

DINAPATA AMOKWU AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, 1900-2007: DEITIES WERE NOT FALSEHOOD

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Abstract

This study, provides empirical basis of the continued relevance and reverence of traditional worship of deities in Igboland using the efficacy of the Dinapata Deity in Amokwu as case study. In spite of the destabilization efforts of Christianity which the Dinapata deity withstood during colonial rule, its survival demonstrates the resilience and cultural sustainability of deities in Igboland. This is evidenced in the efficacy of deities in the socio-political life of the people revealing that the African traditional belief system is at the heart of the natives despite entrenched misconceptions created by Euro-centric scholars. In line with the above, this study argues that the Christian worldview in the Amokwu community did not provide the impetus for the decline in the worship of the Dinapata deity, rather, the intrusion of the alien religion emboldened the worshippers and practitioners of Amokwu deity. The emergence of the new faith deepened the belief in the deity that unlocked the hitherto locked doors of blessings to indigenes and other communities beyond; demonstrating in the process its messianic attributes of love and care. The study adopts qualitative research methodology with the use of archival sources, oral accounts from indigenes, and others beyond the community to validate data collected. The study also used secondary sources of books and journal articles. The year 1900 is significant as indicative of the beginning of Western colonization and the infiltration of missionary adventurers in the study area. On the other hand, 2007, as the terminal date for the research work, is significant as the year witnessed the toxic relationship and cultural clash between Christian worshippers and adherents of the Dinapata deity, heralding the triumph of the latter. The study concludes that though the worship of Dinapata have being affected by intrusion of colonial religion as exemplified by the decrease of his worshippers, the Dinapata deity neither dwindled in relevance, demonstrating the high level of syncretism which exist among the indigenes of the community. The deity in essence served as a bold testament that the Igbo belief system is resilient, assertive, and culturally accommodating, all of which contributed to the survival of its continued relevance and service to the community up to the present 21st century.

Keyword: Amokwu, Ayaya-Festival, Deity & Taboo.

Introduction

Overtime the prestigious Dinapata deity among the people of Amokwu in Udi Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria is accorded with special place of honor. The origin of *Dinapata* is obscure and appears to be as old as the Amokwu community. Evidentially, like most deities across Igboland, the origin of *Dinapata* is shrouded in secrecy, mystery and has remained uncertain. The uncertainty surrounding its origin and existence has been a major discourse among adheres and observers, thus giving rise to several questions, such as: Who is *Dinapata*? Where did he come from? Why has its origin remained enigmatic? These are some of the thought-provoking questions that resonate deeply in the mindset of many. Commenting on this discourse, Ozor Amuzelu opines that the origin and existence of *Dinapata* have remained a mystery for ages.¹ He affirms that, just as the existence of many deities in various Igbo communities was created by those communities, that of *Dinapata* was exceptional. According to Amuzelu:

Dinapata was not made by man neither was he created through necromancy. He came on his own and settled in the present Amokwu community, where he met and interacted with the people and thereafter, became their god and guardian Angel. His worship developed immediately after such an encounter.²

Anchoring on Amuzelu's assertion, Aniebo posits that *Dinapata* is a deity filled with mysteriousness, affirming that on his arrival, it was in the nature of water, which rotates in a circled form. He posited that such a strange occurrence created fear among the people, who, through a soothsayer (*dibia*), discovered his true identity.³ The influence of the deity in the socio-religious and judicial activities of the community is preeminent. These roles have persisted in modern times, despite the advent of colonial and Christian worldviews. Thus, this study will underscore the continued relevance of *Dinapata* deity in the lives of Amokwu people and beyond, especially in this age of Christianity and Westernization influence. It will also interrogate the sustainability and resilience of the deity, despite colonial onslaught against the indigenous traditions. Dynamics in regards to the divination and worship of the deity will also be examined.

Literature Review

As relate to Euro-African contact and relevant of deities in Igbo socio-cultural life and activities, Madukasi and Ahamba, (2020) in their work "*Deities and their Symbolic Representation in Traditional Igbo Community: A case study of Alaogbaga Deity*

¹Interview with Amuzelu Aka, Ozor titled man/Farmer, 90, Amoboli-Amokwu, 10th February, 2023.

²Interview with Amuzelu Aka.

³Interview with Aniebo Ibe, Farmer, 80, Amube-Amokwu, 11th March, 2023.

in Chokoneze Mbaise,⁴ x-rayed on Alaogbaga's role as a judge of virtue and justice in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Imo state. According to Madukasi and Ahamba, the advent of Christian faith adversely affected the worship of *Alaogbaga*, leading to the community neglect and denigration of the deity. This agent assimilation in their view resulted in disrespect and abuse of the god on the part of various cadres. Though, they emphasized that *Alaogbaga* deity still retain some relevance despite the scourge of foreign religion, which has failed to tame the functions of the deity in Mbaise community. In elucidation, it could be deduced that Madukasi and Ahamba work, portrayed *Alaogbaga* deity as a defeatist god as a result of the decrease in its worship, which could be attribute to the effect of foreign religion. In similar vein, Eze, (2017) in his scholarly work "*Deities in a Changing Igbo Society: Ndi Nsukka, 1960 – 2016*,"⁵ examined the significant of deities like *Adoro* and others, in the socio-political life of the Nsukka people, highlighting how it defines and regulates relations between individuals and groups of people in the region. The work also made note of the local population's decreasing devotion to these gods. According to Eze, this decrease could be attributed to the effect of some steadfast criticism from followers of other religions, most notably Christians. The work also covered the detrimental effects of such an assault and disregard for safety on the socio-political affairs of the local populace. Eze work could be view within the mirror of battered gods which has been confronted with issue of rejection leading to its insignificant in the life of Nsukka people.

As scholars elaborate on the resilience of Igbo belief system with deities as center point, Isiani et al (2022), in their work, "*not all Deities were Transformed in Igbo Land: A Cultural History of the Api-Opi deity*,"⁶ examined the influence and sustainability of *Api-Opi* deity in the life of *Opi* people despite the scourge of colonization and missionization. Isiani et al argues that existence of *Api-Opi* and the level the people mostly the youths embrace her worship, indicate that foreign religion failed in its objective. This according to Isiani et al demonstrate the Igbo traditional religion's resistance to the negative effects of Christian infiltration. For Omeje and Magawi (2013), in their work, "*borrowing from the Gods: Oracular Deities as Traditional Sources of credit among the Igbo of Nigeria*,"⁷ examined the significance of deities in maintaining the customary credit system among the Igbo people. Omeje and Magawi argues that

⁴C, Madukasi & L.N, Ahamba, Deities and their Symbolic Representation in Traditional Igbo Community: A case Study of Alaogbaga Deity in Chokomeze Mbaise. *Randwick International of Social Science Journal* vol 1 no 1 (2020) 63-72. Accessed on 6/05/2023

⁵O.C, Eze, Deities in a Changing Igbo Society: Ndi Nsukka. 1960-2016. *Journal of Social Science Research* vol 2 no 1, (2017). 88 – 99. Accessed on 12/05/2023.

⁶M.C, Isiani et al, Not All Deities were Transformed in Igboland: A Cultural History of the Api-Opi Deity. *Journal of Cultural Heritage, Management and Sustainable Development* vol 1 no2, (2022). 68 – 89. Accessed on 17/05/2023.

⁷K.Omeje & J. Magawi, Borrowing from the Gods: Oracular Deities as Traditional sources of Credit among the Igbo of Nigeria. *Journal of Ethnographic Study* vol 4 no 3, (2013). 100 – 105. Accessed on 23/05/2023.

the recognition of deities' roles draws people closer in their seek for justice when undermined especially on the area of credit or trust system. Deities are consulted or petitioned to assist in resolving a variety of societal issues that might otherwise diminish the value of society. This in their view, the well-established social control, criminal justice, and livelihood support duties of the deities appear to be a logical outgrowth of the credit system. For Ajang, (2016), "*Our Deities, our strength, the example of Nfam and Oolim in Ogoja upper Cross River Region of Nigeria*,"⁸ examined the existence and hierarchy of African deities, as well as the African worldview on deities. Ajang affirms that the worship and reverence of deities in Africa was inspired by the idea that God cannot be seen by a sinful, mortal man, opining that the Africans' have a conviction that an all-knowing God must be too holy to approach, the need for lesser deities. In Ajang view, the gods serve as a bridge between God and humanity. As a result, they serve as means to a goal rather than an end in themselves.

Methodology

Few relevant literary works were rigorously reviewed as it identified with the subject of study. The information on the subject matter was based on oral co-creation, which involved a personal interview with some elders and youths in the community. In addition, ethnographic study was equally conducted in the course of study by visiting and observing some rituals being performed by members of the community at the shrine. The visitation took place at early march 2023 at *Onuachu aja*, one of the deity shrines located at Umugwunye village Amokwu. The total number of respondents (10). All the respondents were male. An ozor titled man, a chief priest of *Odo* deity and some youths who volunteered for the interview. The age includes 33-90, as some could not recalled their exact age of birth. The interview took place at the house of various respondents. Some few women approached were reluctant in accepting an interview, rather suggesting their male counterpart. Questions were asked based on ethnographic observation. Origin, rituals and the creeds observed by the deity were interrogated. Additionally, archival visitation at National Archive Enugu at middle of May 2023, was carried out to get a verified information regarding Christian incursion into the area.

Conceptual Clarification

Deity

Deity as a concept does not have one generally accepted definition. As a result, while some use it as a synonym for God, others connect it to a particular deity. The name has its origin from the Latin word *deitas* or *Deus*, which means "god," and has been given some divine qualities, such as God, whose representative they are to the

⁸J.A, Ajang, *Our Deities, Our strength, the example of Nfam and Oolim in Ogoja Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria. A Journal of Contemporary Research*, vol. 13 no. 3, (2016) 31-40. Accessed on 6/05/2023.

people. For many decades, the concept of deities in Igbo traditional religious thought has been a controversy. According to Metuh these controversies include a lack of written documents, lack of in-depth study of traditional religion leading to hasty conclusions, prejudice by Western scholars who misconceived traditional religious concepts with Christianity, and language barriers.⁹ Mbiti agrees by saying that most of the scholars who came to study the indigenous religions were armchair scholars who depended on data from missionaries who themselves concentrated in one community or tribe. They used the scanty information derived from one or two localities to draw conclusions about the ontology of deities.¹⁰ Idowu affirms that the belief in the existence of deities is fundamental in an Igbo society.¹¹ For Brown, deities are spirit beings that reveal themselves in many different ways, and human beings have always felt its presence and responded in worship.¹² Mbiti contributes thus;

These revelations have brought about a relationship between mankind and the deities leading to what we now call religion. The greatness of deities is also portrayed in African traditional religion by him when he explained that, though the knowledge of deities is not documented in any sacred book, it is expressed by proverbs, short statements, songs, prayer, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies.¹³

He asserts that Africans express their concept of deities in the attributes accorded to them. They personify nature's gifts like forests, groves, trees, etc., and dedicate them as representatives of the presence of deities. According to him, in traditional religion, deities are not considered to be living beings, but to express certain concepts, they employ anthropomorphic language and images about it as an aid to their conceptualization of it that they have not seen and about whom they confess to know little or nothing. The belief in the cult of deities is a phenomenon that is generally acknowledged in Africa. The myths that are prevalent in African communities about the presence of mermaid spirits, spirits of the deceased, and other spirit forces unknown to man show a belief in deities. These ideas significantly affect people's lives, as evidenced by their worldviews, values, and attitudinal orientations. In Amokwu, the Supreme Being (God) is invisible; hence direct interaction with Him is not easy. Furthermore, *Chi*, *Chi-Ukwu*, *Chineke* the creator God is great and powerful and has attendants like deities to address human needs. To the Amokwu person, *Chi-Ukwu*, endowed the various deities that dot the landscape with the power to intervene in the affairs of the people. This goes in line with E.O. Anyacho when he observed that as a

⁹ E. I. Metuh. *God and Man in African Religion*. (London: Chapman, 1981), 70.

¹⁰ J.S. Mbiti. *Introduction to African Religion*. (London: Heinemann, 1975), 56.

¹¹ B. Idowu. *Oludumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. (London: Longmans, 1962), 34.

¹² D. A. Brown. *A guide to Religion*. (London: Speck, 1975), 89.

¹³ J.S. Mbiti. *Introduction to African Religion*. 58.

result of their (deities) closeness to God and their superiority over man, they are accepted as intermediaries between God and the society with the powers to save and destroy and to provide for the needy.¹⁴

Therefore, a deity may be seen as an intermediary of *Ch-Ukwu* or *Chineke* who interacts with man and assist him, of which the people of Amokwu believe in, as seen in *Dinapata*. The worship of the deity especially on the day of his celebration is done on *Orie* day according to Igbo four market calendar. *Afor* or *Eke* are meant for other days outside the day of his festival. The items used during the worship are cloth called *Akwa ndi Nhu*. A weaving cloth, white in colour and usually made by the women of the community prior to the day of his celebration. The process is usually referred as *Ikwe akwa Dinapata* (making the *Dinapata* cloth). Any menstruating woman does not come near the cloth or a place of its making. Outside cloths, other items are *Oji-kolanut*-which must be one year old, cock-*Egbene*, *Ebine*-ram-must be of Igbo stock, palm wine-which must not touch ground, two feathers mostly from a bird called *Ugo*- eagle and another called *Aghu*, snuff- *Utaba*. These items must not be defied prior to the day of the celebration. Some sacred objects of the deity such as *Oji* and *Arow* are equally involved during the ritual process. These various word of incantation are invoked at this period, such as *Dinapata Udumanugwu, Iyi bi na agu n'eze bi na ugwu Odenigbo, Ogbujuru Ubosi Okosisi gbachiri Ezi, Dinapata Ugbo Orimmiri, Oka ome and Ngedegwu. Dike gbakoru idenyi oso ga na Agu ga ebiri*. These words of eulogization were also accompanied with *Okanga* music which rotate seven times in a circle form signifying the completion of the festival. The festival of this deity is not exclusive to men, women were inclusive as well. Women dressed with two pieces of rapper, danced along with *Okanga* music performance, demonstrating their loyalty and appreciation to the deity. As narrated by Aniebo regarding the importance of *Dinapata*, he posited thus:

Dinapata in our life is like a water that flows from the sky. His blessings know no boundary irrespective of any faith. His role in our community has remain the same despite vicious attacks from the Christian followers. He has been the defender of our community especially from evil calamity, just as seen in some other communities around us, whereby money ritual exists, it is not so in our community due to the fear of *Dinapata* wrath. He does not condone such evil practice.

Taboo

The phenomenon of taboo is a particular case of a religious ban that exists in every religion. Webster New World College Dictionary defines a taboo as something sacred

¹⁴E. O Anyacho, *Essential Themes in the Study of Religion*, 2nd edition. (Obudu: Niger Link Printing and Publishing, 2005), 10

and consecrated or too dangerous.¹⁵ Hutton describes taboo as a prohibition that is, an object under a prohibition.¹⁶ Adler considers taboo to be "subject to its cultural environment."¹⁷ In the case of *Dinapata*, the following constitute his taboo (*Nso*), which is as follows: Fornication before visitation to his shrine is prohibited, Eating leftover food in the morning before visitation is prohibited, Eating of cassava (*Akpu*) or things associated with it is prohibited as well, "Menstruating women are prohibited from visitation, Women are also prohibited from putting an under-wear during a visit to his shrine, Carrying of fire or light during the night visitation are prohibited, Using a charm during a visit is equally prohibited, Wearing of footwears is also not allowed during visitation at his shrine, Indulging in a partiality when fetching water in his shrine is equally prohibited, Eating unclean animals such as sheep, rat, etc. are also prohibited, Indulging in adultery is also prohibited. The following commandments, according to Ifeanyi Osigbo, constitute the key pillars in the ritual, sacrifices, invocation and offerings of the deity. The essence of these prohibitions is to instil purity or holiness on the worshippers.¹⁸

Ayaya-Festival

Ayaya is a festival celebrated during the festive of the *Dinapata* deity. The festival is very unique, as it prepares the path for the deity celebration. The month of its celebration occur at late November or at most first week of December each year. The day of its celebration occur on *Afor* day according to Igbo four market days or calendar. This festival is exclusive to Amube village in the Amokwu community. Any individual outside the village does not partake in the festival. An exception is through maternal link or connection. During the festival, a music dance known as *Okanga* music involving youths is utilized. The significance of this festival is that it creates bonds and a sense of belonging among members in Amube village. Every individual be it male or female, Christian or Traditionalist, regard *Ayaya* as a period of love and happiness, and a result, embrace each other on the day of the celebration. This festival in the village is like a Christmas celebration, attracting people from other villages that make up Amokwu community.¹⁹

¹⁵A. Michael; and S. N. Andrew (ed.) Webster 's New World College Dictionary, IDG Books Worldwide. (1999), 98

¹⁶W. Hutton, *Taboo: A Sociological Study*. (London: Oxford University Press,1942), 58

¹⁷M.K. Adler, *Naming and Addressing:A Sociolinguistic Study*. (Hamburg, Germany: Buske, 1978), 64

¹⁸Interview with Ifeanyi Osigbo, Trader, 40, Awolo-Amokwu, 16th March, 2023

¹⁹Interview with Aniebo Ibe, Farmer, 80, Amube-Amokwu, 11th March, 2023.

Deities in Igboland and Christianization

Christianity has come to stay; in fact, it should be adopted as the religion of the Igbo. This is the conclusion of people who think that Igbo traditional worship has long passed its usefulness. It served the past generations and should be utterly thrown out of the Igbo people's lives.²⁰

In line with the above notion, indicate how deities in Igboland are perceived as regard with Christian worldviews. On this conception, N. Uzoamaka argues that people with such a belief system, fail to realize that Igbo traditional worship, locally known as *Odinani*, is a religion filled with spirituality that takes its root in nature and is anchored on the sanctity of deities.²¹ However, the advent of Christianity in Igboland meant the introduction of a Christian worldview. The religious beliefs, practices, and the provision of social services of Christian religion have an impact on the religious and cultural life of the traditional communities in Igbo land. Christianity, at times, has undermined some of the traditional religious and cultural values that have fostered peaceful co-existence over the years.²² One such belief and practice that have survived the onslaught of the forces of change in Igbo land is the belief in deities. Mbiti states that deities, though in retreat, are very much alive. The average Igbo Christian would not normally participate in the public worship of deities but would resort to deities for help when difficult life situations such as illness, misfortunes, deaths, barrenness, present themselves for solutions. This attitude exhibited by most Igbo Christians underscored the notion about the existence of syncretism. The syncretism which entails blending of Christian faith with traditional practice, does not only exist in modern Amokwu community, but as well exposed the hypocrisy which have come to define the 21st century Christian movement in Igbo land.²³

However, O. Eze in his view, posited that deities, was always an important factor in the socio-cultural life of the Igbo people, defining and regulating inter-personal and inter-group relations. The institution in his view, ensured that there were cordial relationships not only at the horizontal but also at the vertical levels of society. Thus, deities bridge the gap between God and the people.²⁴ In the Amokwu area, like

²⁰E. O Egbo, Conflicts between Traditional Religion and Christianity in Igboland South Eastern Nigeria. *West African Religion* 10, (1971). 7-17.

²¹N. Uzoamaka, Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion, *A Journal of Contemporary Research*, vol. 13 no. 3, (2023), 34-44. Accessed on 6/05/2023

²²Nwuba Mary and Grace Chinyere, The Interface between Igbo Traditional Religion and Christianity, *African Journal of History and Culture*, Vol.13(1), (2021), 37-42, Accessed on 6/05/2023

²³J.S. Mbiti. *Introduction to African Religion*. (London: Heinemann, 1975). 50.

²⁴O.C, Eze, Deities in a Changing Igbo Society: Ndi Nsukka, 1960-2016, *Journal of Social Science Research* vol 2 no 1, (2017). 88 – 99. Accessed on 12/05/2023.

other parts of Igboland, based on Eze view, deities perform various duties, ranging from the political and economic to the social and judicial. For E. Egbo, this institution that hitherto promoted peace and harmony among the people through its impartiality in administering justice and arbitration has, in recent years, been faced with relentless attacks from organized religion particularly from Christianity. He opines that since Colonization and Christianization of Igbo land, many deities have been melted with attacks, resulting in the destruction of their shrines and abandonment. This destruction in his view was a manifestation of the overzealousness of Christian followers against the institution.²⁵

However, against these onslaughts, one among the few deities, that withstood colonial attack is the *Dinapata* deity of Amokwu. The resilience of this deity against Christianization demonstrates the uniqueness and sustainability of Igbo belief system with regards to traditional worship. The deity has played a religious, socio-cultural, and judicial role in the life of Amokwu residents. The upsurge in appreciation of the deity demonstrates the positive impact he has on the lives of the people as they seek solutions to their problems. Rather than disappearing, as claimed by the Christian religion, the deity has continued to soldier on in the Amokwu community, this in essence, affirms that the deity's influence on Amokwu life is intact despite the advent of Christianity into the area.

Dinapata in the Life of Amokwu: Judicial and Socio-Religious Role and Impacts

The Idea of deity as an institution in the Igbo belief system has been paramount in the adjudication and settlement of cases in various Igbo communities. This institution has always been petitioned by various individuals or people who felt cheated or maltreated in their rights. The idea of resorting to deities is a belief in their impartial judgment.²⁶ In every Igbo community, this institution is seen as a last resort in conflict resolution. The deities are solicited to intervene, with the notion to adjudicate justice and fair play. Through impartial administration of justice and arbitration, this institution assists in fostering peace and harmony among the populace. Omeje and Magawi, affirm that "the deities are looked upon as a result of people's loss of faith and confidence in the modern judicial system which in their perspective are characterized by corruption and bribery. These as a result make the attainment of justice impossible."²⁷ To buttress the point, Ejiofor posits that; the modern legal system which creates room for bribery and corruption, and for criminals to evade justice is at variance with the institution of deity which is believed to offer an impartial verdict in all

²⁵E. O Egbo, Conflicts between Traditional Religion and Christianity in Igboland South Eastern Nigeria. *West African Religion* 10, (1971). 7-19.

²⁶O.C, Eze, Deities in a Changing Igbo Society: Ndi Nsukka. 1960-2016. 103.

²⁷K. Omeje and J. Magawi, Borrowing from the Gods: Oracular Deities as Traditional sources of Credit among the Igbo of Nigeria, 109

matters.²⁸ In reference to *Dinapata*, the deity has served as a judicial and socio-religious control agency for the Amokwu community's residents and other communities beyond. The deity's power is derived from the fact that his system of adjudicating justice is founded on objective judgment.

In the Amokwu community and beyond, *Dinapata* is known to have rendered justice in several cases that were brought to his notice. His pattern of justice has attracted encomium, and a lot of sacrifice for appreciation from individuals and persons within the community and beyond. Such method of adjudication made the people of the community revered him as; *Oka Ome and Ome mgbe Onyilidike*. (The one that never failed and the one that always came when all hope are lost).²⁹ The effectiveness of his justice's demonstrate how unbiased and effective the institution of deities is in addressing issues about injustice. Elechi in explaining the effectiveness of deities in dispensing justice, affirms that before the arrival of the Europeans, Igbo conduct and behaviors were governed by custom based on the institution of deities and other norms accepted by the people.³⁰

Some of the cases centered on the judicial roles which *Dinapata* rendered as extracted from an oral account are as follows: First, the destruction of the Ukpata community at Uzo-uwani, following the death of Mr. Okoroafor Onyiani, who was drowned by a River known as Adada, located at Ukpata community in Enugu State. The story had that *Dinapata* sent five mysterious women, namely Mrs. Oyiafor Idike, Mrs. Oyinamuife, Mrs. Nwaneze, Mrs. Ijeoma Odoba and Mrs. Enife Ozulu, on a war mission, leading to razing completely Ukpata community. In addition, Mr. Michael from Amube village in the Amokwu community who was accused by his neighbor-Chijioke - in Enugu metropolis of having an affair with his wife in their compound. Mr. Michael in his reaction, picked up a kolanut and called upon *Dinapata* for justice. The aftermath of this scenario led to the death of Mr. Chijioke. His death was accompanied by sacrifices for appeasement.³¹ In another similar case as narrated through oral account was in the case of Enechi family at Uzo-uwani local government, Enugu State. The story had that one of their sons was kidnapped, prompting the family to solicit for *Dinapata* intervention. The assailants unknowingly requested for the ransom to be kept at *Dinapata* shrine. One of the assailants was apprehended in the course of trying to get the ransom at the shrine. The family in appreciation, brought a ram "*Ebine*" for offering and thanksgiving. Finally, was an issue involving Mrs. Mgbeke Onaji and Mr. Ekene Ugwuegbu from Amokwu community. *Dinapata* was petitioned by Mrs. Onaji

²⁸Peter Ejiofor, *Cultural Revival in Igbo Land*. (Enugu: Nolix Educational Publishers, Nigeria, 2002), 71

²⁹Interview with Aniebo Ibe, Farmer, 80, Amube-Amokwu, 11th March, 2023.

³⁰O. O, Elechi, *The Igbo Indigenous Justice System* (University of Ottawa press, Canada, 2019).

³¹Interview with Amuzelu Aka, Ozor titled man/Farmer, 90, Amoboli-Amokwu, 10th February, 2023.

following the misconduct of Mr. Ekene over her goat. The resultant effect led to the death of Ekene, who died mysteriously.³² Thus, these various cases, as accounted, demonstrate how impactful on the judicial entanglement, the deity had over Amokwu community and beyond.

Apart from the judicial role and control, *Dinapata* also exercises socio-religious control in the Amokwu community. As accounted through oral interviews, there was a crop of cultural conflict between the two religious' faiths in the community. This conflict between the traditional adherents and Christian followers occurred during the middle of July 2007. The conflict impacted negatively on the daily activities of the community. At early wee hours of 15th August, 2007, seven people were arrested and detained, most especially the prominent members of the community who were perceived as fueling the crisis. This incident took place during the *Odo* (masquerade) festival celebration. The reverend father at Saint Michael Parish at the time, Father Raphael Okeafor, insisted on undermining the practice of the *Odo* festival which restricted women's movement in the community. The stalemate between the church represented by the Reverend Father and the followers of traditional worship, created what the people of the community refer to as "*Oso Father Odo*". This skirmish between the Church and the members of traditional worshippers in the community persisted ab initio the intervention of the Enugu diocese and subsequent redeployment of the reverend father to a new locality. The redeployment of the father by the diocese saved the situation from snowballing into a bloodbath. However, despite the scenario, the various religious faiths in the community have continued to live in peace and harmony in the practice of their faiths. As part of peaceful co-existence, traditional worshippers contributed financially to the building of Saint Michael Parish and Sacred Heart Station both located in the community.³³ The aftermaths of this skirmish, spur more people into embracing the worship of *Dinapata*. They perceived *Dinapata* as a god of justice, due to the role he played in encouraging peace in the community. Apart from diocesan intervention, the role of *Dinapata* in cementing peace during the period cannot be forgotten. Through a soothsayer (*dibia*), *Dinapata* instructed for a sacrifice to avert calamity from befalling the community. The sacrifice, heralded peace, unity and love among both faiths.³⁴

³²Interview with Aniebo Ibe, Farmer, 80, Amube-Amokwu, 11th March, 2023.

³³Interview with Aniebo Ibe, Farmer, 80, Amube-Amokwu, 11th March, 2023.

³⁴Interview with Amuzelu Aka.

Dinapata Shrine at (Onuachuaja), A Place of Sacrifice Known as Holy of Holiest.
5th May, 2023



Christianization and Traditional Worship of Dinapata: Resilience of Igbo Belief System

The wave of Christian missionary evangelism moved in tandem with the colonial incursion of the diverse areas of Igboland. According to Onwu the coming of Christianity into Igboland in 1842 was rightly perceived as a civilizing mission.³⁵ It meant the introduction into the relatively stable Igbo traditional religious framework of an alternative view of the world, a rival cosmology, and a different way of understanding the place of Igbo people in creation. This encounter marked the beginning of the restoration of the broken link and what has been the development implication of modernity. The encounter between the Igbo indigenous religion and Western culture was put clearly by Achebe when he said that the white man had put a knife on the things that held us together, and we had fallen apart. Achebe claims "That new cultural forces that the Igbo people were unwilling to interact with or take seriously contaminated their culture, sense of community, and sense of solidarity."³⁶ Westernization led to the erasure of Igbo culture and the adoption of foreign lifestyles.

³⁵D. N. E. Onwu, *Uzo ndu na Eziokwu: Towards the understanding of Igbo Traditional Religious Life and Philosophy*. (2023), 43. Retrieved from <http://ahiajioku.igbonet.com/2023/igbo.2023>.

³⁶C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*(London: Heinemann, 1958), 98.

People's worldviews underwent significant changes as a result of their exposure to new kinds of life and the opportunities they presented. In the words of Udeagha

The choice of terms, which the Western Missionaries and scholars used in describing the native, indigenous and traditional religion of the Africans, were not just derogatory and opprobrious but also inflammatory and seditious". They condemned the religion as idolatry, paganism, animism, ancestor worship, heathenism, fetishism, etc. Such blatant condemnation was borne out of pride and arrogance. In view of their cultural sophistication, the Europeans disregarded the way of life that did not measure up to their cultural pattern. But they failed to look at the values of Igbo religion and culture before uncritically imposing western religious pattern.³⁷

Thus, the first encounter of Igbo Traditional Religion with Christianity and Western culture was marked by antagonism and the rejection of Igbo traditional belief as pagan and devilish. However, Igbo traditional religion proved resilient, even while Christianity grew rapidly in Igbo cosmology. What many have not considered is that even though Christianity got to Igboland in 1857, it was not readily accepted. The British initiated military expeditions to conquer the Igbo people, and seeing how hard it was to get the Igbo to submit to their rule, they utilized religion being that that Igbo people are highly religious and spiritual. With religion, the conquest of the Igbo people became easier. As pointed out by F.K. Ekechi, "It was the period following the extension of British political authority that missionary evangelism prospered. Before that, the Igbos treated missionary propaganda with respectful indifference."³⁸ Thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, Christian converts were instructed against using taboos, oracles, and oaths as tools of societal control. They eliminated people's faith in and apprehension about the vengeance of the gods and ancestors. They propagated the idea that the gods are powerless. In order to achieve this, Christians developed a fervent devotion to the gods and began destroying numerous holy groves and temples.³⁹ Having made destruction of Idols, shrines, *ofò*, *Ikenga* and every symbol of traditional worship in their (the prospective Igbo convert) possession as a prerequisite for baptism and acceptance into Christian faith. To the people confusion, as Ekechi put it:

In the sights of the traditionalist worshippers, society seemed to have been set ablaze by the revolutionary teaching of the missionaries. Watching their children, formerly law-abiding act

³⁷N. Udeagha, *Democracy and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: 1999-2007*. B.A Thesis submitted to the Department of Religion. (University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2007), 98.

³⁸F. K Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igbo land 1857-1914*. Vol. 119. *Psychology Press*, (1972), 43-50. Accessed on 7/05/2023

³⁹C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*(London: Heinemann, 1958), 102

so irreverently, many began to ask whether Christianity was a license for outlandish excesses and violation of the moral code.⁴⁰

Actually, it is a sad reality that the forceful destruction of symbols of traditional worships as oftentimes carried out by Christians of today is the brain child of the missionaries having ab initio introduced the subject matter to the then young converts. Nonetheless, despite the Christianization onslaught, *Dinapata* deity of Amokwu demonstrates the resilience of the Igbo traditional worship system challenging the notion about the decline of powers of deities in Igbo land. A Christian worldview was brought to Amokwu with the arrival of Christianity. The Christian faith first arrived at Eke following the British pacification of Udi. Eke is a community in present Udi local government area Enugu State.⁴¹ The establishment of the Udi division in 1908 and the appointment of Chief Onyeama by colonial authority made the spread of Christianity in the region possible. Chief Onyeama donated land at a place known as *Nkwo Eke*, where Saint Paul Catholic Church was set up.⁴² The establishment of Catholic presence at Eke led to the spread of the Christian faith to other neighboring communities. The Amokwu people adopted Christianity and Western values, which affected the traditional religion in its organized form. More specifically, as a result of the rapid adoption of Christianity, the worship of the *Dinapata* deity was in essence affected.⁴³ Through the influence of Christian doctrine, some people, mostly women, were influenced into abandoning the worship of the deity. These women who were hitherto adherents of trado-faith were lectured, and convinced to abandon his worship. The conviction of these women was done by their children, who threatened for attending to their needs if they fail to renounce the worship of the deity. Another act that has been witnessed in the modern Amokwu community regarding the existence of the deity, was a desecration of his object of worship. For instance, some families at times desecrate and destroy the property of the deity whom they perceived as idol, especially those that situated, in their compounds. The consequence at time result to calamity and at most, death.⁴⁴

Commenting over this uncouth attitude or what could be seen as eco-terrorism i.e. destruction of artifacts, Aniebo in a personal interview, described the attitude of Christian adherents towards *Dinapata* deity as un-African, describing their actions as act of ignorance. In his assertion, he posits that *Dinapata* is kind, contending that his act of kindness has made some Christians to behave contemptibly, arguing that there is no logic where their cultural heritage could give way to foreign culture, which its only

⁴⁰F. K Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igbo land 1857-1914*, 60

⁴¹ National Archives Enugu, ONPROF 7/14/195 Application for a Site at Eke Enugu Division from Chief Onyeama, 1927

⁴² National Archives Enugu, ONPROF 7/14/195.

⁴³ Interview with Chukwuma Ozulu, Trader, 39, Umuoti Amokwu, 14th April, 2023.

⁴⁴ Interview with Udenna Enyi, Trader, 42, Umugwunye-Amokwu, 15th June, 2023.

impact is to create confusion and division. In his emphasis, he maintains in Igbo parlance that *Mbiambianism* cannot defeat *Nnononism* (externality cannot defeat internality).⁴⁵ Echoing Aniebo's argument, Atulume Agu in a personal interview, asserts that colonialism and Christianity have affected the way traditional worship system is practiced as handed over by forebears, affirming that the attitude of Christian followers will never deter nor destroy their resolve towards the worship of *Dinapata*. He asked in rhetoric Is not an act of foolishness and ignorance for someone to think that he or she can destroy *Dinapata*, who is a spirit, impossible? He described the overzealous Christians as an agent of Western destruction and domination, affirming that they have been hypnotized into abandoning their culture in placement of others, describing such as an act of self-denial.⁴⁶ He further echoed thus:

We the followers of *Dinapata* will not leave the belief of our forefathers for colonial religion. *Dinapata* was here before Christianity came to our community, and will be here to see its demise.... we must worship *Dinapata* till we die

Adding credence on the above views, Ozor Amuzelu in an interview, argues that people might say that Christian adventures have impacted negatively on the worship of other deities in Igboland, but that of *Dinapata* is different. He attributed it to the love people has for the deity, whom he described as the gods of the ancient whose origin are yet to be ascertained. Regarding the attacks on the deity, Amuzelu posited thus:

The aim of those attacking and soliciting for the destruction of *Dinapata* was to enable them to indulge in nefarious activities like money rituals, kidnapping, stealing and injustice of all kinds, which is abhorred by the deity.

He further argues that the existence of *Dinapata* is the greatest thing to have happened to the Amokwu community, stating that the deity has brought numerous blessings and protections to the community, which as a result, instills the cherishes of the deity. To buttress his point, he narrated a story of how *Dinapata* averted calamity that befell the Amokwu community during the time of forebears. The calamity, which occurs in the form of death, happened in the late 17th century. In his narrative, he elaborated on how a shadow of death took over the Amokwu community, day and hour, families buried their loved ones. This situation became worrisome, as a result, every adult was summoned to the village square to deliberate on the matter. After the deliberation, a soothsayer (*Dibia*) was summoned to ascertain the root cause of the untimely occurrence. At the inquiry, *Dinapata* implored them that some spiritual

⁴⁵Interview with Aniebo Ibe, Farmer, 80, Amube-Amokwu, 11th January, 2023

⁴⁶Interview with Atulume Agu, Farmer, 75, Awolo-Amokwu, 5th May, 2023.

elements brought a battle to the community and instructed that, they should bring a white ram, "*Ebine*" and display it in the presence of the rising sun for a ritual. The aftermaths heralded to the end of the untimely death within the community. Amuzelu described this miraculous wonder as what the recent generations mostly the Christian irredentists in the community, are not knowledge of.⁴⁷

Dynamics in Divination and Worship of Dinapata

All communities in Igboland experienced dynamism in their cultural practices following the advent of Western colonialism and missionization. While some cultures gave way to Western influence, some remained intact and resilient against colonial destruction. *Dinapata* deity of Amokwu is one among the deities, that demonstrate such resilience of the Igbo belief system. In essence, the wave of Christianity in recent times, have challenged the historical ties and cultural norms of many traditional communities in Igboland. Thus, *Dinapata* deity is one such traditional Igbo belief system that has been challenged by Christianity, especially his worship and functionality. The deity has been a victim of organized attacks by the received religion – Christianity - but interestingly, he has continued to soldier on. Inquiry shown that the deity patronage and power have remained intact despite the influence of Western values and civilizations. This, in essence, signified the resilience of the deity and his adherents. Furthermore, the failure of the Western institutions has unintentionally increased the people's belief in the deity's spiritual powers. The new system's perversion of justice, expensive litigation costs, and endless adjournments, on the other hand, forced some people to continue with business as usual. This goes in line with Pita Ejiofor when, making remarks about the Western judicial system, suggested; "for the majority of offenses, people can clear their records of wrongdoing by simply paying penalties without experiencing any physical pain."⁴⁸ The reality that the new system permits artificial compromises (which) do not ease the feelings of the oppressed and marginalized in society increasingly explains this. This is illustrated by the proverb "justice delayed is justice denied," which shows that despite Christianity's long alliance with the legal system, a significant portion of Amokwu people have continued to adhere to their traditional legal system, which places the *Dinapata* deity at the forefront.

In Amokwu, *Dinapata* is seen as a final arbiter in the settlement of disputes. His impartial as regard to justice, draw in more converts, mostly the Christians who patronized the deity through a covert means hence, made the traditional worshippers to refer them as "*Ndi Uka Ekwelu Akama*" (The Christians have accepted the deity). Most often, some Christian folks usually employed the service of some traditional

⁴⁷Interview with Amuzelu Aka, Ozor titled man/Farmer, 90, Amoboli-Amokwu, 10th February, 2023.

⁴⁸Peter Ejiofor. *Cultural Revival in Igbo Land*. (Enugu: Nolix Educational Publishers, Nigeria, 2002), 75

worshippers to officiate on their behalf. This double-faced attitude of the Christian followers in the community, which could be described as a syncretism was in alignment with O. Eze when he argues that, the contemporary Christians followers in Igboland, indulged in syncretism. In his argument, he posits thus:

Most Igbo Christians as of recent are complicity of syncretism. They behave and act in double-faced, neither here nor there. They profess Christian faith in open... but secretly, they patronized deities and men of traditional doctors. This syncretic nature has become a tool that sustained Christians movement in Igboland.⁴⁹

This further reinforces F. K Ekechi's view when he argues that one of the achievements of Christianity and Western Civilization in Igboland after more than one hundred and fifty years is the emergence of a people who are not truly Christian and not truly African. The average Igbo Christian has adopted an ambivalent lifestyle. They are according to Ekechi, half Christians and half 'pagans'.⁵⁰ The Christian God and Western style of living are acknowledged publicly in blissful moments while deities and traditional means are turned to secretly when life's vicissitudes present themselves. Hence, traditional and Western worldviews rule the minds of the Igbo. Based on this, Uzoamaka observes the syncretic nature of Igbo Christians when she affirms that:

A majority of Igbo Christians are, so to speak, double-faced; one face is that of Christianity, which hangs on them as a coat as long as the vicissitudes of life find one on joy and peace, and the other, the traditional face which naturally belongs to them to the core. This face is manifested and projected in life's crises. Confronted with illness, misfortunes, deaths, and barrenness, the double-faced Christian adheres to the traditional methods for solutions to these life's problems.⁵¹

However, one important feature in Amokwu as regards *Dinapata* function, is that irrespective of faith, be it a Christian or traditional follower, his protection and blessing cover all. During Sharia crisis in Northern Nigeria, Kaduna State precisely, in the year 2000, as narrated by Ozo Amuzelu, it was averred that every Amokwu indigene in the region was safe, courtesy of the *Dinapata* deity. Amuzelu anchored his narrative on the testimony of some indigenes of the community who narrated how a man in a replica of

⁴⁹O.C, Eze, Deities in a Changing Igbo Society: Ndi Nsukka, 1960-2016, *Journal of Social Science Research* Vol. 2 no 1, (2017). 99-102. Accessed on 12/05/2023.

⁵⁰ F. K Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914*. Vol. 119. *Psychology Press*, (1972), 63-67. Accessed on 7/05/2023

⁵¹N. Uzoamaka, Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion, *A Journal of Contemporary Research*, vol. 13 no. 3, (2023), 34-44. Accessed on 6/05/2023

Ozor titled holder came to their rescue when they encountered some Hausa rioters on their way to Kaduna military barrack. In their testimony according Amuzelu, the man stopped the bus conveying them to the barrack and advise them to divert to another route preventing them from falling into the hands of the rioters. Amuzelu stated that it was through a soothsayer (*dibia*) that people in the community discovered that it was *Dinapata* that came inform of Ozor titled man. Cow *Efi* Igbo was sacrificed in a show of the appreciation.⁵² In recent times, it has been affirmed that despite the overzealousness of Christian adherents, the worship of *Dinapata* in the community has grown rapidly. The people see *Dinapata* as a Guardian Angel who was sent to protect the community. *Dinapata* in their life is like a sun that shines from the East. His power and fear pervade around their daily life and events. Hence created the notion "*the fear of Dinapata is the beginning of wisdom*".

Conclusion: Reflecting on Igbo Traditional Worship with Reference to Dinapata Deity of Amokwu

The study explored the Igbo traditional worship system and its resilient attributes. This was done in reference to the *Dinapata* deity of the Amokwu community in the Udi Local Government Area. It argues that despite the threat of Christianity to its identity, the Igbo traditional belief system has remained resilient, affirming that one that demonstrates such resilience is the *Dinapata* deity of the Amokwu community. In all, evidence from this study demonstrated the resilience of the Igbo traditional worship system even amid culture clash and religious iconoclasm advanced by Christianity in Igboland. In the area of justice, *Dinapata* has been effective in the Amokwu community. In the same manner, he has settled and regulated conflicts and administered customary law in a spirit of justice. He has played a major role in lowering the incidence of cases and enhancing harmonious relationships in a time when moral fiber in society is eroding and people have given up their moral principles in the pursuit of material gain. From the foregoing, it is clear that *Dinapata* deity positively affects the judicial and socio-religious circumstances of the Amokwu community's residents. Positively, his administration of justice contributes to the preservation of calm and harmony among the community members. Presently, in Amokwu, it is obvious that the presence of Christianity and the widespread Christianization has not affected the belief system of the majority of Amokwu inhabitants. The confrontations by Christians have not stopped the worshippers from reverence. The *Dinapata* deity remained till date with unique approaches. This, in essence, disapproved the wrong narratives being peddled by some Euro-centric scholars against the existence and role of deities in piloting socio-religious and judicial affairs of the natives, but as well demonstrates the cultural sustainability that exists in Igboland despite the colonial contacts. Therefore, this paper concludes that despite the

⁵²Interview with Amuzelu Aka,

scourge of colonialism and the Christianization project in Igboland, which affected most Igbo socio-religious practices as exemplified by the attacks and destructions of deities, *Dinapata* deity of Amokwu is among the exceptionality. The resilience of this deity in navigating Christianization onslaught is a clear manifestation that reaffirms the sustainability of the Igbo traditional worship system. It is on this note, it posits that those nursing the idea in pursuing the renaissance of the Igbo culture as regard to deities' worship, should dim its importance to study this deity, as they geared towards restoring the battered Igbo socio-religious culture.

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