

A Culture in Retreat: The Inyama Priestesses of EnuguEzike, Nigeria

Ngozika A. Obi-Ani and Innocent V. Nweze

Department of History and International Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Stella Okoye-Ugwu

Department of English and Litreary Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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Abstract

In traditional Igbo society, priests and priestesses are seen as intermediaries between man and the gods. These messengers are held in awe and often act strangely; some do not barb their hair and appear manifestly possessed. They perform rituals to heal the sick, avert calamities for their various communities and are revered by the people. These priestesses, known as Inyama in Enugu-Ezike, Nigeria are believed to be divinely called to serve different deities. Young maidens who behave weirdly in the community are assumed to be possessed by the Inyama. Those who reject the call to serve the deity could go mad and be afflicted with misfortunes. As Christian missionary activities penetrated into Enugu-Ezike and the surrounding areas, Inyama priestesses appear to lose followership and patronage. Some of them are now nominal Christians who use their supernatural powers to perform their traditional functions of intervening between man and their new "god." This paper attempts to interrogate the place of Inyama priestesses in Enugu-Ezike using predominantly oral information and other extant secondary materials.

Introduction

In pre-colonial Enug-Ezike, religion played and still plays a very significant role in the life of everybody. The people strongly believe in the supreme God, creator of all things in the world and above it. For them, God is all knowing. He is called 'Ezechukwu-oke or 'Ezechitoke' as the case may be. This firm belief in an all-knowing God is the reason why every community in Enugu Ezike has its own deity (Nweze pers. Comm., 2016). Indeed, until the advent of Christianity, the people of Enugu-Ezike worshipped many deities which were regarded as messengers of Ezechukwu-oke (God). There are several deities which the people greatly revere and even fear. Enugu Ezike people also venerate, worship and pour libation to their ancestors and believe in the existence of an individual 'chi' or personal god that is responsible for every individual's destiny in the world. Priests who oversee the deities are popularly known and referred to as *Attama*. Their female counterparts, known as Inyama, are also respected; they are believed to mediate between the people and the spirit world, heal them of their

sicknesses and foresee impending dangers. Thus, apart from being well respected, they are also revered in the community.

The Inyama cult dates back to antiquity. It is difficult to decipher the history of the cult, but the people believe that the cult is as old as the town itself. Inyama is said to be a spirit force and those who are possessed by it are referred to as Inyama; only the females are so-possessed. It is also believed to be hereditary (Oluwa). The Inyama spirit can possess both young girls and older women. However, if a young girl is possessed, she is kept in abeyance after sacrifices have been made till she matures. A girl possessed was usually called and seen as *Ogbanje*. On the other hand, an older woman that is possessed by the spirit receives the "*Echi*" (anklet) from the chief priest which she wears as a mark of her membership. Refusal to accept the call of Inyama brings misfortunes and ill luck and other grave consequences to the family concerned, such as sickness, barrenness and chaos among others. For the young girl, it manifests between the age of six months and seven months with several signs like frequent malaria, convulsion and other strange signs (Elua). In the case of an older woman, the spirit makes her run hysterically to the chief priest in charge of the deity in question. She weeps loudly *Nnenne emeo* (a cry for help) as she moved followed by her family members who prevent her from stepping into the *Ogee*, a sacred spot in the shrine. People are not allowed to pass near *Ogee*, as offenders are expected to propitiate the gods with sacrificial items stipulated by the gods.

Furthermore, a witness who must be an Inyama herself must be present. Her duty is to help the prospective initiate collect the list of items required for initiation and the associated sacrifice. The ability of the potential Inyama to provide all the necessary items depends on her family wealth. Some pay by installment every four days or monthly until it is completed. A month before the final initiation, the possessed person is expected to visit the shrine every four days with a gallon or two gallons of palm wine. The palm wine is shared by the chief priest and priestesses of the deity. The final initiation which makes one an Inyama priestess, takes place thereafter. Nevertheless, this all important cult that was revered in the precolonial times by the people as the intermediaries between the gods and the community is fast going into extinction. Christianity and western civilization have combined to diminish its influence, thereby rendering her traditional functions almost irrelevant. Indeed, their adherents and clients are greatly dwindling. It is against this background that we attempt to study this invaluable cultural product first, to add to the body of knowledge on traditional belief systems in this part of the globe and second, to document it as a repository for future generations.

Study Area

Enugu-Ezike is located at the extreme northern part of Enugu State, Nigeria. The town is in Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area with its headquarter at Ogrute, and is made up of thirty-six villages. It shares boundary with Alor Agu of Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area and Amaka of Benue State on the West. On the East, it is bounded by Amalla and Obollo-Afor of Udenu Local Government Area. It also shares boundaries with Ete and Ofante of Kogi State on the north while on the south, EnuguEzike has boundaries with Iheakpu-Awka and Iheaka of Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area. The town is within the high forest vegetation zone. However, increased human activities and global climatic changes have turned Enugu-Ezike into a Guinea savanna ecozone, with tropical dry land that supports the abundant growth of palm trees (Omeke 2010:5). Like other Igbo societies, the Enugu Ezike people engage in numerous economic activities, including agriculture, wine tapping, blacksmithing, oil palm production and trading. Agriculture occupies the greatest part of the Igbo economic activity of which Enugu-Ezike is a part.

Initiation into Inyama Cult

Initiation into the cult of Inyama involves rigorous activities and a lot of expenditure. The new initiate has to undergo some processes of spiritual refinement before she can be admitted into the cult. An Inyama priestess sounded a warning that one needs to be careful in the process to avoid the wrath of the gods (Urama pers. Comm.,2015). When the prospective candidate had accumulated enough money to foot the bill of a rather costly feast, she invites all the Inyama priestesses in her town and beyond.

At her initiation, all the other *priestesses* in the vicinity assemble in order to open the spiritual eye of the novice so that she would have the power to see the spirit and foresee the future (Arinze 1970:65).

The act is carried out by older or more experienced priestesses and priests whose job is to install the shrine or personal god (*Adema –spirit calabash*) for the prospective candidate in her home. Fowls, goats and other sacrificial items stipulated are offered on the new altar and the new priestess pours libation to the spirit. After the libation, the “*Adema*” (spirit calabash) is installed in the newly constructed personal temple or altar. The spirit calabash represents the deity in question (Odo pers. Comm., 2016).

The initiation takes place only on *Afor* market day (one of the four days in Igbo week). The occasion is marked by fanfare as the new Inyama

dances round the temple while listening to the music of the spirit (egwuma) (Arinze 1970:69).

Various kinds of foods, especially pounded yam to entertain her guests and palm wine are usually in abundance. This initiation could last from 7:00 pm till dawn with spirit songs, incantation and dances (Onoyima 2011:37). The family of the prospective Inyama, relations, friends and wellwishers also attend the celebration on the initiation day, but are forbidden entrance into the *Ogee* (sacred place) designed by the *Akara* or *Ogama* (male deity servant) (Urama pers. Comm., 2016).

The sacrificial items needed for initiation includes fowls (white), goats (Ewu Igbo), chicken, palm oil, pieces of wools (Ikakwa) of different colour, palm wine, kola nut (Oji), *Oodo* (powdered like and always yellow in colour), *Nzu* (white chalk), yams, *Ashakpa* (cowries) among others. The fowls, goats, yams and palm wine were used for entertainment while other items are sacrificed to the spirit (Ijeoma pers. Comm., 2015). The provision of these items kicks off the ritual initiation.

The training of new Inyama takes place in the shrine, temple or sacred grove. Arinze F.A (1970:69) notes that there is no special training college. From childhood to final initiation, the future priest/priestess must have learned much of the priestly sayings and practices, especially with reference to sacrifice. However, training to become Inyama involves learning various prayers, songs, rituals, skills, dances, and crafts and all aspects of their religion. The training is always characterized by the observance of certain taboos. She is withdrawn from the public and does not attend burial ceremonies at her own will. The taboo is religiously observed as the contrary may be suicidal. These taboos will be discussed later.

Before the final initiation, the prospective candidate sweeps the shrine every morning with branches of a specially chosen thorny shrub for a number of days. By so doing, she would get acquainted with the practices in the shrine. This is also part of their training. In all these, there does not seem to be any real rite of initiation by which power was transferred from those that were already priestesses/priests to the new candidate. The above ceremonies are nevertheless important and indispensable, without which the future Inyama cannot assume duties or presumed to have 'fed' the spirit (Ijeoma pers. Comm., 2016).

Roles of Inyama Priestess

Through revelations, training and initiation Inyama priestesses possess diverse knowledge of how to approach the spiritual world for the benefit of the society. They assist people in every area of their life. They offer advice and advance holistic solutions to the myriads of human problems.

Major ugly situations and misfortunes are usually regarded and explained as issues that have spiritual undertone and therefore require spiritual solutions. Among the Enugu-Ezike, Nsukka and Igbo people at large, certain illnesses and misfortunes are believed to be caused by ill-will mainly through charm, witchcraft and sorcery, broken taboos or the work of malevolent spirits. Minor cases and complaints like stomach upset, catarrh, headache and rashes are treated with herbs and other medicines known to each family or village. Nonetheless, complicated, persistent and serious cases require the attention, knowledge and skills of specialists. As Bleeker noted:

There are many medicine men in the Ibo villages. A number of them have made regulation as curers others are formed as diviners who diagnose illnesses and prescribe cause and sacrifice (1969:113).

The Inyama priestesses use herbs to heal people and are concerned with the overall success of the people. However, they also deal with misfortunes. They help in discovering the cause(s) of a sickness, diagnose the nature of the disease, and apply the required treatment. In treating the patient, she may also do all sorts of things including massages, bleeding the patient, jumping over the patient and using incantation to avert the evil spirit. The patient may be required to bring items like fowl, goat, money and other sacrificial items, to observe some taboos or to avoid certain foods and persons (Eze pers. Comm., 2016).

Since the people believed that sickness and troubles are caused by malevolent forces, the priestesses make spirited efforts to satisfy the spiritual aspect as well. The spiritual aspect of the treatment may be psychological, but it plays a vital role in healing the patient. The priestesses probe into the psychological state of the patient so as to give a satisfactory explanation of the case. Again, they not only heal the patients, but also provide preventive measures to ensure that such misfortunes do not occur again. Such measures include performing certain rituals, applying medicine that are swallowed or rubbed on the body, charms, talisman and amulets (Eze pers. Comm., 2016). Furthermore, the priestesses help people to succeed in their various fields of endeavor. For instance, business men and women, politicians and civil servants as well as students approach them for help in order to succeed in the various undertakings (Eze pers. Comm., 2016). Some people seek their assistance for promotion at their workplace. They also assist families and help in rekindling their love for each other. Farmers seek their assistance for bountiful yield of both crops and livestock.

Indeed, apart from good health, protection and security from malevolent spirits and forces, and encouragement of good fortunes, the

general wellbeing of the society is their utmost priority. However, it must be noted that while there are some good priestesses who are honestly dedicated and devoted to their duties, there are others who in the course of their duties abuse the office of Inyama by engaging in unhealthy, harmful and unethical practices. There are medicines for good fortune, love and success, security of persons and property and so on. There are also medicines against sorcery and witchcraft. Significantly, all medicine contains a power that ought to be used for the benefit of humanity but can also be put to detrimental use by immoral and nefarious individuals (Ugwu and Ugwueye 2004:52). One fundamental aspect of the cult is that any Inyama suspected of witchcraft, sorcery or causing evil of any sort is always avoided by members. In the words of Bleeker, a man suspected of sorcery is avoided by everyone (1969:52). Traditions and laws made it in such a way that anybody caught using charm to cause harm or evil, for example to kill or bewitch her neighbour, will be excommunicated and sometimes banned in the community. Even the *deities* abhor such acts.

It is very rare to see a women priestess (chief priest) in charge of a deity because the priests in Igbo traditional religion predominate and most times women were excluded and forbidden to enter into a shrine or masquerade cult for reasons that have not been properly explained, save for the effort to protect their jealously guarded secrets. In the words of Arinze (1970:72):

Women are entirely excluded from being Eze-alusi. They are not even allowed to enter the innermost parts of shrines and are forbidden to touch certain idols.

Nsukka Igbo especially Enugu-Ezike, appear to be an exception to the above stance. Here, there are priestesses whose reputation have soared to an extent that they can be initiated into the masquerade cult at any time without any consequences. They were and still are known as “OYIMA” (friends of the spirits). For example, lolo Celestina in Ugwu-achara Nsukka and lolo Ngozi Idoko in Ikpamaodo Enugu Ezike are good examples of such women who are reputed as Inyama priestess in the society (Celestina pers. Comm., 2015). They make intercession to the gods on the various needs of the people.

When people want to make offerings, supplicate to the ancestors or the divinities, they seek the services of the priestesses who are believed to have links with the spiritual beings. They receive offerings and make intercessions on behalf of the people. Thus, she is believed to be bequeathed with the power and ability to drive away malevolent spirits, change one’s misfortune and heal the afflicted. She intercedes on behalf of the entire

community in the event of any adversity or calamity that has a communal dimension. It is the function of the priestess, also known as *Ezenwanyi*, to offer sacrifice to God, divinities and ancestors so that they would be pacified and as such reverse the general adversity. According to Quarcoopome (1987:81): "In this capacity, [a priest or priestess] receives from the spiritual world and passes them on to the living members of the community".

The Inyama priestess is also seen as social figure. She is expected to conform to certain regulations governing their moral and spiritual status during and immediately after performing the priestly functions. As noted earlier, the priestess may be required to avoid eating certain foods, attending burial and other taboos that will be discussed later. They are women of respectable character, who are obedient and trusted and therefore, keep sacrosanct the traditions of their offices, the gods or the divinity they serve. In a nutshell, they were well-versed in religious knowledge, in matters of myths, beliefs, traditions, legends, proverbs and the general socio-religious practices of the community. The *Ezenwanyi* also functions as a diviner in the society. Diviners are known as *ndi dibia afa* (herbalists) in Igboland. They are primarily concerned with the art of divination (Onoyima 2011:53). There is a thin line between a diviner and an herbalist. They deal in drugs, most of which have more magical than pharmaceutical values. In whatever type of ailment, sickness or disease, the diviner does not only consider it as merely physical, but also diagnoses its spiritual underpinnings.

They also help to unveil the mysteries of general human life. The Igbo believe that every person has his or her *chi* (*personal gods*) and that the achievement of each person is limited to the destiny with which each person is tied to that *chi*. The *chi*, a personalized providence, comes from *Chukwu* and reverts to him at a man's death. Each man has his own *chi* who may be well or ill-disposed (Isichie 1976:25). The *chi* is a personal guardian spirit that determines the life graph of an individual. It is the diviner that usually unveils what one's *chi* (god) holds in store for him/her. This is done through palm reading (*akaraka*). Palm reading is a method of reading and interpreting the lines on one's palm to know and ascertain what the future holds. The diviner goes beyond the visible lines on the palm and digs deeper in order to confront the signs and bring out the unseen (Onoyima:25).

Socio-economic problems and illness are embedded in human experiences. The diviner in this regard plays a vital role by bringing together culturally symbolic, social and existential approaches to the handling of myriads of unfavorable cases that confront the society (Iroegbu 2006:3). Normally, the diviner states and indicates certain ritual or sacrifices that will be done in order to solve existing problems and to counter future ones. In checking crimes, diviners contribute in revealing crimes and the culprits

behind them. The best way of unveiling this criminal and dastardly act is through *Iga na inyo* (mirror diviner that reflects the scene of crime, such that the clients may see the act for themselves). In cases of death, the attacker would be shown and forced to explain the reasons for the attack. Stolen goods or abducted persons are seen in the mirror; whatever the situation, the consultant is made to see or sometimes hears all there is to envision. Thus, any criminal or evil man who causes his or her neighbour to suffer one form of harsh misfortune or another is revealed by Inyama diviner.

Furthermore, the diviners also assist the people in taking critical decisions. Apart from consulting the diviner to know the causes of deaths, the people also want to know if the deceased would be accorded full funeral rite. In this respect Opata (1988:180) noted:

In many traditional Igbo areas, there is the habit of clan and/or communal divination intended to find out whether a person ought to be accorded full burial and funeral rites. Indeed, the practice was very dominant in many Nsukka areas before the advent of Christianity and/or modernity.

The diviner will also be required to avert the impending calamity if such death is a bad death (suicide, certain illnesses like swollen stomach, vultures descending on the roof of a deceased signifying that the ancestors have rejected the person from returning home among others) or caused by some malevolent spirits. Their functions are indeed far reaching. Moreover, at the time of possession, the priestess loses temporarily the control of her personality and portrays the spirit of deity in her. She will be using such language as *Inyama Obida or Alumu nso* and all sorts of incantations that are mysterious to ordinary people. Such experience generates superhuman power which enables the possessed to do things which would have been difficult or even impossible under normal circumstances. Irrespective of the complicated nature of mediation, the Inyama probes into the spiritual world and pop out into human world without causing havoc, fear or disturbance among the people. They not only establish a bridge between those two worlds, they also enrich religious worldview and activities of our communities (Eze pers. Comm., 2015).

In the traditional Igbo communities, there are no prophets or prophetesses in the biblical or koranic sense. However, the Inyama who do not fit into the strict meaning of the term are occasionally described as prophetess because among their respective functions they may perform prophetic duties. Those priestesses that fall in this category are diviners, seers and fortune-tellers, although they have other socio-religious functions in the community as well. In fact, the Inyama priestess performs prophetic

roles to individual or communities especially when they are consulted for certain purposes. Albeit, that is not to say that they claim to be the prophetic mouthpiece of the Supreme Being, in the manner of prophets as found in the world's religious books. She only relates to the people on behalf of the divinities and the ancestors. In sum, the functions of Inyama priestess in the societies are indeed inexhaustible. It behooves on them to curb and purge witches for the benefit of the society.

Norms and Taboos

Like members of every Igbo traditional cult, an Inyama is expected to always wear *echi* on her ankle no matter where she is or what she is doing. The '*echi*' is an anklet made of either *Ashakpa* (cowries) or metal. It is a bangle that has spiritual connotation, which represents the acceptance of the call to serve the gods and symbolize the Inyama institution. All the sacred objects, namely the calabash (*Adema*), altar, and pots are handled with utmost care. Without this altar, one could not be fully regarded as Inyama (Eze pers. Comm., 2015). The Inyama shrine is usually detached from other buildings in a compound because it hosts the spirits, *Ulo mma* (spirit house). However, some Inyama make sacred grooves for their deities just like male *dibia* (priest) do.

Inyama priestesses wear red clothes or white head ties or cap in public gatherings so as to differentiate them. An Inyama usually wears or ties red or white clothes while entering her shrine for prayers and consultation, depending what the spirit stipulated for the occasion. She backs the shrine as she enters, for it is an abomination for an Inyama to enter the shrine facing it. An Inyama priestess must keep dreadlocks (*dada*) with cowries and perforated coins (especially old coins) attached to the hair. It is to be noted that not all Inyama maintain such a hair style; this depends on the requirements of the deity concerned. Those with natural dreadlocks cannot control them: once she cuts them, they will still grow again (Iyida pers. Comm., 2016).

Just as Inyama priestesses must observe certain rules, so also must they adhere to some taboos, but these are entirely dependent on individual deities. First, they do not attend funeral or burial ceremonies except those of their close relations after making inquiry in an Inyama deity. It is the general belief among the people that every death has spiritual connections and if the deceased has an Inyama spirit in her or him, then the living would be afflicted with strange sicknesses until she propitiates the gods. If the spirit consents, then the priestess can attend the burial or funeral ceremony without any repercussion. Most of the priestesses interviewed believed that most deaths are caused by an Inyama spirit who kills those that refused to

accept their calling (Ezema pers. Comm., 2016). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the priestesses to inquire as to which burial to attend or not. Again, an Inyama priestess is forbidden from eating any food, drinks or kola nut presented during funeral ceremonies, regardless of whether the attendance was sanctioned by the deity or not. If she tastes such items, she will fall sick and could even die unless some sacrifices or rituals are performed to appease the spirit. Sometimes she may be instructed not to allow any material from a burial place into her home, even something as small as a pin. However, this is not to affirm that her entire households are restricted from attending burial or funeral ceremonies. Her children and husband are free to attend and eat whatever they see in the burial place but should not bring anything home.

It is also a taboo to stumble on or throw a stone at an Inyama priestess as it attracts terrible punishment to the offender and to the Inyama. There is a general belief among the people that if one accidentally stumbles on the leg of a person possessed by an Inyama spirit, she will be very angry and a kind of fit or convulsion follows as she tries to fight with the source of the injury until the offender brings palm oil and a chick to appease the gods. She drinks the palm oil to calm her while the chick is used for rituals to appease her spirit (Apeh 2007:34. She can only regain herself after the rituals have been performed. Inyama is believed to possess such mystical power that distance is never a barrier in locating any culprit that refuses to assuage the gods with the desired rites. She will continue to hunt the culprit until such rituals are performed. The spirit, according to an informant, directs the Inyama to locate her offender (Iyida pers. Comm., 2016).

Moreover, some Inyama do not eat *Ede/Nkashi* (colocasia esculenta or coco yam). It is abominable for her to eat coco yam and in extreme cases she dares not enter into any cocoyam farm. There is a common belief among the Inyama in Enugu Ezike that the *Ede* (cocoyam) chases the spiritual beings away from the physical world, that is why the witches and wizards cannot bewitch the cocoyam farm in our land. *Nkashi n'aru ogwu*" (cocoyam destroys charms) is a common saying in the community. Even in Nsukka culture zone where the dominant delicacy is achicha (cocoyam), an Inyama does not violate this taboo. Also, three leaved yam (*Descorea dumentorum*) (ona) and oil bean (*Ukpaka*) (*pentaclethra macrophyla*) are foods that the Inyama avoid. They are believed to have similar implication as cocoyam. Again, the Inyama do not consume any food left overnight. Most of the Inyama do not eat food prepared a day earlier.

The Cult of Inyama in Contemporary Enugu-Ezike Community

Great changes have been taking place in the Inyama cult and other cultural values of the people following the advent of modern civilization. Thus, the patterns of behavior and people's way of life and consequently the Inyama cult have inevitably been altered by modernity. Such factors as Christianity, urbanization, and education have far-reaching and tremendous influence on the Enugu-Ezike people and their culture. The intrusion and imposition of Christianity and western culture on the cult, or rather on the Igbo traditional religion and culture is aptly captured in Chinua Achebe's popular fiction, *Things Fall Apart*, when Obierika soberly quipped that:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We are amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one, He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (Achebe 1958:24-25).

Things fell apart as Christianity started to dominate and win converts. Consequently, Christian agents and other forces began to destroy some shrines and sacred groves in Enugu-Ezike. They destroyed the beliefs in and fear of the wrath of the gods and ancestors. This is similar to the destruction of *ibinukpabi* during the Aro-expedition of 1901-1902. According to Ilogu (1985:70):

The most important of the oracles with its shrine in Aro-chukwu was the long juju popularly known as the ubiniukpabi of the Aros. In 1901/1902 the British carried out expedition in Aro-chukwu in pursuance of its opening up of the interior of the country but with the specific aim of destroying the shrine of the long juju.

In this way, and with the assistance of the colonial military, various shrines and gods were destroyed in order to enable the missionaries to apply more effectively their teachings that Christians should ignore social control, groves and shrines (Agbedo pers. Comm.,2016). In recent times, the massive and intolerant destruction of these sacred places portends a grave danger to the institution of Inyama by Christianity. The climax appears to be the current wave of destruction of deities and shrines in the land by the Christians. As Agbedo (2010:113) pointed out:

Deity worship in Eluwgu (Enugu) Ezike is declining fast given the corrosive effects of Christianity and western civilization on African religions and other cultural values. In fact, about some few years ago, the supreme deity, idenyi Umunaja (in Olido) came under

serious invasion by combined forces of charismatic and Pentecostal movement, during which the entire shrine, effigies, artifacts and other paraphernalia were burnt, while some precious cultural artifacts, were allegedly carted away by those shrewd business crusaders, who hid behind the born again posturing to actualize their mercantile motive.

The Idenyi shrine in question had about forty Inyama in her service and with the destruction of the deity by overzealous Christians, they became increasingly marginalized and a number of them were forcefully converted to Christianity. Similar event happened at Inyi community of the town where one Rev. Sister Martina Oforka along with members of her ministry, destroyed a great deity in the land called *Ngele* Inyi. This was another infringement on the cult of Inyama and their freedom of worship. Thus, as Agbedo pointed out above, precious artifacts that could be dated some millennia ago were all destroyed in the process and its economic potential as a tourist site lost forever. It is quite unfortunate that Igbo Christians are naively destroying their past in the name of community deliverance. This attitude is akin to that of the conceited British, who during the Benin expedition in the late 19th century, labeled everything African as heathen, but at the same time carted away precious Benin crafts to equip their museum for the mercantilist Britain to make more money from tourists. Today, African heritage is being destroyed with little or nothing left for the future generation as their cultural past.

Moreover, the number of Christian converts and churches are increasing every day. Almost in every nook and cranny, one can find one church with no fewer than hundred worshippers. The rate at which individual ministries grow in Enugu-Ezike poses a threat to the Inyama cult and they are winning many converts especially from adherents to traditional religion (Achunike 1995:65). The emphasis of the Christians is no longer laid out in their doctrine, which revolves around obeying God and living a righteous life, but on how to exterminate Inyama and other traditional cultures in Enugu-Ezike. On the side of traditional adherents, the zeal and passion for the vocation is declining especially among the youths who feel that it is no longer fashionable to maintain dreadlocks associated with the spirit in the public (Ogili pers. Comm.,2016). Invariably, not to lose out in the trend, many Inyama priestesses now practice their profession in a "Christian way;" seeing visions and combining the traditional and the Christian methods. In Nsukka today, the number of visioners appear higher in number than their clients. Most of them happen to be former traditional priests and priestesses who wish to flow with the tide. They subtly disguise themselves

as Christian prophets, practising their clairvoyance and proffering solutions to those who sought their help.

Furthermore, following the current social changes and economic trends many Inyama commit evil in their attempt to make money. Some break the laws, rules and regulations guiding the cult for just mere porridge. They now combine Inyama power with Christian teachings to form ministries and enrich themselves. As Achunike (1995: 71) fittingly put it:

...the avidity for money has engulfed the present-day men and women. Everybody seems to be in a hurry to make money and by all means. This get-rich-quick syndrome has indeed permeated the entire fabric of Igbo society. The onslaught of materialism, luxury and what-money-can buy is devastatingly unlimited. The people employ all sorts of unprintable means to make money.

Thus, Inyama priestesses now have insatiable avidity for money acquisition causing them to leave their main functions. Indeed, the beliefs and practices especially the place and roles of diviners, medicine men/women, mediums, priests and other traditional specialist in Enugu-Ezike have been challenged.

It must be noted that the viable approach adopted by the missionaries to establish their foothold in the society was the introduction of schools, which certainly radicalized the youth. Education is acclaimed as being responsible for the massive 'Conversion' to Christianity' in modern historiography (Achunike 1995:68). Today, the effect of this conversion has degenerated to the extent that some educated people in the society have forgotten their culture in preference to western culture. With this mentality, some westernized folks frown at most aspect of their culture; they see them as barbaric and devilish. They speak the western languages; they talk like the white man, dress, eat, walk, build houses and simply do everything imitating white men in the name of civilization. Furthermore, the educated elites began to interpret things scientifically thus, rendering the services of the Inyama and other traditional specialists irrelevant in the society. In cases of ill health, people prefer to consult orthodox doctors who will diagnose their ailment and prescribe appropriate drugs for them thereby making the services of specialist diviners ineffective.

Urbanization and the associated migration also posed its own challenge. In the urban areas, Enugu-Ezike people live among people of diverse cultures as against an ideal traditional Enugu-Ezike society. This resulted in cross-fertilization of beliefs and cultures which consequently propels the Enugu-Ezike to adopt a pattern of life that is not in tandem with

what is obtainable in their villages and communities. This is not to say that Christianity and urbanization are evil. However, they triggered the people to jettison everything that had made life meaningful and sustainable before colonial intrusion and the effects have been haunting the people and Africa economic development in general. The Asians, especially in Japan and China, are referred to as tigers today because they built on their natural endowments and supplemented them with a little of western ideas. Chinese local drugs and refined food now flood the market. Also, those who migrated to urban areas were tried to extricate themselves from the traditional religious practices, even though an Inyama spirit is claimed to have the capacity to force someone to come back home when it possesses the person. As Afigbo puts, having found themselves living their lives outside the immediate shadows of their gods and their priests, in time they started adopting... habits which appeared quite popular in the towns (Afigbo 1981:344).

The diverse contact and nature of urban life make the people develop another ideology that does not suit their traditional culture. This is in contradistinction with the high sense of social order that prevailed in Enugu-Ezike prior to westernization. The people are now 'civilized,' thinking in the scientific way, connecting natural events to scientific causes through scientific methods of diagnoses, observation, experimental analysis and interpretation of data among others (Agbedo pers. Comm.2016). Medical equipment that is produced in these industries is always available to help in diagnosing the cause of an ailment, unlike the traditional method which places premium on spiritual forces and the machinations of evil forces. This has weakened the belief in and the fear of evil forces as the cause(s) of sicknesses. Consequently, westernization has severely disrupted the works of the priestesses in Enugu Ezike.

Howbeit, Inyama institution and worldview have developed an adaptive mechanism with which to respond to the impulses of change and yet hold their own. This explains why Kalu (2002: 365) still opined thus; ...it is wrong to conclude that the radical change has meant the total demise of the traditional religion and culture. There is still in the society a good number of adherents of the religion.

Apart from the youth and other persons that migrated to towns and cities, Inyama and other traditional religious practitioners are also now moving into cities as ministers of God, herbal medicine dealers, prophets and prophetesses and many others. Medicine women and diviners are reported to be doing prosperous businesses in town. A number of them, even though chosen by gods and spirits to serve them, have turned them into Christian

ministries and herbal centres; they claim competence in curing so many diseases.

By and large, Inyama appears indispensable since people still believe in witchcraft and sorcery and when they are not satisfied by the church, they tend to seek traditional means of protection at least to supplement what the church offers. In other words, Inyama and other traditional practitioners now provide supplementary services for some Christians. Many women that are possessed by the Inyama spirit now claim to have been converted to Christianity just to disguise themselves as Christians, when in the true sense they are not. Achunike (1995: 61) commented on such people in Igbo land when he stated;

The second group of Christians is those who are practicing but who are uncertain about that doctrine of their church. They are more comfortable with their traditional religion and would want it mixed up with Christianity. They are often not taught-minded enough to have a firm belief of what lessons Christianity teaches.

The above shows that although Christianity has made an amazing inroad into Enugu-Ezike and Igbo land in general, conversion and reconversion continues to take place. Those who withdrew from church after testing the two worlds, and who claim that the Inyama spirit kept on disturbing them, testify to the fact that they have found neither a meaningful identity nor sufficient security in Christianity. They therefore returned to the ways of their fathers and forefathers. This is what Mbiti (1969:39) called *religious concubinage*. Also, in the contemporary time, most often urbandwellers resort to traditional means while solving some problems and in responding to moments of crisis, theft, and other crimes by inviting the diviners or seers (Ezenwanyi) to ascertain the perpetrators or culprits. The urban dwellers often move down to the villages to consult the Inyama (Abah pers. Comm. 2016).

It must be stressed that despite the fact that the adherents to alien religions outnumber those of the Inyama cult and traditional worshippers in Enugu-Ezike, most of the traditional and cultural norms are still binding on them. The Inyama cult still wields influence in the lives of the people. However, a closer scrutiny reveals that the typical Inyama priestess has adopted western lifestyle. She sends her children to school and even baptizes them in the church, yet she adheres to the ways of the spirits (Ogili pers. Comm. 2016). Certainly, some aspects of the Inyama cult died out and more will follow suit, giving the increasing demand for modern education and people's movement to the cities and the consequent rejection of the vocation

and/or turning it into worshipping ministries. We must remember that some aspects of the cult can still meet the needs of the changing society (Achunike: 61). It is arguable that as long as African rural life continues we can expect Inyama to continue surviving there. Their proximity to the land of their ancestors and spirits makes it difficult for these women to detach themselves from the traditional practices and culture (Achunike: 67).

Conclusion

The Supreme Being, the minor deities, the ancestors and the unseen realities influence man and receive attention from man through their agents called Inyama in Enugu-Ezike. They serve as a link between man and the spiritual world. They are friends of the society who attempt to gain appropriate insight and provide ritualistic remedies to the various problems of man. They offer advice and solutions to a myriad of problems. They contributed in no small measure to the development of the pre-colonial Enugu-Ezike society. However, the influence of Christianity, urbanization, industrialization and modern medicine, among others, has adversely affected the roles and functions of this institution. Their adherents and clients are therefore vastly decreasing as the sentiments attached to it wane. The economic and health benefits accruing from this practice are being lost over the years because of overzealousness on the part of the people who were quick to accept anything foreign.

However, given the people's continued belief that ill health and misfortune can be caused by both physical and spiritual forces and the fact that there still exist mysterious happenings in the life of man, the people of Enugu-Ezike persistently seek the assistance of the priestesses. Hence, sicknesses that are beyond the comprehension and care of orthodox medicine are generally attributed to metaphysical forces and therefore brought to the Inyama priestesses to handle. Some overzealous Christians are advised to find the more fashionable Christian praying ministers to do the same job that the priestesses have always done. It is therefore pertinent that effort be made to harness the groves, shrines and temples preserved by this retreating cultural value for tourism by Enugu State government. Furthermore, and borrowing a leaf from the Chinese, there is need to study the efficacy and potency of their health remedies so as to integrate them into orthodox medicine and finally develop our own unique medicine. Nevertheless, the priestesses that engage in unethical practices should be identified and punished.

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