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Functionalist Study of Rituals in Traditional Priestly Ordination in Elugwu Ezike Igbo Cultural Context

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ABSTRACT

The study is aimed at identifying and analyzing the rituals associated with the traditional priestly ordination in Elugwu Ezike Igbo cultural area in the past. The study investigates the rituals associated with the ordination of a traditional priest in Elugwu Ezike. The study is primarily approached through oral interview and unstructured questionnaire. A total of five informants were selected from the four main autonomous communities in Elugwu Ezike. Recording and tape recording are made first hand during the interview. The study is premised on functionalism theory. The data collected were transcribed and analysed qualitatively. The major findings of the study revealed that the major rituals associated with the traditional priestly ordination in Elugwu Ezike Igbo are: Ikpoyi ma, 'ordination ritual', iba ifu ma 'washing the face of the new priest', igwuyi ma 'installing the deity for the new priest', and ikpu ishi ma, 'shaving the hairs of the new priest'. The study also revealed that westernization and Christianity have influenced traditional priestly ordination both positively and negatively as some of the traditional priests have converted to either Christianity or Islamic religion Moreover, some of the taboos associated with traditional priesthood office are no longer observed by the priests due to the influence Western culture.

Keywords: Ordination, priest, tradition and culture.

INTRODUCTION

A traditional priest is one chosen by a particular deity to offer prayer, libation or sacrifices to the deity. He is the officiating priest in charge of a particular deity. There is no apprenticeship to priesthood. The members of the priestly family learn by observation of the elders and participate in worship from their infancy. The duty of the priest is to serve the god, offer sacrifices to it in accordance with the stipulation by the diviner to the worshipper. The priest usually resides at the shrine of his deity.

Among the Elugwu Ezike people, just like other Igbo communities, the priests are among the various religious leaders who perform specific rituals. These religions specialists in their own ways and contexts serve as intermediaries between human and spirit world. In order to be able to communicate between humanity and the spirit world, they are concerned with the renewal and sustenance of the life of the individual and the community they serve through their rituals. As [1] said:

> Like that of most traditional priests, their effectiveness as ritual healers lies in their ability to control self-induced

> trance states and to perform dramatic ceremonies involving powerful herbal medicines. In this way they exert troubling spirits and expel the evil force of witchcraft.

They are the official servants of deities. They are to be found in places where gods are worshipped and where sacrifices are made to the sacred beings. They are people in charge of the shrine (atama). They take care of the shrines and sacred places in general. Libations, invocation, sacrifices and prayers are made by the priests with traditional rituals and ceremonies at appropriate times and places. They are the keepers of the welfare of the people and are entrusted with the sacred rituals.

When the awareness of the deity first came upon man, he becomes aware at the same time that there was around him an atmosphere in which a particular spirit resided. This place inhabited by the spirit is different in quality from that of the natural world in which he lived his common life. His natural instinct warned him that between these two worlds, the world of the supernatural and his own natural world, there was a sharply defined spiritual line of demarcation (between the spiritual and the physical world).

Thus came into being the priest whose primary function among the Igbo is that of a mediator. The priest is a person in touch both ways between the object of worship and man. He knows them both, hears them and speaks on behalf of one to the other. It is his duty to offer up man's worship and to bless man in the name of his object of worship.

It would seem, though, that when worship first began, everybody was his own priest in that he expressed his attitude towards the object of worship as the impulse seized him. This is very much in evidence today among the Igbo. A devotee of a deity has a shrine set up in his own house and conducts the routine ritual himself as tradition prescribes. Therefore, even though a devotee may himself undertake the routine ritual in the house, he can do this only because he has already automatically received with his adoption of the deity the consecration which fits him for the conduct of the ritual.

The priest presupposes a community, whether that be as small as family or as large as a clan or town. To each household are attached some ancestral and tutelary shrines and they officiate at such domestic shrines is usually the head of the family. Next after the household is the clan or town. Every clan has a particular deity.

In African traditional settings, the people recognize the existence of the supreme God. Although there is the existence of other deities, these other deities are taken to be subordinates to the Supreme Being, which in Igboland is called Chukwu, Chineke, Ezechitoke or Obasị. These names accorded to the Almighty God tend to suggest that there exist other minor gods. These deities unlike the Supreme God, have different meanings, according to the local needs of the people. In case of deities in Elugwu Ezike, some researchers have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to discover any order among the perplexing hordes of deities, the number of which defies any accurate determination of their attributes. Researcher like [2], contends that:

> though a large number of Igbo deities cannot be graded, there is no

> doubt that gradation of status of some sort exists in native minds and that some deities stand so pre-eminently above all others that their relative position to one another can be definitely ascertained.

In the light of this, [3] notes that deities such as Idenyi Umunaja, the arch deity of Olido, has directly under him (Idenyi Umuaaja) in order of seniority the following lesser deities: Idenyi Ugweze, Ugwunokome, Adonu Idenyi, Ụmụada, Idenyi, Inyama Idenyi and Edemunyi. These lesser deities belong to respective kindreds in Olido community.

The institution of priesthood among Elugwu Ezike communities comprises religion specialists who perform sacrificial rituals on behalf of the community. These religious specialists could be men or women. The institution is strong and developed among the traditional worshippers in Elugwu Ezike and they are highly honoured. Concealing the institution of priesthood, [4] observes that:

> ... the priesthood always been an important social figure. As is inevitable in the social patters of the people since the key not

e of their riational life is their religion. Virtually nothing is done without the ministration of the priest. For a part from looking after the "soul" of the community the features prominently in the installation of kings and d

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A priest performs social ritual which is one of their essential characteristics. Ritual is carried out at designated places such as in the shrines, and at the cross roads when the need arises. There is no age barrier as to who becomes a priest of deity among men in Elugwu Ezike.

In Elugwu Ezike, it seems as if men are the only ones in charge of the deities. They are the ones that are usually found in the shrines of deities. Men are the custodians who are usually initiated into the priesthood. Ichi Atama (being consecrated a priest) is usually men affairs.

The institution of priesthood may be hereditary or vocational. Candidates are usually, chosen by the deities, initiated and ordained. They serve the deities that are considered as ministers of God who are believed to be charged with vital functions. Apart from heredity, a devotee can also be called to belong to a deity. The deity can possess the person, through ecstatic trance when he is alone or during a public ceremony or the deity may appear to the person in a dream or vision. The would-be priest could even be struck by affliction which may not be treatable by either orthodox or traditional means. Through donation, it may be revealed to the people that the solution to the patient's problem is to be priest of a deity. After the performance of the initiation, such a patient usually gets well.

According to one of the informants, Patrick Aji, the would be priest may even be faced with one problem or the other. He would be searching for solution ritual he is told that the deity wanted him to serve in the shrine. If the victim agrees, the initiation would be performed. Patrick Aji himself claimed that to have suffered from one ailment or another before he finally devoted his life to full work in the Idenyi shrine.

The institution of priesthood is complex and developed among the Elugwu Ezike people. The initiation is still practiced among the people with its full-rituals performed till date though with fewer number of participants due to the in-road of Christianity. The initiation rite is a covenant relationship between the person that is being initated, the deity and other members of the cult. This initiation, ceremony is called *ikpoyi* ma. The initiation usually starts in the evening or sunset at about 5.pm, when they believed all the deities in the shrine were back at home. The deity emblems are washed with leaves and *ọchẹ* (local soap). This washing is necessary to consecrate the deity and also to replace the damaged emblems where necessary. Thereafter they would apply the *ufweyi* (camwood) and *nzụ* (chalk) to the various emblems.

Before the initiation can take place, the would-be priest must have got ready all the items for the ceremony and a taken sum of money ranging from ten thousand to twenty thousand naira to be given to the chief priests of Ugwu Agu Umachi on arrival. Early in the morning on the day of initiation, the would-be atama would first and foremost worship his chi (personal god) with a fort at ọnụ enyanwụ (at the shine of sun god). The fowl must be consumed by the would-be *atama*, though other atama present might partake in the consumption of the meat. This aspect of Elugwu Ezike cultural life that is full of rituals and oral poetry has not been explored by researchers. The present study is therefore an attempt to explore the rituals and the associated oral poetry that uses various imageries to depict Elugwu Ezike ways of life and belief system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ritual is a determined mode of action. The reference or object of ritual is the belief system of a society, which is constituted by a classification of everything into two realms of the sacred and profane. Ritual has some characteristics. The first characteristic is a feeling or emotion of respect, awe, fascination, or dread in relation to the sacred. The second characteristic of ritual involves its

dependence upon a belief system that is usually expressed in the language of myth. The third characteristic of ritual action is that it is symbolic in relation to its reference. Agreement on these characteristics can be found in most descriptions of the function of ritual. Ritual as symbolic behaviour presupposes that the action is nutritional. That is to say, the means-end relation of ritual to its referent is not intrinsic or necessary.

All rituals are dependent upon some belief system for their complete meaning. Many great rituals are patterned after myths. Such rituals can be typed imitative rituals in that the ritual repeats the myth or an aspect of the myth. Myths are the librettos for ritual. Although it cannot be denied that some rituals explicitly imitate or repeat a myth (e.g., a myth of creation), it cannot be maintained that all rituals do so.

Ritual may be classified as positive or negative. Most positive rituals are concerned with consecrating an individual, and negative rituals are always in relation to positive ritual behaviour. Avoidance is a term that better describes the negative rituals. The word 'taboo' has been applied to those rituals that concern something to be avoided or forbidden. Thus, negative rituals focus on rules of prohibition, which cover an almost infinite variety of rites and behaviour. Rituals of initiation into secret society or a religions vocation (viz, priesthood, ascetic life, medicine) are often included among rites of passage as characteristic passage from old to new on a larger scale, in the past, people farm for them. It is the priest's privilege to take the first and the best portion from any sacrificial meal or sacrificial offerings that includes prayer, consecration of food and drink towards a deity, invoking the name of a deity. In the past, people farm for them. It is priest's privilege to take the first and the best portion from any sacrificial meal or sacrificial offerings.

During traditional priestly ordination, series of ritual ceremonies are performed such as insignia ritual, shaving and removing of clothes ritual performances among others. Ritual is believed to have emerged from the attempts of non-literate men to grapple with the problem of his environment, nature and his very existence [5]. Man discovered that some actions, which he takes gives him courage and reassurance about his natural and psychological concerns. He, therefore, decided to repeat the actions periodically. Many rituals are basically religious and, therefore, sacred. Ritual may be seen as a presented formed behaviour having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers. Ritual provides information and reduces anxiety by making people believe that what has been decreed has been affected or will be fulfilled. By creating its own image of the world desired, ritual brings a certain reality into being. [6] views ritual as

> Special career of social values touches a society because what is revealed or expressed is what concerns the society. Rituals reveal. What touches a society because what is revealed or expressed is what concerns the society, and is usually obligatory to the

society what the group believes is expressed in rituals. Rituals are keys to understanding the constituent elements of a human society especially the African.

African societies make extensive use of rituals in their religious life activities. The rituals are not empty, but contain essentials values of the society. Through ritual, man says something about his inner religions awareness, his vision and beliefs about the cosmos. In this study, ritual is used to denote a body of ceremonies or customary acts, which performances are mostly based on beliefs in mystical powers and which by nature can be seen as the manifestations of the religions or social life of the people.

Rituals are involved in traditional priestly ordination in Elugwu Ezike. These rituals are performed for two main reasons. The first reason is to remove the hand of the late priest from the cult and to establish the new priest in his office. These rituals are performed mainly for their symbolic value. In traditional priestly ordination, rituals often have close connection with reverence for a deity or idealized state of humanity. The second function of rituals has often been exploited for political ends.

Traditional priestly coronation is currently giving way to Christianity and most of the information on the rituals associated with it is transmitted orally by the people. Hence, the need to document information concerning the rituals associated with traditional priestly coronation has become very imperative to save this dying aspect of Elugwu Ezike culture in print for posterity. This study will concentrate on ordination of Oko mkpapi priest, an arch deity in Okpo, Elugwu Ezike.

In African traditional settings, the people recognize the existence of other deities; these other deities are taken to be subordinates to the Supreme Being, which in Igboland is called Chukwu, Chineke or Obasị. These names accorded the Almighty God tend to suggest that there exist other minor gods. These deities unlike the supreme God, have different meanings, according to the local needs of the people. In case of deities in Elugwu Ezike, some researchers have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to discover any order among the perplexing hordes of deities, the number of which defies any accurate determination of their attributes. Researcher like; [2] contends that "though a large number of Igbo deities cannot be graded, there is no doubt that gradation of status of some sort exists in native minds and that some deities stand so pre-eminently above all other that their relative position to one another can be definitely ascertained".

Human beings are sometimes described as basically as rational, political and playing specie. They may also be viewed as ritual beings, who exhibit a striking parallel between ritual and verbal behaviour. [7], sees ritual as a system of symbolic acts. The intricate, yet complex relation between ritual and language can be seen in the history of various attempts to explain ritual behavior. In most explanation, language becomes a necessary factor and the specific form of language that is tied to explanation of ritual remains fundamental to any analysis of religions. [8], posits that ritual is an adaptive and adjustive response to the social and physical environment. Ritual is a determined mode of action. This implies that the reference or object of ritual is the belief system of a society, which is constituted by a classification of everything into two realms of sacred and profane. This classification is taken as a universal feature of religion. Belief systems, myths and the like are viewed as expressions of nature of the sacred realm in which ritual becomes the determined conduct of the individual in a society

expressing a relation to the sacred and the profane.

The sacred is that aspect of a community's beliefs, myths and the sacred objects that is set apart and forbidden. The function of ritual in the community is that of providing the proper rules for action in the realm of the sacred as well as supplying a bridge for passing into the realm of the profane. [9], opine:

> Symbols appeal to experience in society, culture and history and therefore, it is altogether natural that they should find expression in action, particularly collective action, an action which is a process of greater or lesser duration. Such symbolic action we call ritual. It is a dramatization of ideas, values and expectations, a bridge between the level of ideas and the level of practical daily life.

The explanation above portrays ritual as not necessarily a fact of nature, but a concept which originates from human society. According to [10], ritual is viewed as a ceremonial order of actions which at first level re-enacts an established pattern. At its second level of definition, he observes, ritual demands that this conservative re-enactment be really efficacious, effective in its repetition as it was in its origin. Thus, [10] sees ritual as a present act which historically recalls the past for the purpose of re-ordering (even predetermine) the future. In fact, he sees ritual as a prediction which when completed, fulfils itself. In the context of this study, ritual is used to denote a symbolic expression of actual social relations, status, or the role of individual in a society. It also refers to a transcendent, spiritual reality and to the ultimate values of a community. Whatever the referent, ritual as symbolic behaviour presupposes that the action is non- rational. That is to say, the means-end relation of a ritual to its referent is not intrinsic or necessary.

Myth

The field of mythology has been a very favourite one to scholars. In this regard, mention must be made of such scholar as [11] who is of the opinion that in the mythologies of every continent there can be distinguished, great myths and others that are of less importance. Some myths dominate and show the character of religious outlook, while others are less central, repetitive and fanciful. All kinds of myths according [11], need to be taken into account, because altogether, they show the values which the society holds dear. [11], views myth as stories, the product of fertile imagination, simple, often containing

profound truths. They are not meant to be taken too literary. But most myths express serious beliefs in human being, eternity and God. [12], defines myth as any story or plot whether true or untrue. Myths show an odd tendency to stick together and build up bigger structures. When myth features as a sacred narrative, it throws more light on the mysteries of human life, the world and important social and moral actions. Myth is used in explaining the origin of the world, man, death, river, the situation of the unseen world and the things in it, sin and the present relation of man with God and other supersensible.

PRIESTS

The call of a traditional priest varies from place to place and according to the categories of priests. Where priesthood is hereditary, things work out automatically. The next person knows himself and is regarded as such by the people. Similarly, where priesthood is connected with a particular distinguishing mark, the new priest is known by such mark. Often priests are chosen by the deity himself through various means such as dreams, disasters or other misfortune. A person may be possessed by the spirit of a particular deity as a sign for the person's call.

A priest is a leader of his people with enough knowledge to lead others to the presence of the deity. A deity priest in Elugwu Ezike is primarily a mediator between man and deity. He knows, hears, understands and speaks to the deity he is serving.

Deity

[13] advances three interpretations of the term deity, noting that it is "...a god or goddess, ...a divine nature or rank, the essential nature of a god or of a supreme being.", "...a person or thing that is exalted or revered as a supremely god or great," "... one that holds or wields supreme power or influence in some fields ...". Also, deity is viewed as divine quality or nature, state of being, a god or goddess. [13], defines spirit as a supernatural incorporeal, rational being or personality usually invisible to human beings but have the power to become visible to human beings at will" or "the active essence of the deity serving as an invisible and life giving or inspiring power in motion". In the context of this study, deity is defined as anything (human, non-human, object, etc.) that is held in high esteem within a particular society while spirit is the disembodied soul of the dead person,

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

[14], conducted a study on Igbo masks: *"The oneness of ritual and theatre in Nigeria".* The findings of this study reveals that some non-Africans especially the European erroneously build around them the belief that Africans are too primitive to posses scientific knowledge, so, they embark on some primitive' endeavours which are ritualistic in nature as a solution to most of their problems. The study further reveals that ritual is something done by 'primitive' people, who because they supposedly lack scientific attitudes and knowledge must rely on it (as well as magic) to deal with problems that beset them. On the other hand, citizens of industrialized societies, such as the United States are thought to have no need for rituals. [15], in his study of ritual in Igbo land used ten communities as a case study. After a thorough study of the different kinds of rituals in Igbo land, he came up with the assertion that rituals are special careers of the social values of the society. Rituals reveal what touches a society because what is revealed or expressed is what concerns the society and is usually obligatory to the society. The study further shows that what the group believes is expressed in their ritual. Rituals are keys to understanding the constituent elements of human society, especially the Africans. African societies make exhaustive use of rituals. The rituals are not empty but contain essential values of the society.

[16], in his study of consecration in Igbo religion shows that the life of an average Igbo revolves around an ocean of rituals, beginning with religious rituals and extending to all kinds of rituals one can think of. In his analytic work on rituals in Igbo land, he presents a comprehensive taxonomy of the rituals of consecration of time, space, animate objects and inanimate objects. For the purpose of comparison, he selects six (6) areas as representatives of different regional areas in Igboland. The chosen areas include: Ajanukwu and Ovoko

(Northern Igbo), Ngwa (Southern Igbo), Ossomala (Western Igbo), Ezza/Izzi (North East). Nwosu (1996) has an interesting study on the impact of western culture on the Traditional Ritual of Arondizuogu in Ideato Local Government Area of Imo state. The finding of the study reveals that the Igbo have a very rich cultural heritage which they manifest in the different kinds of rituals they perform at various seasons in many different ways. [18], conducted a study on sacrifice in Igbo religion. In this study, Arinze offers a true picture of the Igbo and his ritualistic tendencies. The study presents the various types of Igbo sacrifice/rituals under four (4) broad headings. They are: (1) Expiation (2) Sacrifice (3) Petition and (4) Thanksgiving.

The findings of the study further reveals that ritual is a socio-religious act which embodies levels of meaning which may be portrayed as a symbol of cosmic level which uniquely form the heart of quality of every ritual action which serves to express individual's status as a social person in a structural system in which he finds himself.

[19], has an interesting study on deities and spirits in Igbo land in Elugwu Ezike cultural perspectives. The study focuses on the deities and spirits, hierarchy and method of worship in the cultural context of Olido Elugwu Ezike in Igbo Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State. The study relied mostly on oral interviews, direct observations, group discussions and interactive session with elders and traditionalists for data collection. The findings of the study reveals that the deities and spirits make people feel God's presence among them. They are unifying factors for the people just as the Ark of covenant was to the Isralites. This study is relevant to the present study because it deals on deities in Elugwu Ezike. The methodology adopted in this study will be useful to the present study because oral interviews, direct observation and interactive sessions will be held in collecting data for the present study is focused on the rituals associated with traditional priestly coronation in Elugwu Ezike which has not attracted the attention of the previous researchers. Moreover, functional approach will be used in the analysis of the present study. These are the gaps the presents study intends to fill.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the researcher has been guided by the need to maintain a close problem-theory-method linkage in selecting the framework for the present study. This study is, therefore, guided by functional approach propounded by [20]. The theory of functionalism holds that the nature of ritual is to be defined in terms of its function in a society. The aim of functionalism theory is to explain ritual behaviour in terms of individual needs and social equilibrium. Ritual is thus viewed as an adaptive and adjustive response to the social and physical environment. Many leading authorities on religion and ritual have taken this approach as the most adequate way to explain rituals. Bronislaw Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Parson and Edmund Leach, all English or American anthropologists, adopted a functional approach to explain ritual, religion and myth. Most functional explanations of ritual attempt to explain this behaviour in relation to the needs and maintenance of a society.

The strengths of functional approach are dependent upon a claim that it is both logical and empirical. It is a claim, however, that is open to serious criticism. If the claim of functionalism is to explain why rituals are present in a society, it will be necessary to clarify such terms as need, maintenance and a society functioning adequately, and this becomes crucial if they are to be taken as empirical terms. The relevance of functional approach to the present study is that it remains a heuristic-device, or indicator, for describing the role of ritual in society. The theory also holds that the function of ritual depends upon its reference. Whatever the referent, ritual as symbolic behaviour presupposes that the action is non-rational which means that the means –end relation of ritual to its referent is not intrinsic or necessary.

The functional approach also holds that ritual behaviour entails an attitude that is concerned with the sacred and sacred acts and things, therefore, are nothing more than symbolic representations of society. Ritual involves a feeling of emotion of respect, awe, fascination, or dread in relation to the sacred. Ritual involves its dependence upon a belief system that is usually expressed in the language of myth

and that ritual action is symbolic in relation to its reference.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Preparatory Stage of Priestly Ordination.

At the demise of a traditional deity priest, the deity shrine is locked. No one, except the deity provost (*ọga ma or akara ma*) is allowed entry into the shrine house for *izu esaa* (seven native weeks). The *akara ma* (provost of the deity) visits the deity house to ensure that the deity shrine is kept in order. He keeps constant watch over the deity shrine until another priest is installed to take charge of the shrine. Members of the community hold a meeting for the installation of a new traditional priest to take care of their deity. The meeting is normally held at the compound of *Onyishi* (the eldest man) in the village. At the meeting, delegates are sent to *Ugwu Agu Ụmachi* to find out what they should do to enable the members of *Ugwu Agụ Umachi* to come and install a new traditional priest in their community. As earlier mentioned people of *Ugwu Agụ Umachi* are the only people in Elugwu Ezike that have the mandate to install a new traditional priest in any village in Elugwu Ezike.

The delegates sent to the chief priest of Ugwu Agụ *Ụmachị* present palm wine, kola nut and four tubers of yam to the chief priest. After drinking the wine and chewing the kola nut, the chief priest of Ugwu Agụ will inform the delegates that they should repeat their journey with a cock, four tubers of yam and kola nut again. The cock will be sacrificed to Ugwu Agụ deity by the chief priest. The cock slaughtered at the shrine of Ugwu Agụ is shared among the members of Ugwu Agụ traditionalists and "eha *ọọkọ*" (part of the cock slaughtered) is deposited at the Ugwu Agụ deity shrine. It is the belief of Ugwu Agụ members that the spirit of the would-be priest will come at the dead of the night to pick the e*ha ọọkọ*. According to Okonkwo Anthony one of the researcher's informants, it is the spirit of the would-be traditional deity priest that picks the *eha ọọkọ from* Ugwu Agụ shrine. The would-be *Atama* may not be aware of what is happening. He may be sleeping in his room and the spirit will move to the shrine of Ugwu Agụ to pick the *eha ọọkọ*. When the spirit of the would-be *Atama* comes to pick the *eha ọọkọ* at Ugwu Agụ shrine, members of Ugwu Agụ would ask the spirit his name, where he resides and his occupation. After answering the questions posed to the spirit of the would-be traditional priest, the chief priest of Ugwu Agụ then installs *awọ* feather on his forehead. In addition, *ike ekwa* (white cloth) is tied round the would-be traditional priest's head. All these act as identification marks of the would-be *Atama* on the day of actual installation. All these are happening spiritually and cannot be observed physically by non-members of Ugwu Agụ. On the day of coronation of the traditional priest, the horn blower will be calling the name of the would-be priest as they come for the occasion. An attentive observer may even be hearing the name of the would-be traditional priest as members of Ugwu Agụ are approaching the scene of the coronation.

First Phase of the Ritual: *Ikpoyi Ma*

Ritual is the actualization of faith. According to Aji Patrick, one of the researcher's informants, rituals associated with traditional priestly ordination are performed for two main reasons which are first, to remove the hand of the late priest from the deity cult and second, to establish the new priest in his office.

On the day of the arrival of the people of Ugwu Agụ Ụmachi, the adherents of the diety assemble at the village square. It is the responsibility of the community to provide the Ugwu Agụ people with a calabash of palmwine known as '*ibidẹ'* (soured palmwine purposely left on palm tree untapped for many weeks for the occasion). Every taxable traditional worshipper in the community will queue up in two long rows. The Ugwu Agụ people are served kola nut and palmwine first. After chewing the kola and drinking the palmwine, the Ugwu Agụ start beating their *ọkanga* (wooden drum) while the flutist blows his flute mentioning the name of the would-be priest. Women of Ugwu Agụ dance and chant incantations. Then, the Ugwu Agụ people go round the people who queued up in lines to find out the person who would be ordained as the new priest. The person carrying the emblems of the Ugwu Agụ shrine followed by *ọga Ugwu* Agụ (provost of Ugwu Agụ deity) would go round the

people who queued in two rows. Other people present would be watching very carefully to see the person to be chosen as the new priest. The people who queued in lines would be shivering. They also pray individually in their hearts so that they will not be chosen as a traditional priest.

The Ugwu Agụ people go round the people for at least eight times pretending not to know who is to be chosen or ordained. Later on, the person chosen would be signaled with '*Ojiri'* (a type of sword) in front of him. The person carrying the *ibide* (calabash full of soured palmwine) breaks the calabash containing ibide wine on his feet. It should be noted that sometimes the would-be priest may not be present at the installation ground. The would-be priest may be a Christian who is absent from the ordination ground because of his faith. In such a case, nobody will be ordained as a traditional priest. The Ugwu Agụ people inform the traditional worshippers the name of the person chosen by their deity to serve the deity but because he is a Christian and has refused the offer, no one should be ordained as the traditional priest until the chosen man is no more. The deity hut is then locked and the deity provost ("*akarama"*) is mandated to keep constant watch over the deity emblems until a new priest is ordained. But when the chosen priest is a traditional worshipper, sacrifices are offered. The chosen deity priest laments and cries continuously. His wife, children, relatives and friends join him in weeping. The reason why the chosen person cries is because he will be taken away permanently from his home. He will henceforth dwell at the deity shrine. There will be feast and merriments for Ugwu Agụ people. Gifts and presents are also given to them as formerly agreed.

The newly chosen traditional priest will be accompanied to the deity shrine by his kinsmen. He will be sleeping and staying at the deity shrine for twenty-eight (28) days without going anywhere. A thatched house is immediately constructed for the new priest at the deity shrine if there is none there. There will also be night wake by his friends, relatives and well-wishers within this period, there are feasts and merriments. People jubilate in order to keep the chosen priest happy. The new priest is expected to be sleeping on a local mat made of stems of banana and palm fronds.

Within this period of twenty-eight days seclusion, the *ede* (eldest woman in the community) would be visiting him very early in the morning on daily basis. She (ede) rubs the new priest's body with *odo* and *usheyi* (cam-wood) after bathing him. If the new priest dies this period of seclusion, it signifies that the priest had been rejected by the deity. But if he survives, within the period of twenty-eight days of night wake, it implies that he has been accepted by the deity.

Second Phase of the ritual *Iba Ifu ma* (Washing the New Priest's Face)

On the 28th day, the new priest's face is washed by the chief priest of Ugwu Agụ Ụmachi at the deity shrine. The chief priest of Ugwu Agụ Ụmachi removes the new priest of his former clothes and replaces it with the priestly attire. The chief priest also shaves the new priest's hairs. In the evening on the 28th day, the new priest lay parallel in front of the sun god of the deity naked. A white cloth is used to cover the new priest while he lay before the deity sun god. A fowl is slaughtered. The provost of the deity opens the new priest's eyes and the blood from the slaughtered fowl is allowed to drop into the new priest's eyes. This ritual resembles *ịwayi ọọkụ nẹ-ẹnya* ritual performed to a male deceased traditional worshipper in Elugwu Ezike. The ritual signifies that the new priest is regarded as dead and can now commune with the ancestral spirit. He can no longer g o back to his former residence. When he dies, he will be buried at the deity's forest. This also accounts for the reason why the new priest, friends and relatives weep during the time he was chosen to be the traditional priest. *Ịwayị ọọkụ nẹnya* ritual is symbolic in traditional priestly ordination because it establishes the new priest to his office. The rules and taboos surrounding priesthood are now revealed to the new priest by the chief priest of Ugwu Agụ. The newly ordained priest promises firmly to abide by all the rules guiding priesthood and pledges to be of good beheviour. The need for the atama to be of good behaviour is emphasized by Eliade (1995:19) in the following words:

> ... from the fact that man was created, civilized by supernatural being, it follows that the sum of his behaviour and activities belongs to sacred history, and this history must be carefully preserved and transmitted intact to succeeding generations.

Africans are conscious of this, and try to preserve their sacred history, and transmit it to future generations. Initiation of a new traditional priest helps them tremendously to realize this. It is rather more of sacred teaching in the customs, traditions and religious values of the community. Before one is considered worthy to receive teaching as a deity priest, one must first be prepared spiritually. This type of initiation occurs in the spirit of the deity cult. It venerates deified shades and effects union between the spirit and its adept through practices which are spiritualistic and mediumistic, the spirit takes possession of the new priest, makes him his tool and moves his personality into him. This spiritual possession lasts through the ordination ceremony, but the ordination of the new priest to the spirit is permanent. With it, the individual will be one of the associates of the spirit of the deity and his personal safety is assured. In this form of initiation, the initiate lives in association with the prerogatives of the spirit to whom he is ordained. He is made to become a new man, living in the style, with the spirit world and enjoys dignity and privileges of the spirit. That is to say that the new priest is totally in possession and is totally possessed by the spirit into which he is initiated. The spirit inserts himself so completely into him and absorbs him so completely that he takes his side in everything and ensures that he triumphs. This transformation of the whole person occurs in the process of the ordination ceremony.

On the twenty-eight day, the new priest is given full authority to take care of the deity shrine. From that day onwards, the new priest can move out freely. Prior to this ritual performance, his movement is strictly restricted. A small portion of the priest's hair is left uncut. He normally put *awọ* feather there whenever he is moving out as a mark of identification as a traditional priest. Nobody is allowed to touch that portion of the priest's hair. If someone touches it, he or she will provide fowl, kola and palm oil for sacrifice to appease the deity spirit otherwise the priest will not have peace of mind.

Also on the twenty-eight day, there will be feast and women of Ugwu Agụ Ụmachi cult dance and chant. One of the researcher's informants, Oyibo Eze, who is also a member of *enya ma* (Ugwu Agụ deity member), rendered this chant

Dinta **Hunt**

Ba-afurma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ - Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ - Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ - Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Ajẹdẹ 'o o Hunter o o.

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ - Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Ajẹdẹ nene lọlọ
Hunter of Mother deity.

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ . Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Nene ne-egbə anə eryi anə oo Mother kills animal and eats

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ o o – Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Ajẹdẹ nene lọloBa-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ - Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Ọ bə ndə inyama ma o o - It is we Inyama ma cult oo

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryikwa ajẹdẹ - Come and see a hunter in a thick forest

Nene anyi o o Mothr lolo o o

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryịkwa ajẹdẹ o o Come and a hunter in a thick forest

Ajẹdẹ na-achụ ńta egbu anə o o Hunter hunts and kills animals

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryịkwa ajẹdẹ Come and see a hunter in a thick forest.

Ajede ne-egbe anə eryi anə o o Hunter kills animals and eat.

Ba-afụma ajẹdẹ nẹ-ekwaryịkwa ajẹdẹ Come and see a hunter in thick forest.

Ọlọọha Olooha

Agə Agu

In the above chant, the chanter regards the deity as a hunter. As hunters look for a game when they need meat, the deity also looks for a priest to take care of its shrine and to offer the deity sacrifices. The chanter uses the image of hunter and thick forest to showcase the arduous task ahead of the new priest. This signifies that the office of the traditional priest is not an easy one. It demands a lot of hard work, and honesty on the part of the new priest. The chanter also reminds the general public that although the traditional priest always has plenty of meat to eat, he has to be very careful in dealing with his adherents and the deity itself. He has to abide by the rules and regulations guiding the priestly office otherwise he will meet his untimely death. The image of thick forest in the above chant shows the various challenges facing a traditional priest in the performance of his duty.

Another informant, Nwada Ogbese, provide the chant below.

Nene

Nene hanə anyị nẹ anyị akagə ẹnya

Nene hanə anyị nẹ anyị akagə enya

Nene hanə anyị nẹ anyị amagə ịhe

Nene hanə anyị nẹ anyị amagə anyị ịhe

Onye nẹ amagə ihe ga bə ya ga-ama

Onye akalẹ enya bə ya ma o o

Nene hanə anyị nẹ anyị bə ụmụnchị

Nene hanə anyị nẹ anyị akagə enya

Nene hanə anyị nẹ anyị akagə enya ihe

Onye ga-amagə ihe ga-abə ya ga-ama o o

Ndə ga-akalẹ enya ga-abə he ga-ama

Nene haa anyị nẹ anyị akagə ẹnya

Nene haa anyị nẹ anyị akagə ẹnya

Nene haa anyị nẹ anyị amagə ihe

Onye amale ihe ga-abə ya ga-ama

Onye akale ẹnya ga-abə ya ga-ama

Onye amale ihe bụ ya ga-ama oo oo

Mother

Mother leave us for we are in a state of ignorance

Mother leave us for we are full of ignorance

Mother leave us for we lack knowledge

Mother leave us for we lack knowledge

It is left for those that lack knowledge

It is left for those who are in the state of knowledge

Mother leave us for we are still children

Mother leave us for we are in a state of ignorance

Mother leave us for we lack knowledge

It is left for those who lack knowledge

It is left for those who lack knowledge

It is left for those who are knowledgeable

Mother leave us for we are in a state of ignorance

Mother leave us for we lack knowledge

It is left for those who claim that they are knowledgeable

It is left for those who claim that they are knowledgeable

It is left for those who claim that they are knowledgeable

oo oo.

Ọlọọha is an epithet for the priest. In this song, the chanter is appealing to the deity to exercise some restraints in punishing them (the adherents of traditional religion) on the basis that their actions were out of ignorance. This indicates that in most cases the songs and dancing by *Inyama ma* women cult members are in honour of the deity they are serving. Although the songs and dancing add luster to the celebration of the traditional priestly ordination, they have a veiled but more important effect of curbing recalcitrant and criminally minded members of the community who had broken the norms, and customs prevalent in the community. The songs are deliberately composed to highlight the abuses and crimes committed and expose the criminals. The singing groups, protected by the community's traditions, perform the role of the people's court to whose verdict the culprits and their relations cannot pretend to be indifferent and against which they have no appeal.

Also, Ijeoma Eze, one of the researcher's informants has this song to sing: **Egwu e ji echi atama n'Elugwu Ezike**

Ejekomə ozə nne m zərə m

Ejekomə ozə nne m zərə m

Ozə nne o o

Ozə nene lọlọ

Nene lọlọ Ụgbabe

Ozə nne anəgə agwụike

Ozə nne anəgə awọ afwụa

Ozə nne bə uru

Ozə nne bə uru karyirə ishi afwụa

A song used in the ordination of a traditional priest

I am running an errand for my mother

I am running an errand for my mother

My mother's errand o o

Errand for my mother lọlọ

Mother lọlọ Ugbabe

One does not feel tired when running an errand for his mother

One does not encounter loses for running his/her mother's errand.

Running of mother's errand is full of gains

The gain accruing from running one's mother's errand is greater than the loss.)

Lọlọ is an epithet for the priestess. In this song, the chanter is extoling the good qualities of the goddess she is serving. There is repetition of *nene lọlọ* and *ozə nene* to intensify that she (the chanter) is not acting on her own. She is rather performing the role assigned to her by the goddess (*nene lọlọ*). Running errand for *nene lọlọ* is full of benefits.

Furthermore, with their ritual dances and singing, women warm the hearts of the gods who, by their nature, hate evil and always want to get rid of them. Disarmed by the traditional immunity enjoyed by the women, people with deviant behaviour are either compelled to mend their ways or flee from the community. This indeed, has been a very significant and effective mechanism of social control in many African countries. It is important to note that as part of the celebration, traditional priest offers sacrifices to purify the community and remove the evils accumulated during the new year, thus renewing the society.

Adherents of the traditional religion do violate the rules and regulations guiding the priestly office and as such plead for forgiveness. This is to prevent the wrath or anger of the deity from befalling on the defaulters. The poet further notes that those who claim to be knowledgeable enough should be ready to face the anger of the deity they have offended. From the excerpt above we can deduce that no matter how old or knowledgeable one may be, he or she is still a child before the deity and equally in a state of ignorance as the following line of the poem illustrates: *Nene haa anyị nẹ anyị akagə ẹnya* (Mother leave us for we are in a state of ignorance). The traditional religionists regard the deity they are serving as their mother. They request the deity to cloth them as mother cloths her children. That means that the deity protects its adherents from danger as mother protects her children from danger.

Third Phase of the Ritual -*Ịkpụ Ishi ma,* (Shaving the new priest's hairs)

The priest's hair is shaved after one year. This ceremony of shaving the priests hair is called *Ịkpụ Ishi ma.* The kinsmen of the priest give him a cow. Pounded yam is prepared for the feast. Each adult male of the kinsmen presents a gallon of palm wine. The priest is then shaved by the akarama.

Ọkanga music is played and the new priest dances to the tune of the *ọkanga* music. As the priest is dancing, relations and friends post naira on his head as a mark of solidarity. All the money collected in this process is given to the priest. Other members of the community join in the dance expressing the degree of joy they have for the survival of the new priest for the period of one year in seclusion. This is accompanied with eating and dancing to the traditional music. This merry making will be performed by atama and his kindred and is accompanied by offering of gifts; no money must be placed on his head, but in a calabash put beside him or carried by akarama. The above initiation rituals symbolize death and re-birth, in which a new personality has emerged with new language learnt to communicate with the deities. The priest's attire is white and this is symbolic of purity. However, other gods and goddesses allow the use of different colours for their attires.

The cow and goat provided for the occasion are slaughtered, cooked and shared among the people present for the occasion. Also food and wine are served to the guests and everybody eats and drinks to his or her satisfaction. It is worthy to point out here that it is the duty of *Inyama ma* (women cult members) to cook the food and the slaughtered animals for the occasion.

Women cult members are selected by the deity itself on the day the new priest is ordained. The would-be *Inyama ma* (deity cult member) is possessed by the deity spirit. When a woman is possessed by the spirit of a deity during the priestly ordination, she makes a loud noise and falls down on the ground rolling and crying. The new priest immediately rushes to her side, holds her firmly and uses *odo* (cam wood) to rob down her face saying:

Enya gə lata alə

Enya gə lata alə

Let your eyes come down

Let your eyes come down

As the priest robs *odo* on the woman's face, her tension is restored and from that day she becomes a members of *Inyama ma ahụ* (a female cult member of that deity). The number of women possessed and treated by the new priest in this way constitutes women cult members for that deity.

The Role of *Inyama ma*

The *Inyama* cult members have a place of their own at the deity shrine. Every *Oye* market day and Afọ market day, they all assemble at the deity shrine. They are responsible for clearing and sweeping the compound of the deity shrine. They also have *Inyama* shrine there where they perform sacrifices [to *Inyama* shrine]. It is the duty of their most senior member to perform the sacrifice on their behalf. They are also responsible for cooking food and animals slaughtered to the deity on those market days. Eke and Afọ market days are days specifically marked for the deity. The female cult members have their own share on the slaughtered animals.

Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study reveal that traditional priestly ordination in Elugwu Ezike Igbo is deeply rooted in myths and the beliefs system of the people. The Elugwu Ezike Igbo like other African communities perform certain rituals during the ordination of atama (priest of a deity) to remove the hands of the late priest from the deity cult and to establish the new priest firmly in his office. The study also reveals that the major rituals performed during the ordination of a new deity priest include: Sacrificing of a fowl at Ugwu Agu deity shrine at Umuachi community of Elugwu Ezike, provision and breaking of a calabash of soured palm wine (ibide as it is called in the dialect of Elugwu Ezike) in front of the new chosen traditional priest, ikpoyi ma(handing over of the deity shrine to the new priest), iba ifu ma (washing of the new priest's face) and ikpu ishi ma (shaving of the new priest's hair).

CONCLUSION

All the rituals associated with the ordination of a traditional priest in Elugwu Ezike are dependent upon some belief system of the people for their complete meaning. A great many of such rituals are patterned after myths. The people's strong belief in the deity is manifestly the most striking features of Igbo traditional religion. All the local deities are not of equal importance and power to the people. Although a lot of variation exist in names, categories and details of belief in and worship of these deities, a number of them are believed to be major deities and are widely acknowledged by the Elugwu Ezike people. These include Oko, Idenyi, Ohe, Alụm among other arch deities in Elugwu Ezike. Of all the deities, the arch deity in each community is generally worshipped as the arch deity and seen as the guardian of the people's morality, a power which controls other lesser deities and a force which brings fortune and economic prosperity. There are numerous other lesser deities which constitute the dominant feature of Elugwu Ezike religious cult.

Ordination of a traditional priest follows strict procedures of visiting the Ugwu Agu people of Umachi, ascertaining the necessary rituals to be performed, and the amount of money to be paid to Ugwu Agu people. The rituals associated with traditional priestly ordination in Elugwu Ezike includes: *ikpioyi* ma (initiating the new deity priest into the deity cult), *ịba ifu ma* (washing of the new priest's face), igwuyi ma (installing the new priest into office), and finally *ịkpụ ishi ma* (shaving the new priest's hair). Women chant during the coronation of a traditional priest. Their chants are poetic and draw imageries from nature to express their emotion of their state of ignorance and appeal to the deity to forgive their errors in life. From these women's chant *Inyama* cult members, we can deduce that the Igbo have a strong belief in the power of deities in protecting their lives and inflicting calamities on defaulting members of the community.

Various ritual practices associated with the ordination of atama are of immense benefits to the traditional worshippers. The rituals help to keep the traditional worshippers in good relationship with the deity they serve. Through ritual practices, the various gods and goddesses reward the adherents or punish offenders as the case may be. Through rituals, the priests commune with the spirit world. Ritual practice serves as a re-enactment of their covenant with the one another and the deity. The ritual practices bring together members of the cults and give cohesion in the community at large.

The office of traditional priest is currently endangered due to the influence of Westernization. Many traditional priests have been converted to either Christian or Islamic religion. As a result, many deity shrines have been destroyed. Most people now neglect traditional priestly codes of conducts. There is no doubt that Westernization would continue to influence the survival of traditional priestly ordination and priesthood office externally, but inwardly those who are ardent believers in traditional religion would not reduce substantially in number for a long time to come because old custom die hard.

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