

Socio-Religious Implications of Negligence of the *Obi* (Family Homestead) in Contemporary Igbo Families

Kenechi Nnaemeka Afunugo, PhD

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

This study examines the contemporary Igbo family in relation to Obi or Ngwuru (family homestead), vis a vis the core Igbo people's reverence and esteem for it. The study employs both the primary and secondary means of data collections. The required notions and closures were made exclusively on the analysis and synthesis of the gathered data delineated through culture centered and phenomenological approaches. Additionally, this study adopts the Berry's model on the theory of Acculturation. Findings posit that the pre-colonial Igbo enclave accorded high reverence to the Obi or Ngwuru. Regrettably, however, some contemporary Igbo families do not place much necessary value on its significance. Some contemporary Igbo first sons who inherit the Obi or Ngwuru according to the Igbo cultural provisions often sell it out for quick wealth, thus they bring shame and disgrace to the legacy of their parents and ancestors. Consequently, they lose their ritual, moral and legal rights and they are denied the basic positions and obligations they supposed to wield among other aspersions the Igbo societies cast on such violators. This study advocates that the contemporary Igbo family should redirect their steps back to the ancient pathway of maintaining the sanctity of the Obi or Ngwuru. They should not allow the obsession for quick wealth or foreign influence to push them to lose their cultural identity. Ways to redeem and re-consecrate the Obi or Ngwuru that had been violated and desecrated in order to avert the associated curses were also posited in this study.

Keywords: *Obi, Ngwuru, Desecrate, Re-consecrate, Igbo Family, Cultural identity, Heritage*

Introduction

Igbo people are very passionate about family relations; hence they take issues regarding family matters very seriously. Igwe and Amoncar et al (2020) in this regard, express that Igbo families provide an entrepreneurial leadership platform which influences youths through role models, providing mastery experiences and socialization. They stress that the extended family provides a safe environment for creativity and innovation. Igbo people

then can hardly be separated from family affairs because their entire social, cultural, religious and entrepreneurial formations were forged at the family circle. Okoli and Ujumadu et al (2021) insist that family relations and upholding the core values and heritage of the family is paramount in the life of an average Igbo person. They emphasize for instance that the concept of extended family system is a recognized, well known age long practice in Igbo land. It is a practice where many relations, including distant ones, depend on other capable relations for upkeep, education, training, apprenticeship and general survival. Okoli and Ujumadu et al elucidate as well that the practice of extended family has been in place in Igbo land for long and is a kind of multi-generational family. They maintain that the core of the family is the nuclear family consisting parents and their children, while additional relatives are considered extended involving multiple relatives other than just the parents and their children living in the same household. No Igbo person can be simply separated from both nuclear and extended family ties since they work in synergy in the socio-cultural, socio-religious and socio-economic formation of every Igbo individual person.

Don and Anaekwe (cited by Okoli and Ujumadu et al, 2021) express that Igbo people are passionate about family relations and equally hold tenaciously to the family issues because it aids in fostering unity and development in Igbo land; it is part of Igbo identity and culture hence the Igbo cannot do without it; the Igbo will harm themselves more if they abandon it; it offers security to members of the family as well as for the fact that both the nuclear and extended family relations bring unity in the entire Igbo enclave. Slattery (2010) and Umu Igbo Unite Los Angeles (2018) assert that every Igbo person goes to great extent in maintaining their core family heritage and customs because family is an important institution in the lives of Igbo people. They posit that all relationships, according to Igbo culture, emanates from the family. Every child birthed in any family thus begins to learn about human relationships from within the family.

Sequel to the afore-mentioned assertions, Igbo people maintain their family cultural values and heritage irrespective of all odds or their location. E. Onuike, U. Nwoye and J. Madu (personal communication, December 10th, 2023) posit that there abound various negative impacts in addition to socio-religious implications that ensue when an Igbo person spites on or despises and neglects their core family values, customs and traditions. Little wonder Afigbo (1981) notes that regardless of the fact that the colonial rule transformed Igbo society in many respects, it did not destroy Igbo identity or cultural soul. He expatiates that:

The Igbo have remained “Igbo” in their attitude to and style of life; that is, while changing they were able to preserve their “ethnic essence” because they were astute enough to use in their own way, the new institutions and values introduced

by colonialism....In other words, it is a gross exaggeration to say that Igbo society and culture disintegrated or collapsed under colonial rule for, to a greater extent than has so far been recognized, the Igbo have sought to use institution and techniques acquired through the link with the outside world established by colonial rule to maintain those values and styles of life which are intrinsic to their separate identity. (p. 283-284).

Okafor (2016) in like manner submits that in spite of modern developments, environmental, traditional cum family values of Igbo spirituality are still preserved and practiced, and have practical functions within community life. Areji (2022) notwithstanding his argument that migration seems to be hampering the continuity of Igbo cultural traits and distinctive features, he, however, attests that “to be an Igbo person just like as is predominantly obtainable in many African cultures, is to be identified with and by one’s culture and family values, customs and heritage” (p.3). The Igbo person is wholly and entirely Igbo wherever they find themselves. They exude peculiarities pertinent to various Igbo features and traits.

In view of the foregoing reflections, this study examines the socio-religious implications of neglecting *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (Family Homestead) in contemporary Igbo family. Relevant literature on the subject matter were consulted while experienced Igbo elders and cultural custodians particularly from Ogidi and Awka towns in Anambra were consulted via personal communications. This study adopts the Berry’s model of the theory of Acculturation. The required notions and closures of this study were made exclusively on the analysis and synthesis of the gathered data delineated through culture centered and phenomenological approaches.

Family structure in Igbo land

The Igbo people have an in-depth cultural heritage that places great importance on family and kinship ties. Family is considered the bedrock of Igbo society, and various customs and practices revolve around maintaining and nurturing these relationships. Consequently, for one to understand the concept of *Obi* or *Ngwuru* in the Igbo cosmology, one ought to be conversant with the structure of the family in the Igbo enclave. A synoptic review of literature on the Igbo family composition will definitely suffice.

Eze (2012) avers that the family set up in the western culture hinges more on monogamous and nuclear formation; whereas the African notion of family especially among the Igbo tilts more towards extended and either form of monogamous and polygamous family pertinent to one’s choice. Eze expresses that the Igbo places high regard and value on the family formation. They believe that it is a taboo for a woman to

procreate outside marriage. Eze emphasizes that the belief is that children raised outside wedlock may not be properly nurtured into sound moral and core Igbo entrepreneurial stance. Such children may end up not being relevant in the society. Eze insists that the Igbo people hold that brotherhood is the essence of quality living; hence, life of isolation is discouraged since communal life is the epicenter of the family structure in the Igbo parlance.

Uchendu (2007), Onyemelukwe (2015) and MOTUN 911 (2019), assert that the man or father is the head in the Igbo family structure. The Igbo law of succession is by primogenitor, that is, the eldest son inherits the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* and the major property of the father. Other properties will now be shared among other sons excluding the female children. The Igbo family structure is patriarchal in nature. Isidienu (2015) explicates that the family includes the man, his wife or wives (as the case may be in a polygamous family), children and every other person that has blood relations or lives with the family: This is the quintessence of the Igbo extended family structure. Ogbalu (cited by Isidienu) states that the family in Igbo context differs from the family in the English (Western) concept of family in the sense that it applies not only to the husband, his wife, and children (which is the nuclear family structure), but also includes somewhat vaguely other relations such as in-laws, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, all blood relations both distant and near as well as even house helps and keepers. Relatively, Onwuatiegwu (2020) retorts that the notion of family in the Igbo African society is distinct in several features and factors when compared to the one in the western cultures. Isidienu in her peculiar research then suggests that there is need to return to the usual family way of life by which the Igbo people are known since some ills in the society in recent times are attributed to the neglect of the core Igbo family life which aids in good moral character formation of Igbo youngsters.

Ufearoh (2010) expatiates that the Igbo family is an inter-connectedness of beings, visible and invisible, that mutually co-exist. It is an integral whole comprising of the living, the dead and the unborn. Ufearoh insists that a hermeneutical analysis of *ezi-na-ulo* (family) gives rise to a family characterized by dialogue, consensus, freedom and mutual understanding. The exposition of Ufearoh aligns with the submission of H. Obi Nwosu (personal communication, November 21, 2010), that even the living-dead and ancestors or dead members of the family are still part and parcel of the Igbo family structure. Obviously, this conception of the family will aid one in understanding the significance of *Obi* or *Ngwuru* and the need to sustain its legacy: it equally serves as core ingredients for building a stable human society. Madu and Umeanolue (2018) elucidate that the family is the building block of the Igbo community in which the propagation of the human race through procreation rotates. They equally declare that the traditional Igbo view of family

is one which incorporates not just the physically living members but also the departed ones and unborn ones. Their study argue that family solidarity and union is expressed and physically externalized in Igbo ancestral homes and communal land with the ancestral symbolic objects and shrines like; *Ofo*, *okwuani*, *Ngwuruchi* among others, which littered in Igbo family homesteads in the pre-Christian era. Igwegbe (cited by Madu and Umuanolue) expatiates that:

The family solidarity of the Igbo is also demonstrated in the burial of their dead ones who died natural and good deaths. These are buried in the family compound from where they even at death participated in the life of the family. They are believed to hear and follow all discussions made in the family and all activities transpiring in the family. It is believed by the traditional Igbo that the worst radical form of breaking link with the dead was to bury them outside their family. The traditional Igbo therefore bury their dead in the family compound where they lived, toiled, rejoiced and died with the belief of being together in life and in death. (p. 29).

This afore-extensive expostulation makes it obvious that any negligence or violation of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (family homestead) constitutes spite and an aspersion on the ancestors as well as the core heritage of the Igbo people.

It is worthy of note that the Igbo polygamous family structure reflects where a distinct man is married to two or several wives and thus may have several sons. The first son born into the family by any of the wives becomes the overall (eldest) first son as well as the inheritor of *Ngwuru*. The Igbo monogamous family structure represents a situation where a man is married to only one wife. Here the first son to be born in that family by the wife automatically becomes the eldest son and the inheritor of the *Ngwuru* as E. Chukwuogo, V. Nwafor and C. Chukwurah (personal communication, December 26th, 2023) express that the Igbo general idea of what constitutes family members are everyone living within a definite or defined household; for instance, a man, his wife or wives, his children, blood relations, extended relations and even house helps, servants and housekeepers. This is equally what is represented as the “extended family system” in the Igbo cosmology as Nwala (1985), Nwokoye and Chukwurah (2021) as well as E. Onuike, C. Okonkwo, U. Nwoye and G. Onwubiko (personal communication December 26th, 2023) delineate. Sequel to the foregoing, Mgbemena and Muonwe (2021) argue that modernity with its associate trends of industrialization, urbanization, individualism, globalization and increased sense of personal autonomy, had brought about changes in the Igbo family structure. This study upholds that the core values of Igbo family life and structure remain strong irrespective of the changes in family dynamics courtesy of modernization and globalization. Regardless of the fact that the younger generation may face challenges in

balancing traditional values with contemporary lifestyles, owing to the shifts in family structures and practices brought about by the same urbanization, migration globalization and the influence of western culture. The suggestions of Ikegwuonu (2015), Ezea (2015) and Zort and Karabacak et al (2023) which posit that the Igbo families can adapt to these changes by maintaining strong ties through digital technology and communication among themselves and the Igbo in diasporas, organizing family reunions and preserving cultural practices via digital documentation as well as reformed digital story telling tools is a great relief. Truth remains that the Igbo people's rich cultural heritage places immense importance on family and kingship ties. The Igbo people still upholds both monogamous and polygamous family structure. Marriage, lineage, extended family, primogenitor inheritance and the role of elders are integral aspects of Igbo family life. Despite the challenges posed by modernization, Igbo families continue to adapt and preserve their cultural values especially the family retention or preservation, hallowing, maintaining the sanctity and primogenitor (elder son's inheritance) of *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (family homestead).

The Essence of *Obi* (Family Homestead) in Igbo Cosmology

There are various names to which *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (family homestead) is referred according to various Igbo distinct dialects, this includes among others; *Obi*, *Obu*, *Ngwuru*, *Iba* and *Ogbiti*. A. Oforah and B. Ejidike (personal communication, December 10th, 2023) declare that *Ngwuru* or *Obi* (family homestead) refers to the main or major compound where the father who is the head of the family lives. In this very compound, the father equally erects a structure that particularly represents the *Obi* or *Obu* which signifies that the compound is actually *Ngwuru* or *Obi* where the family head resides. According to E. Okoli (personal communication, December 19th, 2023) even if "the father" or "man" who is the head of a peculiar family is married to several wives, the very compound where the house which he sleeps in and lives is located, is referred to as the *Ngwuru* or *Obi*. He can now schedule on how to be visiting his various wives at their designated *mkpuke* or he invites them on schedules to be visiting him one after the other on specific days at the *Ngwuru* or *Obi*. *Mkpuke* represents each house built for a peculiar wife of the head of the family where such a one dwells with her own children. N. Ezeama (personal communication, December 11th, 2023) explains that *mkpuke* belongs to women and is inherited by mainly the last male child of a particular woman in an Igbo monogamous family system or the first male child of a peculiar wife especially when he is not the overall eldest son in a polygamous Igbo family structure. The overall eldest son inherits the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (family homestead) in an Igbo polygamous family system while the first son inherits it in an Igbo monogamous family structure.

Clarifying the concepts, E. Okoli and E. Onuike (personal communication, December 12th, 2023) explicate that the *Obi* which is the structure constructed for mainly the receiving of visitors and where oblations and sacrifices are made by the father who is the head in both Igbo monogamous and polygamous family structure must be erected at the *Ngwuru* (family homestead) wherein the head of the family resides. Thus, the *Obi* is always erected at the *Ngwuru* (family homestead) which represents the main compound where the head of the family resides in each of the Igbo family structure. Where the *Obi* is located definitely marks the (family homestead) or the main compound of the family. At times, an enlarged compound with a common wall or fence may contain both the *Obi* and all the *Mkpuke*. The salient point is that once the *obi* is situated within a peculiar compound, that compound and land must be revered and hallowed; it should not be disposed of, sold out or given away as a gift. The family must retain it because of its various values, heritage, and socio-religious cum socio-cultural relevance. Again, it must be noted that *Ngwuru* or *Obi* (family homestead) are used interchangeably in various Igbo enclaves, whereas *obi* strictly refers to the erected structure stipulated for the head of the family to be receiving visitors within the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (family homestead). One of the objectives of this section is to expose the sacramental, sanctimonious and sacrosanct nature of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (family homestead); thus, it should not be treated with disdain and levity. Madukasi (2021) intimates that the *Obu* or *Obi* is believed generally among the Igbo to be a sacred temple and the ancient ritual center for keeping and binding the brotherhood of Igbo communities together because Eri is believed to be their great ancestor that instituted it in Igbo cosmology. In this regard, through the mediation of its symbolism and cultural ethos, the ancient spiritual center is so revered that it portrays Ndi-Igbo as the spiritual epicenter for the ritual consolation and reunification of other Igbo communities that make up the Igbo race through her ritualistic endeavors. The situation cum construction of *Obi* or *Obu* in the family homestead makes the compound hallowed, sacrosanct and sacred. *Obi* or *Obu* signifies the sacred homestead for Ancestor veneration in Igbo traditional religion according to Madukasi.

Berry's Model Theory of Acculturation

Cole (2019) underscores that acculturation is a process through which a person or a group of individuals from one definite culture ventures to adopt the practices, norms, traits and values of another culture, while still retaining their own peculiar culture. According to Cole, this process reflects within groups where none is necessarily a majority or a minority. Hence, it can occur at both group and individual levels and can as well manifest as a result of in-person association or contiguity through art, literature, or media.

Redfield and Colleagues (1936) (cited by Berry, 2004) expatiate that:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. (p. 1).

This definition posits that acculturation should be differentiated from culture change which is one aspect in acculturation and assimilation, which is more often than not a phase of acculturation. Social Science Research Council 1954 (cited by Berry) on the other hand declares that acculturation is “culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems” (p. 1). This implies that acculturative change may be the result of direct cultural contact; it may be acquired from non-cultural causes like ecological or demographic modification facilitated by an impinging culture; it may be detained, as with intramural adjustments consequent upon the undertaking of peculiar traits or patterns; or it may be a spontaneous modification of traditional modes of life. Jacob (2020) exposits that acculturation is a process of social psychological, sociological cum cultural change that accrues from the employment of two cultures while hinging to the dominant culture of the society. It is a process in which a person embraces, cultivates and conforms to a new cultural environment as a result of being placed into a new culture, or when another culture is brought to someone. Worthy and Lavigne et al (2020) elucidate on Berry’s Model Theory of acculturation that there abounds four acculturation strategies which are Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Margination. This study adopts the Berry’s model theory of acculturation pertinent to integration. Berry proposed this model theory of acculturation in 1992. He expostulates that integration occurs when individuals or group of persons are able to assume the cultural norms, traits and values of the dominant prevailing or host culture while maintaining their distinct and peculiar culture of origin. Integration fosters biculturalism. It is often synonymous with biculturalism. Schwartz and Unger (2010) elucidate that biculturalism in general terms represents solace and expertise with both one’s distinct cultural heritage and a host country’s culture. It is applicable to both immigrants as well as the children of immigrants; irrespective of the fact that they were born and raised in the receiving society, but then are probably deeply rooted in the heritage culture at home with their families. It can equally apply to individuals living in ethnic enclaves, where the cultural heritage is likely to be sustained across generations, as well as to individuals from visible minority ethnic group even if their families have been in the receiving society for multiple generations. Adopting the Berry’s model theory of acculturation for this study is poised at submitting that the Igbo people need not discard the cultural heritage of revering and honoring the pristine sanctity of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* (family homestead). With globalization, modernization, urbanization, migration in addition to the egomaniacal

concept of individualism, the Igbo family cultural heritage of retaining the *Obi or Ngwuru* (family homestead) by the eldest son in a given family should be sustained since the practice is not despicable or barbaric but rather a blessing as well as a very distinct, phenomenal and sublime mode of maintaining the link between each Igbo family and their ancestral root. It is actually what noting that the family is a proper and statutory Igbo family. Besides, the Igbo are intrinsically; naturally cum eminently religious hence even their migration dexterity had been underscored by Okoro (2022) as being spiritually and supernaturally inclined, thus a divine mandate. The Igbo people's migration prowess hinges on obeying this divine instruction. This should spur the Igbo people on holding tenaciously to their culture wherever they are located because their culture and its peculiarities cum complexities exists as an act of God and should be preserved along with being sustained and transmitted across generations.

The significance of *Obi or Ngwuru* in Igbo land

Ngwuru (family homestead) retains various importances in the Igbo cosmology. From the works of Uchendu (1965), Okafor (1992), Ogbukagu (2008) and Nwokoye and Chukwurah (2021) along with O. Nwachukwu, V. Nwafor, S. Onuegbu, E. Okoli and I. Onuekwusi (personal communication, 27th December, 2023), the significance of *Ngwuru* (family homestead) are as follows:

- It is at the *Obi or Ngwuru* that the compound head or “*Onye nwe ezi (obi)*” or “*onye isi Ngwuru*” resides. A high degree of harmony and order is achieved through the respected office of the compound head.
- All the members of a peculiar family recognize the full authority of the compound head and are expected to consult him before taking a major political, official or traditional title. This posits that no member of a distinct family can be ascribed a traditional title or take one, or run for a political office without the recommendation and endorsement of the compound head. This must be undertaken at the *Obi or Ngwuru* (family homestead).
- Various traditional functions are performed strictly at the *Obi or Ngwuru* and they include among others, settlement of matrimonial cases; conferment of special names on each child born in the compound; payment of dowry on any female member of the family as well as retrieval of dowry referred to as “*Ikwughachi Ngo*” on any case of a dissolved or dissolution of marriage; scheduling of burial dates and funeral rites planning; and the announcement of the death of a family member both male family members and *Umu Ada*” (female family members that were married off to other villages and towns).

- The *Obi* or *Ngwuru* represents the seat of the dwelling place of the gods and ancestral spirits where numerous rituals, moral and legal obligations are executed. It is there that the compound head offers sacrifice for the welfare of his family members, whom he helps to extricate from their ritual, social and legal difficulties.
- The *Obi* or *Ngwuru* serves as the burial place for all the family members, thus a peculiar *Obi* or *Ngwuru* may be the burial place for the parents and grandparents up to the great grandparents in succession. It is perceived as both the physical and spiritual seat of the Ancestors.
- The *Obi* or *Ngwuru* with its resident compound head serves as a shield of protection and the wall or fence surrounding each distinct Igbo family.
- The family “*Ofo*” and “*Ogu*” (beacon of light, truth and staff of office) along with the *Ikenga* (an image of a deity that directs each particular family members) or a cross or crucifix in the case of a Christian, are kept at *obi*.
- Every Igbo family traces their origin via the primogenitary inheritance of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* in every generation, lineage or pedigree. At the death of the family or compound head, the eldest son or the immediate eldest male member of the family automatically takes his position apposite to the peculiarity of the situation.

Implications of Neglecting the *Obi* (Family Homestead) in Igboland

In the contemporary Igbo family, some eldest sons who inherit the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* neglect or violate it in the following ways: selling it off as a result of obsession for quick wealth and gluttony; negligence; urbanization; migration; globalization; individualism; complex issues; superstitious beliefs and indifferent character disposition. Some even give it away at will as they do not perceive its paramount and pristine significance. The following constitutes the socio-religious implications of neglecting the *Obi* or *Ngwuru*:

- It is an action that brings shame and disgrace on the legacy of the parents and forebears: A land that the forebears strived to retain and sustain over generations should not be abandoned nor sold off. It should rather be occupied and new structures built while renovating old structures that require such. It is sheer act of irresponsibility to sell such revered landed properties in Igbo land.
- Families or first sons that discards, sells off, abandons and neglects the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* are regarded as “*Akaliogoli* or *ofogoli*” (that is hooligans and wayward nonentities): They lose respect in the Igbo society and amongst their kinsmen. They are perceived as reckless and rash individuals.

- It is tantamount to the desecration of the burial place of a peculiar family forbear. This brings about curses on the remaining members of the family. V. Nwafor, F. Nwoye and E. Chukwuogo (personal communication, 27th December, 2023) insist that restitution and consecration must be appropriated before such curse will be lifted from such a family.
- The family or sons guilty of neglecting their *Obi* or *Ngwuru* often lose vital official positions in the Igbo society: They may equally be denied of taking traditional and chieftaincy titles since they are perceived as irresponsible, social outcasts and infidels.
- The enlarged family may start living in disharmony, disunity, chaos and disorientation: The *Obi* or *Ngwuru* has a peculiar mode of instilling into the others sons of the family that must have erected their various family homes at other places or lands that they have acquired for themselves and their distinct families, the understanding along with the high regard that the eldest son must be obeyed, adored, respected and honoured voluntarily, willingly, passionately and unconditionally. This facilitates living in solidarity and harmony. Again, the younger generation may no longer be conversant with the core values, quality and sound teachings that aid in the moral rectitude and formation of the Igbo individuals.
- The neglect of *Obi* or *Ngwuru* implies a violation and desecration of the sacred family groove; such family may be stripped of their spiritual coverage, protection including identity: They will no longer possess the Altar where they make oblations and sacrifices for their family well-being, including soliciting for protection from the gods and ancestors. The family will be left susceptible and vulnerable to tragedy, uncertainties, failures and misfortune.
- The younger generations may be unable to trace their family root, origin cum nativity and thereby become ignorant of their family history: Younger generations should be able to trace their paternity and nativity. Neglecting of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* leads to obscurity in tracing individual's historicity or genealogy. Isaiah 51:1 of the bible remarks that one should be able to trace one's origin in the process of solving basic foundational problems especially hereditary ones associated with the genes.
- One of the problems of Africans and the Igbo people in particular is being careless over the upholding and subsequent transmission of family and general cultural heritage: Being reckless, nonchalant and inept in upholding family traditional heritage brings about anomie, chaos and various anomalies in the

society as youngsters exhibit attitudes and behaviors alien to the core values of the Igbo societies. Various strands of intimidations the African societies are facing in the global perspective in the contemporary world is as a result of the inability to preserve their culture, maintain their originality, resist undue influence and define their priorities. Maintaining ones originality and heritage aids in withstanding intimidation and deception. The Igbo societies must hold tenaciously to the traditional heritage of revering and maintenance of the family *Obi* or *Ngwuru*. This will foster the “brotherhood” Igbo ideology as well as the “think home” Igbo philosophy stance; wherein everyone attempts to invest in their ancestral home town along with making every effort to assist their relations in succeeding in life, thereby actualizing common social welfare and stability of all.

- It is an abomination and a taboo in the Igbo society to discard, abandon and neglect the *Obi* or *Ngwuru*. The *Ngwuru* represents the family fortress and crucible for moral formation and personal grooming. All that a peculiar family stands for is connected to the *Obi* or *Ngwuru*. Neglecting the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* is like destroying a nation’s state house.

Restoration, Redemption and Rededication of the Obi in Igbo Families

In the face of the violation and desecration of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* by selling it off or abandoning it to strangers; E. Chukwuogo, V. Nwafor, O. Nwankwo, A. Nwankwo and I. Charlie Ngwo (personal communication, December 28th, 2023) expatiate that the restoration, redemption along with the rededication cum re-consecration of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* is referred to as “*Ijunata Obi* or *Ngwuru*”. This means that the family involved should set aside another place to be revered as the new *Obi* or *Ngwuru*. The processes involved in “*Ijunata Obi* or *Ngwuru*” especially in the situation where the family’s forbears had been buried at the violated *Obi* or *Ngwuru* are as follows:

- The family involved must first acknowledge their error and its gravity: They must acknowledge that they have committed an abomination and a taboo. This show of taking responsibility of their error must be undertaken by every member of that peculiar family and not just the particular eldest son that discarded it not minding the means. The family involved must show remorse for such atrocious act of irresponsibility. By so doing, the stage is set for them to obtain mercy from their forebears along with the members of that peculiar Igbo community.
- The family will procure another portion of land to be rededicated and re-consecrated as their new *Obi* or *Ngwuru*: They will set aside a new portion of land wherein they intend earmarking as their new *Obi* or *Ngwuru*. This may be an

already existing land inherited by any member of the family or a new portion of land acquired for the sole aim of hallowing it as the *Obi* or *Ngwuru*.

- The entire family members will go to the abandoned, discarded or neglected *Obi* or *Ngwuru* and appease their progenitors buried therein; and then reclaim their burial places by their confessions: This does not necessarily require any sacrificial offerings, stipulated traditional incantations or any form of peculiar traditional rites according to Agbani, Ifite-Awka people as explicated by O. Nwankwo, A. Nwankwo and V. Nwafor (personal communication, December 31st, 2023). The representatives of the family members will go to the very portion where their progenitors were buried and declare the acceptance of their foibles and solecisms in abandoning the place; confess repentance and ask for forgiveness; and then request for the spiritual retrieval of their bodies for transfer to the new *Obi* or *Ngwuru* site for burial and as their permanent burial ground henceforth.
- They are required to collect small quantity of sand from the original *Obi* or *Ngwuru* as they go: The family members will collect small portion of sand from the burial site at that original *Obi* or *Ngwuru* to be placed at the new site.
- The family members will now ordain the new site as their proper *Obi* or *Ngwuru* henceforth: This ordination simply involves the re-consecration and rededication of the new site with their oral confession as their *Obi* or *Ngwuru* proper. They will then pour the sand collected from the initial *Obi* or *Ngwuru* at the new site and declare it inviolable, sacrosanct and sacred.
- They will then hold a feast to mark the event a memorable one: The members of the family will end the process with a get-together feast or party. They may invite others if they so desire.

It is however worthy to underscore that the Ogidi people require some stipulated sacrifice in the process of redemption, restoration and rededication of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru*. M. Nwocha of Ire, Ogidi (personal communication, December 29th, 2023) being a core Igbo traditionalist gives detailed information in that regards viz: It is an *Alu* (an abomination) to sell off, abandon, neglect, discard and violate the sanctity of *Obi* or *Ngwuru* in any form. There are traditional ritual cleansings that must be appropriated; which involves “*ikpu alu*” and “*Ajana ikpochi ebe ahu*”. “*Aga ekpochi onunu*” (covering of abominable deep pits or chasm created by the abomination of violation of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru*). “*Aga akpotu ya, gbuere ya Ewu ma obu Ehi ka obi nwere di ha mma*” (appeasing the ancestral spirits with killing of cow or goat as the case may be). In the process of “*Ikpu alu*”, “*Onye Nri ma obu Adama*” will carry it out. *Aga agba afa* (making of divinations to

determine whether the “*Ikpu alu*” will be carried out by “*Onye Nri*” or “*Adama*”). Abomination is in levels. The divination will determine whether it will be cow or goat. It may even require live cow or goat to be buried or burying their heads alone depending on what is discovered during the divination. “*Ndi Ichie na Ndi nna anyi ha di na udi na udi; ike ha di na awaja na awaja* (The ancestral spirits operate in different modes; their rank of powers equally differs, and can only be determined via divination to know the actual mode and process of sacrifice). They will apportion a parcel of land for the *Ngwuru* or *Obi*; that is where they will perform both the sacrifices, oblations and all the ritual processes (*Ikpotu ana, ikpochi onunu, iwa ana na ichu aja*). They will now tell the ancestral spirits that therein will be their permanent resting, dwelling and burial ground; and also that therein is the proper *Obi* or *Ngwuru* thereafter.

Conclusion

This study has examined the Igbo family structure, the essence of *Obi* or *Ngwuru* in Igbo land; the significance of *Obi* or *Ngwuru* in Igbo land; the socio-religious implications of selling off cum violating the sacredness of the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* in the Igbo cosmology; and the modes of restoration, redemption cum re-dedication of a desecrated *Obi* or *Ngwuru*. The study does not claim to have exhausted all that are pertinent to the topic. There is room for further research especially in the area of reasons that stimulates the neglect and violation of the Igbo family tradition and cultural heritage in contemporary times. It is obvious that the sanctity of the Igbo family cultural heritage should be upheld since there is nothing abysmal or despicable attached to it. Every human setting wields their peculiar cultural heritage even in the biblical records of the Israeli people. These cultural heritages must be sustained and transmitted to the younger generations because it defines each people and shapes their perspective, potentials, attitudes and attainments. The Igbo people should be proud of their cultural heritage and origin. Discarding one’s culture is like denying one’s true essence for the perpetual futile pursuit of shadows. The younger Igbo generations should be nurtured on the Igbo peculiarities. Various acts of indecency endemic amongst the Igbo youngsters accrue from ignorance and being oblivious of the Igbo core values rooted in their family traditions and cultural heritage.

Recommendations

This study proffers the following recommendations pertinent to its peculiar findings:

1. Globalization, urbanization, migration and individualism should not constitute a problem to the sustenance and transmission of the Igbo family cultural values and heritage to the younger generations. It should rather facilitate its prospects. Igbo

people should endeavor to identify with one another and form solid bond and small community wherein they emphasize “think home philosophy”, “brotherhood” and keeping in line with one’s peculiar cultural roots and nativity wherever they are located.

2. Today, it is obvious that the internet has reduced the world to a global “dining table”. Information communication and digital technology cum all associated with internet digitalization and social media should be used as an advantage for the upholding, sustenance and propagation of the Igbo family cultural values to youngsters. The entire Igbo community both home and in diasporas must get connected to social media platforms and continue to communicate themselves as well as promoting the Igbo cultural values and heritage via such means.
3. Religious groups in Igbo-land should prioritize on promoting their distinct tenets of religion rather than condemning Igbo cultural values and heritage. The words “culture and tradition” has been corrupted by some religious group that they appear synonymous with evil. The major setbacks including various societal ills the Igbo communities are experiencing today are completely rooted to negligence of their core cultural values and heritage. Culture and tradition are one’s origin and represents who one is and where one hails from.
4. Adults in the Igbo enclaves should re-introduce and encourage storytelling and oral history to pass down Igbo cultural narratives, traditions and values.
5. The use of Igbo language at home, schools, and community settings should be promoted to ensure its continuity. These will equally heighten the interest of the younger generations in all associated with Igbo peculiarities.
6. Religious groups in Igbo-land should be promoting the good aspects of the Igbo culture and traditions especially all connected to one’s peculiar family roots.
7. Parents should encourage their young ones to be participating in festivals and gatherings that exposit Igbo traditional practices and values. Igbo communities should endeavor to be organizing such relevant cultural events.
8. Igbo cultural studies should be introduced into the formal education of institutions located within Igbo communities, for the purpose of creating awareness and understanding among the younger generations apposite to the Igbo family cultural and traditional norms cum values.
9. Conversations between people of various generational gaps (like between adults and youths) should be facilitated to bridge the gap and exchange perspectives on Igbo family traditional cultural values and heritage.
10. The internet digital technology and platforms should be utilized by the Igbo people in sharing their distinct cultural contents, stories and moral lessons especially via special online platforms that attracts and appeals to youngsters.

References

- Afigbo, A. (1981). *Ropes of sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. Ibadan: Caxton.
- Areji, S.O. (2022). Migration, family Values and Continuity: A study of Igbo Diaspora in Italy. *International Journal of Migration and Gloval Studies (IJMES) TetFund*, 2, (2), 106-126. <https://ijmgs.nou.edu.ng/volume-2-number-2/>.
- Berry, J. W. (2004). Acculturation. *Science Direct Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/acculturation>.
- Cole, N.L. (2019, November 8). Understanding Acculturation and why it happens. *Science, Tech, Math-Social Sciences: Thought Co*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/acculturation.definition-3026039>.
- Eze, E. (2012). *The implications of rapid development on the Igbo sense of communication*. Masters Degree Thesis Submitted to the Departments of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Ezea, M.U. (2015). Transforming Society through Igbo Cultural values: The Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the 21st century. *World Educators Forum*, 7, (1), 1-16. <https://www.globalacademicgroup.com/journals/world%20educators%20forum/MARCEL%ugwu.pdf>.
- Igwe, P.A., & Amoncar, N. et al. (2020). Keeping it in the family: Exploring Igbo ethnic entrepreneurial behaviour in Nigeria. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, 26, (1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBr-12.2017-0492>.
- Ikegwuonu, C.N. (2015). Enhancing and learning of the Igbo language through Information Communication Technology (ICT): Best practice for sustainability. *Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages (AJILL)*, 9, 57-70. <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/index.php/ajill/article/download/152/131>.
- Isidien, C.I. (2015). The Family as the Bedrock of Igbo Traditional Society. *JMEL- Journal of Modern European Languages and Literatures*, 4, 119-128. <https://www.jmel.com.ng>.
- Jacob, L.M. (2020). Acculturation. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*. Hackensack, New Jersey.
- Madu, E.J. & Umuanolue, I.L. (2018). The Cosmological Matrix of Igbo family structure and its transcendental reality in Igbo traditional religion. *Preorajah*, 3, (2), 19-41. <https://journals-ezenwaohaeto-c.org/index.php/preo-cjah/article/download/03-2-0002/pdf>.
- Madukasi, F.C. (2021). OBU: The sacred Homestead for Ancestor Veneration in Igbo Traditional Religion. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJCISS)*, 5, (1), 2454-6186. <https://rsisinternational.org/sacred-homestead-for-ancestor-veneration-in-igbo-traditionap-religion/>.
- Mgbemena, S.C. & Muonwe, M. (2021). Effects of Modernity on Family and Pattern of parenting in Igbo land. *OCHENDO: An African Journal of Innovative Studies*, 2, (1), 235-246. <https://www.acjol.org/index.php/ochendo/article/view/3057/3011>.
- MOTUN 911. (2019, September 13). *Igbo Law of Succession*. <https://motun911.wordpress.com/2019/09/13/igbo-law-of-succession/>
- Nwala, T.U. (1985). *Igbo Philosophy*. Ikeja: Literamed.
- Nwokoye, C. & Chukwurah, C. (2021). *Omenanana Odinana Nri: A Compendium of Nri Cultures, Customs and Traditions*. Awka: Scoa Heritage.

- Ogbukagu, I.N.T. (2008). *Traditional Igbo Beliefs and Practices: A Study on the Culture and people of Adazi-Nnukwu*. Enugu: Snaap.
- Okafor, E.N. (2016). The Concept of Igbo Spirituality and Environment. *Prajna Vihara*, 17, (2), 145-162. Assumption University Thailand.
- Okoli, A.& Ujumadu, V. et al. (2021, July 21). Extended family system in Igbo land has great advantages, but is it sustainable? *Vanguard*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2021/07/extended-family-system-in-igbo-land-has-great-advantages-but-is-it-sustainable/amp/>.
- Okoro, K. (2022). Igbo: A conventional or a mobile Nation? Interrogating the Igbo People's Migration Dexterity. *Asian Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies* 5, (1), 1-12. <https://www.ikprres.org/index/php/AJAASS/article/view/7570>.
- Onwuatiegwu, I.N. (2020). The Notion of Family in Igbo African Society: A Philosophical Appraisal. *European Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religions Studies*, 4, (1), 17-25. www.ajpojournals.org
- Onyemelukwe, C. (2015). Inheritance and Ownership Among the Igbo. *Presentation at 4th Annual Igbo Conference SOAS University of London, April 17-18, 2015*. <https://catherineonyemelukwe.com/publications/inheritance-land-ownership-among-igbo/>
- Schwartz, S.J. & Unger, J.B. (2010). Biculturalism and context: What is Biculturalism, and when is it Adaptive? *Human Development*, 53, (1), 26-32. Doi:10.1159/0002-68137
- Slattery, K. (2010). *The Igbo People: Origin and History*. Masters Degree in Modern Literary Studies, Queens University, Belfast. <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=2406713>.
- Uchendu, V.C. (1965). *The Igbo Southeast Nigeria*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Uchendu, V.C. (2007). Ezi Na Ulo: The Extended family in Igbo Civilization. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 31, (1-3), 167-219. <https://journals.scholarsportal.info/details/03044092/v3i1-3/67-envtefiic.xml18sub=all>
- Ufearoh, A. (2010). Ezi-Na-Ulo and Umunna: In search of democratic ideals in Traditional Igbo family. *OGIRISI: A new Journal of African Studies*, 7, 94-105. Doi:10.4314.org.v7i1-57926.<https://www.ajo/.info/index.php/og/article/view/57926/46292>.
- Umu Igbo unite Los Angeles. (2018, February 3). *The Igbo family structure.Culture + Connections*.<https://www.uivolsangeles.org/post/the-igbo-family-structure-1>.
- Worthy, L.D. & Lavigne, T. et al. (2020). Berry's Model of Acculturation. *Culture and Psychology.MARICOP.A COMMUNITY COLLEGES*. <https://open.maricopa.edu/culturepsychology/chapter/berrys-model-of-acculturation/>.
- Zort, C. & Karabacak, E. et al. (2023).Sharing of cultural values and heritage through storytelling in the digital age.*Frontiers in Psychology*, 14.<https://typeset.io/papers/ sharing-of-cultural-values-and-heritage-through-storytelling-3gnvxkvv>.