti, Isulamani Isumpe and Onicha-Ukwuani. They regarded the alligator as a totem. Later Ezeodu and Ezemu migrated to other areas to found Onicha-Ukwuani and Emu. When Adamgbodongbo had died, leaving only Ezeti and Isulamani on the land. They later founded Umuseti and Isumpe quarter. (Oguzi Ajieh...2008).

Aspects of the legend go on that Utagba married many wives, one of the wives gave birth to Ezeodu (Eweshi) another man (Onicha-Ukwuani) and “Isump” and “Umuseti” to Utagba it is known as Umu-Onicha Umusadege, Umusam, Umusedeli, they were also known as Umu-Nsukwa, then Ikilibi and Etua were of the same mother (Ikechukwu Izuegbu,...40). There was also another oral tradition that traced the origin of Utagba-Uno into four migrant wave. There are the Ikilibi, Umu-Onicha, Umu-Nsukwa and Etua migrant group. In the view of Ajieh Ogwezi on Ikilibi Origin, it was believed to have been founded during Ewuare wars, by a migrant band that pull out of Akumazi. There were said to have been led by One Eziza. Initially, Eziza and his group settled on the Eastern side of river Adofi, with time, his name Eziza was changed to Ezizauweani, in the new site, he later got other children. One of them, Umenem, founded a section of what became Etua. Later Ezizauweani developed hernia. This type of hernia according to Daniel Ossaiete was a unique one that attracted many people (Daniel Ossaiete, 2008).

Utagba-Uno right from time immemorial had evolved a cultural heritage. It manifested in some of her social activities, festivals, ceremonies, and as well as craft. There are also social institutions in Utagba-Uno such as age-grade associations. Utagba-Uno has numerous festivals such as Ikenga, Osa Nsukwa, Ifejoku, Iwaiji (new yam festivals) Ukpalabor, Ise and Ukwata etc.

### **Ikenga Festival**

The celebrants are the Okpala of Umusadege and the Onotu-Uku of Umusadege. The Okpala, through his messenger, sent white chalk to Ikpala of the other six quarters stating the date. The Ikenga is, therefore, a special festival, because it is an occasion to invoke the god of good luck to ensure bumper yields and fortunes in business. This also explains why the festival is always slated for late June when plantings have been completed and the tempo of commercial business is generally low (Ikechukwu

Izuegbu, 2003, 39). On the first day, all the young men with their leaders, danced war dances with cutlass and guns. Before the nineteenth century, these cutlasses and guns were used on each other, while the dances were going on, but recently it was no longer in existence. It was celebrated as a juju war festival just to ensure success for the people in any military endeavour. The Ikenga was done as a mark of respect to the living and dead heroes of Utagba-Uno (Onah Henry Eni, 1984, 17-18).

### **Osa-Nsukwa Festival**

This festival holds every late January. It is used to commemorate Ossai believed to have led the Nsukwa migrants to Utagba-Uno. It is a feast for all Nsukwa migrants, namely-Umusam, Umusadege, Umusedeli and Umu-Nsukwa Isumpe. The ceremony is done for a period of five days. On the first day, the ceremony would start with eating and drinking. The following day, all the male children or descendants of Nsukwa were not allowed to go to the bush. It was believed that ancestors would appear on the farm. The third day was the Mbossai (daughter of Ossai). This is done yearly (Ikechukwu Izuegbu, ... 38). The fourth day is resting and preparation for the final day. Throughout the festival, no one could prepare any other type of food apart from Inri-iji (yam-fufu). Only at present people may cook rice or beans as a substitute for yam-fufu. The fifth and final day would be on the market day. This was the greatest day of the festival. During the period there was no mourning or crying for the dead. It is an abomination for a member of Ogbu-Iji, Onotu and Elishi to die during the celebration. It will not be announced until the festival is over.

### **Ifejoku**

This is a festival specifically dedicated to the yam cult. Farmers in Utagba-Uno have this god in their farms regarded as the god of yam. Okpala of Umusam remains the chief celebrant of Ifejoku festival. The feast holds in August to further involve the yam god to ensure a bumper harvest. (Ikechukwu Izuegbu, ...40). This festival holds between late October and early November. According to Utagba-Uno tradition, it is Etua that sets the Ise festival in motion. If there was no incumbent Obi, the Okpala of Etua performs the take-off rituals which are done by the Obi or Okpala as the case may be. In the evening, pounded yam will be served with several slaughtered cocks. Each head of the family from the Okpala down to the nuclear family is presented with gifts to his immediate subordinate, mostly yams and palm wine drinks. There was also house purification by Umu-Ada for those who would roast the Otite yam. During the purification, gifts of yam will be given to Umu-Ada which they returned to the respective Ada of the family (Omede Omenorgor, 2009).

### **Ukpalabor**

This feast seems to be exclusively limited to Umu-Onicha quarters of Umu-seti and Isumpe. Only males from both quarters did the Ukpalabor dance but all were participants. Peter Odaiche, an informant opined that: Umuseti and Isumpe claim that, it is a cult and that their forefather brought it from Onicha-Olona respectively. Ikilibi strongly believe that Ezizanweani, brought it from Akumazi. (Peter Odaiche, 2009).

### **Iwa-Iji (New Yam Festival)**

The origin of this festival can be traced to the discovery of yam, which greatly improved the food supply. In Utagba-Uno, the feast holds in late September into October. No one is allowed to eat new yam until the celebration of the festival.

### **Ukwata**

This festival is celebrated by the people of Etua mainly. During the period numerous people do come from Etua satellite clan that include Etua-Etiti, Etua Ukpo and Etua-Ogo. It is usually celebrated on January (Margaret Ossai, 2008).

### **Marriage Institution**

The marriage institution is one of the oldest institutions in the world. According to the Bible it originated from the Garden of Eden. Marriage is not only vital to the people of Utagba-Uno alone but

to the entire globe. Utagba-Uno men are not polygamist but rather monogamist in this era. Marrying many wives was not forbidden by the people of Utagba-Uno. At the same time, Utagba-Uno could not be grouped as a polygamous society. According to Gold Ossai, he observed that: Men were allowed to engage in extramarital sex with unmarried ladies. It was only the married women that were restricted from extramarital sex with married and unmarried men (Ossai Gold, 2009)

There were many different types of marriages in Utagba-Uno. The recognized ones are customary marriage, gambling marriage, (Igba-Ufor) marriage by inheritance and marriage by proxy.

### **Customary Marriage**

This is a type of marriage that is arranged by the family. As a rule, the parties to a betrothal are the families of the prospective spouse themselves. The consent of the spouses is required when they are of age. Customary marriage is very enduring as it is a union of two families. The obligations were continuous: Ife Nsu (marriage obligations never ends as long as the marriage exists. Interestingly, every member of both families refer to one another as in-laws (Chidi Isaac E, 1998, 173-174).

### **Igba Ufor**

In the 19th century in Utagba-Uno this type of marriage was practiced. It was a custom where several suitors will be seeking a girl's hand in marriage by doing all sorts of manual work to please the girl and her parents in all competitions. During the girl's first menstruation, each of the contenders made his shade with palm leaves for a party called "Igba Ufo". The marriage is therefore concluded with the chosen man. It was a risk and a gamble which modern society could not have accommodated. This type of marriage is not very common in Utagba-Uno (Chidi Isaac E; 173).

### **Marriage by Inheritance**

As the name implies, it is a marriage by inheritance. This types of marriage occurs when a man dies, the eldest man in the family of the bereaved man would inherit the wife of his brother. Commenting on marriage by inheritance Omenorgor Akponobi observed that, it is not only the eldest man in the family that may also marry the wife of his bereaved brother, it could be the younger person or any distant members of the family. However, women who are considered too old to be inherited would be under the care of a member of the family of the deceased husband. (Omenorger Akponobi, 2008).

### **Marriage by Proxy**

This is a type of marriage that allows a parent to represent the prospective husband. The prospective husband will be absent during the period of courtship and payment of bride price. Someone had to stand in for the suitor who must account for the absence of the suitor. (Nzemiri Ikenna; 1972,24).

### **Religion**

Utagba-Uno people believe in the reality of God. They believed that God is always close enough to assist in times of distress and share with them in festivals. At the same time, He could also punish a person who is doing evil. He is the final arbiter in interpersonal as well as inter-group relations (Gold Ossai, 2008). Gold Ossai, an informant opined that, Adofi was regarded as a mediator. He is next to God, he intercedes for the people. He is also regarded as a messenger, that carries information of the people of Utagba-Uno to God (Gold Ossai, 2008).

The supreme God of Utagba-Uno is "Chi-Ukwu" the Great God who was believed to be the maker of Heaven and Earth who makes everything grow as a source of human life.

The summary of the religious beliefs of Utagba-Uno are:

- i. Belief in Chukwu (the Supreme being)
- ii. Belief in other minor deities
- iii. Belief in the spirit of good and bad luck
- iv. Belief in reincarnation, belief in immortality and belief in reward and punishment for good and evil committed on earth (Karma) (Gold Ossai, 2008).

### **Punishment of Offenders in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Utagba-Uno**

Right from the creation of Adam and Eve, punishment and act of discipline have been in existence. After the fall of man in the “Garden of Eden” God said, in Genesis 3:16, “To the woman. He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and conception; in sorrow, you shall bring forth children, and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you and he also said to Adam, because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree, of which I command you saying you shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life’ (Genesis 3:17.17). It was God that instituted punishment and an act of discipline. Writing on punishment in Utagba-Uno, Williams observed that: The majority of offences were regarded 'as torts rather than crime.... Thus the punishment for murder... is the principle for a man and in some cases, compensation was allowed and in some rule. (Williams, 41). Theft in isolated cases was not seriously regarded... Adultery was sometimes regarded merely as an injury to the husband and offence against the village because the spirit of the ancestor on the land had been offended ( Gold Ossai 2008). Gold Ossai also opined that the criminal code of Utagba-Uno was not enshrined in any book, it was unwritten (Gold Ossai, 2008). The execution of the sentence is left in the hand of the clans, to be precise in the land of Otu-Nta. This group punished a man who was caught stealing or killing. The punishment meted to stealing is a sheer disgrace of the person with nakedness, while that of murder is the killing of the person in question. To the woman that committed adultery, the punishment is left in the hands of Umu-Ada. However, sometimes, the Okpala-Uku and the Odua can also decide on the issues, that concerns punishment (Chidi Isaac E;...173).

### **Social Values**

In the 19th century, even from time immemorial, Utagba-Uno cherished and valued greeting, kola-nuts, Inotu title, the Ogbu-iji title, respect for age, and cooperation.

### **Greeting**

In every society, greeting is highly regarded. It is believed that any girl that does not know how to greet would hardly get married. She would also be hated by the male folk. Such a girl may not also be a good wife. Among the male folks, it is expected of them to greet their elders. In Utagba-Uno community greeting takes the following forms.

Okpala-Ogbu Ewu or Okpala

Nde Okwa-Okwa

Okpala wife -Ogene

Ada- Ada or Ofasi

Onotu-Uku –Odogwu Abi

Ogbu-Iji- Ogbu Iji

Inotu (men) – Ajieh

Ndiom (women)- Ote Ofo

### **Kola Nuts**

Kola nut presentations to a stranger or visitor is an index of Utagba-Uno man's hospitality. The kola nut is usually put in a saucer i.e. “Okwa” which is supported or wedged with a small denomination of money, sometimes coins. Elders are given the kola first. The server would then be asked to serve generally. This is very vital in every society. In sharing anything, the most senior person is given first even though he is the poorest. It is the eldest person in the community that pours libation if a drink is given, and it is he who prays before kola-nuts is broken. When an animal is killed, some parts are given to the senior or head of the family. The Okpala is sent parts of certain animals because of his age. During festivals, the young members of the family sent gifts of palm wine to their seniors.

### **Inotu Title**

Any man who has not gotten this title is regarded as an ordinary man. In Utagba-Uno traditional society, the Inotu constituted the executive class who carried out all the communities functions and duties. Some on their initiative and others as approved by the Okpala-in-Council. The title is taking by any person

who desires to be initiated. Anybody who has taken this title cannot be given the position of Okpala-Uku, Odua or Okwa of the community.

### **The Ogbu-Iji Title**

This is one of the highest titles a man can acquire during the era in question. It is only a few persons that possess this title because it is very expensive to have because of the material and monetary involvement. The people that are Ogbu-Iji are greeted as Ogbu-Ije. The community usually place them at a high premium and there are highly respected. (Chidi Isaac E;...173).

### **Cooperation**

This is seen in the rendering of several communal services, town or clan union activities and development union. During the 19th century, it was as a result of this Omede Omenorger opined that "co-operations were seen in the economy, farming and social life of the people (Omede Omenorger, 2008). There is no half brother in Utagba-Uno language or sister. Every member of the lineage is a brother or sister. Care of the aged, parents, uncles, aunts, brother and sisters are undertaken as a moral obligation (Chidi Isaac E;...173).

### **Taboos**

Utagba-Uno in the 19th century, regarded the following things as a taboo: a woman that gave birth to twins, suicide, a woman climbing kola nut, stealing of any kind, throwing of one's parent during an argument, killing or eating of a totem animal, and a wife that refused to mourn her bereaved husband.

### **Suicide**

This is an act of killing oneself, either by hanging in a tree or through a gun or cutlass. In the 19th century even, at present, anybody who is a victim of suicide will not be given a befitting burial. The father or the family of the man or the woman that committed the suicide would sacrifice a goat, yam and fowls to the community or the quarters in which the man resides. Without paying the fine or offering the sacrifice, the man in question would not be buried.

### **A Woman Climbing a Kola Nut**

Any woman caught climbing Kola nut is synonymous with a witch and rebel. On the part of the woman, it is a sign of arrogance. During this era, she had to do some appeasement to the gods of the land before peace reigns.

### **Stealing**

Right from time immemorial stealing is regarded as a serious crime. Even God himself punishes a thief. During this era, there was no armed robbery with a gun in Utagba-Uno. The people that were involved in stealing made use of locally made cutlass, sometimes without cutlass. The things they normally steal during this era were fish from somebody's fishing net, meat from somebody's trap, yam, corn and money.

### **Throwing of One's Parent During Argument**

In the 19th century and at present it happened once in a blue moon. Any man or woman that fell victim to this, would be fined a goat by the clan to which the person belongs. The goat would be eaten by the members of the clan.

### **Killing or Eating of Totem**

A totem is an animal or plant that has a special spiritual connection with a particular tribe. Each of the quarters in Utagba-Uno has its totem. Umu-Nsukwa included: Umusam, Umusadege, Umusedeli and Ogbe Nsukwa Isump. They have alligator and python as their totems. Etua and Iklibi have monkey and lamb as their totems. Umuseti, Awameka Isumpe and Isulumani Isumpe have an alligator as their totem. (Edeme Osaite,2008).

Gold Ossai, an informant observed that anyone found eating this totem in the 19th century would be ostracized from the community. His children and wife would be treated mercilessly. The same punishment is also meted to a married woman or a youth that violates such a law. Farmland would not be given to the person (Gold Ossai, 2008). At present, because of Christian faith and practice, any person found eating any of this totem would not be given the same punishment as it were in the 19th century.

### **A Wife That Refuses to Mourn Her Bereaved Husband**

This was regarded as a serious taboo during this era because it harmed both the woman in question and her children. The wife that refused to mourn her husband would not be given any property that belongs to the man. She would be hated with a passion by both paternal and maternal side. Margaret Ossai, an informant observed that a wife that refused to mourn her bereaved husband would not be allowed to eat with any of her children. The implication of eating with her children will result in the death of her children (Margaret Ossai, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it could be seen from the foregoing, that Utagba-Uno clan could be regarded as a festive community in the 19th century even at present. Culturally, Utagba-Uno even before the 19th century had evolved a cultural heritage. These festivals mentioned earlier like the Ikenga festival, Osa-Nsukwa festival, Ife-Joku, Ise, Ukpabor, Iwa-Iji and Ukwata had been in existence even before the 19th century. But in the 19th century, some of the methods of celebration of these festivals changed. A good example was the Ikenga festival. However, in the late 19th century, Utagba-Uno practiced different types of marriage institutions like customary marriage, Igba Ufor, marriage by inheritance and marriage by proxy.

Utagba-Uno believed in the reality of God. Their religion is centred mostly on ancestral worship. Lawbreakers are punished during this period depending on the gravity of the offence. Also from time immemorial they cherished and valued greeting, Kola-nut, Inotu title, the Ogbu-Iji title, respect for age and corporations. Also, in Utagba-Uno in the 19th century, they had the followings as taboo: birth to twins by a woman, suicide, a woman climbing kola-nut, stealing, throwing of one's parent during an argument, killing or eating of totem and a wife that refused to mourn her bereaved husband.

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