

THE IWELE DEITY IN UMUOBA ANAM: IT'S RELEVANCE ON THE CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY

By

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Abstract

This study exposes the existence of Iwele deity in Umuoba Anam. Deities are believed to be constituted in the myths associated with the existence of mermaid spirits, spirits of dead, and other spirit forces unknown to man which are predominant within African communities. These beliefs have total influence on the lives of the people which are evident in their worldview, attitudinal orientations and values. This study investigates the functions and relevance of Iwele deity in the daily lives of Umuoba Anam community, the effect of Iwele deity on the lives of the worshippers of Iwele deity, and causes of the gradual progression to death of the tradition and cultures of Umuoba Anam. It also investigates the origin and nature of Iwele deity, and examines its socio-religious influence on the worshippers in the era of globalization, modernization and coming of Christianity in Umuoba Anam. Furthermore, It seeks to determine the reasons why some Christians who go to church and have titles in church still worship the deity secretly or openly, and how to use this research work to revive and sustain the people's interest in the tradition and moral expectations of their ancestors. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The historical and culture area methods were used for data analysis. This study found out that Christianity, modernization and globalization have reduced interest in worship of Iwele deity. Many of its young worshippers have converted to the new Christian faith leaving only but a few elders to the traditional faith. Some young men who could perform some acrobatic dances and masquerade dances during the festivals and celebrations are not more interested. Many equally have left their homeland to the cities in search of greener pastures and also due to urbanization, thus deserting the village which has been the centre for all festivals and other socio-religious ceremonial activities. However, this study found out that the paramount issue caused by Christianity and modernization is weakening of the cultural heritage, tradition, moral values, norms and customs which guide the community. This study therefore strongly recommends that efforts should be made to address the evils and vices in the community in order to restore it back to its original state. Cultural studies should be included into the educational curriculum at all levels of education. The research recommends that the people should go back to their root and reconcile with positive traditions and moral value which was handed over to them by their forefathers to help reduce the increase in immorality. There should be an in-depth study of the impact of modernization and globalization on Iwele socio-religious influence on Umuoba Anam people.

Key Words: God(s), Deity, Sacred.

Introduction

The assumption is that cult of deities is a phenomenon that is generally accepted in Africa. The belief in deities is apparent in the myths associated with the existence of mermaid spirits, spirits of dead and other spirit forces unknown to man which are predominant within African communities. These beliefs have prominent influence on the lives of the people and which are evident in their worldview, attitudinal orientations and values. Iwele deity is said to be a divine, powerful spirit force that is highly regarded, respected, believed in and worshiped by Umuoba Anam community. Deities are believed to be custodians and guardian angels on earth. For this, it is necessary for the living to maintain good relationships with them. This good relationship is only achieved through regard and worships. The worship of Iwele deity in Umuoba Anam is the business of everybody especially in the olden days. But in recent time it's no longer business as usual. Many of the youths are converted to the new Christian faith leaving only but few elders in their traditional faith. Some left their home land to cities in search of greener pasture. Stories have been told about deities that are terror to the members of their community but Iwele deity is not one of such deities neither are her servants. She always protects her people, sees to their affairs and settles disputes justly. The presence of the shrine of Iwele deity close to the market brings security, solidarity, unity among the people.

In Umuoba Anam the worshippers of Iwele deity ascribe a lot of socio-religious functions to the deity. These functions include unification function, control of crime, promotion of human rights, justice, peace and love amongst worshipers, creation of a spirit of oneness, protection of cultural norms and tradition as well as guaranteeing the overall growth and development of the people. Also, it promotes and enhances morality in the community. In recent times, some people have lost the strong belief in the socio-religious influences of Iwele deity in their lives. It is also observed that the socio-religious lives of the people are on decline. There are instances of incest, murder, kidnapping, sexual abuses, abortions, robbery and so on. Apparently, in view of this scenario, the belief of the people on the socio-religious influence of the deity become questionable unlike in the olden days where the fear of Iwele deity is the most powerful agent to checkmate morality in the community.

According to U. Mbane (personal communication, 13th June 2021), if one has misfortune or loses something and asks Iwele to fish out the offender, Iwele will hold the person either by striking the person with a strange sickness that will make the person to be forced to go and consult to know what is the cause of the strange sickness. Sometimes Iwele will leave the offender and go to his family or clan to kill or strike a rich or an important

person there if the offender is a useless person in the family. Nnazor (2009), agrees that it is also assumed that an *alusi* (deity) kills dishonest persons or thieves who offend it in one way or the other. Again that if not appeased adequately before or after death of the victim, such deaths would continue in the family circle till the whole people died. Iwele is always appeased through sacrifice during fishing season.

According to V. Morba (personal communication, 23rd April 2021), there was a particular time when a cow was given to the deity to appease her so as to fish in the river during fishing season. The Iwele deity rejected the cow because the cow was bought from someone else that had left over cow from funeral and sold it to the fishermen that went to appease the deity. So she demanded for a virgin cow to be given to it. Whenever there is fishing season, announcement will be made that anyone that is not clean should not participate in the fishing and Iwele will be asked to take its children up (that is the sacred animals) through sacrifice. If any unclean person insists and joins in the fishing, the crocodile will strike the person's boat and the person will be drowned in the river, unless the person confesses of his sin or sins.

A. O. Anazor (personal communication, 27th December 2020) explains that there was a case of the man during one fishing season, as the fishing was going on, the man fell inside the river and started shouting, "I did not have sex with the Iwele's wife. It was somebody else's wife that I had sex with, Iwele please forgive me." After his confession, he went and appeased Iwele and was forgiven. Its sacred animals are crocodile, python and bees. These animals are what Iwele uses for different functions. However, Iwele normally sends bees to any person or somebody that soils his or her hand with evil or even uses it sometimes to stop one from doing evil. The python is sent to people's house and whenever the python comes to one's house, it is either for a message to the person or a warning. The person will then go and consult to know what is expected of him or her. Calamity befalls anyone who harms the totem unknowingly and does not so to say appease the deity. The presence of Iwele deity pricks the people's conscience. Iwele is believed that it protects, settles dispute justly, orderliness is enforced in the community and their businesses are preserved, cases are brought before her and instant settlements are achieved. If one is coveted or dispossessed of a property or wife by a rich man or a powerful person by intimidation, the accused usually decides to return the property or the wife so to say if there is a threat to report to Iwele deity by the victim. When one loses a possession by theft and seeks help of Iwele deity in its recovery, the culprit on hearing it usually goes back to the

victim and returns the stolen items. The fear of Iwele deity makes the people to keep to its rule especially in the olden days.

According to G. N. Nwazor (personal communication, April 2019), there was a case where Iwele killed a man for greedily taking another man's land and refusing to return it. Umuoba Anam indigenes will immediately relinquish belongings of another which they greedily take at the mention of the Iwele court. The fear of Iwele's undiluted justice is no longer an agent to checkmate morality as it used to be. It has been neglected by the community; the shrine is no longer properly cared for. It is no longer the concern of the whole community but a few who still value their culture and tradition. The patronage to the shrine has reduced. It can be said that people from the neighboring communities are the most patrons of the shrine. In pristine days, the chief priest of Iwele deity was respected like the deity. But today they are insulted, fought and even call police for them. The cultures and traditions of our forefathers are relegated to the background while the youths go about propagating the alien culture which in most ways runs contrary to the moral values handed down by our ancestors. They all came with the advent of Christianity and modernization.

Despite the developmental breakthroughs in science and technology, civilization, globalization and Christianity, people who go by beautiful Christian names still go back to Iwele when they consider it necessary, when it is planting and fishing season. For instance, some of these people consult the Iwele deity for a bountiful harvest through sacrifice. They promise the deity that they will come back for thanksgiving if they have bumper harvest with goat or cow depending on the performance of the harvest. Some youths go and borrow money from the deity to start up a business promising to pay back when the business is established.

Concept of Deities

Deities, according to Iroegbu (2014), are defined as supernatural beings with such powers and attributes believed or thought to control some parts of people's life. This perspective originates from the fundamental belief by Africans in the existence of two worlds. Ugwu (2002) sees the two worlds as the visible, tangible and material world (*uwa*) inhabited by God's creatures, and the invisible, intangible and immaterial world (*Ala mmuo*) inhabited by the Supreme Being and his other agents (p. 46). Brown (1975) says that deities are spirit beings that reveal themselves in many different ways. Human beings have always felt its presence and responded in worship, thus bringing about a relationship between mankind and the deities and leading to what we now call religions (p. 65). The greatness of deities is also portrayed in African traditional religion

by Mbiti (1975) when he asserts that the knowledge of deities is not documented in any sacred book, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies (p. 60). Deities according to Ajakor (2016), is referred to as gods, Ambassadors or Deans (p. 55).

Mbiti (1975) further explained that Africans express their concept of deities in the attributes accorded to them. They personify nature's gifts like forests, graves, trees, hills etc. and dedicate them as representatives of the presence of deities (p. 60). No wonder Madu (2004) confirmed this when he said that:

The cosmological sketch of the Igbos of Nigeria consists of three-tier intimately related but distinct worlds, each of which is well inhabited – the heavens, the earth and the underworld. The heaven is the abode of the Supreme Being (*Chukwu/Chineke*) and such major divinities like *Amadiŋha* (Thunder god), the earth is the home of the earth goddess (*Ala/Ara*) and man; the ancestors and myriads of spirit forces inhabit the underworld (p. 51).

In traditional religion, deities are used to express certain concepts, such as anthropomorphic language and images as an aid to their conceptualization of who they have not seen and about whom they confess to know little or nothing. Idowu (1973) observed that the people of West Africa generally believed in pantheons of deities who share aspects of the divine status and are believed to have emanated from the Supreme Being (p. 165). Ogbajie (1995) explains that categories of beings in Igbo invisible world are many, peculiar powers are called in peculiar situations (p. 56). The world of the Igbo man cannot be fully understood without his knowledge of mystical forces. There are deities that are not brought into being through divine order. These deities are seen as our ancestors and heroes deified by humans. They are the deities made by man. The Igbos believe that beside the Supreme Being, there are many intermediary spirits '*mmuo* or *arusi*' who normally act within the cycle of human beings under the law of *Chukwu*. Ugwu (2002), asserts that this helped tremendously in bringing the state of affair between the two realms of existences into a state of equilibrium. (p. 54). He further said that deities share aspects of the divine states and are often believed to exist only as a consequence of the Supreme Being. The Igbo gods have a hierarchy of beings. At the top are *Chukwu* or *Chineke* (creator of the universe), deities, spirit forces, and man. (p. 48). According to Amaegwu (2011), these divinities are subordinates who *Chukwu* endowed with special powers in the affairs of human beings and material forces of the universe. They rule the world and also relate with the ancestors and other good spirits (p. 58). Afigbo (1981), roots the origin of Igbo traditional religion to two main periods which he termed, the B-horizontal and the C-horizontal. The former was marked by recession or pure intuition, the fall of man, the withdrawal of the creator and the dominance of man's daily life by a host of gods and spirits. God left the earth and kept

it under the watchful eyes of the deities. The latter marks the era in Igbo land, since, Igbo traditional religion started as fathers. The fore-fathers lost the vision and turned their created things like Ala not as a creator but as their controller. (p.100) According to Njoku (2002) “Principal deities are regarded as part of the original order of things, primarily with the coming into being of the cosmos. They include such divinities as *Amadipha* – thunder divinities, *Ara* or *Ala* – earth divinities (p. 63). Mbiti argues that diviners were created by the Supreme Being. He explains further that divinities have been created by God in the ontological categories of the spirits. Their activities or manifestations are either as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of these major objects or phenomenon of nature (p. 76). Idowu (1962) asserts that divinities were not created but were brought out into being. He opines that from the point of view of the theology of traditional religion, it will not be correct to say that the divinities were created. It will be correct to say that they were brought into being, or that they came into being in the nature of things with regards to the divine ordering of the universe (p. 169). Nwoga (1984) agrees that “the Supreme God (Being) is worshipped through the minor deities. He neither has any cults to himself nor priest, whether he is remote or immanent, worship of other deities goes directly to him” (p. 61). Igbo man prays and demands from these deities’ services and protections. Uchendu (1995) explains that “If they fail in their duty, they are always threatened with desertion”. This means that the Igbo man demands services from the divinities for the worship and sacrifices given to them. Igbo people approach the divinities because they believe that it is they that convey their prayers to Chukwu. Arinze (2005) agrees that:

Worship of the lesser deities is an act of worshipping the high God, who is considered to be immanent in subordinate being or is symbolized by the images of lesser deities. In any case, whatever power the inferior deities possess, powers are ultimately derived from God, the source. Thus, among the Igbos in Eastern Nigeria, deity shrines (among which are those of Ala) are common but it is also understood that the deities are the descendant powers, especially considered of *Chukwu* – *Chi,Ekuke, Chineke*. (p. 108).

Afigbo (1981), argues that deities were brought into being by *Chukwu* to look after the world after he withdrew from human because of their sins. They are sometimes called the sons of God (p. 52). Madu (2004) asserts that:

The Supreme Being is a *deus otopsis* – that God has completely left universe in the hands of deities who then act independently under Gods command and are said to be beyond human reposit. On another note, the deities hold a mediatory role between God and man on the rest of the world (p. 85).

Madu (1997) outlined the deities and spirit forces in Igbo land thus:

Anyanwu (the lord of life and light), *Ala* (the earth goddess, mother of life and queen of morality), *Amadioha* or *Kamalu* or *Igwe* (god of thunder), *Mmuo mmiri* (the divinely appointed temptress), *Ahajioku* (the lord of agriculture), *Agwu-nshi* (the lord of divination and healing) (p. 6).

Nweke (2017), agrees that:

These are messengers of *Chineke*. They are referred to as ambassadors of gods. They include: *Anyanwu*, (the lord of life and light,) *Ala*, (the earth goddess, mother of life and queen of morality), *mmuo mmiri*, (the divinely appointed temptress). *Ahajioku* (the lord of agriculture), *Aguru Nsi* (lord or divination and healing). The spirit forces (*Arusi/Alusi*): These are either created by God or man. They are somehow the mediators of the vital forces between God and man (p. 107).

According to Opoku (1978),

The paramount function of the divinities is mediating between the humans and God. They operate between the realm of profane and the sacred. They have the power to reward human beings, punish them with misfortune, disease, or even cause death. There are some among them that are associated with various features of the environment, but these palpable objects are the abodes of the deities and not the deities themselves. The deities are usually regarded as males, although some are thought of as females. Most are believed to dwell in the sky (p. 112).

Onwubiko (1991) agrees that Igbo traditional society believes that there are deities that bring about evil to a community instead of averting evil. On this Ugwu (2002), asserts that, based on the religious and cultural backgrounds of the Igbo man, the names which are given to them differ from one culture to another. But the mode of liturgies and their roles are similar because of their interceding functions.(p.56) Iroegbu (2009), explained that a powerful spirit may be consulted in order to find out one's way in politics, business, dispute and medicine. He said that deities have played and continue to play a major role as a form of supreme divinatory court, citing the Arochukwu oracle (*Ibinukpabi*). He went further to explain that a community may call upon their deities for the regeneration, protection, growth, as well as for oath taking.(p.80) Talbot (1969) agrees that deities like *Ibinukpabi* of Arochukwu are believed to answer questions on issues which are mysterious through the medium of qualified priests. Furthering his statement, he said that the goddess has power to identify sorcerers and witches. He also believed that the deity can make barren women fertile and give success in trade, fertility of crops and granting victory in war. (p.70)

Arinze (1970) argues that:

The deity can be capricious to the extreme, can hinder or help bring prosperity or calamity but can be difficult to placate if defiled. He further explained that the deity descends swiftly on moral offenders like witches,

murderers, sorcerers, thieves and law breakers. The deity is also believed to be the rain sender and the giver of fertility (p. 50).

Arinze (1970) also identified three deities as having much influence on the life and welfare of Igbo people, -the Ojukwu deity, *Agwu* deity and *Amadioha* deity. He explained that Ojukwu deity is an expression of the wrath of god of small pox. The deity is said to dislike evil men and so withholds his aid from them. (p. 60) Arinze (1970), and Madu (2006), further explained that the *Agwu* deity is a tutelary divinity of diviners who seek to discover secrets and give advice on spiritual matters (p. 80). Anyanwu (1999), asserts further that Igbo deities are believed to be many and are classified into major and minor deities. The major deities are those universally acknowledged like *Anyanwu*, *Ala*, *Amadioha*, *Ahajioku*. The minor deities are those associated with a particular society and occupy influential positions in those societies (p. 70). Metuh (1999), identified such deities as *Ogwugwu*, *Idemili*, *Ojukwu*, *Ngwu*, *Ulasị*, *Ubu*, and *Ele* (p. 40). Mbiti (1969), buttress that:

Some societies see evil as originating from or associated with spiritual beings other than God. Part of this concept is a personification of evil itself. For example, Vugusu says that there is an evil divinity which God created good, but later turned against him and began to do evil. The evil divinity is assisted by evil spirits and all evil now come from that lot. Thus, a kind of duel exists between good and evil forces in the world. There are other people who regard death, epidemics, locusts and other major calamities as divinities in themselves or as caused by divinities. In nearly all African societies, it is thought that the spirits are either the origin or evil agents of evil. (p. 76).

Mbiti (1975) asserts that when such deity becomes intolerable for the community, they do away with it. This culture of casting out involves calling the priest of another great deity, like the priest of thunder or *Amadioha*, to chase the evil deity away. Its shrine will no longer be used and a new shrine of another deity will be erected. (p. 80)

Emile Durkeim's Sociological Theory

The sociological theory which was propounded by Emile Durkheim, states that people's belief about the nature of gods/God is a reflection of their society,

He went further to explain that the manner of action to which the society is strongly attached to was imposed on them by its members. The society speaks through the mouth of those who affirm them. It is the society that we hear and in hearing them, the voice of all has an accent which that of one alone could never have. But social action follows ways that are too circuitous, obscure, and employs psychical mechanisms that are too complex to allow the ordinary observer to see whence it comes. Man knows well that they are acted upon, but they do not know by whom. So they must invent for themselves the idea of these powers with which they

feel themselves in connection. Social action does not confine itself to demanding sacrifices, privations, and, efforts from us, for the collective force is not entirely outside of us; it does not act upon us wholly from without but rather, this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us, It thus becomes an integral part of being and by that very fact, this is elevated and magnified.

This stimulating action of society produces, as it were, a perpetual substance for our moral nature. So we ordinarily think of it under the form of a moral power which, though immanent in us, represents within us something not ourselves.

Durkheim's theory tries to explain the deity as an illusion created by the behavior of the society. This is to explain that, man as an individual belongs to the society and was born and nurtured with provision made available by the society and, with this, man was not allowed to run his life all alone by himself. Some laid down rules and regulation were projected or made available for man to be able to function well in the society.

It also recognizes the fact that man is always in need of, and seeks support and refuge from the deity. It also recognizes the awareness by man of the supernatural and of an ultimate reality other than, and transcending himself, as the source of his being and having the disposal of his life. However, this theory is an important contribution to this research work as it points out that the society contributes to the religious life of its inhabitant. The culture and traditions (*omenala*) are developed by the society and backed up with religious practices which involve the divine. The (*omenala*) which was adopted by the people is strongly believed by them to be a guide to them was handed over to them by their ancestors.

The theory of Euhemerism

Theory of euhemerism stated that the origin of the gods is created from the deification of heroes before and after death by man, the gods, goddess and events of methodology are the memories of people and events of the ancient past kept alive and magnified.

This theory was propounded by Euhemerus who followed the steps of the early writer Hecataeus. Hecataeus in his own word explains the general belief in the existence of divine beings by using the theory of gods of Egypt which were deified benefactors of mankind and that the gods of Greece were of Egyptian origin.

He gave an account of an imaginary journey where he found a happy isle. In his own words he claimed that this imaginary aisle had a temple of golden pillar on which Zeus has recorded, in a sacred script, his deeds and that of Uranus and Cronus. This is the basis of

theology or Theogony where Zeus, Uranus and Cronus were seen as originally mortals (human beings).

Euhemerus argued that Zeus was a mortal king who died on Crete, and that his tomb could still be found there with the inscription bearing his name. Euhemerus went further to prove that these original heroes are being deified after death and some of them raising themselves to divine status before death. The fundamental bearing of this theory is with regard to deity.

This theory sums up some fact about deity and man's faith. The question raised here calls for investigation into the origin of human inhabitant of earth.

According to Idowu (1973):

Genesis 6:1-4 states that the sons of God came into the daughters of men and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men which were of old, the men of renown. The story of hybrids resulting from contacts between the divinities and humans is persistent in ancient mythologies. The Yoruba in Nigeria (and in the fact other peoples in Africa) think that it is not improbable that the original inhabitants of the earth were divinities who as they withdrew from the earth in visible forms left behind offspring's who became what we now know as human beings (p. 56).

Actually there seems to be some historical support for Euhemerism. Some Roman emperors were deified after death. Some proclaimed themselves divine during their life time. The Egyptians also have the same root with the Romans in cultures, where kings or emperors were believed to have existed and were direct descendants of deity. The assumptions or deifications are very clear, because it is believed that they belong to a deity on behalf of whom they rule.

Idowu (1973) said that:

The deification of ancestors is not alien to African belief. Among the Yoruba's for example, an ancestor becomes a divinity only by absorbing the attributes of an earlier original divinity, especially where the ancestor had been a priest, king or a powerful priest (p. 70).

This theory tries to explain that truly there is an existence of deities whether as agent brought into being by God, or ancestors deified by the living members of the community. They all serve as evaluators of justice and morality adding to checkmate and direct the affairs of the community. So this theory is relevant to this research work because, it helps to authenticate the belief in the existence and relevance of deities irrespective of how they came.

The Origin of Umuoba Anam and Iwele Deity

Umuoba Anam is one of the towns in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State Nigeria. Before Christianity and western education came into Igbo territory, Umuoba

Anam community along with other communities that constituted Omambala area were noted for traditional medicine and other cultural institutions. They were predominantly farmers. There is belief in the cult of divine powers and authorities in the Igbo traditional society, and Umuoba Anam is not an exception. This is shown in the myths associated in the appearance of the dead, existence of mermaid spirit and other unusual supernatural forces manifestations that influence, African communities.

Iwele deity is said to be a divine, powerful spirit force that is highly regarded, respected, believed in and worshiped by Umuoba Anam community. Umuoba Anam is made up of five villages. They are Umuobalichi, Umuezeanya, Umuoji, Umuoche and Umuoike. The Iwele deity is located in Umuobalichi. The deity is as old as the community itself because the area it is located happens to be the oldest area of Umuoba Anam. There is a big river near the shrine of the deity, called Ayoko and a market square known as Ikedinuzo which holds every Afor market day.

The area is agrarian in nature as most of the people engage in agriculture. The aspect of agriculture they are deeply into is farming, which includes crop farming and fishing. Nnanchor. E.I. (2006), stated, fishing in Anam, like crop farming, is multi-dimensional and there is no aspect of fishing that the fishermen in Anam have not perfected. From time immemorial, fishermen in Anam have been practicing the following forms of fishing; casting net (ive ojogolo), hooking of all forms, local damming (ilu –iyi), net laying (ibolo mwusi, bilinkasa and ibolo-akpa), bailing out water from ponds (ikwo iyi), and iku akilika. (p. 13). The homestead of the deity is Umuobalichi and the deity is as old as the community itself. According to oral tradition the deity was created by our forefathers who felt the need for a medium through which they could communicate with Chukwu Okike (the Supreme God), and also to have an agent to direct and guide them. They held a meeting and decided that each village must have a deity and a day was picked for worship of the gods, which is an Eke market day. They also chose the deity of their choice, some chose Otosi, Ayoke, and others chose Olingbomgbo and Oguu. Umuobalichi chose Iwele deity.

Structures and Nature of Iwele Deity

The Iwele deity is served by a priest and the priest must be male. There is a particular clan in Umuobalichi that sees to the affairs of the Iwele, and this responsibility is assigned to the oldest man in the clan. This oldest man then chooses somebody that will serve as the priest of the Iwele deity. The person is called the *Uko* (servant). According to A.O Anizor (Personal Communication, 17th January 2021), the current oldest man chose a young man to be his Uko

because he is a Christian and too old to serve the deity. So the young man he chose is now his servant (Uko) serving as priest on his behalf. Umuobalichi is made up of Umuezendumanya, Umuodo, and Umualochi clans, but Umualochi is the only clan that the oldest man will serve as the priest of Iwele or he chooses an Uko (servant) that will serve as the priest of Iwele. J. N. Ekwealor (Personal Communication 28th April 2020), said that there was a time somebody from Umuezendumanya clan was chosen as Uko. Women have never served as Uko or the priest and are not allowed to perform a sacrifice or prayer. According to J. O. Okoye (Personal Communication 29th march 2020) Iwele deity works with subordinate deities like;

- *Nne nwanyi* (god of fertility)
- Police (god of attacker)
- *Dibia* (god of war)
- *Oguu* (god of healing)
- *Ikedinuzo* (god of agriculture)

These spirits of deities execute several purposes to their overlord Iwele depending on what they want to achieve. Sacrifices are tendered to the messenger deities by the worshipers of the master. Iwele deity was considered to be very famous and was highly revered in Umuoba Anam.

The people said that the deity can appear in human forms physically, either as a very old man with walking stick or a small boy, when it is out for a special assignment. While on such mission, it can also manifest its presence in the form of either of the following:

- Thunder
- Python (eke)
- Bees
- Crocodile
- Hearing one's name called without seeing the caller.

In the event of any of these, the involved person would usually consult diviners for interpretation and certifying to be linked to the Iwele deity. Thereafter the priests are consulted, and the demands of the deity fulfilled accordingly.

I. O. Onyekwe (Personal Communication, 28th march, 2020) speaking on this said that, Iwele is a mysterious deity. It takes different forms to accomplish its mission, as a small boy, young, or old man, snake, ants and soldier ants. He explained further that the deity does not strike evil doers without a fair warning and if the evil doer willingly confesses and asks for forgiveness

before the shrine, he will be a forgiven. But if he continues, judgment will be issued for his evil ways. It does not harm or kill an innocent man. Some sacrileges for which it can harm includes:

- Suicide persons are never buried without proper sacrifice to the deity for it is an abomination for one to take one's own life.
- A person killed by the deity is never buried until the necessary sacrifices are performed to appease the deity.
- Having sexual intercourse with a widow during her period of mourning especially by her priest is an abomination to Iwele deity.
- Women are not allowed into the shrine or to pour libation and break kola or officiate in any traditional ceremony.

Women in their menstrual period desecrate the shrine in Igbo society generally. A woman on her menstrual flow is not allowed to do some vital things for her titled husband let alone come to the shrine. This therefore is one of the reasons why women are not always allowed to the shrine of Iwele but in a situation where it is important that her case must be settled in the shrine, the chief priest through the information passed to him by the woman's husband, sets a date that will not clash with her menstrual date. Females are never allowed to serve as priestess to the deity and are forbidden to enter the shrine unless it is necessary, that is only when they have serious case like accusation of murder, adultery or incest that must be handled in the shrine.

According, to C. C. Obadiogwu (Personal Communication, 22nd December 2020), agrees that there are certain inherent female weaknesses, excesses which are setbacks to the worship of the deity such as pregnancy, labour, lactating and motherly/wifely duties are other vital issues. They can easily be influenced by male lovers and in the process defile the authority of the deity, He stretched further that females are easily given to flippancy and can easily divulge some vital esoteric information about the deity. Women on menstruation and not allowed in the shrine to avoid defilement or desecration of the shrine.

Madu (1997) agreeing with Essien (1978) and Ejizu (1986) says:

Phenomenological study concerns itself with the phenomenon itself. One does not have to make up his mind already before approaching the subject or phenomenon. Such a situation of prior bias would make the study superficial and unrealistic. Therefore, it is good to know what one is talking about and not what one feels about something. One's feeling about a thing leads to subjective judgment but studying a thing as it presents itself leads to objective judgment and to clarity (p. 59).

Iwele deity therefore has a structure and it is very possible to study it in its nature as it presents itself to researcher. It is possible to have a phenomenological study of this structure

without first having preconceived intention. A careful analytic study of Iwele deity, as it relates to Umuoba people involves the clarification of some relevant issues and these were achieved through oral tradition and personal communication.

According to A. O. Egwuoba (Personal Communication, 7th December 2020), in the days of our ancestors, if a man was killed by Iwele, he would be buried in the deity's forest after all necessary sacrifices had been performed. As time passed, the people pleaded for the body of their own to be buried in the homestead and this request was granted, but the necessary sacrifices must be done.

The deity demands no sacrifice from its priest and individuals unless it is necessary. Animals sacrificed to it or its messenger spirits are shared and consumed by its priest, caretaker and people around the shrine. The deity has sets of taboos which it abhors like murder, crossing through the shrine with a corpse, adultery, abortion, sale of human beings, incest, human sacrifice, evil charms, injustice, greed, fighting. Generally evil acts are forbidden by her. She punishes miscreants who violate the traditional norms. Beyond shading of human blood and other evil mentioned above.

A. U. Anizor (Personal Communication, 17th January, 2021) said that the deity does not punish an innocent person and warns before it strikes. He explained further that there was a time during fishing season, that before the fishing commenced, the deity would be asked to take its children up through sacrifice and rituals. In the process of the fishing one man started shouting and confessing saying that he did not have sex with it, but that it was another man's wife that he had sex with, showing that the man's hand was not clean. It will be announced that if you know that your hand is not clean, do not go to the festival. It was the crocodile of the deity that hijacked the boat of the man.

J. E. Ekwealor (Personal Communication, 5th April 2020) said that the deity is also associated with one taboo or the other in Umuoba Anam culture. Killing or consumption of totem or sacred animal like crocodile or python is a taboo, he that kills such animals for any reason must perform sacrifices to appease the deity. If the taboo is committed in secret, the deity follows the culprit until he confesses or he is killed.

The Shrine of Iwele Deity

A shrine is said to be a holy or sacred place which is dedicated to a specific deity or an ancestor. Iroegbu (2009), Madukasi (2017) and Madukasi (2020) describes a shrine as abode of the

spirits and also a place of consultation with esteem extra human forces to answer answerable questions in order to allay fear and provide a way to resolve problems be it economic, political, and religious, kinship, theft, accusation, power-seeking and all that require supernatural insight and competencies (p. 50). In the thinking of an African man according to Madukasi (2018), Madukasi (2018), Madukasi (2021) and Madukasi (2022) shrines are also seen as the ritual convocation tourism centres for ritual cleansing where adherents seeking for spiritual favours converges. The Iwele deity place of worship has no wooden image in her shrine. Rather it is an empty space, an open ground, except her “*Obi mmuo*”. Unfortunately, according to the caretaker (the priest) the inside of the shrine cannot be snapped for it is said to be a sacrilege against her honors. But there is a small hut where worshipers and those who have cases in the shrine settle wait for their turn to be administered, and there is also another hall which is meant only for the priest. Iwele liturgical worship is carried out at the shrine of Iwele according to the demand of the deity. There is also another hall at the shrine of the Iwele, it is where most cases involving women are settled. Also other unserious matters are held there and this takes place every Afor market day. Behind the shrine is her river and forest, where fishermen and hunters are allowed to fish and hunt. Even women and children go on snail hunting at night in the forest unless on specific days when it is forbidden. There are also trees around the shrine that represent the subordinate deities used by Iwele to carryout different missions. The people have different views on the meaning of shrine and its significance in any community, J. Nzedigwe (Personal Communication, 22nd March 2020) said that a shrine is one of the essential things needed most in a community, its presence aids to assess the morals of the people. It is a house of the deity and it is also a place where sacrifices are offered to the deity to appease it. C. Egwuoba (Personal Communication, 20th April 2020) agrees that “shrine in the community brings fear of the supernatural being beyond our human power”. A shrine is a sacred place set apart for people to go and obtain solutions to their problems and justice.

Relevance of Iwele Deity

Religious Relevance

In the Igbo religion, it is very difficult to see a shrine dedicated to a Supreme Being and this misled the early foreign researchers to say that Africans or Igbo people do not worship the Supreme God but deities and ancestors. However, Igbo people worship the Supreme God through deities, divinities, ancestors and other gods because for the people, the Supreme God is so superior for them to approach directly. This is also the same in the belief and practices of Iwele deity. During the ritual, the worshippers of Iwele deity regard the Supreme God as the Almighty God who is above all other gods, and prayers are offered to God through the minor

gods that exist. It is the belief of the people that there is always a peaceful relationship with the gods each time they carry out the ritual, but failure to carry out proper ritual creates psychological imbalance in the adherents which they believe may result to problems like sickness, poor agricultural produce, infertility of wives, poor domestic animals and so on.

The primary aim of worshipping of Iwele deity is to ensure cordial relationship between the visible, physical world and invisible spiritual world. It also creates in the people the consciousness of a supreme and transcendental being and man's dependence on the being and also to put people's behaviors and activities in check.

Political Relevance

Iwele shrine is seen as a court to ensure justice, equity and sincerity in communal relationship. Worshippers report disputes at the shrines for settlements. And this report is normally made with some items involving a certain amount of money and other items depending on the complaint. A representative from the deity will be sent to the accused person inviting him to appear for defence on a given date which is either *Afor* day or *Orie* day corresponding to the day of worship of the deity.

In order to answer the invitation, the accused comes with hot drink, kola nut or money to the shrine. At the commencement of the discussion, the priest brings out the *ofò* to consult the spirit of the deity to come and witness, the complainant and the accused are to stand in front of the shrine without wearing anything on their legs, swear by the *ofò*, declaring that all they say before the shrine is nothing but the truth. It is also used by politicians to sustain loyalty from the sons. The spirit-fathers achieved this by getting the spirit-sons swear by the deity to ever remain loyal to them. More so, to consolidate this agreement, sacrifices are made to the deity, thus, establishing a covenant. During the crowning of a king, the priest of the deity uses the *ofò* on the crowned king, urging him to be true to his words and to be a good ruler or face the wrath of the deity. It is also used enormously to enforce traditional rules and norms and this is carried out by the chief priest who uses the *ofò* with the authority of the deity to pray and declare the practices permissible or abominable.

Economic relevance

Iwele deity helps to create economic favors for its people and worshippers. Market women who pay tribute to the deity get favors from the deity on each market day which helps them to sell their goods. It helps the young men whenever they have issues with their business, he lends them capital to start up a business or to put in their business only to return it when the business is moving very fine. The villagers do consult the deity for bountiful harvest at each planting and fishing seasons.

Social Relevance

The Iwele deity is used for oath taking to determine the truth especially in matters of controversy. During such cases, the *ofò* is brought out and the parties involved are asked to remove their foot wears and stand before the shrine then incantation is done by the priest which is followed up with prayers. The priest brings the kola nut, breaks it and gives some to the two parties and warns them to speak nothing but the truth. There is no bias or bribery associated with matters involving the deity. The rich and the poor are treated equally before the deity. Even the priest receives his punishment from the deity when he derails and there is no distinction between the free born and *oru*. Just like in Igbo land where the masquerade is believed to be used in reinforcement to the social modes, conducts by reducing social evils in the communities, the masquerade enables the people to behave themselves around him.

IWELE DEITY WORSHIP

According to Quarcoopome (1987) “Worship may be defined as the spontaneous expression of man’s experience of the divine being whom he considers to be the ultimate reality and determiner of destiny” (p.85). Worship according to Ifesich (1989) is an important aspect of religion. It is the means through which man responds to the appearance of the holy (p. 50). Ojikwe citing Awolalu (1981) opined that worship is used to honour spiritual beings. It is an act of veneration paid by human beings to such spiritual beings believed to have great influence over their lives (p. 50). Through the act of worship, the worshippers acknowledge the supremacy or superiority of the worshiped over their lives and by so doing seek to maintain a positive relationship with the spirit beings (p.65). In Igbo traditional religion, as in other religions of the world, worship are acts of response and assent to the unique holy. Thus, it is not surprising that the people of Umuoba Anam carryout religious worship in respect to their deity.

The worship of Iwele deity involves the use of symbols and images, consecration, sacrifices, singings, music, incantations, pouring of libations and celebration of specific festivals attached to the deity. Igbo traditional religion as to every other religion, the people have bases for their belief and worship to a particular deity.

Worshippers of Iwele deity ascribe a lot of socio-religious functions to the deity. These functions include unification functions, control of crime, and promotion of human rights, justice, peace and love amongst others. It is observed that the socio-religious life of the people is on the decline. There are instances of incest, abortions, robbery, kidnapping, murder and sexual promiscuity and such other vices. The Igbo belief that any deity that has no answer to the people’s needs should be replaced and that meeting the needs of the people are usually

through these intermediaries. In the words of A. Ekwealor (Personal Communication, 1st August 2021) said that if people are asked reasons for worshipping Iwele, There will be differently but he feels that the general reasons were: a song of obedience and loyalty, submission to the authority of the deity, it makes it more responsive and in appreciation for a favour granted. He gave an Igbo adage “*e kelee dike na nke omere omekwa ozo*”.

Availability of the necessary materials

The materials for sacrifices are usually provided by the worshippers but if the deity requires any particular item for a specific sacrifice, it is the duty of the priest to look for it. Individuals who wish to offer sacrifices depending on their varying reasons provide to the shrine the needed items stipulated to them by the chief priest, through the direction of the deity. But when any particular item is not adequate, it is either the priest helps them to purchase it or they give the money equivalent. Presently, it is mostly settled with money equivalent. The materials required are those needed for sacrifice, either for worship, appeasement, thanksgiving or to ask for favour.

Oath-taking and Iwele deity

According to Macdonald (1976) Oath-taking can be defined as “a solemn appeal to a god or something holy or revered as witness or sanction of the truth of statement”. (p.906). Udobath (2005) said this about Oath-taking in a preliterate society, where no one could read or write, the pact takes swearing to an oath in the name of a respected and feared deity which is believed to punish the one who attempts to cheat or defraud the terms of the agreements (p. 168).

In Umuoba Anam, Oath taking in Iwele deity is done by the chief priest who admits it to the part involve by giving them something to eat or hold while taking the oath. According to Ossia (2018) opined that it is important to say here that in many cases, people misunderstand Oath-taking with covenant, *Igba Ndu* in Igbo language, but they are not the same thing. He further explained citing Ekejiuba (1972) that *Igba Ndu* as the most solemn and strongest bond that could exist between individuals. The obligations of the pact clearly and precisely spelt out during the rite of *Igba Ndu* were held in great esteem” (p. 62). The Iwele deity can also be used for both Oath-taking and *Igba Ndu*, that is why it is good for clarification to know that there is different between Oath-taking and *Igba Ndu*.

Administration of oath with Iwele deity

Administration of oath with Iwele is done in two forms and it is known as *Ịnu iyi*. This oath taking is usually done inside the scared shrine of Iwele deity. Firstly, the priest first of all

carries out the required sacrifices and thereafter explains to the person the implication of taking the oath falsely. He tells the person the punishments and also advises that if the accusation of which the oath is to be taken is correct, the person can opt out to avoid calamity.

The priest also assures that the deity is an honest deity which only punishes one that takes oath falsely and vindicates the one that is innocent. After that the priest takes the oath first that he will not induce the deity to reverse justice, but to maintain the belief of the people and never to act otherwise.

Example of oath taking with Iwele deity of Umuobalichi village of Umuoba Anam

In Umuobalichi village, the process of oath taking is as follows:

Anị Umuobalichi Anam ekele m gị - The land of Umuoba Anam, I greet you

Anị Umuobalichi Anam ekele m gị - The land of Umuoba Anam, I greet you

Ndị nna nna anyị ekele m unu – Our ancestors, I greet you

Iwele ekele m gị - Iwele, I greet you

Ọ bụrụ na ihe m na-ekwu bụ asị gbuom – If I am lying, strike me dead.

Mana ọ bụrụ na ọ bụ eziokwu zoputa m – But if I am saying the truth, vindicate me.

Iwele Umuobalichi lete m na ezinaụlọ m – Iwele Umuobalichi, look after me and my family.

After the oath taking the family members of the person is taken home.

Celebration of innocence after oath (Iwuaru)

After a stipulated period, which is usually one lunar calendar year or six moons (months) depending on the offence and if the person who took the oath is still alive, the person is assumed to be innocent. If one takes oath with Iwele deity for land dispute, the stipulated period is one year (thirteen moons). This is because the Igbo lunar year is thirteen moons according to Ossai (2016) thus: “in other words Igbo calendar known as *iguarọ* is based on the cycle of the moon where each complete circle is one month calculated of twenty-eight days by which is thirteen (moons) plus one extra day more up one year (p. 57).

However, if it is other offence that is not land dispute the waiting period is six moons. Either of the periods, the innocence celebration is a made for sincerity and honor to the person who takes the oath and to his family members. The celebration of the innocence is made with big ceremony in the community which is always at the expense of the accuser.

On the fixed date which is fixed by the accusers, the accused invites the family members and friends for the celebration. Before that date, the accuser provides large quantities of drinks and food to the accused house so also a fowl, goat or cow depending, palm wine, yam and

condiments to the chief priest who then informs the other chiefs. The items provided for the chief priest is for sacrifice to the deity and celebration of innocence at the deity shrine.

When the people have taken enough food and drink, they all dance to the shrine where the chief priest and the other chief are waiting to welcome them. When going, they go with fowl, goat or cow, cola nuts, spirit (hot drink) and other things edible which they can offer to the chief priest and the other chief for sacrifice and celebration. The chief priest uses the fowl for sacrifice to the deity and then prays for the celebrants, his family members and friends and after this the jubilant crowd dances round the village square, market and along the road ringing and dancing. The merriments continue till the people become tired and depart to their homes. Another day, the celebrant can go back to offer gifts to the deity for the vindication. This time, the cost is borne by the accused and not the accuser, however, family members and friends can assist.

Death of the accused

After the oath taking, precautions are taken to ensure that the person does not die within the waiting period. According to Ossai (2014) "Having sworn to an oath... the person is forbidden from certain things to avoid death during such period." He/she should avoid eating and drinking in public, and also avoid attending public gathering of any type. In a situation where one who takes the oath suddenly dies during the waiting period, the people believe that the death must have been caused by the deity which is a big shame to the family and such death is handled with disrespect (p. 118).

The family members of the deceased find out the cause of the death by consulting a diviner, they perform the proper ritual after finding out the cause of the death. After finding out from the diviner, if it is believed that it is Iwele deity that causes the death, the family members approach the chief priest to ascertain the ritual to be performed before burial. So after the ritual the person is buried but the fact remains that the burial and the funeral of such person is treated with disdain because of the shame brought to the family. During the field work of the research, it reveals that Iwele deity is believed to kill people who take oath falsely with its name. And it is also revealed that the deity makes people who are guilty senseless when the deity is declared to punish an offender. According to U. E. Ogugua (Personal Communication, 5th June, 2021), there is a case of a man that was killed by Iwele but the man did not have people to ascertain and perform ritual for Iwele so the corpse body was brought to Iwele shrine, the corpse remained there until certain sacrifice or rituals was made to Iwele deity before the person will be buried. Iwele does not kill innocent person.

Adherence to traditional liturgical procedure

The liturgy of Iwele deity involves a number of age long traditional procedures and practices. These involves-making sure that the items are complete before the celebration begins, including that the conduct of the liturgy occurs only on Afọr or Eke market days, that the acceptance of items for sacrifice to the deity is confirmed through divination or throwing of pieces of yam that the liturgical celebration is officiated by the appropriate person which must be the male priest rightfully chosen by the deity. And more so the Igbo kolanut is used and the animal killed, the blood split on the correct places. Traditionally, all the sacrificial items are first offered to the deity before any human enjoys the items.

Signs, symbols and images of Iwele deity and their socio-religious significance

The deity is believed by the people to manifest its presence in several physical forms. These include:

1. Human form-either as a small boy or an old man.
2. Sending Iwele's python to the people's house.
3. Visit by bees either as a swarm or as single bee coming in a phenomenal manner.
4. Mysterious illness.
5. Iwele's crocodile strikes people's boat to sink in the river.
6. Thunder.
7. Can call your name without the person seeing the caller and
8. Unusual events.

The influence of Christianity, globalization and modernization in the worship of Iwele deity

Anyanwu (1999) stated that "the missionary to Africa and Igboland in particular came with the notion that there was either no religion at all in Africa or that it was entirely of the devil. On the point, the missionaries considered it their duty not only to convert the Igbo to Christianity but to make them give up and forget their past entirely and take to their new religion which is Christianity. Therefore, the arrival of Christianity marks a new turning point away from the rooted beliefs which the traditional Igbo man and woman had in their deities, spirits and sacred trees (p. 152)."

They preached against the belief in worship of deities and other objects of worship that are in contrast with Christian ethics and doctrine. Converts were made and new social orders in town and villages were introduced. The missionaries neglected the respect and reverence given to the worship of deities. In the olden days, worship of deities was held to heart and were

given the fullest of respect and allegiance. Christianity, therefore, brought about disrespect to the worship of deities, it preached against the traditional concept of worshipping of deities. Hence, the trust which the traditional Igbo have on worship of deities is fast disappearing.

However, the influence of Christianity notwithstanding, some people remain adamant and unshaken in their belief to worship of Iwele deity. Some of today's Christians find themselves in syncretic role of attempting to blend traditional religion with Christianity. They still believed these deities have abode of the spirits who have answers to their problems. They offer sacrifices to the deity and at the same time pray to God either in secret or through a representative. These people say that Christianity should not prevent them from paying allegiance to the ancestors and nothing prevents them from paying traditional rites. On this note, Okeke citing Mmadu (1997) submits that "Tradition ensures even when acculturation has taken place. This is because it springs from a people's value system which undergird their behavior (p. 136)." In olden days, shrines of deities were built in the forest. Today this shrines and forest are cleared at will. They are used in building houses although in some cases, after some rituals have been performed, frustration of modern roads and bridges in towns and villages might also affect these shrines. Hence, evil forest (*ajọ ofia*) housing these deities are cleared for the constructions of modern roads and bridges in town has also affected the worship of deities. It appears that modern Igbo society thinks that worship of deities does not possess any power of mysterious nature, therefore they should be tampered with or felled. With the development science and technology, the traditional belief in worship of Iwele deity has today became unrealistic.

Many young women who are supposed to be making the socio-religious celebrations more enriching have left for Christianity, only but few are left to play their meager roles in its ritual worship. According to Nnedum and Ezeokwu, gender roles are undergoing some dramatic changes, as young women seek jobs outside the homes and even outside their native country. Women who once used to fight for their right in the midst of a discriminatory world now found solace in the Christian faith which gave them back-up and recognition as children of God. Even the young men no more have interest in entering the masquerade cult and there is not much respect left for the deity, such that some of his idols and emblems have been sold out into foreign museums in exchange for money. Though, notwithstanding these influences, Iwele deity remains strong and active among the people of Umuobubachi.

The Umuoba Anam people have adopted Christianity and western culture which have changed the traditional religion in its organized form yet the traditional religious beliefs and practices still excel the minds of Umuoba Anam Christians. The majority of Igbo Christian

would not normally take part in the public worship of deities but would return to deities for help when in difficult life situations such as illness, misfortunes, deaths, bareness, present themselves for solution. In this context, culture clash is inevitable as the dominant culture strives to overthrow the recessive culture. As conflict arises, new modes of behaviour and lifestyle rises which results in new identity. There is not much respect for the deity again, the shrine has been neglected, it is no longer the concern of the whole community but a few who still value their tradition. The patronage to the shrine has reduced. The influence of Christianity and globalization on the culture and traditions of the Africans seems to be a heavy clamp down, the African gods seems to be knocked out and they retreated. Thus Achebe (2008) lamented that.

The white man is very clever, he came quietly and peaceably with his religion, we were amused by his foolishness and allowed him to stay, now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (p. 50).

However, there is some measure of resistance by Africans towards western dominations. According to Kalu (2015):

The Nigerian cultures (or deities) only retreated they were never “knocked out”. Despite the expansionist idea of imperialism, globalization and Christianity, and despite the domineering influence of imperialism and globalization, many traditional cultures of Nigerian society are still retained and some are today being reawakened by the consciousness of enculturation. This is to say that the Christian religion in Nigeria has some high prospects with regard to cultural revival which will help the society to extricate herself from the shackles of imperialism and globalization, and build authentic Nigeria Christianity (p. 111).

Moreso, African Christian theology is an exercise in African enculturation which Madu (2004), states that “traditionalizing the kernel of the Christian kerygma” (p. 66). The “kernel” or “gem” of Christianity is what is necessary to be incarnated in Nigeria or African culture. The kernel of Christianity is the gospel message of salvation in Christ and the universality of human race created in the image and likeness of God. The other paraphernalia of Christianity like wares, language, vessels and the like are not kernel of Christianity and are therefore liable to be adapted to a particular cultural value.

Conclusion

Conclusively speaking, it was discovered that Iwele deity has positive socio-economic and religious influence on the lives of the people of Umuoba Anam community. Positively:

- a. It helps to maintain peace and harmony among its members especially through the individual and communal oath-taking ceremony which is being carried out by the chief priest.
- b. It also promotes unity and solidarity ensuring a kind of symbiotic relationship among its adherents and the entire Umuoba Anam people.
- c. It does not encourage 'Osu' caste system where some members are ex-communicated and ostracized from the rest of the people in the community.
- d. Every member of the community enjoys equal freedom and opportunity for religious participation and officiating in the worship of Iwele deity.

The officiating has long been reserved for the male priest from the priestly family and a caretaker can be selected from any family in Umuobalichi.

This study also found out that Christianity, modernization plus globalization has reduced the worship of Iwele deity. Many of its young worshippers are converted to the new Christian faith, leaving only but few elders to their traditional faith. Some young men who could perform some acrobatic dances and masquerade dances during the festivals and celebrations are not more interested. Many equally have left their home land to the cities in search of greener pasture and also due to urbanization thus, deserting the village which has been the center for all festivals and other socio-religious ceremonial activities. Some persons are even ashamed of their cultural heritage and primitive. They have assimilated the alien culture and religion to the extent that all they have left is a fragment of their culture and identity. This study has found out that the paramount issue caused by Christianity and modernization is weakening of the cultural heritage, traditional, moral values, norms and customs which guide the community.

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