

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Festival celebrates a day or period of religious or cultural significance which reoccurs at regular intervals. It involves a time people engage in what they don't; abstain from what they normally do; carry to the extreme behaviours that are usually regulated by measures; and invert partners of daily social life. It also involves carefully planned programmes, outpourings of respect, rejoicing, or high revelry, established custom or sponsored by various cultural groups or organizations.

Among other reasons, festival celebrates or renews the fertility of the people, the fields and the rivers¹. It is a celebration, a feast, a season of musical or other performance involving joyfulness and merrymaking². G.T. Basden saw festival as "...nothing more than a fete with dancing, music, feasting and general manifestations of pleasure and enjoyment, with congratulations for the year past and good wishes for the year ahead"³. In his own analysis, F.C. Ogbalu perceived festival from another dimension. Agreeing with the views above, he however associated festival celebrations with idolatry when he averred:

There seemed to be no festival that was not connected with (the) worship of idols and gods. Idols have festivals celebrated in their names in a particular month of the lunar year on village or town level. Village festivals are quiet while those of the towns as a whole were very colourful⁴.

In all these, festivals remain distinctly human activities which are communally celebrated.

In Igbo land, the people are known with lots of festivals which announce their heritage and ancestry. These festivals possess distinctive significance which in most cases are felt on the spiritual dimension. For instance, most festivals (if not all) are spiritually potent in unifying the dead with the living and this ensures peaceful co-

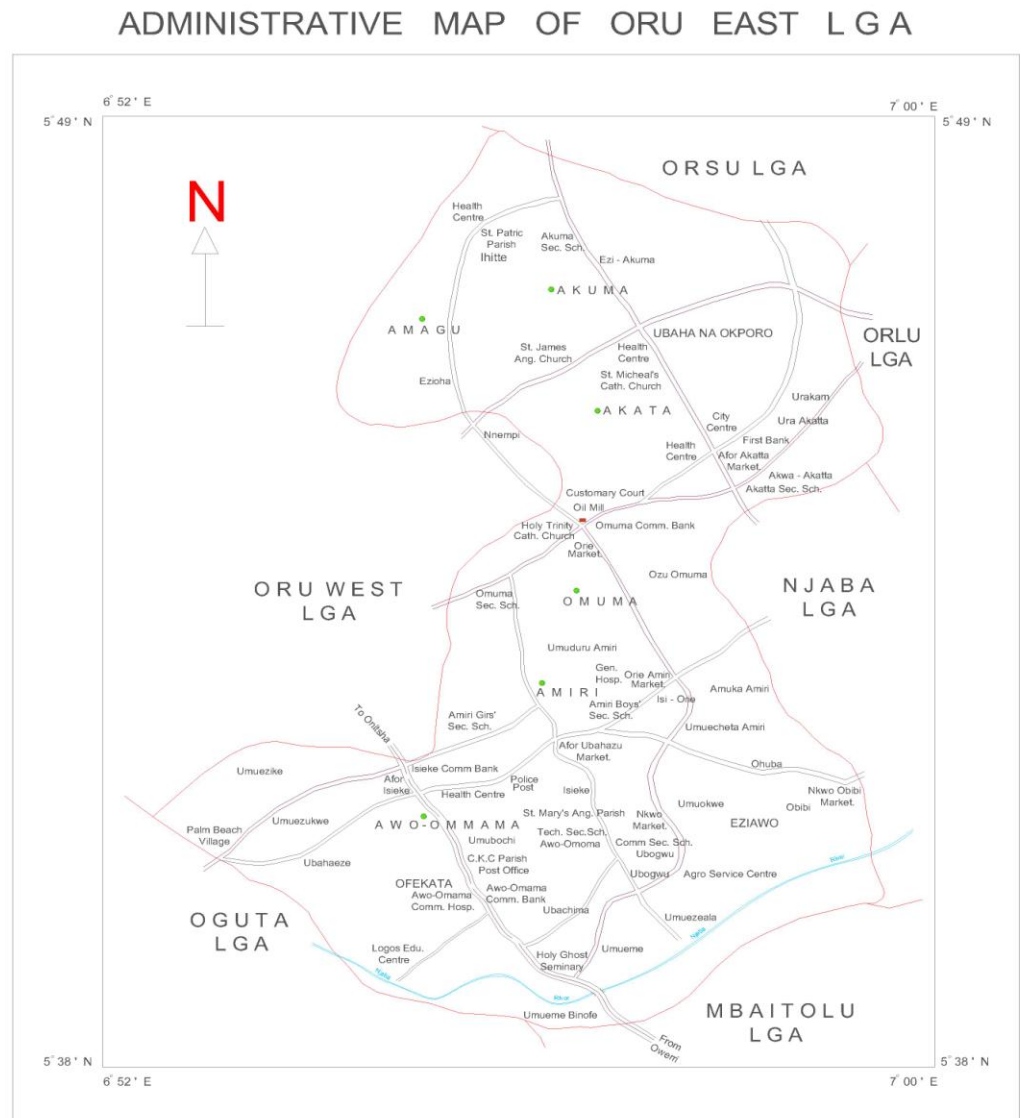
operation between the two groups. There are lots of benefits that accrue from this and one of them is the continuous progression of these communities in various aspects of endeavour. This was the case with the Owu festival for which the people of Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State are known.

Historically, the Owu festival originated from riverine communities of Oguta Local Government Area, and one notable example of such communities was Nkwesi⁵. There, it was first organized by women of the community; subsequently, it became an affair of the men⁶. The festival was said to have permeated the riverine communities following its introduction by a maiden who had learnt the dance from a mermaid, hence the name Owu Mmiri⁷. From the riverine communities, it diffused into Oru region with its presence felt first in Awo-Omamma. The Njaba River was instrumental in the diffusion of the Owu into Awo-Omamma territory, from where it spread to Amiri and Omuma⁸. These communities are situated in the present day Oru East Local Government Area (see Map of Oru East attached). With its introduction into these communities, the Owu festival became a traditional identity for the people.

Within the period under study, Owu was usually celebrated by the initiates of the Owu cult. By implication, therefore, the festival was an activity carried out by members of the Owu cult in Oru East. It had its own belief system, with rituals associated with deities as well as ancestors. Owu had all the ingredients of social cohesion and solidarity⁹. The festival was celebrated within the Owu season which stretches from mid-May to August.

Also, within the study period, it was evident that there were changes in the celebration of the Owu festival in Oru East. This partly informed the decision of the researcher to examine these changes and the factors responsible focusing on the

Fig. I shows administrative map of Oru East Local Government Area showing the communities under study



Source :- Oru East Local Gov. Council, (2000).

Scale :- 1 : 60,000

Legend / Map Key

LGA Boundary
LGA Headquarter
Dual Carriage Way
Towns
Major Roads
Other Roads
River & Bridge

Source: Oru East Local Government Area Council, 2000

aforementioned communities in the Local Government Area. These changes were examined from different features of the festival such as costumes, rituals and celebration patterns. The study also examined the various impact of the festival on the communities as well as the challenges that faced the festival. Other areas of concentration in the study included the concept of the Owu festival, and its similarities and differences.

Statement of the Problem

Festivities are distinctly human activities. G.T. Basden had posited that they are social events replete with manifestations of pleasure and enjoyment¹⁰. He equally added that “music, dance and song, to the community, are an instrument for creating social, emotional, and aesthetic solidarity”¹¹.

As a cultural festival, the study of Owu had not been able to attract enormously the interest of scholars hence the paucity of documented information on the celebration of this festival in a local government Area. Available documents on the Owu concentrated on celebrating communities and they contained insufficient information on the festival. Consequently, the general public was ignorant of the dissimilar features which the Owu festival possessed in the various communities of celebration and in a local government area. This, therefore, constituted one of the primary rationales why this study was embarked upon, to add to the existing studies on the Owu and imbue into the populace the adequate information on the festival.

Again, the Owu festival, within the period of this study was discovered to have faced some challenges which had threatened its existence as an aspect of the culture of the people. In other to unravel the causal factors to these perceived challenges as a guide to the custodians of this tradition towards avoiding the possible

re-occurrence of this development and to ensure the continued existence of the festival, this study was deemed imperative.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study constitutes the aim and objectives which the researcher seeks to achieve. While the aim is to present a new perspective that would provide ample understanding of the study of the Owu as a cultural festival of the people of Oru East Local Government Area, the objectives therefore include:

- ❖ To trace the origin of the Owu festival;
- ❖ To trace the History of the festival in the communities under study;
- ❖ To examine the changes which had occurred in the course of celebrating the Owu festival;
- ❖ To examine the various features of the festival, their similarities and differences in the study area, within the period under study;
- ❖ To assess the impact of the Owu festival within the time frame; and
- ❖ To investigate the nature of the challenges facing this cultural event in Oru East in the post-civil war era, and proffer possible panaceas.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study would be established on the following fronts:

- ❖ The study would aid researchers, students, and institutions who are conducting researches on the territories of Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma, as it contains substantial information on these communities;
- ❖ The study would serve as an instrument of revelation to the entire Nigerian populace not just on the existence of the Owu festival as one of the festivals celebrated in the Nigerian polity, but also the impact and challenges of the

festival, and the various changes that had occurred in the celebration of the Owu within the period under study;

- ❖ The study would serve as a contribution to the historiographies of Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma communities. It would also serve as a contribution to the plethora of literature on Igbo history, customs, traditions, and values;
- ❖ The study would assist in bringing to limelight the values of Igbo customs and traditions, with special focus on the Owu festival in the communities under study;
- ❖ The study would assist in educating the indigenes of the communities under study who are deficient in the knowledge of their communities, on the Owu culture and traditions of their respective communities. These groups of Nigerians would equally be educated on the importance of this culture and tradition. The study would further assist where necessary in re-shaping the views which might be negative to this culture subsisting among these groups of Nigerians;
- ❖ The study would assist where necessary in proffering solutions to the challenges facing the Owu festival in the communities under study; and
- ❖ The study would reveal the potency of festivals in tourist attractions. This could go a long way in encouraging the perception of tourism, by governments, as a principal source of revenue generation. This, in turn, would ensure diversification of sources of revenue which would positively affect the economy.

Methodology and Sources of Data

To achieve stated objectives in research, a meticulous approach in terms of methodology becomes imperative. Therefore, the utilization of a wide range of sources by a researcher in the course of research represents an evidence of scholarship.

In view of the above, the researcher utilized available sources of information which are under the categories of primary and secondary sources. While the former represents interviews conducted during fieldwork and personal observations, the latter constitutes of theses, textbooks, and journals. Additionally, pieces of information from newspapers, magazines, and the internet were also explored. In analyzing the information, the qualitative approach of historical methodology was adopted.

The primary rationale behind the adoption of oral interviews and personal observations was to clarify the areas not adequately explained by written sources which could be unclear and cumbersome to comprehend. There was also the need to provide adequate information on areas not captured by written sources, which are imperative in the study of Owu festival. As a result, adequate information on different concepts of the Owu festival, the impact of the festival, features of the festival, various challenges facing the festival, as well as different changes which took place in its celebration in the communities under study, were provided with the aid of these methods. The bulk of information needed in these areas could not be provided by written records as a result of limited written documents on the Owu festival.

With the above process, the researcher is confident of achieving the outlined objectives bearing in mind the limitations of sources. Data derived from written records or sources such as books, newspapers, magazines, unpublished theses, as well as the internet, were verified before usage.

Scope of the Study

This research work examines the Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area. The focus of the study is limited to Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma considering the presence of cultural uniformity in these communities. Also, of the six communities found in the Local Government Area, only the three aforementioned communities celebrate the Owu festival¹². The other communities that are found in the region include Akatta, Akuma, and Amagu¹³. As a post-independence study, however, the information provided covers from 1970 through the year 2013.

Similar to most communities in Igbo land, the thirty months Nigeria Biafra War affected various cultural events which represented aspects of the peoples' heritage and ancestry. An example of such cultural event was the Owu festival. However, the celebration of the first post-civil war Owu festival within the Owu festive period that stretched from mid-May to mid-August 1970 marked an impressive comeback in the exhibition of a people's cultural identity. Subsequently, there were recorded some changes, impact, and challenges associated with the festival which in no small measure affected the celebrating communities in Oru East. The study terminates in 2013, owing to the fact that this period marked the commencement of significant change in the celebration of the Owu festival. What was designed as a pan-cultural event to be celebrated annually, from this period, began to be used for an economic purpose. To this end, Owu dancers were hired for gracing occasions, especially the ones organized by the affluent people in Oru East. This practice was antithetical to the cultural foundation upon which the festival was instituted.

Conceptual Clarifications

Owu: A cultural dancing festival celebrated annually in Awo-Omamma, Amiri, Omuma, and some other communities in Oru region. It was usually celebrated in the

months of June and July with pomp and pageantry. This festival possessed dissimilar features in the various celebrating communities. For instance, the features of the festival in Okwudor and Umuaka communities in Njaba Local Government Area differed from those of the Oru East¹⁴. These dissimilarities, in most cases, were found in the dances connected to the festival, the masquerades and officers of the Owu cult. However, there existed a common belief in the origin of the festival, as credit was given to the riverine communities of Oguta, in Imo State.

Owu Qma: An aspect of the Owu festival, it was a type of the Owu cultural dance celebrated with costumes different from the annual dancing festival. Again, this aspect of the Owu was not celebrated annually. In Awo-Omamma, for instance, the Owu Oma was celebrated at intervals at the volition of the Owu heads. Sometimes, it was celebrated every ten years or at a time when the socio-economic and political prosperity of the community were assumed to be bountiful¹⁵.

Owu Abuba: A type of Owu cultural activity that featured on yearly basis during the Owu festival. The dance permitted the free participation of both the ceremonial dancers and amateur members of the Owu cult¹⁶.

Owu Ulo-Akwa: A type of Owu dance which was usually celebrated as a mark of honour in respect of a deceased Owu head. Its celebration followed the decision of the deceased's kinsmen to accord the deceased the funeral rites reserved to late Owu functionaries. Dreaded masquerades carried out their activities during the celebration of this dance¹⁷. For instance, in Awo-Omamma and Amiri, the Agwu usually performed his activities as the king of masquerades in these communities.

Okoroha: A masquerade that comes out during the Owu festive period. Its presence signified that the Owu festivity was coming to an end, as well as the impending new yam festival. It had a unique feature from the other masquerades. For instance, the

masquerade had its language which could only be understood by members of the masquerade cult¹⁸.

Ito nkwa: Also called *itotu nkwa*, was a ceremony associated with the Owu festival. It marked the commencement of the festival. It involved lowering of the traditional musical instruments tied to the roof at the end of one festival celebration. Usually hung in August, the instruments included long and short metal gong (*ogele*), *Abia* (a cylindrically shaped drum), and *ekwe* (wooden instrument), etc. They were usually hung by the officers of the Owu cult led by the *Osere*. After this, the instruments must not be touched until the next Owu celebration when they would be brought down from the rooftop. Before this was done, sacrifices must be offered to the gods where they were notified of the coming celebration and the impending new yam festival. Led by the *Osere*, the sacrifices were done according to villages in the celebrating community. Some of the sacrificial items here included a cock, water pebbles which established the marine origin of the Owu, and *akpu* (*kapok*) plant which signified the continuous existence of the festival¹⁹.

Ito nri alij: A ceremony associated with the Owu festival. The ceremony created an opportunity for every household to communicate through a spiritual medium – the family shrine. Through this means, the presence of the dead was usually sought for in the festival²⁰.

Ara na umu: Another ceremony associated with the Owu festival. This ceremony unified children and grand children with their mothers and grand mothers. It was a commemoration of a traditional mothers' day. It also afforded every matrilineal family member the opportunity to appreciate the dignity of motherhood and their blood lineage²¹. The ceremony formed a ritual link in the chain of the Owu festival.

Osere: A term for the head of the Owu cult - *Onye Isi Owu*. He presided over all meetings of the council. This office was in-charge of the responsibility of producing the dance instruments. He was also the custodian of the mask of the father of masquerades called Agwụ²².

Agwụ: The father of masquerades which appeared only during the Owu Oṃa dance or at the death of an Owu head in Awo-Omamma and Amiri. As the name implies, this masquerade had some evil connotations. For instance, pregnant women were not allowed to behold the presence of this masquerade as such development could lead to miscarriage. Again, in his course of moving around, any domestic animal caught by this masquerade must be released through one of his members, else it remained with Agwụ²³.

Ugbọ: The second office in the Owu cult or Owu organization. The office represented the process or medium which was adopted in transporting the Owu into Oru region. The custodian of this office also served as the personal assistant to the Osere; he was charged with the responsibility of disseminating information to the other officers for a meeting, at the request of the Osere²⁴.

Akpụ/Iche: The third in command of the Owu cult. Like its superiors, it was occupied by a man who had the responsibilities of keeping the parrot feathers used in the dance and safeguarding the kapok tree. The kapok tree was usually planted where the dance would be taking place²⁵.

Ada-owu: This was the fourth office in the hierarchical ladder of the Owu cult. It was manned by a woman whose responsibility was on cooking and serving food on the day of the Owu celebration²⁶. Like other offices of the cult, this office was hereditary. The responsibility of this office lied solely with a woman, despite the fact that men were observed in some communities heading this office. She, amongst other women

in the communities, had the right to participate in the celebration of the Owu festival²⁷.

Ofuzo/Ohuzo: This was a seer which must come out first before the commencement of the Owu festival. Usually, it forbade being seen by a woman. Thus, an attempt to contravene this rule was regarded as desecration of tradition²⁸.

Ozo umu umu/Ozo Afichi: This was the type of ozo title which afforded the male descendants of the titleholder the privilege to be ozo titleholders. It enabled the continued existence of the ozo title within the family of the holder at his demise²⁹.

Ozo otu agha: This was the type of ozo title conferment which solely remained with the holder. It neither provided the male descendants of the holder the opportunity to become ozo titleholders nor gave them the privilege of enjoying the rites of the holder at his demise. The demise of the titleholder meant the termination of the ozo title in his family except one was initiated anew into the ozo royal society³⁰.

Njaba Eziakwu: A deity in Awo-Omamma which partnered with the Alì Ubogwu in judging a case³¹.

Amachi: This was a ceremony associated with the Owu festival in Omuma community. Having existed in the precolonial periods, the ceremony was conducted by women of the community headed by the Ada Owu. It was instituted as a form of compensation to the women on what was perceived in Omuma as an act of injustice; they were prohibited from celebrating the Owu despite being the originators of the culture. The ceremony went into extinction following of neglects by women – a development encouraged by Christianity³².

Agalaga: An elongated structure used as a head-dress which formed part of the costume of the Owu Oma. A wooden carved structure, it was longer than what was used in celebrating the Ekeleke dance³³.

Olokoloja: Also called Ebule Nwaolokoroja, was a dancer with the feature of a masquerade in the Owu festival. With outrageous height, he was usually seen during Owu-Ọma dance; he was provided alongside an owu-ọma by the Ada-owu³⁴.

Ibari: Mini-shrine found in the house of ọzọ titleholder through which he communed with his Chi and ancestors. This was different from the one worn on the waist by the dancers of the Owu, which were produced using different clothing materials³⁵.

Okorosha: A masquerade in Awo-Omamma and Amiri which was usually seen within the Owu festive period³⁶. In Omuma, the Owu dancers were known as Okorosha³⁷.

Ulọ Echere: A hut with an inbuilt fireplace where the Owu equipments were kept. Only the initiated members of the Owu cult had the right to enter the hut³⁸.

Iba n'owu: Initially known as ịkwa mmụọ, this meant initiation into the Owu cult³⁹.

Iyi/Iji Owu: The official salutation of Owu. It involved stopping in the middle of an Owu dance to greet the gods and goddesses of the Owu – the marine cosmic entities who brought about the Owu dance prior to its diffusion into the human society. In doing this, in addition to the common Owu salutation (*Yi kweni owu ni!*), the following expressions were heard: *Akpụ jie owu, Oshere jie owu, Oji ji eme owu, Oji akpụ eme owu, Oji azụ eme owu, aakwani!* In these expressions, Owu ancestors were being called upon to have their share in the dividends of the festival⁴⁰.

Akakpo: A masquerade in Omuma community. Like the Okorosha masquerade in Awo-Omamma and Amiri, the presence of this masquerade was also felt during the celebration of the Owu festival in Omuma⁴¹.

Nne mmọnwụ: A masquerade in Omuma community. Like the Akakpo masquerade, the indigenes of Omuma also witnessed the presence of this masquerade during their Owu festival⁴².

Nwankpa: A principal dancer provided by the Ugbọ during Owu-abuba and Owu-oma dances. In the latter, he was provided alongside an owu-oma⁴³.

Nwaanyanwu: A principal dancer provided by the Akpu/iche, with an owu-oma during Owu-oma cultural dance. A special dance was usually introduced for him once he was sighted at the dancing event arena⁴⁴.

Nwaezeowu: A principal dancer provided by the Osere during Owu-abuba and Owu-oma dances. In the latter, he was provided alongside the Agwu and an owu-oma⁴⁵.

Owu Council: This constituted the Owu cult functionaries of a particular village⁴⁶. Therefore, it was made up of the Osere, Ugbọ, Akpu/iche and the Ada-owu. The Agwoli also constituted part of this council.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the structural functionalist perspective or structural functionalism or functionalism as its theoretical base. With August Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Talcot Parsons as its proponents, the theory emerged as a result of the acknowledged inadequacies of the evolutionary and diffusion theories in the explanation of human societies or social life⁴⁷. One of the oldest and still the dominant theoretical perspective in sociology and social sciences⁴⁸, functionalism sees the society as a complex system whose parts function collectively for the promotion of solidarity and stability⁴⁹.

The theory views the society from a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole, and believes that the society has evolved like organisms⁵⁰. On the social structures and social functions, functionalism addressed the society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements to include norms, customs, traditions, and institutions. These constituent elements are referred to as organs that work to ensure adequate

functioning of the body as a whole. This, therefore, presents the society as a functional whole resulting from the effective and efficient functioning of its parts.

Festivals represent an aspect of the aforementioned constituent elements. They are integral parts of the African society. This results from the fact that man is a social being who in a whole year round engages in different kinds of festivities and/or celebrations. Consequently, U. Onunwa observes that unlike the monk or hermit, man does not spend time in studying the cosmos, but in the daily affairs of the world in the manner of symbolism and ritualism⁵¹.

Festivals, according to C.I. Ejizu, are in African traditional life very popular and recurrent event. They are cultural systems which function for social integration and solidarity. Their celebrations mark times for merry-making, a time to establish new relationships, mend broken ones, and maintain peace in the society⁵². As a constituent part of the study area, which is part of African Society, all these attributes were represented during the celebration of Owu festival.

Literature Review

Reviewing works of other scholars in a similar subject of discussion has been a common routine among researchers. Therefore, without the views of intellectual predecessors and academic mentors, hardly will a product be considered academic or intellectual⁵³.

In relation to the context of this study, Elizabeth Isichei described how rich in culture the Igbo society is. These cultures, in her analysis, are found in their religious lives, belief systems, festivals, etc. In their religious lives, she opined that:

The Igbo regarded their religion with great seriousness. Their sacrifices were real and not token sacrifices; the sacrifice of a goat, for instance, represented a major loss of wealth in a poor society. Religious taboos, especially those surrounding priests and titled men, involved a great deal of what we would call asceticism. While communities deprived themselves of palatable and nutritious foods

in religious name – among them, the sacred fish of the Imo River...⁵⁴.

Though the above submission by Isichei represents an aspect of Igbo culture, it did not consider the impact of this belief system on Igbo land. This study, therefore, revealed that there are some impact associated with Igbo culture on Igbo land. Such impact were examined in this study from the Owu festival, which unarguably represents an aspect of Igbo culture and tradition.

Similarly, Vin Okeke has revealed that akin to many towns in Igbo land which have quite a number of festivals, Awo-Omamma has a number of festivals with the Owu being the most celebrated⁵⁵. On the festivals, he thus submitted:

The Owu festival is celebrated between the months of June and July every year and spans for about a period of six weeks. The yearly calendar owes its structure to this festival as moments of the year counted based on the cultural landmarks of this celebration⁵⁶.

Okeke further revealed the processes associated with the celebration of the festival⁵⁷. He also revealed that the festival is celebrated by the towns surrounding Awo-Omamma⁵⁸. However, his study failed to acknowledge the problems of the Owu festival, as well as the perceptions of the people on the festival. These were amply presented in this study.

G.T. Basden, in his work, is of the view that in Igbo land, there are some types of dancing which are connected with religious festivities⁵⁹. Such dances, which are celebrated as ceremonies, are mainly carried out by women. Describing the dance, Basden further submitted:

It (the dance) consists of almost entirely of strange sinuous movements of the limbs and body... The dances are always held in the open air... Frequently they are held in the compound of a chief or other prominent man. (The dance)... is invariably associated with heavy drinking. After joining in a few short figures at the beginning of the festival, many of the old men find it difficult to rise from their seats of honour with any degree of steadiness⁶⁰.

However, his study did not acknowledge some of the problems of this dancing festival as well as the religious festivities in the Igbo community. Having been considered an important aspect of studies on festival, possible challenges of festivals were examined in this study focusing on the Owu festival.

S.A. Lasisi has maintained that the Orusun festival is celebrated in Idare town, which is one of the oldest towns in Yoruba land. The festival is an annual festival which is celebrated in the month of May or early June every year. The study further revealed that there have been changes in the festival and these represent the major impact of Christianity⁶¹. In as much as it also tried to present the perceptions of the people of Idare town on the festival, the study, however, failed to acknowledge the fact that there must be challenges facing the festival. Therefore, focusing on Owu festival, this study has evidenced that cultural festivals are faced with challenges.

Adiele Afigbo posited that the non-Igbo speaking people of Edo kingdom of Benin had a great cultural influence on the Igbo people. Such cultural influence, according to him, was found in the village chieftaincies and monarchies all over the Western Igbo area. It was also seen in the regalia of these chiefs, in the court ceremonials, in some features of their title system as in the claims that many of these institutions came from Benin. Also, this influence manifested in social institutions and practices which were borrowed from Benin. Undoubtedly, part of these social institutions was the festivals which represented an aspect of the cultures of the people⁶². His study, however, could not underscore how this social institution impacted on the Igbo people of this area (the western area). Also, it de-considered the possible changes which must have taken place in this social institution. With focus on the Owu festival in Oru East communities of Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma,

these lacunas were evidenced in this study as requisites to the study of social institutions of Igbo communities.

Paul Okoro Ashiegbu and Hilary Chukwuka Achunike had posited that in the traditional Igbo society, there was a festival of yam celebration and that this festival had continued to exist till date. This festival, according to them, was celebrated in commemoration of the significance of yam among the Igbo people. Part of this significance was that yam was used as a yardstick for distinguishing the poor and the rich. Consequently, a man would marry so many wives so as to have many children who would assist in farming activities in order to ensure bountiful harvest of yams. In line with its significance, sacrifices were equally offered to the god of yam popularly known as Ifejioku or Ahiajoku⁶³. The study, however, could not trace the origin of the festival in the traditional Igbo community. Also, since the festival still subsists till date, there must have been introduced some changes in its celebration consequent of societal transformations. The study equally did not consider the similarities and differences in the mode of celebration of the festival in Igbo communities. Therefore, by looking at the origin of the Owu festival, this study had established this as an important aspect of studies on festivals. Also, by revealing some of the changes in the festival within the stipulated period of the study, this study has evidenced the fact that festivals are affected by changes in the society. Additionally, this study also served as evidence to the fact that there are similarities and differences associated with a festival which was celebrated by more than one community. This evidence was revealed focusing on the Owu festival in Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma communities in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State.

Paul Okoro Ashiegbu and Hilary Chukwuka Achunike had equally submitted that Nigeria is a nation of traditional festivals. Some of these festivals, as they rightly

outlined, include the yearly celebrated Argungu fishing festival, and the masquerade (mmanwu or mmuo) festival⁶⁴. Talking about the masquerade festival, they thus revealed:

The mask (of the masquerade) is carried by a human being but within it, there is the belief that it is the spirit (mmuo) of the land. Masquerades are very popular in Anambra and Enugu states of Nigeria. Many parts of Nigeria exhibit the masquerade festival at different seasons. In some places like Nsukka, particular masquerades appear once in every three years⁶⁵.

However, from the study, one can conclude that the author through his inability to sample views on the festivals failed to realize that this constitutes an important aspect of studies on festivals. Additionally, by failing to reveal some of the changes in the celebration of masquerade festivals in his areas of study, one could equally submit that the author was ignorant of the fact that traditional festivities are susceptible to societal transformations. These were evidenced in this study focusing on Owu festival in Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma communities.

Pius Azuka Ntagu has revealed that one prominent festival known to the people of Obowo in Imo State was the Iwa-akwa festival. Commenting on the festival, he therefore was of the view that:

Iwa-akwa, literally translated as dressing, is a traditional way of tying wrapper by men quite differently from how women tie wrapper. It could also be referred to as a method of body adornment, temporary or permanent, as applied on human beings. Iwa-akwa is an exclusive male phenomenon within the Igbo society symbolically showing the grown up male child's readiness to accept difficult tasks ahead⁶⁶.

However, it should be noted that one importance of festivals lies on the impact they create on the celebrating communities or towns (as was revealed in this study focusing on the Owu festival in Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma). Therefore, Iwa-akwa, being one of the festivals celebrated in Igbo land, must have some impact and problems in the celebrating community. These were neglected in the study.

Martin Uchendu and Linda Anyalebechi observed that the Igbo people celebrate a ceremony known as the masquerade ceremony, which represents an aspect of their cultural heritage⁶⁷. In describing the ceremony, they maintained that:

A masquerade ceremony (Oso mmanwu) is the day set aside for masquerades to exhibit their prowess in dancing and entertainment and refers adjectively to someone who wears a mask. It is Igbo mythology meaning spirits of the ancestors that guide the people. To the uninitiated, the masquerade (mmanwu) cult is shrouded in myths and secrecy⁶⁸.

The scholars further revealed:

Igbo masquerades are believed to be from the nether world(sic), which come as guests of the living as a means of fostering communication between the living and the dead. This has resulted in the Igbo translation of masquerade as mmanwu which is derived from the two words mmuo (spirit) and onwu (death), thus mmuonwu (dead spirit) or rather in a more understandable way 'mmuo ndi nwuru anwu' (spirit of the dead)⁶⁹.

In all, the scholars concentrated more in explaining what the mmanwu or masquerade ceremony is; they never deemed it imperative to examine the various challenges of this ceremony in Igbo land, as well as the changes introduced in its celebration. These, if had been considered, would have shown that societal changes sometimes constitute a major challenge to festival celebrations. This was evidently presented in this study with central focus on Owu festival in Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma communities.

Olaudah Equiano, in Paul Edwards, was of the view that there existed during his days different customs in the society. One of these customs was an abhorrence of adultery which according to him "...was sometimes punished with slavery or death..."⁷⁰. He further was of the view that the punishment usually meted out to an adulterer or an adulteress was "...inflicted on it through out (sic) most of the nations of Africa, so sacred among them is the honour of the marriage bed and so jealous are they of the fidelity of their wives"⁷¹. Equiano, in this thesis, concentrated on what was

done to a defaulter of this tradition; however, he could not sample peoples' views on the tradition. Additionally, he did not deem it imperative to examine the impact of this tradition on the society. This could stem from the fact that he never considered tradition to be capable of yielding meaningful results on the land that adheres to it. If that be the case, this research stands to debunk this view by revealing the impact created by the Owu festival, which represents an aspect of a people's culture and tradition. Also, by looking at the concepts of the tradition, the study stands to validate the fact that diverse views on a tradition usually exist among the people consisting the adherents.

C.F. Chidozie and A.O. Ayibainewoufini have revealed in their study that there was a festival in Lagos State known as the Eyo festival. This festival, which was a cultural heritage of the people, according to them, had created notable impact on the state. On the economic front, the Eyo festival generates yearly revenue to the government of the state and income avenue for local artisans⁷². Despite the efforts in divulging the impact of the festival, the study, however, failed to bring to limelight the changes that have been introduced in the festival. This could result from the researcher's lack of knowledge on the fact that festivals, like every aspect of the society, are susceptible to change. This study, therefore, served as evidence to the above statement by revealing the various changes that had been introduced in the celebration of the Owu festival in the areas under study.

Ngozi Ezenagu and Tabitha Olatunji have maintained that among the people of Awka town in Anambra State lies a prominent festival known as the Imoka festival. Describing the festival, the duo thus submitted:

This (the Imoka festival) is the first feast observed in traditional Awka calendar. It ushers in the beginning of a New Year and planting season. Imoka feast is the most colourful and famous festival collectively celebrated in Awka. It is a medium through

which the community pay (sic) homage to the Imoka god beseeching him for a prosperous new planting season⁷³.

In this study, Ezenagu and Olatunji went ahead to reveal how and why the festival was instituted in Awka community⁷⁴. However, by neglecting the features of the Imoka festival, the various changes introduced in the celebration of the festival, the problems of the festival, and the views of Awka people on Imoka, the study has failed to establish the fact that these areas are vital in the study of festivals in a given locality. Credence to this assertion was laid in this study focusing on Owu festival in the areas under study.

B.C. Asogwa, J.C. Umeh and V.A. Okwoche, in their research, had maintained that amidst the people of Kebbawa in Argungu town of Kebbi State, Nigeria lies a prominent annual event known as Argungu fishing and cultural festival.

Commenting on the festival, the trio were of the view that:

The Argungu fishing festival (Fashin Ruwa) is a celebration of life. It is a tool of conserving natural resources, maintaining and promoting traditional life. It is the precursor of today's fishery management measure. The local people believe they have been fishermen for all time... It is also part of an ancient fertility ritual which, from the point of view of the local Kebbawa people, is the most important aspect of the occasion. The festival takes place usually in February after all agricultural work is finished. It marks the end of the growing season, and it opens the fishing season with a bang⁷⁵.

The trio, in their study, further admitted that the festival created notable results on the community. This is evident in their submission:

...the festival (Argungu fishing festival) has generally enriched citizens from Argungu who benefited from the award of contracts connected with staging the festival. More than 4000 persons have secured jobs on a seasonal or permanent basis with the fishing festival committee. Most of these employees are engaged as labourers or officials for specific entries to the festival... In short, the various activities connected with the festival have served to raise the average standard of living in Argungu town and its environs⁷⁶.

However, the thesis failed to acknowledge the fact that there are changes which must have been introduced in the celebration of the festival. Also, the study did not deem it

imperative to sample the views of people on the Argungu. This could result from the researchers' lack of knowledge that festivals are victims of change in the society, as well as the fact that diverse views are held by people over a particular festival. This study laid credence to the above assertion using the Owu festival as a case in hand.

P.O. Okunammiri, in his work, had revealed that the Ntumaka festival represented one of the three main festivals celebrated by the people of Obowo in Imo State, Nigeria. The festival, which literarily means the final yam festival of achievement during the dry season, according to him, "...is usually a stock-taking ceremony by which members of the immediate and extended families come together to take census of themselves"⁷⁷. Usually celebrated in two consecutive days (Eke and Orié days) between the months of August and December, the festival, according to Okunammiri, had three stages namely Oji-aka, the main Ntumaka, and Irió-ihie⁷⁸. However, despite the fact that the study failed to acknowledge the challenges facing the festival, the researcher concurred to the fact that there have been recorded some changes in the celebration of the Ntumaka festival. These changes manifested as part of the effects of Western Education and Christianity in Obowo community⁷⁹. Again, considering the fact that Obowo is a local government area, there could have existed elements of similarities and differences in the features of the Ntumaka festival in its fourteen towns. These were equally neglected in the study.

P.S.O. Aremu, Y. Ijisakin, and S. Ademuleya, in their research work, were of the view that among the Yoruba people of Ile-Ife lays a prominent festival known as the Edi festival. According to tradition, the festival was celebrated annually in commemoration of a certain woman called Moremi who sacrificed her happiness in fulfilling her promise to the gods, having achieved her quest to clear the doubts of the

Ife people about the Igbo warriors⁸⁰. The festival, thus, had been recognized by the aforementioned trio as:

...a celebration of acknowledgement of the protection which the deity (Moremi) gave the entire community over the year, which at the same time is to solicit a continuous supply of good things of life to the adherents and the entire Ile-Ife community. The celebration stems from the conscious communal appeal to greater powers for some form of benevolence. They are geared at getting benefits such as rainfall, good harvest, eradication of poverty and human reproduction...⁸¹.

The researchers, however, failed to acknowledge the various changes associated with the celebration of the festival in Ile-Ife community. They could be unaware that as components of the society, festivals are susceptible to societal changes. This research, therefore, served as evidence to this assertion focusing on the Owu festival in the areas under study.

Elizabeth Modupe Olaniyan has revealed that the Osun festival is one of the traditional festivities celebrated by the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. The festival, which was an annual celebration, usually served as a period and occasion for joy, merriment, and spectacle. Celebrated in August every year, it had a crowd-pulling strength, and the date for its celebration was usually fixed by the elders of Osogbo, consisting of the king, the chiefs, the chief priests and priestesses of Osun River⁸². Additionally, as she further stressed, the festival runs through two weeks but the major events were carried out within only seven days in the two weeks. During this period, some ritual rites were performed by the priests and the priestesses involved⁸³. Having explained the Osun festival and its practices, Olaniyan in this piece, failed to bring to limelight the impact, changes, and divergent views of the people of Oshogbo vis-à-vis the Osun festival. This could result from the researcher's unawareness that these areas are vital in historical studies involving festivals. The vitality of these areas was divulged in this study focusing on the Owu festival.

In his work, A.E. Afigbo, in reference to the researches of H.F. Mathews, P.A. Talbot, Simon Ottenberg, U.I. Ukwu, and David Northrup, was of the view that trade routes which were controlled by the Aro, Efik, Ijo, Awka, Nkwerre, Abiriba, and Akunakuna intimately linked the people of South-eastern Nigeria⁸⁴. However, the study did not realize that aside trade, festivals could also have contributed in linking the peoples of south-eastern Nigeria, during this period. This could result from the author's negligence on the potency of festivals in inter-group relations. This study, therefore, revealed that festivals, just as trade, were (and still are) promoters of inter-group relations, focusing on the Owu festival.

A.E. Afigbo, in his work, equally posited that the "southern Nigeria was not an economic island entirely of itself but on the contrary was linked virtually by trade with the peoples of the Benue valley"⁸⁵. The study neglected the fact that cultural institutions, which festival is part of, equally contributed to the promotion of this link. This was evidenced by Ade Obayemi when he posited that an institution (a cultural institution) contributes in promoting the links between Igbo villages of Nsukka region and the Igala neighbours (members of the Benue valley)⁸⁶. This represents an impact of a cultural institution on communities. Further impact of cultural institutions on communities were examined in this study focusing on the Owu festival.

Geoffery Parrinder, in his study, has revealed that there is a traditional ceremony associated with the Zangbeto society. Talking about the society, he maintained that the "Zangbeto... is the strongest (society) in the region of Porto Novo, though... found along the coast into Nigeria at Badagry. The ... society serves as an initiation society for young men, as well as representing the spirits of the dead"⁸⁷. This traditional ceremony is usually carried out during the initiation of a new member. Here, the "candidate for initiation ... pay gifts in cash or kind, and is then

told when to appear in the grove... There was (also) a ritual interrogation, to which the devotees chant in chorus...⁸⁸. However, Parrinder failed to acknowledge in his work the various changes introduced in the traditional ceremony. This could result from the author's lack of knowledge on the fact that societal changes affect various components of the society, an example being festivals. Evidence of this was laid in this study using the Owu traditional or cultural celebration.

J.C. Nwadike and J.O. Nwoke had stressed that among the people of Okwudor existed a cultural festival known as the Oghu (Owu) cultural festival. In their study, the duo were able to present useful information on the origin of the cultural festival, the procedures of its celebration, the offices of the Oghu organization, as well as the instruments used in the celebration of the festival⁸⁹. In addition, like the features, Nwadike and Nwoke also revealed some of the impact of the Oghu festival on Okwudor community. Amongst these impact was the fact that the Oghu festival creates unity among the people of Okwudor, as well as reunion between those living in the cities and those in the rural community⁹⁰. The study, however, did not acknowledge the changes introduced in the celebration of this festival. These were presented in this research work focusing on the communities under study.

Chuks Osuji had averred that one cultural festivity known with the entire Igbo nation was the New Yam festival. According to him:

Yam eating festival is a serious Igbo cultural and traditional affair. ...today it is most universally observed Igbo festival ... characterized by exchange of visits and gifts, excessive feasting, slaughtering of cows and fowls and eating of yam prepared in various forms⁹¹.

The study further affirmed that there are variations associated with the celebration of the festival in different communities when it pointed out that:

Dates and times (for the celebration of the New Yam) vary from community to community, from clan to clan. The Aros called it Ikeji, Mbaise and other clans within Igbo heartland call it Iriji, others may have different types of terminology for the same festival but the

objective is the same – to mark the beginning of yam harvesting by thanking God for His protection of the people and for giving them successful bounty⁹².

In all, having attempted to identify the differences, and views of people on the festival, the study failed to acknowledge the existing similarities in the pattern of the celebration of the new yam festival in the celebrating communities. Focusing on the Owu festival in the study area, this research evidenced that, there exist similarities in the celebration of festivals that cut across communities.

J.F.A. Ajayi and E.J. Alagoa were of the view that trade was one major factor that linked the peoples of Nigeria prior to the 19th century. In their words, thus:

...different Nigerian peoples interacted through trade... in the 14th and 15th centuries... Several major trade routes become prominent linking Hausaland with Borno; Borno with Adamawa and the Benue valley; Hausaland with Nupe and the confluence; Hausaland with Yorubaland; Yorubaland with Benin. In addition there was constant traffic on the Niger-Benue waterway and on the creeks and lagoons. These were in addition to the innumerable branch routes and networks of local routes linking various periodic markets⁹³.

However, the study failed to acknowledge the fact that factors like festivals, just like trade, must have also contributed in linking these various groups together. This could result from the authors' inability to realize that festivals promote inter-group relations. Evidence of this was provided in this study with a focus on Owu festival.

M.A. Onwuejeogwu, in one of the results of his interviews, admitted that there existed traditional cults as part of the cultural identities of Nri. Revealing some of these cults, he first recognized the cult of the Ikenga which had spread all over Igbo land as a result of the belief in progress attached to it⁹⁴. He also explained the Ikenga:

Ikenga is the right hand with which a person works out a successful living in this difficult world. If one is successful, one gives good things to one's Ikenga. If one fails in his undertakings and if life becomes difficult and hopeless, instead of committing suicide, he can always hang up his Ikenga. Some frustrated people would split their Ikenga and throw it away and make a new one, thus starting a new life⁹⁵.

Additionally, Onwuejeogwu provided other cults that existed in Nri. They thus include the Iru cult, which was the cult of the face symbolizing a commanding and charming personality essential in winning the heart of men; the Uhu cult, which was the cult of the tongue representing one's fame in the community; and the Ụkwụ na Ije cult signifying success in adventures in a foreign land⁹⁶. Though his thesis presented what each of the cults represents in the tradition of Nri, Onwuejeogwu, however, failed to look into the various views of the people of Nri vis-à-vis the tradition of the cult, the various changes introduced in the cults consequent of societal transformations, and the impact of the cult on the adhering community. He could have de-factored these as important aspects of the tradition. This study, therefore, evidenced that these components were important aspects of a traditional cult, exemplifying with the Owu cult in Oru East Local Government Area. This evidence was provided using the Owu festival which is known with the members of the Owu cult.

P.I. Oguagha had stressed that some of the features in Igbo society were felt as a result of cultural diffusion which resulted from the interactions between the Igbo and her neighbours. On the Igbo-Efik and Ibibio relations, he thus submitted:

Igbo interaction with its southern neighbours, the Efik and Ibibio, account for the secret societies found among southern Igbo groups like Ohuhu, Ngwa, and Aro communities. Such societies include the Ekpe, Akang and Okonko which played active roles in the administration of the towns⁹⁷.

However, as social institutions, Oguagha did not deem it imperative to look at the other aspects of these secret societies such as changes introduced in their practices, and their similarities and differences. This could result from the author's negligence in perceiving these areas as vital components of social institutions. This study, therefore, divulged the relevance of these outlined areas in social institutions focusing on the Owu festival.

Still on the Igbo, P.I. Oguagha equally submitted:

The head-hunting practice of the Cross River Igbo groups of Abam, Ohafia, Abiriba and Edda have been traced to (the) cultural influence from their semi bantu neighbours the Yako and Ekoi peoples. Among some of the riverine Igbo communities along the Niger masked dances like Okorosia and Ogbukele were derived from the Owu dances of Ijo⁹⁸.

Oguagha, in this submission, like the previous one, tries to further establish the cultural influence the Igbo have as a result of their interaction with their non-Igbo neighbours. Here, he tries to establish that the practice of head-hunting which is associated with the aforementioned Igbo groups was as a result of the interaction of these groups with the Yako and Ekoi. The Ogbukele and Okorosia masked (cultural) dances which are cultural features of the riverine Igbo communities, were resultant effects of their interactions with the Ijo. In all, his thesis also failed to capture other aspects of these cultural practices, especially their impact on the Igbo communities as well as the changes introduced in their practices. As cultural institutions, these represent very important areas to study. Evidence of the importance of these components in the study of social cum cultural institutions was further provided in this study focusing on the Owu festival in the area under study.

On Aguinyi clan (a group in Igbo land), Lambert Ejiofor revealed the importance of the masquerade cult. According to him, masquerades contribute their own quota in legislative process, thus he posited:

They (masquerades) are mainly of a recreational value; however, they are used for guarding certain places and properties. In the execution of their assignment, they make rules that facilitate their work. Their power lies in their 'invisibility' and 'anonymity'. They frequently enact laws barring people from dealing with those who have gone against their rules⁹⁹.

Though the study tried to present the impact of the masquerade on Aguinyi clan, which was divulged in the area of legislation, the study did not deem it imperative to reveal the process of making and enacting these laws. In these processes must lay

some changes owing to the fact that as a social cum cultural institution, the masquerade cult was susceptible to societal changes. Therefore, in this study, pieces of evidence of societal change on cultural institutions were presented focusing the Owu festival.

A. Onyeneke, in his study, provided that:

Every Igbo community, whether at the village group, village or major lineage, had occasionally observes festivals. They are public celebrations of events considered important and of high value by (the) community. Events that invite public celebrations may be those of life crises of individual birth, puberty, marriages, title taking ... death celebration, marking of farm cycles of planting and harvesting and the veneration of local deities, personal 'chi' (gods as personal spirit) and the community ancestors¹⁰⁰.

Though Onyeneke's thesis tried to divulge some of the possible types of festivals (which he called public events) in Igbo land, it failed to acknowledge the fact that these festivals have their features which makes them distinct to one another as well as peculiar to their observing communities. This, therefore, was evidenced in this study focusing on Owu festival in Oru East L.G.A.

A.A. Opoku quoting Busia, informed us that:

Ritual surrounds important seasonal community activities as well as the critical periods of an individual's life. Planting, harvesting and fishing, birth, puberty, marriage – these are occasions for the community or kin group to come together, to join in song and dance or ritual to give expression to the sense of dependence on the ancestors or on other supernatural powers¹⁰¹.

However, it is important to note at this juncture that rituals represent an important aspect or feature of festivals. This was neglected in his study. This study, therefore, affirmed this fact focusing on Owu festival in the study area.

J. Mbiti, in his study, tried to reveal the importance of festivals to the people.

Therefore, he submits:

Through festivals the life of the community is renewed. People are entertained and their tensions find outlets. It also brings together the people as a group, thus strengthening their unity and cohesion. Religious and secular values are repeated and renewed through

communal festivals. Artistic talents are utilized, drama and oral communication. Where the festival involves beliefs concerning the unseen world, the link between human beings and spirit is renewed¹⁰².

The above revelation by Mbiti equally suggests likely results festivals usually create on the celebrating communities. This represents an important aspect of a study on festivals. It is also important to note that challenges facing festivals represent an important aspect of such study. This, however, was not considered in his thesis. In this study, therefore, the problems of the Owu festival in the area under study were looked into as an important aspect of study on festivals.

M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, in his study, revealed that there exists a cordial relationship between Nri and Orieri towns of Anambra State. He also divulged the origin of this relationship when he posited:

...the Orieri social structures and political system shows that they have three maximal lineages: Umu Nri Agu, Umu Nnakwa and Umu Nri Ezula. The founders of these three maximal lineages were regarded as the sons of Avo, who was himself regarded as the brother of Nri. Avo fled from Nri after a disagreement and founded Orieri which is only about ten miles south-west of Nri and is now bounded by Adazi Enu town on the north, Igbo-Ukwu on the south, Agulu-Uzo-Igbo on the east and Ichida on the west¹⁰³.

On the results of the relationship, he further stated that:

The ... (cultural) system developed in Orieri was similar in many respects to that in Nri. It was based on a sacred kinship called Nri that manipulated the... religious symbol in order to achieve political cohesion and economic viability and dominance amongst people whose basic social structure consisted of segmentary patrilineages¹⁰⁴.

Despite the similarity, there must exist difference in the cultural systems of both towns. This was neglected in his study. This research, therefore, evidenced the fact that cultural dissimilarities exist between communities whose relationships have been existing since time immemorial. Such evidence was presented in this study looking at the features of the Owu festival in the area under study.

Olatundun Abosede Oderinde, in his study, revealed that the Yoruba people are a group in Nigeria known with replete religious cum cultural festivals. Some of these festivals, according to him, include the Ifa, Ogun and Sango festivals¹⁰⁵. Though the study tried to reveal some of the features of these festivals, however, it failed to acknowledge the fact that these festivals could be facing some challenges in their areas of celebration. This study, therefore, evidenced the fact festivals face some challenges in their various places of celebrations focusing on Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area. This represents an important aspect of studies on festivals.

Donald Uchenna Omenuko, in his study, provided some knowledge on Igbo culture. He revealed that Igbo culture to include traditional custom, beliefs and general way of life of the people, are derived from their ancient history; as well as issues in the alliance of Igbo culture and religion¹⁰⁶. He further submitted that:

Igbo culture is guided and influenced by both religion and worldview. Through the accompanying ritual, religion may be used to enhance the transmission of tradition. The traditional practices of the people are more in time with animism which involves the worship of many gods. This is more the case because the Igbo see themselves as part of nature rather than superior or outside it¹⁰⁷.

In all, the study, however, failed to reveal various important units in the study of Igbo culture, such as the impact, challenges and features of the culture. The perceived changes also constitute an important unit of such study. These were amply represented in this study on Owu festival as an example of Igbo culture.

Jimi Ogunnaike, in his study, provided that the Ojude Oba festival is a festival known with the people of Ijebu Ode in the western part of Nigeria. This festival, according to him, means “...the forecourt or frontage of the king”¹⁰⁸. He further submitted that the festival was previously known as the Obanta festival which was instituted by Awujale Ogborogan Obanta¹⁰⁹. The study went ahead to reveal some of

the advantages or benefits of the festival which cut across social, economic, political and cultural dimensions¹¹⁰. However, the study failed to look at the challenges of the Ojude Oba festival which unarguably represents an important aspect of studies on festivals. This was substantiated in this study on Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area.

Gabriel Alhassan Ottah, maintained that in Onitsha Anambra State of Nigeria is celebrated the Ofala festival, which is also regarded as Ofala Nnewi¹¹¹. According to him:

It (Ofala festival) is celebrated annually to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Igbos (sic) and also foster unity and love among them. The term Ofala is derived from the words *ofa* meaning authority, and *ala* meaning land. A merger of the words therefore means authority of the land¹¹².

He continued:

...the Ofala festival dates back to the 1950s. It used to be celebrated twice within the Obi kingship era. The first was a day after coronation of the Obi, and the second, after his death. Today, the Ofala is celebrated annually because of civilization and political influences¹¹³.

Though the study further revealed the celebration patterns which constitute part of the features of the Ofala¹¹⁴, it, however, failed to divulge the possible challenges starring threatening the existence of the festival. This study, therefore, proved the fact that festivals battle with challenges in their celebrating communities focusing on Owu Festival in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State. This also constitutes an important aspect of studies on festivals.

Edwin Njoba Onyeabor was of the view that in Onicha Igboeze community in Ebonyi State exists a prominent festival – the New Yam Festival. In his observation:

New Yam Festival (*Iri ji ofu*) in Onicha Igboeze community begins in the ancestral villages of Ndiumeze and Ufuakuma in Ntiabor with the rebuilding of the yam-house (*iwu ulo ji*) in Ufuakuma. The elders of these villages are traditionally charged with the responsibility of determining the appropriate date for observing New Yam Festival, usually in the month of August, which coincide (sic) with the period

of harvest. The rebuilding of the yam-house signifies the new yam is due for harvest. The date is scheduled ahead of eight market days (one month) which is then conveyed to the Ezeugo who is the traditional ruler of the community and his ruling council. It is the Ezeugo that (sic) announces this date to the entire community¹¹⁵.

He further submitted:

Events of the festival take-off properly on Afor market day. It is on this day that members of the community take purchases of the essential things for (the) celebration of New Yam. On the second day, which is usually market called Nkwo Oshiji in the people's language, members of the community embarked on cutting of sticks that are traditionally used for harvesting new yam. However, traditional title-holders are free to harvest their yams on this day. The third day, being Eke market day, is the feast of new yam. It is marked with the harvest of new yam, breaking the yam and thanksgiving. Sacrifices are made and the people pray for renewed life as they eat the new yam¹¹⁶.

The author in his study also took cognizance of the impact of the festival which was revealed in the area of tourism; however, his study failed to acknowledge the possible changes which must have been introduced in the festival. He could have disregarded the fact that festivals are susceptible to social changes and transformations. Evidence of this was presented in this study on Owu Festival in Oru East Local Government Area.

In their study, Tayo O. George and Tolulope A. Amusan revealed how profoundly religious the Igbo people are. They believe in a benevolent Creator known as Chukwu, who created the universe¹¹⁷. The Igbo also believe in the existence of the alusi, which in the words of the authors, are:

...minor deities and ...forces for blessing or destruction, depending on circumstances. They punish social offences and those who unwittingly infringe their privileges. The role of the diviner is to interpret the wishes of the alusi, through hereditary lineage or he is chosen by a particular god for his service, usually after passing through a number of mystical experiences. Each person also has a personalized providence, which comes from Chukwu, and returns to him at the time of death, a Chi¹¹⁸.

It should also be noted that demonstration of belief systems of the Igbo people are also seen in festivals which constitutes part of the traditional social institutions. This was

not considered in their study. In this study, therefore, the Owu Festival has been presented as an aspect of the belief system of the Igbo people with a focus on Oru East Local Government Area, which is a microcosm of the larger Igbo society.

D.O. Makinde provided that amongst the people of Ogbomosho lies the Egungun Festival, which has been adjudged the most popular traditional festival of the Yoruba people of Nigeria¹¹⁹. The author further revealed the processes involved in its celebration; in his words:

...a calendar ...is worked out to fix the date and period of the festival. Usually, the celebration covers a seven-day period. The festival is held between the second and third week in June every year. Secondly, once the date is fixed, elaborate preparations are made towards the festival. ...the town crier beat (sic) his gong to alert and sensitize the public to the proposed festival. ...the festival is usually characterized by merry-making, entertainment, singing, drumming, dancing, procession and feasting members of the Egungun cult, neighbours, family and friends. The coming together of the people is re-enacted, and many people for the first time in the year meet in this occasion¹²⁰.

In all, the author failed to reveal some of the changes experienced in the celebration of the festival. The author could be ignorant of the fact that as changes are introduced in a society, the components of that society are equally affected and that include the belief systems, customs and traditions where festivals belong. Evidence of this was provided in this study focusing on the Owu Festival in the study area.

Emeka Nwabueze recalled an observation he made in Igbo masquerade festival. He had submitted that:

The long-term effect of the European sojourn in Igbo land was that it brought into conflict another set of cultural values with those of the Igbo people. The Portuguese arrived at the Niger Delta around 1470, came into contact with the Igbo people, and an alien culture was thrust into the midst of the Igbos (sic). Though the sojourn of the Portuguese was short-lived, it heralded the coming of other European colonialists. The colonizers sought to force their own culture on the Igbos (sic) thus placing Igbo culture in double jeopardy. Regarding the effect of this on the masquerade performance, one notices that the arrival of the Europeans led to events which necessitated the transition of the masquerade performance from their ritual practices to entertainment¹²¹.

From the above submission, the author tried to recount the negative effect of the Europeans' presence in Igbo land on Igbo culture with a specific example on masquerade performance, which unarguably, is a type of cultural and traditional exhibition in Igbo land. Such effect was witnessed in the distortion of the cultural tenets of the tradition; consequently, masquerade performance transmitted from cultural event to a mere exhibition for entertainment. This constitutes a challenge as well as a change in masquerade performance in Igbo land. Despite these unhealthy developments, however, there could be some recorded impact of this cultural event or exhibition on Igbo land. Constituting an important aspect of studies on cultural events, this was neglected by the author. In this study, impact of cultural events on the host community has been presented as an important aspect of such study focusing on Owu Festival in Oru East Local Government Area.

Gbadegbe Richard Selase maintained that in Ghana, there exists a festival known as the Asogli yam festival. The festival is celebrated to thank the gods for the gift of fresh yam¹²². The author went further to unveil some of the economic values of the festival which were felt in the areas of yam farming, art and crafts, tourism, native games, the hospitality industry, trade and housing¹²³. The activities associated with the festival which equally represent aspects of the features of the Asogli yam festival were also provided in the study¹²⁴. The author, however, failed to consider some of the challenges affecting the festival in the celebrating community. This could result from his inability to recognize this as an important aspect of studies on festivals. If that be the case, this study presented this aspect to be pertinent in the study of festivals focusing on Owu Festival in Oru East.

Abioye Lukman Adegboyega, in his study, provided an insight into the Egungun festival. He explained the festival as a yearly festival observed among the

Yoruba speaking tribe of South Western Nigeria, for several days to appease the spirits of the ancestors¹²⁵. It is believed that during the festival, the dead members of the community will come back to make prayers for living ones¹²⁶. Since the festival is celebrated across Yoruba land, there could be elements of differences and similarities existing in its celebration amongst the various observing Yoruba communities. This was neglected in the study. Therefore, this study on Owu festival proved that there are similarities and differences in the features of a festival observed in more than one community in a given ethnicity.

Ukachukwu Chris Manus posited that Emume Iri Ji Ohuru constitutes one of the festivals celebrated among the Igbo of South East Nigeria. This festival, according to him:

...is a thanksgiving festival otherwise known by different names among various sub-ethnic groups in Igbo land. The ceremony is variously known as Emume-Ifejioku, Iwa-Ji, Ime-Ahiolu, Emume-Ahianjoku, Iro Ofo or Ofala. The rite (to the festival) is celebrated in many Igbo villages in the form that follows the Okpala, that is the eldest Oji Ofo (a person who is held as the most upright and just, the one who commands moral authority in an Igbo community) is the recognized ritual head. The rite is usually performed under an Ukwu-Egbu tree, an Ukwu Abosi or an Ogirisi tree. On that day, the most fattened yam tubers donated by an accomplished Di Ji (expert yam-cultivator in the community) are displayed. A huge cock, several kola-nuts, kegs of dry gin and jars of palm-wine, alligator peppers and other ritual items such as nzu (white chalk), nchara (yellow chalk), edo (red chalk) are gathered¹²⁷.

Despite the fact that the new yam festival is observed by different communities in Igbo land, its pattern of celebration differs in these communities. This was not considered by the author. Therefore, this study on Owu festival verified the existence of dissimilarities in the system of celebrating a festival observed in more than one community.

I.S. Yusuf Oluwatoyin and Ishola Owa Afolabi wrote on the tourism potentials of traditional marriage festivals. In their argument: “the events of these acts of

marriage could not be divorced from the normal activities of tourism because in it are embedded lot of pleasurable attractions”¹²⁸. However, the study failed to reveal some of the changes introduced in Nigeria’s traditional marriage festivals. This study, therefore, proved the fact that festivals in Nigeria have remained victims of change, and this was as a result of social transformations.

Chinyere S. Ecoma and Lequome E. Ecoma, in their study, looked at the Edele festival of the people of Itigidi in Agbo clan of Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State. They had submitted that:

The Edele festival denotes a period of rest from hard work. It is also a period of recreation and merriment for all. ...non-indigenes and citizens gather together to watch the festival. The usual recreation to Edele is emotional fascination which is entertained. People dance to rythms to Edele music. The enthusiasm with which people clamour to watch the Edele is traceable to the beautiful dance styles and variations of the music¹²⁹.

The duo were able to reveal the impact of the festival which cuts across economic and social dimensions, as well as the processes involved in its celebration which constitutes part of its features. Their study, however, failed to consider some of the challenges threatening the existence of the Edele festival. This study on Owu festival, therefore, evidenced the fact that festivals are usually faced with challenges in their celebrating communities, and this constitutes an important aspect of studies on festivals.

Abdul-Rasheed NA’ALLAH conducted a study on the Egungun festival which is known among the Yoruba people. The study looked at the origin of the festival through different traditional perspectives¹³⁰. It, however, failed to look at the features of the festival which which constitutes its major aspect from the period of origination. This study, thus, looked at the features of Owu festival in the area under study. By so doing, it presented this aspect as an important area to consider in studies on festivals.

Chinwe Nwoye, in her study, emphasized on the existence of the Abam n’obi and child naming ceremonies in Igbo land. While the former involves a “ritual ceremony of the take-over of the home-head by the eldest son of the family...”¹³¹, the later is “the ritual naming of the newborn (which in the Igbo worldview) ...is the beginning point of being socialized into the membership of the community”¹³². The processes involved in carrying out these ceremonies were not revealed by the author. She could have disregarded this as an important aspect of studies on social events. This research, therefore, proved celebration process as important aspect of studies on social events. This constitutes part of the features of such events.

S. Kquofi, A. Olowonirejuaro and E.A. Asante, wrote on some of the festivals celebrated in Asante and Ijaw ethnic groups of Ghana and Nigeria, respectively. On Asante, the trio provided that:

Three major festivals of the Asante ethnic group are the *Akwasidae*, *Awukudae* and *Adaekesee*. The *Akwasidae* is celebrated on Sundays only, every forty days throughout the year. In the Ashanti calendar with nine months making a year, the *Akwasidae* festival marks the beginning of a new month. Every month has forty days. It is a day for remembrance of the ancestors. In the morning of an *Akwasidae*, the *Asantehene* goes to the mausoleums to pour libation and offer prayers to the ancestors. Requests and the needs of the people would be asked of the ancestors and the stool houses of various families may be opened to the family members. They pour libation, offer sacrifices and ask for the help of their ancestors as a family, which crowned by a grand durbar where the *Asantehene* sits in (a) state surrounded by his retinue of elders¹³³.

On the Ijaw, the authors equally submitted:

Three major festivals celebrated by the Ijaw are the *Segbein*, New Yam Festival and *Amapumo*. With their residence and towns very close to the water, between the months of August and November, there is flood yearly for the Ijaws (sic). After the flood, at end of November or early December, they celebrated the *Segbein* festival. When the water has receded, there a lot of fish and other sea food (sic) trapped behind in the mud, which the people go after. They go fishing in beautifully decorated boats and beautiful attire for themselves. Both men and women are involved in this exercise. After making (a) big harvest of sea food (sic), they compete in the boat regatta which is a boat racing exercise. The chiefs, elders and other members of the community, visitors gather at the river bank to

watch the display. In the evening, the traditional priest offers sacrifices and performs libation to the ancestors, expressing their gratitude for a bumper harvest. The people give parts of their harvest to the traditional priest, his followers, compound heads and to the chief of the town. This attitude of sharing symbolises their strong sense of caring and belongingness¹³⁴.

The trio continued:

The *Amapumo*, ...a town cleansing festival, takes place also at the end of a flood. At the dawn of the day appointed for *Amapumo*, the traditional priest, chiefs and some members of the community dress in rags with their faces blackened with kitchen soot. Also, they insert leaves of oil palm branches in their mouth whilst they sweep every compound, pathway and parts of the whole community. This is symbol of “sweeping away” disease, poverty, curses, barrenness, famine and death. This ritual is climaxed at the river bank where they wash their bodies as a sign of cleansing away misfortunes, after which they feast and make merry¹³⁵.

In all, as evidently shown above, the authors failed to look at the possible impact, challenges and changes in these festivals. Festivals create impact and face challenges in their celebrating communities. As events rooted in their communities since time immemorial, there exist elements of changes in their celebrations. Credence to these postulations was laid in this study on Owu Festival.

Christian Ikechukwu Nwaru, in his research, looked at the Ikeji festival, when he submitted that:

The Ikeji festival is a long held (sic) tradition passed down through the ancestry of the Arondizuogu clan emanating from Arochukkwu in Abia State. It is an annual festival of the entire Aro kingdom spread alongside the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. The festival is an annual home coming (sic) ceremony and gathering of the Aro descendants from home and abroad to give thanks to God for making them see the New Year¹³⁶.

The Ikeji festival must have created some notable impact on Arondizuogu community. This was not considered in the study. This study on Owu festival, thus, showed that festivals create notable impact on their host communities.

Kelechi Chika Ubaku, while considering in his study, the roles played by the Owu, Okorosha and the New Yam festivals in strengthening the relations of Awo-Omamma and Amiri communities¹³⁷, failed to reveal the challenges as well as the

similarities and differences of these festivals in these communities. Therefore, this study on Owu festival, did not just prove that festivals face challenges in their host communities but also served as evidence on the existence of similarities and differences on a particular festival celebrated by more than one community. The latter constitutes a major feature of such festival.

AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm, informed us that among the Yoruba people of Ijebu land is the Ojude Oba festival¹³⁸. According to him:

The ...festival normally begins with prayers by the Imam of Ijebuland, followed by the National Anthem, Ogun State Anthem, and the Awujale Anthem, and finally the lineage praise of the Ijebus (sic). ...after the anthems and lineage praise, the parade of different ages in the community known as *Regberegbe* begins¹³⁹.

The author revealed more features of the festival which were seen in the areas of dressing, music and musical instruments, the use of horses, the mock war, as well as the significance of the festival which assumed cultural and spiritual dimensions¹⁴⁰. However, he could not divulge the challenges facing the Ojude Oba as well as the changes introduced in the celebration of the festival. This study, therefore, presented these areas as important aspects of studies on festivals focusing on Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area.

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opportunity to observe the festival in Oru East and Njaba Local Government
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16. Ngimah.
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18. Chinedu Omeziri, 48 Years, Civil Servant, interviewed at his residence in Awo-
Omamma, 10/08/16.
19. Anene.
20. Ubaku.
21. Ngimah.
22. Ngimah.
23. Gerald Ukwuegbu, 55 Years, Headmaster, interviewed at his residence in Amiri,
18/09/16.
24. Augustine Uzo, 79 Years, Osere, interviewed at his residence in Omuma,
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33. Ngimah.
34. Ngimah.
35. Omeziri.
36. The researcher observed the presence of Okorosha masquerades in one of the Owu festive periods in Awo-Omamma and Amiri. This observation was corroborated by Chinedu Omeziri in an interview session.
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38. Anene.
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CHAPTER TWO

LAND AND PEOPLE OF THE STUDY AREA

In the preceding section, the areas of concentration in this study were the towns Awo-Omamma, Omuma and Amiri. Though these three towns alone do not make up the entire Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State, the primary rationale behind the limitation of this study on these towns stems from the fact that among the six towns that are found in the Local Government Area, only the aforementioned celebrate(d) the Owu festival – the central discourse of this study. Therefore, in this chapter, the requisite information on the land and people of Awo-Omamma, Omuma and Amiri communities were provided. These pieces of information cut across the physical, their economic, socio-political features and religion and culture.

Physical Features

Awo-Omamma, Omuma and Amiri communities, as earlier divulged, are located in Oru East Local Government Areas of Imo State. A tradition of origin, the Oma tradition, holds that the trio were progenies of certain ancestral parents, Oma and Mma, believed to have lived in Ibiasoegbe, a town presently found in Oru West Local Government Area of Imo State¹. Other children of this couple include Egwe, Egbe, Mgbidi and Atta². This tradition further holds that the evidence of cultural uniformity existing among these communities was as a result of their common ancestral descent³. However, as they grew into men, the three brothers migrated to various locations where they settled, and their descendants subsequently constituted the existing communities.

The town, Awo-Omamma, is dichotomized into Ofekata and Eziawo sections, covering an area of about 89.2 square kilometers⁴. It is bounded in the north by

Mgbidi and Otulu in Oru West Local Government Area and Amiri in Oru East Local Government Area; in the east by Okwudor in Njaba Local Government Area; in the west by Akabu, Awa and Mgbele in Oguta Local Government Area, and in the south by Eziama Obiato in Mbaitolu Local Government Area⁵. The Njaba River which rises from Isunjaba in Isu Local Government Area of Imo State washes the southern stretch of the town before emptying into the Oguta Lake⁶.

Awo-Omamma lies between sixteen and twenty kilometres on the Owerri-Onitsha trunk A road⁷. The town situates in a tropical evergreen rainforest belt with all the climatic traits of the zone. The plains are low. The presence of the Njaba River provides the people of this community with access to a natural source of water supply. Presently, there exist six autonomous communities, fourteen villages, and thirty six kindreds in Awo-Omamma⁸. The autonomous communities and their traditional rulers include:

- ❖ Ofekata I, HRH Eze Anthony Nnabuo (Ezeudo III of Ofekata I);
- ❖ Ofekata II, HRH Eze Benard Amanfo (Ezeoha IV of Ofekata II);
- ❖ Ofekata III, HRH Eze Polycarp Abanukam (Okosisi I of Ofekata III);
- ❖ Ofekata IV or Umuezeali/Umueme, HRH Eze Titus Ngimah (Uchekaku I);
- ❖ Eziawo I, HRH Eze Leonard Amukamara (Egbuador III of Eziawo I); and
- ❖ Eziawo II, HRH Eze Theophilus Onyenekwu (Imo IV of Eziawo II)⁹.

The villages, on the other hand, include:

- ❖ Ubogwu in Ofekata I Autonomous Community;
- ❖ Ubachima in Ofekata II Autonomous Community;
- ❖ Okworji and Umubochi Villages in Ofekata III Autonomous Community;
- ❖ Umuezeali and Umueme Villages in Ofekata IV Autonomous Community;

Fig. II shows Map of Awo-Omamma in Oru East Local Government Area showing the villages of the community, excluding Umuelibe which is yet to be included in the map

Source: Oru East Local Government Area Area Council, Omuma (2000)

- ❖ Umuokwe, Obibi and Ohuba Villages in Eziawo I Autonomous Community;
- and
- ❖ Isieke, Umuezukwe, Ubahaeze and Umuezike Villages in Eziawo II Autonomous Community¹⁰.

Under these villages are the kindreds (See villages and kindreds in Awo-Omamma attached). The emergence of Umuelibe as a village brought the number of existing villages in the community to fourteen. The indigenes of Umuelibe had achieved autonomy as a village having successfully seceded from Okworji village. This secession cause was championed by Achiukwu, Ogbenna, and Nwakamma families, which are influential amidst the seceding group. Despite the recognition of its autonomy within the community, however, Umuelibe is yet to be gazetted, hence its absence in the existing map of Awo-Omamma.

In Omuma, there are four traditional rulers spearheading the affairs of the autonomous communities. A recent development, this did not constitute the original traditional political structure of the community. There existed, prior to this period, a single autonomous community under the leadership of HRH Eze A.E. Ukachukwu, Eze Oma I of Omuma¹¹. To satisfy various political interests, however, four autonomous communities were subsequently carved out of the existing single autonomous community. This brought about the emergence of four traditional rulers in Omuma.

The traditional rulers and their autonomous communities include HRH Eze B.U. Agwaimo, Ogwualamakiri I of Umuhu Omuma autonomous community; HRH Eze G.O.B. Okafor Anyanwu, Igwe I of Etiti Omuma autonomous community; HRH Eze T.O. Ukachukwu, Ezejiofor I of Abia Omuma autonomous community; and HRH Eze Philip O. Uzodinma, Ononenyi I of Ozuh Omuma autonomous community¹².

These autonomous communities have their prime ministers and members of the traditional council. In Abia Omuma, Ozuh Omuma and Etiti Omuma autonomous communities, the traditional royal stool is not rotational. However, the situation is not similar with Umuhu Omuma as the royal stool is not clinched to a family. The underlining factor behind the differences in the tradition of the royal stool stems from the fact that Eze B.U. Agwaimo appears to be the first traditional ruler of Umuhu autonomous community. This situation contradicts what is obtained in the other autonomous communities as their traditional rulers have been emerging from one particular family. For instance, Eze T.O. Ukachukwu was said to have inherited the traditional royal stool of his autonomous community following the demise of his father; Eze G.O.B Okafor Anyanwu became a traditional ruler by virtue of the fact that he is a member of the royal family in Etiti Omuma; and Eze Philip O. Uzodinma was privileged to ascend the royal throne of Ozuh Omuma with the mantle of leadership falling on his younger brother, Chief Hope Uzodinma, a Senator of the Federal Republic representing Orlu Senatorial District in Imo State, following the creation of Ozuh Omuma autonomous community. With his call to national service, his father held the office of the traditional ruler of the new autonomous community. He was therefore succeeded by Philip Uzodinma, at his demise¹³. However, as a new autonomous community coupled with the demise of their first traditional ruler, Eze B.U. Agwaimo, the council of elders and indigenes of Umuhu Omuma decided to adopt a different direction in the tradition of their royal stool. Consequently, there was a consensus to transfer to another family the royal throne of Umuhu Omuma¹⁴.

The villages in Omuma are organized under the aforementioned autonomous communities. In Etiti Omuma, Amaimo Etiti Omuma, Umunnem Etiti Omuma, Ubaha Etiti Omuma and Umuezeala Etiti Omuma constitute its component villages.

Others include Ubahaise Etiti Omuma, Umuememe Etiti Omuma and Umuorie Etiti Omuma, which are yet to be gazetted¹⁵. The internal strife which in the past engulfed the political atmosphere of Etiti Omuma had been responsible for the demands for autonomy from this trio leading to their secession from their original villages. Originally kindreds, Ubahaise, Umuememe and Umuorie were formerly parts of Umuezeala Etiti Omuma, Umunnem Etiti Omuma, and Amaimo Etiti Omuma villages, respectively¹⁶.

The component villages of Umuhu Omuma autonomous community include Umunnem Umuhu, Ihitte Umuhu, Ubahaeze Umuhu, and Okwu Umuhu. Others are Umuduruocha Umuhu, Umuocho Umuhu, Umuoogwuala Umuhu, Umuezikendu Umuhu, Umuozu Umuhu, Umuezikedim Umuhu, Umuchunkwo Umuhu, and Umuduruocha Umuhu¹⁷. As revealed, the people of Umunnem Umuhu share common ancestral descent with the people of Umunnem Etiti in Etiti Omuma autonomous community, hence the abhorrence of inter-marriage between these groups. The former, as History provided, were believed to have migrated from the latter and settled in their present location. Following the emergence of Umuhu Omuma autonomous community, they became recognized as part of the emergent union¹⁸.

In Ozuh Omuma autonomous community, Ubaha Ozuh, Okwu Ozuh, Umuokpara Ozuh, Umunezeagu Ozuh, Umu-uheze Ozuh, and Umundisi Ozuh constitute the component villages¹⁹. Akin to Umunnem villages in Etiti and Umuhu autonomous communities, there exists a common ancestral descent between the peoples of Okwu Ozuh and Okwu Umuhu in Ozuh Omuma and Umuhu Omuma autonomous communities, respectively²⁰. According to an oral source, the indigenes of Okwu Umuhu migrated from Okwu Ozuh²¹. However, unlike the Umunnem villages, they can exchange marital vows as a result of a mixed population which

resulted from waves of migration identified in the peoples' genealogies²². Abia Omuma autonomous community has the following as its component villages: Umuliwe Abia Omuma, Umunwanzu Abia Omuma and Umuokata Abia Omuma. Others include Okuwa Chukwuma Abia Omuma, Umuogidi Abia Omuma, Ubahaokpara Abia Omuma, Okwu Owere Abia Omuma, Umuokata Abia Omuma, Umuogbe Abia Omuma, and Ibenanlele Abia Omuma²³.

As evidently shown, one striking feature of these villages is the presence of the names of autonomous communities where they are found, in their nomenclatural identities. The primary rationale behind this development, as divulged by Augustine Ibeneme, was:

To ensure apposite identification of the villages owing to the fact that some of them were known with the same name in different autonomous communities. The existence of rancour in the relations of these autonomous communities during this period had also encouraged this development²⁴.

Celestine Ihewuba provided a divergent view on the ongoing subject. He had submitted that: "these villages were descendants of their respective autonomous communities who constituted the four sons of Oma, the female ancestor who founded Omuma community"²⁵. The source did not consider the villages which became part of the respective autonomous communities, consequent of their migration from their original settlements. However, with the emergence of autonomous communities, these migrants became identified as part of the union where their new settlement was located²⁶.

Amiri occupies one of the most enviable positions in Oru East Local Government Area. It is the second largest populated community in Oru East²⁷ and lies along the Owerri-Onitsha trunk 'A' road with Nchoko village marking the entry point from this location. The community lies after the famous Awo-Omamma junction where various trading activities take place by the indigenes of Awo-Omamma and

Fig. III shows Map of Etiti and Abia Omuma Autonomous Communities showing the villages

Source: Oru East Local Government Area Council, Omuma (2000)

Fig. IV shows Map of Umuhu and Ozuh Omuma Autonomous Communities showing the villages

Source: Oru East Local Government Area Council, Omuma (2000)

their neighbouring communities. The town has tropical evergreen rainforest belt and low plains. The Njaba River equally serves as a natural source of water supply to the members of the community.

The people also benefit from the economic dividends which the river yields, such as fishing, game reserves, and sand excavation. The town is characterized by dispersing settlements with her inhabitants living in mud and brick houses and very few living in modern houses. Most of these houses were roofed with corrugated sheets.

Amiri has four autonomous communities, ten villages, and thirty one kindreds.

The four autonomous communities and their traditional rulers include:

- ❖ Amiri Isu, HRH Eze B.N. Igbodekwe (Gedegwum I of Amiri Isu);
- ❖ Amiri Oru, HRH Eze D.D. Nnabuo (Igwe III of Amiri Oru);
- ❖ Mbubu, HRH Eze Cyril Uzoukwu (Mbu I of Mbubu) and
- ❖ Umuduruigwemmadu, ruled by HRH Eze N.N. Obilom (Duruoha IV of Umuduruigwemmadu)²⁸.

These traditional rulers have serving chiefs who alongside with the elders wield greater authority than elected councilors in the community.

The kindreds are found under the villages (See villages and Kindred in Amiri attached). They are bonded together by the OFO and ALI (also called ALA/ANI).

This organization validates the observations of M.S.O Olisa on villages in Igbo land.

In his words:

The village is in its composition a federation of kindreds (or sub-villages, which are themselves clusters of kindreds). The strongest basis of unity and solidarity here is the common attachment to one ANI, i.e. the ANI which embraces the village and the whole town. Another factor of group solidarity is the OFO which is held by the OKPARA (OKPARA UKWU) of the most senior of the kindreds constituting the village; the bond of common ancestor is still recognized, but it is not so strong as the first two bonds²⁹.

The villages in Amiri, include:

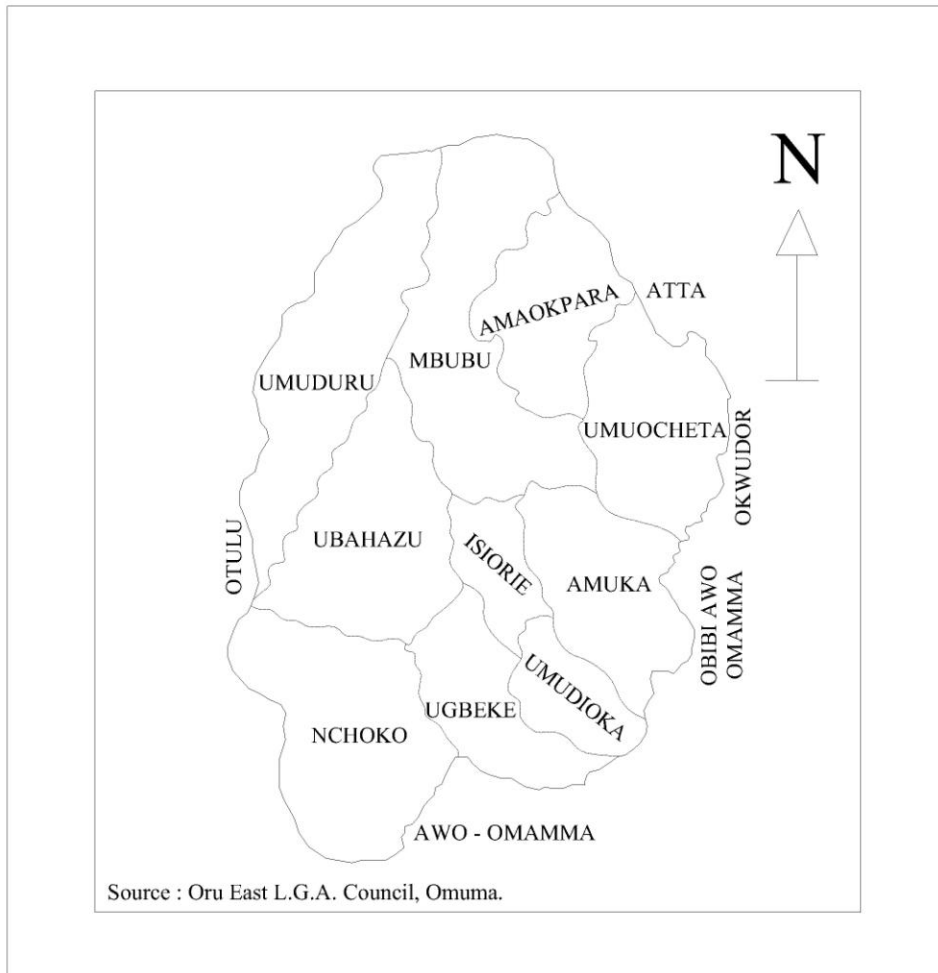
- ❖ Ubahazu, Nchoko, Ugbeke and Amaokpara Villages in Amiri Oru Autonomous Community;
- ❖ Mbubu in Mbubu Autonomous Community;
- ❖ Umuocheta, Amuka, Isiorie and Umudioka Villages in Amiri Isu Autonomous Community; and
- ❖ Umuduru in Umuduruigwemmadu Autonomous Community³⁰.

Prior to this period, Umuduru and Mbubu were villages in Amiri Oru autonomous community; they subsequently achieved autonomy as autonomous communities following the demands of their indigenes³¹.

These villages have their distinctive features. Umuocheta is known for the religious, educational and traditional structures found in the village. For instance, it is the only village in Amiri with both mission, private, and public schools. The presence of St. Gregory Secondary School, Seven Days Nursery and Primary School, and Ukwuegbu Central School contributed in providing the village with such feature unique from the other villages. The newly built Catholic Cathedral, St. Michaels Parish, Umuocheta is also another striking feature to mention³².

In Ubahazu situates St. Pauls Catholic Church Amiri, which is one of the biggest Cathedrals in Oru East built in 1978³³. The village equally houses some of the schools in the community to include Amiri Secondary School, Central School Amiri, Ubahazu Central School, C.P.S Umuonuoha and Stella Maris Nursery and Primary School which is the only private school in the village. The village is also home to Dr. Okechukwu Okibedi, one time Deputy Speaker of Imo State House of Assembly. He was the first person in Oru East to hold such political position³⁴.

Fig. V shows Map of Amiri Community in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State showing the villages



Scale :- 1 : 80,000

Source: Oru East Local Government Area Council, Omuma, (2000)

Amuka, on the other hand, is one of the smallest villages in Amiri, in landmass³⁵. It houses the OGWUGWU NJABA OWERRE, one of the most dreaded deities in the community. The history of Sabbath churches in Amiri will not be complete if no mention is made of this village, as Sabbath missions in Amiri were said to have started in Amuka in 1913³⁶.

Mbubu is one of the largest villages in Amiri. The village is mainly known for housing the first reservoir built in the community by the Germans in 1903³⁷. The village is equally known for producing the first female legislator in Amiri, Hon. (Mrs.) Oyibo Nwaneri, who represented Oru in Imo State House of Assembly, between 1979 and 1983³⁸. Ori Amiri, the largest market in the community, is situated in Mbubu village. In addition, the village has one Catholic Parish (St. Martins the Tour Parish), as well as accommodates the only government's maternity hospital (Ori Amiri Health Centre) in the town.

Isorie is one of the smallest villages in Amiri with a population of about one thousand (1000) people³⁹. In contrast, however, Umuduru is one of the most populated villages in the town⁴⁰, with topography which is mostly unfavourable to vehicles. The indigenes are known for sand excavation as their main source of livelihood. The village houses a Catholic parish centre (St. Gerald's Umuduru), one primary school, and a mini market known as Nkwo Umuduru.

The indigenes of Umudioka are known with blacksmithing. The village has neither a school nor a market. However, they are highly applauded in the entire Amiri town for their splendiferous dancing techniques. Consequently, they are highly patronized by the indigenes of neighbouring communities during their celebration of one festival/ceremony or the other⁴¹.

Amaokpara village is known to have produced in 1963 the first Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) in the entire Amiri town, Justice Richard Odidika⁴². It is also home to Hon. Dr. Cajethan Dike (Ikemba), one time honourable member of Federal House of Representatives, representing Oru East, Orsu and Orlu Federal Constituency⁴³. The only existing filling station in Amiri, Ike Oil Limited, is found in this village⁴⁴.

Ugbeke village is home to HRH Eze D.D. Nnabue, the traditional ruler of Amiri Oru autonomous community, who was also the first indigene of Amiri community to travel to Europe in 1970. The village is also known for its formidable security network courtesy of its youths. The indigenes are presently celebrated in the entire community for being the first to organize the Ekeleke festival.

Of all the aforementioned villages of Amiri, Nchoko remains the only village with distinct cultural features. That is to say, while other villages possess uniform features evident in their culture and tradition, Nchoko seems to differ. An example could be drawn from their marriage culture; while inter-marriage between indigenes of a particular village is discouraged as a result of the belief in common ancestral descent which the various villages possess, the act usually receives an applaud in Nchoko⁴⁵. The reason is that the majority of Nchoko indigenes are not originally from Amiri. Rather, their ancestry is traced to Otulu, a neighbouring community in Oru West Local Government Area⁴⁶. Inhabiting in the land of their forefathers, these people became part of Nchoko following a historical event which occurred in Amiri town, as provided by a tradition of its origin. Nchoko, a belligerent son of Amiri (founder of the community) had encroached into this part of Otulu where the town shares border with Amiri, with his descendants. This territory was subsequently

renamed Nchoko by these people who like their father, were pugnacious and obstreperous⁴⁷.

Economic Activities

The people of the study area engage in various activities which are economically oriented for wealth creation and survival. This has been encouraged by the presence of land which, like in Central Tivland is “the most basic means of production on which all ... economic activities depend”⁴⁸. In Omuma, for instance, the people are distinguished with baking, though farming is the predominant occupation. To this end, agricultural products like cassava, cocoyam and yam are produced by the indigenes of the community. These products, after harvest, are sold in the markets, one being the Orié Omuma – a major market in the community. Like Ubulu, Awo-Omamma and Amiri, the people of Omuma are also known for basket weaving⁴⁹.

Baking, as an economic activity of Omuma people has been highly beneficial to the community at large. Aside from being a source of livelihood, the teeming population of youths in the community has benefited from the employment opportunities which this economic activity provides. Consequently, one hardly sees a youth in Omuma who is not gainfully employed in one baking outfit or the other. The effects of this have been experienced on the positive dimension, with one being that it has helped in reducing the rate of crime perpetration in the community⁵⁰.

Most families had been enriched through baking. Such was the case with the family of Calistus Ukwunnaya from Etiti Omuma, who had been enormously favoured through baking. Today, Blessed Baking Industries which started in Omuma and subsequently opened branches in Mina (Niger State) and Port Harcourt (Rivers State) are owned by the family⁵¹. In a similar vein, the families of Chief Dennis Okorogu from Umuezeali Etiti Omuma, and Chief Innocent Nwanojuo from

Umunnem Etiti Omuma had also benefited from baking. Dennis Baking Industries and Kings Bakery which started in Omuma and respectively owned by these families, presently have their branches in Mgbidi (Imo State), Abakaliki (Ebonyi State) and Ogoja (Cross River State)⁵². Through baking, Chief Dennis Okorogu now owns chains of businesses. A typical example is the Dennis Okorogu Enterprises Limited, which is an oil and gas outfit in the community⁵³.

In Awo-Omamma and Amiri, the economic activities are multi-dimensional. This can be attributed to the vantage location of the towns, overwhelming serenity and entrepreneurship of the people, and the presence of industries in the communities. Other factors include the presence of the Njaba River, and the presence of the Onitsha-Owerri trunk A roads and the Orlu roads.

The people are predominantly farmers, and this activity takes two folds: part time and full time. To this end, crop production and animal husbandry are practiced. Several people are gainfully employed in the farming sector with a sizeable percentage of the required workforce being provided by unskilled men and women. These people meet the demands of their families with the wages paid to them by their employers. They also run their own subsistence farms which provide the families with food both for consumption and for sale at the market. Through farming, items for sale at the various markets in the communities are produced. To this end, items like yams, the three-leaved yams (Una), palm produce, local spice (ogiri), breadfruits and coco yams usually flood the Nkwo Umuokwe, Afor Isieke (in Awo-Omamma) and Orié Amiri (in Amiri) during their market days.

What is more, Awo-Omamma and Amiri are associated with industrialization and urbanization. This development has encouraged such economic activities as artisanry, cobbling, bicycle repairing, tailoring, petty trading and bricklaying among

the people. There are also roadside mechanics, welders, carpenters, staff of Nigeria Breweries (formerly Consolidated Breweries located at Ubachima Village, Awo-Omamma), staff of Afrik Pharmaceutical Plc, and staff of Nich Ben Group of companies. Additionally, there are labourers who sell their services in different forms to employees in the factories.

Sand and gravel excavation along the banks of the Njaba River, an occupation which had started since the late 1970s⁵⁴, provide means of livelihood to many in these towns. It has been serving the structural development needs of the people. Block molding industries in Awo-Omamma and Amiri obtain their sand and gravel from the banks of this River – an activity that has been responsible for erosion menace and loss of lands in the area of excavation. Despite these negative implications, however, the economic activity subsists till date courtesy of the benefits accruing from the exercise.

Another economic activity worthy of mention is trade. Trade, according to Toyin Falola et al is “...the most important factor which linked many groups together”⁵⁵. A.E. Afigbo corroborated the ongoing avowal when he specifically noted, citing the research findings of H.F. Mathews, P.A. Talbot, Simon Ottenberg, U.I. Ukwu, and David Northrop, that the various groups in Nigerian territory were intimately linked by trade in the pre-colonial era⁵⁶. From these submissions, one could, therefore, deduce the importance of trade to the people of Awo-Omamma and Amiri communities.

Trade plays an important role in strengthening the relations of the aforementioned communities. It involves the transfer of goods and services from one person to another by getting something in monetary terms in exchange with the buyer. Sometimes, it is loosely called commerce or financial transaction. A network that encourages this factor is the market.

In the traditional economy, markets are fixed locations where buyers and sellers transact businesses. In Awo-Omamma and Amiri, they are located in strategic points to serve the people of both communities and their neighbours. Consequently, the defunct Orie Bridge market located near the Njaba River served the people of Awo-Omamma and Amiri, as well as people from other places such as Mbaitolu, Isu and Oguta. The market became extinct as a result of the disturbances of the River on the traders⁵⁷. However, following the demise of the Orie Awo-Omamma – a development which was experienced in 1973⁵⁸ – the bulk of trading activities by the members of these communities now take place in Orie Amiri situated in Amiri, and Afor Isieke and Nkwo Umuokwe - the two major markets in Umuokwe and Isieke villages, respectively.

Trading is gradually assuming a formidable position in the communities. Aside from trading in their immediate environments, the people also trade in faraway communities. Evidence abounds with the presence of traders from Awo-Omamma and Amiri, in Douglas area of Owerri where Eke Ukwu Owerri was situated.

As a result of trading activities, many markets similar to those in urban areas spring up in leaps and bounds. There subsist distributors of finished products from renowned companies such as the Nigeria Breweries and Coca-Cola. Also, there are those who are into transport business, such as Okada riders and commuters. By operating in all nooks and crannies of the communities, these people assist in eliminating difficulties in transportation.

Socio-Political Division

As earlier pointed out, Awo-Omamma, Omuma and Amiri are made up of six, four and four autonomous communities, respectively. These autonomous communities have their traditional rulers whose cabinets constitute of traditional prime ministers

and the village heads. In Awo-Omamma, the royal stools of all the autonomous communities are not rotational, that is to say, they concentrate on one family⁵⁹. This arrangement, however, runs counter to that of Omuma where the royal stools of three out of the four autonomous communities concentrate on one family. With Umuhu Omuma being the odd one, the rationale behind this obtainable development is that, apart from being the youngest autonomous community, there was reached a consensus by the indigenes for the royal stool to be rotational⁶⁰. Rotational system, on the other hand, is practiced in Amiri⁶¹.

Traditional Rulers: These are rulers of autonomous communities who ascend “the throne of Ezeship in accordance with (the) established operative law in Nigeria and in accordance with the customs and traditions of the area of ... (their) jurisdiction”⁶². They command the highest respect and honour among their subjects. They have strong influence in determining, controlling and implementing public policies affecting their subjects.

The traditional rulers perform different functions, such as maintenance of peace and order amongst the subjects. They also enhance inter-group relations between the indigenes of the autonomous communities and the generality of indigenes of their respective communities with their neighbours. They also perform the functions of bestowing chieftaincy titles on illustrious sons of the community. As custodians of the tradition, they ensure that the *modus vivendi* of their subjects conform to the established laws of the land. Usually, there is a penalty attached to any law desecrated which is pronounced by the traditional rulers.

Village Heads: The village heads, on the other hand, represent the traditional rulers in their respective villages. They are charged with the responsibility of conveying information reached at the council meeting to the villagers. Like the traditional rulers,

the village heads ensure the existence of peace amidst the indigenes of their respective villages. In a situation where an issue becomes difficult to handle, the involvement of the traditional ruler of the autonomous community where the village is situated becomes imperative. The village head does not have the prerogative to pronounce penalties on defaulters of the laws of the land; he can only carry out such responsibility with the consent of the traditional ruler.

Umuada: The Umuada are members of the kindred who are married outside these towns. This is a very important group as one of their functions lies in restoring peace in families, and between husbands and wives. In Awo-Omamma, “the Umuada group is equally made up of unmarried daughters of the community who have attained or passed the age of marriage”⁶³. They are also known for instilling discipline in any woman who is known for defiant tendencies such as adultery, as well as extending punishment to one found guilty of killing her husband⁶⁴. The hair of the guilty is shaved in humiliation; afterwards acting on the pronouncements of the traditional ruler, she is either banished or ostracised by the group⁶⁵.

Umunwanyi Aluru alu or Ndi Inyem di: Among the three communities under study, this group does not exist in Amiri. In other words, only the people Awo-Omamma and Omuma recognize the significance of this group in their socio-political structure. This group constitutes of women from different communities, far and near married into the aforementioned towns. In Awo-Omamma, this group equally consists of women from the community married in the community⁶⁶. Like the Umuada, this group is also important as they are harbingers of peace. Found also in every kindred of the communities, they perform most of the functions of the Umuada. Their meetings are held in any of the four market days in Igbo cultural calendar, except Nkwo and Eke market days which are exempted as periods for such meetings in Awo-Omamma and

Omuma, respectively. This is associated with the tradition in both communities which abhors the organization of any social event in these market days. This type of in-group does not exist in Amiri.

Umuokorobia: These are the youths of the communities. Also known as Ndi Mgboto in Awo-Omamma, their functions include guiding the frontiers of the land, engaging in activities that would benefit the communities (such as bush clearing, creating pathways and maintaining community schools and churches through labour), upholding the customs and traditions of the land, and arresting land desecrators⁶⁷.

Umunyadi: These are fathers of the land. Some of them are traditional council members in their respective autonomous communities. The Umunnadi are the pillars of the community consisting of the heads of every family. Their meetings are held on any of the three market days in Igbo land except Nkwo (in Awo-Omamma and Amiri) and Eke (in Omuma), depending on the consensus reached by each kindred. In Awo-Omamma, for instance, Umuajara kindred usually hold their Umunnadi meetings on the Orié market day. Formerly conducted on the Eke market days, the period for such gathering was shifted to Orié as a result of the busy schedules of the people at Eke Achara (market of the kindred), on the Eke market days⁶⁸.

The Umunnadi are principally charged with the security responsibility in Awo-Omamma, Omuma and Amiri. In other words, the security of lives and properties of each kindred rests on the shoulders of this group. To ensure the achievement of this task, therefore, they ensure the mobilization of able-bodied men as local vigilantes whose duties are usually experienced at night. As custodians of customs and traditions, they make sure that the norms of the land are not defiled. This they ensure by penalizing offenders which serve as deterrence to others. Such penalty which must be issued with the consent of the traditional ruler through the village head

usually comes in the forms of fine payment, ostracism, banishment or excommunication, depending on the gravity of the offense. The group is also charged with the responsibility of maintaining peace in families experiencing conflict. The intervention of the traditional ruler becomes imperative in this situation when the issues are too difficult to handle.

A traditional council in Awo-Omamma, Omuma and Amiri towns is made up of the traditional ruler, the traditional prime minister, the palace secretary, the president-general and the village heads. This structure subsists in each autonomous community. While the traditional ruler, as we have seen in the preceding section, is the political head of each of the autonomous communities, the traditional prime minister represents the second in command to the traditional ruler. The palace secretary does the clerical and administrative works in the palace; the presidents-general heading the town union fora; and the village heads representing each village in the traditional council.

Religion and Culture

J.C. Anene once posited:

No study of the Igbo is intelligible without a clear appreciation of the pervasive reality of the supernatural world. Among the Igbo, the religion, law, justice and politics were intricately bound up. Law and custom were believed to have been handed down from the spirit world, from time immemorial, from ancestor to ancestor. The spirit world comprised a hierarchy of gods: the most important perhaps, was the god of the land-the unseen president of the small localized community. No community is complete without the shrine of the god of the land⁶⁹.

The above submission tries to present how religious and cultural is the Igbo society. These features are equally represented in the communities under study as microcosms of the larger Igbo society.

There exist three religious groups in Awo-Omamma. There are the Christians, the Muslims, and the traditionalists (adherents to African traditional religion). The

Christians consist of the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals and the white garment apostles and this population is dominated by mostly the Catholics and members of the Church Missionary Society.

Christianity has impacted enormously on Awo-Omamma. With the presence of Roman Catholic Mission, the community is presently known as home to Congregation of Holy Ghost Fathers in Nigeria, courtesy of the presence of the Holy Ghost Novitiate Seminary built by the Catholic Church⁷⁰. To this end, the body of the member of this Order, at his demise, is usually laid to rest in this seminary⁷¹. Situated at Ubachima village near Njaba Bridge, along Ontitsha-Owerri trunk A road, the impact of Holy Ghost Novitiate has further been felt on Awo-Omamma and even beyond, in the areas of academics, and promotion of agriculture. For instance, St. Patrick's nursery and primary school, Awo-Omamma was established by the seminary, as well as palm oil and cassava processing mills found in various sections of the community. There are also poultry farms and piggeries in Awo-Omamma established by the seminary. A typical example is one built within the premises of St. Marys Catholic Church, Ubogwu. The Roman Catholic mission also established St. Basil the Great group of schools located in Umuokwe village, as well as St. John's Primary school, and CKC group of schools. The Church Missionary Society has in Isieke village St. Mary's Primary School.

The Muslims are found in Umuajara kindred (Ubogwu village) in Nwagwasim family where the head, Alhaji Jubril Nwagwasim, was said to have inherited the tenets of the religion from his father⁷². This son of Awo-Omamma holds a reputable position in the Muslim community; currently, he is the Secretary of Muslim community in Imo State⁷³.

Nwagwasim family is part of Dim Nwaneri, one of the extended families that made up Umuajara kindred. The family is known for its contribution in propagating Islamic religion in Awo-Omamma – a development which was instrumental to the conversion of more families to Islam in the community. Consequently, one hears of the conversion to Islam of the family of one Okoro Ofokire in Umuifa kindred (Ubachima village)⁷⁴. The Muslims usually participate in various social activities in the community. They are part of the kinsmen meetings where their voices are always heard on issues bothering community development. That is to say that, their religion does not in any way encourage possible alienation between them and other religious adherents in Awo-Omamma. This also evidenced the fact that the principles of Igwebuike, Anyị bụ otu, and Onye aghala nwanne ya, known with the Igbo people, have strong foothold in Awo-Omamma irrespective of one's religious background.

Adherents to African traditional religion are the next dominating group in the religious population of Awo-Omamma. The people mostly constitute of the titled men, ndi Nze na Ọzọ, both Ọzọ ụmụ ụmụ/Ọzọ Afichi and Ọzọ otu agha. These people are honoured and respected, just as Njoku observed in a larger Igbo society⁷⁵. As Oforchukwu equally observed in Isu-Njaba⁷⁶, women are not admitted into this fold in Awo-Omamma. In fact, among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, they are subdued in the Ọzọ title⁷⁷.

These people have mini-shrines in their homes which serve as channels through which they commune with their gods and ancestors. Known as the Ịbarị, these mini-shrines, in some cases, serve as media through which justice is achieved or the truth is revealed over a troubling issue. Some of the deities worshipped by these traditionalists include the Njaba, Eziakwu, and Arusi Ogidere Ibe ya – a female deity, god of justice, located at technical junction, otherwise known as Ama Okoro Ofokire,

in Umuifa kindred. There is also Njaba Eziakwu which works with another deity known as Ali Ubogwu. The former is believed to work with instructions from the latter. Its main function (Njaba Eziakwu) is to eliminate any person or group of persons found guilty of defiling the norms and traditions of the land, by the Ali Ubogwu deity⁷⁸.

Awo-Omamma is known with cultures which in some cases are similar to other communities in Igbo land. Unlike most of the Igbo communities, however, the practices of sororate and levirate do not exist in Awo-Omamma and the indigenes abhor getting into a marital union with communities known with this cultural practice⁷⁹.

Again, it is forbidden for women to climb trees in the community. A penalty is usually extended to any woman who defiles this norm of the land. There is also abhorrence in the killing of particular specie of python, known as the Eke Njaba. As provided by V.N. Okeke:

(This)... particular python is associated with the Njaba traditional worship... (It) ... is highly revered and dreaded in Awo-Omamma as belonging to the local deity who gives protection and security. It is neither harmed nor killed and people treat it with respect, as it is not equally harmful unless it is provoked. Other snakes could be consumed as meat in the town but it is a taboo to eat Eke Njaba or encourage any evil against it⁸⁰.

Aside from the Eke Njaba, there are other animals which are also revered in Awo-Omamma. The Hyena (locally called Edi Abali or Edi), a particular mammal belonging to the dog family, is revered by the people of Ubogwu village. The reason for this traditional practice stems from a historical account which has continued to make a wave in the belief systems of the adherents to this tradition. History, therefore, has it that, prior to this period, the people of Ubogwu village usually transform into this animal to secure their farmlands, especially during inter-community wars. This practice was mainly associated with a large extended family in

Obilofia kindred, the Ụmụediabalị family, which presently consists of Ubaku, Ojiaku, Njennobi, and Nwachukwu-Ahize families; and the Okele family in Ụmụejikere Ukwu kindred⁸¹. This tradition still upholds in the present generation. Similarly, particular specie of the grass cutter, Ewi, is not killed in Umuokwe village. Like the Ediabali tradition in Ubogwu, the rationale behind this tradition also stems from the fact that the people transform into this animal to attack the farm crops of their enemies. This historical traditional practice still exists till date.

Festival celebrations also form part of the culture of the people of Awo-Omamma, and one of the festivals prominent in the midst of the people is the Owu festival. A cultural dance festival, the Owu is celebrated annually between the months of June and July, within the Owu festive period which stretches from mid-May to mid-August. Like in other communities in Oru East, its significance is to thank the gods of the land for the last planting season, as well as ask for their benevolence in the next planting season. The festival provides entertainments, affords families the opportunity to re-unite, and encourage conflicting parties to bury all hatchets.

The Owu festival in Awo-Omamma has some associate ceremonies which signify the celebration of the festival is imminent. These ceremonies, thus include, the Ekwe Emume, Ito Nri Ali, and Ara na umu ceremonies. The festival is celebrated in different forms to include the Owu Abuba, Owu Oma, and Owu Ulo akwa.

Okorosha festival is another festival in Awo-Omamma celebrated by the initiates of the masquerade cult. Conducted within the Owu festive period, the festival kicks off from mid-July and ends in the second week of August. It also indicates the coming to an end of the Owu festival. The Okorosha masquerades, during this period, possess religious significance. Their bodies are covered with raffia and woven masks.

They are regarded as spirits walking in human forms, hence the belief that no one knows who wears the masks.

The masquerades are harbingers of peace. They enter the house with their backs first. Dressed in strange costumes, they sing and perform acrobatic displays from house to house collecting presents. Their functions include maintaining law and order during the Owu festive period. Consequently, they are used to strengthen out children with deviant tendencies by compelling them to conform via the fear of masquerades. Their language is unique and unintelligible to the uninitiated, newly initiated, and children. Revealing some aspects of their language, Nimah thus submitted:

Women are generally called *ali ga n'out*, which means that women are the same everywhere; water or rain is called *ogba gere gere-oozer-*; money is called *obe yoroyoro...*; the shield which they use is called *ekete ugu* or war basket; while sucking babies are addressed as *ekulu obielo*, that is gladders of the heart⁸².

The new yam festival is also another prominent festival in Awo-Omamma community. Like other festivals, it is part of the people's culture, which is celebrated after the Owu festive period by mid-August. It signifies the conclusion of a harvest and the beginning of the next work cycles. The celebration is a very culturally based festival in this community which is agrarian and depends on yams. Indigenously, the festival is called *Emume iri ji ofuru*.

Yam planting is a serious and important business in Igbo land⁸³. This could result from the degree of importance which the crop enjoys in the society, as revealed by Obi Iwuagwu:

Yam is the number one crop of the Igbo. In fact, so important is the crop that to be deprived of it, may say, is to create a condition of absolute distress. Whatever substitutes were offered could not satisfy the Igbo man's desire for his favourite food. Virtually every Igbo farmer cultivates yam no matter how small... Yam usually came first in the yearly allocation of available land in the farmer's

budget. The quantity of a man's yam harvest determined his status as a farmer, no matter the quantity of other crops produced⁸⁴.

In line with the ongoing, Chinua Achebe equally submitted:

Yam the king of crops was a very exerting king. It demanded hard work and constant attention from cock-crow till the chicken went back to roost. The yam tendrils were protected from earth-heat with rings of sisal leaves. As the rains became heavier the women planted maize, melons and beans between the yam mounds. The yams were then staked, first with little sticks and later with tall and big tree branches, the women weeded the farm three times and definite periods in the life of the yams⁸⁵.

Therefore, the place of this crop in Igbo society, as divulged above, constitutes one of the reasons why the people of Awo-Omamma hold the new yam festival, to thank the god of yam for a successful yam harvest. It also provides a medium through which the god of yam is requested to continue encouraging the growth and cultivation of yam in this community.

The festival marks the beginning of the first harvest and eating of fresh yams to include water yam (*Dioscorea Alata*) natively called Ji Ashara/Ji Nkiti, yellow yam (*Dioscorea Cayenensis*) known as Ji Ogbagada, and white yam (*Dioscorea Rotundata*) locally referred to as Ji Agah/Ji Okomocha, in different homesteads. It stresses the continuity of Awo-Omamma community with the earth goddess from one generation to another. It provides the medium through which the earth goddess is acknowledged for the fertility of the land. Prayers are offered to the gods during this period, to continue providing the indigenes of the community with good health, and protect them against diseases and infertility of the land, people and domestic animals. The climax of the festival is the cooking and consumption of boiled yams with chicken pepper soup, otherwise known as Ji mmiri awa. Women cook the food while the men clear village pathways. There is much drinking and eating groups. The festival also provides an occasion for family reunion.

The new yam festival in Awo-Omamma is celebrated according to villages in phases. As a result of primogeniture rights, Umuezeali village is usually the first to celebrate the festival. With this arrangement, in-laws, friends and well-wishers were invited from other villages. The celebrations are held on Eke, Orié or Afor market days. Nkwo period is exempted as a period for the celebration of the new yam festival. Only the Njaba deity celebrates its own new yam festival on this day within the festive period. Consequently, sacrifices are made to the deity using items such as tubers of yams and fowls, at either the bank of Njaba River or intermediary shrines of the deity stationed at different points in the community. This traditional exercise is called *Ịwara Njaba Ji*.

Ekeleke festival is another festival known to the people of Awo-Omamma. Usually celebrated during the dry season, the festival holds annually according to villages, where it is celebrated in kindred. Whenever the Ekeleke festival is being celebrated by a particular village, no other village holds a similar celebration. The festival always affords the indigenes of the community the opportunity for entertainment and relaxation. It is a dance festival with costumes different from the Owu and Okorosha. A borrowed culture, Ekeleke was believed to have diffused into Awo-Omamma from Anambra area courtesy of migrants who in a particular time in History migrated from this area into the host community⁸⁶.

Omuma possesses slightly distinct religious and cultural features. Two kinds of religion exist among its populace. There is Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The latter has more population in the community than the former. The adherents of African Traditional Religion are called *Ndị ọdinala*⁸⁷.

Christianity brought about the proliferation of denominations and churches in Omuma. Consequently, there are the Roman Catholic Mission, the Church

Missionary Society (CMS), the Jehova's Witness, Sabath Missions, the Pentecostal Churches, Cherubim and Seraphim, and Eckankar. The Roman Catholic Mission dominates the Christian population, followed by the Anglican Church. This observation of the Catholics in Omuma validates the submissions of J.U. Igwe on churches in Igbo land. In his words:

The Igbo people of Nigeria are affected more by Christianity. The tenets and teachings of this alien religion have been adversely affecting the existentiality of the cultural heritage of these people in their distinctive communities. To this end, the tenets of their various cultural institutions are facing gradual erosion. The Roman Catholic Mission has the largest Christian population among the Igbo. For this reason, the people, among other ethnic nationals in Nigeria, have the highest number of Catholic priests, some of who (sic) have been beatified in the posthumous recognition of their priestly endeavours...⁸⁸.

The impact of churches have been enormously felt on Omuma community. Through the churches, there has been some degree of sanity in the lives of the indigenes. The people are wary of contravening the provisions of the Holy Book, the Bible, as they are meant to understand that heinous punishments await a defaulter. Through this means, immoralities are placed in check in the community.

Again, the Churches have been able to provide some of the basic amenities for the community. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, provided the community with boreholes located in different sections of the town. There are some in the church premises, while others are found in each of the autonomous communities. The Roman Catholic mission also provided the indigenes of the community with the opportunity to acquire formal education. To this end, schools were built by the mission across the community. Amaodum primary school, Stella Maris College Abia, Powerline primary school, Ozuh Central School, and Holy Trinity Nursery, Primary and Secondary School are typical examples. These feats of the Roman Catholic Mission in Omuma (alongside other communities in Igbo land) accounts for the reason why Chike

Maduekwe was emphatic in his statement that: “without the Church (the Roman Catholic Church), there is no way Eastern Nigeria could have made the stupendous progress it has recorded in education, especially from 1945 when the Second World War came to an end”⁸⁹.

Aside from the Roman Catholic Mission, other churches have also impacted enormously on Omuma. The Church Missionary Society presently built a secondary school in the community; there is also Redeemers Group of Schools built by the Redeemers Ministry. The schools include a nursery, primary and secondary school located at Ozuh Omuma, along Akatta-Okporo road.

On the other hand, *ndị ọdinala* (the traditionalists), like their Christian rivals, have made notable impact on Omuma. In line with the Christians, they have been responsible for the presence of sanity in the lives of an average Omuma indigene. The potency of their religion has made it possible for the people to desist from acts abhorred in the land such as incest and fornication. When this happens, the perpetrators are required to cleanse the land and appease the gods. The presence of this law, however, does not indicate the absence of this act in Omuma as there are constant reports of fornication and incestuous acts, especially from the Christian population. Since the religion emphasizes the existence of a merciful and forgiving God and abhors draconian principles or laws of the traditionalists, some of these perpetrators believe that their sins once confessed would be forgiven. This could account for the reason why Ali Mazuri argued that the missionary Christianity brought to Africa a God with feminine characteristics and qualities – attributes which differ from African gods which he identified as masculine, specific, firm in character, quick and prompt in action⁹⁰. R.A. Granfield once averred:

It cannot be doubted that the provisions of Christianity, in comparison with other religions, are lenient to its adherents. The

religion advocates peace, mercy, love and kindness, and these emphases are practically represented in the lives of believers. With the rising population of its adherents, Christianity suffers hostility, antagonism, and hatred from other religions. A case in hand is Islam where the Quran enjoined the Muslims to fight the Christians – Surah 5:51, 8:39. Unlike Islam, the concepts of peace, mercy, love and kindness are the cardinal tenets of Christianity, hence her continuous suffering in the hands of the Muslims. Though not, to an average thinker, this could depict weakness.⁹¹

Thinking alongside Granfield, one can equally conclude that the primary rationale behind the perpetration of the aforementioned abominable acts by the Christians stems from the concepts of mercy and forgiveness that Christian Religion carries which equally accounts for its weakness.

Ndi Ođinala have also been useful in the area of genealogy. In fact, it was through this group that the community became aware of how abominable it is for indigenes of some of the villages found in the autonomous communities to intermarry, courtesy of the existence of blood relationship amongst them. For instance, as revealed in the preceding section, it was established that due to the presence of common ancestral descent between Umunnem villages in Etit and Umuhu autonomous communities, the indigenes cannot intermarry. Such is also the case with the people of Okwu villages in Ozuh, and Umuhu autonomous communities, respectively. The Ođinala are also custodians of the various cultural festivals celebrated in the community. Through the efforts of this group, these festivals which represent marks of identity for the people of Omuma, have continued to exist. A typical example is the Owu festival.

The Owu festival is one prominent culture which the people of Omuma are known for, alongside the people of Amiri, and Awo-Omamma. The Owu, in Omuma, is a cultural dance festival which is celebrated with members of the masquerade cult. To this end, a masquerade known as Uđo is usually seen during the celebration. The dancers of the Owu in Omuma are called Okorosha. The Ođuzo, the seer, is seen on

the eve of the celebration. Charged with the responsibility of visiting the houses of the heads of Owu cult, *Ndị isi owu*, across the celebrating community, women are not allowed to behold its presence – a tradition which also subsists in Awo-Omamma and Amiri. The visit by the *Ọhuzọ* notifies the Owu heads to be fully prepared for the big event which commences the following day.

In Omuma, Owu festival is celebrated in villages, with Umunnem village in Etiti Omuma being the first to celebrate the festival. Following Umunnem is Amaimo village also in Etiti Omuma autonomous community. In fact, as gathered from sources, all the villages in Etiti Omuma first celebrate the Owu festival before the villages in other autonomous communities. The celebration sequence is structured in such a way that the villages in Ozuh autonomous community celebrate the Owu after Etiti Omuma. Following Ozuh is Abia Omuma, and lastly Umuhu Omuma. In its celebration, the Owu festival lasts for three days in each celebrating village. It takes place on the night when *Ohuzo* pays his visit to the Owu heads – *Owu Abalı*, the morning of the following day – *Owu Ụtụ*, and the evening of the coming day – *Owu Mgbede*. The presence of the Owu heads is usually felt in the morning when the event is properly felt in the celebrating village. The night version marks the preparatory stage.

Rain is not expected to fall during the celebration of the Owu festival⁹². When this occurs, the celebrating village is heavily fined – a tradition referred to as *Ibu Owu*, which also applies to other communities celebrating the festival in Oru East. The *Owu Abalı* must be celebrated on the Eke market day that is the eve of the *Orie* market day when the morning version of the festival is held. The evening version, *Owu mgbede*, follows on the *Afor* market day, and its celebration marks the end of the festival in a particular village. *Nkwo* market days are held sacred when it involves

the celebration of events, except marriages⁹³. This, therefore, means that no event but marriage ceremony is celebrated on the Nkwo market day in Omuma community. Every other celebration can be done on other market days except Nkwo. This is similar to what obtains in Awo-Omamma and Amiri communities where Nkwo market days are exempted from celebrations⁹⁴. However, the difference is seen in the issue of marriage ceremony. While the people of Omuma do not marry on the Eke market days, Awo-Omamma and Amiri communities do not recognize Nkwo market periods for marriage ceremonies.

Aside from the Owu festival, masquerade festival represents a cultural feature of Omuma community. Traditionally known as Emume Mmanwụ, some of the masquerades that feature during this period include, Nne Mmanwụ and Akakpo, which move around the community entertaining people. They also serve as agents of peace, as they extend warm greetings between traditional rulers. These masquerades are also seen during the new yam festivals, as well as at the burial ceremony of a demised Owu head. Occasionally, their presence is equally felt during Christmas periods and Easter celebrations where they entertain the sons and daughters of the community who returned home to celebrate the periods with their kith and kin.

The New Yam festival in Omuma is celebrated generally within a stipulated period. This runs counter to what is obtained in Awo-Omamma and Amiri where the festival is celebrated in villages, and autonomous communities, respectively⁹⁵. Many activities are associated with the new yam festival. There are varieties of dances by women, members of the masquerade cult, and Owu cult initiates. The periods of new yam celebration are not fixed; they vary depending on the outlined activities accompanying the celebration.

The Okpesi ceremony must be carried out prior to the celebration of the new yam festival. In fact, this ceremony heralds the new yam festival. It is held in July, at the end of the Owu festival. Without the celebration of this ceremony, the New Yam festival will not hold in Omuma.

The Okpesi ceremony is a ceremony of family identification. It affords the members of every household the opportunity to identify with their families. By so doing, members of the community who are living outside Omuma return home to identify with their blood relations. The ceremony equally serves as a measure to checkmate incest which is abhorred in the community.

Before the Okpesi ceremony, there is the Iwa Ala or Ike Ala ceremony. This ceremony requires seeking the presence of the gods in the upcoming new yam festival. During this period, the pagans usually assemble at the groove of Nnemozu, a female deity well revered as the mother of Omuma indigenes⁹⁶. Sacrifices are made at this groove with the indigenes pledging for the successful celebration of the new yam festival.

Pythons (Eke) and Monkeys are animals generally held sacred in Omuma community as they are regarded as the property of the gods. Thus, they are neither touched nor killed. Defiling this tradition requires burring these animals by the culprit, else he or she experiences plagues from the gods. However, the provisions of this tradition are constantly violated by the Christians.

Aside from general beliefs, there exist belief systems associated with families. For instance, it is established in Omuma that an extended family known as Ubaha Duru, holds a belief in the sacredness of the Hyena, locally known as Edi Abali. The presence of this animal in this family, as believed, signals imminent danger. Once

spotted, one is expected to go backwards into the house. The presence of this animal signifies imminent death of a member of this family⁹⁷.

Omuma community is pantheistic. To this end, there exist different deities with their respective portfolios. There is the Nnemọzụ (a corruption of Nnemọ ọzụ), which is a female deity recognized as the mother of the indigenes of Omuma. Represented by a female statue with a child on her back, this deity is also responsible for the security of lives of indigenes of the community living in and outside Omuma. There are also the Afor Amah, a female deity charged with the security responsibility; Ala Abja which takes care of the problems of the people of Abia Omuma autonomous community in particular, as well as ensures that they yield bountiful harvest after each planting season; and Okwu Okwuduru owned by the people of Umunnem village in Eiti Omuma. A god of justice, it is also charged with the responsibility of securing the lives and properties of the indigenes of this village in particular, and Omuma at large⁹⁸. However, beliefs in these deities do not appear to be strong in the contemporary dispensation consequent upon the presence of Christianity in the community.

Like Omuma, two religious groups exist in Amiri, and they include the Christians and the traditionalists. The Christian folds in the community are the Catholics, Anglicans, Sabbatarians, and the Pentecostals. The Catholics dominate the Christian population in the community. With the existence of Catholic faith, Amiri town now boasts of five Catholic parishes to include St. Michael's Catholic parish Umuocheta, St. Martin's Mbubu, St. Paul's parish Amiri, St. Johns Nchoko, and St. Gerard's Umuduru⁹⁹. The Catholic community engineered building of the road linking Ubahazu and Amiri Girls Secondary School by the government of Owelle Rochas Anayo Okorocho¹⁰⁰; the building of town halls where community meetings

are convened, and schools (such as St. Gregory Umuocheta) also constitute other contributions of the community to the development of Amiri. Nwannegadi Microfinance Bank was also another major impact of Catholic Church worthy of mention. A Vicar of the Church, Monsignor Moses Ukwuoma had instrumented the presence of this financial institution in Amiri town¹⁰¹.

Like the Catholics, the impact of the Anglican Communion also have been felt. With the presence of Anglican faith, the church presently has three parishes stationed in Amaokpara, Umuocheta, and Ubahazu villages. Some of them, thus, include, St. Mathias Ubahazu and St. Louis Umuocheta.

The traditionalists have created little impact on Amiri community. Presently, they are applauded for the construction in 1972, of a road linking the community and Omuma, through Amaokpara village¹⁰². The road was constructed to provide the Ozuh Nnamaraoche, a female deity in Omuma, with easy and accessible road whenever she journeys to Amiri to visit Ogwugwu Ube, a male deity believed to be her husband¹⁰³. The presence of inaccessible road sometimes made it difficult for her to visit Amiri and whenever this happens, the people face difficulties in their daily endeavours¹⁰⁴.

Between 1961 and 1975, there existed religious cooperation between the Christians and traditionalists in Amiri. Such cooperation was mostly witnessed during the celebration of ceremonies associated with the groups. For instance, during the celebration of the Owu festival (which was considered heathen consequent upon its preparations and activities), invitations were extended to the Christians by the traditionalists. The Christians attend the occasion with firewood as a sign of appreciation for the invitation. Invitations were also given to the Christians during the

celebration of the Ekeleke and the new yam festivals by the traditionalists, where both groups jointly thank God for the achievements made during the year.

In a similar vein, the traditionalists were usually invited by the Christians during Christmas and Easter celebrations. The invitees honour such invitation with items like tubers of yams and white cock for their hosts. However, this cooperation turned sour following waves of Pentecostal revivals in Amiri community which began to be felt in 1978¹⁰⁵. Those who associated with the traditionalists were not regarded as Christians by the Pentecostal folds – a development which resulted in the Christians being estranged from the traditionalists. Consequently, the Christians began experiencing an extension of hostility from the traditionalists, a situation which has continued to subsist in Amiri town. Whenever a Christian desecrates the land, he or she is severely dealt with. The desecrator, in most cases, is required to pay outrageous fines enforced by the masquerades like the Okorosha. Failure to act accordingly attracts the wraths of this group. In some cases, the offender having provided the required items is dragged to either the groove of Ogwugwu-Ube or Eke Umuecheta - dreaded deities in the community, to commence the process of land cleansing.

Amiri community is also known with the Ekeleke festival. This festival usually presents to the people the Igweji and Oru- $\text{ukw}\text{u}\text{a}\text{la}$, which are the two types of Ekeleke in the community. The Igweji is danced with sticks which the dancer stands on. Worn under the foot, the stick provides the dancer with an intimidating height which is immeasurable with the height of any living individual. Oru- $\text{ukw}\text{u}\text{a}\text{la}$, on the other hand, does not make use of dancing sticks. Rather, the dancer performs in the ceremony with his foot and a rattler worn on the ankle. The rattler provides

illuminating sounds while the dancer dances according to the rhythm produced by the drum.

A dance festival, the significance of the Ekeleke festival in Amiri lies in preparing the youths for external aggression, as well as entertainment. It is a festival of peace. This accounts for the reason why white cloths constitute part of its costume. Other costumes include a carved wooden head of a beautiful maiden carried on the head, a long stick worn under the feet (for the Igweji dancers), rattler worn on the ankle and white stockings (for Oru-ukwuala dancers).

Another festival worthy of note is the Okpeshi. Celebrated during the dry season, the festival is held between the months of October and November, and it provides opportunities for pomp and pageantry. In fact, it affords the indigenes of the community the opportunity to enjoy gifts from the gods of the land which is normally experienced through the bountiful harvest of agricultural produce.

During the Okpeshi festival, foods are usually prepared using *Emilia Sanchifolia* (a leaf locally called Njanja) and oil bean. The primary rationale behind the use of the leaf to prepare meal in different homesteads stems from the fact that it is medicinal, hence its potency in taking care of health issues such as pile and stomach problems. Families invite one another and while honouring the invitation, the visiting family is expected to present the host with gifts. With this, therefore, one can comfortably submit that the festival affords an opportunity for building family ties and interaction, as well as encourages peace in the community.

Endnotes

1. J.C. Ofoamara, 77 Years, Retired Teacher, interviewed at his residence in Omuma, 30/07/16.
2. Ofoamara
3. Ofoamara
4. K.C. Ubaku, “Awo-Omamma – Amiri Relations since 1970”, Unpublished Master Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 1.
5. See Map of Awo-Omamma attached.
6. Paschal Ibeawuchi, 70 Years, Tailor, interviewed at his residence in Ubogwu Village, Awo-Omamma, 03/08/2016.

See also Map of Awo-Omamma attached.
7. Ubaku, “Awo-Omamma – Amiri Relations...”, 1.
8. Chinedu Omeziri, 48 Years, Civil Servant, interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma, 01/08/16.
9. Eze Ubaku, 50 Years, Business man, interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma, 02/08/16.
10. See Map of Awo-Omamma attached.
11. Mike Nzegbu, 70 Years, Retired Civil Servant, interviewed at his residence in Omuma, 30/08/16.
12. Chikezie Nzedinobi, 49 Years, Civil Servant, interviewed at his residence in Omuma, 02/09/16.
13. Nzedinobi.
14. Nzedinobi.
15. Nzegbu.

16. Nzegbu.
17. See Map of Umuhu/Ozuh Omuma attached.
18. Evaristus Onochie, 78 Years, Trader, interviewed at his residence in Omuma, 10/09/16.
19. Onochie.
20. Onochie.
21. Onochie.
22. Onochie.
23. See Map of Etiti/Abia Omuma attached.
24. Augustine Ibeneme, 69 Years, Retired Principal, interviewed at his residence in Omuma, 06/09/10.
25. Celestine Ihewuba, 62 Years, Trader, interviewed at his residence in Omuma, 14/09/16.
26. Ihewuba.
27. Gerald Ukwuegbu, 55 Years, Headmaster, interviewed at his residence in Umuocheta-Amiri, 18/09/16.
28. Ukwuegbu.
29. M.S.O Olisa, "Igbo Traditional Socio-Political System", in *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, ed. G.E.K Ofomata, (Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited, 2002), 222.
30. Ukwuegbu.
31. Evans Nwakonobi, 49 Years, Police Officer, interviewed at his office in Awka, 30/09/16.
32. Augustine Nnanyere, 48 Years, Teacher, interviewed at his residence in Amiri, 05/09/16.

33. Okechukwu Ibekaku, 50 Years, Civil Servant, interviewed at his residence in Ubahazu-Amiri, 07/09/16.
34. Ibekaku.
35. Ibezirim Nnajiaku, 70 Years, Retired Teacher, interviewed at his residence in Amuka-Amiri, 08/09/16.
36. Nnajiaku.
37. Cyril Uzoukwu, 57 Years, Traditional Ruler of Mbubu Autonomous Community, interviewed at his palace in Mbubu-Amiri, 25/09/16.
38. Uzoukwu.
39. Ukwuegbu.
40. Ukwuegbu.
41. Sylvester Amadi, 68 Years, Retired Civil Servant, interviewed at his residence in Umudioka-Amiri, 27/09/16.
42. Ukwuegbu.
43. Nwakonobi.
44. As the researcher was touring Amiri community from one village to the other, the visible features of the town were noted. Then, it was discovered that Ike Oil Limited situated in Amaokpara village was the only filling station found in the entire community.
45. Ukwuegbu.
46. Ukwuegbu.
47. Ukwuegbu.
48. Baver Dzeremo, *Colonialism and the Transformation of Authority in Central Tivland: 1912-1960*, (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2002), 12.

49. Uchechukwu Ezedike, 65 Years, Trader, interviewed in Awo-Omamma, 15/08/16.
50. Ezemeka Ubanwe, 63 Years, Trader, interviewed in Awo-Omamma, 16/08/16.
51. Ubanwe.
52. Ubanwe.
53. The researcher was taken to the site where the oil and gas outfit is situated.
See photo attached.
54. Simon Ubaku in K. C. Ubaku, Awo-Omamma – Amiri Relations since 1970, Unpublished Master Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 4.
55. Toyin Falola et al, *History of Nigeria 1: Nigeria before 1800*, (Ikeja: Longman, 1989), 122.
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60. Amadi Nnochiri, 70 Years, Retired Civil Servant, interviewed in Omuma, 31/07/16.
61. Lambert Ukadike, 60 Years, interviewed in Amiri, 02/09/16.

62. Benard-Thompson Ikegwuoha and Mark Ajuogu, *Igbo People of SouthEastern Nigeria: Issues, Questions and Dilemma of Leadership*, (Washington: Victory Group Publishers, 2016), 39.
63. Omeziri interviewed.
64. Omeziri interviewed.
65. Omeziri interviewed.
66. Theresa Igweji, 58 Years, Politician, interviewed in Awo-omamma, 02/10/16.
67. The researcher was able to discern the activities of the youths in Awo-Omamma during an informal interaction with some of the youths in one of his field trips to the community.
68. Omeziri interviewed.
69. J.C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1966), 12-13.
70. Charles Onuoha, 45 Years, Reverend Father, interviewed in Awo-Omamma, 14/08/16.
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72. Omeziri interviewed.
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92. Nwigwe.
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94. Ubaku, Awo-Omamma – Amiri Relations..., 55.
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96. Nwokeilo Ibe, 52 Years, Teacher, interviewed in Omuma, 22/09/16.
97. Ibe.
98. Igwe Mmadubuike, 67 Years, Retired Teacher, interviewed in Omuma, 23/09/16.
99. Ejikemeuwa Ibekaku, 72 Years, Former Catechist, interviewed in Amiri, 26/09/16.
100. Ukwuegbu.
101. Silas Nzekwe, 62 Years, Catechist, interviewed in Amiri, 28/09/16.
102. Nzekwe.
103. Nzekwe.
104. Nzekwe.

105. Obioma Igwenna, 60 Years, Trader, interviewed at his residence in Amiri, 25/08/16.

CHAPTER THREE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE OWU FESTIVAL IN THE STUDY AREA BEFORE 1970

This chapter deals with an account of the Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area before the end of the Nigeria Biafra War. The necessary information in this chapter was provided according to the communities under study. Thus, considering the short period demarcating the end of colonial rule and the end of the Nigeria-Biafra War, it is imperative to note that, most features of colonial Owu festival were also seen within this period.

The festival and its celebration, during the War, went underground only to re-emerge at the end of the thirty month mayhem that besieged Nigeria's political environment, in 1970. In the next chapter, features associated with the celebration of the Owu festival from this period were examined.

Origin of the Owu Cultural Dance/Festival

Cajetan Nnanemere informed us that:

Owu (cultural dance) reminds its observers of their common heritage and ancestry. It offers them a chance for a get-together, re-union (sic) and fence-mending. It promotes social advancement and is instrumental in sustaining societal values. Owu calls for sound ideas in morality and social obligations. It positively shapes the lives of the group members.¹

Historically, the Owu festival was generally believed to have originated from the riverine communities². This historical account, however, stands to refute some existing literatures crediting Oru communities as the originators of the festival³. Nkwesi community in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State, therefore, stands as an example of the riverine communities that first had the Owu cultural dance⁴.

According to tradition, Owu was an affair of the marine world, hence the name Owu Mmiri, and was introduced into human society by a woman from Nkwesi

community. This woman had gone to the river, on a forbidden period to fetch some fishes, which she was to use in preparing a meal for her children. Little did she know that such an odd hour was when the presence of the mermaids was felt ashore. Approaching the river, she was seized by mermaids who were infuriated by the woman's act of defiling the tradition of the land. As the tradition of Nkwesi stipulated, no indigene of Nkwesi was expected to visit the river at such odd hour⁵.

Having narrated the reason for her visit to the river, the mermaids were sympathetic; consequently, she was taught the Owu dance as well as its dos and don'ts. She was also instructed to make a living using the dance in her community⁶. With its subsequent introduction into the human community, therefore, the Owu cultural dance was first performed by women. In fact, it remained the affairs of the women after it was fully embraced by the neighbouring riverine communities⁷.

During this period, the women of the riverine communities whose major economic activities were farming and fishing made the Owu dance an annual event. To this end, they set aside the period between the seed-planting season and harvest of early crops like maize for entertaining the villagers with the dance. To these women, this time was regarded as a period of rest and triumph over the period of stress and strains characterized by hard manual work in the farms⁸. The dance was celebrated in communities marking their joy and happiness. It also served as a medium of whiling-away idleness⁹. The men moved to the village squares to watch their wives dance joyously and entertainingly to the rhythm produced by the sound of the assorted musical instruments, with simple but attractive costumes. Incidentally, there was a large kapok tree, Akpu, which grew at the very centre of the village where the dance was usually staged, hence the belief that the tree on whose top birds nestle and played peacefully, would also bring accord to those who dance around it¹⁰.

The Owu dance, during this period, was in the morning hours staged theatrically, while group reveling by the women would envelop the other hours or periods of the day¹¹. In the celebration, they moved from the house of one elderly woman to another¹². This period equally served as a period of family reunion; married daughters were seen with their husbands and children coming to join in the annual celebration. Family members living outside their respective communities usually came home to celebrate with their own¹³.

As the women were engaged in the activities associated with the annual festival, their husbands attended to household chores as well as entertained guests at home – a situation which made a ridicule of the men. Holding firmly on the situation, the women began to exercise dominion over their husbands. As a result, any man who failed to attend to the guests or carry out household chores appositely awaited the wrath of his wife upon her return. This propensity, with time, gained momentum thereby becoming contagious amidst the female folks. It contributed to the women's recalcitrant behaviour during this period. The insolence was unbearable to the male folks¹⁴.

Subsequently, the men of the riverine area met and resolved to put to an end the downgrading attitude being extended to them by their wives. They decided to wrest the dance entirely from the women. They would not live to witness the domination of the women over the male folk courtesy of a mere dance. Thus, the men ruled that from that moment, no woman would have any access to the inner machinery of the Owu cult¹⁵. Some flavour of secrecy was attached to it aiming at deriding their wives and keep them in the dark and in their right place. Quarrels between couples were equally outlawed during the Owu period in order to ensure the pervasiveness of maximum peace and tranquillity. This was also aimed at averting a

possible revolt by the women. Any woman who went contrary to the established laws of the Owu was compelled to procure a goat as fine¹⁶.

Indubitably the resolution of the men of the riverine area was not left unchallenged by the women. In resistance, the women made derogatory remarks about the resolutions of their husbands which disfavoured them. Such lamentation as “what was originally initiated by the women, you men enviously arrogated. We are now driven aside”, surfaced. Thus, ‘*Owu nwanyi butere nọrọ ya n’usọ*’, had since become a slogan consequent upon the tyrannical treatment meted out to the women by the men over the Owu institution¹⁷. Therefore, before Owu diffused into Oru region, including the present day Oru East Local Government Area, it had already become men’s affair.

Owu Festival in Awo-Omamma

The Owu festival was perceived in Awo-Omamma as a good phenomenon to the people, especially for the fact that it connected the living with the dead and their gods, as well as used in counting the traditional year¹⁸. The period of the Owu festival served as a period of peace and harmony in the community. Consequently, no one was expected to exhibit any form of cantankerous propensity within the period of its celebration. Contravention of this norm automatically attracts a fine on the culprit¹⁹.

Owu festival period in Awo-Omamma served as a period of thanksgiving to the gods for the last planting season, as well as requesting for their benevolence in the coming planting season²⁰. That is to say, the celebration of the Owu festival in Awo-Omamma marked the end of a planting season and showed an impending season of planting. It also heralded the new yam festival which usually was experienced at the end of the Owu festive period which was marked with the end of Okorosha festival.

Awo-Omamma was the first community in Oru East Local Government Area to celebrate the Owu festival. In fact, it was through the community that knowledge of the festival was known in other celebrating communities in the local government area, namely Amiri and Omuma. This had been made possible as a result of contiguous borders which the communities share. Recall that Awo-Omamma, as represented on the map of Oru East, shares border with Amiri community in the north²¹. Similarly, Amiri shares border with Omuma community²².

Two different traditions accounted for the history of the Owu festival in Awo-Omamma. One of the traditions accounted that the community knew about the festival from Ogwu-Akiri, a riverine community in the Niger Delta area, while the other was of the view that the Owu diffused into Awo-Ommamma from Nkwesi.

According to the first tradition, Ogwu-Akiri was one of the communities in the riverine area which learnt the Owu culture from Nkwesi²³. By the time it diffused into Awo-Omamma, the festival had been hijacked by the male folks. This does not just stand to establish the fact that the Owu was never celebrated by women in the community, but also discredits individuals whose accounts vis-à-vis the origin of the Owu festival in Awo-Omamma community are in this direction.

Information gathered under this tradition posited that the Owu festival had its way into Awo-Omamma community through a certain returnee slave from Umunwafor kindred in Okworji village. He was sold into slavery to an Owu chief priest from Ogwu-Akiri, at the period when the culture had become an affair of the men. Prior to their departure (after the business transaction had taken place), the parties involved had an agreement which was sealed at the groove of a powerful deity, Njaba. The agreement had two components: first, the parties agreed that the family

selling their own must not demand the return of the slave; and secondly, that the buyer must not kill his slave²⁴.

On getting to Ogwu-Akiri, the slave merchant and his slave had another agreement which was sealed in the presence of another powerful deity, Ngalanga, which was native to the merchant²⁵. Here, the slave swore never to run away from his master's custody except when asked to. The master, on his own part, promised not to insult his slave by reluctantly asking him to leave his fold²⁶. With this agreement, the slave and his master lived in peace and the days rolled into weeks, months, and years. As a result of the cordial relationship existing between both parties, the slave was properly groomed in all elements of the Owu culture. The secrets of the Owu were revealed to him by his master and he participated fully in the ritual activities and ceremonies of the culture²⁷.

Subsequently, the slave accompanied his master and his family members to work on their farmland which was in a location far away from home. On getting to the farm, the master climbed a tree in order to cut some branches for his yam seedlings. As one of the branches was falling in the direction of the slave, the master shouted "Oyia Laa", which literarily means "Friend go". Mistaking the call to clear from the direction the branch was falling for a breach of the agreement sealed before Ngalanga deity, the slave took to his heels to his master's house. There, he packed few of his belongings hurriedly and equally took with him some sacred pebbles and other Owu artifacts from the sacred hut of the Owu known as Ụlọ Echere. From there, he headed back home to Awo-Omamma.

On getting to the bank of Njaba River at Isieke in the evening, the slave returnee sighted Okwuodu, a ferryman, who he asked to ferry him across the Njaba. He had explained his ordeal to Okwuodu, and as a result, the latter believed that the

slave was in a danger of risking his freedom. An indigene of Ubaheze village in Awo-Omamma, Okwuodu agreed to assist the slave returnee without any charge for his service. As a reward for his benevolence, the slave returnee proposed to teach Okwuodu's kinsmen the dance of the Owu²⁸.

Arriving Ubaheze at night having left the river bank together, the returnee waited till the wee hours of the next day when the dance was to be staged, as it has always been in the riverine communities. Following the assembling of Okwuodu and his kinsmen, subsequently, the returnee demonstrated the dance while he was being imitated. At the end of the ceremony at dawn, some sacred pebbles were handed over to Okwuodu by the ex-slave. He (Okwuodu) was instructed to bury the pebbles at a permanent spot where the dance would be staged in the future. He was also advised to plant a life kapok tree beside the buried pebbles to serve as a memorial for the institution of the Owu dance. Okwuodu and his kinsmen were further advised to visit any riverine community and learn more about the dance in order to enable them to be fully acquainted with the Owu culture. At dawn, the returnee was escorted to his village, Okworji, where he was grandly received by one Dim-Edoziem, the head of Umunwafor kindred in Okworji. Subsequently, the people of Okworji were exposed to the Owu dance courtesy of the returnee²⁹.

Having been introduced in Ubaheze and Okworji villages, the Owu dance remained a secret for sometime. Later, it was revealed to the entire community when one afternoon, Ubaheze village made the dance public by organizing it as a form of ceremony³⁰. Consequently, the people became known as the first to celebrate the dance not just in Awo-Omamma, but in Oru as a whole³¹. People from neighbouring communities were invited to the ceremony. In fact, the dance, during this period,

strengthened the relations of Awo-Omamma and her neighbours – a development which has continued till the contemporary era.

As Ubaheze people were celebrating the Owu, the people of Okworji were present at the occasion. Here, they recognized the dance as the same dance which they were taught by their returnee kinsman. Other communities present at the occasion became aware of the festival thereby encouraging its diffusion into their communities. This was how the Owu had its way into Amiri community³².

In the meantime, Okworji people came in contact with the people of the riverine whom the ex-slave had revealed were the owners of the Owu dance. The people were great fishermen, hunters and subsistence farmers. This contact tremendously assisted in the proper establishment of the Owu institution in Okworji, and the people learnt properly the Owu art.

On the other hand, the people of Ubaheze ferried across the Njaba River to Nkwesi community to learn properly the Owu art. As part of the riverine communities, Nkwesi had a well established Owu institution. It is presently situated in Oguta Local Government Area, and the Njaba River separated the community from Ubaheze village. The journey across the Njaba to Nkwesi by the people of Ubaheze, to learn the Owu culture, was encouraged by the relationship between Ubaheze ferrymen and Nkwesi fishermen.

In a bid to export their culture, the people of Nkwesi, on the arrival and request of Ubaheze people, agreed to teach the latter the technicalities associated with the Owu culture. Consequently, the Owu dance was ferried across the river in a boat, Ugbọ, to Ubaheze on the day scheduled for the ceremonial introduction of the dance to the people. A life kapok tree was planted on this day at the public square chosen by the people. This represents the immortalization of the establishment of the Owu

institution in Ubaheze, thereby corresponding with its original feature at Nkwesi. The people were also taught the practices and ritual technicalities associated with the Owu. Subsequently, these features were exported to neighbouring communities who presently celebrate the Owu festival. It assisted in improving in these communities the dance which the people had seen in Ubaheze village when it was first staged in a quasi-ceremonial mode³³.

According to the second tradition, Owu cultural dance came into Awo-Omamma community in c1746, through a particular trader, Iche, who hailed from Okworji village³⁴. A dealer on clay pots, Iche had travelled to Nkwesi to purchase some items for sale. As he strolled around the community, he stumbled into an arena where the Owu dance was staged in a quasi-ceremonial mode. There, he met an elderly man who by all indications was the head of the Owu performers. Having exchanged pleasantries, Iche appealed to the elder to allow him to learn the dance and in turn, teach his people how to dance the Owu. In his argument, once transferred to his people, the Owu dance will contribute in establishing a formidable cordial relationship between Awo-Omamma and Nkwesi land. The Owu head, however, did not grant Iche's request. He had made it clear to him that "Owu is Nkwesi and Nkwesi is Owu; the dance can be watched and enjoyed but must remain with Nkwesi"³⁵. Judging from this statement, it is clear that this individual was being conservative with the culture of his people. He was trying to safeguard for the people of Nkwesi what was originally theirs.

Subsequently, Iche was allowed to learn the Owu dance and in turn, involve his people in the culture. This happened after the Owu head had been pressured by his son to grant Iche's request. There and then, Iche was taught all the initiation rites of

the Owu. He was also allowed to partake in the dance where he started learning the dancing patterns³⁶.

On returning home, Iche ferried across the Njaba River to Ubaheze carrying with him all the theatrical elements of the Owu. At the river bank, he was held by some thugs from Ubaheze who threatened to kill him except they were monetarily compensated. Seeing that he had none, Iche proposed to trade the Owu dance in exchange for his freedom and safety. He thought these people how to dance the Owu and afterwards the dance was held by the people of Ubaheze in a quasi-ceremonial mode. With this, therefore, Ubaheze is presently recognized as the first village in Awo-Omamma in particular and Oru in general to celebrate the Owu cultural dance³⁷.

As revealed elsewhere in this study, the Owu festival was a well-respected event in Awo-Omamma. In fact, following its presence in the community, the festival was adopted as a cultural mark of the people. Consequently, in its primordial stage, it was mandatory for any male child born in the community to become an initiate of the Owu institution³⁸. The initiation, during this period, was usually used to adjudge the attainment to adulthood of a male child³⁹. This exercise usually brought lots of benefits to the child's family, one being that the family would stand to be respected among other families in the community⁴⁰. Since the Owu was (and still is) entirely affairs of the men, any male folk who wished to partake in the celebration, whether as a spectator or a dancer, must be an initiate of the Owu cult, else he became a subjected to ridicule⁴¹.

The Owu festival, during this period, was a *pan-heathen* exercise⁴². Prior to its celebration, some sort of divination must be carried out at the groove of Njaba deity located within the community. Njaba deity stood to be the central deity in Awo-Omamma, a tradition which is retained in the present period. After paying homage to

the deity, the festival was then celebrated according to villages, starting with the Ito nkwa ceremony, which traditionally marked the lowering of the instruments of the Owu. The instruments were usually hung to the rooftop of the Owu sacred hut at the end of each celebration.

The Owu was celebrated by an alliance of villages, as most villages were yet to acquire rights to organize and celebrate the festival. This system also transcended into the colonial period. As a result, colonial Ubogwu organized and celebrated their Owu with the people of Umuezeali and Umueme villages⁴³. There were incessant inter-village conflicts in the community, during this period. As a result, villages constantly raided one another. This was the case with Ubogwu which suffered incessant attacks from marauders sent by warrant chief Amanfo of Ubachima village⁴⁴. This event which has a historical landmark in Ubogwu led to a change in the period when the people celebrate the Owu festival⁴⁵. To avoid the possibility of being assaulted at the time the people would be engulfed with the excitement the festival provided, hence their being security unconscious, the people resolved to be celebrating the Owu at the same day Ubachima people were holding their celebration⁴⁶. The reason behind this resolution was that, since they (Ubachima people) were usually occupied with the responsibilities of celebrating the Owu on this day, they wouldn't have the time of planning to invade Ubogwu people⁴⁷.

Inter-village conflict also encouraged the decision to celebrate the Owu on a fixed day by Ubaheze, Okworji and Umubochi people. Prior to this development, it happened that while Ubaheze male adults left their houses dancing at the public square on the festival night, their male counterparts from Umubochi and Okworji would valiantly go and cohabit with the women of Ubaheze and even plunder their property. This glaring insult on Ubaheze womanhood was a source of inter-village

conflict that would have brought about a bloody fracas but for a timely resolution and compromise that was reached between the parties⁴⁸.

However, as a *pan-heathen* event, a white ram was usually slaughtered with the blood sprinkled on the instruments once they were loosened from the rooftop, thereby establishing the sacredness of the event⁴⁹. Also, women were not allowed to go near the arena where the event was taking place⁵⁰. However, things began to change in this direction with the presence of Christianity in Awo-Omamma community, which was felt during the colonial era. There was a paradigm shift in the heathen practices and draconian laws of the Owu⁵¹. Therefore, until the outbreak of the Nigeria Biafra War which temporarily halted the celebration of this annual cultural event by the people, the Owu cultural practices were slightly adulterated as a result of firmness of Christianity in Awo-Omamma Community⁵².

Owu Festival in Amiri

To the people of Amiri, Owu festival... (was) an accepted event. The celebration... (marked) a period when the gods... (were) thanked for bountiful harvest during the immediate past planting season. Requests... (were) equally pledged during this period for the munificence of the gods in the upcoming planting season. Therefore, the festival in Amiri... (was) held in commemoration of the gods for what they... (had) done and what they... (were) yet to do in the agrarian community⁵³.

Owu Festival had its way into Amiri community from Ubaheze and Isieke villages in Awo-Omamma. Contiguous borders had encouraged this development. As the Owu culture was instituted in Awo-Omamma, its exhibition attracted members or indigenes of neighbouring communities, especially those sharing borders with the community. This was how one Onyemansoonwu Onukaku, an indigene of Umudioka village, learnt about the Owu culture and introduced it to his people in Amiri⁵⁴. Thus, he became the first Osere (head of the Owu) not just in Umudioka village but in Amiri at large⁵⁵. He was assisted by the families of Duruiheoma and Amukamara in Awo-

Omamma to institute the Owu culture in his community⁵⁶. Like Ubaheze village in Awo-Omamma, Umudioka was the first village to organize the Owu festival in Amiri community⁵⁷.

Having learnt about the Owu, Umudioka for sometime, engaged in the joint celebration of the festival with the people of Ubaheze, Isieke, and Ubogwu villages in Awo-Omamma. Aside from ensuring the existence of a cordial relationship between these groups through this medium, their joint celebration of the Owu cultural dance was aimed at assisting Umudioka, Isieke and Ubogwu in becoming properly assimilated in the Owu culture⁵⁸. This was the situation until 1950 when there arose a problem within the group leading to their separation⁵⁹. The injustice associated with the sharing formula of a goat killed after a particular celebration led the foundation for the problem. According to the law governing the group, the Owu head of Ubaheze, in such event, would be the first to carry a share of the goat, considering the fact that the village was the first to celebrate the Owu in Oru region. Following Ubaheze were Umudioka in Amiri, Isieke and Ubogwu in Awo-Omamma in their order of sequence. Umudioka, on her turn, made a request for the thigh region, and this was not granted. Instead, she was provided with another part of the animal. This act of injustice was not accepted by the people, hence, their secession from the alliance⁶⁰.

With the death of Onyemansoonwu, who was killed by his father, Onukaku - the community leader during this period, the headship of Owu fell on his uncle, Okafor Iduogu, having been asked to hold the position pending attainment to the age of responsibility of his kid brother, Okoronkwo. Their father had fled Amiri having learnt that warrant for his arrest had been given to Duru Ohaga - the head warrior, by the community⁶¹.

However, in c1956, interests began to be shown in the headship of the Owu⁶². This was how a reputable individual in the community, Okpara Nzerem, won for himself the position of the Ada Owu in the Owu offices having failed to emerge as the Osere which he strongly bid for. This was done to reduce the rate of confusion created in the community by the tussle for Owu headship. This position remained with his family after his demise⁶³.

From Umudioka, Owu cultural dance diffused into Isiorie, Amuka, Mbubu, Umuocheta, Nchoko and Ubahazu villages⁶⁴. Umuonuoha kindred was said to have brought the dance into Ubahazu, hence, the residing of the custom of the dance in the kindred⁶⁵. As the Owu calendar presented, they were next followed by Nchoko village to celebrate the Owu festival after Umudioka. This was because these two villages followed suit in instituting the Owu culture after Umudioka. This arrangement has persisted till date⁶⁶.

In its earliest period, the Owu festival in Amiri, akin to Awo-Omamma, was a *pan-heathen* event. The festival divulged, during this period, pieces of evidence showing that it originated from the river. For instance, water pebbles and sand were collected from the river whenever the celebration of the festival was under preparation. These items were usually deposited inside a musical instrument traditionally called Ekwe, during the festival celebration. The Ekwe could not be beaten without containing some water pebbles and sand⁶⁷.

Again, every participant in the cultural dance applied white chalk to his feet. This chalk, traditionally known as Nzu, was collected from the river, soaked for seven days before the commencement of the festival⁶⁸. Members of the Owu cult, in the company of some diviners, paid homage to the Njaba River, with sacrifices given to the gods and spirits of the marine world for the gift of Owu⁶⁹.

Corollary to the foregoing, some rituals were attached in succeeding to the offices of the Owu cult, as these offices were hereditary in Amiri community. That is to say, at the demise of an Owu functionary, his direct descendant could step into his shoes as the custodian of his position within the cult. This was done by conducting some initiation rites for the successor. At the final stage of the initiation, the planted kapok tree in the compound signifying the authority of an Owu functionary would be uprooted and re-planted. This, therefore, indicated a change of the officer of the Owu. An animal must be killed in this exercise, and the type of animal depended on the office which the exercise was held for. For instance, if the exercise was being held for the office of Osere, a white male and female goat would be killed in uprooting and re-planting the kapok tree, respectively⁷⁰. In the latter, the blood of the female goat would be sprinkled on the new plant. For other offices, on the other hand, a white cock and hen were used for the same exercise⁷¹. These were also applicable in Awo-Omamma and Omuma communities.

Moreso, those who were to be initiated into the Owu cult were assembled before a shrine of the community's deity where sacrifices were made to the gods. In turn, these individuals would pledge their loyalty to the gods before the deity; they would also swear to keep the rules of the Owu. They were also made to pledge their loyalty to the Owu functionaries before the deity. Any act contravening these promises attracted serious penalty. Following this formality was merriment section where families of the new initiates presented items requested by the Owu heads, the most important of them being a goat which was usually killed and shared by the functionaries. The Osere went home with the lion share. Other items to be presented by the families included breadfruit and corn, which like the yam were also important food in Igbo society. No other food was to be prepared⁷².

Prior to the proper celebration of the Owu festival, during this period, the first task to be carried out was lowering the instruments, otherwise known as *Itọ nkwa*. This was usually done at the night of Eke market day. Once the instruments were lowered from the rooftop of the Owu hut, the *Ekwe* began to be beaten. This exercise known as *Ekwe Emume* ceremony heralded the festival celebration. It marked the commencement of the Owu festival. The next morning, the metal gong, *Ogene*, would be sounded. The sound of this prohibited every woman from having problems with one another. A contravention of this norm attracted heavy fine on the culprit⁷³. Additionally, with the sound of the metal gong, no burial ceremony was to be held. In a situation where one died, he or she would be buried without formal ceremony. The ceremony marking the demise of an individual could be held at the end of the Owu festival⁷⁴.

With the presence of the Europeans, some changes were introduced into most of these features of the Owu. Christianity marked an important feature that encouraged some of the changes, during this period. Thus, from around 1911 when the presence of the Christian missionaries began to be felt in the community, some of the custodians of the tradition and indigenes of the community began to disassociate themselves from the Owu festival⁷⁵. Those who saw nothing wrong with the tradition, alongside their Christian faith, acted in accordance with the provisions of 2 Thessalonians 2:15: "...brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught..."⁷⁶. Also, they must have taken into cognizance that: "to detach oneself from the ...(traditions) of one's community is to be severed from one's root and kinships"⁷⁷, as Olatunde Abosedo Oderinde once warned.

The name associated with the process of initiation, *Ikwa mmuọ*, was re-christened *Iba n'owu*. This was also felt in Awo-Omamma and Omuma

communities⁷⁸. The primary rationale behind this change of nomenclature was to encourage disbelievers in the *pan-heathenish* nature of the Owu, so as to enable its acceptance by all and sundry, irrespective of one's religion⁷⁹. New initiates were no longer taken to the shrines to pledge their loyalties as well as to be taught the dos and don'ts of the Owu. New items were also introduced for the *Ìba n'owu* ceremony⁸⁰.

Owu Festival in Omuma

Like the other communities under study, the Owu festival in Omuma was widely accepted amongst the people. It was perceived as a celebration instituted by the forefathers for the good of the community. The festival created a special relationship between man and the gods in such a way that man benefited from their blessings⁸¹. It marked a period between the end of a season and the beginning of another.

In the preceding section, it was revealed that the Owu festival diffused into Omuma from Amiri community. However, further studies on Omuma revealed that the people also learnt about the festival from Mgbidi in Oru West Local Government Area⁸². This was the case of the people of Umunnem Umuhu Omuma who agreed that their Owu was learnt from Ugbele village in Mgbidi community⁸³. The people of Mgbidi learnt the tradition from Oguta communities, one of which was Nkwesi. Contiguous borders between these regions had encouraged such development. Similarly, trade was also a major factor that brought about the institution of this cultural dance in Mgbidi as these peoples were engaged in trade relations which had been instrumented by the Oguta Lake⁸⁴.

On the other hand, a study on Amiri-descent of the Owu Omuma revealed that the festival diffused into the community from Amiri. This development was experienced after the propagation of the culture in Amiri community by one

Onyemansoonwu Onukaku⁸⁵. According to this study, the people of Amaopkara village had instrumented the presence of the Owu tradition in Omuma⁸⁶.

However, in these studies, the study on Mgbidi seemed to appear convincing. This is because Owu tradition in Omuma seemed to share similar features with that of Mgbidi, which were distinct to Owu Amiri. For instance, like in Mgbidi, Owu in Omuma was celebrated without the presence of Okorosha masquerade, as the masquerade did not exist in the community. Rather, masquerades like Akakpo were seen policing the community as well as entertaining the people in their acrobatic ways of dancing during the festival⁸⁷. Their activities, during this period, were synonymous to those of the Okorsha masquerades in Amiri and Awo-Omamma. The absence of Okorosha masquerades in Omuma did not in anyway suggest the inexistence of the nomenclature; the dancers of the Owu were known as Okorosha⁸⁸.

Another similar feature was the absence of Owu Oma as a type of Owu in Omuma. Also, unlike Amiri community, the office of the Ada Owu was strictly reserved for a woman who was the daughter of the Osere⁸⁹. This feature in Omuma was also obtainable in Awo-Omamma.

Owu Omuma was celebrated within the Owu festive period which stretched from mid-May to mid-August. From mid-May, the period counting into the celebration of the main festival, which like the other communities held from June to July, commences. With the coming of the Owu, Ike Ala became the first ceremony to be celebrated within the festive period which heralded the festival proper. This preceded the Itọ nkwa ceremony⁹⁰. Recall that the Ike Ala ceremony, as revealed in the preceding chapter, was held in respect of the impending new yam festival. It provided the people the opportunity to solicit the presence of the gods in the upcoming big event. Thus, since the celebration of the Owu festival in Omuma also

announced the impending new yam festival, the Ike Ala ceremony was considered imperative prior to the celebration of the Owu.

The Ike Ala ceremony was usually held at the shrine of Nnemọzu, the central deity of Omuma. Here, sacrifices were made to the gods where the indigenes asked for the successful celebration of the Owu and the new yam festivals⁹¹. During this period, it was mandatory for every village in Omuma to be represented in the ceremony by their village heads, as they would convey to their people the blessings of the gods. The blessings of the gods, as believed, would not be extended to any village which was absent in the ceremony. However, with the coming of Christianity during the colonial era, the trend was affected by societal changes. To this end, Ike Ala ceremony began to be held in two folds: in the church, and at the shrine of Nnemọzu⁹². While the former was associated with Christian converts who solicited the presence of God and His Son in the upcoming occasion, the latter was carried out by groups of Nze and Ozo titleholders and other adherents to African Traditional Religion.

One week after Ike Ala ceremony comes the Itọ nkwa⁹³. Akin to the other communities, this represented a traditional lowering of the Owu instruments from the rooftop of the Owu sacred hut. The Owu festival was staged in the coming week after the Itọ nkwa ceremony. The commencement was usually marked with the assembling of the Owu heads in the house of their Osere. Here, the Osere danced before his co-heads. Other officers followed suit in hierarchical order. Once any of the heads came out to dance, he was expected to showcase the Odikorodi, Igwu-Udo, Ekewuba and Egwu nwaieghe – the four dancing patterns of the Owu⁹⁴. This event attracted people to the house of the Osere where they were entertained.

Like Awo-Omamma and Amiri, one of the don'ts of the Owu festival in Omuma was the non-participation of women in the traditional dance⁹⁵. However, unlike the aforementioned communities, the people of Omuma made an effort in compensating the women on what they perceived as an act of injustice, vis-à-vis the Owu festival. The compensation was seen in the institution of the Amachi ceremony, which existed at the early periods of the Owu in Omuma community, to give the women a sense of belonging in the celebration of the festival⁹⁶. Strictly celebrated by the women, the Amachi was a day event, lasting from morning to evening of the Eke market day preceding the Orié market day when the Owu festival commences. Then at night, the *Ofuzo* would start executing his duty⁹⁷.

One charged with the responsibility of organizing the Amachi ceremony was the *Ada Owu*⁹⁸. During the celebration, there must not be rainfall. If this happened, the *Ada Owu* would be fined. A similar fate would befall the *Oseré* once rain fell when his village would be celebrating the Owu. Subsequently, this ceremony ceased to be celebrated in the community. Its extinction was as a result of abandonment by the women who were supposed to be the custodians of this tradition. With the coming of Christianity in Omuma, most of the women embraced the new religion⁹⁹.

As one of the laws of the tradition, women must not reply to the official Owu salutation – *Yi Kweni Owu ni!* This also applied to Awo-Omamma and Amiri. Known as *Iji Owu*, whenever this salutation goes, ‘Owu’ was usually replied by the officials and members of the Owu cult, raising their clenched fists in strength and unity¹⁰⁰. The salutation was of *Nkwesi* dialect, thereby establishing the community as the main source of origin of the cultural event¹⁰¹. These laws equally existed in the early periods of the Owu in Omuma¹⁰².

Also, by this period, burial for a demised Owu functionary was conducted at the dead of the night. This was done to avoid the women and children from witnessing the Owu rituals which were carried out in honour of the deceased¹⁰³. Though this practice still subsists till date, it lost most of its original features with the presence of Christianity in Omuma community¹⁰⁴.

Endnotes

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6. Minwe.
7. Minwe.
8. Amadi Ikeagwu, 62 Years, Farmer, interviewed at his residence in Nkwesi, 05/11/16.
9. Mbanefo Isinguzo, 60 Years, Trader, interviewed in Nkwesi, 04/11/16.
10. Ikeagwu.
11. Agbako Ogidi, 68 Years, Retired Civil Servant, interviewed at Amadi Ikeagwu's residence in Nkwesi, 05/11/16.
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13. Isinguzo.
14. Ikejiofor Emeaghaa, 69 Years, Cobbler, interviewed at Amadi Ikeagwu's residence in Nkwesi, 05/11/16.
15. Ofodi Okoro, 67 Years, Carpenter, interviewed at Amadi Ikeagwu's residence in Nkwesi, 05/11/16.
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19. Ngimah.
20. Chinedu Omeziri, 48 Years, Civil Servant, interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma, 01/08/16.
21. See Map of Oru East Local Government Area, attached
22. Map of Oru East
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25. Ubaku.
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29. Ofodiri.
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46. Onumara.
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49. Ajah.
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51. Ibeziri Umeh, 74 Years, Retired Teacher, interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma, 24/10/16.

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53. Nzerem.
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55. Nzerem.
56. Minwe.
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64. Nnamdi Okoro, 67 Years, Retired Teacher, interviewed at his residence in Amiri, 15/09/16.
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90. Adiigwe Akukwe, 63 Years, Trader, interviewed at his residence in Ozuh Omuma, 07/11/16.
91. Akukwe.
92. Akukwe.
93. Agunegbuewu.
94. Ikemba Orji, 58 Years, Business Man, interviewed at his residence in Abia Omuma, 09/11/16.
95. The researcher observed that the women were not allowed to take part in the Owu celebration of Omuma during the past festival period. Rather, they were following the activities from a distance.
96. Aguneguewu.
97. Akukwe.
98. Orji.
99. Orji.
100. The researcher observed the members and officers of the Owu cult perform the Owu official salutation during the past Owu festival in Omuma.
101. Nze Adibe, 69 Years, Ugbò, interviewed at his residence in Abia Omuma, 09/11/16.
102. The researcher was informed that the laws prohibiting the women of Omuma from participation in the Owu dance and salutation was in existence in the early periods of the festival in the community.
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CHAPTER FOUR
FEATURES OF THE OWU FESTIVAL IN ORU EAST LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREA

Having had an overview of the Owu festival before the end of the Nigeria Biafra War in the preceding chapter, this chapter is concerned with the features of Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area within the period under study. To this end, the following areas were covered: the organizational structure of the Owu cult, dances connected with the Owu festival, mortuary rites of the Owu head, initiation into the Owu cult, and ceremonies associated with the Owu festival.

Organizational Structure of the Owu Cult

The Owu as a cultural institution had its way into Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State through Ubaheze village¹. Located in Awo-Omamma, the people of Ubaheze were the first to celebrate the festival in the area under study. They modeled and gave the Owu its features, some of which still exist. These features were also found in Amiri and Omuma and one of them was seen in the area of creating new priestly functionaries or offices which constitute the Owu government. These offices were hierarchically organized with each bearing some certain responsibilities. They enjoyed some prestige and difference and these offices include the osere, ụgbọ, akpu/iche and ada-owu. There was also the agwọlị but this office was not as primary as others².

The aforementioned offices were considered hereditary, ascribed and operated on the principle of primogeniture. In a situation where a chief priest had no heir to succeed him at his demise, the eldest kin of the lineage group automatically succeeds the office. Whoever takes over the office would be installed by being presented ritually to the council of the Owu cult in a particular village. Through these

individuals also, the successor was presented to the dead ancestors of the group. At this time each of the other heads performed some religious responsibilities, and this takes place after the mortuary rites of the deceased had been completed³.

The head of the Owu cult was known as Osere. An Owu terminology denoting Chief Priest, that is 'onye isi owu' (which has been retained till date), it had no fetish connotation as was wrongly perceived and disseminated by the early missionaries and their hoodwinked converts. He owned the *Ọfuzọ* as well as presided over all meetings of the cult council⁴. The Osere was also charged with the responsibility of providing the dancing instruments, but this responsibility was delegated to his aides. The customary right to appoint the holder of the Ada-owu office laid solely with him. In Awo-Omamma and Amiri, the sacred mask of the father of masquerades, *Agwụ*, was also kept in his custody on behalf of the community. He was at the head of the initiation ceremonies and until he performed his rites on any initiates, none of his co-heads would carry out his own initiation roles. Doing this before him was considered the desecration of Owu tradition which usually attracted a fine of an adult goat. Some dancers in the festival days were selected by him. He upheld peace and good government in the cult organization⁵.

Ugbọ, on the other hand, was the second office in the hierarchical structure of the Owu cult functionaries. This office represented the fact that the Owu festival was ferried across the river to Oru East region in a boat at its inception. He ran errands for the Osere, such as disseminating information to the other Owu heads for a meeting. He was also charged with the responsibility of advising the cult. *Ugbọ* had initiation rites. Akin to the Osere, he provided special dancers during the Owu festival⁶.

Akpụ/iche was the third in command in the Owu cult. This office represented two different elements of the Owu. *Akpụ* represented the kapok tree planted at the

public square where the dance was institutionalized by the people of Ubahaeze. The office also represented the ritual worth of this tree. As such, the Owu cultural dance could not be staged in its absence⁷. This was synonymous with the rationale behind the official tradition of planting of trees at the grounds of certain government institutions to commemorate the commissioning of the ceremony of such establishments. In the university, such act was witnessed amongst graduating classes where they planted special trees to mark their graduation years. Iche, (an Owu terminology for parrot) on the other hand, represented the feathers of the parrots which the dancers performed with. These feathers were used in decorating the head-gears of the dancers. A performer could not participate in the Owu dance without his head-gear. This was also observed in the coronation of a king or queen which would not be complete without the crown. The holder of this office, therefore, had the responsibility of guarding the ritual tree which had a long lifespan or the headdress which adorned the throne of the cult. He also served in the capacity of publicity secretary of the cult. On the festive periods, like the other functionaries, he had the right to provide specified dancers. He also had initiation rites like his co-heads⁸.

Ada-Owu is another head of the Owu cult to be examined. This office came fourth on the structural ladder. In the villages of Awo-Omamma and Omuma towns, this office was held by a woman who was the daughter of the Osere. Amiri town, however, seemed to have a different practice as a man headed this office but this did not suggest that he must carry out the responsibilities mainly reserved for the office. In such situation, he could delegate such responsibility to his wife, daughter, or any woman of his choice. An example could be drawn from Umudioka village where Nze Adizuomma Nzerem held (and is still holding) the office of Ada-Owu in the village's Owu cult⁹. He'd inherited this office from his father, Okpara Nzerem.

In Awo-Omamma, during the first decade of the post-civil war era, this office was not held by a woman in most of her villages. During this period, there were in existence thirteen villages in the community. The office of the Ada-Owu in eleven of these villages was manned by men, while the other two had women as the holder of this office. These two villages were Isieke and Umuezike¹⁰. The reason for this dissimilarity stemmed from the source where the villages concerned adopted the culture. While the eleven villages had Nkwesi as their source, the tradition had its way into the other two villages from Oguta¹¹, and by this period, both Nkwesi and Oguta were in the riverine area of Ohaji/Egbema/Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State. In the eleven villages, women were completely secluded from the cult and its practices. Only the males had the privilege to take part in the cult's activities.

Subsequently, there was experienced a change in this direction. Since the office represented the woman waitress cum wife of the Owu Chief Priest who cooked and served food on the day the dance was brought to Ubahaeze, there was a consensus by all the Owu cult functionaries in the community for the office to be delegated to a woman¹². The occupant of the office, as agreed, must be a daughter of the royal lineage of the Osere. She was principally charged with the responsibility of preparing what must be consumed in the house of an Osere, during the Owu festival¹³.

Dances Connected with the Owu Festival

Within the period under study, the Owu was an annual festival in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State. It was celebrated with pomp and pageantry by all the villages in Awo-Omamma, Amiri, and Omuma communities. The feast of the masquerades marked the end of the Owu festive period or season when the festival was celebrated. The *itọ nkwa* ceremony acted as a harbinger to the festival, while the indigenous religious ceremonies ushered in the ritual dance which commenced with

delight. This was usually experienced on an Eke market day, two days from the *itokwa* ceremony¹⁴.

There were three unique aspects of the Owu cultural dance in Oru East Local Government Area. This had remained an important feature of the festival in the area and period under study. There existed mutual inclusion in the methods and variation of the dancing. The only distinguishing elements were their names and importance. These three aspects or types of the Owu dance were the Owu-abuba, Owu-oma and Owu-ulo-akwa.

Owu-abuba dance featured annually during the celebration of the Owu festival. It was the dance of all the initiates. This was because both the ceremonial dancers and amateurs of the Owu cult participated freely as members of the cult¹⁵. Four principal officers were usually under the obligation to compete in this dance, and they included the Nwaezeowu provided by the Osere, Nwankpa owned by the Ugbu and one Owu oma each owned by the Akpu/iche and Ada-Owu¹⁶. These four dancers constituted the ceremonial regulars. In a situation where one failed to appear on the stage, the Owu head responsible for this act was heavily fined. This was so because such incident was perceived as a ritual calamity and it was capable of inviting the wrath of the gods and ancestors on the communities¹⁷.

The dancers were ordered hierarchically in the sense that only expert dancers could be selected by the Owu heads to perform on their behalf. Consequently, dancers of all categories behaved very competitively to attract recognition and admiration of the spectators. Money and gifts were showered on the dancers by friends, relatives, and admirers¹⁸. As a dancer outrivaled the others through his rhythmical body movement, he collected more money and gifts. When the orchestra starts producing rhythmical ritual sounds of the ensemble which introduces the first variety of the

dance, the Osere would enter, salutes the musicians, and in the most solemn demonstration starts his ritual dance¹⁹. The implication here was that unless the Osere opens the stage, no other dancer would perform and the dance would be called off for that year. The Osere was followed quickly by his own ceremonial dancer, Nwaezeowu, who strikes a small gong, Ogele, rhythmically. Here, he was the leader of the dance²⁰.

Afterwards, the other ceremonial dancers belonging to the other three Owu heads took the stage in their order of ranks. They were followed by ordinary dancers who may be two in the ring but who danced one at a time in a more competitive manner. The dancing followed this pattern till the end. Also, in appearance were the masquerades, Okorosha in the case of Awo-Omamma and Amiri, and Akakpo and Nnemnwu in Omuma, scaring away the women and perform their own ritual dance and acrobatic exhibitions²¹. The activities of these masquerades were synonymous to those of the adult societies in Cross River Igbo, as revealed by Udobata R. Onunwa, when he posited that:

Some ... (secret societies in Cross River Igbo cultural area) provide some recreational activities and entertainment at ... funeral ceremonies of their members, traditional annual festival of the community, etc. These ... ostensible functions ... (are provided) to justify their existence. Some of them provide such entertainment and amusement and in return expect gifts from the audience and spectators²².

The costume of the dancers consisted of white skirts and white singlets or polos to match with waistbands decorated with ribbons of assorted colours. The head-dress which was embellished with fresh white feathers was wedged at the base with a transparent white cloth to hide the dancer's face from the spectators. There was also a dancing anklet on which were tied tiny cocoon rattles filled with water pebbles. Locally called *Onwiriṅwa*, it was worn on the ankle, and this told the spectators whether or not the dancer was dancing accurately to the beatings of the drummers²³.

The costumes had their various meanings. The white coloured singlets or polos and skirts showed that Owu was a peaceful tradition. It was a festival of peace and tranquillity and as a result, did not require any form of bloodshed. The skirts were adopted to replace shorts which were used towards the early periods of the post-civil war Oru East region²⁴. The introduction of skirts as part of the costumes of the festival was to give the dancer freedom to dance to the different beatings of the Owu as produced by the drummers²⁵. The white stockings were worn to prevent infliction of wound on the feet of a dancer while he performed to the rhythm. Its white colour, like the singlets/polos and skirts, revealed the peaceful nature of the Owu. In Amiri, as a result of modernity, it also replaced the white chalk which every dancer applied to his feet before setting out on stage to dance²⁶. The white chalk, as revealed, in the preceding chapter, presented the connection between the festival and the marine world²⁷. The white feathers also presented the Owu as a festival of peace while the ribbons worn with waistband evidenced that the Owu was a respected cultural event²⁸.

In Omuma, during this celebration, there was usually witnessed the presence of a dancer with a masquerade-like costume. Still existing presently as a feature of Owu abuba in the community, this individual was usually seen in black-coloured cloths (covering the face), skirts, stockings, footwears, and waist ban with coloured materials. White gloves were worn over his fists. This individual was known as Nnemọzụ because he represented the deity. He comes out from the shrine of Nnemọzụ, the central deity of Omuma people. His presence in the community usually marked the impending end of the Owu festival of that year²⁹.

Ceremonial and amateur dancers were all regarded as sacred during the dance. In some cases, they were perceived as spirits in human disguise. This was because their faces were not seen by the spectators. They were usually covered with white

transparent cloth which only afforded a performer the possibility of vision. This notion of spirits in human disguise began to wage in the minds of the populace when the dancers were initially masked³⁰. Geoffery Gorer seemed to have further intensified this notion having posited that “all masked dancers are representatives of dead men”³¹.

The musical instruments for the Owu-abuba dance included Ekwe, a two-tone wooden instrument for varying the melody; Nkwa/Adudu, a cylindrically shaped drum used to set and alter the rhythms, as each rhythm had emotional appeal to the dancers; and finally, two small gongs, Ogele, to supply ringing sounds in rhythm³².

At the end of the dancing ceremony, the accredited Owu heads and members of the cult from villages not performing the same day would retire to the palace of the celebrating Osere as guests of the local Owu council, where they were hosted with carefully prepared ngwo-ngwo meat (mainly by the fathers of the new initiates). Both palm wine and local gins were also served. Subsequently, the guests would retire to their respective homes. Then, there was generally experienced a social euphoria which was usually expressed in group merriments, rejoicing, entertainment of invitees, singing of ritual songs and occasional masquerade displays. This continues intermittently till the last day of the masquerades³³.

As revealed, Owu-abuba dance encouraged inter-village relations. Therefore, this dance contributed enormously to achieving peace which was one of the cardinal objectives upon which the Owu festival was celebrated. It also assisted in promoting inter-community relations. To this end, there existed cordiality in the economic, political and cultural relations of the post-civil war Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma. Though in some cases one heard of conflictual development between the

relating communities such as the Otunne conundrum between Awo-Omamma and Amiri³⁴, it did not in any way suggest the absence of a cordial relationship.

Owu-oma dance, unlike Owu-abuba, occurred periodically at the volition of the Owu heads. Ideally, one Owu-oma separated from another with about ten-year interval. It usually took place when the socio-economic and political prosperity of the community was generally assumed to be bountiful³⁵. Amongst the communities that celebrate the Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area, only Awo-Omamma and Amiri performed the Owu-oma dance³⁶. Omuma did not recognize the dance, hence its inexistence in the Owu calendar of the community. The reason was that in Mgbidi where most of the villages in Omuma learnt about the festival, Owu-oma dance was not recognized³⁷. This, therefore, suggested that the Owu festival in communities in Oru East retained the features of their main source of diffusion.

Whenever the Owu-oma was decided to be celebrated at the meeting of the Owu council, it lasted for eight days at a stretch³⁸. Its celebration was rotational among villages and it usually attracted people from within and outside the celebrating community. Guests who called at will to wish households well in the spirit of the season were entertained during this period³⁹.

The Owu-abuba dance was staged in the morning of the first day of the Owu-oma dance, thereby acting as a forerunner to the latter. After that, the Owu-oma would be staged in the evening of that very day, as well as the subsequent evenings. Only the ceremonial dancers provided by the Owu heads were recognized participants in Owu-oma. To this end, the Osere provided Nwaezeowu, one Owu-oma and Agwu - the scary masquerade whose presence was usually felt with a mace symbolizing his staff of office. The Ugbọ, on his own part, presented Nwankpa and one Owu-oma, while Akpu/iche would provide one Owu-oma and Nwanyanwu who like the Agwu

also goes about with his staff of office. Nwanyanwu, as the name implies, was life-like and radiated in its beauty like the sun. The Ada-owu comes up with an Owu-oma and an Olokoloja who performed comically in his style of dance which ran counter to the rhythms of the drums⁴⁰.

Wealthy citizens who were not Owu heads could afford their own dancers on the recommendation and ritual approval of the Owu heads. A post-civil war phenomenon, this feature was not associated with the ceremony prior to this period⁴¹. A dancer produced by such means during Owu-oma celebration was regarded as “Owu-akụ” showing that the dancer existed as a result of the wealth of the owner as distinct from the Owu-oma which was ceremonial⁴².

The costumes for Owu-oma differed from those of Owu-abuba. For instance, while white skirts, white singlets or polos, waistbands decorated with ribbons of assorted colours and head-dress embellished with fresh white feathers made up the costumes for Owu-abuba, Owu-oma costumes, therefore, included cloths, feathers, and an elaborate tome designed and carried at the back which was adorned with multiple colours. The head-dress was an elongated structure called Agalaga, decked with bright plumes at intervals⁴³.

The Okorosha doro akpu was the only ritual titled masquerade to display during the Owu-oma celebration. This was different from Owu-abuba celebration where all grades of masquerades performed. The primary rationale behind this was that this type of Okorosha masquerade possessed similar rank with the Agwu as both were conferred higher initiation rites⁴⁴. Few masquerades attained this status after paying high initiation fees thereby making the position an achieved one. This practice where other masquerades alongside the Agwu displayed during Owu-oma period was

a post-independence era innovation; it had not been in practice prior to the period under study⁴⁵.

During Owu season, it was usual for masquerades to move around the streets at night making their ritual sounds at intervals. This, however, did not apply to Owu-oma period as the Agwụ had the sole prerogative to move at nights. Its ritual sound was usually heard at different corners; also heard was the sound of its mace⁴⁶.

The Owu-ulo-akwa dance was celebrated within an Owu festive season for the purpose of according late Owu heads the last funeral rites reserved for the Owu functionaries. It was not celebrated in a special year⁴⁷. In fact, this dance in the Owu tradition had a similar purpose with the requiem mass in the Roman Catholic Church.

Owu-ulo-akwa was celebrated to bid farewell to a departed head of the Owu cult to the spirit world, appreciating his unique role in the cult during his lifetime. This would ensure that the deceased wouldn't return in fury to hunt his in-group and his living co-heads for neglect. Thus, the dance was a sort of last ritual communion and communication, held with the deceased. It evidenced Victor Uchendu's observation that "the Igbo conceive their ancestors as the invisible segment of the lineage"⁴⁸.

The celebration of Owu-ulo-akwa never exceeded four days, within which all ceremonial dancers and masquerades performed funeral rites to the deceased Owu head. The dance was known for bringing forth harmony; it never gave room for competition. In Awo-Omamma and Amiri, the Agwụ as the father of the masquerades, paraded the streets of the communities day and night making its ritual sound. Whereas in Omuma, the nnemonwụ and akakpo were seen carrying out similar obligations⁴⁹. They collected presents from people with the belief that they would be transferred to the deceased for his sustenance in the spirit world. The grave of the

deceased was visited severally within this period by these masquerades on behalf of the community to show their last respects⁵⁰.

These masquerades could not be confronted during this period as it was feared that they commune with the spirit of the deceased. A contravention of this norm, as believed, infuriates the deceased. They were not allowed to eat anything offered in sacrifice, as the right to do so laid only with the immediate grandsons of the deceased, Umunwanwa. This group also had the customary responsibility of digging the grave and burying the corpse in the night following the traditional wake-keeping observed by elder initiates, relatives and married female relatives. From that night and subsequent four days, the masquerades would be visiting the compound and graveside of the deceased to pay the last respects⁵¹.

In the light of all mentioned, there was experienced in the communities under study, especially in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a situation where the celebration of Owu-ulo-akwa would be announced in the church, after service. The Vicar or one in charge of announcements would announce to the congregation on the preparations of the community to celebrate this cultural dance for a deceased Owu head, though on the request of his family members who must be Christians⁵². This development showed the acceptance of one's culture and tradition by Christianity as long as such culture does not contradict natural laws.

Mortuary Rites of an Owu Head

The demise of an Owu head sets in motion a wave of burial and memorial ceremonies and rites. His passing was described as going home. Thus, the lamentation 'Nna anyi alaa' filled every nooks and crannies of the affected village in particular and community at large. With the waging situation, every head and grand initiates of the Owu cult assembled at the house of the Osere. In a situation where the office of

the Osere was vacant as a result of the demise of the holder and yet to emerge a successor, the assemblage would take place at the house of the Ugbọ, who was next to the Osere in the cult functionary⁵³. The burial arrangements were made here. To ensure a successful internment, this group would usually take up the following responsibilities: washing and dressing the corpse, positioning it to lie in state, preparing a framework of an Owu dancer and placing it by the side of the corpse⁵⁴. The reason for the latter responsibility bordered on the belief that the framework would be carried by the deceased to the forebearers of the tradition, to account for his stewardship. After consulting with a diviner on who should perform what ritual for the deceased, a separation rite was performed⁵⁵.

At this juncture, the Umunwanwa were summoned to start digging the grave. This was their customary responsibility. Another was the right to consume victuals and lay the corpse in the grave. A traditional wake-keeping was also organized for the deceased. The masquerades (Agwu in Awo-Omamma and Amiri, and Nne mmọnwu and Akakpo in Omuma) moved around the community visiting the compound and graveside of the deceased⁵⁶. Next was the Owu-ulo-akwa dance discussed in the preceding section.

After the committal, on the eighth day, the deceased's kinsmen would procure goats, fowls and four yams with which the living co-heads would use in sacrifice designed to uproot or demolish the akpu of the deceased⁵⁷. Note that the decision to procure goats or fowls, as divulged earlier depended on the office affected. While the office of the Osere had the goats, fowls were used in other offices. This Owu tradition had been in existence since time immemorial.

The tree designated authority which was transferable⁵⁸. The offerings were now consumed by the co-heads and the grand initiates⁵⁹. After the consummation of

these rites, the successor to the leadership would be conferred with the inheritance rites, as Owu offices could be inherited. Fabian Ukaegbu has informed us that “succession is an ordinance of continuity...”⁶⁰. This shows the reason for this practice of inheritance in the office of the Owu cult. Therefore, to evidence succession in the office, the akpu of the successor was established after he had gone through some ritual processes⁶¹. The brother of the deceased emerges as the successor in a situation where the latter had no heir to take after him⁶².

Initiation into the Owu Cult

One becomes a member of the Owu cult through initiation and only the males had privilege to this. The transition of an ordinary person into a sacred pedestal as provided by the Owu cult was marked by ritual, known as passage rites. In other words, initiation had to do with lifting the uninitiated from the status of an ordinary person to a pedestal of sacredness. This is different from what Paul Kyalo calls Vocational Initiation Rites (VIR), which are “...initiation ceremonies for special groups or fraternities that consist of an elite class of persons who have demonstrated that they possess a special capacity to understand the sacred mysteries or gifted with unique spiritual powers”⁶³.

Initiation rites showed inner changes in moral and social status. The cult was different from a secret society though the institution was sex discriminatory, as women were not allowed into the fold. Unlike the Ekpe society of the Cross River where only able-bodied men were initiated into the fold as they come of age⁶⁴, every male child was qualified for admission into the Owu cult. In Oru East Local Government Area, male citizens were divided into the initiated and the uninitiated, with the latter assuming profane identity – Ofoko – with the women⁶⁵. The initiated, on the other hand, were highly regarded in every aspect of social life⁶⁶.

The ofoko were neither entrusted with societal secrets nor admitted into sacred religious places such as the masquerade cults. As a result, parents initiated their male children from childhood. Those to be initiated were admitted by the Owu heads that were paid initiation fees according to the hierarchy of their offices; this was the normal practice⁶⁷.

Initiations were also done during the celebration of the Owu festival, but this was mostly experienced in Awo-Omamma and Amiri towns. Here, the Agwụ alone had the prerogative to admit. Therefore, any male child born during this period, after the *ịtọ nkwa* ceremony, was initiated by the Agwụ⁶⁸. As revealed elsewhere in this study, the Osere owned and kept the mask of the Agwụ on behalf of the community. His superiority over other Owu heads was established in the initiation privilege which the Agwụ masquerade exercised in his name during this special period. Other Owu heads, by this period, never carried out initiation rites.

Initiation into the Owu cult in Oru East was done procedurally. Parents visited the Owu heads with the purpose of paying the initiation fees of their sons, after the *ịtọ nkwa* ceremony. The Osere received some amount of money, some bottles of beer or native gin, kola nuts, alligator pepper and tubers of yam. The Ugbọ, Akpụ/iche and Ada-owu also received their own items which, in the hierarchical formation of the offices, must be lesser than those of the Osere⁶⁹. This was obtainable especially in the early years of the post-civil war era. Subsequently, things began to change in this direction. To this end, instead of procuring the aforementioned items which were mandatory, one could decide to monetarily substitute the items⁷⁰. This feature is still witnessed till date.

Offerings were offered to the spirit of the ancestors at each initiation ceremony. This was done by each Owu head on behalf of the initiates, and it was

considered the preliminary stage of the initiation ceremony. The admission ceremony starts at the house of the Osere at the morning hours of the Owu dancing festival. Every initiate would hand a cock to the Osere for onward sacrifice to the ancestors. Libations were poured and special prayers were equally offered to the gods and ancestors on behalf of the new initiates. The initiates were also rubbed with white chalk, Nzu, which signified new life, peace and goodness in the fold. Afterwards, they would head to the dancing arena for public presentation to the masked dancers. With this, they were formally admitted into the fold. As a result, fathers and guardians of the new initiates would move into the dancing ring with their initiation cocks. This was experienced once a special variety of dance was tuned. They (the fathers and guardians) would carry out the ritual dance on behalf of the new initiates, ending by having their (the initiates') feet placed on the main drum of the orchestra. The fowls brought by these fathers and guardians were taken home, killed and consumed by the members of the household to the health of the new initiates. Additionally, a plate of ngwọ-ngwọ meat would be sent to the Osere by the household of each initiate, and they were eaten by the Owu heads and grand initiates after the dance⁷¹.

Initiation ritual into the Owu in Oru East Local Government Area indicated rebirth just as the baptism kind of spiritual transformation in the Christendom. An expressive ceremony, all the new initiates at the end of the initiation exercise were ranked with the old initiates. Now held as sacred, they became part and parcel of the Owu cult. Consequently, they were accorded recognition in any village of the communities. They could also take part in any ritual ceremonies associated with the Owu festival⁷².

Ceremonies associated with the Owu Festival

Karl Marx informed us that religion is the opium of the masses⁷³. This thus stands as evidence to the fact that the existence of man would not be complete without religious belief, which has to do with a belief in the supernatural. Religious belief in man is encouraged by his inability to understand both the unknown and the rationale behind the plethora of failures and misfortunes which he encounters at different periods of his life. To find a possible panacea to these problems, he resorted to sacrifices to agents of the unknown. Most times, these sacrifices afford occasions for revels of all sorts which members of a group had to accept.

Providing a clue on religious belief, F.C. Ogbalu focusing on the Igbo, was of the view that:

The Ibos believe in one Supernatural Being. They call him Chuku. He is known to them by other names: Chineke (literarily God that creates, Chi na-eke), Chuku Okike (God the creator). Indirect ways of referring to Him are Olisa-eberuwa (abbreviated Olisa), Obasi bi n'elu (abbreviated Obasi, God who lives on high). They believe He lives above (i.e. Obi n'elu) not necessarily sky but it is not equivalent to heaven for the Ibos have no conception of the biblical heaven. Chuku (Chukwu) is often said to mean Chi-uku. That is Big God as distinct from small ones. These small ones are certainly not idols. They are Chi, the personal god of a man or woman. They are like God Himself were (sic) not represented in any form or shape as was the case with idols. Chi Omumu, in some areas means god of fertility and birth, in others Ala (mother Earth) is also worshipped in its place. It is therefore possible to classify the divinities into three, namely God (Chuku), gods (chi), and idols (arusi). Sacrifices are offered to the gods and idols but not God. They are also formally worshipped but God is revered, feared and He is not formally worshipped. Where heavenly bodies such as the sun, stars and thunder are worshipped, they belong to the class of gods (chi) for they, like all the other gods are not represented in any tangible form and sacrifices are offered to them⁷⁴.

The above submission evidenced that the Igbo do not only have belief in the Supreme Being but also are pantheons. In other words, they have a strong belief in the supernatural. This was further captured by Victor Uchendu when he wrote that: "the spirit world is the abode of the creator, the deities, the disembodied and malignant

spirits, and the ancestral spirits”⁷⁵. Thus, in Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma, apart from the Christians, the people, within the period under study, possessed a conception of whom they regarded to as Chineke, God the Creator. He had no dedicated specific alter yet the people offered Him sacrifices and prayers. Akin to the larger Igbo society, as contained in the submissions of Ogbalu, the people also had beliefs in other spiritual beings or deities. Examples of these spiritual beings cum deities were provided in the second chapter of this study.

There existed in the aforementioned communities the concept of Chi, which the people believed to be guardian spirits assigned to each person from birth. These spirits, as believed, were usually responsible for the success or failure of the ones they guided. This constitutes, therefore, the reason why sacrifices were offered to them by these individuals.

To the deities, sacrifices were offered on regular basis for the interest of the community. Such exercise which could be done ceremoniously had the capacity of bringing people together from different villages. It also showed that the people were grateful to the gods for bestowing them with their blessings in the past, built hope for favours in the future and solicited for guidance from the operations of nefarious individuals and spirits. These exercises which assumed ceremonious mode were experienced within the Owu festive period. They foreran the Owu festival, and therefore form subjects of discussion in this section.

The first exercise to be discussed in this context is the Emume ceremony. A harbinger of the Owu festival, this ceremony was marked by beating the Ekwe Emume – the traditional cum ancestral drum, at the appropriate time of the year⁷⁶. Beaten to proclaim the annual Emume ceremony, the Ekwe Emume drum regulated the native year by cyclically ringing out and in the old and new years, respectively.

The drummer was guided by his observation of the stars, lunar phases and other natural occurrences – an activity which was synonymous to an astrologer. Unless this ceremony was carried out, no rituals associated with farming and annual festivals (including the Owu) or ceremonies would take place in Awo-Omamma and Amiri⁷⁷. However, the situation was not the same in Omuma. Though they performed the Emume ceremony as an associate of the Owu festival, it did not determine whether or not the seasonal rituals for farming and annual festivals were conducted⁷⁸. In a situation where the annual seasonal rituals for farming and festivals were performed without the Emume ceremony in Awo-Omamma and Amiri, the ire of the gods was experienced. As a result, the gods were appeased at the Njaba groove by the defaulting groups with the officiation of a priest from Umuezeali in Awo-Omamma or Umuocheta in Amiri, depending on the community where the desecration was done⁷⁹. The reason why the priest must come from either of these villages was that both hold the primogeniture rights of the communities⁸⁰; they are the *Okpara* of Awo-Omamma and Amiri, respectively.

The Emume drum sounded every morning and evening for eight days, starting on the evening of an Eke market day. The first day was filled with cleansing and thanksgiving sacrifices to the gods of the land. These sacrifices were jointly offered by the Chief Priests and titled elders of the community. Through this exercise, the ancestors and the gods were pleaded to neglect the peoples' misdeeds in the past and bestow them with ample protection in the impending traditional year. Everyone, on hearing the first sound of Emume drum, was filled with joy and enthusiasm. There were also elements of social, religious and political felicity which accompanied the occasion. Consequently, enthusiastic discussions on the coming Owu festival became the order of the day⁸¹.

Prior to the period under study, no stranger was expected to be seen at the environment or area where the Ekwe Emume was beaten on the last day of the Emume ceremony. Anyone who fell victim of this norm was consecrated to the god of Emume, hence he was regarded as an Osu in the community⁸². Such victims were kept separately from the entire community, just as Chinua Achebe⁸³ and Francis Arinze⁸⁴ presented of an Osu in their works. However, as a result of the societal transformation, such practices were subsequently abolished.

The responsibility to accurately keep the communal calendar by beating the Emume drum at the precise period of the year laid with an accredited officiator. When he disappoints, he stood the risk of being fined heavily as well as pacifying the gods in an exorbitant cleansing ritual. This was because such careless or reluctant act was capable of bringing upon the community the anger of the gods⁸⁵. In addition, it was also regarded by the people as a deliberate act of the officiator to set backward the hand of the clock of the traditional year⁸⁶. This could be highly detrimental to the people; it was capable of introducing bad omen into the community, as believed⁸⁷.

The beating of the Ekwe Emume ushered in the celebration of the Owu festival, as well as some other indigenous festivals or religious observances carried out within the Owu festive period. Therefore, as the Ash Wednesday heralds the Lenten season in the Catholic Christian Faith, the Emume ceremony showed the impending Owu festival.

İro-alı was another ceremony next to Emume. Equally associated with the Owu festival, it usually took place once every year and normally lasts for four days after the Emume ceremony. The ceremony was characterized by offering sacrifices known as İro-alı or İkpı-alı at one of the village shrines known as ihu alı. This ritual was organized by all the titled men of a particular village with the chief priest

officiating. To them, land - *alì* was sacred; it belonged to the community; no one was without a land; it can't be sold without the consent of the people; it could be pledged, mortgaged or leased freely but not sold; and everyone was buried in the land at demise. As the abode of the ancestor, the land was never desecrated⁸⁸. Nomenclaturally peculiar to Awo-Omamma and Amiri (amongst the three communities under study), this ceremony existed in Omuma as Ike-ala or Ire-ala ceremony⁸⁹. In fact, its operational contents were same with the Ike-ala ceremony, and both were associated with the Owu festival in their respective communities. Where there existed a difference was that while that of Awo-Omamma and Amiri held after a particular ceremony, the Ike-ala ceremony preceded all ceremonies associated with the Owu festival in Omuma⁹⁰. Like the Emume ceremony, the Ike-ala must be carried out in Omuma before any ritual for the year was experienced⁹¹.

At the ceremony, the Chief Priest would appeal to the deity inhabiting the shrine. Hence, one sees the Chief Priest in Omuma appeasing to *Nnemọzu*⁹², and those of Awo-Omamma and Amiri solicited from *Alì ubogwu* (in some cases) and *Ogwugwu-ube* in Awo-Omamma and Amiri, respectively, for the protection of the people of the community from accidents within the working period and afford them bountiful harvests⁹³. A sheep or a specie of fowl locally known as 'ebuke' was normally used for the sacrifice. The Chief Priest would consume the sacrificial items after the ritual.

An annual ceremony, the Eleke was used in regulating the traditional year. This ceremony was to the people of Awo-Omamma alone. In other words, Amiri and Omuma knew nothing about this ceremony. In Awo-Omamma, it was mainly known with Umuawa people in Ubachima village.

The origin of the ceremony cannot be discussed in the absence of the account on the people's origin. Awa, the founder of the kindred was said to have migrated from Umudioka in the present day Dunukofia Local Government Area of Anambra State. Skilled in etching the ichi mark on people's faces, as Umudioka men were known with⁹⁴, he concentrated on titled men in Awo-Omamma community. The act of etching ichi mark, igbu ichi as it is traditionally called, was a lucrative business in Igbo land at this period. Basden, therefore, divulged its relevance in Igbo land when he said: "the ichi ... is a much more elaborate and serious affair, and where the custom prevails no freeborn male would dream of foregoing his inherited right to display the marks of his town and family"⁹⁵. Thus, the ichi was a sort of identifying mark which dignified the bearer as a bonafide member and/or representative of a particular town or family. Herein therefore, lays the rationale behind etching the mark on the faces of titleholders in Awo-Omamma.

By this time, Awa sojourned at Ubachima village, in Umuejike kindred. Here, he was given a place to cultivate and settle with his household. His kinsmen, many of them, subsequently migrated to his settlement. Consequently, the people increased by leaps and bounds, and were referred to as Umuawa – the children of Awa⁹⁶. They had their own belief system in their god known as Eleke, whom they built a shrine for and worshipped⁹⁷.

Eleke tradition provided that unless the people of Umuawa worshipped Eleke god and kept his laws, they would be wiped out by stomach ailment or an epidemic. Consequently, the people of Awo-Omamma integrated them into their social structure and recognized the celebration of the Eleke ceremony as one of the annual events for the regulation of the calendar⁹⁸.

This ceremony was usually celebrated eight days after the last round of the Owu dance in Awo-Omamma. Possessing social and religious significance for the people of Umuawa in particular and Awo-Omamma at large, it reminds the former their ancestral link with the people of Umudioka. Children born within the period in Umuawa were initiated into the Eleke cult with a fowl⁹⁹. The women would cook delicious dishes which they were to bring to the shrine for an offering. At the shrine, everyone assembled in the evening for communal sacrifice and feasting. Only married daughters, their husbands and children were eligible to participate in this sacrifice. One who defaults the norm of the Eleke ceremony usually experienced stomach problems and this signified the visit of the eleke god¹⁰⁰.

As constraints to the people of Umuawa, the eleke god forbade a married man without an heir to merry from any item used for sacrifice in its shrine, hence the notion that the ceremony was replete with discrimination¹⁰¹. The ceremony was also coloured with the presence of masquerades which entertained viewers publicly. Their display exercise continues until their exit which marked the end of the Owu festival¹⁰².

Ìtọ nri alì was another indigenous ceremony in Oru East Local Government Area. Celebrated in Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma, it comes within the Owu festive period. A ritual ceremony associated with the Owu festival, ìtọ nri alì was designed to enable the head of every household to communicate with his forebearers via the family shrine which served as the medium. Known as 'Ihu ndì ogaranya', this shrine was found in the abode of members of a corporate group who traced their origin to a near common ancestor¹⁰³. As traditionally believed, thus, contact with the dead brethren must be ritually maintained.

The *Ịtọ nri alị* ceremony was carried out by giving food to one's forebearer. To this end, fowls, breadfruit meals, cooked yams, kola nuts and palm wine were offered in sacrifice. The head of each household performed the sacrifice on behalf of his family, and the *ọkpara* did the officiation for the lineage group. The latter was done before married men gathering at the shrine which like earlier mentioned, served as the medium through which the spirits of the dead ancestors would visit their living descendants¹⁰⁴.

The fowls which were offered in sacrifice were killed with the blood sprinkled on the *ọfọ* of the family. The feathers were pulled and spread around by children who were jubilating, at the gate¹⁰⁵. In a situation where none of the feathers was found at the gate, the head of the household was seen as someone who was inconsiderate of the well-being of his dead ancestors, as the feathers would evidence the fact that one's dead ancestor had been well fed through the *ịtọ nri alị* sacrifice¹⁰⁶. The offerings were communally consumed after each sacrifice thereby evidencing the existence of unity between and solidarity among the people¹⁰⁷. The presence of the masquerades was felt in the occasion. These masquerades personified dead ancestors believed to have returned in human form for the occasion which afforded every household the opportunity to ritually reunite with its dead ancestor¹⁰⁸.

The *Ara Ụmụmụ* (also called *ara na ụmụ*) was another indigenous ceremony associated with the *Owu* festival in *Awo-Omamma*, *Amiri* and *Omuma* communities. Celebrated within the *Owu* festive period, the ceremony embraced all married daughters of every circle and their children. It formed a ritual link in the chain of the *Owu* festival¹⁰⁹. As a result, there was a reunion between married daughters and their children with their parents and maternal grandparents, respectively, during this period.

There was usually a meeting of the participating daughters prior to the day of celebration. In this meeting, they would reach a decision on how much to contribute individually as assistance to enable their mother or stepmother host the occasion. A fowl was generally provided and all the children born to the daughters were initiated into the ara ụmụmụ - milk stream – with a cock or a hen, according to the sex of the child. This was repeated annually¹¹⁰.

On a preceding night to the ceremony, all grown-up children would sleep with their grandmother. Grandchildren were not expected to send water as gifts to their grandmother. This was because, the period of the ceremony was usually rainy season; consequently, there was plenty of water at the time¹¹¹.

Different kinds of food were usually consumed on the celebration day; foods like ụkwa – breadfruit meal, ji mmiri ọkụ (also called ji mmiri awa) – yam pepper soup, and different kinds of soup were prepared by different families. The guests were usually well treated by their hosts. The sons-in-law would join in the feasting in the evening with jars of palm wine. The fowls were offered in sacrifice at the shrine installed by the grandmother to represent a unifying link for all those who fed directly and indirectly via her own daughters with her breast milk. The meat was then shared among the daughters accordingly while the heads, claws and entrails would go to the grandchildren in order of their birth¹¹². The issue of sacrifice, however, with time became neglected. This was as a result of the firmness of Christianity in the aforementioned communities. This development brought a new face in the celebration of the ceremony as preparations for the event assumed the dimension of being announced in churches. With the elimination of various anti-christian practices in this tradition, many Christian women began to be seen participating in the custom¹¹³. The significance of the ceremony was laid in fostering bonds of maternal affinity between

mothers and their daughters and their grandchildren on one hand, and between cousins on the other hand as families unite to organize and participate effectively in the event.

Ogwugwu ceremony is another ceremony to be discussed in this context. This ceremony maintained the connection a girl, who had attained the age of puberty and left her parents' home to sojourn with her husband, had with her family. To keep up a thread of this relationship, a she-goat was procured and offered to the family ogwugwu god by the girl's father. The guidance and benevolence of the god upon their daughter would be sought for in this ritual exercise¹¹⁴.

Afterwards, the goat was sent to the girl. In turn, it was kept and reared. The first she-goat born by the goat went to the girl's father, while the others belonged to her. On the other hand, the first he-goat born would be killed and the meat was shared among the families of the lady and her husband. Other he-goats subsequently born automatically were the husband's. In a situation where the original goat dies, it was replaced by the girl's father or his representative¹¹⁵.

The Ogwugwu ritual ceremony held once in a year in the communities under study. Also possessing a communal significance, the ceremony celebrated the unity of the people. It falls within Eke (Eke nta) market day, thirty-two days after celebrating the Owu festival. Delicious meals were usually prepared by the women on this day. To this end, rice, breadfruit meal, foo foo with different kinds of delicious soups were prepared. The men provided palm wine as well as fowls for the ceremony.

Agwu-isi was another ceremony in Oru East Local Government Area worthy of mention in this context. This ceremony linked the living with the dead¹¹⁶. Agwu symbolized the religious shrine harbouring the ancestors and from where they oversee their living descendants. Isi, on the other hand, was the direct representative between

the living and the dead¹¹⁷. The agwụ-isi stool was occupied by the ọkpara – lineage prince – of a particular lineage group. Thus, agwụ-isi as a word means the ọkpara acting an intermediary role between the living members of the lineage group and their dead ancestors. He (the ọkpara) held the lineage ọfọ which enabled the ancestors to receive genuflection from the living members of the lineage¹¹⁸.

The members of every lineage, on the day, set aside for harbouring the ancestors, re-dedicated themselves anew to the solidarity aspirations of the corporate group. In fact, it was the day Owu links the members of a lineage to their dead Owu heroes and dead ancestors. All children born within the past fifty-two weeks were initiated into the lineage fold at the agwụ-isi religious shrine by the ọkpara. Here, he (the ọkpara) was witnessed presenting the initiates to their dead ancestors and praying for their long life and prosperity¹¹⁹.

Endnotes

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6. Ngimah.
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39. Amaechina.
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41. Alex Okoro, 57 Years, President-General of Eziawo I Autonomous Community, interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma, 10/01/17.
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52. Joseph Nnabuihe, 48 Years, Catechist, interviewed at Nze Ikechi Emetamma's residence in Amiri, 13/01/17.
53. Innocent Ezedibia, 49 Years, Builder and Grand Initiate of the Owu Cult, interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma, 16/01/17.
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CHAPTER FIVE

IMPACT OF THE OWU FESTIVAL ON THE STUDY AREA

The Igbo has a number of social institutions which are primarily structured to ensure the continuity of the life of their immediate communities in particular and their Igbo identity in general. As a people fond of community effort, this constitutes the source of their strength especially in matters connected with progress and development. The social institutions are structured to provide security, honour, respect or order among the people of a particular town/community and village¹.

As an aspect of social institutions, festivals are structured in such a way that they make villages and towns lively. They also represent an important mark of identity to the people. The Igbo have lots of festivals which represent part of their culture as well as speak aloud the people's heritage and ancestry. While some of the festivals are peculiar to the celebrating communities or towns, others cut across a particular area or region or even the entire Igbo society.

In this study, the Owu festival is been examined as an Igbo culture in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State, which is a microcosm of Igbo land. Having looked at the features of the festival in the preceding chapter, this chapter concentrated on the impact created by this Igbo culture on Oru East within the period under study. These impact were adjudged in the areas of unity, intergroup relations or cooperation, tourism, cultural preservation, and employment/contract opportunities and means of livelihood.

Owu Festival as an Instrument for Peace and Unity

Uzoma Nwanaju has maintained that festivals are part of cultural values which are known to various peoples. These values are primordial and ethnographic which precludes language, feeding habits and artefacts². As cultural values, they can

also be said to be primordial bonds which cumulate to define a group of people as a “cultural criteria of symbols and normative behaviour”³. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, there has been a high level of communal living and festival often constitutes the bedrock on which this communal life was demonstrated.

Additionally, festivals constitute part of the human society. They possess their origin in religious belief, historical events or some socio-political desires or social bonding. It is a gestalt of dance and music with the accompanying drumming which moves the celebrating community. Passers-by stop over to watch to a cathartic, emotive and unrestricted purgation of relief. This further engenders unreserved declaration of love and embrace of fellow kinsmen. To this end, festival elicits harmonious relationship in a given community. It remains a “major communal event that ... receive general acceptability and participation by members of ... (a) community”⁴. Herein lays its role of peace and unity.

Within the period under study, the Owu festival was an example of festivals in Igbo land which elicited harmonious relationship in Oru East Local Government Area. By so doing, the festival fostered unity amongst the people of the celebrating communities in the local government. Such unity was usually experienced during a celebration in a particular village. The presence of people or indigenes of the community from other villages were felt in the particular village. The local Owu councils from other villages were also seen in the celebrating village. At the end of the cultural dance, the visiting Owu heads would retire or be hosted in the abode of the head of the celebrating Owu council, the Osere, where they were given special treatment with different delicacies.

The Owu festival period did not give room for quarrels or bickerings of any sort. It provided an opportunity for quarreling parties to mend fences with each other

else they were subjected to heavy fines. Community and family affairs were debated and resolved with good judgement. Consequently, the festival provided an opportunity for reuniting fragmented families, relatives and loved ones. This was evidenced within Amiri in 1975, where there existed warring factions amidst the people of Umuocheta village. Orchestrated by disagreements amongst the members of the Owu cult, a further result of this development was felt in the balkanization of members of the cult. The venue for staging the Owu dance after the mysterious demise of the Owu head in the village was perceived as the nucleus of the conundrum. However, the situation was arrested by the succeeding Osere at the *itọ nkwa* period of the ensuing Owu festival⁵.

The fines mentioned above were usually collected by the masquerades which carried out police functions during the period. In the case of Awo-Omamma and Amiri, one witnessed the Okorosha masquerades carrying out the function of enforcing law and order as well as levying and collecting fines from lawbreakers⁶. In some cases, political titles were taken during the festival thereby nurturing the political sphere of the community. Those coronated were enthroned under the supervision of the gods. With this, they were expected to be upright in their decision making. In essence, being crowned in the presence of the community made them pledge allegiance to the community never to substitute wrong for right. This was the reason why titled men of traditional Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma communities were men of honour.

The Owu period encouraged family get-together and communal union. In families, preparations were made to receive the visiting ones living within and outside the community. Through its associate ceremonies, the contributions of the Owu festival to the existence of peace and unity in the study area were equally felt.

In the preceding chapter, for instance, one learnt of the Ara ụmụmụ or Ara na ụmụ ceremony which had contributed to fostering peace and unity in Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma communities. In a similar vein, the Ogwugwu, ịtọ nri alị and ịrọ alị ceremonies were other associate ceremonies known to have carried out the task under study. In Ogwugwu ceremony, villagers were seen assembling before a central deity where pledges were unanimously made. Ịtọ nri alị through its sacrifices and feasting unified families, villagers and communities at large. The ịrọ alị, also through its sacrificial event, imbued in the indigenes of the community the spirit of oneness. Here, the Chief Priest, on behalf of the villagers, solicited from the gods their protection as well as the gift of bountiful harvests.

Owu Festival and Intra-group Relations and Cooperation

The Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area also contributed immensely in the area of intra-group relations. To this end, there existed a cordial relationship between the communities under study. Such relationship was found in the economic and social dimensions.

In recognition of the presence of cultural similarity apparent in the Owu festival, there existed a cordial economic cooperation between the communities of Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma. Such cooperation was promoted by trade and markets. While trade which was perceived by Toyin Falola et al as a linking factor⁷, involved the transfer of ownership of goods and services from one person or entity to another by getting something in exchange from the buyer, it was associated with the market. Consequently, Afor Isieke, Nkwo Umuokwe (in Awo-Omamma); Orie Amiri, Afor Ubahazu, Nkwo Nchoko in Amiri; and Orie Omuma in Omuma, served the people of these communities. Also, there was the defunct Orie bridge market.

Located beside the Njaba River, the market ceased to function in 1973; the river had been continuously disturbing the traders.

During the period of its existence, the Orié bridge market operated on Orié market day. It was known for its trade on palm oil. Its proximity to the Njaba River provided palm oil traders the opportunity to transport their goods through the river to places as far as Abonema in Rivers State. During trading activities, the traders from Amiri and Omuma were not allowed to pay taxes owing to the fact that the trio saw themselves as one. Aside from speaking similar dialects, the existence of cultural similarity principally found in the Owu festival had encouraged this development. Such treatment was also felt in other markets.

Partially induced by cultural uniformity in the Owu festival, the communities under study related through marriage – a situation which is also felt presently. A factor that encouraged social relations, marriage in the words of Lucy Mair is a “union between a man and a woman such that the children born ... are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents”⁸. A relation of affinity involving families of no traceable blood relationship, it is “...a factor in deciding a man’s worth both socially and politically”⁹. Marriage could also be seen as a social union between people which creates kinship, as well as an institution where interpersonal relationships are acknowledged. With this, thus, one can confidently submit that marriage is one factor that encourages the existence of a cordial relationship between families, villages, towns, and societies at large. Therefore, with the existence of inter-marriage, the Owu festival with its presence in the aforementioned communities, contributed in creating and strengthening the bonds of the people.

There existed similarities in some aspects of the marital custom of Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma communities. For instance, polygamy was widely

accepted; sexual relationship with one other than his or her spouse was deemed as adultery and this was seen as a crime and the ground for divorce; the practices of levirate and sororate were not recognized, and post-marital habitation was mostly patrilocal. In addition, a marital union in these communities was established when the requirements in the various stages had been met. At the last stage of marriage (igba nkwy) of an Owu member involving two communities, he was accompanied by group members to his wife's place. Here, they would entertain her people with the rhythmical dance of the Owu. This was the man's right as a bonafide member of the cultural organization. The group, prior to their display, must pay homage to the house of the indigenous Osere to announce their presence. In turn, the Osere would approve for a joint celebration between his group and the visiting Owu members. During the act, the spectators were heard cheering to the dancers as they perform in a competitive manner. The Owu council of the village must be present at the occasion to commemorate with one of their own from another community on his marriage ceremony.

Another aspect of social relations, the internment of an Owu member also contributed in strengthening the relationship of these communities as this brought together their various Owu council members. This was the case of Nze Lawrence Nwaogazi of Obilofia kindred, Ubogwu Village of Awo-Omamma, whose funeral attracted Owu council members within Awo-Omamma, and from Amiri and Omuma¹⁰. They took part in the burial activities designed for an Owu head. The Owu councils also ensured that the deceased was bestowed with his full rites as stipulated in the Owu custom and tradition¹¹.

The contribution of the Owu festival to intra-group relations was also experienced in the area of title taking. In Oru East Local Government Area, titles

attracted prestigious social status, and some of them included the Ọzọ and Chieftaincy titles. Ọzọ title was the most highly esteemed title in this part of Igbo land. It was a prestigious title which accorded a man an exalted position in his family, kindred and the entire community. It was an aristocratic position which was recognized as the highest social hierarchy. This title was not for men who had achieved nothing, and they were of two types – the Ọzọ afichi/ Ọzọ ụmụ ụmụ and Ọzọ aka oke/ Ọzọ otu agha. While the former was the type of Ọzọ title which afforded the subsequent male generations of the titleholder the privilege to be Ọzọ titleholders, the latter was the type of Ọzọ title conferment which solely remained with the holder. With this, thus, it was clear that the Ọzọ afichi was higher than Ọzọ aka oke as it enabled the continued existence of the Ọzọ title within the family of the holder. The other did not allow this.

During Ọzọ coronation in one of the communities under study, the Ọzọ royal societies in the sister communities would be invited. While honouring the invitation, the invitees in some cases would visit with their Owu cultural group. In a situation where the celebrant was a member of the Owu cult, the invitees must honour the invitation with the Owu cultural group of their community. At the occasion, the visiting and indigenous Owu groups would dance to the amusement of the spectators. The Owu councils within, and from other communities would equally grace the occasion with their presence. At their requests, they were served on the occasion with different kinds or assorted foods and drinks and this must be in the company of the hosting Owu council. The latter would ensure that their visitors were treated with hospitality throughout their stay in the community.

Owu Festival and Tourism

Ifeyinwa Emejulu informed us that “...tourism entails the movement of a person or persons away from home, and usually for leisure.”¹². Such movements are encouraged mainly by social events, such as festivals. Traditional festivals act as a hook to attract tourists. To this end, it is a great anchor for attracting tourism. On this note, this section x-rays the role of Owu festival in tourism promotion in the area and within the period under study.

Owu festival attracted visitors to the communities under study. Here, they spent their money, enhanced and supported the local economy through restaurants, and hotels. This therefore explained why De Klass Hotel, Dizzle Suite, Awo Guest House, Uzu Guest House (in Awo-Omamma); Lecam Hotel, Haridas Palace, Ikemba Eldorado (in Amiri); and Roundy Hotel, Factom Guest House and Oru Guest House (in Omuma), experienced high level of patronage from visitors, during this period¹³.

The high inflow of tourists and day visitors into these communities during the Owu festival period contributed immensely to economic empowerment of the people through the injection of tourist expenditure in the communities. Aside lodging in hotels, tourist expenditure was also felt here in boarding taxi, bikes and visiting the venue for the cultural event.

For the preservation of this tradition of the people of Oru East, during this period, tourists and/or visitors interacted with the local community, thereby gaining a deeper experience of the atmosphere, customs and local cultures. This enhanced the residents’ pride and promoted the preservation and cultivation of the Owu culture. Through this medium, visitors got acquainted with the local traditions and customs thereby leading to its preservation. In this vein, the Owu festival acted as a medium through which the communities’ images could be improved by offering a prime

opportunity for tourists/visitors to be *au courant* with the local culture and experience the essence of the place.

Owu Festival and Cultural Preservation

The annual organization of the Owu festival contributed to the preservation of an age long culture which the people of Oru East had been known for. To this end, the festival had been transcending from generation to generation. The people became knowledgeable of their root as the cultural event suggested where they were coming from.

The celebration of the Owu festival made it possible for the indigenes living outside the communities to be abreast with the culture of their forebearers. Having known about the festival, they were acquainted with the traditional calendrical period which regulated the traditional ceremonies, as well as their significance.

Contract Opportunities and Means of Livelihood

Within the focal period of the study, the Owu festive period provided the people with contract and job opportunities. People secured jobs as casual labourers mostly during this period. Therefore, indigenes of the communities were seen hired by the traditional rulers to clear the bush parts in preparation for the grand event. As they worked for their community with joy and spirit of the festival, they were provided with palm wine and food prepared by the household of the traditional rulers. The Oserere and his co-functionaries were entrusted with supervisory task who in turn related to the traditional rulers.

Rental business ventures, during this period, usually made lots of profit from their services. Canopies and chairs were rented and mounted at village square where the dance was to be staged. Cloth dealers were also given the contract of providing

the clothing materials needed for the festival. Craft men and women known for producing the ankle rattle (Onwirinwa) were also contracted.

Again, the Owu cultural dance provided some of its members in the local government area with means of livelihood. A deviation of the pan-cultural tenet upon which the festival was instituted, the dancers were invited to grace occasions just like the Omenimo cultural group. To this end, the Owu dancers in the study area were invited to perform in different places during the celebration of a particular event. An example could be drawn from the occasional invitation of the Owu cultural dancers by the members of Awo-Omamma Patriotic Union (APU), Amiri Development Union (ADU) and Omuma Central Union (OCU) living in various parts of the country¹⁴. There were also cases where wealthy individuals would invite the Owu cultural group to grace an event they were organizing. Here, they were paid for their services and also well entertained by their invitees¹⁵.

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CHAPTER SIX

CHALLENGES OF THE OWU FESTIVAL IN POST-CIVIL WAR ORU EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

As divulged in one of the preceding chapters, festivals are one of the features of the Igbo society, which speak loud of the people's culture and identity. There is no community in Igbo land without one festival or the other, and this represents a major aspect of their heritage and ancestry.

The preceding chapter of this study centred on the impact of the Owu festival on Oru East, having looked at other important aspects of the study in other chapters. However, in this chapter, the study concentrated on the problems of this Igbo festival in Oru East. Deemed an important aspect of studies on festivals, the essence was to examine the problems within the period under study and to suggest possible panaceas as these maladies continued to manifest beyond the period of the study. The aim is to ensure the continued existence of this cultural mark of the people of Oru East, following the warnings of S.C. Ubu on the dangers of erosion facing the traditional life of the Igbo¹. These challenges were perceived in the areas of Christianity, inadequate sponsorship, Western Education and discriminatory policies against the women vis-à-vis the Owu cult and festival.

Christianity and the Owu Festival

One major challenge of the Owu festival in the study area within the period of this study was the presence of Christianity. This foreign religion introduced some changes into the festival thereby altering the original cultural features with which it was instated. This did not only evidence the observations of J.O. Urbrurhe on the introduction of changes in the traditional Nigerian Society by Christianity²; it also propelled the lamentations of C.O.T. Ugwu that "...the imported world religions

(which includes Christianity) ...have ...dealt a staggering blow on one social, economic, religious and political systems”³. E.A. Ayandele once intones the total demise of Igbo tradition, which was propelled by his observation on the Jericho-wise collapse of the walls of Igbo pagandon⁴. This was brought about by the effects of Christianity on the culture and tradition of the Igbo which also includes the Owu festival.

The advent of Christianity in Igbo land had meant the introduction of a Christian worldview, as well as turning the Igbo world upside down⁵. Admittedly, Christianity made tremendous achievements. It abolished slave trade and slavery, human sacrifices and twins killing. It also introduced education, hospitals and charity homes. C.C. Ifemesia further draws attention to cult slavery (Osu), poison ordeal and confessional ordeal which the religion also looked into⁶. In concordance with the foregoing, U.D. Anyanwu submitted:

Christian missions stood for equality of persons and love, justice and fairness and condemned all forms of slavery on these grounds. They ...took steps to liberate the victims of these forms of slavery, admitted them into the Christian fold and encouraged them as well as other Christians to reject and oppose political or social structures and systems which made the existence of slavery possible⁷.

By attacking these dehumanizing aspects of the Igbo people, Christianity contributed to refining Igbo culture. U.D. Anyanwu continued:

The liberated slaves won back their human dignity and freedom and were to act as agents of Christianity in schools and churches as well as the wider society. The liberated status made it possible for them to acquire enough confidence to oppose any oppressive and marginalizing socio-political institutions, structures and personalities in their communities. In these ways, the liberating force was impacted in (sic) Igbo culture, thereby making the culture more viable as an instrument of enlightenment, social change and emancipation⁸.

Despite the aforementioned achievements of Christianity and many more, its immersion in Igbo culture did create some problems. As U.D. Anyanwu also revealed:

The involvement... (of Christianity in Igbo culture) was not founded on the principles of equality of relations. Given the colonial setting, which formed the political base of the Christian intervention, Igbo culture was the partner in the relationship with Christianity⁹.

Since the culture was not in line with the missionary religion, its owners began to see Christianity and associate European (Western) culture as the superior one. Some strategies were adopted by the missionaries and converts in promoting this perception and the result was a certain degree of cultural alienation among the recipients of Christianity in Igbo society. As an aspect of Igbo culture, this waging trend posed a serious problem to Owu festival in the study area.

Most members of the Owu cult denounced their memberships arguing that it had fetish and diabolical elements – a projection of Christianity. They also avoided transferring the knowledge of the culture to their progenies. This group wouldn't want any form of association with the cultural institution¹⁰. Thus, to discourage such anticultural thoughts and tendency towards the Owu, there were introduced some modifications. An example was re-christening the process of initiation from *ikwa mmuḡo* to *iba n'owu* in order to accommodate the Christians and sustain the existence of this cultural identity. Yet, the perceptions of the converts did not cease to threaten the existence of the festival.

Initially, this was not the situation; prior to this period, especially during the advent of Christianity, the Christians and members of the Owu cult (who mainly constituted adherents to African Traditional Religion) were co-operating. In Amiri community, as divulged in one of the preceding chapters, this had remained the situation between the Owu members and the mainline Christians. However, things

began to tilt towards the angle of discord with the presence of Pentecostals and their movements which began to be felt in the late seventies (70s). Members of this fold began to condemn what was already in practice, the Owu culture and relationship between members of the cult and the mainline Christians. In their arguments, they made the people believe that social and religious romance with non-Christians was antichristian¹¹. Also, these Pentecostals deemed it hypocritical to be a Christian while taking part in cultural events built on the foundations of African Traditional Religion¹². It's either one was or was not a Christian.

The effect of this message was found in the alienation of the people from Owu traditional culture and its tenets which they were rooted in. Such was also the case in Awo-Omamma and Omuma communities. This unhealthy effect was not only peculiar to the area under study. In Owerri axis, for instance, people (converts) were seen withdrawing from traditional festivals, as revealed by Emmanuel O Inyama¹³.

With this, the descendant of these converts abhorred the association of their children and ward with the Owu festival. In countless occasions, children of this fold who mimicked the pattern of the Owu festival were severely punished. Such punishment, in some cases, was in the act of deliberate starvation. In this case, the child was denied either his dinner or meal for the whole day.

The consequences of this were myriad. First, the child was estranged from the culture rooting his identity, thereby encumbering its generational transcends. Also, it adversely affected the population of the participants who were supposed to add colour to the festival, as well as its sustenance. Second, the associate ceremonies were adversely affected by this development. As a result, most of them lost their original cultural features, while in another case, some of them were no longer observed by some families. Examples included the Ike ala ceremony of Omuma, and the Iro ali

ceremony which lost some of their original features. Ara ụmụmụ ceremony, on the other hand, began to experience the participation of women in their numbers with the removal of its tenets thereby altering its original cultural features, while the Ito nri ali was not recognized in some of the families on the basis that it was fetish. This role of Christianity endangered the existence of Owu festival in Oru East.

Inadequate Sponsorship

Inadequate sponsorship constituted a major problem that faced the Owu festival. During this period (and beyond), social events required adequate sponsorship for their promotion beyond their very locality, as well as to meet up with some of the financial obligations of the events. Such obligations could be found in the areas of provision of costumes, instruments, and other materials which in the process of the event would give the spectators some sense of satisfaction. The Ikeji festival of the people of Arondizuogu in Imo State is an example of social events which gained enormously through adequate sponsorship. As Ikechukwu Nwankwo revealed in an interview:

...various sons and daughters of Arondizuogu contributed their quota to the Ikeji festival. Monetary and material assistance were provided by those living within and outside Nigeria to ensure the success of the festival. Such donations were provided to the traditional rulers of various autonomous communities. The elders at home assisted in ensuring that they met up with the expectations of their sons and daughters – the sponsors. Youths in the village took up some responsibilities, such as bush clearing and mounting of canopies at the village square. Some Arondizuogu indigenes outside home assumed the responsibility of designing, printing and sharing fliers for the festival. Those in the media houses aired the coming events. These assisted in promoting the festival¹⁴.

No wonder the festival turned from a community event to an event with the ability to attract different people from different parts of the country, and the world by extension. Herein lays the tourism power of the festival orchestrated by sponsorship.

Unlike the Ikeji, Owu festival in Oru East experienced little sponsorship from the indigenes of the communities under study. This was one effect of Christianity and its twin brother, western education. Most of these people perceived the festival as heathen, hence their disassociation from the event. At a point, the organization of the festival was made possible with the monies realized from the contributions of members of the Owu cult, the Nzes and Ozos, and the traditional rulers. The number of wealthy indigenes who contributed their quota in ensuring the success of the festival was not encouraging. In an interview, Chiadikobi Obasi of Amiri community poured out his grievance in this direction while enumerating some of the factors which had contributed to this ugly development. In his words:

Owu Amiri lacked proper sponsorship. Majority of the people did not deem it imperative to render monetary assistance to the preparations of the festival. Amiri sons and daughters, who were living outside the community and by extension Nigeria, did not respond to the calls for sponsorship from their traditional rulers. The Owu members at the preparatory stage of the festival only made due with the little contributions from their traditional rulers, elders of the community, the council of Ozo (Amiri chapter), and the stipends generated during the previous celebration. This was unhealthy for the festival in the community¹⁵.

In addition to Obasi's submission, Ikedi Agbawo in an interview also pointed out that, Dr. Emma Ogbenta and Dr. Chime Nzeribe during their tenures as the Chairmen of Oru East Local Government Area, provided support to the celebration of the Owu Festival¹⁶. This was in line with the ideals of their offices in preserving and promoting the culture of their people¹⁷. Ogbonna Abanonu equally provided that the administration of Fisher Ezeugo as the Local Government Chairman of Oru East sustained the Owu Omuma through his donations¹⁸. However, with the introduction of Caretaker Chairmen in the Local Government administration system, by the government of Owelle Anayo Rochas Okorochoa, the Owu stopped receiving support

from the local government administrators¹⁹. This development in the post-Ezeugo era adversely affected the efforts of the communities in sustaining the festival.

Western Education

Western education remained one of the major factors which threatened the existence of cultural elements in the Nigerian society. Therefore, it won't be out of place if asserted that some Nigerian communities lost grip on the tenets of their immediate cultures due to the emphasis created by western education. Shreds of evidence abound in the *modus vivendi* of the people to include their mode of dressing, ways of eating, types of food consumed, patterns of greetings, and erosion of cultural knowledge.

Such effects of western education had been there since its introduction in this part of the world. Herein lays the primary rationale behind its introduction. On this note, N.L. Njoku informs us that:

An important instrument that was used for the preparation of colonial domination was the western education. Western education was an important cultural weapon for the integration of Nigerian society into the capitalist system. The basic philosophy on which it operated was to create individuals who would be loyal to the colonial regime²⁰.

To this end, most people were estranged from their cultures thereby wearing the garb of European culture. They were made to drop their identities, learn the European culture, and saw themselves as the Europeans. N.L. Njoku further evidenced this in his observation of the content of western education in colonial Nigeria. In his words:

On a hot afternoon in... school, a class of black pupils would be taught in their geography lessons, the seasons of the year: spring, summer, autumn and winter. They would learn about the Alps and the River Rhine of Europe but nothing about the Zambezi. ... (as) British colony, they would dutifully write: "We defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588" at the time when John Hawkins... was busy stealing and enslaving Africans and being knighted by Queen Elizabeth I for so doing²¹.

There was no information on African culture, festivals, foods, mode of dressing and the society at large. That is to say, the features of African society were not acknowledged by the Europeans, hence their neglect as part of the knowledge given to Africans.

In a similar vein, western education impacted negatively on the existence of the Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area. It served as an instrument for demolishing children's ideas about the tradition, just as it was observed in the larger West African Society²². As a sister to Christianity, the minds of the younger generations were biased in schools by their teachers. The pupils and students of various primary and secondary schools were not taught about the Owu culture which was one of their main cultural identities. One could, therefore, imagine the fate of this culture in the minds of these young stars who as the supposed inheritors, ought to ensure its transfer to the generation after them.

In some cases, pupils and students who were initiated into the Owu cult were not allowed to remain as members of the academic institution – an act which was mostly associated with mission schools. Admissions were equally denied those who sought to enroll in these schools. Umunna Isikuba recounted an experience he had in 2009 while seeking to enroll his son into one of the mission schools in Omuma community. He had revealed that his child was denied admission into the secondary wing of Redeemer Group of schools located at Ozuh Omuma, just because he was initiated into the Owu cult²³. The underlying rationale behind this act was in the area of the Owu culture being perceived as fetish, evil, and diabolic. Thus, since the culture belonged to the darkness, it had no relationship with the light, as the people were made to believe. There was also the need to protect non-initiates from being contaminated by the doctrines of the culture which the initiates carried with them.

Discriminatory Policy against the Women

This was another major problem that faced the Owu festival in Oru East. Within the period under study, in Igbo land, Igbo culture and tradition was unfriendly to the women. A continued trend, they were always relegated by the tenets of Igbo culture. To this end, some cultural and gender experts queried what must have prevailed this situation which they perceived as a malady. For instance, Rose Madumere once queried the cultural policy that forbade women in most parts of Igbo land from breaking kola nuts²⁴. Kola nut, as informed by Chidi Osuagwu, "...is one straight road to the Igbo world"²⁵. This, therefore, shows that kola nut is an important element in Igbo land. It represents a mark or identity of the Igbo people.

Additionally, a revelation was made on the place of women in one of the traditions of the people of Okwudor in Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State, otherwise known as Nso Nwanyị tradition. Here, the women were highly derogated with the discriminative tenets of the culture. Imagine a situation where married women were meant to receive punishment should there be evidence of adultery – an act which was not peculiar to them, while the men were not included in the tradition²⁶. Such discrimination was also evident in the Owu festival.

In Oru East, the women were disallowed from taking part in the Owu festival. Recall that in one of the preceding chapters, it was divulged that the Owu was instituted by the women at the riverine communities, from where it began the process of diffusion into other communities, including the Oru communities. The only chance given to the women was to assume the responsibility of the Ada Owu in the Owu cult. Though the office was headed by men in some of the communities, as was seen in Amiri, the actual responsibility laid with a woman²⁷. As a result, the man assumed a

ceremonial status in the office. When the issue of discharging its responsibility arose, he appointed a woman who did that in his stead²⁸.

Again, the roles of women were also felt in heralding the Owu festival whenever the period for its celebration approached. The Ara Ụmụmụ or ara na ụmụ ceremony was a case in hand. The ceremony served as a ritual link of the festival. A traditional mothers' day, it was an important associate of the Owu. Therefore, without its celebration, a vacuum was created in carrying out the activities associated with the traditional calendar of the year. In such situation, the festival would not be celebrated. A contravention of this norm, as feared, would lead to the plaguing of the communities by the gods²⁹. Yet the women were not deemed fit to participate in the festival.

The effect of this discriminatory practice was seen in the balkanization of the male and female population. During Owu period, the cultural atmosphere was filled with resentment, anger, anguish and unhappiness from the women. They were not allowed to take part in what was originally theirs, a cultural institution which had developed to the status of eminence not just within the locality under study, but in Imo State as a whole. Consequently, one heard of resentful expression from this group that 'what was originally ours, the men usurped'. The situation degenerated recently with the conversion of the activities of the cult to a profit-making venture, as the women were left out, while still upholding the secrecy of the cult which disqualified the women from taking full part in the cultural activity³⁰.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study provided a lucid account Owu festival in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State. As a post-independence study, it covered from the period of 1970 to 2013. Having been introduced, the study looked at the land and people of the study area. To this end, it examined the physical features where information on the characteristics of the area of study was given. These include the villages, kindred, and locations of the communities, the autonomous communities and their traditional rulers. It further looked at the economic activities of the study area. Here, various economic activities which are known to the people of the study area were discussed. In the socio-political features, the political structures of the communities were examined. The study further looked at the religion and culture of the people where the various festivals celebrated in these communities were studied. Also, the various religious groups found in these communities were revealed. The examination of their impact also was not disregarded.

Additionally, an overview of the Owu festival before the end of Nigeria Biafra War was carried out. To this end, the origin of the Owu festival, the History and patterns of celebration of the festival in the concerned communities, within the period, were considered in this segment. The features of the Owu festival within the period under study were also considered necessary in the study; consequently, the structure of the Owu cult was examined. Here, a revelation was made on the various offices of the cultural organization with their respective responsibilities. Also, the study looked at the dances connected with the Owu festival to include owu abuba, owu oma and owu-ulo-akwa, as well as the costumes and instruments used in their

celebrations. The significances of these costumes were also examined. Next were the burial rites of a deceased Owu head, initiation of an Owu member where the processes and requirements were revealed, and the various ceremonies associated with the festival. These ceremonies formed part of the events in the traditional calendar of these communities.

The impact and challenges of the Owu festival in the area under study were not neglected. Under the impact of the festival, it was discovered that the Owu festival, within the period under study, was instrumental to the existence of peace and unity. In addition was the fact that the Owu acted as a harbinger of inter-group relations between the three communities celebrating it in Oru East Local Government Area. The Owu also promoted tourism, imbued with the people the knowledge of their culture thereby encouraging its preservation, created opportunities for job/contract and means of livelihood. On the other hand, the challenges of the festival were diagnosed in the areas of Christianity and inadequate sponsorship. Other areas diagnosed include western education and discriminatory policy against the women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher is convinced that this study is an appreciable contribution to the historiographies of Oru East in general, and Awo-Omamma, Amiri and Omuma in particular. The researcher also has the conviction that this study has not only revealed to the Nigerian populace the existence of the communities under study as microcosms of larger Igbo society but has equally divulged the Owu as one of the cultures of the Igbo people. Within the period of the study, it represented a mark of identity to the custodians.

Additionally, this study also revealed that the Owu had to a great extent, benefited those celebrating it. Therefore, as a culture, abandoning the festival, as

advocated by some Christian folds, would be synonymous to one deserting his or her identity. Mohammed I.U. Brutai, quoting the 1986 cultural policy for Nigeria, informed us that culture is:

The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political and economic aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus, distinguishing a people from their neighbours¹.

This, therefore, explains the significance of culture (which the Owu festival is one of) in the existence of man.

Recommendations

In one of the preceding chapters, it was discovered that the Owu festival in Oru East battled with some challenges within the period under study, and this threatened its existence as a cultural identity. As a cultural event which has continued to prevail amidst the people of the study area, the perceived challenges are still felt in the contemporary dispensation. On this backdrop, therefore, the researcher recommends the following:

- Cultural awareness aimed at educating the local populace on the importance of cultural preservation in the Owu festival should be organized by the traditional rulers and town unions across the communities under study. Also, through the traditional rulers, the state government should be made to follow the footsteps of Ghanain government² in seeing the need to create subjects on cultural studies in schools and made compulsory for all students. This, alongside cultural awareness, would assist in instilling in the populace the need for cultural preservation;
- Christians, especially those in the Pentecostal fold, should be made to understand that the Owu festival has been a culture of the people,

consequently, there should exist tolerance of the culture by the members of this fold;

- Aside from the Ada-owu responsibilities, more participatory roles should be created for the women during Owu festival celebrations. The discriminatory policy against the women, a characterization of this cultural event, has been adversely affecting the unity of the members of these communities. In a broader sense, this policy *antithesises* the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which recognized “...the socio-cultural, economic and political rights of women”³. In addition to misrepresenting the perception of the Igbo as being “...egalitarian... in nature”⁴, the policy results in what Patrick C. Obinabu saw as “...dividing people with one culture...”⁵, especially during the festival. This, if considered and implemented, can ensure ample manifestation of harmonious relationship between the male and female population during the Owu festival, thereby bringing to an end the existence of age-long rancour between these groups; and
- In the area of sponsorship, families and/or lineages in a particular village should be taxed during their Owu festival preparations. To this end, sons, daughters, and other members of a particular family living outside the community would be involved in the preparation. Again, it is also imperative that the serving governments of Oru East and Imo State be involved in the area of sponsorship, vis-à-vis the Owu festival. This would assist in boosting further the tourism strength of the festival and in turn enhance the economy of the state by adding substantially to the State’s Internally Generated Revenue. The Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, at

a public lecture entitled ‘Promoting Culture, Developing the Economy’ organized by the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) in Abuja, stressed the need to promote culture and tourism sector in the country. He maintained that the sector if promoted could serve as a credible alternative to crude oil which the economy depends on⁶. This sector, as he further revealed, has been supporting the economies of many countries of the world⁷. An example could be drawn from the developed countries which, as discovered by Ifeyinwa Emejulu, “...are benefiting from the economic largesse from tourism...”⁸, and corroborated by Andrew Opare⁹. Therefore, by sponsoring the Owu festival, the governments of Oru East and Imo State would be contributing their quota in strengthening culture and tourism industry in the State.

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2.	Adibe, Nze	69 Years	Ugbọ	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	09/11/16
3.	Adiigwe, Joshua	60 Years	Farmer	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	12/01/17
4.	Akukwe, Adiigwe	63 Years	Trader	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	07/11/16
5.	Agbawo, Ikedi	62 Years	Tailor	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	27/12/16
6.	Agunegbuewu, Ibe	90 Years	Osere	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	05/11/16
7.	Agunze, Banabas	65 Years	Farmer	interviewed at Nze Joshua Adiigwe's residence in Omuma	12/01/17
8.	Agwaereme, Nwokoro	77 Years	War Veteran	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	20/10/16
9.	Ajah, Chigozie	72 Years	Retired Principal	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	22/10/16
10.	Amadi, Obumere	50 Years	Moulder	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	17/01/17
11.	Amadi, Sylvester	68 Years	Retired Civil Servant	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	27/09/16
12.	Amaechina, Paulinus	62 Years	Farmer	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	8/01/17
13.	Anene, Mmaduakolam	69 Years	Retired Teacher	Interviewed in Nkwesi	08/04/2016
14.	Ekewuba, Nnamdi	65 Years	Farmer	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	21/12/16
15.	Ekwedike, Ebubenna	63 Years	Farmer	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	9/01/17
16.	Emeaghaa, Ikejiofor	69 Years	Cobbler	interviewed at Amadi Ikeagwu's residence in Nkwesi	05/11/16
17.	Emetamma, Ikechi	60 Years	Brick Layer	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	13/01/17
18.	Ezedike,	65		interviewed in Awo-	15/08/16

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19.	Ibe, Chukwujekwu	47 Years	Trader	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	11/01/17
20.	Ibe, Nwokeilo	52 Years	Teacher	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	22/09/16
21.	Ibeawuchi, Paschal	70 Years	Tailor	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	03/08/2016
22.	Ibejiaku, Ikedinobi	70 Years	Retired Military Personnel	interviewed at Chinedu Onumara's residence in Awo-Omamma	21/10/16
23.	Ibekala, Augustine	59 Years	Driver	interviewed at Nze Nnanna Nzewuba's residence, Omuma	15/12/16
24.	Ibekaku, Ejikemeuwa	72 Years	Former Catechist	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	26/09/16
25.	Ibekaku, Okechukwu	50 Years	Civil Servant	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	07/09/16
26.	Ibeneme, Augustine	69 Years	Retired Principal	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	06/09/10
27.	Ibejiakor, Aham	62 Years	Palmwine Tapper	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	9/12/16
28.	Igbolokwe, Nnamere	69 Years	Farmer	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	28/12/16
29.	Igwekala, Nnaji	79 Years	Herbalist	interviewed at Nzekwe Mmaduagwu's residence in Amiri	20/09/16
30.	Igweji, Amadi	81 Years	Basket Weaver	interviewed at Nzekwe Mmaduagwu's residence in Amiri	20/09/16
31.	Igweji, Theresa	58 Years	Politician	interviewed at her residence in Awo-omamma	02/10/16
32.	Igwenna, Obioma	60 Years	Trader	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	25/08/16
33.	Ihewuba, Celestine	62 Years	Trader	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	14/09/16
34.	Ikeagwu, Amadi	62 Years	Farmer	interviewed at his residence in Nkwesi	05/11/16
35.	Ikwuoma, Celestine	58 Years	Member of the Ekeleke Dancing Group	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	14/09/16
36.	Iregbu, Pascal	58 Years	Plumber	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	11/01/17
37.	Isikuba, Umunna	52 Years	Bicycle Repairer	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	21/01/17
38.	Isinguzo, Mbanefo	60 Years	Trader	interviewed at his residence in Nkwesi	04/11/16

39.	Iwedinobi, Akuwunma	71 Years	Palmwine Tapper	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	16/09/16
40.	Mgbemena, Anslem	52 Years	Transporter	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	15/01/17
41.	Mmaduagwu, Nzekwe	88 Years	Trader	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	20/09/16
42.	Mmadubuike, Igwe	67 Years	Retired Teacher	Interviewed at his residence in Omuma	23/09/16
43.	Minwe, Dominic	85 Years	Retired Civil Servant	Interviewed at Adizunma Nzerem's residence in Amiri	15/09/16
44.	Nnanyere, Gerald	65 Years	Retired Teacher	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	21/09/16
45.	Ngimah, T.C	70 Years	Traditional Ruler of Ofekata IV (Umuezeali/Umueme Autonomous Community)	Interviewed at his palace in Awo-Omamma	29/03/2016
46.	Nnabuihe, Joseph	48 Years	Catechist	interviewed at Nze Ikechi Emetamma's residence in Amiri	13/01/17
47.	Nnajiaku, Ibezirim	70 Years	Retired Teacher	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	08/09/16
48.	Nnajofofor, Ojemba	68 Years	Herbalist	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	02/11/16
49.	Nnanyere, Augustine	48 Years	Teacher	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	05/09/16
50.	Nnaoma, Sabastine	63 Years	Carpenter	interviewed at Nze Joshua Adiigwe's residence in Omuma	12/01/17
51.	Nneji, Thomas	60 Years	Driver	interviewed at Ibeka Ofodiri's residence in Awo-Omamma	10/09/16
52.	Nnochiri, Amadi	70 Years	Retired Civil Servant	Interviewed at his residence in Omuma	31/07/16
53.	Nwakonobi, Evans	49 Years	Police Officer	interviewed at his office in Awka	30/09/16
54.	Nwankwo, Ikechukwu	54 Years	Legal Practitioner	interviewed at his residence in Owerri	22/01/17
55.	Nwanojuo, Ugochukwu	57 Years	Civil Servant and Owu initiate	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	29/12/16
56.	Nwigwe, Albert	68 Years	Trader	Interviewed in Omu-ma	20/09/16
57.	Nzegbu, Mike	70 Years	Retired Civil Servant	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	30/08/16
58.	Nzedinobi, Chikezie	49 Years	Civil Servant	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	02/09/16

59.	Nzekwe, Silas	62 Years	Catechist	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	28/09/16
60.	Nzerem, Adizuonma	69 Years	Retired Civil Servant	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	15/09/16
61.	Obasi, Chiadikobi	59 Years	Transporter	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	20/01/17
62.	Ofoamara, J.C	77 Years	Retired Teacher	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	30/07/16
63.	Ofodiri, Ibeka	59 Years	Driver	interviewed at his residence in Awo- Omamma	10/09/16
64.	Ofoma, Nnanna	57 Years	Palm wine Tapper	interviewed at Ibeka Ofodiri's residence in Awo-Omamma	10/09/16
65.	Ogidi, Agbako	68 Years	Retired Civil Servant	interviewed at Amadi Ikeagwu's residence in Nkwesi	05/11/16
66.	Okoro, Alex	57 Years	President-General of Eziawo I Autonomous Community	interviewed at his residence in Awo- Omamma	10/01/17
67.	Okoro, Nnamdi	67 Years	Retired Teacher	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	15/09/16
68.	Okoro, Nnanwa	62 Years	Palmwine Tapper	interviewed at Nze Adibe's residence in Omuma	09/11/16
69.	Okoro, Ofodi	67 Years	Carpenter	interviewed at Amadi Ikeagwu's residence in Nkwesi	05/11/16
70.	Okoronkwo, Solomon	66 Years	Business Man	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	04/11/16
71.	Okpalanne, Ignatius	69 Years	Retired Civil Servant	Interviewed at his residence in Awo- Omamma	03/10/16
72.	Okwuoma, Cajetan	54 Years	Contractor	interviewed at Nze Aham Ibejiakor's residence in Amiri	9/12/16
73.	Omeziri, Chinedu	48 Years	Civil Servant	interviewed at his residence in Awo- Omamma	01/08/16
74.	Onochie, Evaristus	78 Years	Trader	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	10/09/16
75.	Onuka, Sabastine	65 Years	Cabinet Chief	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	17/09/16
76.	Onumara, Akubuike	66 Years	Retired Principal	interviewed at his residence in Awo- Omamma	21/10/16
77.	Onuoha, Charles	45 Years	Reverend Father	interviewed in Awo- Omamma	14/08/16

78.	Orji, Ikemba	58 Years	Business Man	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	09/11/16
79.	Ubaku, Eze	52 Years	Business Man	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	30/03/2016
80.	Ukadike, Adigwe	67 Years	Retired Police Officer	Interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	03/10/16
81.	Ukadike, Anayo	52 Years	Painter	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	29/12/16
82.	Ukwuegbu, Gerald	55 Years	Headmaster	interviewed at his residence in Amiri	18/09/16
83.	Umeh, Ibeziri	74 Years	Retired Teacher	interviewed at his residence in Awo-Omamma	24/10/16
84.	Uzo, Augustine	79 Years	Osere	interviewed at his residence in Omuma	28/12/16
85.	Uzoukwu, Cyril	57 Years	Traditional Ruler of Mbubu Autonomous Community	interviewed at his palace in Amiri	25/09/16

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Documentaries

The Making of Owu: A Documentary and Drama on Owu Festival, produced by Dark
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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Villages and Kindred in Awo-omamma

Ofekata Section

Villages	Kindred
Umuezeali	Umuezeali
Ubogwu	Umuajara Umuokparachi Umudaraku Obilofia Umuejikeukwu
Umueme	Umueme
Ubachima	Umuejikeuzu Umuejike Umuawa Umunam Umuifa Umuonwuna
Okworji	Umunwafor Umudim Umuelibe
Umubochi	Umubochi

Eziawo Section

Villages	Kindred
Umuokwe	Umudimoji Umudaragwu Umudaraocha Umuejike
Obibi	Obibi
Ohuba	Ohuba
Isieke	Amaoji Umuojiagwu Umueme Umuduruigwe Obilofia Duruiheoma Umunweme
Ubaeze	Ubaeze
Umuezukwe	Umudike Umuezeoji Umuduruigbo Umudurualim
Umuezike	Umuezike

Appendix II

Villages and Kindred in Amiri

Villages	Kindred
Umuecheta	Umudiro Umuafofom Umuonume Amorji
Ubahazu	Ubuuru Umuozelebe Umuonuoha
Amuka	Umu-uka Umuokparaibe Umudim
Mbubu	Amakpu Umuduruogwu Ugboleha
Isorie	Umunnamkwa Umudibie Umunnemocha
Umuduru	Umuejike-Egwu (Ezeoha) Umuchime Umuobom
Umudioka	Umuezeawaram Umuduruaku

	Umuamuba
Amaokpara	Amorji Umuejike Umudara
Ugbeke	Umuezeorum Umunkwa Umudimoham
Nchoko	Elugwu Umuewi Umudike