

Examining The Importance of Igala Religion in Brazil

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Abstract: The aim of the research work was to investigate the impact of Igala religion in Brazil. The research was carried out using observation, interview and descriptive methods. The results showed that, the worship of Ayan Unyejima, the Igala mother goddess of protection, arts, music, drums, dance, good luck had been in existence in Brazil right from the time enslaved Africans were brought from Nigeria to Brazil, and the descendants of these enslaved Igala people had preserved the Igala religion as elders just like Pa Barroso had done so far. It was also discovered that despite the loss of contact and long separation between Igala people of Brazil and their Nigeria Igala kingdom origin, they also worship other gods and goddesses of Igala like Idu, Oka, Iye Oma, Oya, Eju, Uloko, etc with little modifications due to the earlier resistance faced by the practitioners of the religion. In terms of the origin of the people, it was found out that even before the indigenous Igala people of Brazil came in contact with the Ambassador of Attah Igala, Amb Ayegba, who is in charge of the Igala worldwide research and Reconnection project in 2020, the Igala people of Brazil knew that they are Igala, and had maintained Igala cultures and traditions including the Ifa of Igala ethnic group, Igala greetings, religion. The Igala religion among the Igala people of Brazil helps in the preservation and promotion of Igala tradition in Brazil; helps in the maintenance of the link between Igala kingdom of Brazil and Igala kingdom of Nigeria; helps as an avenue to appreciate God, gods and ancestors, and praying for more protections and blessings; teaches the people, especially the young ones who they are and where they are from. In conclusion, it was stated that Igala religion has a greater impact in Brazil as it is practiced in about six states of Brazil under Igala priests and priestesses (Atamas) who are the regional leaders, and the central temple where the yearly Ayan Unyejima festival holds. It was recommended that more temples of Igala religion be established in other states where Igala people are reconnected to enable effective worship and practice of their faith as well as the promotion of Igala culture.

Keywords: *Atama, Ayan, Brazil, Igala, Unyejima.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Black history in Brazil, like in many other countries in the Americas, dates back to arrival of the Portuguese colonisers in the 16th century. The first enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil around 1530. But even though the exact number of Africans enslaved and brought here is not known, it varies between the estimate of four million, from 1539 - 1888 (<https://artsandculture.google.com>>). The majority of Africans brought to Brazil came from Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Benin, Angola, ... (African Brazilians: Encyclopedia.com). In Bahia alone, Afro-descendants today represent more than 80% of the entire population (<https://g1.globo.com/acao/noticia/2010/11/afrodescendentes-representam-...>). The Nago, a Yoruba speaking people from Bights of Benin, left their mark on both Haitian and Brazil culture ... (<https://africasacountry.com>). As shown above, many people have attributed the Nago origin to Yoruba alone due to

the wrong classification done in those days by early authors like Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. This made many "Nago" people of Brazil or Haiti to believe that they are of Yoruba origin not knowing that there are other tribes who speak related language like Igala in Nigeria. In addition, the term Yoruba is a recent identity, hence should not have been used to describe the people who had their separate identities before they were forcefully taken from Nigeria or African homes.

The use of the term, Yoruba, with this meaning was disclosed by the Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther in his Yoruba language vocabulary – A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language – published in London, in 1852. Before that time, they knew each other by the name of their respective regional groups: Ifés, Oyós, Ijexás, Ondos, etc. (Luis, 2005). Although, the percentage of Brazilians of African or Nigerian descent is very high, some of them are said not have known their real history or origin. This has led to the extra works being done by some Afro-Brazilians to rediscovering their history and/or origin in recent years. In 2018, some Afro-Brazilians visited Nigeria with the aim of partnering with Nigeria in areas of historical and cultural exchange. In 2023, other group of Afro-Brazilians visited the president of Nigeria, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, on the way to establish strong relationship with Nigeria especially the reconnection of Brazilians of Nigeria descent with their root. In addition, as a result of the inadequate information available to some Brazilians regarding their History, only a few are aware of Igala people among the Afro-Brazilians, who are the supposed Nago identity people, as they are the only tribe who have Nago word, and use Nago as greetings in Nigeria. Nago is not part of Yoruba vocabularies, and does not have any meaning in Yoruba language unlike in Igala language where it means "thank you" or "sorry"

More than 56 per cent of Brazilians have black heritage, but most of the black people do not know anything about our ancestors because the available books about history have no details of black history, says the leader of Afro-Brazilian delegation who visited Nigeria in 2018, and Secretary of Culture in Rio de Janeiro, Nilcemar Nogueira (The Guardian newspaper, 2018).

Reconnecting Afro-Brazilians with their African roots will be a great project that will rekindle our past and light up the spirit of our ancestors. "And it is a good thing that this is coming now at a time when we are working on expanding the frontiers of freedom and democracy in Africa, President Tinubu said this in August, 2023. (<https://thanationonlineng.net>).

In other words, the reconnection project of Igala people instituted by Attah Igala, HRM Agabaidu (Dr) Idakwo Ameh Oboni II in 2014 titled "Igala worldwide Research and Reconnection Project", and now continued by the present Attah Igala, HRM Agabaidu (Dr) Mathew Alaji Opaluwa Oguche Akpa II, which has reconnected indigenous Igala communities and people from across various states of Nigeria, and also from Cuba, Brazil, the Netherlands, USA, etc. was a step in the right direction, and which will help in the exchange of cultural

knowledge as well as bringing developmental ideas between Nigeria and these countries now and in the nearest future. In addition, despite the large number of Igala people reconnected from Brazil over these years including their established Igala traditional rulership structure, there is no work of this nature or any published research work done on the Igala kingdom (indigenous Igala people) of Brazil, hence the need for this work.

II. RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research was carried out using observation, interview and descriptive methods. The author took part in the Ayan Unyējima festival of Igala people of Brazil in 2022 through virtual link. He also interviewed some of the traditional leaders (Onu and Atamas) about some activities in Igala Kingdom of Brazil. Also, some materials in the Igala Royal Archives and Museum in Attah Igala palace, Idah, especially the letters written by the then Onu Ocholi Oliveira William to Attah Igala, HRM Agabaidu (Dr) Mathew Alaji Opaluwa Oguche, were used for the work. Online materials and published Magazine works which have provable evidences were also part of the materials used for the work.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The real meaning and origin of Nago and why Igala people were wrongly classified as Yoruba

Nago is an Igala word. It means thank you or sorry. Our people were heard saying Nago, Nago, .. to one another during their journey after been kidnapped from home (Igala communities) in the present-day Nigeria and even at work after they had reached their destinations in the strange lands. This "Nago" greeting or saying sorry to one another made them to be recorded as Nago people. The same thing is the case of Yoruba people of Sierra Leone called Aku people. It was taken after their greeting, Aku, meaning thank you. It is the same scenario in Kogi state of Nigeria where a particular Yoruba people are called Okun, a name after their greeting, "Okun". Even till date, Nago is the greeting of Igala people in all the states of Nigeria where they are found, and they are the only Nago people in Nigeria. Igala people are spread across various states of Nigeria, some are also found in Southwest Nigeria which is dominated by Yoruba people, Southeast, Southsouth and Northern Nigeria. Some of them left Oyo after the reclaiming of Oyo from Nupe and Igala rulers in 1542 after over 85 years of control. Many of them were captured by Oyo people after the reclaiming of the control of their town by Oyo people, and this made many Igala and Nupe to flee to Ogun, Lagos, Yelwa, Benin, Togo, though some still in Ibarapa, Oyo state. That was why some people in Southwest said that Nago people are around Ketu area which are found in Ogun, Lagos, Benin republic, etc. It is on record that some kings of Ketu have Igala names, and it points to the fact that there were some Igala people among the Ketu people. Also, the first name of Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun state, was Oko Adagba, meaning Adagba's farmstead. It was founded by a man called Adagba. But Adagba is not a Yoruba name; Adagba is Igala name. Adagba is an Igala name for elephant. "Abeokuta was founded in 1830, with Sodeke as her leader. The initial name of the city was "Oko Adagba" meaning Adagba's farmstead; Adagba was Itoko farmer. Sodeke who led the Egba people met him there" (thehistryville.com). Egba people were said to have escaped from Oyo where they were under the control of Alaafin (worldpress.com) to the area where Adagba was already living. But irrespective of who was there earlier, the man Adagba, from the name was an Igala man, and coming to establish his farm in the forest or near the Olumo rock there means that he had other family members with him being a farmer and a hunter. Just like

other towns, Egba kingdom was raided by Dahomeyans for slaves in the early 19th century (britanicca.com).

Also, while some Ketu people are in Nigeria, Ketu people are also in Benin republic. "Ketu town is in Dahomey and another principal Ketu town Meko is in Nigeria" (Anene 1963). There were some kings of Ketu or Dahomey with Igala names, one of whom is King Agoli-Agbo. Both Agoli and Agbo are Igala core names which Igala people bear till date. Though they are classified as Yoruba, Agoli or Agbo were and are not Yoruba names. King Agoli-Agbo was the 12th and final king of Dahomey, and was said to have ruled from 1894 to 1900. Other kings of Dahomey with Igala names were king Akaba, king Agaja. After the conquest of Ketu in Nigeria by Dahomey, the regent who ruled from 1893 to 1894 was called Ida, a name which is more of Igala than Yoruba or Ile Ife origin.

According to Wikipedia, Nagos derives from the word anago, a term Fon-speaking people used to describe Yoruba-speaking people from the kingdom of Ketu, while other sources say that Nago are used to describe all the Brazilian of Yoruba origin. According to Wikitionary, the free dictionary, Nago "is a member of Yoruba people living in coastal regions of modern-day Benin and Nigeria,...". This confirms that Nago is not a general name for Yoruba. It is just used for some people around the coastal areas of Benin and Nigeria. This is far away from Ile Ife, the **ancestral headquarters of Yoruba which is in Osun state.**

But who are the people of Ketu who were identified as Anago or Nago, and why are the Yoruba of Brazil called Nago? Is Nago a word in Yoruba vocabularies? Does Nago have a meaning in Yoruba language? Who are the people in Nigeria that have the word Nago as part of their vocabularies or identified as Nago or Anago word? According to the data obtained from my random interview in 2022 with 70 persons from the six states (Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, Oyo, Lagos and Ogun) of Southwest commonly known as Yoruba states even though other tribes are among them, it was revealed by all the respondents that Nago is not part of their Yoruba dialect or not a Yoruba word, and hence, does not have any meaning in Yoruba language. According to Chief Ocholi William Oliveira, the then Onu Igala Kingdom (Head of Indigenous Igala people) of Brazil, the Nago people of Brazil are all classified as Yoruba but that they know that it is not true. This was contained in the letter of congratulations the Onu wrote to the Attah Igala in December 2021 after the coronation of the Attah Igala Worldwide, HRM Agabaidu Dr Matthew Alaji Opaluwa Oguche Akpa II. In his words, "here, many of us were called "Nagos", although scholars, academics and even religious people are not quite sure what Nagos are, and link only to Yorubas and we know that this is not true". In other words, it is true that many people have thought and many still believing that Nago people of Brazil are all Yorubas of Nigeria, but the people themselves know that there are other people apart from Yoruba who are classified as Nago. This is because, irrespective of the destruction of their historical documents in 1889 as ordered by the then Minister of Finance, Minister Ruy Barbosa, to erase it from Brazil history (www.pbs.org), some of the historical information are passed down to the descendants orally and practically. In addition, there are various Nigerian or African religions practiced in Brazil, some of which are used by some people to trace their origin and real tribe instead of the lumped name "Nago" on everyone. But why were Igala and Yoruba people in Brazil classified as Yoruba? Before 1800, there was no nomenclature or name of tribe called Yoruba in Nigeria. Yoruba, as a name of a tribe can be traced to the name Yariba which was said to be given to Oyo people by Fulani or Hausa people in the 19th century AD.

As reported in Vanguard in October 2019, according to Chief Fani-Kayode in his official Tweeter handle, the Hausa/Fulani gave the people of the South West region the name 'Yariba', from which Yoruba was derived, which means "shady and unreliable". The word 'Yoruba' did not even exist until the 18th century and even then, most of the tribes of the South West, including the Oyo people rejected it due to its origin and meaning. The word 'Yoruba' is alien to our culture ..."

"The earliest people accepted it out of ignorance, and this statement was credited to Rt Hon Jumoke Akindele, the first Female Speaker in the Ondo State House of Assembly. Rt Hon Jumoke Akindele said, "the origin of the Yoruba word is too recent to be lost. It is unfortunate that our children have not been given the benefit of history as a compulsory course in our schools. As recently as the 18th Century, there was no word called "Yoruba", according to vanguard news in 2019. This confirms that the name Yoruba is a recent name. As stated above, many people even rejected the name as some towns have their own History of origin including some who were said to have existed before the arrival of Oduduwa such as the people of Ugbo in Ondo state as well as those who traced their origin to the Nile Valley area of South Sudan like Ijebu people of Ogun state. The Olugbo of Ugbo, Oba Frederick Obateru Akinruntan, was quoted by thisday newspaper online news report in 2016 to have said that the ancestors of Ugbo people were in Ile Ife before the arrival of Oduduwa, hence being the owner of Ile Ife.

According to Chief Sola Ebiseni as quoted by the same vanguard news in October 2019, many people are aware of the origin of the name, and till date, some towns would prefer to identify and be identified with names of their town. He said "Even in many parts of Ondo State today, people still refer to themselves as Ondo, Idanre, Ilaje or Ikale but refer to their brethren from Oyo, Osun and Kwara as Yoruba while Lagos and the riverine Yoruba refer to other Yoruba people as Ara-Oke, that is, people of the upland"

B. How Igala and many other tribes were wrongly and forcefully classified as Yoruba

Haven confirmed that the name Yoruba, irrespective of the meaning, was a recent name, how come Igala people of Brazil were classified as Yoruba? Well, it is good to know at this juncture that it is not only the Igala people of Brazil that are victims of this wrong classification, Igala people of Nigeria are also victims of this wrong classification. And it stemmed from the work by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. In the work of Samuel Ajayi Crowther in the 19th century to identify the origin and History of some ethnic groups, Samuel Ajayi started combining different tribes without investigating their origin or finding out the reason for some similar vocabularies in their languages from the people themselves. To make it worst, was the fact that instead of combining the tribes under the already existing identity or name like Igala, he combined them under the newly introduced name Yoruba (Yariba), even as many people in Southwest were already rejecting it. But despite the protests by various towns, the work of Ajayi stood because it was a report he submitted to the colonial masters he was working for. That was how Igala, Itsekiri and even Benin were classified wrongly as Yoruba. In 1854, Samuel Ajayi Crowther after his visit to Idah, headquarters of Igala kingdom, published a book titled "A comparative word-list of Yoruba, Igala and English language" and in it, he said that Igala was a Yoruba sovereign who had lost his territory to Fulani invaders and ran to the Sultan of Nupe Kingdom for assistance to enable him have a new habitat. And that Sultan came down to Idah, met Akpoto people there, drove them away, bought the land, and installed a Yoruba man as king

with title "Attah". Unfortunately, Ajayi Crowther did this in order to increase the population of Southwest people, especially Oyo, who are originally the owners of the name Yoruba, and where, he, Ajayi was reported to be from. How could someone say all this? Did it ad up? Does it make any sense? Read it again. Fulani invaded and chased Igala away but when Sultan of Nupe came, he met Akpoto not Fulani again, and even drove the Akpoto away. Sultan bought the land and installed a Yoruba man and gave him a title of Attah. Terrible!

According to Awujale, the King and traditional leader of Ijebu Kingdom, Ijebu people are not descendants of Oduduwa or not related with other Yoruba but that Ijebu people are from Sudan. In June 2010, PM news online, in an interview with the Awujale, Oba Sikiru Kayode Adetona, in his palace, stated that Ijebu people are from Waddai in Sudan, adding that every tribe in the country migrated from somewhere. The King was reported by the news outlet to have said that "before Obida came to Ile-Ife, Ife was already in exit". In same way, according to ijebuassociation.org, "there is a lot of evidence in support of the fact that the Ijebus migrated into Nigeria from Sudan". In the same Southwest, there are indigenous Nupe and Igala people in Oyo. They are the Tapa people of Ibarapa North, Oyo state. They are the remaining people or part of the descendants of Nupe and Igala led by the King of United Nupe, called Tsoede (Ichado) who invaded and ruled Oyo at a point in the 16th century. Tsoede was a son of Attah Igala, Agabaidu Ayegba Oma Idoko. When he was leaving Idah, he went with many Igala warriors given to him by his father, Attah Igala along with some royal materials, deity and charms, to enable him establish or form a United Nupe Kingdom and rule effectively. "Tsoede was a son of an Igala Prince, who later became the Attah Igala" (Nnoli, 2016). At a point, Tsoede started invading neighbouring towns to expand his Kingdom. He was been accompanied by these Igala warriors and some Nupe warriors. In the 15th or 16th century, the King of Nupe invaded and conquered Oyo and sacked the rulers.

"In 1457, the King of Nupe invaded Oyo and sacked the capital which caused the flight of Alaafin Onigbogi to the land of the Ibariba where he died. The Oyo empire had no King for 85 years until Ofinran became Alaafin in 1542" (thehistoryville.com). Although some sources stated that the invasion was in 1535 (1535 - 1610) (World History Encyclopedia) and that they controlled Oyo for about 75 years, the bottom line is that there was an invasion of Oyo by Nupe-Igala Prince and his warriors of Igala and Nupe. "... Oyo suffered military losses at the hands of the Nupe, commanded by Tsoede. The Nupe conquered Oyo about 1535, forcing the reigning family to seek sanctuary in the kingdom of Borgu"(Osadolo *et al.*, 2021). In other words, during these 85 or 75 years of Oyo without their own King or Alaafin, they were ruled by the King of Nupe, and later, his Igala descendants after his death. The Nupe and Igala people in Oyo for over these years had multiplied and settled in various places in the area, though after the recapture of Oyo by Oyo ruling houses, many of the Nupes and Igala descendants ran out of Oyo to Ketu and part of Ogun and other places like Benin, Togo. But till date, there are some in Ibarapa with Iye amoja (Yemoja) goddess taken from Idah. Ugbo people have the history that they were in Ife or Southwest before the arrival of Oduduwa in Ile Ife as reported earlier. And talking about the history of Oduduwa, although the exact year of Oduduwa's arrival at Ile Ife may not be known, Oyo was founded by his son called Oranmiyan. According to sources, Oyo was founded around 1300 CE by Oranmiyan, who became the first King of Oyo. Oranmiyan was succeeded by his son Ajaka, after whom was Shango as Alaafin (<https://everyevery.ng>). Then, if Oranmiyan, the son of

Oduduwa was in existence in the 14th century AD or CE, Oduduwa, his father, cannot be in existence before the 12th century AD (1100 AD). This can be corroborated by another source, thus; Radiocarbon dating places the “classical” period of Ife art at about AD 1000–1400, which is also the period covered by the king-lists of large polities like Oyo, Ketu, Benin, and Ijebu (Eades Reference Eades, 1980). Many of these polities were established between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries with the founders claiming to have migrated from Ile-Ife at some point (Eades, 1980)

History of migration of Igala to Idah is very clear, though Samuel Ajayi didn't bother to find out, or was even aware but decided to write another thing entirely to call Igala a branch of Yoruba to suppress Igala politically and otherwise since they were the first to be met by the British on their arrival to Nigeria, and even requested Lokoja land from Attah, the king of Igala people on lease at a given price. “The Attah of Idah gave the Queen of England a large area of land area of land at the confluence, where Lokoja station now stands and to its south, on which the model farm was duly started” (Crowder, 2012). This occurred in 1841. Even Ajayi himself was given a piece of land in Lokoja where he built his church and a primary school; Holy Trinity Primary school, built in 1865, which is said to be the first primary school in Northern Nigeria by Atah Igala.

Igala people migrated from ancient Egypt to the present-day Nigeria and settled in the location called Attagara (Attah Igala) community, Gwoza, Borno state (HRM Agabaidu (Dr) Aliyu Obaje, 1970s (Audu, 2014) and Agabaidu (Dr) Idakwo Ameh Oboni, 2020 (summitnewspaper.worldpress.com)). Attagara was corrupted from Attah Igala, a name after the King of Igala people. This was during the formation of Kanem empire by Igala and Kanuri, who also were from Nuri town of ancient Egypt. The arrival of Igala to Borno state then Kanem empire was around 700 BC (Anatole *et al.*, 2017). From Borno state, Igala people migrated to Tangara/Attagara in Ibi town near Ibi River in the then Kwararafa now Taraba State (Temple and Temple, 1965). It was later that some groups of Igala (Igalamela and Igalaoaba) migrated to Idah from Kwararafa around 500 BC (Jacob, 2018), while some later moved to other places including Opi in Enugu State which has the archaeology date of around 400 BC (Chigozie, 2020). But irrespective of this popular knowledge of Igala migration from Kwararafa to Idah, Samuel Ajayi still wrote in his book that Igala was Yoruba. As a result of this, Igala people were regarded by many people across the world as Yoruba. Nupe, Itsekiri, even Benin people in Southwest were regarded as Yoruba. That combination made the population of the new tribe, Yoruba to be much, hence other tribes now seen as the “child” of Yoruba. This was the foundation of many tribes being classified as Yoruboid tribes even as Yoruba came into existence recently. Even some online dictionaries such as Merriam-wester.com started defining Igala people as Yoruba speakers or Yoruba people. Before 2017, Merriam-wester.com defined Igala as “a Yoruba people on the Niger at its confluence with the Benue in Nigeria”. When this had happened, all the Igala people who were forcefully taken from Nigeria to Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, USA, etc. were regarded as Yoruba. It is a provable fact that it is only Igala that use the word “Nago” in Nigeria as a whole, but since the Igala people at home (Nigeria) were already classified wrongly as Yoruba by Ajayi Crowther and the documents already circulated, the Igala people among the other enslaved people had no choice than to live with the wrong identity. It was of recent that many people started knowing the truth that Igala people are different from Yoruba people. It was the work or results that made a Merriam-Wester online dictionary to change its definition of Igala from Igala as

“a Yoruba-speaking people on the Niger at its confluence with the Benue in Nigeria” to “a people on the Niger at its confluence with the Benue in Nigeria”. This is also as a result of the fact that the Igala people of Brazil know who they are as confirmed by Onu Oliveira in his letters to Attah Igala in 2021, and they practice their Igala culture and religion as others of Yoruba or Southwest origin are doing theirs too. The Igala people of Cuba also know that they are not Yoruba but Igala even as they are classified as Yoruba through the same wrong histories. They are generally called Olukumi or Lucumi people and in some sources, Anago speakers. Olukumi is a variant of Igala word, Onukumi, and it means my friend. In many parts of Yoruba, my friend is Oremi. It is just some few towns of Yoruba (not in Ile Ife which is the centre) that use Olukumi. But as a result of the wrong histories, no one identifies them as Igala. During the trans-Sahara trade, many Igala people were captured from the farms, farmstead, isolated settlements and camps by the side of the rivers from Idah through Benin and other places. Some were even Igala warriors captured during Igala Benin war of 1516, in which the Portuguese mercenaries came with sophisticated weapons, fought the Igala with Benin, which overpowered Igala warriors, leading to the capturing of some Igala warriors including those who surrendered, and taken to Brazil Spanish territories and other places.

Egbarevba's *Short History of Benin*, presents a vivid picture of the Benin City of Oba Esigie soon after the Idah war ended.

The letter said that:

Peace had returned to the kingdom; the European, even through Priest of God, had been away with Esigie to Idah for a whole year, and had helped Benin to defeat the Igalas: the Preaching of the Gospel: the great Mystery, and the conversion of the Benin people to Christianity which had been shelved because of the total commitment of the kingdom to the war effort was not possible, now that the war was over; the effort to convert the pagan kingdom to Christianity had begun in earnest. Already Oba Esigie had built a Church commitment of the kingdom to the war effort was not possible, now that the war was over; the effort to convert the pagan kingdom to Christianity had begun in earnest. Already Oba Esigie had built a church... (Bradbury, 1973).

This is the confirmation of the alliance, and what led to the capturing of many Igala warriors during the war, and the subsequent enslavement of the warriors, and some of whom revolted in the various destinations in the USA, Brazil, Haiti and even Cuba.

D. Who are Igala people in Brazil

1. History of Igala kingdom of Brazil

Although the records of many Africans in Brazil were destroyed, new names and identities given to them, some people were able to trace their root through their cultural practices handed down to them from generations to generations. In some cases, the people of certain culture may find it difficult to get the actual origin of their culture due to wrong Histories being told leading

to limited ideas about a particular tribe among the enslaved people, as well as loss of the Historical details. According to Chief Oholi William Oliveira, the Onu Igala Kingdom Brazil from 2020 - July 2023, it was a particular man who confirmed that their culture and religion, the Ayan Unyejima worship was Igala religion. It was from then he began to carryout research about Igala people of Nigeria since almost everyone including some from other countries like Ghana are classified as Yoruba. In his words, "I heard from my master [Barroso] that our songs and rhythms are from Igala people and not Yoruba", Chief Oholi Oliveira, October 29, 2020. This simply means, his master, being an old man knew about Igala songs and culture. He also knows about Yoruba culture, and that made him to differentiate between those practicing Igala culture and those practicing Yoruba culture even as all of them are called Yoruba based on the old classification made. And one more important point is that for the man to have known that the culture of Onu Oliveira and his people are Igala culture, it means that Igala people are part of the Nago people right from the beginning, and their culture and religion have survived several erosions but still preserved by the descendants of Igala people even without knowing the actual origin of it. This was confirmed in 2022 by then Atama Onu Igala of Brazil, Atama Joao Paulo Akoh'medu, who is now the Onu Igala kingdom, Brazil, in an interview with National Ethics and Values magazine, Abuja. Master Barroso was a descendant of an enslaved Igala people who worship Ayan unyejima goddess. Ayan or Iye Unyejima is the mother goddess of the arts, crafts, harmony, dance, chants, music and drums. Both Master Barroso and Godmother Helena, his wife, thought our Onu Oliveira about Ojo, Omachala, Iyemoja, Ogwu, Ode, Oya, Eju, Egwu, Ifa, and many other deities that we worship at the present day (Onu Akoh'medu, 2022).

While many historians and authors have left Igala out of their writings and publications, the descendants of Igala people among the Brazil people have not abandoned their own religion or cultural identity. They continued to practice it, and in the process, continued to teach the young ones in order to carry the practice forward. This was the role the Igala descendant, Master Barroso had played, and through him, Onu Oholi Oliveira was able to fully understand Igala religion and History. He didn't stop there but raised other disciples who after learning, would be able to practice and as well teach others too as time progresses.

Although, the reconnection of Igala people of Brazil with their origin, Igala kingdom of Nigeria, took place officially in 2020, the Igala people of Brazil knew over many years before 2020 that they are Igala. They had been practicing Igala religion and culture which had been handed down to them from generations to generations. They practice Igala religion, and which is rooted from ancient Egypt. According to Chief Oliveria in his letter to Attah Igala in December 2021, "our Ambassador, Ayegba Abdullahi, with his very important work of searching the Igala around the world, found us and gave us back to our ancestral roots. Around here we praised Ayan Unyejima. We sang and played according to Igala traditions. We made connections with Egyptian rituals, but in the Igala way and we didn't know it until we found our roots". In other words, even before the reconnection with their Igala root, they have been practicing Igala religion or rituals. They know that they are from Igala ethnic group of Nigeria. In Brazil, though the use of DNA test is now adopted by some people, most of the origin of the people is based on historical and cultural perspective because, around 19th century, all the documents of Africans enslaved in Brazil were destroyed to prevent them from knowing their origin or ancestry. In the words of the late Onu Oliveira, "although our

ancestry is motivated by spiritual and cultural paths, we feel Igala in blood, soul and faith..."

Also, in the interview granted by Onu Joao Paulo Akoh'medu, the present Onu Igala Kingdom of Brazil, and published by National Ethics and Values magazine in March 2022, the same statement of them having known their origin to be Igala for many years before they met Ambassador Ayegba, was made. In his words, "even before we met Ambassador Ayegba Abdullahi, and were rescued to our roots, we ostensibly studied our origin and tradition as a fundamental part of the rituals and initiations to which we are subjected. This is how the tradition has not been lost until today in Brazil. Our studies have always taken us to the Igala people of Nigeria, and from there to ancient Egypt..." As a result of this fore knowledge of their Igala root, Onu Oholi Oliveira of blessed memory travelled to Idah, Igala kingdom headquarters when he was 19 years, and studied the Igala Ifa briefly before going back to Brazil (Onu Akoh'medu, 2022). According to Atama (Priestess) Sivia Mara Idu, the Atama Ebule Onu Igala Kingdom of Brazil for Porto Alegre, Igala religion or Ayan Unyejima had being in existence in Brazil from time immemorial, and that she began the full practice of Igala religion over a decade ago.

I met Master Obashanan in 2010 and became his disciple ever since, joining the so-called Umbanda Esoterica – a religion that preaches convergence and the School of Synthesis. From 2011 onwards, my Master, immersed in studies on sound and drums, began to establish close links between Iye Uniejjima and what we had worshiped for years and which had a much earlier ancestral origin. From 2012 onwards I followed my initiatory life and maintained the Igala cult in Porto Alegre - capital of RS, maintaining the only temple of this nature in the extreme south of Latin America, but with the prospect of expansion soon, as all the disciples sing and worship the Igala way. In 2023, due to the passing of Master Obashanan, the Brazilian diaspora was reorganized and I, Aryacy Idu, was consecrated Attama Ebule Igala in Brazil. According to tradition, at least once a year, we celebrate the Igala Festival in Rio Grande do Sul (Priestess Aryacy Idu Sivia Mara, interview, 2023).

It is worthy of note that wrong classification of many Brazilians as Yoruba did not affect only Igala people of Brazil. It affected other people including those who had even spent many years on Earth or who are aged already. An example is Zulu Araujo, who heads a cultural center in Bahia, who learned that he descends from the mostly Muslim Tikar people in Cameroon. "That was a surprise. I thought that like many in Bahia I must be Yoruba. I've had to change the identity I carried in my head for 62 years," said Araujo, an expert in race relations.

"In Brazil, our origins were stripped from us in a sophisticated and brutal manner. They took away our ancestors' papers and changed our names. It was a perverse strategy to keep domination." He visited Bankim, a Tikar village in Cameroon, as part of the documentary research. "I was able to come face to face with my origins," he said. "The physical and cultural similarities were clear. I recognized myself in the fact that they were extremely musical." To celebrate his new identity, he has had himself rebaptized Tikar in an Afro-Brazilian ceremony, he said. Another who was surprised to find out that his roots are not what he thought they were was Ivanir dos Santos, organizer of Rio's annual march against religious intolerance since 2007. After thinking he must be of Yoruba origin, "the DNA told me I'm 100 percent European on my mother's side," he said (<https://phys.org/news/2015-07-afro-brazilians-dna-pre-slavery.html>). This confirms that just like in Nigeria, there are some people in Brazil who think or are thought by other people

to be Yoruba but are not Yoruba. In addition, it also implies that in Brazil, tribes are mostly through cultural and historical relationship and not in all cases through DNA.

Like Nago name attributed to Igala, Igala people of Onitsha especially their women have such an appendage or alias. The women of Igala are called Onye-Agba, meaning Agba people. It is because of the Igala greeting Agba, Nago, Agba, Nago that is used continuously always when greeting one another or other people who understand Igala language or their greeting. It is the same way the Yoruba people of Kogi state got their name, “Okun”, which is also their greeting, or Seara Leon Yorubas got Aku identity from their greetings too.

3.4.2 Traditional rulers of Igala kingdom of Brazil

The traditional rulers of Igala kingdom of Brazil are Onu Igala, Atama Onu Igala, Iye Igala, Omaonyete. Onu is the head of the kingdom or entire indigenous Igala people of Brazil. he is the representative of Attah Igala in Igala kingdom of Brazil. He is also a Priest King in Brazil Igala kingdom. He works with the palace of Attah Igala, and Igala kingdom of Nigeria through the Ambassador of Attah Igala known as Ejuh Attah Igala. He works with other traditional officials on the development of the kingdom and the people. He heads the temple of the Ayan Unyejima as the priest too. He organizes the Igala festivals or central events of the entire Igala kingdom at their headquarters or any convenient venue for them. He also supports the Atamas (Priests and Priestesses) during any event in the regions. The Iye (Queen mother) is the mother of the entire Igala kingdom of Brazil. As a mother, she supports the Onu and other traditional officials to plan things regarding the Igala people. She intervenes and settles disputes as a mother too. The Omaonyete (Princess) is the official who is close to the Onu and works with him on certain activities of Igala people of Brazil. She sometimes delivers the messages of the kingdom for the Onu. “The Atamas serves as regional leaders and spiritual guides of the community. In addition, they advise the Onu on its affairs relating to Igala king” (Atama Vitoria, Interview, 2023)

Names of some Igala traditional leaders of Brazil and their locations

1. Onu (Chief) Joao Paulo Akoh’medu Oguche, Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil; Sao Jose do Rio Preto.
2. Iye Cicera Mari da Silva, Iye (Queen mother) Igala Kingdom, Brazil; Sao Paulo City.
3. Atama Marco Aurelio, Atama Ekele (Priest) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Sau Paulo city, Sao Paulo.
4. Atama Idu Silvia Mara, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Porto Alegre.
5. Atama Vitoria Picoli Fracarolli, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Guarulhos, Sao Paulo.
6. Atama Bianca Moreira Guerreiros, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Sao Jose do Rio Preto.
7. Omaonyete Francisslene dos Santos, Omaonyete (Princess) Igala Kingdom, Brazil, Sao Jose do Rio Preto.
8. Atama Wanessa Teodoro, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Cuiaba, Mato Grosso.



Chief (Onu) Ocholi William Oliveira; The Onu Igala kingdom of Brazil from 2020 – July, 2023



Chief (Onu) Joao Paulo Akoh’medu; The Onu Igala kingdom of Brazil from September, 2023 -

The image shows a formal letter on a light green background. At the top left is a star-shaped logo with the Igala word 'EJE' and symbols. At the top right is a triangular logo with a cross and a lamp. In the center is a logo for 'IGALA FOREVER' featuring an elephant. Below the logos, the text reads: 'Osholi Obashanan ONU IGALA OF BRAZIL'. The date is '28 de outubro de 2021.'. The recipient is 'HRM Agabaidu (Dr) Mathew Alaji Opaluwa Ogwuche Akpa, The Attah Igala Worldwide, Idah, Kogi State, Nigeria.'. The letter contains warm greetings and information about the festival on July 15 and 16, 2022. It lists activities like prayers, music, and dance. The letter concludes with 'Yours in Service, Master Obashanan Ocholi Oliveira Williams, Onu Indigenous Igala People of Brazil, and Head of Green Star Ayan Unyejima Temple, Brazil'.

Copy of the letter by Chief Oliveira to Attah Igala in December, 2021, notifying the Attah Igala of the 2022 Ayan Iye Unyejima festival.



Atama Marco Aurelio, Atama Ekele (Priest) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Sao Paulo city, Sao Paulo



Atama Idu Silvia Mara, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Porto Alegre.



Iye Cicera Mari da Silva, Iye (Queen mother) Igala Kingdom, Brazil; Sao Paulo City



Omaonyete Francisslene dos Santos, Omaonyete (Princess) Igala Kingdom, Brazil, Sao Jose do Rio Preto



Atama Vitoria Picoli Fracarolli, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Guarulhos, Sao Paulo



Atama Bianca Moreira Guerreiros, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Sao Jose do Rio Preto



Atama Wanessa Teodoro, Atama Ebule (Priestess) Onu Igala Kingdom, Brazil, for Cuiaba, Mato Grosso

2. Igala Religion

The origin of Ayan Unyejima in Igala Culture

Ayan Unyejima or Ayan Iye Unyejima or Iye Unyejima is mother goddess in Igala religion. She is a goddess of River. Ayan or Iye means mother. Ayan can also mean old woman or grandmother. Unyejima means to bind the house or guide the house or home. Iye Unyejima literally means the mother who guides or takes care of home. As the name implies, she is a mother, and hence plays the role of mother. Iye or Ayan Unyejima is the goddess of protection, care, covenant, good luck, music, dance. The Ayan Unyejima mother goddess in Brazil was taken by the enslaved Igala people from the present-day Nigeria to Brazil. In Igala, she is a revered goddess, and she is still in some families who are Igala traditional religion practitioners. She is mostly with white clothes. The worshippers wear white, red, blue clothes or the combination of white and other colours. The white colour denotes peace and purity. Red is the colour of the crown of the kings of Lower Egypt where she was worshipped. Red is also of royalty and commitment. Mut, her name in ancient Egypt or Iye Unyejima was also associated with red colour in ancient Egypt. Blue is also her (Iye or mut goddess) water origin as she was originally associated with blue colour while in ancient Egypt. She doesn't expect anyone to keep malice or hate others in the family or society. She is a mother who would ensure that all her children are in peace with one another. During her celebration or worship, foods, drinks, monies and different gifts are offered to her. Igala people of Nigeria did not start the worship of Ayan in Nigeria even though they are beside River Niger. Ayan Unyejima goddess was brought by Igala people from their origin, the ancient Egypt. In fact, all the gods and goddesses in Igala religion originated from ancient Egypt. Historically, Igala migrated from ancient Egypt around the 8th century BC when the Kush Kingdom invaded Egypt. From the town of Tjebu or Qau where they stayed during their ruling of ancient Egypt as the tenth dynasty (Igala/Galla) rulers (2130 BC – 2040 BC), they continued to move along and on the river Nile through various towns until they arrived in the present-day Nigeria around 700 BC. The migration of Igala people has its traces till date along their routes. From Lower Egypt, some moved to Al-Garah in Upper Egypt, some continued to Sudan, and the town of Gara is still in Sudan. The journey continued to South Sudan where there is Azande Kingdom and AbonGara relatives of Igala people in addition to

Gara town in South Sudan. While some migrated through other directions to Uganda, and founded Igala Kingdom of today, some migrated to Kenya as Igara and Maragoli people today. Some continued from South Sudan to Central African Republic where there is Gara Ancient town of today. From Central African Republic, Igala people continued to Chad where Gara karoua town is still there, and later to the present-day Borno state around 700 BC. This was the beginning of the formation of Kanem Empire. In the then Kanem Empire founded by Igala and Kanuri, Igala people were in Amuda, Gara, Ngala and Attah Igala villages. The location of the king of Igala is the place called Attah Igala which was later corrupted to Attagara. Till date, they town of Attagara in Gwoza LGA of Borno state is still in existence. Igala people came from Egypt with Egyptian cultures and traditions of their ancestors including the regalia of Attah Igala of today as well as other processes of coronation, and during his transition to the underworld. In Ancient Egypt, the Ayan Unyejima goddess was called Mut. Mut was the goddess of Nile River, and was in Lower Egypt which was the location of Igala people. Mut mother goddess (Ayan Unyejima) existed in ancient Egypt from 3000 BC (Egyptian goddess Mut: Quatr.us Study Guides). She was part of triad of lower Egypt which are Ra, Mut and Khonsu which are father, mother and son. Ra or Amun Ra is the creator god, Mut as the mother, and Khonsu the moon god as the son. Khonsu is moon god, and it is called Ochu in Igala language. Ra is the sun god, and it is called Ojo-olu in Igala, but called Ojo Odoba or Omachala, Olichaoke as the creator god. Just like in ancient Egypt, Mut which means Mother just like Igala language Iye is associated with river in ancient Egypt. She is worshipped in Igala Kingdom of Nigeria as it was done in ancient Egypt, and the same thing is being done in Igala Kingdom of Brazil.

3. How Ayan Unyejima is worshipped in Igala Kingdom of Brazil

As a result of the various effects caused by the people who enslaved our people in Brazil as well as later governments policy which aimed at erasing all the records of Africans brought to Brazil by destroying the entire records in 19th century, coupled with the intimidation of our African brothers and sisters, most of the religious practices were added with some elements of the religion of the slave masters which is Christianity. This marriage gave birth to what is called Umbanda. Umbanda is the combination of some African traditional practices and catholic practices.

In Brazil, the celebration of Ayan Unyejima takes place in Sao Paulo Brazil where the temple of Ayan Unyejima is located as well as other regions under the Atama Ekele and Ebule Onu (Priests and Priestesses). Green Star temple is the temple of Ayan unyejima. The temple is located in Sao Paulo, headquarters of Igala kingdom of Brazil. Apart from the Ayan unyejima goddess, the temple has many historical and cultural items which are traceable to Igala kingdom of Nigeria. They Ayan unyejima and Ibegwu (ancestral) festival conducted yearly is celebrated at the temple.

During the celebration, all the worshippers, both male and female will dress in white, blue, red or the mixed colours of Iye (Ayan). There will be drumming, signing, chants and various incarnations. Food sacrifices and other items are presented at the temple as sacrifices. Prayers are offered through songs and orally. The Master leads the prayers, and prays to the Ayan for the people for peace, good health, protection, and blessings. The Onu is also assisted by some of the priests and priestesses (Atama Ekele Onu and Atama Ebule Onu) in some of the activities. There is also cooking of variety of foods which will

be eaten by the worshippers or participants at the temple. Drinks and water are also used to make libation to the ancestors or Ibegwu during the festival. The water is given to the ancestors for peace and growth, as without water, no living thing can survive, while the wine is given to the ancestors as an honour and a gift for the elders as elders and not children are the ones to drink wine.

There is also initiation of new members who had completed their training and studies of the religion under the master or Onu.

Other Igala gods and goddesses in Brazil Idu, Uloko, Alijenu, Ibegwu, Iyeoma, Ojo, Ichekpa, Omachala, Iyemoja, Ogwu, Ode, Oya, Eju, Egwu, Ifa, Akpabana which is equivalent to shango of Yoruba, Oka.

4. Importance of Igala religion practices in Brazil

1. Igala religion practices in Brazil is a way the Igala people thank their gods and their ancestors: Ayan Unyejima and other god's worships are ways of thanking God as well as the gods and the ancestors for the blessings so far, and also praying for more blessings, protection and development.

2. It is their Igala cultural identity: In Brazil, the worship of Ayan Iye Unyejima mother goddess is limited to Igala people alone. Other gods and goddesses like Idu, Iye oma, Alijenu, Ibegwu, Ebo-oko, etc. are exclusively of Igala origin too, and the worshippers are Brazilian Igalas.

3. It helps to promote Igala culture and religion in Brazil: The practice of Igala culture in Brazil has "exported" Igala culture from Nigeria to Brazil. The celebration of various Igala feasts in Brazil have made many people to know about some Igala cultural practices in Brazil and across the world through the ones on You tube channels and Facebook, or at the celebration grounds.

4. It is important in the preservation of Igala religion and culture in Brazil and beyond: The practice will make the Igala culture and religion in Brazil never to go into extinction as the younger ones will learn from the elders already practicing it.

5. It connects the Igala people of Brazil with their Igala Kingdom root in Nigeria culturally: Culture stems from the root or origin. Irrespective of the location where it is taken to by the people, its origin or source remains the same. And whenever the culture or the religion is being practiced, it is done as if they are doing it at their home or origin. The Brazil Igala ensure that it is always practiced as done in Igala kingdom of Nigeria where they originated from.

6. It is an avenue for the younger ones to learn the Igala cultural practices with a view to carrying on when the elders are no more active or gone to the land of the ancestors: Culture can be learned or inherited. This is possible through individual observation, participation and initiation. The younger ones will learn the arts as they take part in the yearly celebrations or whenever its being done.

7. It shows Igala to the world outside Nigeria: Today, if there is an Igala festival in Brazil, Igala people across the world as well as other people will participate especially joining them through social media or You tube. Apart from participating, the information is available on the internet for other people to learn from and know more about the Igala people of Brazil.

CONCLUSION

The research work on the impact of Igala religion in Brazil has been done using personal observation method, interview method and some library materials. From the results, it can be concluded

that Igala religion consisting of Ayan Unyejima, Ichekpa, Alijenu, Idu, Oya, Eju, Uloko, Egwu, Akpabana, etc. has a great impact in Brazil, and that it had been in existence or being practiced by the Igala people of Brazil right from the time some Nigerians were forcefully taken from their home during the trans-Saharan trade. It can also be concluded that despite a very long period of separation between the Igala people of Brazil and their origin- Igala kingdom of Nigeria, the modality of worship of Ayan unyejima goddess in Brazil is almost the same as it is still done in Igala Kingdom of Nigeria. Furthermore, the Igala people of Brazil hold the Igala religion and Igala ancestors' worship in high esteem, with honour and reverence till date.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that temples for Igala religion be built in other states where indigenous Igala people are located in Brazil to enable them practice their religion effectively. Also, it is recommended that the Igala museum of Brazil, be organising history and culture seminar occasionally to enable the public learn about Igala people, history and culture especially as Igala people are sometimes wrongly classified as Yoruba including those in Brazil.

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