

OGBU CHI AND WOMANHOOD AMONG THE IGBO

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Introduction

The Igbo traditional society has the belief in one supreme God who they call Chi Ukwu which means the Great God, the Highest God, and the Omnipotent God. It is then believed that because of the greatness of this particular God (Chi), there should be some smaller gods through which they reach this big master. It is then also believed that these smaller gods would be the servants of this great master and then through them, they reach the mighty master, likened to the Igbo idea and system of monarchy in which they believe that every king must have servants and attendants. In the same vein, they arranged their pattern of traditional worship to be in line with having smaller gods through which they reach their master. So, they have Ogwugwu, Udo, Agwu, and a host of others. Apart from all these, they still have the need to have and maintain personal gods. For this, they use some sacred trees such as ogbu, oha, Ogirisi, Echichirii, Ngwu, Akpu and others to represent these personal gods. Of all these, the women make use of ogbu to represent their chi hence, the ogbu chi.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, Modernity and Christianity seem to have truncated the reverence of Ogbu Chi as a representation of personal god. Through this modernity, Christianity is trying to overshadow and completely abolish the Ogbu chi and a lot of traditional heritage which invariably has also negatively affected the use of Ogbu chi.

Purpose of the Study

The study intended to examine how Modernity and Christianity truncated the reverence of Ogbu Chi as a representation of personal god among the Igbo. It also studied the adverse effects of apathy of women in traditional religious worship in the recognition of the worship of personal god represented by the sacred and religious Ogbu tree. This work investigated how the harmful human activities like felling of trees to erect structures in family compounds have impeded the institution and prosperity of Ogbu chi. The study evaluated how natural disasters like flooding and erosion in flooding and erosion prone areas have destroyed this sacred Ogbu tree. Finally, the study also investigated the traditional worship and reverence to Ogbu chi by women in traditional religion in Umunri in Njikoka Local Government Area and Ikem in Anambra East Local Government Area in the Pre-colonial days.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was delimited to the four towns that make up the Umunri which include: Nri, Enugu-Ukwu, Nawfia and Enugu-Agidi in Njikoka Local Government Area and Ikem in

Anambra East Local Government Area. These two different Local Government Areas really gave an insight into the Igbo traditional belief in Ọgbụ chi.

Research Questions

The following research questions formed the driving guide to the study.

1. What is the meaning of Ọgbụ Chi in Umunri and Ikem?
2. What is the process of Irata/Irota/Imawata Chi in Umunri and Ikem?
3. How is Ọgbụ chi Managed and cared for?
4. What is the Relevance of Ọgbụ Chi to Womanhood in Umunri and Ikem?
5. What is the current attitude of women towards Irata chi and possession of Ọgbụ chi in Umunri and Ikem after the advent of Christianity?

The meaning of Chi

Just as a renowned scholar, a seasoned educationist, Prof. Alex O. Anedo of Ikem has it: “in the Igbo traditional belief, it is acknowledged that whoever comes into the world has his personal god (chi) who sent him to reincarnate in two, three or more persons at a time.” This means that the person who reincarnates someone is one who has died and would wish to come to the world to live his life again. This again means that the person is represented on earth physically and in the land of the spirit spiritually. The belief is that the replica in the spirit world controls the affairs of the physical in the physical realm. Hence, the Igbo expression- *chi onye adighi n'izu, ihe a naghị eme ya, ebe onye dara ka chi ya kwaturu ya, onye kwe chi ya ekwe*, among others. When one has met a lot of oppressions in his time or a lot of hard times, difficulties and obstacles and unfulfilled destiny, it is believed that when he comes the second time (reincarnates), he would avenge (in case of oppression), make tremendous progress and success (in case of difficulties and obstacles) and make amends (in case of unfulfilled destiny). It is then found out that when the person appears again to fulfill this unfulfilled destiny or make amends and the physical representation goes contrary to this bidding, the physical body would start having problems. It is only the diviner, (*dibia afa*) on consultation, will clear this mystery.

Ultimately, it is believed that, the one in the spirit is the personal god (chi) of the one in the physical in form of reincarnation. According to Prof. Anedo, it is believed that the chi is the representation of the physical body in the land of the spirit who stands to argue the case of or mediate for the physical body which prompts the Igbo saying- *ihe chi onye amaghị, a naghị eme, onye buru chi ya ụzọ, ọ gbagbue onwe ya n'ọsọ*. It is obvious that a man's chi has a special hold over him such that no other spirit or powers can control. He reincarnates to avenge, in form of a personal chi, on those who maltreated him in his first life and avoids having anything to do with these former enemies which the Igbo calls ‘*nsọ chi*’. If this physical body does not do this ‘*nsọ chi*’ to avenge on his personal chi by avoiding those who maltreated him in his first life but starts intermingling with those enemies of his personal god, the personal god can punish him severely in any form which only the diviner (*dibia afa*) can unravel and work for the atonement.

According to “Chi in Igbo Religion and thought; the God in every man”-jstor, chi is an enigmatic concept in Igbo and this has given rise to various interpretations and translations of its meaning by scholars. Chi has been interpreted as the Igbo personal life force, guardian angel, creator, companion, individual providence proportioned out of principle. It is also interpreted as a person's deity- identity in the spirit land which complements his human identity. Chief Jude Nwankwo Okonkwo (83 years) of Uruakor, Nawfia; 14th April, 2023 said that chi is somebody's life force.

It is the energy that gives life to all humans. He therefore spoke in one voice with Prophet Dr Ikechukwu Kenneth Okafor, Orumili Atuora of Enugu-Ukwu who also maintained that chi is someone's life force. Chief Nnatu Nwaelom, Oloolo n'Igbi, Ikem (80 years) on 12th Feb, 2022 also maintained that chi is a person's life wire who directs and controls a person's destiny. Mrs. Akayana Ovuelo (62 years), Mrs. Nwaagbo Udeegu (76 years) both of Ikem Anambra East L.G.A. (12th Feb, 2022) and Mrs. Catherine Obiageli Okonkwo (72 years) of Urualor, Nawfia, Njikoka L.G.A all from Anambra State maintained that chi is a personal god and guardian angel. Chief Emenike Ikegbunem (Uzuakpundu) aged 84 of Akamkpisi, Nri of Umunri and a retired librarian of University of Nigeria, Nsukka on 16th October 2023 also confirmed that chi is a personal god. Finally, Ozo Fredrick Onubuogu (Ozo Oke-eke) aged 82 and a retired staff of Enugu State Forest Reserve Department of Enugu-Agidi also lent a voice to the above resource persons to consolidate that every human being has a personal god.

The meaning of Ogbu

According to some of the resource persons, Prophet Ikechukwu Kenneth Okafor, Orimili Atuora Enugu-Ukwu, Ogbu is a religious tree in Igbo land. Mrs Nwaagbo Udeegu (76years) of Ikem also maintained that Ogbu is a sacred tree used in Igbo traditional religious worship popularly by women in their husband's homes. She stated that Ogbu is symbolic through which these women have access to their chi. it is one of the religious trees that are used for Igbo traditional religious worship. It is a tree that can survive all adverse conditions and has a very long life span and this is why it is called "death never kills" - "onwu egbu." The seed of this particular ogbu tree can survive on top of any other tree like the palm tree, oil bean tree, iroko tree and others when it is dropped by birds, bats which usually storm on the ripe seeds day and night. He further stated that there are three types of ogbu tree which are:

- a. Ogbu Igbo or Ogbu Udene
- b. Ogbu Oyibo
- c. Ogbu Okooko

The Ogbu Igbo or Ogbu Udene is the one that can survive all sorts of adverse conditions and which ripe seeds can germinate and grow on other trees. This Ogbu Igbo/ Ogbu Udene seeds germinate on these other trees and send their veins, via these host trees to the soil for survival. Most times, these host trees, like the oil bean, wither and die but the ogbu tree takes full possession of the host's stump and continues to survive having out-lived the host tree. This is one of the sterling qualities of this religious tree which makes it survive for generations. The Ogbu can even start sprouting producing fresh shoots from its roots to form more trees. Because of its strong nature and longevity, it is called "death never kills" – onwu egbu" (as mentioned earlier). This is the only Ogbu that can be used for traditional religious worship. It has a unique dark green broad leaves and smooth edges with usual veins. This is the particular ogbu that is used for Ogbu chi. The Ogbu oyibo has no relevance in Igbo traditional religion and so is never recognized. The Ogbu 'okooko' is the one used for ornamentation in the environment as okooko in Igbo means flower. It is used for hedges and beautification of family compounds, offices and parks.

Meaning of Ogbu chi

According to Mrs Nwaagbo Udeegu (76years) of Ikem Ogbu is a religious tree used in Igbo traditional religious worship popularly by women in their husband's homes. She stated that Ogbu

is symbolic through which these women have access to their chi, She emphatically added that the Ogbu chi is conspicuously venerated during the period of Alomchi ceremony when the woman's in-laws and her daughters whom she has given out in marriage honour her invitation to the Alomchi ceremony. They drop all the gifts they brought for her ranging from tubers of yams, goats, pieces of cloths, and others at the foot of the sacred Ogbu tree. Mrs. Catherine Obiageli Okonkwo (72 years) of Uruakor, Nawfia equally added that apart from the sacred Ogbu tree, through which these women reach their chi, they can also have an effigy that represents their spirit incarnate put beside the sacred Ogbu tree to also invoke their spirit incarnate to join in the worship of the sacred Ogbu which represents their chi.

This religious tree called Ogbu becomes a sacred tree after its institution on the altar (Irata/Irota chi) of the personal god. That gives it the name "Ogbu chi." Because chi is a central point in psychology, thought and belief of .The Igbo, people recognize it as being responsible for their wealth and prosperity, life and health, success and failure and for all their fortunes and misfortunes. In general, controller of their life affairs. Ogbu chi is therefore a physical representation of a person's spirit incarnate which is the person's chi instituted in altar which the woman venerates intermittently as her chi.

The Process of Irata Chi in Umunri and Ikem

In some cases, the day a girl gets married, her husband gives her father or her father's kinsmen (if the father was late) a hen and some tubers of yam. As she leaves for her husband's home, her father kills the hen and cooks it with the yams to appease her personal god. A ceremony called "Akwali Omumu" is performed during the process. It is a feast of fertility performed for the girl to appease her personal chi to open her womb and bless her with children. The next morning, the chicken lap is taken to the girl in her husband's home and she must eat it. Through this process, the girl has been initiated or introduced to her personal god. Subsequently, during her married life and she starts witnessing some adverse conditions like difficulties in child bearing, sickness, setbacks and others, she takes up the process of Irata chi, Ime Ekwe or Imawata chi.

To do the Imawata chi, the woman in question can get the two slim branches from her own mother's Ogbu chi. If her mother is dead, she then starts checking around the village to get the closest sister who also came from her kinsmen from whose Ogbu chi she would take hers. Women do not procure this Ogbu chi carelessly but gets from the best of Umuada who have integrity and goodwill because it is like a good `seed`. Orimili Atuorah and Nwankwo Okonkwo of Umunri also confirmed the claims of Nwaagbo Udeego and Akayana Ovuelo of Ikem that the Imawata chi must be from an Nze of acknowledged integrity or a benevolent shrine because the Ogbu chi is seen as a god and no woman would like to bring a malevolent spirit into her house and so, they usually go for the best of `seeds`.

Items needed for Irata chi/Ime ekwe/Imawata chi/ Ido chi

A woman who wants to do Irata chi, Ime ekwe or Imawata chi or Ido chigoes with these items: A cock and a hen if her parents are still living. The cock is for the father while the hen is for the mother and/or a goat depending on the person's financial status. Some tubers of yam. One bottle or one gallon of red oil. One gallon or four gallons of nkwenu. These items are presented and to the altar of the chi and eventually are cooked and people present and the invitees eat and drink. It is usually a very big ceremony. Then, the woman goes home to install her own Ogbu chi after this

ceremony. Her guests give her a lot of gift items which are: The two slim branches of the sacred religious Ọgbụ tree. Any other type of gift items at their disposal are packed in her long basket (ukpa/abo) which she carries home. When she gets home, a traditionalist who also comes from her father's kinsmen with her, institutes the altar of the Ọgbụ chi.

It was found out that in Igbo traditional religion, a man can have Ọgbụ chi. A woman can equally have Ọgbụ chi. Before a man installs Ọgbụ chi for instance, he must have married and acquired some traditional titles like igba agụ ibu amanwūrū, ịdọ obere chi and ịdọ nnukwu chi before he becomes qualified for ịdọ Ọgbụ chi. According to Prophet Dr. Ikechukwu Kenneth Okafor, Orimili Atuora of Enugu-Ukwu, (58 years) ịdọ Ọgbụ chi is usually a very big ceremony and relations, friends and well-wishers are invited. But this study particularly is based on Ọgbụ chi and womanhood

As soon as a woman marries, her people do not hesitate to negotiate and arrange for her chi to go along with her to her husband's home because of the invaluable roles that are noted the chi plays for her in her husband's home. For instance, Emecheta, Buchi (1982 p.30) confirms this fact when she added among all other things Agbadi, her father, packed for her was a new and more beautiful; effigy of the slave woman who was her chi was made and placed on top of all Nnu Ego's possession, to guard her against any evil eye..." Agbadi, Nnu Ego's father, thought it very necessary to include the effigy of the slave woman who reincarnated in Nnu Ego among other gift items he has prepared to bequeath to her daughter as she leaves for her husband's home.

In the Igbo traditions and customs, a woman usually has Ọgbụ chi. In Ikem, it is called Irata chi or Ime Ekwe while in Umunri it is called Ịdọ chi or imawata chi. According to Mrs. Nwaagbo Udegū (72 yrs) and Mrs. Akayana Ovuelo (62yrs) all of Ikem (12th Feb, 2022), a woman can start negotiating for the process of Irata chi or Ime Ekwe after she must have given birth to children in her husband's home. She may have started encountering some family problems or difficulties in her marriage and a diviner who was consulted may have advised her to have an Ọgbụ chi. The essence is to have her chi with her to whom she can readily consult in times of difficulty and who will always guide and guard her and members of her family. The woman in question starts checking around her village to get the closest sister who also came from her kinsmen whose Ọgbụ chi she would take hers from. Women do not get this Ọgbụ chi anyhow but get from the best of umuada who have integrity and goodwill because it is like getting a good 'seed'. Orimili Atuorah and Nwankwo Okonkwo of Umunri also confirmed that the Imawata chi must be from an Nze of acknowledged integrity or benevolent shrine because the Ọgbụ chi is seen as god and no woman would like to bring a malevolent spirit into her house and so, they usually go for the best of 'seed'.

In some cases, the day a girl gets married, her husband gives her father or her father's kinsmen (if the father was late) a hen and some tubers of yam. As she leaves for her husband's home, her father kills the hen and cooks it with the yams to appease her personal god. A ceremony called "Akwalī Omumu" is performed during the process. It is a feast of fertility performed for the girl to appease her personal chi to open her womb and bless her with children. The next morning, the chicken lap is taken to the girl in her husband's home and she must eat it. Through this process, the girl has been initiated or introduced to her personal god. Subsequently, during her married life and she starts witnessing some adverse conditions like difficulties in child bearing, sickness, setbacks and others, she takes up the process of Irata chi, Ime Ekwe or Imawata chi.

A little variation was met in Nri in the course of this study. according to Chief Emenike Ikegbunem, the women in traditional religion in Nri use the Ora/Oha tree in for *Ido chi* instead of the usual *Ogbu chi* as is the case in Enugwu-Ukwu, Nawfia, Enugwu-Agidi and Ikem in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Items needed for Irata chi/Ime ekwe/Imawata chi/ Ido chi

A woman who wants to do Irata chi, Ime ekwe or Imawata chi or *Ido chi* goes with these items: A cock or a goat depending on the person's financial status. Some tubers of yam. One bottle or one gallon of red oil. One gallon or four gallons of Upwine (Nkwenu). These items are presented and to the altar of the chi and eventually are cooked and people present the invitees eat and drink. It is usually a very big ceremony. Then, the woman goes home very late in the evening to install her own *Ogbu chi* after this ceremony. Her guests give her a lot of gift items which are: The two slim branches of the sacred religious *Ogbu* tree. Any other type of gift items at their disposal are packed in her long basket (ukpa/abo) which she carries home. When she gets home, a traditionalist who also comes from her father's kinsmen with her, institutes the altar of the *Ogbu chi*.

The Installation of Ogbu chi in Umunri and Ikem.

According to Prophet Dr. Ikechukwu Kenneth Okafor, Orimili Atuora of Enugu-Ukwu na Umunri aged 58 (25th April, 2022), some items are brought together to institute this altar. An Nze or an amiable traditionalist gathers these items: two tiny branches of the *Ogbu* tree which have been sunned for three days, nzu ikenga, nzu ezumeezu, nzu ezenwaanyi, dadaani ura, ejite (the stubborn grass), miracle leaves (do as I say leaves), mkpume mmiri or a good mkpume elu ala washed thoroughly with alligator pepper because of its continuity's an egg from a local hen and a day old chick and a bowl of water.

It was found out that in Igbo traditional religion, a man can have *Ogbu chi* and a woman can also have *Ogbu chi*. Before a man installs *Ogbu chi*, all the resource persons confirmed that he must have married and acquired some traditional titles like igba agu, ibu amanwuru, *ido obere chi* and *ido nnukwu chi* before he becomes qualified to *ido Ogbu chi*. According to Prophet Ikechukwu Kenneth Okafor, Orimili Atuora of Enugwu-Ukwu, *ido Ogbu chi* is usually a very big ceremony and relations, friends and well-wishers are invited. But yhis study particularly based on *Ogbu chi* and womanhood.

Still on the findings of this study, before a woman begets *Ogbu chi* she must have given birth in her husband's family. In other words, a barren woman does not beget *Ogbu chi* because she has no chi yet. In Umunri the woman can install *Ogbu chi* when the daughters must have gotten married or still earlier in life or when she must have reached the age of menopause but must have done Iyom title taking or igu Aha. But a woman who has not got a child, can do *Ido Mkpume chi*; a ceremony of instituting her altar silently at the corner of her homestead where she would still want to have her permanent *Ogbu chi* when the time comes. Subsequently while installing this stone on the altar, a lot of people are called to hold the stone as it is gradually planted, this is to bring together the souls of people to the stone that is planted at the altar of the chi. This altar invariably becomes the heart of the compound. All the ceremonies done by that woman are done at the altar. Most times the crumbs and left-overs of food are allowed to stay overnight at that altar to make

sure the spirits to whom those sacrifices are offered had feasted on them (Chief Emenike Ikegbunem).

This ceremony of *Ido Mkpume chi* still serves as the institution of the woman's altar even without the symbolic traditional religious tree. This serves the same purpose as the *Okwu chi*. On this altar, she performs all her rituals and traditional functions like *Alomchi* ceremony. The resource persons made it clear that some these women in our Igbo traditional religion can still want to avert public notice of the veneration of their personal gods and can adopt this alternative method of *Ido chi* or *Ido Mkpume chi*. In the process of *Ido Mkpume chi*, there is this water stone, three types of plants; the stubborn grass (*igite*), the miracle leaves (*do as I say leaves*), *dadanura* leaves, a clay bowl filled with water, an egg from a little hen, *nzu ikenga*, *nzu ezenwanyi*, *nzu ezumezu*, in the absence of *mkpume mmiri*, *mkpume eru ala* thoroughly washed with alligator pepper, can serve. There should be *ogirisi* leaves and *oji* leaves.

The traditionalist institutes this altar in front of the woman's home stead. The water stone is buried in the ground in front of the home stead. As the traditionalist is burying this stone, he invites the woman's chi the person she reincarnates to come and take her place in the stone which now takes the place of the *Ogbu chi*. He invokes the female names of the four market days in Igboland; *Mgbeke*, *Mgborie/Mgboye*, *Mgbafor* and *Mgbankwo*- one of which must be the personal god's name assuming they did not know the name of the person who she reincarnates. These leaves; the stubborn grass (*igite*), *dadanura* and miracle leaves are planted around the altar. The clay bowl of water is placed in front of the stone that is slightly seen or noticed above the ground. The traditionalist makes a shallow hole in front of the altar and plants the clay bowl of water. This bowl of water is never allowed to dry. It is refilled constantly as her chi always drinks water though practically one usually sees birds, chickens and even goats and other domestic animals helping themselves with the clay bowl of water at the altar. All these leaves mentioned above which are planted in front of the altar and different types of white chalks that are involved are constantly used to pray and make incantations on the altar. The egg is broken on the stone to ward off all malevolent spirits physically and spiritually. Sizeable piece of stones or empty bottles are planted upside down to prevent trespassers from trampling on the altar and to demarcate the altar from the rest of the homestead. All the white chalks are securely kept in a sizeable bowl on the altar. At last the life egg is smashed on the stone to consummate the institution of the altar of the woman's chi.

The woman marks that area as her altar and secures and guards it from abuse and desecration by people especially visitors. She usually goes there for the veneration of her chi and to offer sacrifices. The installation of *Ogbu chi* is a very big ceremony. The woman invites her in-laws, all relations, friends and well-wishers to come and rejoice with her. She provides enough food and drinks for her guests who are there to witness the installation ceremony. The stone that is smashed at the altar is symbolic. It is used to douse the grievances of the owner of the altar (*ize iwe*). Assuming the woman is ripe for *Ido Ogbu chi*, after undergoing all the aforementioned ceremonies, she then plants the traditional religious *ogbu* stems behind the stone at the altar.

Management and care of Ogbu chi.

It was found out that generally in Igbo land, particularly in *Umunri* and *Ikem* all of *Anambra State*, *Ogbu chi* is handled with reverence because it is sacred and a woman's personal god. According to the resource persons interviewed on the management and or care of the *Ogbu chi*, their answers

were the same. Mrs. Nwaagbo Udeegu (76 years) of Ikem, 12th Feb, 2022, Chief Jude Nwankwo Okonkwo (80 years) of Uruakor, Nwafia, 14th April, 2022, Ozo Fredrick Onubuogu of Enugwu-Agidi, Chief Emenike Ikegbunem, Mrs Akayana Ovuelo of Ikem, Mrs. Catherine Obiageli Okonkwo of Uruakor Nwafia and Prophet Ikechukwu Kenneth Okafor Orimili Atuora of Enugu-Ukwu na Umunri (58 years) 25th April, 2022 all stated the same methods and procedures of the management and care of the *Ogbu chi* which include:

The Sanctification. It is a tradition that the altar must be sanctified before any sacrifice is made. The person offering the sacrifice must also sanctify him/herself before offering the sacrifice. This procedure is observed so that the sacrifice will be accepted by the *chi*. The *chi* must be clean likewise the person offering the sacrifice. One can easily notice that this type of sanctification is also applicable in the Christendom who always sanctifies their altars, the priests and even the congregation before the Eucharistic sacrifice to the almighty God. Items for the sanctification include: one whole alligator pepper (pod), a white piece of chalk, fresh *ogirisi* leaves and one live few-days-old chick.

The Procedure – The woman offering the sacrifice to her *chi* first of all does some sanctification of herself and her *chi* before offering any sacrifice. She uses the fresh *ogirisi* leaves to run herself from head to toe and throws them away. She opens the pod of the alligator pepper and extracts some seeds from one of the lobes. She also uses the seeds extracted to cleanse herself running the seeds in her cupped right fingers from head to toe; the eyes, nose, mouth and rub same on her palms and throws them away. She uses the live few-days-old chick and runs it round her head to ward off all evils that may befall her and her family. The essence of all these cleansing is to make her clean and capable of communing with her *chi* during the sacrifice and to absolve herself of all sins and evils that may disturb the acceptance of the sacrifice by her *chi*. She also cleanses her *chi* to prepare it for the proposed sacrifice.

She gets some fresh *ogirisi* leaves to run through her *chi* and the altar of her *chi*. She gets some more alligator seeds for the same purpose of sanctification of her *chi* and the altar. She has now cleansed herself as well as her *chi* and the altar. She uses the white chalk to draw some lines before the altar making her incantations and supplications. The altar and her *chi* are now prepared to receive the sacrifice from the clean woman. She can now give her *chi* some cooked food and drink. If the sacrifice involves blood, a man, her husband or her son or even a lad (a virgin boy) from her husband's kinsmen will then pray with the *colanut* and kill the chicken or a goat sprinkling the blood of the animal of sacrifice on the altar.

The Relevance of *Ogbu Chi* to Womanhood.

Ogbu chi is connected to womanhood because the married woman institutes this altar of her *chi* with the sacred religious *Ogbu* tree physically representing her personal god which she runs to in times of need. Whatever happens to one, his personal god knows. This woman consults her *chi* through this sacred religious tree to mediate for her in cases of difficulty in her marital life or venerates her *chi* in the physical representation of the tree to appreciate it when things are moving well. The woman can make consultations with her personal god and make some prayer requests promising her *chi* what she can do for it if it grants her requests. The promises are fulfilled when the *chi* answers her prayers but calamity is likely to strike in a case of promise and fail.

Ọgbụ chi has a significant relevance to womanhood because it gives the woman the confidence that she has her guardian angel in her husband's home and so she has the satisfaction and fulfillment that she is not alone but always in the company of her chi. Thus, the presence of Ọgbụ chi in the homestead of every woman makes her a complete bride.

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Ọgbụ chi makes the woman complete in her husband's home. The presence of Ọgbụ chi in a woman's home give her the confidence, trust, courage, joy, satisfaction and hope that she is not alone but always with her chi. Ọgbụ chi is very vital to any woman especially a married woman in her husband's home. She sees Ọgbụ chi as her personal god which can make or mar her. She thus handles the Ọgbụ chi with utmost care and reverence and as her personal god. It is through this sacred tree that she talks to her chi for all her needs. During her supplication before this sacred tree, she presents her needs like; child bearing, her family progress, long life for her husband and children, family protection, peaceful planting season and bumper harvest and a lot more.

According to Chief Nwaagbo Oloolo n'Ikem (80 years) on the 12th of Feb, 2022, Ọgbụ chi forms the basis for the interrelationship of the woman and her married daughters and their husbands because during the period of Alomchi all these married daughters come to visit their mother with all their husbands and children for this feast of Alomchi. This period of Alomchi usually comes every January in the Igbo calendar when the women venerate their personal gods in a special way. They usually throw a feast and invite their children at home and in diaspora to come and celebrate with them. It is usually a period of great feast for these women who prepare different types of local dishes to host their guests. These visitors give her a lot of gifts. Her daughters and their husbands each carry ten heavy tubers of yams, money, pieces of cloths and drop these gifts at the altar of this Ọgbụ chi. She starts chanting in excitement and invites neighbours to come and witness the generosity from her daughters and their husbands. All her daughters, no matter their number, must each, do the Ibu chi during this period of Alomchi. It is usually a great period of harvest of joy as she beholds her daughters bringing these gifts to her during that special period which usually comes once in a year.

Before this altar, all her son-in-law and her children drop her gifts during the Alomchi ceremony. In Umunri , it is worthy of note that during the course of Igba Aku Nwanyi, the son-in-law is informed categorically that he must do the Ibu Alomchi for his mother-in-law for, at least, two times. If the son-in-law is in good terms with his in-laws, he performs this ceremony on yearly basis. He carries a long basket of yams (ukpa ji) to his mother-in-law. The content of this ukpa ji is not necessarily a long basket full of yams but the contents of this basket are two good tubers of yams at each end of the long basket, a cock and a keg of palm wine in the center of the basket.

According to Chief Nwagbo Oloolo n'Ikem, Ọgbụchi chi forms the basis for the interrelationship among the woman and her married daughters and their husbands because during the period of Alomchi all these married daughters come to visit their mother with all their husbands and children for this feast of Alomchi, this period of Alomchi usually comes every January in the Igbo calendar

when the women in Igbo traditional religion venerate their personal gods in a special way. These visitors give her a lot of gifts. Her daughters and their husbands each carry ten heavy tubers of yams, money and pieces of clothes and drop these gift items in front of the *Ogbu chi*. She starts chanting in excitement and invites neighbours, friends and co-wives to come witness the generosity of her daughters and their husbands. All her daughters, no matter their number must each do her *Ibu chi* during this period of *Alomchi*. It is usually a great period of harvest of joy as she beholds hers and sons-in-laws bringing these gifts to her during that special period which usually comes once in a year.

In all *Ibu Izizi* (first gift for the *Alomchi*) is usually fantastic most especially if her husband is wealthy. When her daughters are going back home with their husbands after the feast, she gives them her own gifts of bottles or earthen pots of red oil and molds of salt. It is during this period of *Alomchi* that, generally, the woman in her husband's home looks forward to receiving gifts from her in-laws who may not have had the time to visit her for a very long time because it is compulsory he must do the *Ibu Alomchi*. She sees her children, male and female and her grand-children and becomes so elated and blesses her *chi* for being so kind to her and extending the benevolence to her children and grand-children.

This singular *Alomchi* and *Ibu chi* ceremony add to so many other reasons why married woman must have a great and inseparable attachment to her *chi*. Thus, the relevance of the symbolic sacred and religious *Ogbu chi* to womanhood in *Umunri* and *Ikem*. During the pre-colonial days, this compulsory *Ibu Alomchi* that was negotiated for, to be done at least twice during the paying of the bride price, was meant for the *umunna* but the modern Mothers' Sunday (*Uka Nne*) of the Christian religion has truncated this interesting bonding of communal living because during the Mothers' Sunday, the Christianized *Alomchi*, all these gifts are solely meant for the woman in question as her *Ibu Uka Nne*.

Summary

Based on the oral interviews conducted for this study, the findings of the study are summarized as follow: It is actually true that the Igbo have the belief in one Supreme God; the creator of heaven and earth and through Him all things are made. Because of the supremacy of this Big Master, they are so much afraid to reach him directly for their prayers and supplications. They devised some means of reaching Him and these means serve as mediators and His servants. This is the reason the Igbo in the Igbo traditional religion carve or make smaller gods and give them names for identity through whom they reach the big master.

This is principally so because the Igbo tradition upholds that a 'big man' or an *Eze* or *Igwe* must have servants who attend to him which informs the fact that even when the 'big man' dies, he must be accompanied by some of these servants to his grave who continue to attend to him in the spirit world. For this reason, in the pre-colonial days, there was always man-hunt whenever a traditional ruler died. The victim would be buried alive with the traditional ruler to serve him in the land of the dead.

Every woman in Igbo traditional religion in *Umunri* and *Ikem* aspires to own this *Ogbu chi* because of the immense benefits because this *Ogbu chi* gives her family absolute protection and a trouble-free marriage. It assists her in child-bearing and gives her the confidence that she always has her

chi with her. She sees it as her chi who determines her destiny. Apart from the fact that the alter of the Ọgbụ chi forms the heart of the woman's homestead where she does all her prayers, supplications, incantations and sacrifices and the aesthetic beauty of the full bloom tree, that spot forms a cool shade in the homestead under which drinking earthen water pots are kept which chills this water especially in the dry season.

The woman who sees Ọgbụ chi as her god takes good care of the traditional religions tree by sanctifying it, offering regular sacrifices to it, trimming it at intervals (Ikpu isi) when it over-grows. Though Ọgbụ chi is destroyed when the woman dies, certain ceremonies are performed to bring her in permanently to continue her sojourn with her ancestors in the land of the dead.

The study however finds out that the advent of Christianity has bedeviled this all-important Igbo traditional religion. Some of these women in Igbo in Igbo traditional religion in Umunri and Ikem are shying away from Irata chi, the institution and offer of sacrifice to Ọgbụ chi in their homesteads.

Conclusion

This study having run the length and breadth of Ọgbụ chi and womanhood in Umunri and Ikem as a part of Igbo traditional, it can now conclude that reverence to Ọgbụ chi by women in traditional religion in Umunri and Ikem is not ịdọ Ị worship. These women in Igbo traditional religion maintain the Igbo perspective of having some smaller gods to represent the Big Master (Chi Ukwu) and through these smaller gods which they also see as servants, they offer their prayers to the Creator of heaven and earth and all things.

It is recommended that this Igbo traditional reverence and veneration of Ọgbụ chi by the women in traditional religion in Umunri and Ikem should be upheld due to the immense benefits associated with it. This is because it creates an avenue for communal living when relations visit these women with gift items to celebrate the women during Alomchi ceremonies. The Ọgbụ chi makes them complete in their husbands' homes consolidating their sojourn as full-fledged mothers who are always assured that their chi is always with them because through that symbolic traditional religious Ọgbụ tree, they talk to the one they believe to be the Almighty God (Chi Ukwu)..

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