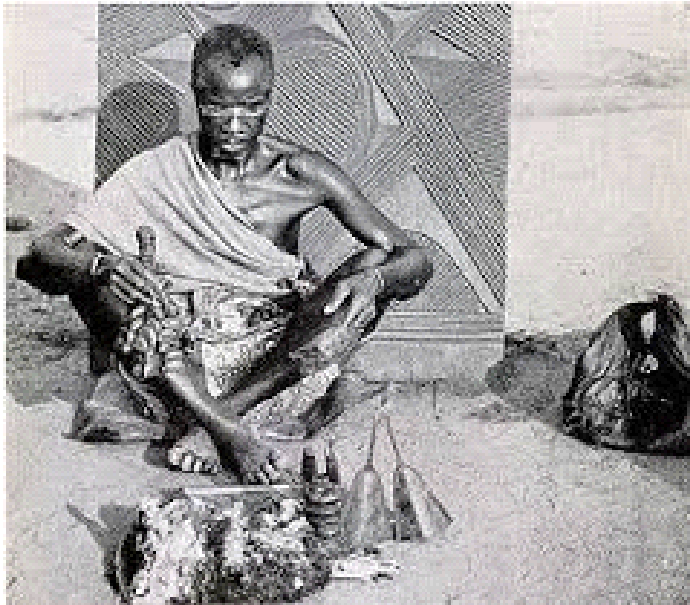


## **MGBOWO AND 'ICHU AJA ARO'**

### **(YEARLY CULTURAL SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

'Ichu aja aro' is a yearly traditional spiritual environmental sanitation, practice by Mgbowo, a town in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu state of Nigeria. Enugu State is in the eastern part of Nigeria where Igbo language is spoken. 'Ichu' means chase away, 'Aja' means sacrifice and 'Aro' means year. The exercise, gathers momentum especially at the end of a year that calamities are recorded here and there and bumper harvests are not experienced. However, the exercise takes place at the end of every traditional year. It is a practice to sack the invisible members of the community on whom the community repose their faith to cause good omens and tidings for them, whom, now, it is assumed that they (spirits) have failed in their responsibility and have to vacate the community by fire by force, to usher in new regime of better spirits that can perform. A kind of spiritual deliverance for the community. This cannot be divorced from the belief in supernatural beings who are invisible but dwell with the people in the community, and are assumed to be closest to God head. Therefore, they can intercede more quickly for the community for safety and prosperity



Igbo native doctor, also believed can communicate with and control the invisible members of the community.

#### **THE EXERCISE PROPER**

The date for the exercise of that year is announced in advance through a paid town crier. Everybody is made to be adequately aware of the day. On that day no one is expected to go to the farm. All should make provisions in order not to break the rules of the exercise and desecrate it. On that day everyone is expected to cook and have early supper as no one is expected to be eating supper when the bang for the chase drums. For this will tantamount to discretion of the cleansing rite. The chase is always by late night hours. Everyone is expected to be armed with the tools or weapon for the chase and wait in readiness to hear the chase kick start with loud bang coming from the umpire who may be in a distant village. He is the only one that has the authority to shoot a Dane gun for a kick start of the chase. The tool or weapon for the night chase is called 'Ehuriho', dry flower stump of palm tree. This is made aglow with fire, for a fire brand which is brandished all around every nook and corner of the community where the bad powers are imagined to be taking cover or refuge in anticipation of their being hunted by humans. The wrong spirits are expected to return to their home at the evil forest where the chase terminates. Everyone participates. 'Okpete', a kind of fleshy-stemmed plant, is another weapon. This plant is believed to have repelling potency against the failed, thus, unwanted spirits. So all compounds, cast the stems of the plant at their frontages to wade off the escaping spirits.



Paid town crier

with his metal gong instrument which he strikes to get audience.

A peep into the night of the event relays what can be comparable to the present day fireworks or the beaming of the sky in a starry night. The celebration is divided into three segments: Morning exercise, Afternoon exercise and the Night exercise.

The morning event is held at the centre of every Mgbowo Village where a big fire is made. The Village people all come out with something, usually yam and meat, to roast in the big common fire, probably as a symbol of unity. Here people ask questions and seek clarification regarding the occasion. Those who forget to make provisions for the day may seize the opportunity to approach one another for assistance.



### **Big village fire initiating 'Ichu aja aro'**

Here instructions and advices are shared for caution during the noon and night segments of the celebration as offenses of arsine and immorality will not be condoned. After the barbecue morning everyone returns to his home and go about his household chores. Going to the stream, laundry and looking for 'okpete', 'Ehuriho' and Ikpo used in the exercise are allowed.

During the afternoon segment children, teenagers and the adolescents are the most active. Traditionally, they use 'Ikpo' a species of tall grass which they heat in fire and when slapped on flat surface makes an explosion. This explosion continues to sound till evening. Parents are not expected to hinder their kids from enjoying the celebration with their 'ikpo' bangs.

The night segment is the most colorful and interesting part of the event. There is no restriction as per chasing from one village into another. The exercise is usually peaceful and there has

never being any report of misdeed by participants. So when once the umpire gun sounds to begin the chase, everyone quickly grabs the fire brand, indiscriminate of gender and begin brandishing it round the community even across, if such participant have the strength. The chase can go on into any hour of the night and is expected to terminate in the evil forest into where everyone casts the fire brand. The chase goes on with a special song and dance.



Ichu aja aro in progress

#### **THE SONG AND DANCE ACCOMPANYING THE CHASE:**

Ulu chuwa ha wo, chuwa ha wo!

Chorus: Ekwe mbe!

Ulu chuwa ha wo, chuwa ha wo!

Chorus: Ekwe mbe!

Ihe ha mela ayi aro'a!

Chorus: Ekwe mbe!

In a way of translation:

Chase them away, chase them away!

Chorus: Not by speed of tortoise!

Chase them away, chase them away!

Chorus: Not by speed of tortoise

For the evil they did to us this year!

Chorus: Not by speed of tortoise!



Ekwe mbe dance

All through the generations past 'Ichu aja aro' has being in practice until the influence of Biblical faith begun to weigh down on it during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. That is to say it survived the incursion of the colonialists but suffered the mowing implement of religious conversion that continued after colonialism. The debate is, since the practice resembles those of the unorthodox churches, if the practice should be fine tuned into what is Biblical. In this way the ancient will be preserved in the modern, in this case, for the irredentistical value potent, the tradition still holds for the Igbo community.

**Written by**

**Akah Lawrence**

**Doctoral Researcher (Sch. of Politics and Int'l Rel.)**

**Mahatma Gandhi University Kottayam Kerala India (Jan. 2019)**

#### **REFERENCES:**

Action research (Observation and participation by the writer).

The Images are culled from internet.

*Odinani* Wikipedia.

*Resolving the prevailing differences between Christianity and African (Igbo) Traditional Religion*

*Through Inculturation*. LIT Verlag Munster.

Afulezy Uju (April 03, 2010) *Odinana: The Igbo Religion*, Niger Delter Congress, Nigeria.

Obiego, Cosmas Okechukwu (1984) *Africa Image of the Ultimate Reality: An Analysis of Igbo Ideas of Life and Death in Relation to Chukwu-God*, Lang Peter Publishers.