

THE HERMENEUTICS AND RELIGIOUS CONSTRUCT IN THE ILA-OSO CULTURAL FESTIVAL OF AMIYI AHABA ISUIKWUATO.

Amanambu, Uchenna Ebony, PhD

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State

ebonyuchem@gmail.com

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Abstract

The correlation between religion and culture has been an intriguing one both within the society and academic circles. This is an unbiased investigation into the history and hermeneutics foundation of Ila-oso cultural festival of the people of Amiyi Ahaba in Isuikwuato Local Government Area of Abia state. The study delves into the implications of Ila-oso cultural festival which is unarguably, the most attractive festival of the people. Like every other festival in any sensitive and pluralized religious environment across Igbo land, it has received its doses of criticism and vituperation from other religious movements especially Christianity. However, the study tries to unearth the cause of this reservation, then analyze the social, religious and moral implications of the festival on the peace, development and sustenance of the community. This is because, the overt aim of celebrating the festival is to build a strong bond and the principle of solidarity and brotherhood both within Amiyi community and their neighbouring brother community. The celebration also strives to conscientize among the people the power and strength in unity vis-à-vis the powerlessness and danger of disunity. The study seeks to encourage social harmony, love, solidarity, tolerance and understanding as the antitheses of religious and ethnic bigotry, prejudices, ignorance and triumphalism that are disquieting the stability of the country today.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Religious Construct, Ila-Oso Cultural Festival, Isuikwuato

Introduction

There seems to be an age long cold war going on among the major religions in Nigeria. The wars seem to be more pronounced between the traditional religions fondly called the African traditional religions within the academic circle and Christianity. This is because while the traditional religions strive to assert their *indigeneship*, Christianity often malign their practices. For example, the researcher was once shocked at how his senior colleagues publicly castigated him through their homilies for attending and officiating a celebration of “oji gbara asaa” (a cola with seven cobs) of a particular traditional ruler who was a member of his parish. Throughout Igbo land, it is considered a rare occurrence to have a cola produce seven lobes. It is understood and believed to be a sign of favour and

good things coming the way of the owner of the cola nut. Probably, to avoid the Christian stigmatization, the traditional ruler invited his priest to officiate the celebration. The priest made series of enquires and after the enquires, he went and said the opening prayer and took his leave and from every available record, nothing else was done there except for people who ate and drank and it was concluded with a prayer from a fellow priest. Now, what is wrong with the celebration that it would warrant such a castigation? The same stories abound. However, being aware that most of the traditional celebrations left much to be desired in terms of their fetish undertones, not all of them are evil and ungodly. Most of them if well understood and harnessed, are recipes for various socioeconomic and political sustenance of a community. Hence, the researcher has embarked on the religious construct of the Ila-oso festival of the people of Amiyi Ahaba in Isuikwuato Local Government Area of Abia State.

Clarification of Some Terms

Hermeneutics: Hornby (2010) defines it as a technical way of reading, understanding, analyzing and interpreting the meaning of a written text.

Religious construct is a combination of two terms: **Religious** is the act of practicing religion. Cicero in Nmah (2009) holds the view that religion came from a root word *leg* meaning to take up, gather, count or observe the signs of divine communication. Karl Bahner described religion from the word *religere* which means binding oneself back to one's origin or goal or to bind oneself fast to God (p.22). Therefore, to be religious can be described as the sacred attitudes of an individual toward who and what he believes in. **Construct:** according to Hornby (2010) has multiple entries but in this study, it is to be viewed as an idea or a set of belief that is based on various pieces of evidence or upon what something is built.

Festival: Hornby (2010) defines festival as series of performance of music, dance, play, film, movies etc usually organized at the same time or once in a year. It also means a series of public events connected with a particular activities or idea.

Culture: Culture has been variously defined by scholars and there is yet to be a generally acceptable definition. However, Taylor's definition seems to be more needful in this study. Taylor (1871) defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p.1). Furthermore, culture can be material and non-material but generally culture is a social fact.

In the context of this study, being aware that culture and religion are inseparable social and human realities, the hermeneutics and religious construct in the Ila-Oso cultural festival of Amiyi Ahaba Isuikwuato means interpreting and explaining the annual celebration of Ila-oso belonging to the people of Amiyi in Ahaba and the existence of a deep correlation it has with what and who they believe in. This is done with the aim of understanding the origin, history, import, some reservations expressed by some of other people, the socio political and moral impacts of the celebration.

Theoretical Frameworks: Functionalist, Interactionist and Conflict Theories

Functionalist:

In analyzing the data and findings in the study, the study adopts the Functionalist, Interactionist and Conflict theories together with the Historical approach to the study of religion. According to Pals (1996), Functionalist theory is developed by many thinkers such as Durkheim, Weber and Karl Marx. For instance, Karl Marx argues that religion is like other social institutions because it is dependent upon the material and economic realities in a given society (p.157). Functionalist theory stresses the interdependence of the patterns and institutions of a society with their interactions in maintaining cultural and social unity.

Interactionist:

Just like the functionalist theory, the interactionist theory is a useful social theory which Crossman (2016) said to be a major framework of sociological theory because people develop and rely upon it in the process of social interactions (p.13). Ahamefula and Nnajioto (2005) state that interactionism is largely influenced by the works of early sociologists and philosophers such as George Simmel, Charles Cooley, George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman. Therefore, interactionism is a theoretical perspective that derives in social processes such as conflict, cooperation and identity formation from human interaction (p.14).

Conflict:

Barret (1991) asserts that Conflict theory has strong affiliation with Karl Marx, who sees religion as an illusion that eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression. He sees religion as series of myths that justify and legitimize subordination of the subject class and the domination and privilege of the ruling class. The Conflict theory states that society or an organization functions so that each individual participant and its groups struggle to maximize their benefits which inevitably contribute to social change (p.13). Ani (2012) avers that conflict

manifests as products of interactions amongst human beings and groups (p.158). This theory shows that conflict is often generated by the quest to protect one's identity and interest.

Historical Approach

Madu (2002) describes Historical approach as an approach that asks question about what was. Thus from the basic question, the historical approach seeks to make an excursus into the past to know how religion originated, its founder, circumstances that favoured the spread, doctrine and liturgy. From the past, the present situation of religion is evaluated and future projection can be made (p.148). Nze (2009) said that historical approach emphasizes the systemic collection and objective evaluation of data related to the past occurrences in order to test hypothesis concerning causes, effects or trends of these events that may help explain events and anticipate future events (p.83). Ejizu (2013) avers that historical approach is essentially diachronic in nature, as it assists the students' attempts to contextualize belief; practices, object, institution in space and time and to unfold their dynamic evolution of realities over time and space (p.25). Therefore, these theories and approach make strong statement in understanding the Ila-Oso festival of the people of Amiyi Ahaba in Isuikwuato Local Government Area of Abia state.

This study may not begin the discourse on cultural and religious issues anew but only recognizes the fact that as a recurrent social phenomenon it is worth being explored further. One acknowledges that a study of this nature can best be substantiated by a practical field experience since it is a fact that spanned across the communities. Hence, in this study, efforts were made to analyze the religious construct in the Ila-oso festival of the people Amiyi Ahaba in Isuikwuato L.G.A Abia state. Therefore, the researcher believes that the society will be in danger if religion and culture are not understood and reformed for social solidarity and harmony. This is because the end result will be nothing but violence, strife and disharmony.



Pix 1 showing the researcher with Mr. Kanu Ikea- the Obi of Imenyi-one of his resourceful respondents

Brief History Of Amiyi Ahaba

Amiyi Ahaba is one of the communities found in Igbo land. The Igbo people as stated by Nzomiwu (1999) live in the tropical region of Africa. They are mostly found in Anambra, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi state. Some others are found in parts of Delta and River States. Igbo land lies between latitude 5° and 7° north and longitude 6° and 8° east of Greenwich line. Igbo land is bounded on the north by the Igala and Tiv people, on the east by the Ekoi, on the south by the Ibibio and on the west by Bini and Isoko (p.1). High Chief Nwadinobi Ndukwe (personal communication 15th April, 2020) President General of Amiyi Ahaba avers that oral traditions handed down to the people by their forebears has it that the name Imenyi is a collective name for Umuimeyi as given to them by Enyi, who with his brother Obiangwu founded the present day Isuikwuato. Many years before the advent of the white men in Nigeria, there was a mass migration of people in search of food, security and peaceful settlement across Igbo land. Therefore, Enyi and his brother, Obiangwu left their original abode at a place that cannot be located for now, passed through many villages and obstacles probably acquired some charms and a goddess they called "Ogudu". The goddess was credited with mystical powers, protection, guide and security to its holder over dangerous and hostile communities.

High Chief Nwadinobi continues, the charm went ahead of them through Okporo Enyi (the path through which Elephant passed). In the course of their migration, they passed through the present day Isuikwuato and settled at Obi Eke in Amiyi Ahaba where the Ogudu goddess had asked them to pitch their tents and settle down while other migrants continued. Enyi and Obiangwu

surveyed the unoccupied lands, made them suitable and warded off external hostilities. They built their settlements at the present day Amyi Ahaba on a gentle slope river known as “Eme” which the Amiyi community still depend on till date for good water. Enyi and Obiangwu had children and one of their children was named Imenyi who gave birth to the ancient Imenyi kingdom with Ahaba as the first son. It was this Ahaba who had one of sons named “Amiyi”.

According to Mr. Kanu Ikea, (personal communication 10th April, 2020), the Obi of Imenyi, Amiyi is a name of the first ancient father and founder of the Amiyi community. He said that the man must have existed several thousand years ago. He was the first born and son of the ancient Ahaba the first son of Imenyi kingdom. His Father Ahaba had other six male children which include, Iheokwe, Ehuma, Amaogudu, Agbo-na-elu, Eluama and Ihenzu. These seven children of Ahaba founded the present day *Ahaba asaa* known as seven Ahaba communities.

Mr. Kanu goes on to posit that Amiyi as the first born of Ahaba, was doubly favoured that he had twelve sons-close to the double of his father’s children. These twelve children later became fathers of another twelve sons who in turn founded the twelve kindred in Amiyi. They include: Umuovo, Amaji, Umuaruro, Umuosiamia, Amangwu, Umuobu, Umuokehi, Ndi Oturu, Ndi Dike, Amaokwe, Umuechemoko and Umuecheulu. Pa Eleanya Oluka (personal communication 11th April, 2020) stated with the balkanization of traditional kingdoms under the administration of former governor of Abia state, Chief Orji Kalu in early 2000 and today, Amiyi community produced two autonomous kingdoms and by that, they have two traditional rulers. These autonomous kingdoms are Imenyi and Agbaja-Ukwu kingdoms. The Imenyi autonomous kingdom consist of Umuovo, Umuosiamia, Amangwu, Umuobu, Umuechemoko and Umuecheulu kindred and they are led by His Royal Majesty (Eze) Ezo Ukandu. While Amaji, Umuaruro, Umuokehi, Ndi Oturu, Ndi Dike and Amaokwe formed the Amaja-Ukwu autonomous kingdom and they are led by His Royal Highness, Eze Brown Nwokocha Okoroafor-the Obi-Irem 11 of Amaja-Ukwu kingdom.

A visit to Amiyi will help one discover the irony and politics of the balkanization of traditional institutions in Igbo land. This is because despite the existence of these autonomous kingdoms, their politics, culture and religion have remained unchanged. For example, the Ilu-oso cultural festival has not been balkanized, their membership in the churches especially Methodist church where their memberships are well pronounced is still intact and they are still being governed by one President General whose election according to Mr. Kanu Ikea (personal communication 10th April, 2020) is not subject to any other condition

other than performance, capability, capacity and competence. He opines that there is nothing like zoning arrangement, sentiment, marginalization or other complaints regarding the choice of the president General. Nobody cares if one family produces the President General for two hundred times as long as the choice is capable. The researcher observes that the assertion sounds factual because the existence of strong age grade system and the brotherhood in the community can help any leader to deliver. For example, the community has strong youth association and other layers of dispute resolution committees whose jobs it is to dispense justice. The researcher has spent years in the community, there is yet to be a day when security agency came into the community for arrest. All disputes are handled by all the layers of age grades with the help of other leaders.

Mr. Kanu Ikea (personal communication 10th April, 2020) states that the famous Umuimenyi kingdoms began from Amiyi and all the traditional institutions in Imenyi kingdoms were excised from the Amiyi kingdom.

The Hermeneutics of Ila-Oso

Odili (2013) suggests that hermeneutic should be involved in the study of human related activities (p.45). Mbonu (2013) argues that hermeneutics should not be reserved for sacred texts alone. According to her, hermeneutic is derived from the Greek word Ερμηνεύς (sic) meaning “interpreter”. In turn, it is related to the Greek god named “Hermes” whose role it was to interpret the message of the gods (p.97). Hermeneutics as the methodology of interpretation is concerned with problems that arise when dealing with meaningful human actions and the products of such actions, most importantly, word and text in a phrase, clause, statement or sentence. As a methodological discipline, it offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts and other meaningful material. In that case, it is all about interpreting a choice text in a statement hence the need to situate the phrase “Ila-oso”.

There were arguments among all the respondents as to whether it is called “Iluo-oso” or “Ila-Oso”. Whichever one, the point is that each of them is a combination of two words. The first term is pronounced *Iluo* in some communities like Akporo Achara Isuochi in Umunneochi local government area of Abia state. Among them *Iluo* is a word used for greeting somebody who has either come back from farm work, other works, long journey, abroad, has achieved a good result after some evidential pains like a woman who has successfully put to bed a child, recovers from dangerous sickness or successfully ran away from danger

and found himself/herself among his/her relatives. The implication is that the person has struggled, suffered and worked hard to achieve something good, spent a long time away from his/her home or escaped danger hence, to appreciate the presence of the person or the result, the people who are either present or put a call will welcome the person and appreciate the good result achieved with the greeting of “iluo” meaning “welcome”. By this term, the person is happily ushered into the home or his/her victory or result is appreciated. “Ila” on its own stands for “to go”. The phrase- “to go” in this context, means to go back to one’s house or home. Just like the previous term, “iluo” it shows that one has a place he/she is going to either stay, rest or hide. It is used to among other things; to go home after work, visit or to run away from any seeming danger or threat hence the statement “ilaa la ta” meaning “one has just escaped today”. The researcher believes that the later seems to rhyme more with the celebration.

The second term is referred to as “Oso” which loosely or simply means to “move fast or take a run” in English language. It is used in three dimensions in Igbo parlance or cosmology and they include: running as in competition, racing, running mostly out of danger and in some cases, it represents the danger or threat itself. When an Igbo person says “ogba la oso” it then means the person has taken to his/her heels depicting he has escaped danger or beaten a retreat. The person in question is running out of danger, threat and dreadful circumstance. Traditionally, across Igbo land, it is said, “oso chu ba mmadu ogba la na ibe nne ya” when a person is threatened or felt he/she is in danger, the person runs to his/her brothers, people, relatives or mother’s place of birth before marriage for safety. In view of this, an average Igbo person tries everything humanly possible to maintain solidarity with his/her people no matter the distance. The people here include the maternal and paternal places. Having established this, the researcher believes that “Ila-oso” in Amiyi community implies a speedy movement or procession depicting solidarity, unity, love and brotherhood undertaken by all the males of Amiyi visiting their Ihenzu brother community which will be reciprocated by their Ihenzu brothers in no distance. To the researcher, this is aimed at reminding each other that should any threat or in the case any danger arises any time, they will run to each other’s community or houses for safety. It is a way of conscientizing themselves that unity is strength and division is weakness.



Picture 2 showing the cross section youths preparing for the Ila-oso festival.



Picture 3 some boys jubilating during the celebration.



Picture 4 showing some boys who were newly initiated into the age grade.

The Ilu-Oso Celebration

Ogbuaku (2008) argues that history deals with the study of past-past events and developments. It is not only learned from the myriads of books on the discipline of history but also transmitted orally from one person to another and from generation to generation with errors and distortions such as method entails. Compression of history therefore is a useful and commendable means of passing on information of more than common interest and a systemic account of the past people, the modes and consequences of their pattern of life, their mistakes and achievements (p.5).

Elder Igwe Ogoma, Pa Eleanya Oluka and Mr. Kanu Ikea (personal communications 11th April, 2020) in separate interviews with the researchers confirmed that the date of the celebration is uncertain. They said that even their ancestors seemed to have met the celebration. Mr. Ikea emphatically said the celebration is as old as the existence of Amiyi as a people. It is a celebration for all male children who will dress with a piece of cloth round their waists, tie the other small ones at their necks and paint their faces and bodies with white chalk or powder then file out in gorgeous procession to Ihenzu. The little male children will file out first according to their ages and sizes, followed by other males according to their age grades and other ranks and files. The community called Ihenzu is another neighbouring village that is about five kilometers from Amiyi. It is situated immediately after Ehuma along the road going to Umuahia.

When the researcher asked Mr. Kanu Ikea and Pa Eleanya Oluka why they chose Ihenzu instead of the other closer neighbouring brother villages and they answered that their forefathers told them that some of those communities especially Ehuma cannot be vouched for, they are not reliable, dependable and consistent. They said that a point Amiyi males could not marry from their Ehuma brother community neither do they give out their daughters in marriage to them. To the people of Amiyi, Ila-oso celebration is the last festival of the year for the community. Apart from the Christmas that they claimed was imported to them, they boasted of the Ila-oso being their own Christmas.



Picture 5 showing the researcher with Pa Elenya, a Christian and an elder of Amiyi Ahaba

As they marched down to Ihenzu, the Ihenzu community will welcome them at their village square. It is a brief stay as the host will welcome them with songs and to express their joy before they go, the host community will give them all kinds of wine especially palm wine which the visiting convoy will bring back to Amiyi community. But before, they leave for the procession, the elders and leaders of the community will make available a very big bowl and fill it with palm wine and keep one cup on top of it. At their return from Ihenzu, everybody will drink with the same cup and from the same bowl. After the drinking, everybody is expected to joyfully retire to his house for merriment. The merriment is organized by most of the women who will cook deliciously to welcome other guests just to express their joy that their sons have grown into adulthood.



Picture 6 a costume showing the joy of their celebration

The Implications Of Ila-Oso Festivals

All the respondents to the researcher agreed that the Ila-oso celebration is for two principal reasons which are to show solidarity within themselves and brothers at Ihenzu and also a show of force to warn external aggressors.

The Principle Of Solidarity: The celebration is principally to show solidarity. Gullin (1948) said that culture is the cement binding together into a society its component individuals (pp.188-189). The system of Umunna or kindred men are people whose genealogical relationship can be traced to a common ancestry and they constitute the strongest and most effective means of managing and controlling excesses in a community. It is also an essential vehicle for maintenance of law and order in Igbo land. Pa Eleanya Oluka (personal communication 11th April 2020) told the researcher that the festival is used to go and express their solidarity, unity of purpose and the principle of brotherhood both amongst themselves and their brothers at Ihenzu. Generally, the Igbo idea of wellness and healthiness is interpreted from the lenses of solidarity. “Onye nwere mmadu ka onye nwere ego” translated in English “Anybody who has relatives, is wealthy” Therefore, a healthy person is a person who has not been uprooted from the context of his primary solidarity. One who is in harmony with his brothers and deity. The researcher sees this principle as a psychological art of war.

The Show Of Force: The celebrations is also used to make statement and send signal to other neighbouring villages and the general public that they are not to be joked with when it comes to fomenting or looking for trouble. Of course, this is insightful because, the conventional state security apparatuses sometimes move in convoys publicly to send warning signals to the criminals or other would be trouble makers that they are battle ready.

Initiation Into Age Grade: Mr. Kanu (personal communication 11th April, 2020) said that the Ila-oso festival is used to initiate the upcoming youths into adulthood. This order is very strong in the community. The newly initiated groups are conscripted to defend the community for five years which after, they will be welcomed into the mainstream of the community politics. They will be expected to exhibit in maturity and ready to handle some sensitive leadership offices in the community. They will be expected to be contributing to the development of the community like payment of developmental levies. There are eight age grade systems in Amiyi Ahaba and they are named after the four Igbo market days in the order of young and older ones. There are Eke-ukwu age

grade, Eke-nta age grade, Orie-ukwu and Orie-nta age grade, Aho-ukwu and Aho-nta age grade, Nkwo-ukwu and Nkwo-nta age grade. Since a week is counted as eight days in Igbo land as against the western seven days of counting, each of these age grade representing a particular market day has a particular day they must watch over Amiyi community. They overtly and covertly move around checking what is going on in the community. They will not go to farm or do any other thing on that particular day.



Picture 7 showing a cola plate known as “okwa oji” in Igbo land. It was used to share cola nut at the last celebration and it was used to present cola to the researcher at the house of Mr. Kanu Ikea.

Drinking From One Pot: Pa Eleanya Oluka (personal communication) said that just like the Christian Eucharist service where members are often made to drink from one cup, the pot provided at the “mbala-ama” (community square) where they assemble to take off for the festival procession is a sign of communion for the community. According to them, this is to show love and a proof that their hearts are clean towards one another. Just like the way the Christian Eucharist service is conducted to ensure bonding, unity and love, so is the drinking from one cup and pot policy thickens the bond of peace, unity, love and brotherhood among the people of Amiyi Ahaba. This buttress the position of Iwe (2002) that cultures serves as a guiding force of people’s behaviour in the society. It defines

relationships, exerts social control, as a stamp or trade mark that distinguishes people from others, it serves as an integrating force, systemizes and interprets values, institutions and norms of the society. Culture charges people with meaning and purpose and also serve as a social unity and solidarity (p.57).



Picture 8 showing the site for the location of one the earliest shrines in Amiyi belonging to the Umuobu clan but has been rusticated by Elder Ogoma who is supposed to be its custodian having become a repented child of God.

The Religious Construct In Ila-Oso Cultural Festival

Mbiti (1969) asserts that Africans are notoriously religious (p.1). Confirming Mbiti's assertion, Enwerem (1995) citing Kalu concurs that religion dominates the root of the culture of Nigerians (p.13). In view of these, little or no distinctions is made between the profane and the sacred and sacred dimensions of life. Thus, the activities and instruments of governance and survival are clothed in religious ritual, language and symbolism. Moreover, from the definition of culture, it is evident that culture and religion connote belief and Iwe (2002) argues that the young and the immature would think or imagine that religion is irrelevant to cultural evolution. To dispel such illusion or self-deception, he prefaced that religion and culture are essential and inseparable aspects of human existence. Religion and culture are twin, essential, inseparable and interdependent aspect of human life. The duo is so intimately related and connected that in reality it is impossible for a society to have a culture without religion or religion without culture (p.58). Emphatically, Opoku (1978) maintains that God is the final Guardian of moral code and of law and order (p.153).

In that case, all the respondents unanimously agreed that before they move out for the Ila-oso festival and procession, the elders will come and pray extemporarily for the people and their safety. The same elders will encourage them to be responsible while on the journey. When the researcher asked Mr. Kanu if the elder would pour libation before saying the prayer and he vehemently answered “nobody pours any libation anywhere or anything” and confidently said that they only make utterances. Mbiti (1981) stresses that festivals in African setting is a means through which the society receives blessing from God and their ancestors (p.137). It then means that what Mr. Kanu said could be true. He affirms that they use Ila-oso to express the happiness of seeing the last month and season in the year and it serves a hope for them to enter the new with joy and peace. The religious construct in the Ila-oso is that their elders use the opportunity to pray for the good and peace of the community. They also use it to reinforce morals, solidarity and bond of unity in the communities.



Picture 8 the researcher with Elder Igwe Ogoma- a committed Christian elder in Amiyi Ahaba

Beyond Cultural Festivals: The Born Again Christians' Reservation On Ila-Oso

Elder Ogoma (personal communication 12th April, 2020) who is a strong Christian known beyond Ahaba, whose faith cannot be doubted and having also defaced one of the shrines he is supposed to be its priest said that no committed or serious minded Christian should participate in that kind of cultural practices. When the researcher probed further and deeper on why Christians should not be party to it. He corroborates the proposition of Metuh (1981) that the characteristic features of Africa traditional religions are that God is usually approached and

worshipped through the intermediaries of deities and ancestors (p.13) He said that every celebration among his people be it cultural or religious as founded by his forebears had fetish undertone. Being unaware of the account of Basden (1982) who has earlier noted that there was a common custom of holding certain waters to be sacred throughout Igbo land. A reverence which was thought to be for the water itself but it was later discovered that they were actually reverencing the fish instead. These fish were often called “*nne anyi*” meaning our mother because they are thought to protect lives (p.217). Elder Ogoma reminisced that even the water they drink known as “*Eme Amiyi*” at a point was so revered and dreaded that nobody can eat its fish until during the Nigerian civil war when Hausa soldiers destroyed everywhere and started eating the fish, then, the villagers began to reconsider their positions and began to eat the fish. He agreed that the celebration may not be attached to any god or shrine to his knowledge but the foundation with which their forebears founded all the cultural and religious celebrations cannot be trusted as a Christian. He also complained about the costumes of the men who engage in this celebration arguing that those costumes represent the gods. He asked, “do you see the kind of clothes, paints and white chalk they pour on their faces and bodies?” Expectedly, all the born again groups who responded to affirm Elder Ogoma’s position. A reservation the researcher put across other respondents such as Mr. Kanu Ikea and Pa Eleanya Oluka who quickly dismissed it as just imagination.

Whatever the case, religion and culture are like fish and water. Therefore, the religionist should appreciate the position of Ukpong (1995) when he posits that those Africans who were converted into Christianity did not change their African worldviews (p.76). Owing to this, Iwe (2002) argues that religion (religionist) owe the culture a duty of enlightenment, appreciation, purification, defence, promotion and development as the conscience of the society (p.59). With this in mind, the reservations expressed by the born again Christians and other enlightened groups needs to be critically accessed so as to redeem the Ila-oso cultural festival for stronger solidarity and developments among men. The researcher has witnessed the celebration and come to the realization that no other event in Amiyi community has commanded such attention, enthusiasm and crowds.

Conclusion

The study of history of people do not only provide data but serves as a guide for planning, improving on accomplishments and modifying other misjudgments so as to make the world better place for human habitation. A synthetic diffuse data

can diffuse animosity, controversies and bad blood between people and their various religious leanings in any given community. Ours is like Mbiti said "I am because we are". Similarly, Gullin (1948) maintains that culture patterns people's behaviours in a society (pp.188-189). The implication is that a person learns from his culture what is good and valuable. No doubt the festival of Ila-Oso is a religio-cultural event that is garnished with the overt and covert aims of building a community, solidarity and brotherhood among men, to ward off intending aggressors against the community and ensure that the bond of unity takes its pride of place in the community. However, the leaders of the community should diffuse some aspects of the festival which other members of the community especially the born again Christians have strong reservations about. This is because one characteristic feature of culture is that it is not stagnant rather it is evolving especially when it comes in contact with other cultures.

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