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The study identifies yam and briefly examines the system leading to its production and various problems associated with it. The conclusion of farm work is signalled by a ritual festival which centres on yam and symbolizes the end of the year. The setting is Owa, an Igbo village community in Amhara State.

The report leans heavily on personal experience derived from birth and socialization. But this is not all. With grants from Senate Research Committee of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, I am currently investigating causes of religious conflicts in Igbo Oha and Isiegbu Local Government Areas of the State.

Owa, a village community in Ezza Local Government Area is about four kilometres South of the Nine Mile Corner near Ezza. Nine Mile derived its name because of its strategic importance being the jumping off point between the roads linking the South and the North of the country East of the Niger. It is also nine miles from Ezza, which was the regional headquarters of Eastern Provinces of Nigeria and still the capital of Amhara State. Owa is bounded in the East by Nsukka and Ezza, and in the North by Eke and Aboh. These four distinct groups of villages are in Ezza Local Government Area of Anambra State. Owa is flanked in the South by Agbo Owa which is the headquarters of Ezza Local Government Area.

The name Agbo Owa needs some explanation because the exercise would give a hint to the nature of the socio-economic life of the people. Agbo could be rendered Farm or grass. It could also mean for a herder or tiger. In reality, it means an uninhabited open ground left for wild animals to roam about and has other potentialities including areas for collecting thatch. On the other hand means heart or centre of concern or where ones interests are concentrated. It could also refer to any piece of land considered suitable for permanent settlement. In the light of this explanation, Agbo Owa means a settlement of migrants from Owa. Further down and still South of Agbo Owa is yet another settlement of the Owa people known as Igbo Owa.
This pattern of migration leading to permanent settlements is very characteristic of the Northern Igbo people (see Nkpo, 1979:1, Anie, 1984). What inspires movements of this kind is often farmland. Land considered vital for success in growing yam which is the traditional occupation of the people.

Some serious observations have been made with regard to such migrations. Before colonization, migrations may have been a significant factor in the acquisition of new territories (cf. Anie, 1980). In fact, the structure of village names especially in the North of the Igbo country lends credit to this observation. But today, new territories cannot be acquired that way because village boundaries are now clearly defined and acquisition of land by sheer force is no longer considered legitimate. But the migrations have continued nevertheless. As a result, the farmers who are involved must keep two homes, one at the place of work and the other in the traditional village and move following the cycle of agriculture. Such life style has been shown to be the cause of dislocation in primary schools in the area (Igbo, 1978:3) because the farmer and his wife must stay together to work in the field and the tender child cannot live alone.

The farmer too cannot develop any of the plans because of fluctuations in migrations. Some of these observations seem to disturb the State Government. In fact, there is strong evidence to show that the State Government itself has instrumental to a policy which incited the farmers out of their farm lands and thereby even fostering greater migration (Anie, 1980:6). Despite all these the peopled interest in growing yam has persisted.

Yam, a dioccaria corymbosa in the Igbo staple food (Nkpa, 1968:103). Igbo etymology traces the origin of yam to the remains of one of their sons from whose grave it sprouted (Nkpa,1968:209). The story has a far reaching implication for by linking yam to a first son, it suggests that for the Igbo at least, yam came next to a child in order of priority. For them, too, traditional occupation would recognize growing yam as the chief (Nkpa, 1968:263). Yet it can be shown that growing yam is as disintegrative as it is unifying in its social effects.

Some important observations have already been made about yam. It requires reasonably rich soil for successful growth and which is not always readily available. This is mainly because of a large concentration of the people on agriculture which in the traditional Igbo context simply means growing yam. Secondly, frequent cropping depletes the fertility of the soil and continued use in turn produces poor harvest.
Demand for fertile soil does in turn cause a lot of conflicts among the farmers, solutions to which are sought in migrations (Anigbo, 1980).

Today, Oma people can be found all over Nigeria where there are available rich soil distances from their traditional villages notwithstanding. They are found in Abia State, Imo, Benue and Plateau. This type of phenomenon associated with yam production can explain a lot of issues in the Igbo culture. It can explain the phenomenon of ife and ifun which are the common features of the structures of the social organizations among northern Igbo group of villages (Kanu, 1967). The meaning of ife has been noted. Ife in its turn simply means a house, a home or a traditional home (Anigbo, 1980).

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Yam also divides the sexes and fosters status differentials among the men. In the first place, there is the social ideology which precludes women from the ownership of yam. That it means in practice is that only men can take titles associated with it or enjoy the privileges or glories derived from the product. The social equation with regard to yam is therefore invariably men with yam and never with women. But then, even with this recognition, the successful production of this commodity requires a joint effort between men and his wife.

There is work for the man and work for the woman and their joint effort is vital for the survival of the household. In the first place, the culture places embargo on women making yam hills and punish them if they do. Women on their part have to provide support for their men by cooking for them while at work and weeding the fields from time to time as it becomes necessary. Women also cultivate cocoyam which is the only locally grown foodstuff which the people have been able to process and store for use during the period between the conclusion of the planting season and the beginning of the harvest (Anigbo, 1980:145). Here, one recalls Shelton who examines cocoyam and the serious effort which men put towards its production for he sees it in terms of the interdependence of man and woman in meeting the food needs of the family. He concludes that women are generally responsible for the family foods when yams are no longer readily available because they have been planted (Shelton, 1973).

In Iheaja Oma, a village community, not too far removed from Owa, it is for the mother to provide her daughter with some nucleus of cocoyam seedling to start her off in life at the beginning of her marriage (Anigbo, 1980:146). In Oma itself, mothers do it as option not obligation. There, however, the woman must make the effort herself to acquire cocoyam seedlings. She can hire her labour out to other women and get paid with cocoyam. She can also
spend each if it available. Her objective in life is to be independent on
notice connected with the product for she can earn extra cash on her
homes and spend the money on the village.

In this account, it would be reasonable to infer that every child is to
perpetuate the line, traditional occupation such as growing yam can be
considered a significant factor which urges a man to marry and stay married.
For them too, it is traditional for the potential bride and the groom to
investigate each other before the marriage can be concluded. The investigation
should not be confused with quests for a potential wife. For among the Igbo
a man is free to scout for a potential wife and take an offer of marriage
to her as he pleases. The girl on her part is free to turn the offer down.
But several offers to different girls and refusals can become a form of
indictment and the individual is discreetly warned to think again.

The potential groom must therefore critically examine himself and adopt a
ew strategy for subsequent approaches. None of these steps constitute
formal investigations. Investigations properly understood start occur after
the presentation of the kola-nut and a number of issues dealt with, the bride's party may say to the party of the
man: "Kola naa?", which means, let us institute some inquiries. The
kola-nut presented in the occasion represents what is technically known as
Gabi which means kola-nut that asks questions (Isiako, 1960).

The kola-nut is the fruit of the kola tree chiefly cola-nitida and cola-
ammunia. It is common in tropical West Africa and there serves many
purposes. But in contrast to its multi purpose use, it is very cheap
(Isaako, 1960:6; Isiako, 1966:65). For the Igbo it is a great term of
social conversations. Its role in a marriage setting cannot be exaggerated.
For without it, no marriage can be recognized (Isiako, 1964:65).

Besides issues peculiar to the sexes, terms of reference for such investigations
are the status of the man and woman as well as their distinct identity
within the general ancient links in the society as a whole. Issues governing
relevant and relevant mechanisms are also taken into consideration
where they occur. In addition, there may be some consultations with the
diviner or fortune teller or the opinions of the ancestors for the proposed
union. Such a verdict is based on as a result of such consultations
must be strictly upheld and adhered to by the groups.
Another important aspect of the investigation is the attitude to work of the potential bride and groom. Here the Igbo shows clearly how he appreciates the importance of the genes or the pedigree in human beings for he does not select mates arbitrarily.

What primarily motivates the choice of bride or wife is attitude to work. Work here specifically refers to traditional occupation and other household duties. Methods used to establish reliable opinions are both empirical and comparative. Each party to the union is very clear about this and must be satisfied that the attitude to work of the partner is good. The focus is not just on the potential bride or groom only for they may be young at that time and their attitude to work not confirmed. The investigation is therefore centered on the general approach to work of father and mother and indeed of the entire members of the descent group.

Specific qualities which are avoided in either men or women are sluggishness, laziness, indulgence of all descriptions and late rising. On the other hand, qualities which are sought or pursued are getting up early, sustained stamina in the pursuit of specific tasks and promptness in response to emergencies. These are qualities which can be crucial in approving or rejecting an offer of marriage. If the descent group is heavily loaded with people sharing either of the characteristics the candidate may be advised to change direction or get on with the business at hand.

Although for the Igbo, recurrent serious incidents of misfortunes such as death in the family can constitute obstacles to one getting a wife or husband (cf. Anigho, 1982:116), the success of father or mother in farming or other business does not of itself influence the approval or rejection of son or daughter for a proposed union. The community can also uphold the character of father or mother and seriously question those of sons or daughters (Anigho, 1969:50). This is because the Igbo do not attribute the success of an individual to the genes, nor to inherited qualities and not even to personal ability or ingenuity of the individual. Although they may accept the genes as a working hypothesis towards forecasting the achievement orientation of an individual, they are not relying upon as absolute guide in all cases.

In the Igbo social ideology, various individuals can pursue the same type of occupation and equally dedicate themselves to it and yet in the end achieve different rewards. What explains the differences in the results obtained is not the individual ability, it is the ci of the individual.
Ci can be seen as a paternal personal god who comes to exist into existence with the conception or commencement of life of any organism and ceases to exist at its death. Ci protects and guides the organism and nothing can happen to its protection without his approval or requirement. This may be seen in the Igbo saying "life ends much when Ci runs" - which means "whatbefalls an individual also affects his Ci". This saying can lead one to conclude that Ci is a helpless as the individual for whom he acts as guardian (cf. Audjo, 1990:165). This view is strengthened by the attitude of the Igbo themselves. For the Igbo an individual can challenge an opponent by asserting superiority in wealth or power not only over him but also over his personal deity - Ci. There, one can hear "ike nekalaka Ci gi" which means I am more powerful in all respects than you, and your personal deity put together (Ezekwue, 1973:128). In this kind of response is not found when by the Igbo, it is obvious that Ci is not Chukwu - god the creator of all things (cf. Audjo, 1990:164; Rudes, 1966; Farrinder, 1971). Yet Ci has a shrine which must be renovated at the death of the owner.

But by being intimately bound up by the fortunes of each personal deity, the Igbo appear to accept a kind of fatalistic attitude to the business of life. This view derives from Igbo cosmology which upholds the existence of three worlds: the world of the living, the world of the dead and the world of children not yet born (Ezekwue, 1973).

However, in the world of children not yet born, covenant is free and individuals single together and even discuss with their Ci - their personal deity and agree with him on what would be his fortune in the world of the living. When eventually the individual is born into the world of the living, his failures and successes and indeed his fortune are seen as living out the agreement reached in the world of the children not yet born. Thus, one can see that the social ideology conditions individuals to accept failure and success as pre-determined and not as results of personal efforts.

The Igbo philosophy of pre-determination can be seen as a serious attempt by individuals mind to come to grips with problem of evil, inequality, status differentials and other aberrations of social life. Although some individuals see at these find comfort in this kind of explanations, the philosophy of pre-existence poses similar problem as the doctrine of predestination or determinism which also has preoccupied highly tutored minds for centuries. Were such philosophy to be accepted and carry universally, society would grind to a halt.

Fortunately for the Igbo, their apparent fatalistic attitude to life is
countered or not by another aspect of their social idiom which recognizes that there are marked differences between achievements arrived at through physical exertion sustained by a determination to make the predicted results from required efforts. For example in Hausa, the people are aware of the difference between the title of Dadin and Gwam. Both titles are linked to the process of growing you. Only a man can conquer you fields. Any one who is able to make four thousand yam hills in a single day obtains the title. In fact, it is often poor men who are able to frame themselves to achieve it. Gwam, on the other hand, does not derive from sheer physical exertion. The individual earns the title if after planting his yam, he in Benue with very modest rich harvest which are measured in terms of quantity and quality gains. The latter is obviously conferred by the Gwam, the personal deity (cf. anfang, 120:12).

All these speculations and illusions are simply designed to show that the process is not being carried out by same people in their investigations because they could not be happy to be satisfied with a corner without initiative, also lazy and constantly pushing up to perform the basic elements of her domestic duties. On the other hand, the family of the bride are not different either for it is clear to them that an insolent housemaid would surrender her own share of family responsibilities to a dutiful wife. It may be necessary to add that the example of the most eligible groom with the potentiality of living on handsome inheritance and therefore free from labour and the richly endowed bride calling for the incipient groom are not verified in the Igbo traditional marriage pattern. If they exist today, it is in contradiction of traditional practices or at least a form of adulteration.

Therefore, the expectations of a standard Igbo traditional marriage are bride and groom who are healthy, strong and who can live together in peace to explore their environment and wrest from it the means of their livelihood. Whatever fortunes or titles they may acquire as a result of their joint efforts are blessings from their Olu - their personal deity.

( IV )

In the marriage is virilocal. As soon as the negotiations are over and the bride-price paid, the woman is expected to settle with her husband. Their immediate preoccupation would be how to secure plenty of seed yam to start off their marriage. But it is not unusual not to have enough at the beginning. Such deficiencies can be made good by either the parents of the groom or the bride. Normally with the harvest over and yam stocked in the barn, it is customary for the father of the bride to invite his daughter
and eleven, her with what is technically known as "founder-in-law".

"Founder" means something heavy, great or important. When it is associated with a gift of cereals, it indicates unspecific, but great quantity of cereals. The non-specification is not accidental because there is no secret reciprocity implied in the gesture. The daughter is therefore expected to receive the gift with gratitude, and on her part arrange the transportation to her matrimonial home where she stands over to her husband.

Meanwhile, the planting season has started in earnest and the threat to it may give rise to all kinds of greasings. Here is the scene which seems to be the center of all activities for the farmers. Both men and women have to pay attention to their own affairs. Both men and women have to clear their fields, canals, streams, and roads, as well as the farm work. This should be carried out with the help of family, friends, and neighbors. Everyone should be involved in the work, and all of them working together will make the work more efficient. The gesture in reciprocation is a lavish entertainment at the end of the day (see Anigbo, 1988).

Whenever success or failure occurs, be it a man or his wife, after they have worked hard it attributed to their C1. If for example there is a flood and their crops are not affected, the couple would claim that C1 had given them the crops. When the crops are not good, the same C1 is blamed. This means that our personal deity is in contact with nature. Where one man has good crops, another may have a poor harvest. People fall victim to some natural disasters and other people are affected by the incident too. They say "nobody is spare" which means our individual fortunes are evil. When a man has no child he would invoke his C1 to furnish him with a child. If his prayers are not answered he would begin to question whether he had not done something contrary to the customs of his time and his being punished for so doing by the deprivation of children. (Amol, 1980).

Therefore, when the harvest is good or a child is born to a man, he can take the blame to himself but recognize the place of the C1 in the scheme of his life. In like manner, victims of misfortune also react accordingly and plan for a change.

For the glory of success in premonitory events not realized and not strictly known. This is because he recognizes well an important contribution for the head. In his life eating and drinking are consequences of hard work in one without the other provides continuity, raised several questions
which may lead him to the character of an individual be scrutinized, a man
and a woman, little valued from his lineage trace his 21 and not his person
for he can do nothing further. People tend to agree and sympathise with
him. But a man who sleeps with himself; and does no work in stagnation and
people avoid his company. Such one is considered as half or no one.

This belief system or philosophy of life is pervasive of the entire Indo
social life and experience. It can also be identified from analysis of
some of the systems which occur from time to time especially those
connected with any of the conclusion of a cycle of farm work, they work in
with one of such celebrations (Redfield, 1941). In one,\textit{ Alonj} is one
such celebrations.

\textbf{(v)}

\textit{Alonj} is a festival which dramatizes the unity of the lineage or even the
descent group so that all married daughters must return to their
ancestral home; in this obligation is total, the unity of the lineage is
maintained with married daughters replacing sisters as head of family. I will
now proceed to analyze the structure of the festivity and other aspects of
the celebrations.

There are three distinct but related times in \textit{Alonj}: (i) \textit{Ji Alonj} which serves
prolonging the date for the commencement of the celebration; (ii) \textit{Rema
Ijede} - aspect of the celebration which reflects religious worship and
(iii) \textit{Ijede} - which means the taking of the city of year which concludes
the festival. Since \textit{Ji Alonj} and \textit{Rema Ijede} refer to time or sequence of
events and not directly to social structure, I will not disturb the
analyzes by describing how such activities are observed in the community.
It is more meaningful to analyse the social implications of \textit{Ijede} the \textit{Alonj}.

\textit{Ijede} the \textit{Alonj} means husband organizing feast and having them sent to his
father-in-law to commemorate the marriage of his daughter. It is usual
for wife to accompany the carriage. But in usual however, is that wife
should return to her mother home during the period. This is in important
social transaction and recalls any disease in a carriage.

at that time.
One could see the gift of Yam as an exercise in reciprocally especially in view of the Akamji which the father-in-law gave to the son-in-law through his daughter at the start of their marriage. But here the principle of reciprocity does not apply. This is because although the standard practice is to send nine large yams to father-in-law in fulfilment of the obligation, there is no strict equation between the gift and Akamji. Moreover, it is not imperative that the number must be nine. What gives direction to the conduct of yams on this particular occasion is the condition of the marriage.

The first year of marriage demands that the husband should be very selective in his choice of yams for they must be really large, nine of them being carried as a kind of bearer. Young men carrying them and singing songs reflecting the weight of their burden. They are taken to father-in-law and left before him as exhibits.

Yams in Akamji have several implications. The size of yams presented can portray different aspects of human relationships in a particular marriage. They could indicate first year of marriage or that the husband is rich since yams for the occasion could be bought. Such may also suggest that the husband has had a rich harvest. Where the latter is the case, the yams can symbolize successful joint enterprise. At times husband can present large sized yams to spite his wife. This situation can be verified where the son-in-law is at peace with his father-in-law but at great discord with his wife. Not to send yams would have been the natural thing to do. Here, yam becomes both a symbol of peace and hostility.

On the other hand, where the size of yams are considerably small would indicate bad harvest or very advanced affinal ties. The honour of wife demands that a son-in-law should not be seen in asking the gift of yams to his affines. Therefore where the harvest fails, he is not expected to strain his pocket to fulfill the obligation especially if he has been dutiful.

This would be more so in the case of old couples who are no longer able to scout for rich soil which could assure them rich harvest of yams to meet the standard. Similarly, where the number of yams are less than nine could show that husband and wife are dead but left at least a son to honour the memory of mother. This is because as long as there is a male child surviving a woman, the obligation of the gift of yams would continue to be met at that time.
Sometimes paves are not sent at all and may no longer be sent. This calls for clarity because it throws light on some fine aspects of social relationships. In the first place, a man who cannot afford paves in any socially approved manner is not expected to seek to get the obligation. Usually, father-in-laws are made to accept gifts of paves from non-in-laws who are confirmed thieves for fear of being offered stolen paves. In fact, good citizens regard stolen things as polluting. Therefore, it is quite possible that a good citizen could not afford paves, and such a man would be given recognition for not paying the obligation. If he has no other means of earning, he would be encouraged to get his wife to go home to get paves with a pot of palm wine. The affinies would explain his gift and provision of various kinds of aid are due to his sister in recognition of their poverty.

These wife lives with husband as no paves are sent on her behalf. It is a clear case of crisis. But the source of crisis may not be immediately obvious for it could come from the man or his wife. When the father or brother is silent about the gift he is a clear indication of a but in a relationship. Either the father or brother has question a defaulting non-in-law or this important aspect of marriage is attacked by his wife and receive satisfactory explanation for the incident.

In that case, withdrawal of gifts of paves or more be seen as a turning to parents that daughter's behavior constitutes threat to the life of the marriage. This is an opportunity for people to take corrective measures against an erring daughter.

But non-in-law can equally be at fault. The crisis could be resolved if he acceps and wants his way. But it is also equally possible he would remain recalcitrant and still willing to live with his wife. Here, the honor of daughter is at stake. The father or brother can redeem it by declaring a war of food against the non-in-law. This step could be more necessary if the difference between the affinies derive only from failure to make the gift of paves. The father-in-law could wage the war by reversing the conduct of paves at that time and have gifts of paves sent to the non-in-law. By that kind of move, the father-in-law challenges the non-in-law to accept that he is self-sufficient in food supply and does not rely on his meeting up with the obligation in order to survive.

Such conduct provokes instant reaction, for the non-in-law cannot just accept the gift of paves and does nothing. Where he is anxious to preserve his honor, he must take all necessary steps to rectify the situation, otherwise he returns the paves to father-in-law and by law out from the marriage. This is a clear case of fighting an issue with food as demonstrable in the
in the Kalana Abuta (Young, 1971). There, Young shows clearly how the giving of food especially yam can be a form of expression designed to shame an opponent (Young, 1971:109). But in the case of Akan, the reversal of custom enhances the identity of daughter and establishes her as a daughter of so and so. At the same time it incribes a non-in-law and dramatizes him as a non guilty of dereliction of duty in an important issue of social relationship such as marriage.

Today, things are changing. With the advent of Christianity and its stiff opposition to things traditional (see Schuyler, 1963:210; Hastings, 1967:58) especially those associated with religion, yam at Akan has assumed a new dimension. Although, Christians have accepted the principle of giving the gift of yam to father-in-law, they now insist they must do their own on entirely a different day and not on the original prescription. Here, yam represents opposition between Christians and those still loyal to traditional religion.

One can readily say that despite new factors influencing the symbolic representation of yam, western education and some of the technology of mass production have not shifted the interests of the Owa people from their traditional method of growing yam.

CONCLUSION:

The paper dealt with yam in the light of the experiences of Owa people of Anambra State. The people cultivate it and treasure it as others do (Boden 1966; Kolinowski, 1922; Young, 1971). But for Owa, at a particular period in the year, yam becomes the yardstick through which issues in a marriage can be assessed or resolved. Then, its wealth as a system of symbolic representation is immense for it can indicate stages in a marriage process, strained relationship, obstinacy, inferiority complex or superiority, extinction of affinal connections and in Christian era opposition between tradition and modern.

The festival however, is a landmark in the socio-economic life of the people. It emphasizes the autonomy of the village group and in a special way redefines the unity of the major lineage for the return of daughters and exist of wives, the descent group is intact. One wonders whether this validates the matrcentric theory of the beginning of family life (Mohannan, 1967:75).


