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CULTURE: OUR HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

Exploring the Rich Values in Some African Practices



**EDITED BY
DR. ANTHONY EMEKA OKONKWO S.D.B**

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**EXPLORING THE RICH VALUES IN SOME
AFRICAN PRACTICES**

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A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON AFIA OLU FESTIVAL: HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE IN AWKA-ETITI OF ANAMBRA STATE

John Owen ADIMIKE

ABSTRACT

The interest of this submission is to decipher philosophical meaning from the cultural practice of Afia Olu of the Awka-Etiti people. This interrogation which extracts philosophical significance is principally geared towards apprehending why such a practice still maintains in the tradition of the Awka-Etiti as well as what residue philosophy can consult in respect to current thinking. The insights of reflection revolve around the factual significance maintained in relation to the Awka-Etiti people. Hence, this submission attempts to make out philosophical meaning embedded in the practice of Afia Olu.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy, Reflection, Afia Olu, Awka-Etiti, Culture, History, Tradition.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to portray and retell a dimension of the cultural heritage of the people of Awka-Etiti in Anambra State of Nigeria. This people shall be our frame of reference in reviewing the implications of certain aspects of lifestyle common to such a geographical inscription. Acknowledging the expanse of the range of culture, the paper takes into account those as only which revolve about depicting communal threshold and symbolisms of shared, collective and mutual *raison d'être*. In effect, the paper shall present to a considerable length, only one of such collective strong concrescences; specifically, the Afia Olu Festival. This festival shall be treated in a manner such that its partitions as presented herein follow in immediate succession to one another as a bid towards understanding the social dimension that it presents the life of the people of Awka-Etiti in Anambra State. Afia Olu speaks of the need to

be generous and to acknowledge the work of those who surround an individual and importantly, those who are the beneficiaries of one's employment; it requires that one understand the spiritual advantage of workers in any enterprise and calls upon the workers to a fidelity of character. This practice is a tradition that affirms the African identity of Awka-Etiti. The paper is titled *A Philosophical Reflection on Afia Olu Festival: History and Significance in Awka-Etiti*; to adequately portray this; the first section shall be devoted to fully providing some notable details of Awka-Etiti history as accounts and documentations permit; the history that is provided herein presents results from general correspondence as well. The second section will receive the baton and tow the course from the exposition of the festivity spoken of above. Following the insight to the course of celebration of the festivity, a little bit of reflection on the factual significance maintained in relation to the Awka-Etiti people is proffered. Thus, shall the paper proceed.

AWKA-ETITI AT A GLANCE

This section presents a brief overview of the history of Awka-Etiti. The emphasis of this section is on the incipience of Awka-Etiti; that is to say, we look at how Awka-Etiti as we have it today came to be. There are two kinds of sources that are employed in this section; the first source is the commonly consulted documented reference and the second, inherited folk oral history. This is to show the vastness of history and not dissonance—what is captured by one is complemented by what is reported by the other.

AWKA-ETITI HISTORY

From general correspondence, there is no explicitly succinct account of the histories of Awka-Etiti. Notwithstanding, what is presented herein reflects the widely accepted elements of Awka-Etiti descent. Awka-Etiti as a geographical location is to be found about twenty-four

kilometers from the River Niger, at the north-east of Onitsha¹ and is about sixteen kilometers from Nri and some two kilometers from Igbo-Ukwu. The town of Awka-Etiti is landlocked by the towns of Ichida, Azigbo, Nnokwa, Nnewi, Nnobi and Amichi; the town speaks the Idemili variant of the Igbo language.² A census of 2005 puts Awka-Etiti population at approximately 35, 000 inhabitants, with a large community in the diasporas.³ As early as the twelfth century before the Common/Christian Era, like archaeological studies have proven to us, there had been commercial and socio-cultural contact between the town of Awka-Etiti and Ancient Egypt.⁴ This is evident as Awka-Etiti had a good rapport with Igbo-Ukwu and thus, together with the latter's immediate neighbourhood, engaged in commercial dealings with Ancient Egypt. As regards the history and provenance of Awka-Etiti, there are various accounts owing to the little or no furniture of written records of genealogy. Just as is common in some other African cultures, most available accounts are derived from oral heritage. As earlier mentioned, there will be notably two sources for the historical account of Awka-Etiti: one shall present the versional adaptation proffered by a well-informed correspondence (i.e., oral tradition); the second is a thread of narrations that concur—albeit with dissensions occurring sparingly. This is a documented reference.

The oral traditions acknowledge a certain Diedo (interchangeable with Awka-Etiti) as the founding father of what is known as Awka-Etiti⁵ and he is said to be the son of a certain Ezenne. Diedo and Okwuike (the father of the land called Nnobi) were at one point in history, brothers; however, certain variants of oral tradition believe

¹ E. R. Dallah and E. C. Nzewi, *Brief History of Iruowelle Village Community* (Enugu, Optimal Books, 1996) 2.

² Dallah and Nzewi, 2.

³ G. O. Akajiobi, *Awka Etiti Chieftaincy Dispute and Related Crisis: 1957-1999* (Onitsha: Africa-Link Books, 2005), xxii.

⁴ J. E. G. Sutton, "Igbo-Ukwu and the Nile", in *African Archaeological Review*, 18, no. 1, (2005): 51.

⁵ Afoma A. Okpala, in discussion with the author, July 2018

that Awka-Etiti (i.e., Diedo) was the brother of Ebenesi, a settlement in current day Nnobi.⁶ Irrespective, Diedo and Nnobi were related. A feud caused by the distribution of their father's estate led to Diedo's absconding home and eventual emigration to the present Awka-Etiti territory, "for reasons of oppression and suppression"⁷ in search of freedom and unthreatened autonomy/independence. As time progressed, Awka-Etiti (that is, Diedo) decided it was about time to settle down to conjugal bliss, getting for himself two wives. The first wife, Nneoka—who traditionally is the 'senior wife'—bore four sons to her husband: Nkolofia, Ejighinandu, Iruowelle and Ogunzele. The second wife—Ebenato, traditionally the younger/youngest wife ('junior wife'), bore her husband: Ocha, Dunu and Nnaba. Ocha's progeny later settled in their ancestor's patrimony and were called *Umunocha*⁸ while Dunu's descendants were called *Umudunu*⁹. These are thus, the seven surviving sons of Awka-Etiti and they are the current seven villages of Awka-Etiti.¹⁰ In order of birth, these villages are: Nkolofia, Umunocha, Ejighinandu, Iruowelle, Umudunu, Nnaba and Ogunzele. However, Diedo had nine sons originally. Of these, two of them: Umoh and Ezioka, were engaged in a ghastly fratricide with the aid of mercenary hunters from Ohafia and Abam; the result of this war led to the near extinction of both villages. The survivors of Ezioka were integrated into Nkolofia village while Umoh's remnant was absorbed by Ejighinandu, thus making Awka-Etiti seven villages.¹¹ Awka-Etiti was once previously known as 'Awka-Nnobi'¹² because of his germination from Nnobi. This was not the only name they received; they were also given other names for various reasons. "In the nineteenth century, they [Awka-Etiti] fought a war with neighbouring Nnewi—a very fierce war. Because of the bravery of

⁶. Callistus Adimike, in discussion with the author, June 26, 2021.

⁷. Mr Adimike.

⁸. This name traditionally means "children of Ocha".

⁹. This name in the Igbo language means "children of Dunu".

¹⁰. Mr Adimike, discussion.

¹¹. Dallah and Nzewi, *Brief History of Iruowelle Village Community*, 3-4.

¹². Mr Adimike, discussion.

Awka-Etiti people, Nnewi nicknamed Awka-Etiti, Awka-Nkakwu".¹³ The *Nkakwu* is a very smelly rodent. Awka-Etiti received this moniker because of their expressed bravery at the battle. This can be understood in that the *nkakwu* (skunk) is also known to be fierce and inflicts sharp bites on its predator or perceived foe. It was only about the dusk of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth century did the inhabitants of Awka-Etiti confer the name of 'Awka-Etiti' upon the town.¹⁴ It was called 'Awka-Etiti' because already, there exists a town/city called Awka—which is the capital of the Anambra State. In order to differentiate their 'Awka' from the capital 'Awka', the indigenes introduced the suffix of '-Etiti' so that the meaning of the name of their town now meant "the 'Awka' that is within the central axis, bordered by so many towns; 'Awka' that is in the centre".¹⁵ Awka-Etiti is from the Igbo coinage: *ọka* + *etiti*. As pointed out that accounts of the history of Awka-Etiti vary, the account provided by Chuka O.G. Obah and Omemma Nnobi present another dimension. They believe that Diedo was as well called *Ọka* and that his father, Obi was the chief priest of the goddess, *Idemili*.¹⁶ Over time, the name *Ọka*, became anglicized to make way for what is now known as 'Awka'. Hence, Awka-Etiti.¹⁷

SOCIETAL HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE

Awka-Etiti '*kemgbe*' [as of old], had no traditional ruler. This, as expected, is in accord with the expression, [*Ndi*] *Igbo enweghi eze*: the Igbos have no king.¹⁸ Awka-Etiti had no traditional institution as is witnessed today; they functioned with an introduced system of what

¹³. Mr Adimike.

¹⁴. Mr Adimike.

¹⁵. Mr Adimike.

¹⁶. Chuka O.G. Obah and Omemma Nnobi, "The Origin of Nnobi from a Mythical View Point", accessed October, 6 2021, <https://nnobiuna.org/nnobi-origin/>.

¹⁷. Mrs Afoma Okpala, discussion.

¹⁸. Mrs Afoma Okpala.

is termed 'warrant chieftaincy'.¹⁹ This period set in with the era of colonialism. "During the colonial era... about three warrant chiefs were in the town of Awka-Etiti, of one which hailed from Ejighinandu village—a descendant of the *Oyi* family".²⁰ When there was a need for the Eastern House of Assembly to have a council of traditional rulers, Awka-Etiti was forced to elect her own traditional ruler; this was around the year 1957. Thus, the first traditional ruler of Awka-Etiti, Chief Silas Ezenwa was elected in 1957 under the accolade heading, '*Obi* of Awka-Etiti'.²¹ This event was an omen marking the beginning of traditional regency in Awka-Etiti. The regency of Awka-Etiti as well includes the '*Obi-in-Council*', which according to our chief correspondent, Mr Callistus Adimike, is synonymous with a royal cabinet, made up of men awarded the accolade of '*ichie*'—so to speak, the cabinet is thusly comprised of *ndi ichie*.²² The title *Obi-in-council*, is often times interchanged with the label, *Igwe-in-Council*. Each village of the town has a number of *ndiichie* to bring forward to join the cabinet. The *Obi* himself has a power to appoint about five members and his *Onowu* (Prime Minister). It is this total number that makes for the *Obi-in-Council*.²³ Apart from the *Obi* and the *Obi-in-Council*, there is an institution of traditional heritage called '*nze-na-ozo*' or commonly spelt, *nze-n'ozo*. The *nze-n'ozo* is a celebration of strong social and religious connotation. It is a festival that enjoys the intertwine of sociality and religiosity.²⁴ From general correspondence, we are made to understand that:

Nze-n'ozo is a kind of fraternal group for male children who have come of age. Anyone who wants to take the *ozo* title has to pay a certain amount of money which is called '*i bu ego ozo*': when the person pays the fixed amount that is meant for the conferral of the '*ozo*', the person will be required to fix

¹⁹. Mr Callistus Adimike, discussion.

²⁰. Mr Adimike.

²¹. Mr Adimike.

²². Mr Adimike.

²³. Mr Adimike.

²⁴. Mrs Okpala, discussion.

a date within a time frame where/when he is required to celebrate the conferral—a social celebration otherwise called in Igbo, 'itu ugo'. It is on that selected day that the traditional dance called *ushie* will be played for the man to dance. Also, the red cap will be placed on his head with an eagle's feather; so, it will then be said of such a man, 'o turu go ugo' for this ritual process makes him an 'nze'—a full-fledged ozo-titled man is called [an] nze. This is a strongly visible and cherished part of the traditional institutions in Awka-Etiti.²⁵

At about 2014, the first *Obi* (or *Igwe*) of Awka-Etiti, Chief Silas Ezenwa, died and a second *Obi* was elected: Chief J. O. Ojukwu. It was unfortunate that within a year of his election, he died, leaving the throne vacant.²⁶ The third *Obi* of Awka-Etiti who is currently the incumbent *Obi* (or *Igwe*) on throne, Chief Engr Michael [Mike] Ezeudenna was elected. Thus, in the historical records of Awka-Etiti, the town has registered three *Obis*—with the inclusion of the incumbent.

EDUCATION AND RELIGION

Awka-Etiti is home to several primary and secondary schools both publicly and privately administered. Awka-Etiti also has a special science school and a minor seminary which belongs to the Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha.²⁷ Before the advent of the British into the land of Awka-Etiti and the yonder hinterlands of the Igbo contours, Awka-Etiti (or Awka-Diedo) was a very resistant force to British advance to the extending vicinities; it was only in 1904 that Awka-Etiti welcomed the first white man on her soil.²⁸ After the British had finally conquered the land of Awka-Etiti with some obviously dubious intervention of neighbours,²⁹ Christianity and other British influences advanced in the land. However, the people upheld their cultural pride for in 1944, it was formed the Awka-Etiti Improvement Union (AIU). It was this

²⁵. Mr Callistus Adimike, discussion; Mrs Afoma Okpala, discussion.

²⁶. Mr Adimike, discussion.

²⁷. Mikhail Joseph Adimike, in interview with the author, June 29, 2021.

²⁸. Dallah and Nzewi, *Brief History of Iruowelle Village Community*, 10.

²⁹. Dallah and Nzewi, 7-10.

body that eventually changed the name of the town in 1946 from Awka-Diedo to Awka-Etiti.³⁰ “Awka-Etiti was of old, esteemed for its professional and vocational administration of business and its related hyperacuity. They were extremely adroit in the art of making money and the techniques of selling—and the mechanisms regarding the barter of goods and services”.³¹ Through the recession of the previous century and into this century, Awka-Etiti has with the same vigour it channeled into business, explored the terrains of education. As it stands, Awka-Etiti can boast of a striking number of professors who are purely indigenous. Within and without the country, the town boasts of intellectuals who offer their deposits of sapience in respectable tertiary institutes of learning. Awka-Etiti is thus a force to reckon with in the spheres of theoretical articulation and practical operations. On the religious plane, it is now over a hundred years since Christianity took root in Awka-Etiti, precisely 117 years. Roman Catholicism was introduced to the indigenes by the European missionaries in 1913; this marked the massive largescale ‘conversion’ to Christianity. Soon after, the Anglican Church came into the land, followed by the Salvation Army and the Cherubim and Seraphim and the host of Pentecostal communions/denominations found in Awka-Etiti land. The Catholic Church in Awka-Etiti has three parishes: the mother parish being St Joseph’s Catholic Church; St Anne’s Catholic Church (Umudunu) and Holy Family Catholic Church (Umunocha).³²

SOCIAL GROUPS

The town Awka-Etiti has varied social groups. One can cite a few: Awka-Etiti Youth League; Awka-Etiti Youth Vanguard; Awka-Etiti Action League and the mother group which is the oldest of the lot for it was existent even before the independence of Nigeria; the Awka-Etiti Improvement Union. The Union is responsible for the construction of the town’s ‘Eke’ market and continually ensures that

³⁰. Mr Adimike, discussion.

³¹. Mr Adimike.

³². Mr Adimike.

the town is a principal force in the vicinity and an especial principal rank in the sale of beef and cows.³³

MILESTONES

"Awka-Etiti townfolk are progressives; they love themselves so much: one is bound to discover, on close observation, the degree of close cooperation within the common-folk of the town. They love to assist one another. These are some features that characterize the Awka-Etiti folk and I should add with a modest sense of hubris, that I am proud to be an Awka-Etiti indigene".³⁴ Awka-Etiti is a peace-loving town: one that loves peace and pursues development; it is "a town small in size yet huge in heart, in achievement, huge in stature";³⁵ for this, most neighbours respect Awka-Etiti for its great and living spirit. The 'Awka-Etiti' spirit is a gingering, prompting and uniting one—it moves one to achieve almost anything.³⁶ In this spirit of impossibility and a volition of dominant thrust, Awka-Etiti as a town has recorded her own milestones. She as well boasts of those her children who are ample representatives of her spirit in the larger sphere of life. First, we may trace the thread of tertiary education as recorded in the history of the town. The first university graduates of Awka-Etiti were Mr E. R. Dallah in 1955; Dr A. A. Okoye in 1956 and Chief O. F. Obi in 1957. The first medical doctors from Awka-Etiti graduated around 1965 and they are: Chief Dr Francis E. Ezissi (whose ozo title is *Ife Awka-Etiti*), a surgeon trained in Germany; Dr Samuel Ezenwa, who was trained in the United States of America as a surgeon; and Dr George Udenkwo, an Irish trained gynaecologist.³⁷ Economically, the town has also distinguished herself observably and characteristically. In the days after the disastrous Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), indigenes of Awka-Etiti engaged in entrepreneurial projects. Some of

³³. Mr Adimike.

³⁴. Mr Adimike.

³⁵. Mr Adimike.

³⁶. Mrs Okpala, discussion.

³⁷. F. Chidozie Ogbalu, *Animo: A Directory of Anambra and Imo States* (Onitsha: University Pub Co., 1982), 86.

these enterprises include the G.M.O. Group of Companies, the Roadmaster Industries Ltd., Angela Plastics and JKN Foods.³⁸ We find other Awka-Etiti indigenes of business acumen in various commercial centres within and without the country. Some notable figures from Awka-Etiti include Ambassador Sam Okechukwu (a fourth republic Nigerian ambassador to Ghana), Late John-Kay Onyekwelu Okpala, and the Adimike family members such as: Rev. Fr George Adimike PhD, Chief Godwin Lucky Adimike, Callistus Adimike, Gerald Adimike, Ekene Martin Adimike, and Charles Adimike.

SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMON FESTIVITIES IN AWKA-ETITI

This section focuses on the selected festivity of mutual celebration in the town of Awka-Etiti: *Afia Olu*. The aim is to depict clearly and distinctively, the philosophical underpinnings of such a celebration. Shortly after describing the *modus operandi* of the celebration, what will follow is a philosophical approach at extracting those principles of fundamental humanity at the core of the celebration.

AFIA OLU FESTIVAL

Awka-Etiti town is distinctly and unmistakably replete with traditional events (*omenala*), some of which have been discarded owing to a popular conviction of their depraving idolatry whilst the surviving have been christened into a subtle allusion of Christianity or have had their contents essentially altered to match the new predominant Christian *weltanschauung*.³⁹ Of these festivities which have barely managed to survive (though mortally battered on the aspect of participant population), their celebrations are markedly widespread observances. One of such is the *Afia Olu* festival. The festival would normally hold annually towards the end of October and span for about four days from around the 28th through the 31st. The '*Afia Olu*' shows the culmination of the farming season; it is a portent of fruitfulness for the

³⁸ Mr Callistus Adimike, discussion.

³⁹ Mr Adimike.

just-concluded farming season. One striking thing about this celebration in Awka-Etiti is its communitarian dimension.

It is a time when people who offered helping hands in terms of tilling, cultivation and the whole process of farming—to their relatives or other folks who are fewer in terms of household size or who have a lesser number of farmhands—are rewarded by an invitation to pomp, merriment and feasting comprising of choice delicacies and exotic drinks. In fact, one could say that it is a time to say 'a job well done' and a hearty 'thank you' to them (i.e., those who have rendered assistance in the course of the farming season), consolidated with well-deserved gaiety.⁴⁰

Another remarkable pomp of the celebration (*Afia Olu*) is the display and outing of a special kind of masquerades called the '*Opiaka Mkpala*'.⁴¹ These masquerades called *Opiaka Mkpala* differ significantly from normal masquerades in that they are not diabolic; i.e., they do not employ charms, amulets or *ogwu* (potions) from native doctors/medicine men (*ndi dibia*); rather, "flogging spells their type".⁴² They entertain people by flogging themselves on their legs to know who will outdo the others in the flogging binge. They as well engage in pursuits of the onlookers, scaring them with their canes grafted from stalks.⁴³ On the days mapped out for the celebration of the *Afia Olu* festival, it is a common thing to find the youth and children troop in their numbers to the '*Eke*' market square and along the major promenades, to have glimpses of the masquerades and their flogging escapades. The festival of *Afia Olu* is among the few cultural practices to have escaped the Western-induced 'mass extinction' of cultural practices.⁴⁴

⁴⁰. Mr Adimike.

⁴¹. Mr Adimike.

⁴². Mr Adimike; Mrs Okpala, discussions.

⁴³. Mrs Okpala, discussion.

⁴⁴. Mr Adimike, discussion.

SIGNIFICANCE OF AFIA OLU

“A cultural relevance of this festival is that it helps to foster and promote closer cordial and fraternal relationship(s), simultaneously spicing up existent peace and harmony within the community that celebrates it”,⁴⁵ in this case, Awka-Etiti. The words of our correspondent, Mr Adimike, elucidate this relevance of *Afia Olu* to the people of Awka-Etiti. First, is that it recognizes a status of ‘fraternity’ in the community. When we mention ‘fraternity’, we make recourse to the Latin origin, *frater* which means ‘brother’. This brother here, is to be understood in the Greek variation of *phratōr*, which means a sort of relationship among kinsmen and clansmen. Thus, the celebration emphasizes that the people of Awka-Etiti are one; not just one, but that they are bound by a thick cord of consanguinity. Hence, this relationship demands that no member of the clan is to be abandoned for any reason. The fraternity of Awka-Etiti is a living and animating spirit;⁴⁶ this spirit moves the one Awka-Etiti person to look at the other and confidently say, ‘*frater meus es tu*’.⁴⁷ The Awka-Etiti people then employ the festival of *Afia Olu* as a medium to express their bonds of fraternity.

Another striking point about the *Afia Olu* festival is its duration and period of observation. The festivity lasts for four days which is a subtle allusion to the four market days used by the people—in Awka-Etiti and Igboland generally. The four market days signify the completion of the gifts of the great God, *Chi Ukwu*, contrasted as *Chukwu*, to the people through four messengers: *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor* and *Nkwo*.⁴⁸ Dunu Okigbo explains that these four wisemen, *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor* and *Nkwo*,

⁴⁵. Mr Adimike.

⁴⁶. Mr Adimike.

⁴⁷. Anthony Emeka Okonkwo (Director of Studies, Don Bosco Institute of Philosophy; Founder and CEO, *Mmadubuike Philosophy*), in discussion with the author, October 9, 2021.

⁴⁸. Dunu Okigbo, “Origin of the Four Market Days in Igboland”, *Society of Igbo Professionals*, published January 6, 2020, <https://societyofigboprofessionals.org/origin-of-market-days-in-igbo/>.

were sent to a one time regnant ruler of Nri (which is considered to be the hub of Igboland in the same fashion as Ile-Ife is for the Yorubas), Eze Nriji for I (1300-1390AD) who was able to decipher their names. With this feat, the wisemen handed to Nriji for I, four baskets and instructed that the market days of the people be four: one day for each of the wisemen (who were actually deputies of *Chukwu*).⁴⁹ Thus, *Afia Olu* represents the fullness of the gifts that *Chukwu* provides for his people. It is a clear depiction of that in that *Chukwu*, through the intervention of his deputies, provided for the people of Awka-Etiti. The celebration therefore, is one that thanks *Chukwu* for his gifts; and there is no better way to do that if not to recapitulate his donation of sacredness through the instance of the four baskets—thus, a celebration of four days. Following from the aforesaid idea, the period of the celebration of this festival of *Afia Olu* is remarkable. The Igbo people have a unique way of calendaring. This system is one of an annual cycle comprised of thirteen months, as against the Gregorian 12-month system. This Igbo calendar system, *Ògúàfò̀ Igbò*, is a product of mythology and commerce.⁵⁰ Besides this, the Igbo calendar reflects some functions of those sub-powers of divinity under the command of *Chukwu*. This makes the period under which the festival of *Afia Olu* falls, interestingly especial. M. A. Onwuejeogwu shows the titles and underpinnings of the months (*onwa*) in Igbo custom; these months are: *Onwa Mbu*, *Onwa Abuo*, *Onwa Ife Eke*, *Onwa Ano*, *Onwa Agwu*, *Onwa Ifejioku*, *Onwa Alom Chi*, *Onwa Ilo Mmuo*, *Onwa Ana*, *Onwa Okike*, *Onwa Ajana*, *Onwa Ede Ajana* and *Onwa Uzo Alusi*.⁵¹ The Gregorian calendar month of October coincides with the Igbo *onwa* (month), *Onwa Ana*. There is thus, some symbolism here. *Ana* (or *Ani* and *Ala*), is the goddess of the earth and is one of the foremost deities of Igbo culture.⁵² *Ana* oversees the events that occur in the realm called *Uwa*

⁴⁹. Okigbo.

⁵⁰. Jón Ófóegbu Ukaegbu, *Igbo Identity and Personality Vis-à-vis Igbo Cultural Symbols* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1991), 42.

⁵¹. M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom and Hegemony* (London: Ethiope Publishing Corporation), chs. 3-6.

⁵². Mrs Madonna Adimike, in interview with the author, August 29, 2021.

mmadu which is the realm of all corporeal things: animate and inanimate.⁵³ Therefore, whatever is sown is engaged directly with the earth goddess (*Ana*) who is a deputy of the supreme deity, *Chukwu*. Thus, understanding the cosmology of the Igbo people⁵⁴ and that *Chukwu* is not perceived in the sense of Christianity but in a deistic fashion, Awka-Etiti people are indirectly rendering their gratitude to *Chukwu* through the mediation of the goddess, *Ana*. These thanks are rendered just before the new month begins, the month of creation—*Onwa Okike*. Thus, celebrating *Afia Olu* in this manner is the surrender of colossal acknowledgment and praise to *Chukwu* for his providence through the intervention of one of his foremost deputies, *Ana*.

There is reason to remark that the celebration of the farmhands is overly symbolic. The author thinks that these farmhands are deputies of *Ana*; deputies in the sense that they have a sort of mystical experience with *Ana* which cannot be possessed by *mmadu ozo* (another person) for virtue of the farmhands' intimate communion with the Mother Earth. The other indigenes of the Awka-Etiti community realize that these farmhands have a spiritual reality of experience with *Ana* that is neither ordinarily apparent to sensual observation in the fashion of mundane occurrence nor is the quality of the experience immediately obvious to the intellect. The experience of the farmhands involves the nature of the gift/destiny of the farmhands and the inherent spiritual *Shakra* embedded in the nature of their 'powers' as well as their individual direct (besides conscious) and subjective communion with the reality of *Ana*. Thus, one can infer that the farming power is a gift bestowed on the farmhands, to which the author may add that it can be inherited as a form of genealogical election by *Ana*. Thus, the celebration of *Afia Olu* is in addition to being one of *Ana* and the providence of *Chukwu*, a celebration of the gift and spiritual energy (*Shakra*) of the farmhands. The nature of the farmhands' experience and potency means that

⁵³. Mrs Adimike.

⁵⁴. Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization*, 18-23.

favour with them secures a bounty of favour from *Ana* and a spite or disregard/maltreatment of them attracts an equal measure of ill-luck and unproductivity from *Ana*. Hence, to complete the cycle, the Awka-Etiti people pay deference to *Ana* by acknowledging and celebrating her 'ministers', so to speak. A final significance to reflect upon—which the author deemed obvious enough not to skip—is the duration between the celebration of *Afia Olu* in the ninth month of Igbo calendaring and the next month in consecutive succession. The tenth month is the month of creation, *Okike*.⁵⁵ The inquiry that is natural at this point is trifold: who creates? What is created? Why is it created? A learned thinker of Metaphysics, Anthropology and African Philosophy, Dr Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, SDB would reply that although the question of 'why' demonstrates difficulty to riposte to, it is most fundamental of all questions which must be tackled especially as it regards the concept of creation; hence, we resort to replacing the question with 'how'.⁵⁶ Thus, our inquiry is: who creates what and how? Igbo ontology believes that *Chukwu* is the all-potent supreme deity who creates at his discretion. What then does *Chukwu* create? Okonkwo answers this splendidly when he ripostes "existence";⁵⁷ this implies both actual and potential; mental and extramental.⁵⁸ How does *Chukwu* create? Igbo philosophy of religion acknowledges that as part of the supremacy of *Chukwu*, is the power of creation. Miracle Chinonso says that "everything in the universe was created by his hands and given life by his divine authority"⁵⁹; he as well argues further that while *Chukwu* is vague to perception and is an incomprehensible mystery, we can conceive of *Chukwu* under the philosophies of Absolute Divinity and that of Creation.⁶⁰ Chinonso argues that the

⁵⁵. Onwuejeogwu, ch. 4.

⁵⁶. Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, discussion.

⁵⁷. Okonkwo.

⁵⁸. Mr Adimike, discussion.

⁵⁹. Miracle Chinonso, "Igbo Philosophy: The Concept of Chukwu (God), Our Igbos' Blog, published on Thursday June 29, 2017, <http://ourigbosblog.blogspot.com/2017/06/igbo-philosophy-concept-of-chukwu-god.html?m=1>

⁶⁰. Chinonso.

philosophy of Creation implies that existence—i.e., living and non-living beings, acts and potencies, mental and extramental entities—is owed to the divine power of *Chukwu*; this is why *Chukwu* is called *Chi-na-eke* (Deity that creates). Chinonso states that how *Chukwu* creates is that he “forge[s] new forms of creation and put[s] life into them”.⁶¹ A budding thinker, Christopher Okafor [SDB] argues that while *Chukwu* possesses the ultimate power of creation, he delegates the custody of the continuity of those powers to certain creatures of his; i.e., his deputies. He argues that: “*Chukwukere wee mezie ka Ana solu n’i miputa oluoma ya. O ihe kpata na Ana na miputa, anyi bu ndi mmadu na riputa*”⁶² [*Chukwu* created and granted *Ana* the favour to collaborate by bringing forth those works of his splendour. This is why *Ana* brings forth and men reap what is brought forth].

Following immediately from this idea, it can be readily deduced that *Ana* brings forth fruits as granted by *Chukwu*. *Afia Olu* then celebrates the work of *Ana* as a culmination of the gifts of *Chukwu*. It becomes symbolic to celebrate it during the last four days as *Afia Olu* portends that after the culmination of one gift, the process/cycle of creation, i.e., *okike* begins all over again. It is very logical to accept the truth of this proposition. Culmination already implies a climax; in this case, in the month of *Ana*, the last four days (which is the period of *Afia Olu*) is the peak of the epiphany of the intervention of *Ana* in *uwa mmadu* (the realm of corporeal entities). After this, *Chukwu* begins to replenish *Ana* through a process of *okike*. This is symbolic for the Awka-Etiti people because it is common an aphorism among them that, ‘*e too dike na nke o mere, ya e mekwara ozo*’⁶³ [once a mighty man is praised for a deed, he performs another]. Thus, the more Awka-Etiti people express their gratitude for the gifts received, they are assured of a bounty of fruitfulness from *Chukwu* through the intermediation of the earth goddess (Mother Earth), *Ana*.

⁶¹. Chinonso.

⁶². Christopher Okafor, in discussion with the author, October 9, 2021.

⁶³. Mr Adimike, discussion.

FURTHER PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON AFIA OLU

One could be prompted to ask the reason why *Afia Olu* has not phased out from Awka-Etiti culture, despite the attack on cultural practices by Western ideologies. With the aid of philosophical reflection, it is comprehended that the whole idea of *Afia Olu* is communitarian in nature rather than being individualistic. The current predominant ideology of the West is one that allows for individualism; this idea is unsupported for the Awka-Etiti indigene. As an African, the Awka-Etiti indigene understands that 'igwe bu ike'.⁶⁴ Accepting a culture of individualism would cause a very grievous conflict—a crisis of identity. The Awka-Etiti indigene, always surrounded by a community that upholds the tenets of common living is insusceptible to the influence of individualism. *Afia Olu* as a celebration holds some philosophical connotation of communitarianism that disaffirms the possibility of individualism among the Awka-Etiti folk. This depicts that Western ideology failed to dismantle the core of the African outlook; it could not penetrate that 'African-ness' in the Awka-Etiti person that constitutes for his sense of identity. As Okonkwo would argue, the African understands his own uniqueness or individuality among a community;⁶⁵ as the author should add, the Awka-Etiti person (who is an African) further cognizes that he can only be unique among a community of persons. It is only among persons that the Awka-Etiti person recognizes his own uniqueness, such that he understands that he is a being appellated by that clause of identity, 'I am'. Excluding the community, the individual is not inimitable, but is actually a misplaced identity and marooned at that.⁶⁶ Thus, the individual understands his individuality (an inimitable uniqueness) better only among a community of persons. This is what *Afia Olu* is all about and is why it has not faded out among the indigenes of Awka-Etiti. At the core of this Igbo communitarian dimension is that move towards 'the other'.

⁶⁴. Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, in lecture series of *Mmadubuike and African Philosophy*, October-December, 2020.

⁶⁵. Anthony Emeka Okonkwo, *Individual Community and Dialogue* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2020), iii.

⁶⁶. Mrs Adimike, discussion.

Fundamentally, *Afia Olu* does not present itself, so to speak, as a festivity that celebrates oneself or egoistic hubris; such a stance would be highly moot in relation to what *Afia Olu* is all about. *Afia Olu* is a carnivalesque that celebrates others and not one; it preaches that the other is a reflection of oneself and that, as Okonkwo argues in his philosophy of Igbo personalism, *mmadubu* 'mma ndu'—that is to say, that a person is the pulchritude and comeliness of life.⁶⁷ *Afia Olu* calls for that profound realization that 'I am and We are' (as the author reflects) and that personhood which is instantiated in every instance of persons, is the sublimest of corporeal matter.⁶⁸ *Afia Olu* may be said to be the Ash Wednesday of the Awka-Etiti people in the sense that it has a deep philosophical undertone of proper personalism that stresses on the essentiality of the human person. In his philosophy of Igbo personalism, Okonkwo brings forward the idea of *mmadu bu ike*; this philosophy which is a valid logical deduction from the philosophy of Placid Tempels implies that in the human being is force: this force is the force of life (*Shakra*) and that it is an unmistakably animating energy, permeating every membrane of the person's life. Each instance of *mmadu* (*mma-ndu*) is a spiritual energy that reflects some certain character of life/existence: *ndu*.⁶⁹ In the light of Okonkwo's personalism, *mmadu* has a force (*ike*) which is special to the one and is capable of manipulating that of another *mmadu* in the case of spiritual advantage.⁷⁰ The essence of *Mmadubuike*, the author suspects, is to portray that deeply cosmological facet of the human person that is as a result of the fact that the human person is the sublimest of the comeliness of reality in corporeal entities. This idea is not in any way alien to the people of Awka-Etiti.

⁶⁷. Anthony Okonkwo, in lecture series of *Mmadubuike* and African Philosophy, October-December, 2020.

⁶⁸. Isaac Ukpokolo (Professor of Epistemology, The University of Ibadan), in inaugural lecture at the Don Bosco Institute of Philosophy (annex of the *Universita Pontificia Salesiana*, Italy), October 7, 2021.

⁶⁹. Mr Adimike, discussion.

⁷⁰. Anthony Okonkwo, discussion.

It was mentioned earlier about the divinity of the work of the farmhands who are celebrated in *Afia Olu* by the Awka-Etiti people. The farmhands who are instances of personhood i.e., human persons, are beings of spiritual energy that command a certain predilection from *Ana* with whom they are in constant relationship. Their relationship implies that with their *Shakra*, they manipulate the mechanisms of the procedure of *Ana* in order to replenish both *Ana* and *ndi mmadu*. Theirs is a powerful activity that sees to the expenditure of unimaginable and unfathomed *Shakra* in tilling and cultivating. *Afia Olu* thus calls for the appreciation of these farmhands who are employed by other clansmen to 'manipulate' the land and invoke the *Shakra* of *Ana* that their lands may bring forth fruit. One could draw from this argument that the *Shakra* of the farmhands is of great spiritual advantage to the employer for the *Shakra* of the employed worker becomes for the employer, a merit with the subtleties of *Ana* and is a surety of cordiality with the revered deputy of *Chukwu*, since the farmhands have drawn her kindly countenance upon such and such a farmstead. Existentially, the argument draws upon the happenings of contemporary society. *Afia Olu* reminds *ndi mmadu* (men; the humankind) that every person who is the beneficiary of one's employment is an intercessor between the *Chi nta* that serves as the deputy of *Chukwu*, and the entire enterprise of the employer. If the employer looks upon the employee with disdain, a negative radiation of *Shakra* is emitted which is received by the *Chi nta* and consequentially, percusses on the *Shakra* of the employer, the employer's ménage and the enterprise of the worker. On the other hand, if the workers are treated with graciousness, the *Shakra* radiated will be one of positivity and will attract an equally meted discharge of positivity from the *Chi nta* in custody of the domain of reality in which the enterprises of the employer operate. This calls for an examination among employers; the employers are spoken to by this festival of the Awka-Etiti folk if they treat their employees justly and graciously. One who does so and is generous, acknowledging the work of those who surround one will eventually become a beneficiary of the goodwill of the gods (*umu chi nta*).

An obviously glaring *del reverso* is that if the employers have a responsibility to dispense, the workers have a duty/obligation to maintain. In Okonkwo's personalism of Igbo culture, he excogitates that every being must act according to its nature; this is what is meant by justice (in the thought of Augustine of Hippo as well). Any creature that flaunts this law of nature is *de facto*, away from the track: *i-odos* [Greek for 'out from the way'].⁷¹ Similarly, any being of human instance, i.e., *Ofu [onye] Mmadu* that does not live in accordance with the path/fate mapped out for the same is automatically *i-odos* and is in danger of facing the vehement ire of *Chukwu* and those sub-powers of divinity that are his deputies as regards their function of the custody of those dimensions of reality entrusted to their jurisdiction. As Okonkwo etymologically explains, such fellows are 'idiots'.⁷² Thenceforth, the worker who acts contrary to his call and manifests an attitude similar to that of the 'idiot' (*i-odos*) is inevitably disconnected from the living and animating force of his *Shakra* and cannot efficiently dispense the spiritual power in his custody; nor is such a worker able to properly relate with the divinities that *Chukwu* delegates [*umu chi nta*] to superintend those affected aspects of reality. It can be correctly said of such a worker that such a one is misplaced and has had the spiritual energy natural to his activity, consequentially corrupt. Hence for the worker, the only way to remain 'with the way' [Greek form: *meta odos*]⁷³ is to maintain fidelity to the character of one's profession. Given the arguments above, the chapter presents to the reader some philosophical reflections on the significance of *Afia Olu* festival in Awka-Etiti circumscription. Summarily, this partition began by painting a historical canvas of the practice of *Afia Olu* and then tracing the thread of philosophical implications as well as personalist outlooks from the retina of Igbo philosophy. The derived reflection is Janus-faced in that it depicts the

⁷¹. Anthony Okonkwo, in lecture series of *Mmadubuike* and African Philosophy, October-December, 2020.

⁷². Okonkwo.

⁷³. Okonkwo

role and responsibility of employers and then likewise for the workers.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This work was solely devoted to explaining the history and philosophical relevance of the festivity of *Afia Olu* in the life and milieu of the people of Awka-Etiti—the people that serve as our frame of reference in this work. In this work, the procedure began by plotting the history of the people of Awka-Etiti by indicating the acknowledgement of inherited oral folk history and then what documented sources admit. In the course of the work, we examined *Afia Olu* in the light of the critical inspection of philosophy, concluding that *Afia Olu* is a relevant festival for the people of Awka-Etiti for some obvious reasons. First, we acknowledged that *Afia Olu* recognizes the character of African consciousness of identity in that it adheres to a communitarian dimension of sociology; this societal constitution is one of mutual cohabitation where one individual acknowledges his inimitableness and uniqueness among the community of other individuals. Secondly, we realized, in the course of our investigation, that *Afia Olu* is other-directed and calls for an appreciation of the gift and spiritual deposit in the other. From this point, we adduced further that in every instance of personhood, there is a sort of spiritual advantage bestowed that enables some kind of connection and relationship with those deputies of *Chukwu*, the supreme deity of Igbo cosmology. This allows for a unique relationship that ensures and secures continuity of human activity. The course of examination unraveled certain undertones and symbolisms in the celebration of *Afia Olu*. The scrutiny concluded by the affirmation that employers and workers have roles and responsibilities to play in preserving the relationship between *ndi mmadu* and *umu chi nta* in the cosmological balance ordered by *Chukwu*. The factual significance of this paper is its address of/to contemporary work ethics. From the sagacity of Awka-Etiti cultural practice of *Afia Olu*, it was excogitated that employers are to respect their workers for they are carriers of some spiritual energy that is only exercised by them in their engagement with the *Chi*

nta of their work domain. Should they be treated fittingly, they attract blessings from the *Chi nta*; should it be contrariwise, they appeal for an equal measure of ill-fate. Addressing the role of workers, *Afia Olu* recommends and admonishes them to sustain and uphold fealty to their empowerments of spiritual advantage. Only in such do they derive authenticity of being and keep along the tracks paved and destined for them by their different *umu Chi nta*.

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