

X-raying the Religious and Socio-Political Land of Uboma Today

Ifeanyi Okeke

Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Abstract

All over the world and particularly with the advancement of research, researchers explorers and the like, scholars have engaged in the study of people, culture and places. Today, people can easily read about people, and places they have not been to nor visited. Such people or places are brought to the knowledge of others simply through researches and works carried out and made available to the reading public or academic community. This is simply what this research work is all about. The work is an attempt to bring to the fore, the land called Uboma, its dialect and what remains of the community after the activities of the missionary religions, colonialism, modernism and dynamism which are the hallmark of every society. Documentary, oral interview and observation were used as data collection methods while descriptive and historical methodological approaches were used in the analysis of the data. At the end it is manifest that Uboma and its people have had their fair share of the effects of the encounter with the agents of change. While some of her traditional institutions and practices have witnessed social and religious changes, some aspects of the people's lives still remain intact.

Keywords: Socio-political, religion, Ubomaland

Introduction

Since society and human beings are dynamic, the social institutions, if they must perform their various functions, must as well be dynamic along the societal dynamism. This is the argument of structural functionalism (Otite & Ogionwo, 1979). Further to this, the institutions of society should and must be dynamic if it must be alive to function and provide for the needs of that particular society and by extension her people. Ubomaland and its people are not exceptions of this dynamism from social and religious agents of change. These forces of change were paramount in the 19th century in Africa with the

balkanization of and subsequent scramble for Africa by the imperialists after the Berlin Conference. The colonization of Africa coupled with the activities of the missionary workers left indelible marks on African society generally including Ubomaland. It becomes necessary therefore that this work should investigate how Ubomaland was affected by this conquest and colonialism.

Uboma in this context refers to the southerly portion of Old Okigwe Division (Okafor, 2018). Uboma community today is one of the two

largest communities that make up the present day Ihitte/Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State, which was part of the former Etiti Local Government Area after the carving out of Obowo Local Government on September 23, 1989 by the erstwhile Babangida Administration.

Ihite/Uboma Local Government Area is located on the Eastern part of Imo State. It is washed on the East by Imo River which separates the area from Umuahia Local Government Area of Abia State. On the North, it is bound by Okigwe Local Government Area, while on the West it is bound by Ehime Mbano Local Government Area. Southwards, it shares boundaries with Obowo and Ahiazu Mbaise Local Government Areas. It occupies a land mass of about 116 square kilometers with a projected population of 245,976 in 2007, based on a 2.5 per cent annual growth rate on the 2006 census. It is accessible from Owerri through Aguneze Road and lies on Federal Trunk A road from Umuahia to Anara. Ihite/Uboma Local Government is popularly known as the food basket of Imo State due to the high yield of rice and other farm produce which feed the Umuahia beach at Abia and other parts of the country. Its headquarters, Isinweke, is about five kilometres from Umuahia/Owerri and Umuahia/Mbano junction popularly known as '7 and half' and about four kilometres from Oriagu market in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area.

Historical Origins

Okafor (2018) posits that what we know of Uboma today mostly come from oral tradition

and socio-archival sources. There seem to be two major versions of the oral tradition of the origin of Uboma. According to one of the oral traditions, Uboma was founded by a man called 'Elele'. Elele was said to have arrived with his wife to settle in this vast expanse of uninhabited virgin land with rich and lush vegetation. The land was so beautiful and evergreen with numerous streams and rivers crisscrossing the entire landscape. The land was not only fertile but also home to a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, crops and animals. The rivers and streams were also home to numerous aquatic life. Out of delight and excitement and with gratitude to his "*chi*" for the beauty and the lush of this environment, Elele named his first son, Ugboma. The name Ugboma, as already implied, was purely in appreciation of the beauty and the abundance of nature made manifest in the area. The Igbo word, "*ugbo*", means 'beauty'. Literarily speaking, therefore, *Ugboma* means beautiful farmland or rich farmland.

Ugboma was the name at the beginning of time as evidenced in the archives. It is the name that featured prominently in the early European diaries and archival records. It was much later that the name came to be spelt and pronounced in its present form of "Uboma". This anglicized name, "Uboma", did not alter the original meaning. Fortunately, both names share the same meaning. Uboma also implies either *Uba-oma*, which is good wealth or royalty, or an adulterated word for *mba oma*, which implies land of beauty.

In all, everything about the land meant beauty. However, Pa Jonah Okoronkwo informs the researcher that there is another oral tradition which posits that Uboma people never migrated from anywhere but that they have lived in their present location since the creation of the world.

All the people inhabiting this area called Uboma they are Igbo speaking people who speak the Uboma-Isu dialect. Uboma is presently made up of eleven Autonomous communities each having a recognized traditional ruler as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Automous Communities and their traditional rulers

S/no	Community	Traditional ruler
1	Abueke	Eze Onyenonachil
2	Abueke Eluama	Eze A.O Ariawa
3	Dimneze	Eze Obaji
4	Ezimba	Vacant stool
5	Ikpenweafor	Eze Innocent Onuoha
6	Ikperere	Eze G. Ogbonna;
7	Okata	Vacant stool
8	Umuawuchi	Eze Okachie;
9	Umunumo	Vacant stool
10	Umuoma	Eze Onyemukwuru
11	Uzunomi	Vacant stool

Socio-political Organization

Ubomaland is made up of eleven autonomous communities with villages further segmented into lineages, lineages into sub-lineages (compound-ezi) and then into households. The traditional house of an Uboma man is made with clay and thatch of rectangular shape, interspersed with groups of magnificent trees and flowering shrubs. But today, modernization and its attendant goals have made the people change to the use of bricks made from cement and corrugated iron sheets in building their houses. The Uboma family is patrilineal. Decent is traced through the father as with many societies like the Hausa-Fulani and the Bini. Their settlement is patrilocal. The spouses

live where the husband/parents live. Family is seen as an economic unit. It produces all that it needs under the extended family system. A man's conjugal family would be joined to his father's conjugal family to form one extended family, or it could be joined to that of his in-laws. Traditionally, Uboma society was essentially that of polygyny-a system of marriage in which one man marries more than one wife. In the olden days the family served as a religious unit, with the father or the compound head as the priest. There were family divinities such as ancestors, venerated by the members of that family. The family was responsible for the socialization of its

children. Seniority even till today is marked by chronological age. The young is expected to respect the older person. The family life and processes create conditions for mutual affection amongst its members as well as for the satisfaction and control of the sexual needs of its adults. The family provides a socially approved context for child bearing and child care. Properties in the traditional times and now are inherited from the line of the father –patrilineal descent. Authority is based on seniority rather than on the individual initiatives and/or achievements.

Marriage traditionally and in most cases in Ubomaland, followed existing relationship. It could be friends who intended their children to get married or it could be a situation where a married woman, who was already married to a particular family, proved or exhibited good qualities which drew the attention of any family wanting to marry a wife for her son. Hence, that family might be tempted to get a wife for their son from that family. There were also cases of infant marriage which never followed existing relationship, contracted when the kids so to say, were still very young. This could be as a result of the family of the girl experiencing one type of financial or economic difficulties or the other. Thus, the parents of the girl may be forced to barter the girl in exchange for some amount of money, promising to give the man his wife when she attained maturity of age. In Uboma land therefore, marriage was a normal condition for both men and women. Polygyny or multi-wife

system was a symbol of high status and ideal. In this manner any man who married more than one wife was considered rich and was in no way against the law of the land. The system is not borne out of excessive lust or lack of self-control on the part of its practitioners. It is indeed functional. Its goal is offspring increase. Through this way many children were born and reared to help in the daily economic and other activities. Anybody who never married was considered a social misfit and would not be allowed in a gathering of adults to discuss important issues nor given any responsible political or social stool. Though the Uboma man operates a multi-wife system, he detests adultery.

In marriage, lineage exogamy was and still remains the rule till today. Marrying within ones kinsmen was and is still considered a taboo and punishable. Amongst the 'diala' that is free-born, marriage within the segments of one's mother's or father's mother's patrilineage was not allowed. Marriages were not just the affairs of two people. The parents were part of making of the choice of who to marry and who not to marry. They based their choice on the background of the females. If not from existing relationship, inquiries were made from people who know families concerned. The qualities desired in a bride were good manners, the ability to do farm work while the physical beauty was secondary. The Uboma saying "agwa bu mma (good manners constitute beauty) illustrates this. Children were always a source of trouble amongst married couples since

the Uboma man attached much importance to children. They always said 'nwa ka ego' meaning 'a child is more important than wealth'. If the children refused to come after about a year or more of the consummation of the marriage, the parents of the male would persuade their son to marry another wife after exhausting all other means of seeking solution or relief.

Pa Semion Oguwuike of Umuejere village of Uboma tells the researcher that the Uboma man's family system is broad and extended to include near and distant relations almost ad infinitum like his African counterparts. Each family is responsible for the care of its own weak ones, the aged, the incurable, the helpless, and the sick. Pay Ezekiel Onwukanjo of same Umuejere village adds that the father is basically a founder, author, a builder of the family, a source of strength and support, a motivator, a creator of sort and a benefactor.

The researcher observes that in Uboma land, there is the principled respect for elders. Consequent upon the traditional belief, old age is a virtue as manifested by the wish of the people to grow old as enunciated by Mr Onuwa Okafor. Old age is associated with wisdom as wisdom for them is acquired not through academic knowledge but through practical experience of life-as according to Festus Okafor as quoted by Onyechoa (1997:139), "through long and judicious associations with different individuals, with nature, and with the gods". Age therefore becomes very crucial in Uboma land. Age,

wisdom, proximity to the land of the spirits and close contact with the ancestors go together and the heads of the families and clan are obeyed not just because of their age, but because of their priestly power. To sum up Uboma social setting, what Vice Consul Harry Johnston observes among the Igbo society as regards population, design of compounds and mode of erecting their houses, could be correctly applied to the traditional Uboma community: "The Igbo community is densely populated, and their towns are of a very district character, with rectangular, well built houses of clay and thatch, interspersed with... magnificent trees and flowering shrubs.... The Igbo towns are never crowded..." (Nwaka, 1985:51).

Politically, Uboma community like that of the Igbo generally is an acephalous type, prior to the coming of the British colonialists. No single person in traditional Uboma society had the authority over the making and enforcement of laws. Rather, powers were shared amongst different groups ranging from the family to the entire clan. Today, the political institutions of the Uboma are not different from most of her Igbo counterparts. Each clan or village in Uboma has a clan or village consciousness which existed from primordial times but each village is somehow semi autonomous and sovereign in most matters affecting it. The villages had the most elderly person in each family as the leader of such family, a function which still exists in and around Uboma today.

He was the symbol of authority for that family, holding the Ofo which symbolizes authority. Each compound has also its own leader being the eldest male within that compound. As the person holding the 'Ofo' of each family represents such a family in any meeting involving families, the compound holder of the 'Ofo' also represents the entire compound in compound meetings. In meetings of lineages, different lineages representatives from different compounds converge to seek for the interest of their own people. Decisions reached are later communicated to the people through town criers.

Today in Ubomaland and where it still exists, both the authority of the most senior person in the family otherwise called *diokpara* or *onye-nwe-ezi* and that of the high priests of the village rest solely on the 'ofo', a short sacred rod about one foot long and nine inches circumference, which had thickened, blackened and hallowed by centuries of blood bath from sacrificial victims and spitting from the traditional high-priest. The rod is a piece of wood from *detarium elastica* (Ozurimo, 1990: 37). During the enthronement of people into any religico-political office, such as a priest, the ofo is handed over to the person as a guide, watchdog and witness against him should he attempt to cheat, betray, exploit the village or pervert justice. Succession to the office of the head of the family is by the Adepheic principle - a system where an office is passed from the incumbent to his next brother in line rather than

from father to son. Women play a very minor role in the politics of Uboma people, having as their major concern, child bearing and taking care of the family food-wise.

The heads of different families, lineage, compounds and compound members otherwise known as '*umuma*' and at times the entire villagers were jointly involved in discharging justice. The age grade played important role in punishing offenders especially their members who were found wanting. According to Nze Benson Onwuka (a palace secretary to one of the traditional rulers of Uboma), in Uboma land, age-grades assist in the enforcement of law and order in the community especially amongst their members, while the idea of consulting the oracles in times of epidemic and famine has gradually died a natural death. However, today in Ubomaland, traditional rulers have come to replace most of the functions and duties of the family heads and those of the village heads. The rulers now preside over some issues especially land disputes and other related issues excepting criminal offences.

Chief Dan Anyanwu of Umuchiaku village informed the researcher that where a suspect failed to confess a crime, he was forced to swear before an oracle, shrine or 'Ofo' as it was believed that the suspect if he committed the crime or offence will die a shameful death. Every offence in the traditional Ubomaland never carried equal punishment. Criminals like

murderers and thieves were sold into slavery, banished from the land into unknown land, or thrown into the evil forest to die. Offences against the 'Ala'- the earth mother deity were taken seriously and the accused or suspect was required to provide animals for cleansing through sacrifices. The killing of a man from another clan group, or far away community was not murder as the killer was hailed as a brave and strong man and was usually rewarded as it was believed that the relatives of the deceased should avenge for his death if they could. Such judicial set up, provision and punishment to culprits were for the purposes of preserving the society and ensuring that it has low criminal cases.

Geography and Economy

Uboma like most of Igbo occupied territories is a tropical region, made up of thickets. The area experiences two (wet and dry) seasons yearly. The wet season starts from March and ends in October. The dry season, starts from November and ends in February every year, with the driest period known as harmattan between December and early January. Due to this type of ecology, tsetse fly, mosquitoes, and other insects harmful to the skin are prevalent. The land is made up of high and low lands with streams in almost all the communities which provide the people's daily needs. There are some other muddy areas which make pottery work possible. The land is also fertile for growing of some economic trees like palms, coconut, mango and avocado pear.

Since different people organize their societies in different ways around different economic items, the main pre-occupation of Uboma people in traditional times was and is still farming although some people now combine farming with other business and commercial activities. Uboma people are mainly agriculturists, depending not only on their labor but also on the labor and assistance of their kinsmen, friends and neighbors to clear large farms, hoe, plant and harvest. High Chief Sabastine Ekechukwu an indigene of Ikpenwe for autonomous community and a member of the Eze's cabinet was quick to point out that with the advent of money economy, which provided for monetary exchange of goods and services, today a person can hire the services of laborers who can assist him or her in farm work.

The community had and still has a root crop economy. Yam, cassava, cocoyam had been the chief crops, providing for the bulk of the population with most subsistence needs. The people's major source of income came from the sale of those root crops and palm produce. Palm trees played and are still playing very important role in the lives of the people. There was no family in the Uboma land that had no palm trees. While processing the palm fruits, the men do the work of cutting them down from the trees, and the women and children do the picking and collecting and carrying them back to the homestead. It was from these palm trees that the people got their cooking oil and palm wine which

were sold to generate income. Women and children also engaged in the breaking or cracking of the palm kernels or nuts for sell.

It is also important to note that those who live around Onicha Uboma area which is favorable for the planting and cultivation of rice also engage in rice production. It is therefore on this premise that Ihite/Uboma Local Government Area is believed to be the only local government area in Imo State of Nigeria that produces rice in commercial quantity. That accounts for the construction of a rice mill in Umuopara-Owere village in Ikperejere autonomous community of Uboma. However, some of the people of Uboma do engage in pottery because of the type of the soil in the area, while those who lived around the Imo River area engage in fish farming activities. Some people rear domestic animals like chicken, ducks, goats, sheep and dogs in small quantities. Today in Uboma, one could easily find petty traders, technicians like electricians, motor mechanics and other vehicle operators, all geared towards the sustenance of the family.

Cosmology

This section x-rays how the Uboma people see or view the universe and its components. The world view of the Uboma person is similar to that of the Igbo generally. The Uboma believe in one God (Chukwu or Chineke), in lesser deities, spirits and in ancestors who are regarded as lesser deities and may be venerated as such. This traditional religion is non aggressive, non

evangelical but involves the use of proprietary rites designed to appease the deities or to request their aid in times of need and crisis.

The people participate in African culture of divine and sacred as Isichie (1976:7) argues. The Uboma people's vision, understanding and interpretation of the universe of beings are deeply spiritual and religious which are summarized in the following belief system:

- a) firm and constant belief in the invisible universe of divine beings, good spirits and bad spirits, and the spirits of the departed ancestors;
- b) firm and constant belief in the visible universe of human beings and the natural forces and phenomena;
- c) firm and constant belief in the communion and interaction of visible universe of human beings and natural forces and phenomena;
- d) belief in the spiritual immortality of the human being;
- e) strong belief in spiritual immortality and reincarnation.

The Uboma man's firm and constant belief in the invisible universe of divine beings including good and bad spirits and those of the ancestors made him recognize the existence of 'CHINEKE'-the creator God, whom he regards as the highest in the hierarchy of beings and must be worshipped. The people's belief in the spiritual beings makes them recognize spirits like 'ala'-the earth deity which according to the people is responsible for fertility of crops and,

animals and humans and therefore must be placated through sacrifices periodically to attract and sustain their benevolence and keep at bay their wrath. Thus, a sin against the *ala* goddess in the traditional times was taken very seriously as the culprits were in severe cases banished from the land for committing sacrilege-*'aru'*. The people did recognize and reverence other deities like *'amadioha'*-the god or deity of thunder and vengeance, *'njoku'* or *'ahiajoku'* the god of yam and yam seedlings, *'anyanwu'*-the sun deity and *'agwu'*-the deity of medicine and divination among many others.

Their belief in communion and interaction of human beings and natural forces makes them maintain a good and harmonious relationship among and within themselves. This fosters unity, love and care for each other. On the other hand, the people's belief in spiritual immortality of the human being models them towards living a life of strict observance of approved moral precepts and goodwill so as to sustain peace and tranquility in the whole land and after their sojourn on the physical earth. Lastly, their belief in reincarnation directs and guides them towards living a worthy life while alive so as to reincarnate into a better person in their next world. By this conception too, the Uboma man venerates their ancestors and wish them a happy return. By the foregoing, the world view of the Uboma could be categorized into four namely; God (Chineke); Deities, Ancestors, Magical powers and Medicine with man at the centre. The

above lend credence to the religious traditions of the people. The traditional Uboma man is deeply religious, practicing African Traditional Religion. These religious beliefs and practices permeated every nook and cranny of his life and existence. This religion is indigenous in Uboma land and has lost its origin in antiquity. Thus, what Mbiti (1970: 7) says about Africans generally that *'...Africans are notoriously religious'* is applicable to the Uboma people. The individual is conceived in Uboma land as a dynamic whole, living, and spiritual, exercising his psychic powers in all his deeds. He felt God. His religion which was traditional and indigenous without holy book(s), crusaders, missionaries, and jihadists in the strict sense, was ethical in theory as it planted in the people, the sense of sin and guilt. The moral laws of God-*'Chineke'* were conceived as the highest category of law. The people emphasized the validity of the world, which is permanent, contrary to the Christian belief that the world would someday pass away. Through this way the religious principles of the Uboma gave them their customs, culture, order, discipline and enhanced their social system.

Generally speaking, the Uboma world view is in tandem with that of the Igbo generally with the modeling of the numerous spiritual beings on the cosmic order. The dichotomy between the heaven and the earth in the visible world immediately struck the Igbo as an adequate model for organizing the spiritual beings around two important divinities-the Supreme Being and the

Earth deity. As Metuh (1987:69) argues '...it is characterized by a large number of major spiritual beings, highly institutionalized cult of the major deities and a vast number of non-human spirit forces'. To the Uboma the universe has three basic elements, namely, the present, the past and the future. When a person dies, he becomes part of the ancestry of his relatives whom he can guide and assist in many ways here on earth if they propitiate him in some acceptable ways. There is strong belief in reincarnation and the relatives of a good person are always anxious that he may reincarnate in due course as a member of the same family. All these emphasize the people's acknowledgement of the limitations of human beings, their willingness and eagerness to solicit the aid of others, their faith in the extended family system and their desire for high morality in their behavior towards ancestors and the unborn in order to procure maximum benefit for the family.

Festivals/Ceremonies

In the words of Onwuliri (2011:97), a festival simply means a feast. It can be referred to as a feast, or fiesta, a celebration, merry-making or a performance. Thus, a festival becomes a celebration or a feast to commemorate special events in the society. These special occasions do not occur daily but are held occasionally like once in a year. They are held annually to celebrate significant landmarks and special events that had occurred in the past history of a community. So festivals have their backgrounds

rooted in the history of the community. There are varied reasons for holding these festivals and ceremonies. These reasons are associated with some economic, social, religious and political achievements.

Uboma land is rich in cultural festivals and ceremonies. It is doubtful if there is any village in Uboma community which does not have one type of festival or ceremony or the other. Such festivals included *mbomuzo*, *iwa-akwa*, *agba-agwu*, *egbenkwu*, *ngidi*, *ntumaka*, *edere*, and many others. But the most prominent ones that would be discussed in details are the *mbom-uzo* and *iwa-akwa*. These two festivals are observed and celebrated in the entire Uboma land and even beyond to Ihitte, Obowo and Mbase areas. In Uboma just as in every African society and as Quarcoopome (1987:110) posits, the life cycle of man runs from the cradle to the grave. In the traditional Uboma setting, the landmarks in this life cycle are considered crucial and therefore marked by considerable ritual and ceremony which shed much light on the people's religious ideas and practices.

Iwa-akwa Ceremony

Iwa-akwa festival is an initiation rite or rite of passage of males into adulthood held in Uboma between the months of December and January every three years. According to Imo State Council for Arts and Culture (1989: 105), it marks the attainment of manhood of male adolescent and their being clothed as adults.

Onwuliri (2011:101), writes that as a rite of passage, "It is a festival in which young people of a particular age group are initiated or received into the fold of adulthood". In agreement with this view, Gennep (1960: 3) opines that "rites of passage...mark transition into different phases of human life like birth, social puberty, fatherhood etc. As a rite of passage therefore, "Iwa-akwa" is used to mark a transition from one stage of life (childhood) to the other (adulthood).

In Ubomaland, every male child is free to belong to his age group. This age group is differentiated from another by three years gap. This suggests that every male child born within the space or period of three years belong to the same age group. A male child in Ubomaland culturally begins to be recognized from the age of about 24 - 30 years. At 24 or there about, a male child in conjunction with his age mates and group will partake in 'Iwa-akwa' festival as '*ndi na a do udu*' (those who would hold the rope round the celebrants in a semi rectangular form) preventing the crowd from mixing up with them. At 27, a male child would participate in the festival as one of '*ndi na e du a ahia*' (escorts of the celebrants) dancing and rejoicing in their uniform as the procession to the market square goes on, signifying that they are the next celebrants of 'Iwa-akwa'. Then at the age of 30, the male child marks a very important and significant celebration in his life's time. This is called 'Iwa-akwa' (wearing cloth ceremony), marking his attainment of manhood.

In the opinion of Uba (1985:29), 'Iwa-akwa' symbolizes a number of things. The long wrapper which the initiates wear or put around them while being presented at the market square symbolizes an 'armor of manhood' and the gun they shoot into the air symbolizes strength. Their preparedness to acquire weapons- represented by the gun, required in the constant war which they as male adults and guardians of their village will champion for the rest of their lives when and if the need arises.

Because the Uboma people like their African and Igbo counterparts believe in a causal linkage between the social and the natural order, a disturbance in the social order generates a disturbance in the natural order. To avoid this, the natural order is assured by ceremonies in which the social order is re-enacted and symbolically adhered to. According to Anyanwu (2010:16), "Iwa-akwa marks the end of boy-hood and beginning of adult-hood. It is mainly for men and it is done every three years. The celebrants and their kith and kin dress gorgeously in 'akwa-jioji' (George) and attend their markets in full swing merrily, make 'inyanga', dance and fire gun-shots, now cannons (mkpo n'ala). This once-in-life celebration is full of pomp and pageantry.

Ibo-uzo Festival

This is a religious and ritual festival observed in honour of the gods and the ancestors for various reasons ranging from bumper harvest, safe delivery, life and worship. Uchendu (1991:17)

presents 'Ibo-uzo' as an annual festival "which means clearing the road...celebrated during the dry season..." Though Ugwu (2004:20-24) and Ogbalu (2006:57-59) posit that 'Ibo-uzo' cultural festival in Igbo land is celebrated in a variety of ways, this festival in Uboomaland is observed during the month of December every year. It marks the end of harvesting period. It is celebrated in the seventh month of each year according to the people. In the traditional Ubooma calendar of the year, the first month starts with the planting of the yam-the major food crop of the people around the months of March and April. This month is known as the first month of the year. The harvesting period is around November or December also known as the seventh month. After the harvest, the people would then rest after 'Ibo-uzo' or path clearing festival, having gone through a successful farming season.

This is a period during which, different paths and roads leading to different places of the secular and the sacred, and the general environment are cleared and kept clean. The importance of this cleanliness could be seen also from the fact that at the period, the last Saturday of every month is a general clean-up day in the whole of Imo State and even beyond. Roads leading to the markets are cleared for easy passage. And according to Agwu (1990: 2), it is a period of general cleaning of roads that could otherwise not have received attention, luckily ushering in the new yam, another major festival in Igbo culture. Odu

(2001:118-121), while writing about 'Ibo-uzo' in Umuezegwu posits that:"...it is celebrated with great enthusiasm and love. It is the most important festival in the town. Any child born on "Mbom-uzo' is called 'Uzo-ukwu', that is the great road". The festival is not only socially significant because it marks the physical clearing of paths between villages, but for Imo State Council for Arts and Culture (1989: 105), it is associated with a feast of joy and merry making epoch, for fortunes of the year. It depicts fellowship, love and unity; a period of re-union, when friends, relations and loved ones come together to share fellowship and love. Through this way the maintenance of good and harmonious relationship between man and his neighbors on one hand and man and the spiritual world on the other hand is sustained. To the traditional Ubooma person, man is a living force, in active communion with other living forces in the world. And as Metuh (1987; 182-183) notes, everybody was therefore a nexus of interacting elements of the self and of the world which determined and was determined by his behavior. Thus, the true concept of man was lost if he was considered in isolation. This no doubt is in tandem with the African understanding of man as being ontological in nature. Hence a traditional Ubooma man would say "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."

Conclusion

This work has x-rayed the geographical location of Uboma as part of the present day Ihitte/Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State. It is a typical Igbo community with all its characteristics and features. The socio-religious and cultural stand point are geared towards achieving harmonious relationship, existence and survival of the people and community in consideration of their Ultimate Reality. Of a very important observation is the existence of yet another Igbo dialect called Uboma-isu, which is the version of the people's Igbo language. The area remains the only community that produces rice in Imo State till today. With the coming of the imperialists, the missionaries and other agents of social change into Uboma land, most of the viallge traditional dances have gone into oblivion. For example, 'Eder' traditional dance of Umuejere village is no more.

Pa Chimaonyereke who was a custodian of the dance informs the researcher that the village

stopped the dance before the church preached against it. Sacrifices to the gods are no more carried out in the open. Mr Bartholomew Nwokenna, a member of ECWA in one of the villages visited during the course of this work informed the researcher that this position may be for fear of being labelled an unbeliever or being sanctioned by the churches. The 'agbagwu' traditional rites which witnessed the worship and recognition of the village deity was condemned by the missionary churches as being idolatry therefore against the tenants of Christians practices. 'Mbom-Uzo' and 'Iwa-akwa' festival are not celebrated as of old. Instead of going to offer sacrifices to the deities before the commencement of the festivals, initiates and celebrants are rather encouraged by the church to come to the church and receive blessings from God to mark the celebrations. Indeed, a lot has changed.

References

- Agwu, A. (1990). A welcome address presented on the occasion of Ihitte/Uboma Local Government Mini Ozuruimo Cultural Festival on 27th July, 1990, at Isinweke.
- Anyanwu, S.O. (2010). *Ibo Uzo Cultural Festival among the Igbo. Origins, Religious and Social Significance: A case Study of Mbom-uzo Ihitte Etiti*, Owerri: Edu - Edy Publications.
- Awa, E.O. (1985). Igbo political culture in The Igbo Socio-political System, *Papers presented at the 1985 Ahiajoku Lecture colloquium*, Owerri, Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports.
- Gennep, H.V. (1960). *Rites of Passage*, London, Oxford University Press.
- Imo State Council for Arts and Culture, (1988). "Initiation Rites in Igboland", *Anu-A Journal of Igbo Culture*, 5th issue, Owerri, Govt. Printers. p.105

- Imo State Council for Arts and Culture, (1990). *Ozurumo '90 Festival Brochure*. Owerri, Govt. Printers.
- Isichie, E.A. (1976). *A History of Igbo People*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Mbiti, J.S. (1970). *Concepts of God in Africa*. London: SPCK.
- Metuh I.E. (1987). *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, Onitsha: IMICO Publishers.
- Odu, A.N.C. (2001). *Model Essays and Letters for School Certificate*. Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers.
- Ogbalu, F.K. (2006). *Omenala Igbo (The Book of Igbo Custom) Revised and Enlarged*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company.
- Onwuliri, J.O. (2011). *Classical African Indigenous Religious Thought*, Owerri, Tonyben Publishers.
- Onyeocha, I.M. (1997). *Africa: The Question of Identity*, Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
- Otite, O & Ogionwo, W. (1979). *An introduction to sociological studies*. Ibadan: Heinemann Publishers.
- Quarcoopome, T.N.O. (1987). *West African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan: African University Press Ltd.
- Uba, H. M. E. (1985). Rites of passage. *Ahiajoku lecture Colloquium*, Owerri, Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports.
- Uchendu, P.K. (1991). *Nigerian Social Problem, Origins and Possible Solutions*, Okigwe: Fasmen Publishers.
- Okafor, U.A. (2018). *The Road to Uboima – Origin and Colonial Experience*. Owerri: Sibon Books Ltd.
- People interviewed
- 1) Pa Isaiah Okoronkwo at Umuejere village 23/3/2017
 - 2) Pa Simeon Oguwuike at Umuejere village 23/3/2017
 - 3) pa Ezekiel Onwukanjo at Umuejere village 4/ 4/ 2011
 - 4) Pa Chukwuma Chimaonyereke Umuduru village 4/4/ 2015
 - 5) Nze Benson Onwuka at Umuduru 6/2/2016
 - 6) Mr Onuwa Okafor at Ndinbinu village 21/12/ 2016
 - 7) High Chief Sabastine Ekechukwu at Dobinaro village 5/5/ 2017
 - 8) Chief Dan Anyanwu at Umuchiaku village 8/8/2016
 - 9) Mr Bernard Okafor at Umuezela village 6/6/2016
- **Ifeanyi Okeke holds a Ph.D and he is of the Department of Philosophy/Religion and Cultural Studies, Federal University, Ndufu- Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. He can be reached at: chilurumogu@gmail.com.**