

Ocho Festival Celebration among the Indigenous Igala Communities of South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract: This research work was carried out in order to find out the indigenous Igala communities in South-South Nigeria that celebrate Ocho festival, and how they celebrate it. It was discovered that some indigenous communities in Edo State (Ifeku, Inyele and Uloshi), Delta State (Aika, Ebu, Oko, Asaba, Illah, Umukwata, Ukala, Ukwu Nzu, Amai, Utchi) and Rivers State (Ibi-Bibi in Abonema and Obochi) celebrate Ocho as a festival or a traditional rite. Although, some of these communities have different names other than Ocho which is its name in Idah, the headquarters of Igala kingdom, the purposes of the festival is the same in all the kingdoms or communities under study, and it is to thank God almighty and the Earth god (Ane/Ani) for the clearing of farm lands and planting of some crops without any danger or injury on the farm or to pray to God almighty and the Earth god (Ane/Ani) for good health, absence of death and problem in the society in the coming farming season. It is also done to pray for enough rainfall in the farming season, and bountiful harvest of the crops planted and those about to be planted. It was concluded that despite varying names caused by separation of the communities from Idah for a very long time before the Igala reconnection project commenced in 2014, the method of Ocho celebration and the purpose of Ocho celebration in these Igala communities in Edo, Delta and Rivers States, are in many aspects the same with the one celebrated in Idah, Kogi state. It is recommended that Igala festivals be revitalized among various indigenous Igala communities outside Kogi state, and with Igala names as found in this results in order to sustain their Igala heritage, and as well pass it to the generations to come.

Keywords: Ane, Eri, Farming, Harvest, Igala, Ocho, Ukwu

I. INTRODUCTION

Ocho festival is one of the core festivals of Igala people of Kogi state, Nigeria and even worldwide. In Kogi state Igala land, it is done by Attah Igala while all Igala people come to Idah, the headquarters of Igala kingdom. It is celebrated before farming in Igala kingdom, and this is around April or early May. It has many significant such as to pray for good health, danger-free works on the farm, abundant harvest in the farming season as well as to pray for enough rainfall to enable the crops grow well. Also, in Idah, the earth god is prayed to during the Ocho festival for long live, no sickness, no strange diseases, and no sudden and pre-mature death, no death of young ones in the society, etc. Ocho festival of Igala people just like Iyalo (new yam festival), Ibegwu (feast of ancestors), and others are the heritages brought from Igala origin, the ancient Egypt. It is celebrated in the 4th month. Sokar festival was an agricultural god festival beginning from around 3150 BC. "On the 26th day of the 4th month of Akhet (sowing), Egyptians hold Sokar (chokar) festival in Memphis town of lower Egypt. Egyptians performs rituals of hoeing and animal rearing for sokar god" (Sokar God,

<https://landiustravel-com.cdn.ampproject.org>. Igala migrated from ancient Egypt to the present-day Nigeria and settled in the community called Attah Igala town now Attagara in Gwoza LGA of Borno state. They arrived in Attagara around the 8th century BC when the Kush kingdom invaded Egypt. Igala are descendants of King Ata (Djet) who ruled ancient Egypt from 3000 BC – 2990 BC, as the 4th king in the first dynasty rulers. Igala, originally called Gala also ruled in 3rd dynasty, 8th dynasty, and were the rulers of 10th dynasty from 2130 – 2040 BC, with Pharaoh Merikara been the last king. Part of Gala people are the Gala/Oromo people of Ethiopia, Al-Garrah ancient Pharaonic town, Igara kingdom of Uganda, Igara and Maragoli of Kenya, Lebou people of Senegal, Ngala people of Borno, Lingala of Congo, WanGara of South Sudan, Gara of Central African Republic, Gara of Chad. Till date, the crown of Attah Igala is the same as the crown of the ancient Egypt pharaohs, with the cobra god image still at the front of the crown of Attah Igala like that of ancient Egypt. In addition, all the rituals and taboos of Attah Igala including some royal symbols and totem are same with that of ancient Egypt. The nine gods of ancient Egypt are also present in Igala kingdom as the nine royal deities of Attah Igala. Ocho festival was called Sokar festival in ancient Egypt. It was celebrated before farming, and part of it involved the making of sacrifice to the earth god for good harvest in the farming season. Ocho festival was banned by the British in Idah, Igala Kingdom in 1956, but was unbanned in 2018 by Governor Yahaya Bello during the reign of Attah Idakwo Ameh Oboni II, the Attah Igala from 2013 to 2020. But throughout the banning period, indigenous Igala communities outside Kogi state were still celebrating it. This will be seen in the results.

1.1 Aim

To study the Ocho festival celebration among the indigenous Communities of South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

1.2 Objectives

To study the significant of Ocho festival to the people of the Igala communities celebrating it.

To investigate the mode of celebration of Ocho festivals across various Igala communities in Edo, Delta and Rivers States.

1.3 Scope

The studies cover Edo, Delta and Rivers States' indigenous Igala communities only, and not all the states in Southsouth, Nigeria.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts the interview method. It made use of one-on-one interview as well as phone interview since the area of coverage for the research is wide (three states- Edo, Delta and Rivers States)

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section deals with the presentation of the data gotten from the respondents who are majorly traditionally rulers and elders of their communities.

a. Delta State

(1) Asaba

Asaba is the headquarters of Delta state. It is one of the Kingdoms or towns in Delta state that have Igala origin or ancestry. The father of Asaba people was called Onoja Oboni from Aju Ocholi Attah Igala ruling house, Idah, Kogi state, while the mother was Diaba from Nteje in Anambra state. The history of Nteje people according to various sources including Chief Nwoye Albert in an interview with Centre for Igbo Research and Culture in October 2020, which is available on You Tube, Nteje people are Igala people from Idah, now in Kogi state. He further added that Nteje gave birth to many communities which are now in some states like Abia, Imo, Enugu, Delta, etc. This was also confirmed by Ifenyiwa and Prof Nkechinyere, (2021) in their work on Nteje.

According to Obi (Dr) Benibe Ugboko, Obi of Onaje Quarters, Ocho festival is not part of the festivals in Asaba, Delta state. But there is an earth god in each village. The central earth god is in the location where the first people or founders of the village settled. It is the place in the community that meeting house is built. The earth deities are appeased in each quarter or village in order that it will bring blessings, good fortune, and general development to the community. Prayers for good crop yields or harvest and sufficient rainfall as well as safety on the farm such as no injury of any kind, no animal attacks, no sickness on the farm, no hunter will be wounded, etc. are parts of the prayers offered to the earth god called Ane or Ani. Another role of Ani god is that it helps to reduce crime in the society as anyone who has done any bad thing or accused of something, he or she can be taken to the Ani where he or she will swear. If the person is guilty, there will be a serious consequence on the person by the earth god if he did not confess. This implication deters people from committing crimes in the society.

According to Obi (Barr) Mohammed Nduka Elunor, Obi of Iyagba Community, Asaba people do not celebrate Ocho festival except Ulor festival. Also, the Ulor festival is celebrated bi-annually. The Ulor festival celebrated in Asaba is not related to farming but as a cleansing festival or rite. But we have new Yam festival which we celebrate just like other people in Southsouth and Southeast. I think there is need for Ocho cultural festival to be revived in Asaba since many other people of Igala descent in Delta state, Edo and even Anambra state are celebrating before the commence their farm works.



Obi (Dr) Benibe Ugboko, Obi of Onaje Quarters, Asaba



Obi (Barr) Mohammed Nduka Elunor, Obi of Iyagba Community, Asaba

(2) Ebu

Ebu is the only town in Delta state that speak Igala as the official language. Ebu is located in Oshimili North local government area of DELTA State.

According to HRM Onu Paul Opili Odilile, the Onu Ebu (Onu Umukojodu of Ebu), Ocho is not celebrated as a festival in Ebu but as a form of traditional activity or ritual. Each of the eight towns making up Ebu has their earth god (Ane). Before farming season, each of the community heads will go to the earth deity with some sacrifices. The sacrifices are offered to the earth deity for the farming season that is about to commence to be good for everyone in the community. Prayers are also offered to the earth god for the society to be free of diseases that may incapacitate able-bodied men during the farming season. The earth deity which is also in charge of the guiding and securing the community and the people, wards off strange illnesses and prevents people from committing crimes against the society as the earth deity sees everything done on the earth. As a result of the Ocho not being celebrated as a festival, it makes it not to be done at the same time in all the different Ebu towns.



HRM Paul Odilile Opili, Onu Umukojordu, The Onu of Ebu

(3) Illah

Illah, originally called Allah is locted in Oshimili North local government area of DELTA State. Allah is an Igala word for hut with only roof. It is like Ebu. There are many Igala towns called Allah such as Allah in Anambra state, Allah in Idah, Ankpa, Okpo, etc.

There are many Igala communities in Illah, Delta state, but the discussion in this work will be limited to Ogbeolu and Ukpologwu Quarters only, as they are the ones who celebrate Ocho festival in Ilah. Other communities of Igala origin in Illah are Onya, UmuAshaga, UmuOnaje, Ogbe Ogene, Ogbe Ogene Umutei, Umuonojo, Umuwali, Umu Uduka. etc.

As for the Ogbe Ogene Umutei people, Prince Otakpe was the son of the Attah Igala called Agabaidu Attah Ogala. Prince Otakpe left Idah around the 18th century and settled in Inoma,

an Igala town presently in Anambra State. There are many Igala communities in Anambra state till date including those whose only language is Igala language such as Igbedor, Allah, Odekpe, Odomagwu, Nzam, Igbokenyi, Ukwala, Obosi, Omor, Umumbo, Obikporo, Mgbeleke, Ogbeotu, etc. After sometime, he migrated from Inoma to Illah in the present-day Delta State, leaving behind some family members there in Inoma. Today, in Illah, Delta State, the descendants of Prince Otakpe are in Ogene Umutei quarter or Ogbe (location) Ogene Umutei where Otakpe, their progenitor founded. They celebrate Igala festivals like us in Idah, Kogi State as well as other Igala communities in Illah town too.

UmuAchaga (UmuAsaga) and Umu Onaje: Around the 17th century, the Attah Igala, Attah Itodo Aduga, in his palace Idah, crowned the first Obi of Illah, Delta State. According to history, the Obi whose ancestor, Ika, migrated to the area Allah, now Illah, Delta state from Nteje, Anambra state, had Igala mother, and Nteje father. Historically too, Nteje people also traced their origin to Igala, Idah (Chief Albert, 2020, and Isidienu and Nwokoye, 2021). And if this version of Nteje origin of Ika or ancestor of the Obi is true (though other source stated that he came from Nri, and historically also, Nri people are the same stock with Nteje or other Umueris, and all traced their origin to Igala through Eri who was said to be an Igala warrior who together with his followers came to Aguleri on military expenditure, and established his war camp at Eri-Aka (Idigo, 1955, and Jeffreys, 1934)), then, he (the Obi) was paternally and maternally Igala. He appealed to Attah to send someone to follow him to teach his people how to beat Agidigbo, a wooden drum, and some other traditional rituals. Attah sent his son, Achaga with him, and asked him to come back after about a month. Achaga, while going was given a spear (Okwor) and some traditional materials by his father. After a month, Achaga wanted to go back to Idah, but the people appealed to him to stay. He also found the place conducive. He settled in a place and married. Attah became worried, sent Onaje, younger brother of Achaga to Illah to check and bring him back. Onaje found the place conducive too, and decided to stay with his brother. The descendants of these Igala Princes or sons of Attah Itodo Aduga have two Communities in Illah known as UmuAshaga and UmuOnaje quarters. It is worthy of note that Attah Itodo Aduga has many descendants spread across various states of Nigeria such as Rivers State, Enugu, Kogi, Benue.

Ogbeolu Quarter of Illah

According to Ogbuefi Christopher Chinye Chukwudifu, the Ocho festival in Ogbeolu quarter, the Ochai Attah descendants is called Ocho just like in Idah. Let me explain what Ogbe Olu means. Ogbe means the Village. Olu means Igala. So, Ogbeolu means the Village of Igala. Ocho is celebrated in April. It is always done before farming season here. It starts on the first Olie day of the month. It is done to pray to Agana shrine, Ani, and others. This is to ensure the security of lives of the member of the community, free from dangers while on the farm, ensuring good harvest, and sufficient rainfall for the farm works. The date is fixed by the eldest in the clan, the Diokpa. The festival involves the coming out of Egwugwu, cooking, eating, dancing, and some rituals. It also involves hunting. The Ocho is celebrated on one day, but a day to the day of the Ocho festival, we will go out early in the morning for hunting. We go with bow and arrows. It is the same weapon used by Attah Igala during the Ocho festival in Idah. Ochai Attah descendants are children of Prince Egwu, the brother of Attah Ayegba Oma Idoko, and the eldest son of Idoko Aganapoje. He was the first person to become the Ochai Attah Igala according to oral history in Idah, hence his descendants are known with the appellation or family

name, Ochai Attah. After the hunting, the next thing is, the elders visit the Agana shrine, and tell him of the Ocho. Sacrifices and prayers are offered to him in the temple. Then, Ichiebo deity will be visited. Prayers will be made to it to remove all evils that will come to the community during and after the festival. It is also to remove all evils from the farm for the farm works to be safely carried out by everyone without any danger in the process. There will be a particular ritual performed at the river Niger in Onya, after which they will come back to Ogbeolu to greet the our Attah (Egwugwu) with songs and this involve Igala language as Attah mi wola odudu... my father or king good morning,

At this time, the whole Illah will gather at the venue (Ogbogbo/Obobo square) and later, the Ochenekwu, the Egwugwu in Ogbeolu in Illah will come out to perform. The Egwugwu, as an Igala spirit speaks Igala language only. Our Egwugwu will go to various places where our daughters marry in Illah, and the visit takes time before they return back to Ogbeolu community. There will be eating and drinking, music and dances as people from all over Illah will join them at the celebration ground.

According to Ogbuenyi Chris Uche Okwuagwu, the Ocho festival is an annual event in Ogbeolu, Illah. It takes place in the month of April. It is usually on the first Sunday of April that falls on Olie day. On the eve of the event which is a day before it, many of the daughters who married outside Ogbeolu or Illah come home. Other children of Ogbeolu also come home on that eve. On that eve, the local trumpet man known as Okodo blows the local trumpet called Ufele round the village, and this is to notify the people that the Ocho will be tomorrow. He blows the Ufele round the entire town. In the early morning of the event; the D-day has arrived; he blows the trumpet again to inform them. In the same morning, a masquerade, Egwu afia; an ancestral spirit will come out, and will parade the entire Ogbeolu quarter. There are four Egwuafia in Ogbeolu but the oldest one called Ochanako, is the one that will come out in the morning. He moves around in the Ogbeolu quarter and people greet him: Attah wola odudu Attah wola odudu... meaning father good morning, father good morning. Around this same time, many people will be cooking, and eating going on in various areas. Around 11.00 am, the Egwugwu or Egwu afia and some people will go out to various parts of Illah where the Ogbeolu daughters married, especially those who invited the people and Egwuafia. Around 3.00 pm, they are to go back in Ogbeolu, Illah, the trumpet man also blows the trumpet to remind the people with the Egwugwu that it was time to go back home.

At this time, all the women, old and young, are all dressed in their traditional attire which is white cloths. As the masquerade and the people have returned, the oldest man in Ochai Attah clan who is the Diokpa will be at the front, then followed by the oldest Egwu afia, and then followed by other masquerades. The women now at the front will be singing to the Egwuafia. The Diokpa and the Egwuafia will match to the village square, and the Diokpa and the Egwu will enter the shrine. The Diokpa will pray to the earth god that this is another farming season; there should be no sickness, After doing the sacrifice to the gods in the temple, the Diokpa will come out of the temple, and then followed by Ochanako, and other masquerades. This marks the end of the Ocho though there will still be music, foods, drinks.



Ogbuefi Christopher Chinye Chukwudifu

Ukpologwu

Ukpologwu is an Igala town in Illah Delta State. They are descendants of Prince Ogwu/Ogu, the son of Attah Ayegba Oma Idoko. As it used to happen in those days, he contested to be Attah after their father joined the ancestors, but he could not succeed. He moved from Idah to Ukpologwu after Ukpolo and Ugbukaji now under Igalamela. Ukpolo means valley or lowland. Ukpolo ogwu means the valley where Ogwu settled or leaved. Because of threats, he moved further to Illah Delta State where he finally settled and expanded his family. But while Ogwu was leaving Ukpologwu in Idah, some members came back to the palace again, but later moved to Enugu (Nkpologu Attah), and from there, some moved to Anambra State.

According to Elder Sylvester Keshi (the brother of Late Stephen Keshi, the former Coach of the Supper Eagles of Nigeria), in Ukpologwu village Ocho Festival is called kulokulo festival but the other village, Ogbe Olu calls it Ocho festival. Peradventure it was changed after Ukpologwu people left Kogi State since it also involves cleansing rituals which is oga kulo ola kulo meaning "sickness leave, troubles leave". The festival is before farming begins in the New Year of March or in April.

A day is fixed for Kulokulo and communicated to all Umuadas (women) of Ukpologwu Village who are married in different villages across Illah Town. On the first day of the festival, cleansing ritual is done through the use of fire woods used for cooking on previous days been carried from various houses and taken towards the road and thrown into the bush. The kulokulo song or oga kulo ola kulo song is sang in the process. This is around early morning time. Later on, the Ocho day, the eldest or Diokpa of Ukpologwu will meet with the villagers at the Ogwa that houses the Ancestors of the Village where meetings are usually held. The Diokpa after breaking of the Kola nut and prayers, our Masquerade or Egugwu will emerge. There will be a visit of the Egwugwu to the Umuadas or Ukpologwu daughters who married outside already notified of the Kulokulo in the various villages. There will be collection of gifts and eating of food by those who accompanied the Egwugwu. In the meantime, food will be prepared in Ukpologwu which will be eaten with drinks when the Egugwu return in the evening. The first time I witnessed it many years ago it brought memories of Christmas celebration to me.

According to Okei Uzodiachi, the name of Ocho festival is kulo kulo (Oga kwo ola kwo). It is done around March or April. It is done before planting of crops. The purpose is to thank God and the Ane earth god for good health, and to pray for good harvest in the farming season. The Diokpa (eldest man) of Ukpologwu

fixes the date after having a meeting with the elders of the community on a suitable date.

On the first day of the festival, cleansing ritual is done. Fire woods used for cooking on previous days are taken from various compounds or houses. There will be chants or songs as Oga kulo ola kulo oga kulo ola kulo (sickness leave trouble leave or go away) as the people led by the eldest in the community. The fire woods will be thrown into the bush along the road, and this is done around 5 o'clock am. People cook in various houses. You can kill goat and invite others and people move from one house to other house they like, and eat with their friends. On the same day, three Egwugwu (Egwuafia), reincarnated ancestral beings or spirits which all speak Igala language, move from one house to another in the entire Illah. The Egwu afia will be announcing that farming season has come, and that everyone should be prepared, while also praying for them. The women of Ukpologwu town who are married in other communities within Illah can invite the people and the Egwu, and they visit such people too. In some cases, food and drinks are given to the people and in some places, money may be offered to the Egwu. After finishing the visit and movement throughout Illah, the people and the three Egwu afia will come back to Ukpologwu. This could be around 6.00 pm or 7.00 pm. On their arrival at Ukpologwu, the moved directly to the house of the Diokpa of Ukpologwu. He already had food prepared for the people who went with the Egwu. There, they will drink and eat. The Egwu also will enter into their temple, and that marks the end of the Ocho festival known as Kulo kulo festival in Ukpologwu Illah.



Elder Sylvester Keshi



Okei Uzodiachi

(4) Oko Kingdom

Oko is located in Oshimili South local government area of Delta State.

As presented by Chief Anochie Osua, the Okita of Oko from Oko Amakom, Ocho festival is called Ulor in Oko, Delta state. Ulor festival is an annual festival that takes place within the month of March/April. We celebrate Ulor festival to mark freedom from the clearing, burning of our farm land and embrace the cultivation of crops (planting season). The stages are: 1st day: The ukohote wears their war attire performing the activities of Ulor festival in accordance with the native law and custom. The women's participation starts from afternoon when Ukohote have started. They wear their best cloth, singing the Ulor songs.

2nd day: The elders, the Ukohote and the Idorka assembles at the palace of the present king or in the absent of the king, the ONIHE (OKAKWU takes the position) presents the staff, the king opening prayer presentation and killing of the goat. There would be house to house killing of the goat in remembrance of the late kings by families of those late kings. Around the hour of 11.00am, there will be cooking and eating of food in various quarters for the elders of the community.

3rd day: This day is publicly known to be OFALA DAY in Ulor festival. The community members; men and women, young and old gather together from 2.00pm in the palace of the king. There will be eating and Drinking at this venue too.

4th day: On this day, the youths sing the Ulor festival songs going around the entire Oko community. The present and past events are remembered in the Ulor festival songs. At the end of this, it is the end of the Ulor or coho festival of that year.

According to Chief Emodi Obiorah, Odaje Asi of Oko from Oko umu Oko, Ocho is called Ulor. During Ulor or Ocho festival, no burial takes place. As for the reason for the celebration of Ocho festival, when grasses are cleared, trees cut down and then burned, and some crops planted, and now waiting for rainfall, we give thanks to God for not allowing anyone to be injured, sick or have any danger in the process of doing all these farm processes. It is also the festival done to pray to God almighty for adequate rain to fall to make the crops planted fruitful, and the ones yet to be planted to grow well for good harvest. The earth god is also prayed to at this festival for the good health of the people and the growth and development of Oko kingdom.

As for the procedure, we (elders) meet at the palace of the king (Akor) or the second in command, the prime minister of Oko kingdom. At the meeting there, he tells them that Ulor festival has come, and they plan on the date, and what to do to make it successful. An acceptable date will be fixed and anyone who has anything to do would do it before the Ocho day as no one does other things during the Ocho festival. The date could be set for two weeks' time. Ulor festival in Oko kingdom is done for five days.

On Oye day which is a day before the official beginning of the Ocho festival, the elders visit the earth temple and pray and make a sacrifice. This temple is at the market square. This purpose is to pray to the earth god for a successful celebration of the festival, peace in the society, good health, sufficient rainfall and good harvest from the crops already planted, and the ones yet to be planted.

Eke day is the first day. It is the beginning. The young ones will dress and will announce to the community that Ocho has started by singing while walking round all the parts of the communities in the night. It shows Ulor festival has begun. The next day

which is Olie (Ede) day is the day Ulor will start proper. The first age group will dress in their traditional attire and will be singing and dancing from one community to the other. The third day, the elders and young ones will dance and sing while Ogwedrum, a traditional long drum, will be beaten. They also dance around the town. Some other groups would be moving from the house of one elder to the other. The elders will give them drinks and food which they eat and drink.

The final day which is Nkwo (Ukwo) day, in the night, those whose father are late will kill goats for them in their houses. The next day, it will be cooked and people invited to join in the eating along with drinks. It is a tradition that all the people who killed goats for the late father, they must send one lap of the goat to the eldest in that clan or quarter. He will cook them on the Nkwo day, and elders will meet at his house on that day and they will eat together.

In the same way, Chief Tony Ogwu, the Akwudolu-Eze 1; Oko Anala. also explained the same way as the Chief Anioche Osua; the Okita, Oko Amakom, and Chief Emodi; Odaje Asi, Oko umu Oko, adding that it is a festival which began from time immemorial in Oko kingdom as it was brought from Idah, the headquarters of Igala where the ancestors of Oko came from, which is now in Kogi state.

(5) Ukala kingdom

Ukala is located in Oshimili North local government area of Delta State.

According to Ogbuenyi Ewemasor, Ocho is called Ocho in Ukala just like in Idah, Igala headquarters. It is celebrated in April. Ocho festival is done to make sacrifices and prayers to God before the start of farm works. Ocho festival in Ukala kingdom has Egwugwu as part of the celebration. When the date for the festival is fixed, different quarters will have some sacrifices or rituals done for the Egwugwu and earth on different days before the day of the Ocho. The Ocho is the last event as other events or festivals will take place before the Ocho.

On this final day which is the Ocho day, the whole Egwugwu in Ukala kingdom will go the village square which is the venue of the celebration. But before the Egwugwu will go to the village square, they will all go to the place where the oldest Egwugwu in Ukala is. From there, the oldest Egwugwu and all the others that came to meet him will start to go the venue. The procession is in the orderly form that they move in order of seniority. The oldest one will be at the front, leading them to the Ocho ground. At the venue, there will be foods, drinks, music and dance. Also, in the process, prayer and sacrifice are offered to the earth god at the Ocho land or venue. The reason for the Ocho is because we are farmers, and such, before we start to farm, we pray to God for a bountiful harvest. And this means, there will be good amount of rainfall, no strange pests or insects that will affect the crops, and the soil nutrient will be sufficient to produce good crops. It is also to pray for the land to be peaceful and people to be healthy because, if people are sick, they won't be able to farm.

According to Chief Peter Ikechukwu Nwoji, The Iyasele Agbogidi (Prime Minister) of Ukala Kingdom, our people are from Idah. Our Ocho cultural practice also come from Idah. It involves Egwu masquerades too. The Ocho festival is celebrated for a reason, It is a pre-planting festival. It is the time we pray for good harvest in the coming farming season which is about to start. We also use the period to thank God almighty and the ancestors for the blessings so far, and for sustaining them to the new farming season coming up soon. Prayers and sacrifices are offered to the earth god for bountiful harvest in the farming

season that is about to start. The development of the land, peaceful kingdom and progress of the people of Igala are part of the prayers made to the earth god during the festival.

Egwugwu, the ancestral spirits are part of our Ocho festival celebration. The Egwugwu speaks Igala language, only Igala people especially following it understand the language. The songs by the people are Igala songs such as Idah o o Idah connoting the Egwu and people from Idah, Kogi State. And truly, after the event, the masquerades or Egwugwu will go back to Idah in invisible way, land of the ancestors, and will later come back after sometimes to Ukala from Idah. During the festival, Egwugwu from various quarters come to the venue which is the village square. Sometimes, people of Asaba, Illah, Okpanam or other Igala communities will be invited, and they come with their Egwugwu, and will join in the celebration. Foods and drinks are served at the venue.



Chief Peter Ikechukwu Nwoji, The Prime Minister of Ukala Kingdom

(6) Umukwata

Umukwata is located in Ukwuani local government area of Delta State.

Umukwata (children of Ukwata. Ukwata means child of Attah or one from Attah) are descendant of Achala. Abbi (Abbi means we prayed to God for or we prayed for the child before getting him) is the brother. Both Abbi and Ukwata migrated from Amachala town of Anambra state. Amachala people of Anambra state are Igala from Idah, Kogi state..

According to High Chief Okpaka Johnson Ubaka, Ocho festival is called Utor festival in Umukwata kingdom. It is celebrated in the month of May. Utor festival is celebrated for four days. The date of the event or festival is set by the Okpala uku, the oldest man of the kingdom. When the date is fixed, the next to him, the Odua, then goes to the temple of the Earth god (Ani), and make the official announcement to the deity, making some sacrifices to the god too for a peaceful and successful celebration. In the tradition, when the date of the Utor is fixed or announced today, it will remain nine days but the last four days of the festival are very important.

On the first day of the festival, people from various parts of Umukwata will gather at the Orile, the village square. Pounded yam and our local soup are prepared, part of it is used to make sacrifice to the earth god (Ani), while people are served with the rest. Drinks and other materials served to the people too. It involves a lot of merriments. During this event, the Okpala uku, that is; the eldest in Umukwata will cook food his house. Some

chiefs visit him and eat and drink at his place. People also visit others, and they may eat or drink there with the people.

On the next day, some masquerades will come out to display. It is the final day of the Utor festival. The festival is a post-planting and pre-harvest festival at the same time. The reason for the festival is to thank God and the earth god for the successful clearing of farm lands or trees on the farm and planting of crops, and to pray to God for sufficient rainfall to enable the crops yield well or good harvest from the crops, and to pray to the earth god that there should be no death of young ones or sudden death in the community. It is also done to pray to the land to be free from diseases and sicknesses.



High Chief Okpaka Johnson Ubaka

(7) Aika Kingdom

Aika is located in Ndokwa East local government area of DELTA State. Aika Ezeolu kingdom is one of the Kingdoms in Delta state with Igala origin. According to the Chief Chuks Udeme, the Odaje Asi of Aika as confirmed by the Akor (King) of the Kingdom, Ocho festival is called Ulor festival in Aika. It is celebrated in April before planting of crops. The reason for the celebration of Ulor festival is to thank God and the ancestors, that from the beginning of farming process which include clearing of grasses, cutting down of trees, burning of grasses and others and even planting of some crops already, there was no injury, no sickness and no attack by dangerous animals, and others. Ulor festival is also celebrated in Aika kingdom to pray to the earth deity (Ane now called Ani there) for a bountiful harvest of the crops planted and those yet to be planted. The event is also used to pray to God almighty for enough rainfall for the farming season to enable the crops grow well and produce adequately.

The process

The first stage is the purification or cleansing of the Kingdom and homes as well as the people. The oldest woman in Aika Kingdom will carry egg shells and be touching the houses in the community to cast out all the evils and any bad luck from the community and compounds. This is to make the community pure and clean before foods or sacrifices can be given to the ancestors as they would not accept food or sacrifices in "unclean" environment. As the woman is moving from house to house doing the ritual of cleansing, people give her gifts in the process.

The second stage is introduction for the Ulor festival. It is called Izonu Ulor in our language. In this, the oldest male in the community, the Okpala, will invite the elders of various quarters to his house to discuss on when and how to celebrate the Ulor festival. The discussion will take place for nine days. In another nine days, they will come back again to the house of the Okpala, and this time, he will announce to them the date of the Ulor

festival and other things involved. It can be 15 or 16 days, but it must be started on Nkwo day.

On the Nkwo day, every elder of Aika kingdom will assemble at the house of the Okpala between 4.30 – 5 pm. everyone will bring a big dry fish, pepper, salt and oil. All the fishes will be combined in a basin, the salt, pepper and oil added to it and properly mixed. It will be served to everyone there. After eating, a song will be sung. The Okpala will sing a song and all other elders and chiefs will respond. The drum, a long traditional drum called Ogwe, about 5 in number will be beaten, and people will dance to it. This marks the beginning of Ulor celebration, and it is usually on Nkwo day.

On Eke day which is the second day, the whole Okpala (oldest men in each quarter) in Aika will cook and everyone will eat. The following day, the oldest woman and some women will sing and dance round the community or throughout the entire village. After that, children will start their own singing and dancing round the entire community. On Afor day which is the 4th day, people will cook and eat in different compounds in Aika. The entire chiefs of Aika will cook too, and people will visit them and eat and drink there.

On the fifth day which is another Nkwo day, all Aika elders will gather in one venue and hold a meeting. The meeting will be presided over by the the President of Aika Welfare Association. After the meeting, in the mid-night, the Odaje-Asi, (my respondent from Aika in this work) will give foods, drinks, and goats offerings to the ancestors at the earth god temple. People will be moving from the house of one elder to the other, singing, drumming (beating Okanga), and dancing, and those whose fathers are late already will make sacrifice of goats in their various houses. Each person who kills a goat will take one lap to the Okpala or eldest in their quarter. The Okpala also kills a goat. The Akor, who is the King, also kills a goat.

On the second Eke day, The Akor will invite everybody including the traditional leaders to his palace. There will be different foods cooked, and people will eat and drink. The next day, the people will gather at the shrine or temple of the earth god, Ani/Ane. Ane called Ani is an Igala word for land or earth. It is the same earth god in Idah, headquarters of Igala people worldwide. The Okpala ukwu is the Priest of the Ane deity. All now worship the Ane, and pray to him for good health, good harvest and good hunting and fishing in the year. The next day, the Okpala will call the Okpalas from various quarters, he will cook a small food, and he uses it to make sacrifice to the ancestors at his house.

The quarters of Aika are Umuonoli, Umuoduem, Umuomi and UmuOzoma. Each quarter has her own Okpala or oldest person. At end of the Ulor festival, each Okpala may cook food and invite people to come and celebrate with them.

According to the Akor of Aika (the King of Aika), HRM Akor E. C. Obiechina, and the celebration processes of Ulor festival in Aika is as explained above by Chief Udeme, the Odaje Asi of Aika. It is a yearly festival celebrated by Aika people of Delta state.



HRM Akor E. C. Obiechina, Akor (King) of Aika Kingdom



Chief Chuks Udeme, the Odaje Asi of Aika, with Attah Idakwo Ameh Oboni II (Attah Igala from 2013 - 2020) during Igala conference in Attah palace, Idah, Kogi state in Feb, 2020.

(8) Amai

Amai is located in Ukwuani local government area of Delta State.

According to High Chief Gilbert Chuks Ejede, the Secretary of the Amai Traditional Council, Ocho festival is known as Ikenge festival in Amai. Ikenge festival is done to thank the God almighty for the blessings and protections in the previous year and to pray for more blessings in the coming year. It is done in February which marks the traditional year of our ancestor. Our own year which has 13 months, and also 28 days in a month ends in February and begins in March. We begin our farming, the clearing of land in March. But that will be after we have done our ikenge festival. The festival which will begin on Eke day involves cooking of food especially yam and our local oil soup called Ewai, which always have enough fish in it.



High Chief Gilbert Chuks Ejede

Other towns in Delta State

(9) Ukwu Nzu: In the same way, the people of Ukwu Nzu (Aniocha North local government area of Delta State.), celebrate a pre-farming festival. According to Chief Dan Okenyi of Ukwu Nzu, the pre-farming (Ocho) festival in Ukwu Nzu town is celebrated to thank God for the coming farming season and for a good farming outing.

(10) Utchi: Utchi is located in Ndokwa East local government area of Delta State celebrate. According to Pa Ikechukwu Uzor of Umuochi town of Utchi and confirmed by Ogbuefi Odili Ekwueme, the Ocho festival called Ulor festival in Utchi is celebrated in the whole town, and it is the time we give appreciation to God almighty and the gods of the land for the successful clearing of the farmland without injuries or deaths.

b. Edo state

(1) Ifeku

Ifeku is located in Esan South-East of Edo state.

According to Mr Christopher Omatalah, Ocho Festival in Ifeku-Island of Edo state is called Era Festival. It is being celebrated in late December or early January. The reason for celebrating the Era festival is to appreciate the Gods of the land and our Ancestors for helping us and providing us good harvest for the year and to plead for their help as we plan for new farming season to have a bountiful harvest for the year. Ocho Festival/Era Festival is being celebrated on Ede market day in Ifeku-Island. The Attah Okakwu will go before the Earth God (Ere Ane) with a goat, hot drinks, cola nuts, red feather, piece of white cloth, yams with other Clan Chiefs to offer the items early in the morning.

When the sacrifice is being done, and the prayer is being made to the Gods of the land, they will cook the goat, eat and drink before leaving the place.

After that, they will come back home and people will bring out their Okega or Eyicha (human-like carved image as symbol of the ancestors) and put in the front of their houses and every household will cook food mainly pounded yam and melon or Ogbono soup in their various houses and the man of the house, will take a seat, stool and sit before the Okega and call upon his ancestors and offer them cola nuts, salt, palm oil, piece of white cloth, native chalk (Afu), cowries, red feather, to ask them to bless him and his family members for the new farming season. This is normally done around 10-11 a.m.

In the evening time, the Achimere (Achima-ere: a title for the leader of the elderly men who are no longer going for community works such as clearing of roads and community square) will make a call through his Oga by beating a gong (Agogo/ Ogene) and the youths will gather.

The Achimere will delegate a subgroup called ICHIORA to organise the youths and they will play drums and Akpele masquerade will come out, followed by Egwu itale. After which everyone will go to their various homes. By 8-9 pm that same day, Abule will come out to place curses on the evil doers for the Gods of the land to expose them so that there won't be a hiding place for them in the land.

The following day which is on Afor day, masquerade will come out (Egwu itale) and it's a day of merriment as people move from one house to another to eat and drink with their neighbours in the community. On Ukwu day very early in the morning 5:30 am the biggest masquerade call Attah Ekwe or Otekwe will come out. In the course of the celebration, if anyone fights another especially those following the masquerades, the person will kill goat as a fine them. In the absence of any offender of the laws that guides masquerades in the land, the Attah Agwuba, the custodian of the highest masquerade in the land, can on his own, give the elders of the land goat to kill and eat to end the celebration.

And when the day is dawn, they will hit Obomu (a bigger gong) to allow everybody to come out of the houses because the Otekwe masquerade not every male person can come to see it. There are certain age groups that are allowed come out to see it. If someone's age has not reached to see it, and the person comes out, the masquerade will harm the person. The perform various traditional activities but can't be discussed since they are not seen by everyone.



Mr Christopher Omatalah

(2) Inyele

Inyele is located in Esan South-East of Edo state.

According Chief Obi Joseph Christopher, The Akpeli Ugokojordo of Inyenle Kingdom, Inyele people celebrate Ocho festival. It is called Utu. The purpose of the festival or ritual is to pray for good harvest in the farming season. The earth god in the community is also prayed to in order to make the land fertile for the crop to produce very well. Just like in other Igala communities, it is celebrated before farming began. It is done in the month of September in Inyele before we start to clear the land for yam planting. It is done on one day, but the next day, no one goes to farm.

(3) Uloshi

Uloshi is located in Esan South-East of Edo state.

According to HRH Chief Pius Ikedi, the Onu Odumu I of Uloshi Kingdom, the Ocho festival which is done before the farm work commences is not celebrated widely like other festivals in

Uloshi. Before the farming starts, the King of Uloshi Kingdom, Onu Odumu of Uloshi would go to the earth god of the community and pray to it and to God almighty that farming season is about to start, and that people are about to go to farm. He, along with some community members would pray and make some sacrifices to the earth god called Ane or Ereane. He would pray that people should not fall sick during the farming season, there should be no death or any form of danger on the farm. He would pray that there should be enough rainfall and that the land should be fertile for abundant harvest. Ocho is also a cleansing feast or ritual in Uloshi. It is called Anefa (Ane-efa); that is, to cleans the land. Harvest festival like new yam harvest festival (Ukpede/Utu) is greatly celebrated in Uloshi Kingdom. Historically, Uloshi has nine quarters, namely: Ogemere, Okene, Odioko, Ojamumah, Efuofe, Ukuro Inyele, Araka-ofe, Ocheche and Ukuro-agbogor. Also, Uloshi is also called Ulo or Uro. Uloshi people are related with the Omabo town in Ibaji LGA of Kogi state, Anam in Anambra, Okpanam in Edo state and Ekpeli people of Ebu Delta state. In the traditional structure, there are Onu, Aneche and Ojoko. In a general gathering, when the Onu is seated, the Ojoko sits at the left-hand side while the Aneche sits at the right-hand side. Also, while Ojoko is the one that crowns the king, while the Aneche is the Atama of the kingdom. The kingship, Onu, of Uloshi is rotated among three houses. They are Ocheche, Ogemeri and Efuofe.



HRH Chief Pius Ikedi, the Onu Odumu I of Uloshi Kingdom



c. RIVERS State

(1) Abonema: According to my informant Mr Abiye Nelson, who is of Ibi-bibi Igala clan in Abomena, the Igala people here came for farming and fishing from Idah, but the major occupation is fishing. Ocho is not celebrated but prayers and sacrifices are offered to the god of the land, the earth god of Igala people occasionally for good outing during the major fishing season.

(2) Obosi: According to Mr Pureheart Ekuku, in Obosi, similar feast is done before farmers start their works though the major occupation of the people is fishing. Obosi people of Rivers state are Igala people from Idah but migrated to Obosi in Anambra State before moving from their people (Attah of Obosi clans) on

secondary migration to the present day Obosi where they founded another town.

CONCLUSION

From the results or data from the respondents from the communities under studies in Edo, Delta and Rivers States, it can be concluded that in as much as the communities were disconnected from Idah or Igala kingdom of Kogi state for a long period before the recent reconnection project, the people still preserve their Igala cultural festival, Ocho, in this case. It can also be concluded that the fundamental reason for the Ocho celebration remains the same in all the communities as in Idah, headquarters of Igala kingdom, and that is, the pray to God almighty and the gods of the land for safe and good farming season and bountiful crops yields.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Igala festivals be revitalized among various indigenous Igala communities outside Kogi state, and with Igala names given to the festivals as found in this results in order to sustain their Igala heritage, and as well pass it to the generations to come.

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