

THE PROSPECTS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON MARRIAGE RITES IN ACHARA ISUOCHI UMUNNEOCHI L.G.A

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Abstract

Doubtlessly, there is a huge correlation between people's religion and culture and this correlation borders strongly on forms and methods of rites. This nexus has been an intriguing exercise both within the society and academic circle. Marriage being one of the socio-economic and religious institutions has remained age long practices with a sustained and evolving universal phenomenon. This is an unbiased investigation into the history of the people of Achara Isuochi in Ummunneochi Local Government Area of Abia state, the hermeneutical foundation of marriage rites and the prospect of employing the services of artificial intelligence in organizing and conducting these rites. Like every other ritual and rite in any sensitive and pluralized religious and cultural environment across Igbo land, marriage rites have received some historic and critical attentions yet still maintain some of its strong cultural heritage. Adopting the theory of Interactionism with historical survey approach, the study also tries to analyze the social, economic, religious and moral implications of marriage rites on building a strong bond, general development, principles of solidarity, sustainability, peace and brotherhood both within Achara community and the wider world. The rites also strive to promote among the people the reality of human existence, continuity, identity and strong family ties.

Keyword: *artificial, intelligence, Marriage, Rites, Culture, identity, heritage,*

Introduction

There are three crucial ceremonies that revolve around the existence of any given African society and they seem to be more pronounced within the Igbo cosmology and in particular to the people of Achara Isuochi in Ummunneochi LGA of Abia State. These ceremonies with their attendant rites are birth, marriage and burial rites. These ceremonies are very dear to the Africans and probably much more to Achara people because they define their sense of humanity. For instance, on the day of one's birth, the society rejoices that there is an increase in number and a source of hope for the future. The day of marriage represents two significant issues and they are the hope of the future productivity and the solidity of human relationships. Incidentally, while one can choose or control the day of marriage, the days of birth and death are beyond human. Marriage and the subsequent relationship forged from the union of a couple come with lots of excitements and expectations. Parts of such expectations are that the marriage should last till death and by extension family and social ties owing to the humanity of these rites. However, with the concepts of globalization, digitalization and artificial intelligence driven age, virtually every spectrum of human existence is not spared of the impacts of robotics and computer in performing human functions. Just as it began in the times of old, it has been a serious practice in Achara Isuochi even though modernization has added some glamour thereto. Hence, the study aims at analyzing the possibility of involving artificial intelligence in organizing and performing marriage rites among the people.

Clarification of Some Terms

Prospects: It is the plural of 'prospect' and can be described as the possibility or likelihood of something in the future.

Artificial Intelligence: Anifowose (2019) states that the words "artificial intelligence" were (sic)

first mentioned at a conference in 1956. Artificial intelligence is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. It is the theory and development of computer systems so as to be able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence such as visual perception, speech recognition and decision-making.

Marriage: Marriage can be defined as a legally, religiously and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman.

Rites: Rites is the plural of the term “rite” meaning a prescribed form or manner governing the words or actions for a ceremony.

In the context of this study, the prospects of artificial intelligence on marriage rites in Achara Isuochi Umunneochi L.G.A means the possibility of using computer to organize, speak and perform the rites and actions associated with celebration of marriage among the people.

Theoretical Framework

Interactionist Theory

The interactionist theory is a useful social theory which Crossman (2016) sees as a major framework of sociological theory because people develop and rely upon it in the process of social interactions (p.13). Ahametula and Nnaji (2005) aver 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).

Historical Approach

Madu (2002) describes historical approach as an approach that asks question about what was. From the past, the present situation of religion and rites 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 beliefs; practices, objects and institutions in space and time and to unfold their dynamic evolution of realities over time and space (p.25). Therefore, the theory and approach make strong statement in appraising the prospects of artificial intelligence in performing marriage rites among the people of Achara Isuochi Umunneochi 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 marriage rites are recurrent ontological and social phenomenon 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 within the community. Therefore, the use of computer to replace the activities of human being especially on the rites and celebrations that have socio-cultural, religious, political and economic bearing on the generality of the people needs further unbiased study.

Brief History of Achara Isuochi

Achara Isuochi is one of the communities found in Igbo land and Igbo people as submitted by Nzomiwu (1999) live in the tropical region of Africa (p.1). It is one of the communities that make up the ancient Ochi kingdom. The name 'Isuochi' is historically an acronym for the name of the ancestor

of the nine communities that make up the present day, Isuochi. Meanwhile, late Pa Nathan Madu in a personal communication (15th April, 2017) avers that Achara was the son of Egbebi and Egbebi was supposed to be the first son of Ochi. He said that Ochi had married two wives who simultaneously conceived. The first wife gave birth to Egbebi in the morning but the child refused to cry and being worried, Ochi could not take him into his Obi (semi palace) because he did not cry. But in the evening, Ochi's second wife gave birth to another son who cried immediately and Ochi took his gun to announce the arrival of his first son. He was named Abuga and as soon as the sound of the gun was heard, Egbebi who had been silent began to cry then Ochi became confused. His confusion stemmed from who he would present to the people as the first son among the two boys.



Pix 1. Showing the first place where Egbebi, the founder of Achara once lived.

Meanwhile, there arose a fierce positional tussle between Egbebi and Abuga but Ochi regarded Egbebi as his first son. However, Egbebi was a reputed warrior, hunter, wrestler and fearless man and his father, Ochi had fought series of wars with intruders who were invading his territory from all axis. Looking at all his children, he found Egbebi capable of contending with the invaders and sent him to their present place called Achara Isuochi. Egbebi fought gallantly to ward off the Ohafia and Enugu warriors. Egbebi begot Achara who in turn got married and had two children namely Umuokpara and Akporo. Umuokpara beget two children who were Okwelabo and Okpelu while Akporo had two sons who were Umumeze and Onuma Achara.

Achara community is bounded in the east by Ugwueme in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu state, in the north by Lokpanta in Umuchieze, in the south by Mbala Isuochi and in the west by Amuda all in Umunneochi Local Government Area of Abia State. The people are very industrious dealing in mostly subsistence farming. They take some measure of pride in providing their basic needs by themselves. They are good at digging, gathering and breaking stones, producing cashew nuts, palm kernels and other crops. Within the comity of other communities in Isuochi they are nicknamed “Achara ikpo”-an initial derogatory phrase to acknowledge their astuteness, honesty, strength, courage, fearlessness and physicality.



Pix 2. Showing heap of stone, one of the occupations of Achara people



Pix 3 showing the forest called “Nkoro” where the “ibiniukpabi” deity once lived.

The Concepts of Marriage among Ndi Achara

The rites and celebrations of marriage in Achara Isuochi are so valuable that the people see it as moments of enhancing the harmony, cohesion and solidarity in both family and community. The community's idea of marriage is reflected on the names they bear. These names include: “Di bu ugwu”- loosely translated “husband is an honour”, “Di di uto”- “husband is sweet”, among others. Marriage actually classifies humanity hence the elders will say o gho ba gwo mmadu-he is now becoming full human being.

Steps, Stages and Preparations of Marriage in Achara Isuochi

Before now, it was not popular for a young person to choose who to marry exclusively. It happened that whenever a parent with growing up young man saw that a certain young girl was well behaved and industrious probably like her mother, the parents of the young man would initiate both overt and covert relationship with the young girl's family. It was done mostly by either the father or mother

having understudied the girl and her family history, then initiated a relationship with the-would be in-law's family. This could simply be done by helping them in the farm, defending them when wrongly treated or accused in the community, going out to their houses for relaxation and recreations known as “ifu oriirii”. With time, strong family bonds were built and when the idea of marriage set in, it would be a walkover for both parties. Meanwhile, in most cases, the family of the young girl do not need a soothsayer to read in-between the lines. However, all these have slightly changed. This is because in recent times some young people can get married from any part of the world with minimal approvals of their parents. In personal communications with elders Theophilus Okoroafor and Ekpere David on 12/09/2024, they agreed that there are steps, stages and preparations needed before marriage can be celebrated in Achara isuochi today depending on the family and who is involved.

14. Elder Theophilus Okoroafor(2024). Personal communication 12/09/2024 at his house Achara Isuochi

15. Elder Ekpere David(2024). Personal communication 12/09/2024 at his house Achara Isuochi

Formally, every stage of marriage rites starts first with a stage known as “Enquiries, Introduction or Knocking at the Door” often called “ikụ aka n' uzo”. Depending on the status of the people and the ties built before then, this is the stage where intensions are formally made known and the bride asked some questions by her father's kinsmen before the next stage. But if the groom is from outside the community or in the absence of strong family and kinsmen's ties, they may not ask the bride of her opinion because her kinsmen need to run a family background investigation known as *ijụ ajujụ* on the would-be in-laws. The two families sometimes with their kinsmen conduct their investigations separately. The families usually start their investigation after the first introduction visit depending on where the groom or bride hails from or the ties built. The investigation helps the families to uncover where each family comes from, the village locations, character, general family standing in society, the dynamics, religious practices, including family general health information and other things. The outcome of this investigation can customarily affect and determine the next step in the marriage process.

The next step is a follow-up visit as well as the collection of traditional wedding lists where enquires are positive. At this point, discussions on traditional ceremony-(*igba nkwu* and the bridal/dowry negotiations and payments-(*ihu isi nwanyi*) take place. The bridal list contains items the groom will bring to the bride's parents, kinsmen, mothers' youths, league of daughters among others on or before the traditional marriage day known as wine carrying ceremony day (*ipa mmi*). The bridal list includes items such as: tubers of yam, bags of rice, specified number of alcoholic drinks and Soft drinks, kola nuts, goats, tobacco head, packets of cigarettes etc.

When the above steps are concluded, then followed the stage where the dowry negotiations-(*ihu aku isi nwanyi*) are initiated. The dowry by tradition is any specified amount of money the bride's parents with their selected kinsmen negotiated with the groom, his family and selected kinsmen. Both families may negotiate the amount specified, while some might not. The two groups will meet and discuss the dowry amount as tradition demands. The roles of a middle man (*onye ibu uzo nwanyi*) cannot be discountenanced here. Most times, this stage can be very argumentative and controversial. In most cases, the received amount is given back to the groom with this warning, “with this money, beware that we are not selling our daughter to you, therefore clothe, treat and feed her very well” and this section is completed. Meanwhile, while the discussion is going on, the groom and the bride will be preparing for the next stage. The bride, with the help of her family will select some of her unmarried girlfriends and female family members to serve as her the bridal train (*Asoebi*). They will dress in matching outfits to accompany the bride in processions during the ceremony. They will also assist in dressing the bride and temporarily imprison her until the groom

with his kinsmen and some other well-wishers come to settle and appreciate them. Depending on the mood and time, the bride will first come out with gifts mostly perfumes and powder majestically walk around to greet her husband's people and other guests who will also part with some money to her. Having greeted them, she will get back and dress up again for the peak of all the stages known as handing over and wine carrying rites. She will come out again with her bridal train and move towards her father or his representative in the absence of her father knelt to receive wine and began to search for her husband. This is another interesting and intriguing stage that the conclusion is predicated upon the time and where the groom and his kinsmen and guests came from. If the groom's kinsmen have been seriously troubled by either the in-law or the bride's kinsmen, they can return some happy or sweet revenge by hiding their brother so that the bride will suffer to find him. But if the guests were in haste, they would just direct the bride straight to where the groom was. She would kneel before the groom, sip the wine and gave to him who will drink all the remaining wine and put some money into the cup, raise her up and they moved solemnly to the direction of the bride's father and knelt, after handing him over the wine cup that contained the money. The father would pour his fatherly prayers on them and whenever they stood from there, music and dancing follow immediately. This is another stage where the popular spraying of money is celebrated in the community.

The other stage is a step which can be regarded as Sendoff session (idu ulo). This is where the bride's family shower gifts to their daughter to enable her start her new married life. The gifts vary depending on what the bride's family can afford to gift their daughter but it consists of things such as cooking utensils, beddings, cooking pots etc.

Few days after marriage, the bride's family will visit their daughter's new marital home for the first time or depending, the groom will invite his in-laws in the rites of "mkporu ulo" ceremony. It does not take much except that the local dish tapioca (iwu), foo-foo and palm wine are prepared and served. With this, they have come to know where their daughter is married into. This visit is used to be very casual and relaxed and the two families will engage in general conversations with one another or reminiscence about their journey. Both families will enjoy the prepared foods and drinks before the bride's family leaves. However, extreme care is taken not to schedule any of these rites on "nkwo" market day and every stage must begin with the presentation of kola nuts and their attendant rituals.

The end of traditional marriage rites is very emotional for the bride and her family because the bride will leave her parents' house that night with her packed luggage to go home with her new husband and his family. The traditional marriage ceremony is an open event that attracts families, friends and well-wishers.

16. Elder Theophilus Okoroafor(2024). Personal communication 12/09/2024 at his house Achara Isuochi

17. Elder Ekpere David(2024). Personal communication 12/09/2024 at his house Achara Isuochi

Other Features of Marriage Rites

"Iseka Akwukwo Ure"- Kinsmen Later Entertainment

This practice has not entirely changed rather it has continued to be appreciated. Usually, the kinsmen do not finish their entertainments on the day of the marriage ceremony because of rites locally referred to as "iseka akwukwo ure" literally translated "to tear the leave of castor oil" But the meaning goes beyond the literal translation. It is all about stock taking. Generally, the system of Umunna or kinsmen 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. The practice

is used to go and express their solidarity, unity of purpose and the principle of brotherhood both amongst themselves. Generally, the Igbo idea of wellness and healthiness is interpreted from the lenses of solidarity hence the idea of “onye nwere mmadu kaa 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 rather one who is in harmony with his brothers and deity. This culture of “iseka akwukwo ure” has richly been a blessing to the sustenance of brotherhood and unity in the community.

The Prospects of Artificial Intelligence on Marriage Rites in Achara Isuochi

No doubt artificial Intelligence is influencing different areas of human existence, including religion and culture through the provision of new tools and perspectives on age-old practices. From the context of Achara Isuochi, where spirituality and tradition play major roles in their daily life, the impacts of artificial intelligence on religious and cultural practices can be profound and multifaceted. Artificial intelligence-powered chatbots and virtual assistants may be used by religious and traditional practitioners to preserve and disseminate traditional knowledge and practices. It will help to digitize ancient texts, folklores, artifacts and rituals, making them more accessible to younger generations and scholars. This kind of digital preservation can ensure that the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of the people of Achara Isuochi is preserved. It also has the capacity to change the way rituals and ceremonies are conducted in the community. Robotics and automation can as well help to perform intricate rituals and ceremonies, lowering the reliance on human practitioners and ensuring consistency and accuracy in the ritual processes but the possibility of organizing marriage rituals, sharing food, shaking hands, exchanging pleasantries and other joyous activities will be very difficult if not impossible.

The integration of artificial intelligence in religious and traditional practices offers both challenges and opportunities that need to be carefully examined. One challenge is the preservation of cultural and traditional values in the face of technological advancements in the contexts of a risk of diluting or misrepresenting traditional practices. It is necessary to find a balance between embracing new technologies and preserving cultural heritage. Another bottleneck in the use of artificial intelligence is the ethical considerations that surround it. For example, the use of artificial intelligence-powered chatbots for guidance raises questions about the authenticity and integrity of cultural and traditional practices. Moreover, access to technology is also a huge challenge in the community and limited infrastructure and internet connectivity is a great hindrance. There are also concerns about the impact of artificial intelligence on human-to-human interactions and the diminishing role of traditional religious leaders in a digitized landscape.

Gullin (1948) said that culture is the cement binding together into a society its component individuals (pp.188-189). Similarly, Mbiti (1981) avers that festivals in African setting are means through which the society receives blessing from God and their ancestors (p.137). Generally, the rites accorded to marriage vary from culture to culture and from one religion or one ideology to the other. There are various modes of conducting marriage among the people. The early man in the crude era could have got married without ceremonies but as times go on and humanity enlarges, rites and ceremonies set in. Achara Isuochi is a community that is still very close to her natural base. The community has not completely encountered foreign visitors but her children are scattered all over the world. The community still holds in highest esteem the principles of humanity as reflected in the names they bear such as Onye nwere madu kaa onye, nwere ego –a person who has human being is richer than someone who has money, Igwebuikwe-strength in unity, Madubuikwe- human being is strength, Maduka-with human being you are greater, Nwakaego- a child is superior to money, Nnaemeka- Father has done great and Nnemeka-Mother has done great. All these names buttress

their beliefs that nothing can replace human solidarity, collaboration and relations. Therefore, the prospect of conducting and officiating marriage rites by artificial intelligence for now is better imagined. Regardless of the fact that artificial intelligence can be accredited with serious advances to humanity, businesses worldwide are embracing its transformative power, reshaping how they operate and innovate, using artificial intelligence can exponentially improve effectiveness and efficiency but it can also bring risks in privacy, integrity, the economy and humanity. Artificial intelligence will find it extremely difficult if not impossible to replace human solidarity, relationships and cooperation.

Conclusion

The idea and culture of marriage in Achara Isuochi is one of the crucial rites and ceremonies that define the community. It has the capacity of congregating the good, bad, rich, poor, friends and foes within and beyond the community. It is a moment of intrigues but joyous. Even though the discovery of computer, robotics and other artificial intelligence ideologies have seriously affected the psyche and the existence of the people, the possibility of computer and robotics performing the duty of handing over a bride to the groom or parents accepting a robotic to represent their in-laws to receive either their daughter or son could be better imagined alone for now. This is because the rites and processes required in the ceremony demand human to human contact. Therefore, it is either the groom or bride or the people are turned into robotics as well as their various parents, else it will be a tall order for now among the people of Achara Isuochi.

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LIST OF INTERVIEWS:

S/NO	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	DATE OF INTERVIEW	ADDRESS
1.	Late Pa Simeon C. Amanambu	Adult	Farmer	12/08/2005	Achara
2.	Late Pa Nathaniel E. Madu	Adult	Farmer	15/04/2017	Achara
3.	Elder Theophilus Okoroafor	Adult	Farmer	14/03/2020	Achara
4.	Deacon Stephen Ekpereduru Okoro	Adult	Farmer	16/04/2020	Achara