

**DYNAMICS OF NTA FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE AMONG
IRETE PEOPLE OF SOUTHEAST NIGERIA**

BY

Louisa Nnenna ONUOHA

Matric No: 181136

B.A. (HONS.) Dramatic Arts (OAU, Ife)

M.A. Theatre Arts (Unilag)

**A Thesis in the Institute of African Studies, Submitted to the Cultural
and Media Studies Programme in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Of the

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

December, 2022

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Louisa Nnenna ONUOHA in the Cultural and Media Studies Unit, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, under my supervision.

Supervisor
O. O. Layiwola
B.A. (Ife), PhD (Leeds)
Professor,
Institute of African Studies
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to: Chief Obi Anyakpo (1962-2015) late Uwolo of Ibusa. Your love for the Igbo culture is an inspiration.

Maria Obi-Abang (1971-2019) a true friend, thank you for believing in me to be able to do this.

Mma Cordelia Akujokwu Duru (1926 - 2018). Thank you for your lovely stories of *Nta* in the past and general support throughout my field trip.

You were all there when this journey began. May you find peace in the heavenlies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As this journey finally comes to an end (it seemed it was never going to end), I remain thankful to God Almighty for seeing me through. I owe you everything and remain eternally grateful.

I received a great deal of support and assistance from various people throughout the writing of this thesis.

First and foremost, I sincerely thank my supervisor, Professor Dele Layiwola for his encouragement and patience during my research period. His invaluable advice and continued support helped in bringing my work to a higher level and saw to the successful completion of this study. His guidance through each stage of the process and insightful feedback are very much appreciated.

My profound gratitude goes to Drs. Chukwuma Okoye and Ayo Adeduntan for making out time to read the first draft of my proposal. I am indeed grateful for their vital correction at this stage of my research. I am thankful to Dr. Segun Opadeji for his support and assistance as the Ph.D began.

I thank Prof. Muyiwa Awodiya for his insistence that I should not only start the Ph.D programme, but that I must also complete it without delay. Those calls and messages actually motivated in burning the midnight candles. Thank you so much Prof.

I also thank Dr. Sola Olorunyomi who saw to it that the stress of the Ph.D work was forgotten each time I saw him. His humouristic approach and encouragement calmed the frayed nerves always.

I would also like to thank all my teachers at the Faculty of the Institute of African Studies, especially Drs. Seunfunmi Olutayo, Obafemi Jegede, Kayode Samuel and Senayon Olaoluwa for their invaluable guidance throughout my studies and also for their support at various levels of my research work. This made my Ph.D journey easier.

I thank you all for providing me with the tools that I needed to choose the right direction and successfully complete my thesis.

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues with whom I started this journey. Lilian Soroye, Lagbayi Awonusi, Omotayo Olakojo and Tolu Johnson. I thank you for constantly checking up on me and reminding me that I did not have a choice but to finish this work. I must let you know that your encouragement helped me pull through some of

the difficult period of this research. I would particularly like to single out Tayo, who has now become my sister, for giving me shelter whenever I got stranded. The times spent together, your sisterly advice and your encouragement during this journey will forever be appreciated. The memories of our ‘puff puff’ lunches will always linger on. Thank you so much.

In addition, I would like to thank my mother, sisters, brothers and every family member, especially Joseph, David and Ebuka for their prayers, sympathetic ear, their understanding, love and care during the several trips that I made to and from Ibadan. Knowing that you were always there for me gave me the courage to want to excel.

I express my profound gratitude to all those who assisted me during my field trips to Irete, helping me to gain access to interviewees and key information from members of Irete community. In this regard, I would like to specially thank the Eze Agubiam 1 of Irete, HRH Eze Ethelbert Ekwelibe, Pa Victor Ojjieme, Kelechi Ekwelibe, the Chief Priest of Irete , Morgan Chukwudi Njoku, Duru Sunny George DSG and a host of others too numerous to mention. I thank you for your time and patience.

Finally, I would also like to thank my friends who kept encouraging me with their wise counsel, material and non-material support. Dr Professor Barbara Plankensteiner, Professor Peju Layiwola, Ophelia Leon, Aunty Mary Aharanwa, Silo Bankole, Andrea Iroabuchi and Anita George. Your support throughout this academic sojourn is highly appreciated, it went a long way in helping me complete my study.

Louisa Nnenna Onuoha

December, 2022

ABSTRACT

African festivals are often reconstructed in order not to lose them completely. *Nta* hunting festival has undergone such reconstruction. Although existing studies have mainly focused on the religious and cultural values of the performance, the contemporary and cultural reconstruction have not been thoroughly explored. This study, therefore, examined the reconstruction of *Nta* festival and its impact on both the festival and the people of Irete in Nigeria.

Richard Schechner's Theory of Performance was adopted as the framework. The study utilised the qualitative method involving ethnographic and descriptive designs. Primary data were collected through participant observation and 23 Key Informant Interviews conducted with purposively selected participants, including the autonomous king of Irete (Eze), 10 traditional title holders, the Onye Ishi Ala (Chief Priest of Irete) and 11 members of the Eze cabinet. Twenty In-depth Interviews were conducted with eight council members drawn from Ndi Eze, Ndi Oki, Irete Hunters Union and Ndi Oha; seven notable stakeholders in the cultural reformation of *Nta* festival; and five government officials. Four Focus Group Discussions were conducted, one each with the Umunweju Family meeting (Lagos Branch), the youth wing of Irete Community Development Union, Irete Hunters Union and Irete Christian Fathers Association. Data were content analysed using descriptive and narrative styles.

Christianity, Western education and modernity aided the decline in participation in *Nta* festival as it is regarded as unchristian. The festival has therefore been reconstructed to improve participation, leading to two forms of performance: the traditional *Nta* festival celebrated by adherents of Igbo traditional religion and the reconstructed *Nta* festival celebrated by the Eze Agubiam and his cabinet members. This also accommodates other Irete people who are Christians and would not like to participate in the traditional festival. The traditional *Nta* festival remains as handed down by the Irete forbears and is being practised by the Onye Ishi Ala, members of the Oha cult (Ala priests) and interested Irete indigenes. This form starts with the Onye Ishi Ala's visit to Nkolo forest where he offers sacrifices to the ancestors on behalf of the community. In the reconstructed *Nta* festival, the Eze, members of his cabinet and other stakeholders add a "Christian touch" to the celebration of *Nta*. The performance takes place at the Eze's palace and begins with the blessings of the Reverend Father. All sacrifices to the gods are cancelled and replaced with prayers to the Christian God, making the festival of lesser traditional sacrality. The reduction in traditional sacrality highlights the tension between indigeneity and modernity as occasioned by religion and culture. Due to the reconstruction of the performance, more people now participate in *Nta* festival.

The reconstructed *Nta* festival produces a unique Igbo hybrid festival that represents a new model of religious and cultural expression in contemporary Igbo Irete, thereby protecting the festival from extinction and improving Irete community relations.

Keywords: *Nta* festival, Cultural reconstruction, Igbo Irete

Word count: 469

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	i
Certification	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Plates	xii
List of Figures	xiv
List of Appendices	xv
Glossary	xvi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1	Background to the Study	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem	11
1.3	Research Questions	12
1.4	Aim and Objectives	13
1.5	Scope of the Study	13
1.6	Justification of the Study	13
1.7	Significance of the Study	14
1.8	Definition of Terms	15
1.9	Limitations of Study	16

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1	Festival: Meaning, Forms and Significance	18
2.2	Culture: Meanings, Significance and Elements	24
2.3	Festival and Theatre	32
2.4	A cursory Look at Traditional Phases of Traditional Performance in Nigeria	35
2.5	Festival, Colonial Encounter and Cultural Identity	41
2.6	Cultural Transformation and the Challenges of Modernity and	

	Globalization	44
2.7	Hunting Performance in Igboland/Hunting and the Igbo	45
2.8	Theoretical Framework	47

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1	Research Design	52
3.2	Study Area	53
3.3	Study Population	53
3.4	Sampling	54
3.4.1	Sample Size	54
3.4.2	Sampling Technique	55
3.5	Sources of Data	57
3.5.1	Primary Methods of Data Collection	57
3.5.2	Secondary Methods of Data Collection	58
3.6	Research Instruments	58
3.7	Data Analysis	58

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1	Geographical Location of Irete Autonomous Community	60
4.1.1	Infrastructure and Institutions	61
4.1.2	Primary Schools	61
4.1.3	Secondary Schools	61
4.1.4	Churches	61
4.1.5	Health Centre	61
4.1.6	Population	62
4.1.7	Agriculture	62
4.1.8	Markets	62
4.1.9	Industries	62
4.2	Origin of Irete People	62
4.2.1	Order of Irete Kindred	63
4.2.2	Irete Kindred and Village Formation	66

4.2.3	Occupation	67
4.3	Belief System and Ancestral Worship	67
4.3.1	Deities in Irete	68
4.4	The Family System in Irete	72
4.4.1	Umunna	73
4.4.2	Opara	74
4.4.3	Ndi Ngboto	75
4.5	Traditional Institutions/Leadership	75
4.5.1	Ndi Oki	76
4.5.2	Ndi Oha	77
4.5.3	The Council of Ndi Nze	77
4.5.4	Onye Ishi Ala (Chief Priest)	78
4.5.5	Onye Ishi Ogbohodu	79
4.6	Colonial Administration and the introduction of Warrant Chiefs among the Igbo	81
4.6.1	The Emergence of Irete Community Development Union (ICDU)	84
4.6.2	The Aladimma Ndom Irete	87
4.6.3	Irete Youth Association	87
4.6.4	Political Structure of Irete Community	87
4.6.5	The Eze Institution	88
4.6.6	The Eze Title and Nature	89
4.6.7	The Functions of the Eze	89
4.6.8	Judicial Rights of the Traditional Institutions and Individuals for Peace- Making in Irete	90
4.7	Inter Communal Wars	90
4.7.1	Land Acquisition and Ownership Pattern in Irete	91
4.8	Osu Caste system: Its abolition in Irete	91
4.9	Cultural Festivals and Ceremonies in Irete	93
4.9.1	Iro Ihe- New Yam Celebration	93
4.9.2	Ogwugwu Festival in Irete- Thanksgiving	94
4.9.3	Igba Mgba Festival - Traditional Wrestling Festival	94

4.9.4	<i>Nta</i> Festival	-	Traditional Hunting Festival	95
4.9.5	Okorosha	-	Masquerade Festival	96
4.9.6	Akuko Ifo	-	Folktales	96
4.9.7	Birth of a child in Irete			97
4.9.8	Igba Nkwu	-	Traditional Marriage	98
4.9.9	Ikwa Ozu	-	Burial Ceremony in Irete	99
4.10	Oji	-	Kolanut	100
4.11	Taboos in Irete			100
4.12	<i>Nta</i> Irete and Cultural Transformation			101
4.13	<i>Nta</i> : The Ideological Context			101
4.14	Igba <i>Nta</i> (Festival) in the Traditional Context			106
4.14.1	Ima <i>Nta</i> (Announcement of the Commencement of the Holy Period)			106
4.14.2	Ije Nkolo – Visit to Nkolo Forest			109
4.14.3	Okpe <i>Nta</i>	-	Appeasing the gods	110
4.14.4	Igba <i>Nta</i>	-	Hunting Expedition	111
4.14.5	<i>Nta</i> Festival (Performance)			111
4.14.6	Ikpola <i>Nta</i> - The Return of Ofo Nta			112
4.15	Hybridity in <i>Nta</i> Festival and Its Justification			113
4.16	The Context of Dynamics in <i>Nta</i> Performance			117
4.17	<i>Nta</i> Festival and Cultural Transformation, Identity and Development			119
4.18	<i>Nta</i> Festivals of 2017 and 2018			121
4.18.1	<i>Nta</i> Festival of 2017			121
4.18.2	<i>Nta</i> Festival of 2018			153
4.19	Challenges Encountered in the Reconstructed <i>Nta</i> Festival			167
4.19.1	The People’s Perception towards <i>Nta</i>			169
4.19.2	Power Tussle in Various Quarters			169
4.19.3	Finance			170
4.19.4	Climate Challenges			170
4.19.5	Bad Roads			170
4.19.6	Security Challenges			171

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1	Summary	172
5.2	Conclusion	175
5.3	Recommendations	176
5.4	Contributions to Knowledge	177
	References	179
	Appendices	187

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 4.1:	The researcher and Pa Victor Ojjieme with some members of his family during an oral interview, January, 2017	65
Plate4.2:	The Eze being crowned as first king of Irete community by Reverend Father A.J.V. Obinna the ArchBishop of Owerri Catholic Diocese, Imo State.	123
Plate 4.3:	The Eze and Ugoeze	126
Plate 4.4:	Programme of Events during the Eze’s coronation	128
Plate 4.5:	HRH Eze Ethelbert Ekwelibe, first King of Irete Community	130
Plate 4.6:	The Eze making a speech at the <i>Nta</i> Festival of 2017	133
Plate 4.7:	Members of the Eze cabinet representing the eighteen kindred during <i>Nta</i> Festival of 2017	135
Plate 4.8:	Chief Benjamin Umanze, official MC of the Palace	137
Plate 4.9:	Members of various villages under their canopies at the 2017 <i>Nta</i> festival	139
Plate 4.10:	Members of various villages under their canopies at the 2017 <i>Nta</i> festival	141
Plate 4.11:	Members of various villages under their canopies at the 2017 <i>Nta</i> festival	143
Plate 4.12:	The Chairman is seen giving his opening remarks during <i>Nta</i> Festival, 2017	145
Plate 4.13:	Some VIPs at the <i>Nta</i> festival of 2017	147
Plate 4.14:	Professor Ralph Ononogbo delivering his lecture during <i>Nta</i> of 2017	149
Plate 4.15:	The Women of Irete during the cooking competition of <i>Nta</i> 2017	152
Plate 4.16:	A procession to the venue of the festival	154
Plate 4.17:	Chief Isaac Ugorji receiving his certificate of award from the Eze	156
Plate 4.18:	One of the Chieftaincy title Recepients being decorated with the title ‘ Anyanwuoma Nke Irete’ by Eze Ekwelibe	158
Plate 4.19:	Chief Barrister David Orji being awarded a Chieftaincy Title	160
Plate 4.20:	Chief Professor Andrew Igwenma also awarded a Chieftaincy title	162

Plate 4.21:	Book launched during the <i>Nta</i> of 2018	164
Plate 4.22:	Masquerade performances at the <i>Nta</i> Festival of 2018	166
Plate 4.23:	Cultural displays at the <i>Nta</i> Festival of 2018	168

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Map of Nigeria showing Imo State (Source: Ministry of Land and Housing, Oyo State).	4
Figure 1.2: Map of Imo State Showing Owerri (Source Owerri West L.G.A)	6
Figure 1.3: Map of Owerri West Local Government Area Showing Irete (Source Owerri West L.G.A)	8
Figure 4.1: Triangle of Relationships	70

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix I; Anthem
- Appendix II: Irete Motto
- Appendix iii: Mass booked at the Holy Family Catholic Church, Irete, by the Eze for a Successful *Nta* Festival in 2017
- Appendix iv: Official Invitation to *NTA* of 2017
- Appendix v: *Nta* 2017 programme of Events
- Appendix vi: Speech by the Eze during *Nta* festival of 2017
- Appendix vii: *Nta* 2018 programme of Events
- Appendix viii: Some Villages Submissions on the Abolition of Osu Caste System
- Appendix ix: Certificate of Recognition as Eze of autonomous community in Irete
- Appendix x: Letter of Request for Recognition and Issurance of Staff of Office
- Appendix xi: Letter stating the Autonomous Status for Irete Town
- Appendix xii: Projected population figure for Irete Autonomous Community in Owerri West Local Government Area
- Appendix xiii: Letter stating the stand on the creation of New Autonomous Communities in Umunwaoha to Imo State Governor
- Appendix xiv: Letter stating the stand on the creation of New Autonomous Communities in Umunwaoha to the Secretary
- Appendix xv: Letter of Request for autonomy to the Commissioner Chieftaincy Affairs, Imo State

Glossary of Igbo words as used in this thesis

<i>Nta</i>	hunting
<i>Ubiam</i>	the last son of Nwaoha, the ancestor of the Irete people
<i>Ofo Nwakparaku</i>	also called Ofo Ukwu. Among Nwaoha's descendants, this is the most revered spiritual staff of authority
<i>Ofo Nta</i>	staff of authority used during the <i>Nta</i> festival
<i>Igba Nta</i>	hunting expedition
<i>Ala</i>	patron god of Irete and the protector of lives and property
<i>Ogbohodu</i>	patron god of Irete, protector of children and god of war
<i>Ogwugwu</i>	deity worshipped in Irete, connected with harvest
<i>Igba ogwugwu</i>	Ogwugwu festival primarily connected with thanksgiving
<i>Iro ihe</i>	celebration of the new yam
<i>Igba Okorosha</i>	annual masquerade performances
<i>Igba Ngba</i>	annual traditional wrestling festival
<i>Oru owerri</i>	annual thanksgiving festival of the Owerri people
<i>Ita Okashi</i>	annual festival of the Emii people
<i>Owu</i>	annual masquerade festival of Amakaohia Ubi and environs
<i>Mmawun</i>	masquerade
<i>Eze</i>	king
<i>Ndi Oki</i>	council of elders
<i>Ndi Nze</i>	council of red cap chiefs
<i>Osu</i>	a Caste System in Igboland which describes a group of people as outcasts
<i>Eye nchi ato</i>	the three kindreds in charge of other kindreds in Irete
<i>Anyi elole ha</i>	we have swallowed them
<i>Nnenwachalu</i>	Mermaid Water Spirit
<i>Onye Ishi Ala</i>	Chief Priest of Ala
<i>Onye Ishi Ogbohodu</i>	Chief Priest of Ogbohodu
<i>Chukwu or Chineke</i>	Supreme God
<i>Umunna</i>	members of the same kindred
<i>Opara</i>	first son
<i>Ndi Ngboto</i>	married and unmarried daughters
<i>Ama – Ala</i>	council of law makers and enforcers
<i>Omu</i>	rafia palm
<i>Afor Irete</i>	Irete market day
<i>Igbo enwegh eze</i>	Igbos have no king
<i>Onitsha, Oguta, nri, Osomari, Arochukwu</i>	major towns in Igboland
<i>Igwe</i>	king
<i>Agubiam</i>	Nwaoha's last son and ancestor of the Irete people
<i>Ohu, Osu, and Umecaste</i>	systems qualifying slaves and outcasts

<i>Diala</i>	freeborn
<i>Iwa ji, Iri ji, Iro ihe or Ifejioku</i>	different names of the new yam festival according to towns in Igboland.
<i>Okuko</i>	exchange of words
<i>Okpe Nta</i>	appeasing the gods by the Onye Ishi Ala upon his return from Nkolo forest
<i>Ikpola Nta</i>	return of the Ofo <i>Nta</i> to Umuguma village after the festival ends
<i>Ibi oro</i>	synchronized shouts of joy by women when their daughter or daughter in law delivers a child
<i>Iwu ji</i>	cooking of yam
<i>Igba Nkwu</i>	traditional marriage ceremony
<i>Iku Aka</i>	first call to the family of a bride to be
<i>Imeego</i>	the process of paying dowry
<i>Ikwa ozu</i>	burial ceremony
<i>Ndi Ndom</i>	Wives
<i>Onye we ere oji, we ere ndu</i>	he who brings kola brings life
<i>Una</i>	a specie of yam forbidden in Irete
<i>Onye meru ru ala</i>	one who has desecrated the land
<i>kwa ala</i>	make sacrifices to appease the gods
<i>Ilu ogu</i>	fight
<i>Ije Nkolo</i>	visit to the Nkolo forest
<i>Oji</i>	long metal staff with bells, a symbol of authority often carried by titled men in Igbo land
<i>Utaka naUkwu Anuone</i>	leg and half the hip of an animal
<i>Orie</i>	a market day in Igbo calendar
<i>Onye ahu owu onye olee?</i>	where is that person from?
<i>Owu onye Irete</i>	he is from Irete
<i>Obi ga ri ndi nwe nyi nma na ebe anyi nu</i>	our ancestors will be happy with us
<i>Ihe Agwugwo</i>	a delicacy in Irete cuisine, mixed corn and beans cooked with palm oil
<i>Ogbohodu Ire'e pu'a ngaa m eme ya</i>	even if ogbohodu, the god of Irete comes here, I will not do it
<i>Abigolo</i>	waist dance
<i>Uri opi</i>	songs played using the traditional flute notable among the Igbo
<i>Onu na-erighi ihe a-gaghii ari ndu</i>	the mouth that does not eat will not be alive
<i>Oke mba</i>	great town
<i>Irete ji mma gbue enyi</i>	Irete used cutlass to kill Elephant
<i>Ugoeze</i>	wife of the Eze
<i>Umunna wu ike</i>	there is power in unity

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The Igbo people have always had a rich variety of festivals and dramatic performances, before the coming of the Europeans and, up until now. Such performances which include ritual activities at worship centres, masquerade performances, traditional dances and music etc are all geared towards a better relationship with their god, better understanding of their world and sometimes, mainly for entertainment purposes. These performances, which are also referred to in this study as traditional festivals, however, took a downward plunge during the years of colonialism and after. This has affected so many Igbo communities in different ways. Some of these communities having realised the need for a community to have a common identity, which is a major function of such traditional performances, have been in the duty of resuscitating this aspect of their culture.

For some, however, it has not been very easy. This is the case with Irete Autonomous Community, which is still grappling with reviving one of its major traditional performances, the *Nta* Festival.

Cudny (2016: 641) quotes Emile Durkheim as describing 'feasts and festivals' as an effervescence the intensity of which cements the solidarity of a group or a people, a representation of the invisible relationships between man and the laws of nature, a veritable institution whereby the bonds between the members of a society are maintained, regenerated and reproduced'.

Similarly, Meki Nzewi (1979: 18) propounds:

Traditional drama is a commonly derived drama. It is not one person's creative genius. It was integrated into the programme of its community's corporate being. It was an essential, if not mandatory cardinal in life, not a peripheral and optional condiment in the lives of members of its audience.

The above postulations show clearly some salient issues which have been unraveled in this study. They clearly reveal the meaning of traditional drama and festivals and, provide pointers towards appreciating features of traditional performances and festivals. From these statements, it is obvious that traditional performances and festivals evolved from the belief, worldview and general circumstances of a community and not a product of an individual imagination. It is not a script written by a person or a group of people but a tradition or model handed down from generation to generation. The roots of some traditional festivals are immemorial, speculative, based on myths, legends, folklore or epochal events in the life of the people. Participation in traditional drama is mandatory, often involving all members of the community. It is communal and most often done for the purpose of supplication and purgation. Traditional drama is a festival as well as a rite of passage.

This is because traditional drama and traditional festivals have the same functions. In the African world, a festival is a communal event which may take from a day to months to complete its enactment. It usually involves certain rituals, rites and other religious or spiritual performances. It is not done for the purpose of mere entertainment but for the purpose of intervention by the gods in the life of the people collectively and individually. For the sake of consistency, this study used festival and performance interchangeably. This is because festivals are also performances. Festivals are performed. Festivals can be a day affair or a period set aside to commemorate, ritually celebrate or re-enact, an event (agricultural, religious, socio-cultural) which gives meaning to an individual and to the religious, political, or socioeconomic community. In some communities, festivals are very symbolic to their culture; they might be celebrated for ritualistic purposes or a historical commemoration of the founding of the community. However, in other places it might just be for purely ceremonial purposes; a day set to honour a very important personality. For ritualistic purposes, beliefs are attached; Malomo and Gbilekaa quote Ogunba (1993: 14) as saying that:

Traditional festival is an indigenous institution, a form of art nurtured on the African soil over the centuries and whose techniques are sometimes different from the borrowed ones now practiced by many of our contemporary artists.

The statement simply means that African traditional festivals serve as African methods of remembering who they are, and seen as means of enriching their culture. It also implies that traditional African festivals are, in fact, one of the primordial artistic institutions for Africans. Festivals have often times been referred to as traditional theatre. Meki Nzewi (1979: 6) commenting on the significance of traditional festival in the life of the people says:

Traditional theatre was an integral part of the life style and social religious system of affirmation of the themes of living and dying in order to vitalise or regenerate the issues of survival in a community. It was a transcendental artistic medium for effecting communal, as well as, probes the mystique of human existence.

From the statement above, it shows that traditional festivals also serve the purpose of entertainment even though they are essentially done for religious purposes. This shows that it has a dual purpose or function. This is why they usually involve dance, music, acrobatic displays and performances that are dramatic. It also involves the use of almost all the technical elements of a conventional western drama. There is the use of special costumes and make-ups, props, sets as well as special performance venue. This is not surprising because as shall be revealed, drama has its root in traditional festivals. The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre (2002) states that “the origin of drama can be traced to the celebratory music of 6th century BC Attica, the Greek region centered in Athens. Oscar Brockett (1964: 14) also confirms that drama emerged from the celebration of Dionysus, the god of wine during a performance called Dithyramb.

Still following the same line of thought, Edwin Wilson (2007: 41) notes that:

In the middle ages, drama in vernacular languages of Europe emerged from religious enactments of the liturgy. Mystery plays were presented on the porch of the churches. Religious aspect of the church began to degrade, because the congregation was more interested in the drama rather than the service itself. Conclusions were made by the church that drama should be thrown out of the church, and by so doing it fell in the hands of guilds that saw it as a lucrative profession thereby losing its cultural value. Although they emanated from a purely religious cult, they became a purely entertainment group. Though still wearing their masks, they now performed solely on occasions and for purely entertainment purposes and self reliance.



Figure 1.1: Map of Nigeria showing Imo State

Source: Ministry of Land and Housing, Oyo State

Irete is a community located in the south eastern part of Nigeria. It is on longitude E and latitude W. It is one of the communities which make up the Owerri-West Local Government Area of Imo State which consists of 18 villages or kindreds. The constituent villages in order of seniority, tradition and sharing are as follows:

- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Umueye | 2. Umuelele | 3. Umunweju | 4. Umunjo |
| 5. Umuoba | 6. Umumbe | 7. Umunkweye | 8. Umuagwu |
| 9. Umuohia | 10. Umungada | 11. Umungwenakoroche | 12. Umuedi |
| 13. Umunwanlo | 14. Umuakum | 15. Umuigolo | 16. Umuorieji |
| 17. Umuodumbogbo | | 18. Umuezeduru | |



Figure 1.2: Map of Imo State Showing Owerri
Source: Owerri West L.G.A

Irete community is located half kilometers away from Owerri control post along Owerri-Onitsha road. It has an estimated area of 130 square kilometers. It is bounded on the North by Owerri main town, on the East by Amakohia Uratta, Akwakuma and Egbeada, on the south by Orogwe and Ohi and, on the North West by Ndegwu.

According to oral accounts, the origin of Irete has been traced to two sources. While both stories agree that Irete was the youngest of the five sons of Nwaoha who is the father of Ohigide, Ogwe, Egwu, Nkowu-Ohia and Ubiam (oral sources), they however differ on the original place of migration of Nwaoha before his present abode.

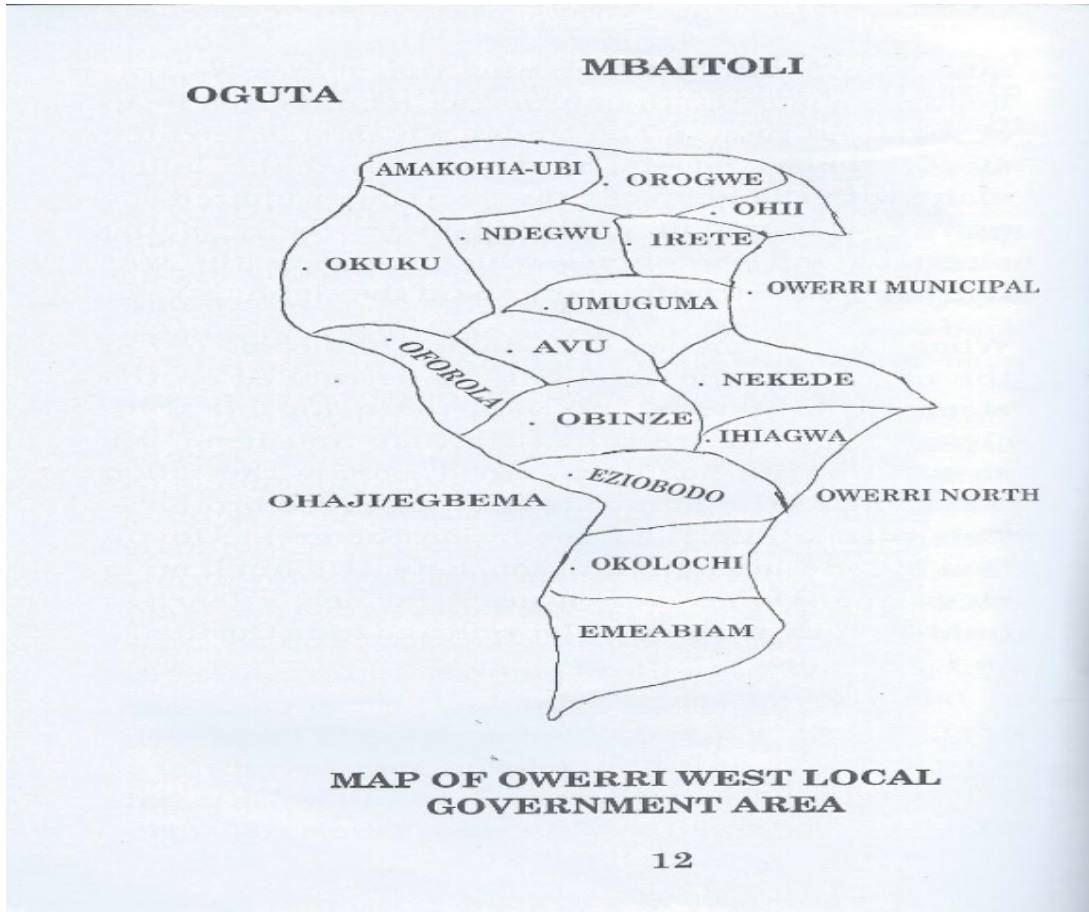


Figure 1.3: Map of Owerri West Local Government Area Showing Irete
Source: Owerri West L.G.A

The five descendants of Nwaoha are referred to as Umu Nwaoha and are today, the ancestors of the five communities that constitute Umu Nwaoha. Ohigide, the first son of Nwaoha is the ancestor of the Ohi community, Ogwe the ancestor of the Orogwe community, Egwu is that of Ndegwu, Nkowu Ohia the ancestor of Amakaohia ubi and Ubiam last son and the ancestor of the Irete people.

Oral sources have it that Nwaoha migrated from Arochukwu and settled in the region where we have the Aboha village in present day Ohi. The other story has it that Nwaoha migrated from Owaelu in the present day Uratta in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State.

Even though, Ubiam was the last son of Nwaoha, he is said to have enjoyed a great deal of love and attention from his father. So much that his father had bestowed on him blessings to keep him from the oppression and hatred of his elder brothers because Nwaoha believed that Ubiam was his father re-incarnate.

Nwaoha bestowed on Ubiam the greatest and most revered spiritual staff of authority *Ofo Ukwu* called 'Ofo Nwakparaku' and the 'Ofo *Nta*' used during the *Igba Nta* Festival among Nwaoha's five descendants.

The *Ofo Ukwu* and the *Ofo Nta* are both significant in that they politically, spiritually and socially endowed the holder with prominence among its fellow communities.

These staffs bestowed gave Ubiam descendants political eminence, most especially in pre-colonial times and, is used till today during the *Nta* hunting performance in Irete. The community shares boundaries on the North by Umuguma, the east by Orogwe and Akawkuma on the west by Okwukwu and on the south by Ndegwu.

Just as life has death as its opposite, so tradition is often said to be opposite to innovation and modernity. But just as within Christianity and other religions there is life in or after death, so there is a "tradition of innovation," as in contemporary Western art traditions, or there may equally be the "innovation of tradition," as in the commonly referred to "re-invention of tradition".

Tradition was the name given to those cultural features which, in situations of change, were to be continued, to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not lost. The people of Irete, like most other communities in Southeast Nigeria had social and religious

ceremonies, performances and festivals which the people had participated in ever before the colonial masters arrived on the shores of Nigeria. While some of these practices still remain with the people and, highly reconstructed to meet current realities, some have become extinct. The people of Irete worshipped '*Ala*' and '*Ogbohodu*', the patron gods of Irete. *Ala* is the protector of lives and property while *Ogbohodu* is the principal god of Irete, protector of children and god of war.

Today, however, the people of Irete are predominantly Christians, with a vast majority in the Catholic faith, and just a handful still involved in traditional worship. The life of the Irete people before the advent of Christianity was conditioned by traditional religion. This religion was and still is characterised by very subtle ritual ceremonies consisting of prayers and sacrifices to the gods and goddesses of the land. They have different deities such as '*Ogwugwu*' deity who is connected with harvest and usually invoked before *Ogwugwu* festival starts

The different chief priests and priestesses were those who acted as intermediaries between these gods and their kin group. As earlier mentioned, Irete community had several traditional and cultural performances and festivals which today are either extinct or have been modified, mainly because the new and prevalent religion of the day has termed them heathenic and fetish, and to be thrown away.

Owusu Frempong (2005: 741) corroborates this point as he states that, 'to maintain its superiority, Christianity has ridiculed African culture and prevented many contemporary Africans from joining in traditional festivals'.

No doubt, festivals play the important roles of adding structure to our social lives, and connecting us with our families and backgrounds. Mbefo (1989:25) further comments on what has happened to African beliefs and practices of which the Igbo society is one:

...modern Africans have become an adulterated type. Their experience of western education has weakened their allegiance to their traditional heritage. After over a century of European adventurism and missionary activity, very little remains of the original and traditional institutions that gave security and confidence...

Before 1980, Irete witnessed annual festivals such as Igba Ngba (annual traditional wrestling festival), Iro Ihe (a celebration of the new yam), Igba Okorosha (annual masquerade performances), Igba Ogwugwu (annual thanksgiving celebrations) and Igba *Nta* (annual hunting festival) and a few others. Of all these festivals, *Nta* is currently experiencing reconstruction and resurgence. It has been remodeled and celebrated twice since the first autonomous Eze of Irete came on board in 2013. Whether in a deliberate effort to keep *Nta* going or because of its resilience, *Nta* Irete has undergone transformation. As Riane Eisler (1988: 6) wrote, “It is certainly true that our world has been changing very fast over the last few hundred years’. Irete is not exempted from this change. Cultural performances and festivals play a very important role in the society as they promote communal unity, transmitting cultural education and preserving cultural heritage. The various investigations carried out during the field trips points to the fact that the people of Irete are aware, in the face of growing globalisation trends, characterising the world as a whole, that for *Nta* to remain, it would require reconstruction and transformation.

Festivals are an expressive way to celebrate glorious heritage, culture and traditions.

Aside from this deliberate attempt at reviving *Nta*, the performance in nature is resilient. Otherwise, it would have been completely wiped out. During the years between 1980 and 2013, *Nta* was still being observed by the Chief Priest and a handful of followers, albeit, on a low key. This resilient nature of *Nta* is another area that this study has examined. Brian Walker and David salt (2006: viii) encapsulate that ‘Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic function and structure’. This is so true of *Nta* Hunting performance of the Irete people. *Nta* in itself embraced change, and change is the heart of resilience.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nta hunting performance has been an important aspect of the life of the Irete people from ancient times. However, from early 1980s to 2013, there has been a decline in the participation in *Nta* by the people. This decline and, in some cases, outright abandonment has caused the neglect of the norms and values this festival has

institutionalised. There is need, therefore, for a reconstruction and repackaging of the *Nta* festival to preserve ethnic identity and promote tourism in Irete and Igboland in general. Hunting Performances are celebrated by various communities in Igboland. It is an age long tradition. This is because hunting is an occupation in all parts of the world. People earn their living from it. Researchers have written articles discussing Igbo festivals, but, there is inadequate scholarly coverage of *Nta* festival performance. The new development of reconstruction is yet to be captured by scholars writing about the *Nta* festival. While Ugonna (1981) analysed the various forms of Igbo festivals, he called for standardising their mode of celebration. Taking in the religious significance of the New Yam festival to the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, Ukachukwu (2007) employed Christian religious leaders in these areas to incorporate the festival rituals into Christian worship to boost inculcation of African culture. Ikechukwu Okodo gives a historical account of the Egbenuoba hunting performance (2012: 134) and asserts that in Abatete and its environs... 'hunters have dramatic performance known as Egbenuoba Performance. This comprises songs, miming and dance. Hunters sing songs as they assemble for expeditions. They perform fully on occasions which may be their feasts, community festivals or funeral rites of their members or great men who could be war heroes'. Similarly, Ekwelibe (2017) presented a historical account of the people of Irete and only discussed the *Nta* festival and its forms as handed down from generation to generation. The current reconstruction of *Nta* festival, the processes involved, the rationale for the reconstruction and the cultural revival ongoing in Irete was largely ignored in his and other works. As a result, the major challenge of this study is to examine how *Nta* is been reconstructed, determine the rationale for the reconstruction, focusing on the processes involved, its reception to transformation in response to social change and the ways it continues to negotiate its relevance in the present among Irete people.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the history of *Nta* in Irete community?
2. What is the social significance of the Festival to Irete community?
3. How has the performance culture responded to cultural encounters such as western civilisation and Christianity?

4. How has it yielded to transformation as a survival strategy and response to social change?
5. How does the festival retain its relevance in the present among Irete people?

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the study is to examine the processes of resilience and change in *Nta* Festival among the Irete People of Southeastern Nigeria

The objectives are to:

1. Examine the history of *Nta* Festival in Irete community.
2. Determine the social significance of the festival to the Irete community.
3. Explore the various ways through which the performance continues to retain its essence since the advent of modernity.
4. Investigate the reception of the festival to transformation in response to social change.
5. Examine the ways it continues to negotiate its relevance in the present among Irete people.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study examined the resilient nature of *Nta* Festival and how it is being affected by Cultural Transformation. It carried out a careful observation of the form of this new *Nta* and how this transformation aims at presenting and preserving the Irete identity and culture and, ultimately, that of the Igbo. The focus of this study, therefore, lingered mainly on the transformation processes of *Nta*. This is itself symbolic of cultural transformation.

1.6 Justification of the Study

Festivals are re-current religious drama which features at regular intervals among the people.

Opoku (1990: 71) submits:

Festivals are rituals which recur at regular intervals and which have as their purpose the expression of beliefs held by a particular community. There is also the conscious

expectation that certain very specific ends will come about as a result of the performance of the festivals and the performance is motivated by the desire to gain some form of satisfaction and is expected to be effected. Festivals take place at special times set aside by a community in order to commemorate some events of historical, cultural or religious significance and by the performance of certain rituals; such events are re-enacted, giving both individual and the communities a sense of meaning and cohesiveness.

Generally speaking, there has been a considerable amount of study as regards festivals in Nigeria generally and, in Igboland, specifically. In the Owerri axis of Southeast Nigeria where Irete is located, scholarly articles about festivals abound, but, the same cannot be said about festivals in Irete autonomous community.

These festivals play a key role in bonding the people. *Nta* festival which has played a key role in forming the cultural identity of all Irete indigene can hardly be read about like one will find about festivals of neighboring communities such as the ‘Oru owerri’, ‘Ita Okashi’ of the Emii people and ‘Owu’ of Amakaohia Ubi to mention a few. While these traditional festivals and performances have been widely studied, the *Nta* has not been given that kind of scholarly attention. Granted that the dominant force of modernity and civilisation have all conspired to reduce the potency and participation in most African festivals, *Nta*, not exempted, a scientific study of the *Nta* Performance will go a long way in bringing to the fore the significance of the festival. Therefore, this study, it is hoped, will not only bridge this lacuna but, also help in fostering an understanding of such a performance to the people, thereby making a deliberate effort at its reconstruction and resurgence.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study brings to the fore the effects of modernity on traditional African performances such as *Nta* Irete. It looks at its resilient nature and efforts at revival and transformation of this culture of the Irete people and ultimately, Igbo people. Furthermore, the study investigates the hybrid nature *Nta* is assuming by infusing western culture into indigenous culture so as to survive extinction and remain relevant, promoting Igbo identity and culture. This study also looks at how the *Nta* festival attracts more

participation and leaning towards becoming an internationally embraced celebration. Therefore, this study makes suggestions as to how stakeholders in *Nta* festival can plan properly in an efficient and adequate way to enhance the sustainability of the festival. Hence, this study, it is hoped, will be of benefit to the traditional leadership of Irete community, members of Irete Community Development Union, Government establishments in the culture and tourism sector in Owerri axis, Political office holders representing Owerri zone in particular and, Imo state at large and, other stakeholders. It will be a meaningful contribution to the already existing literature on the sustainability of festivals in Igboland and serve as a valuable material for scholars and the public.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Certain keywords were adopted in this research, thus, to guide against ambiguity and difficulty in understanding the terms and concepts used, this section is dedicated to definition of terms and key words.

Nta Irete

This is a community hunting expedition of the people of Irete- an autonomous community located in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo state. It was one of the cultural festivals bequeathed to the five descendants of Nwaoha (the ancestral father of Irete). The performance serves both spiritual and entertainment purposes and is pivotal in forming a social identity for the people of Irete.

Igba Nta

This refers to the processes involved in achieving *Nta*. Such processes as visits to the forest, announcements of notice of *Nta* to the community, invitation to hunters from Irete and its environs, songs, dances and merriment etc are what make up the processes of *Igba Nta*.

Ofo Nta

This is the spiritual staff of authority which was given to Ubiam, the youngest son of Nwaoha and the ancestor of Irete by his father. This *Ofo* is politically and spiritually significant among the five sons of Nwaoha in that it bestows on the holder leadership roles. This *Ofo* which was supposed to be given to the oldest son, Ohigide, according to Igbo traditional norms and values, was instead given to Ubiam, the youngest of

Nwaoha's five sons and the father of Irete (oral sources). This caused Irete serious animosity from his brothers. However, the two essential staffs of authority of Nwaoha, Ofo Ukwu and Ofo *Nta* are till today located in Irete, with the Umuogbunda lineage in Umueye village, where the present and first autonomous Eze of Irete hails from.

Festivals

Festivals are significant aspects of our culture as a people. All festivals are cultural in one way or another. There are many types of cultural festivals. Sacred and profane rituals are often mixed in the same festivals.

They all serve the purpose of bringing happiness to our lives and strengthening our sense of community.

In favourable cases the participants of a festival recognise each as participants and develop a group identity or a group feeling, start to interact and thus enhance the experience of the event.

Hauptfleisch et al (2007: 20) in the above statement reiterates the point that festivals manage to bring people physically and emotionally together and bring a lot of meaning to life. This study attempts an extensive definition of festival drawn from previous researches so as to facilitate a better understanding of the study.

1.9 Limitations of Study

The major limitation of this study emanates from the division among the Irete people. There had been agitations for government to further break up the community into two autonomous groups. Irete autonomous community is ruled by Eze Ethelbert Chukwudi Ekwelibe, Agubiam 1. Under his domain are eighteen villages which make up Irete autonomous Community, however, the Ezi Irete bloc, feel that the Eze should have come from their place since they claim to be the senior in the order of seniority. This Ezeship rancor was the reason why Irete did not have autonomy for a long time. When it finally gained autonomy, because it could not come up with an Eze, it lost out on so many things it could have benefitted as an autonomous community especially, from the government. The Ezeship tussle has brought division among the two factions of Amaikpu and Ezi Irete blocs. This has affected the smooth running of the community including the *Nta* festival as some aggrieved members of the Ezi Irete bloc will not have anything to do

with the Eze Agubiam, but, instead agitate for their own autonomy. This was a limitation to the study as some stakeholders from the aggrieved bloc did not participate in the two festivals observed by the researcher.

Similarly, the Onye Ishi Ala, the Chief Priest of Irete, Kelechi Ekwelibe, who happens to be the cousin of the present Eze feels that the appointment of the Eze is a duplication of his duty. As the Chief Priest, he is in charge of the *Nta* festival and he alone can set and announce the date of the *Nta* after due consultations with the gods and his ancestors. Because of the rift between them, *Nta* is not celebrated jointly by the two of them. Rather, the Onye Ishi Ala and the Eze Agubiam 1 celebrate *Nta* separately. The researcher had to run back and forth from one venue to the other to gather data and supervise the field assistants. This was a major limitation.

Another limitation to the study borders on the issue of some of the respondents and field assistants asking to be ‘appreciated’ before giving the researcher audience. Most times, the researcher had to buy gifts and give out money to have access to the interviewees or fix meetings.

Access to most places in Irete was another limitation as the roads are all in deplorable condition.

Power was another limitation as Irete had issues with electric supply most of the times the researcher visited. This took quality time from the work as research instruments such as telephones and camera had to be recharged from time to time. This caused a lot of distractions and slowed down the data collection process.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deals with the examination of several researches which have been carried out by others on related subject of this study. This helped the researcher to identify the gap in knowledge. It also examines the theoretical framework adopted for this study.

2.1 Festival: Meaning, Forms, and Significance

Various scholars have defined festival in different ways. According to Oyin Ogunba in Ogunbiyi (1981: 67):

Festival is an integral, dynamic part of the culture of an unalienated African, an occasion to which he responds spontaneously. It should also be noted that these ceremonial activities (festivals) are handed down from generation down to generation, a new generation might now decide to create a new way on how it would be staged, the moving from the primitive age down to the era of the moment. It is this cycle of performances that evokes much history of the community.

Festivals like culture are a means of identifying a people. It is an integral part of culture. It is a tradition that sometimes takes its root from myths and beliefs of the people. Likewise, Adegbite (2010: 133) maintains that, 'festival can be said to be an event usually and ordinarily staged by a local community that focuses on the unique aspect of that community'.

It is a period when a people come together to celebrate, feast and be part of a collective effort for the progress of the community and its people. Okpoko (1990: 130) corroborates this point as he opines that, 'festivals generally are characterised by spectacular displays, enjoyment of music, food and wine. People express their happiness through dance'.

This definition gives credence to the belief that festival is mainly merrymaking. Some scholars have also argued that festivals are held in memory of the divinities to re-enact important events of the past. Oduyoye (1983: 150) points out that:

Their significance lies in the fact that they illustrate among other things, historical events, coming of age, harvesting of crops and appeasement to various gods for protection against enemies, evil or epidemic disease.

Festival is not an event involving just a person or a group of friends. It is a communal event involving a community. At various times in the year, traditional festivals are held in many parts of West Africa. The festivals mark the history and life of the people, and many beliefs are associated with them. Their significance lies in the fact that they illustrate among other things, the day to day living and life of a people. Festivals re-enact the things of the past, the rites of passage and, are the vehicles used in carrying the placations of the people to the various gods for protection and provision. They also give expression to the people's happiness or otherwise. At the celebration of these festivals, local communities display traditional dances to show how they pray or worship, wed, mark a victory day, welcome royalty, honour the dead, invoke God's blessings, welcome a new baby, cause rainfall or stop it, safeguard community's health in time of epidemics and thank their deity for a fruitful harvest.

According to Amankulor (1987: 31)

Festival is a periodic or occasional celebration, merrymaking or feast day of special significance in the cultural calendar of the celebrants. However the festival which may involve one or more activities is an occasion for the general merriment or rejoicing. During this celebration, the celebrant throws the doors to his house or community open to all visitors and well-wishers who intends to celebrate with him or her. This serves as a sign of friendship and goodwill. The festival period is therefore a social occasion for communal celebration, it is a periodic recurring time of gaiety or rejoicing set aside by a community, tribe or clan for the observance of sacred celebration and the traditional performance of special significance.

He encapsulates (1987: 17) that:

Festivals are regular features in traditional African societies. Some derive their origins from cultural and religious practices of the people, some of which are organised around nature forces, deities, divinities, or supernatural events, myths and legends

According to Martin Banham, festivals can take different forms and can merge both the ritual and secular elements at the same time. He propounds (2004: 5):

It is also the total presentation that is to be regarded as traditional African festival or drama. In traditional Africa, the great artistic institution is the festival. Contrary to popular understanding, festival is not just a religious occasion; if it were, it would hardly command more than a tiny fraction of the interest it generates among the people. In most cases, every festival is attached to a supernatural being or deified ancestor and to that extent may be said to be religiously inspired. But in its realisation a festival's religious origin or foundation is too often and easily overcome, the festival thereby becoming a veritable carnival, dance drama or ritual drama. But not all festivals are ritualistic in nature; some are just ordinary; what can be referred to as secular festival. Secular festivals tend not to attach any belief towards its action, its main purpose of performance is for celebration reasons. A typical example of such festivals is the Northern festival called Durbar. This festival is done annually among the people of Sokoto in the northern part of Nigeria.

Banham (2004:3) continues:

In many West African countries today, except those already totally overrun by foreign religions, traditional festivals are performed from time to time. Such ceremonies are woven around diverse beings and physical phenomena ranging from powerful gods and goddesses to hill and water spirits and the generality of illustrious ancestors. This is particularly true of West Africa where local gods, goddesses and spirits have continued to thrive in spite of the great challenge of modern civilisation and foreign culture. African festivals are, therefore, often described as either orgy of merriments or a string of weird, primitive sacrifices and dances.

Oyin Ogunba (1981: 67) asserts that:

Traditional African festival is an indigenous cultural institution, a form of art nurtured on the African soil over the centuries and which has, therefore, developed distinctive features and whose techniques are totally different from our contemporary artists.

He argues further that 'Traditional African Festivals' are still much alive today in many parts of the African continents separate from the art forms of Western inspiration. It is the only institution that has the framework which can coordinate virtually all art forms, and that each festival is important. A festival may last for a considerable time which may be three, seven, nine, or sixteen days or even a month. Each tends to have a story or myth to perform and each makes use of its own peculiar style in the dramatic realisation of the story. He states further that the festival brings to light all the artistic forms in the community. These art forms or elements are interdependent. An artistic weaving together of these elements enhances the audience appreciation of the dramatic enactment.

Martin Banham (2004: 56) posits that festival:

...has the capacity to integrate diverse elements of communication and entertainment, including dance, masquerade, mime, music and songs. Its language can be verbal, musical or physical, or all at the drama to communicate and entertain through a juxtaposition of different elements- dance, movements, mask, songs, etc.

All these elements have their own significance. Most religious festivals are traditional festivals. Iye and Aluede (2007 cited in Adegbite2010) have defined African traditional festival as being:

Propitiatory, sacrificial and laudatory ceremonies by means of which Africa's ethnic groups acknowledge the blessings of the supreme creator, the lesser deities and ancestral spirits, manifested in good health, good harvest and children (p. 133-134)

This means that festivals carry rituals and, the rituals embedded in festivals are used to appease the powers which are higher than man.

However, Ogunba (1993: 45) again notes that:

When one watches an African festival, which is the chief physical and metaphysical representation of African religion, the dominant impression is often found to be humanistic rather than religious. There is a relish of life and living, a spontaneous and frank preference for this life rather than the life to come. This would appear to be at variance with conventional notions of a religious-life with its emphasis on resignation, moral upliftment or the prospect of a paradise hereafter.

With this statement, Ogunba indicates a hedonistic nature of festivals. Africans are a very religious people. They are guided by their beliefs. The beliefs determine their conducts and interrelationship. In the same vein, Getz (2010:47) opines that, 'festivals are cultural celebrations and have always occupied special place in societies'.

He postulates further, 'people create festivals for specific purposes and one's experience of festival provides personal meaning.

On his own part Parrinder (1990: 40) highlights the five-fold of African beliefs classification as follows:

- **Belief in God:** God is the core and cohesive factor of religion. He is highest and above the divinities. Apart from him other things in the religion are of little significance. All are from him, by him, for him, and responsible to him.
- **Belief in Divinities:** Divinities are divine beings in the sense that they derive from the supreme God. They serve God's will and help him in the theocratic control and maintenance of the universe. They also serve as intermediaries between God and man.
- **Belief in Spirits:** Spirits usually make natural phenomena their abode; although they are not bound with these material objects. They are separate and separable entities, and their being does not depend on the material objects which may be destroyed or replaced. The material objects are mainly channels through which the spirits are approached.
- **Belief in Ancestors:** Ancestors are no longer visible in the sense that they have become spirits, but they still play dominant roles in the running of affairs of the

family to which they belonged while still here on earth. They receive offerings from time to time.

- **The Practice of Magic and Medicine:** Magic and medicine are used by man to conquer his environment. They are used to improve life and obtain what cannot be obtained in the ordinary way. They can be used for good as well as bad ends.

He observes that the supreme God in the West Africa belief is considered to be above all divinities and with absolute authority over the divinities and created order. He says that most of African beliefs and their tradition are as a result of the religion that has been passed from generation to generation through oral traditions or as myths. A myth is from the Greek word 'muthos' and it means anything delivered by word of the mouth. It does not mean a false belief. It is a way of explaining things about the created order and supersensible world. There is no doubt that man has been confronted with riddles and mysteries of life from the beginning. By answering these riddles and questions, man told stories to explain the common occurrences of life. Such stories are regarded as myths. These myths tends to contain various stories such as man's encounter with supernatural forces, man's challenges, the fall of man, how the society he inhabits came into existence. Such myths are kept in memory and are passed on by word of mouth from one generation to another. These myths tend to affect man's reasoning, behavior and beliefs within the community he inhabits.

Another form in which African beliefs and tradition are exhibited is through liturgy. Liturgy is the prescribed form of ritual for public worship. It is a vehicle of communication between man and divine being. And since liturgy is the set pattern of worship in each cult, there is a reason to believe that it has been preserved for us without being distorted. People believe that any ritual that is not performed correctly has lost its efficacy and thereby worthless. To guide against the occurrence, a priest usually adheres to the set patterns to avoid the possibility of jeopardising the life of the worshippers as well as his own life by following the wrong order.

In addition, the beliefs of the Africans lie in their songs. Songs tell stories of people's past, they convey faith of worshippers, belief in and about deity and divinities, and they also express the joys and sorrows of the people, their assurances, hopes and fears of the future and, life after death. Thus in songs and proverbs are found an

expression of the people's doctrine and philosophies. Likewise are adages, epigrams, riddles and other wise sayings which are formulated from human experiences and reflections from time immemorial. These forms help to teach the people's religion, beliefs and practices. For example, proverbs are widely used to settle quarrels, to teach moral lessons, to warn implicitly against evil conduct or an impending doom.

Festivals are celebrated to revive our cultures. It keeps culture from becoming obsolete. Festivals are either religious and sacred or secular and profane. Festivals are not observed in isolation but, together with many other participants who may or may not be from the same community. Since people's cultures can be observed during traditional festivals, through performances such as songs, dance, mime etc, they become channels through which values and beliefs in the society are preserved and disseminated. Indeed, Wanhill and Verberke (2008: 156) summed it all up in their submission:

Festivals facilitate the revival of frozen cultural expressions and also act as a motivation for innovation and in the process, provide opportunities for individuals, irrespective of class affiliations or social, religious, political or economic status, to socialise with community members in unified ways.

2.2 Culture: Meanings, Significance and Elements

Culture in simple term is the way of life of a people. Most of the nineteenth century theories have a more or less explicit view of culture as a creation of a consensus over values and standards, a position remarkably similar to sociological structural functionalism. Culture can be seen to represent ultimate values, the best of which humanity is capable, the determination and dissemination of culture must be associated with a particular class or elite. We must note that a fairly clear distinction is emerging in these theories between the notion of "Society" and "Culture". However culture is something which reflects and ultimately has its own effect on the society. The term culture was first used in this way by the pioneer English Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor when he opined that:

Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. "E.B. Tylor in *Babawale Tunde* (2007: 2)

Taylor also states that the concept of culture has become the central focus of anthropology. Culture is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is a fragile Phenomenon. It is therefore constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds. Our written languages, government, building, and other man made things are merely the product of culture. For this reason, archaeologists can dig up culture directly in their excavations. The word culture has many different meanings. For some, it refers to an appreciation of good literature, music, art, and food. For a biologist, it is likely to be colony of bacteria or other micro-organism growing in a nutrient medium in a laboratory Petri dish. However, for anthropologists and other behavioral scientists, culture is full range of learned human behavior patterns. Thomas Hobbes views culture as used in maintaining order in the society. According to him, ‘man in a state of nature was motivated to act in certain ways by two basic principles: Hedonism and Homeostasis principle’. Hobbes in Ewin, R (1991: 13)

A cultured person is usually one whose manners are polite or polished, who chooses well and is able to follow orders. The scientific meaning of culture says that all human beings are cultured because every human society has a culture.

Culture can be said to be universal, this is because there cannot be a culture without a society, from the sociological point of view culture consist of the sum total of skills, beliefs, knowledge and products that are commonly shared by a number of people and transmitted to their children. Through culture we learn to communicate with one another and to behave and think in certain ways without misunderstanding one another. Culture is a social heritage that is transmitted from one generation to another. Culture is shared. A society consists of all the people who share a distinct and continuing way of life, a culture, and think of themselves as one united people. The Society is the breeding ground of culture.

According to Ewin (citing Hobbes), the following are characteristics of culture:

- It provides socially acceptable means as platform for meeting point
- It is cumulative
- It is meaningful because of its symbolic qualities
- It is learned
- It is a basic determinant of personality

- It depends for its existence on the continued functioning of the society but not upon any individual or groups.

In summary, culture is dynamic.

According to Hess et al (2000: 17)

The need for cultures is therefore an outcome of two to three million years of human evolution during which a number of significant change in the body took place, beginning with the shift to an upright position.

Hess et al also defined culture as, ‘the map for living of a group whose members share a territory and languages, feel responsible for one another and, recognise their shared identity’.

He further explains that the things that make up culture are therefore created by man and a person absorbs many parts of a culture by living amongst it. A man is likely to belong most closely to the culture he has spent most time in and may not necessarily be part of the culture which his parents belong to. He further argues that “... culture is something learned in the society. A person who is influenced by his culture at the same time can also modify and change it”.

Example of this is when a person develops new political and social ideas or when members of the same nuclear family belong to different political parties and ideologies.

The culture of a group therefore consists of:

- Solution to the problem of survival
- The ideals and values that shape rule of conduct
- Tools and other man-made objects i.e. artifacts and other material Culture.

Culture most times are never static, these realities are constantly in a motion of change because of the way the culture have been passed on from one generation to another.

Culture is subjected to influences, fusions, intercultural and intra-cultural influences.

Culture and its Forms

As stated above culture is an abstraction and this is because most of its elements cannot be seen or touched. However, what people do can be described and, the explanation they offer for their conduct noted. The following terms are referred to as the forms and element of culture.

- i. Cultural Variability
- ii. Ethnocentrism
- iii. Cultural Relativism
- iv. Cultural Universals
- v. Law
- vi. Social Norms
- vii. Values
- viii. Mores
- ix. Folkways
- x. Ethnicity
- xi. Tribes and Tribalism
- xii. Sub-Culture
- xiii. Social Class
- xiv. Ritual

Cultural Variabilities

Hess et al (2000 : 14) describe cultural variabilities thus, 'this reflects to the variety of customs, beliefs and artifacts devised by humans to meet universal needs'.

The content and specific details of institutional spheres and ways which these traits are linked together will be different from one society to another shaped by geography and history. This implies that there are different approaches to solve a problem as we move from one society to another society.

Ethnocentrism

In comparing cultures, we have often tended to evaluate the customs and beliefs of others in the light of our own. This is because members of all cultures assume that their own designed way of living is the best and only correct way. Therefore Hess et

al(2000: 17) define the concept of ethnocentrism as, ‘the belief that one’s own culture is the best and, therefore, the standard by which other cultures are consequently judged’.

This is the spirit of self-justification that makes people take for granted, or as natural their cultural ways. Ethnocentrism is thus an unexamined feeling of normalcy of righteousness to a group, nation or race. Alaezi (2015: 3) submits further:

Ethnocentrism has some important functions such as the certainty about the rightness of one’s beliefs and behaviors which reinforces the tendency to confirm and to defend one’s society. *An article presented at the ASUP National Conference in 2015*

Some aspects of culture are thus to be understood in terms of the meaning attached to them in a given society and not by the standards of another culture defined by it. For example, some hold on strongly to the view that they are born to rule and they look down on others as not fit to rule.

Cultural Universals

This implies that people must find solutions to immediate problems of both personal and collective survival such as securing food, maintaining order, producing and training new members and developing identity. As mentioned before, human societies everywhere confront broadly similar problems. Every group must, for example, solve the problem of survival, this is because certain types of arrangements are found in every culture. These are known as cultural universals. Cultural universals are therefore basic elements found in all cultures. For example, the need for human beings to adapt to the environment, seeking for food and shelter brings about the group responses in form of economic activity, which leads to the production and distribution of services. This is a universal phenomenon among world cultures. The universal need for the maintenance of social order, rule, enforcement, dispute settlements, protection and defense gave rise to political behavior, policing, defending and judging which are available in varying degrees among disparate cultures making up the geo-political entity called Nigeria.

Cultural Relativism

This helps to replace value judgment based on one's own culture as far as possible by an appreciation to the value of other cultures. This involves an effort to understand the world as seen by members of other societies. The sociologist, therefore, is not expected to ask what cultural elements are good or bad according to some absolute yardstick but rather why the element exists. How they are sustained and what purpose they serve in that culture. The primary standard for an evolution of an aspect of culture, therefore, is to assess whether or not the pattern (Culture) enhances the well-being of the members of the society.

Law

Laws are norms that are formally adopted which govern behaviors most essential to group survival. Laws are therefore enforced by formal sanctions carried out by officials specifically charged with the maintenance of order in society. These agencies include the police, judges, probation officers e.t.c. customary laws are very common in Nigeria. These laws are the crystallisation of traditional practices. They make clear what is accepted and the cost of disobedience. They are thus backed by formal sanction.

Social Norms

In any society, there are rules of behaviour. These rules are prescriptions, which are definitions of the acceptable and proscriptions, which define behaviour. Some norms are more important than others. For example, rules involving behaviour that are essential to the survival of the group such as "Thou shall not kill" are typically of greater weight than rules of personal hygiene. Therefore several types of norms can be distinguished.

Values

These are central beliefs of a culture that provide standards by which norms are judged, values are thus widely held beliefs for the maintenance of social and public order. Fadipe (1970) and Olusanya (1996) demonstrated the universality of this value, 'social values thus refer to the idea shared by members of a society as to what is good, right and desirable'.

They refer to something worth striving for. Norms are ultimate expressions of a society's values. Norms are means while values are the ends. In other words, the main difference between norms and values is that while values are abstracts, general concept of

ideas, norms are concrete behavioral rules or guidelines for people in particular social situations.

Mores

These are norms that normally cover moral and ethical behaviour. They are more crucial to social order than folkways. They are, therefore, more severely enforced. For example; the obligation to respond to constitutional authority and to maintain community standards of decency and moral rules bring condemnation and scorn on the violator in many primitive and civilised societies. Behaviours shape through these informal reactions. However, the mores of one historical period may not be the same at another epoch. For examples, it was the duty of a parent to beat a child as a corrective measure whereas the same behaviour could be considered as child abuse nowadays. This is evident in the Europe and other western countries where children were beaten by their parents as a corrective measure before the nineteenth century. However, it is no longer the case as this is frowned upon nowadays. Infact, it is considered an offence against the state to beat one's child these days. It could attract some time in prison or the child could be taken away from the parents completely by the state. This situation is also duplicated in certain places in Africa. Agencies such as Office of the Public Defender OPD and National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters NAPTIP were created by Lagos State and the Federal Republic of Nigeria respectively. These agencies among others in Nigeria saw to it that matters such as child labour, where correcting a child through beating is classified, do not go unpunished. With this development, the mores of a historical period in Nigeria has been clearly eradicated.

Folkways

These are approved standards of behaviour passed on from one generation to the other. They generally cover activities that are not essential to the survival of the group. An example of a folkway is the rule that forbids eating without having a mouthwash, particularly in the morning. Folkways are therefore not considered important to be strictly enforced. Violations of folkways are usually handled informally through words and gestures of disapproval. These responses can be referred to as sanctions and are used to enforce and encourage conformity. In various African societies, for example, ostracism and banishment are some forms of sanctions.

Ethnicity

This is contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols. The definition has the advantage of combining two vital aspects of the concept.

- Its static and objective structural properties
- Its dynamic and analytic sense

In Nigeria, ethnicity can therefore not be said to be of only a cultural phenomenon but also a structural category with political and economic undertones. It is an instrument of social organisation in the fields of political parties and other fields of competition.

Tribes and Tribalism

The word “tribe” is taken to denote a primary aggregate of people living in a primitive and/or barbarous African past in which no system of ethics and human principle of conduct were developed on the one hand and, the civilising mission and the white man’s burden of the colonial order, on the other hand. While the above definition may be faulty and misleading due to its Eurocentric undertone, a tribe can be a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect. The term “tribalism” remains useful, not only for understanding the politics of colonialism but also how societies have changed and are changing in the modern world.

Sub-Culture

Difference in values, norms, beliefs and behaviours are referred to as sub-culture. Subculture comprises of variations in values, beliefs and norms among societal subgroups that make up an entity. The concept of subculture admits of the existence of different groups in society each with its own distinctive ways of doing things which may not be shared by the collectivity.

Social Class

By social class, we ordinarily mean a population group whose members are characterised by similarities in income, wealth and economic position by comparable levels of styles of living and by similar patterns of social interactions. .

Ritual

Laing and Frost (2015: 6) in stating the importance of rituals affirm, "...the concept that our ancestors were essentially rational and that their rituals evolved primarily to help their societies survive and flourish".

Rituals, therefore, can be described as ceremonies that reinforce the unity of the society, helping individuals to overcome major transitions in their lives. Rituals are culturally patterned way of expressing some central value of recurring concern of the collectivity. An example of this among the Igbo is the naming ceremonies for newly born children. This act has become a ritual component of their culture. The culture and religion of the Irete people have their own doctrines. These scenario cut almost across the entire Igboland. This belief is in line with Metuh (1981: 12), who submits that every philosophy, religion, and culture, has its own doctrines of the human person. This is not only because the notion of the person is the key to the understanding of all human problems, but also because the human person is the most paradoxical of all realities. He is the paradox of a being that is simultaneously material and yet spiritual, a distinct individual and yet a being essentially in communion with other beings.

2.3 Festival and Theatre

It is generally agreed by most scholars that theatre has its root in festival. In almost all parts of the world, the origin of theatre is traced back to a particular festival or the other. From the western world to the oriental world and to Africa, the relationship between festival and theatre cannot be denied. Just like scholars such as Osacr Brockett, Allardyce Nicoll, Edwin Wilson and Joel Adedeji, Robin May (1974: 78) also traces the origin of theatre to myths and ritual performances. She opines that:

The earliest theatre existed in Greece. The Greek theatre arose from the Religious festival celebrating the worship of Dionysus. Vast congregations were involved in the worship, so the physical conditions necessary for the celebration were vast. The first audience stood on a hill slope and looked down at the rhythmic dancing of a chorus. The chorus, made up of some fifty dancers, was seated at

the bottom hill slope on a comparatively level of ground. This piece of ground was marked out in the form of a circle and was called the orchestra. In the centre of the orchestra was an altar erected for the god.

Oscar Brockett (1964: 45) in the same vein attests that the dances were accompanied by dithyrambs (ecstatic hymns). He notes that:

The drama of Thespis was relatively simple, since it involved only one actor and a chorus... that all characters were played by the same actor. This single actor used masks in shifting his identity; when he left the stage to change roles, the chorus filled the intervals with singing and dancing. The chorus therefore became the principal unifying force in the early drama.

This idea of drama can also be found in Africa. The belief that the first theatre existed in Greece has been contested by some scholars. According to Frank Whiting (1978: 12), 'The origin of theatre has been traced as far back as Egypt in the year 4000 B.C and it undoubtedly extends much further'.

The African people create a performance style which uses numerous artistic elements to create a powerful or overwhelming experience. This term known as the Total Theatre is attributed to Richard Wagner's concept of a Gesamtkunstwerk; a total or unified work of art in which all elements work together. It is a performance which assembles all artistic form in a single dramatic piece. Bode Osanyin (2010: 15) opines that:

The African festival is not a mere idea of the concept of total theatre. The Africa song is more than a mere melody. The African dance is no gymnastics. It is an expression of a soul. The physical is embedded in the immaterial. Both must roll together in one artistic whole. As it is difficult to separate dialogue from speech, or mime from dance, so is it futile to disassociate chants from songs.

This statement supports the interrelationships that exist between festival, drama and theatre. Hence Oyin Ogunba states that most writers on the subject of festival compare festival performances with literary drama thereby noting the limitations of the festival as a full-bodied dramatic performance as they are known in literate cultures. However, he mentions further that man has characterised festivals as pre-drama; that is, a

form of art intermediate between religion and drama; a raw form which has to be purified before it can be converted to use. Festivals, drama and theatre are related; there are limitations in festivals as compared with literary drama; not a full bodied dramatic performance; similar in that they depict historical events. It is quite right in observing that the drama in traditional festival performances appears subsumed in the ritual and that it has not been weaned from the ritual and developed in the same manner that Greek drama did.

Bode Osanyin (2002: 56) further comments that African theatre is:

An assemblage of all African art forms in a highly concentrated, heightened and dynamic theatrical event. This also is common in a traditional African festival; it is the fusion of all art forms, that is, costume, make-up, chants, songs, dialogue and so on.

Another attribute that distinguishes a festival from a theatrical performance is the belief attached to a festival and the suspension of disbelief inherent in a theatrical performance. Festivals are often times a combination of secular and ritual forms. In theatre as performance, the audience tends to suspend their belief that action taking place on stage is real. The term “willing suspension of disbelief” was coined by Poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817 for audience of literary works. However from this traditional performance came what Adedeji refers to as the first itinerant theatre in Nigeria called ‘The Alarinjo Theatre’. Although it emanated from a purely religious Egungun cult, they became a purely entertainment group. Though still wearing their masks, they now perform solely on social occasions and for purely entertainment purposes and self-sustenance. It could be said that theatre/drama has its roots embedded in religious festivals.

In addition, both theatre and festival depict historical events which man must have encountered and passed down through oral tradition. Jide Malomo (1993: 18) supports the statement above as he argues thus:

The festivals and rituals of the people served very much as a point of reference for writers of this age, such as Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola, the classicism of this category rests in the use of language and complex structural arrangements of scenes in the plays.

In conclusion, as the actors wore masks and costumes, they often impersonated supernatural beings, men or animals and mimed the desired effect-success in hunt or battle, the coming of rain, and the revival of the sun. From such dramatic rituals, theatre originated.

2.4 A cursory Look at Transitional Phases of Traditional Performance in Nigeria

It will not be out of place to say that indigenous Nigerian theatre developed from masquerade performances, as evidenced in African theatre history. In masquerade theatre, ritual is a very significant factor. Ritual has so much to do with religious belief and performances. Within the traditionalist African context, it is difficult to distinguish drama from ritual because if the concept of performance is taken into cognisance a “ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency” Eneke (1987: 53).

To further expound that drama or theatre took its root from festival and rituals. Ekwueme (2004: 22) explains:

Masquerade theatre in Nigeria predates colonialism. The nomenclature Nigeria only came into existence in 1914, although around 1900, almost all the regions or ethnic groups of what later transformed into Nigeria had come under the British rule.

Masquerade performances abound in some parts of Nigeria. We find them up till date amongst the Ibibios, the Opobos, the Kalabaris, the Yorubas, the Ijaws, the Igbos and, the Efiks to mention a few.

Rituals can be said to constitute one of the basic tenets of the Nigerian life and culture in general. As mentioned earlier, indigenous Nigerian theatre has its roots in masquerade performances. A ritual is a very significant factor in masquerade theatre and ritual in itself, is most times, associated with performance. According to Adeoye and Jays (2013: 4):

As opposed to most other cultures, early Nigerian theatre and drama does not adopt the Aristotelian model as most others do. This is because drama in Africa is a much more complex and universal phenomenon than Aristotle could ever have imagined.

Within the dramatic context we all know as being traditionalist, it is difficult to distinguish drama from ritual. Whether we like to refer to it as theatre or drama, our plays have always existed in one form or another in Africa societies. Garuba (2010) points out that ‘...their foundation is rooted in festivals and religious rituals, some of which is still being experienced till today’.

The Ake festival of the Egbas, Okorosha and Mmanwu festivals of the Mbaitoli and Enugu people respectively, Ojude Oba festival of the Ijebus, new yam festival (celebrated mainly among the Igbo and Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria) and the Osun festival celebrated in Osogbo amongst many others have laid to rest the doubt having to do with the existence of a rich theatrical tradition in many of our societies. Tracing back into the past, theatrical performance going back to colonialism, is often carried out by actors who regale in masquerade costumes. Adeoye and Jays (2013: 7) posits:

Lagos, the Northern and Southern Protectorates, were amalgamated into one country in 1914. Before the advent of colonialism, the theatre of these regions or ethnic groups was different.

But was there ever theatre before the coming of colonialism into the land we now all refer to as Nigeria? The term pre-colonial theatre refers to theatre practices associated with pre-colonial polities in Nigeria before 1900. Olaudah Equiano, one of the few black writers of the slave trade period, makes reference to this vibrant tradition (long before colonial rule) as he wrote in 1789 that “We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians and poets”.

In Yoruba cosmology and worldview, the existence of masquerades predates colonialism as Egungun is worshipped as a dead ancestor which comes back annually to remind his children of his continued protection. Adedeji captures this in his submissions:

Sango, the Alaafin (paramount ruler) of Oyo during the fourteenth century, is credited with the introduction of the masquerade. He is also credited with introducing ancestor worship, initially called Baba (father) and later Egungun (masquerade). During the sixteenth century, the masquerade evolved into court entertainment. Sango made masks to represent the spirit of his departed father, Oranyan. (Adedeji 1971)

Adedeji further posits that:

After a special ceremony, Sango brought the reincarnate spirit of his father to Oyo, erected the Bara (royal mausoleum) to worship him and named Iyamode (the old woman of the palace) to keep the secret. Her duty was to worship Oranyan's spirit and to bring him out as a masquerade during an evocation ceremony.

Ogunbiyi (1981: 68) affirms the submission by Adedeji on the acceptance of Egungun ritual play as a link to dead ancestors.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the institution had become formalised into [a] festival where various groups performed to display their lineage's history. Yoruba theatre was thus born as the "actors" ensured performance rituals were shaped into a refined, perfect state. As part of the festival, all the ancestors or dead lineage-heads are invoked, and they appear as masquerades on the streets of such communities for a period of time in the form of a parade. These performances have been seen in other areas such as Ijaws, Ibibios, Kalabaris, and other places where we observe the link between masquerade and ritual play.

The masquerade display is also prominent till today in every other part of the country and the Igbos are not left out of this type of festival. Ogunbiyi (1968:69), confirms this 'masquerade ritual drama is still prominent in other parts of Nigeria, especially in the eastern area of the Igbos'.

Nowadays, we can even make reference to such African works like that of Chinua Achebe where there is the vivid description of how the yearly New Yam festival is celebrated. Though there are wide-spread arguments as to the extent of dramatic content contained in these masquerade performances, the fact remains that they are theatrical performances which are a source of entertainment for the masses. A critic once illustrated a theatrical performance which the king of Oyo gave in the honour of Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander in 1826 and stated thus:

Alaafin (king) of Oyo initiated a performance by one of the traveling theatre troupes to celebrate their seven-week stay in Old Oyo (Katunga), the capital of the Oyo (Yoruba) empire at that time. The time was Wednesday, February 22, 1826

William H.G. Kingston (2012) writes that Hugh Clapperton and his party:

...As guests were entertained here with a pantomime, the stage being the open ground before his majesty's residences, the characters in masks. One of them presented a huge snake that slithered out of a bag and followed the manager around the park as he defended himself with a sword. Similarly, a man appeared out of another sack covered in white wax so he looked like a European, miserably thin and starving. As part of the ceremony, he took a snuff and rubbed his nose. The way he walked was awkward, treading as a tender-footed white man would over rough terrain on bare soles.

This goes to show that before the coming of colonialism, Nigerians already used the tool of satire in tending to issues that are politically and religiously inclined in their drama. This is a classic example of a scenario where brilliance and direction is placed on the enactment of performance.

The trend continued and traditional performances gained so much popularity among the people until the coming of Christianity and in Yorubaland's early Christian history, it was the resettled freed slaves who adopted the Christian faith. Consequently, there was a change brought about by this development. The Christian faith changed the conventions of theatre presentation and Ogunbiyi (1981: 73) states that:

Early in 1839, freed slaves and their children having a Western education, were among the first immigrants to arrive and provided a vigorous impetus to the realisation of both the church and British government. Nigerian educated middle class began with this group of immigrants, who would later be joined by Brazilian immigrants. Throughout early modern Nigeria, the English concert and the European drama were imported by this class of Nigerians, which formed the basis for early modern Nigerian drama.

Making reference also to Chinua Achebe's work "*Things Fall Apart*," we are well aware that this forms part of the rancour in the novel when Okonkwo's son joined the Christians and he sees it as an abomination. The rage brought about by the new religion penetrating into their society discouraged some converts from participating in the rituals which used to be a thing of attraction among the villagers. The rank was broken and Christianity preached against such "barbaric acts" in the novel. The introduction of

Christianity, therefore, allowed members to incorporate Igbo, Yoruba and European elements into their entertainment. Suffice to say that there was a deliberate act of accommodating these cultures and re-workings of traditional festival songs into church songs as a means of winning over converts from traditional religions.

In parts of Nigeria generally and Lagos to be specific, attempts were made during the colonial era to continue traditional theatre which had become almost forbidden. This facilitated the construction of Glover Hall, in 1899, by some of the elite natives of Lagos and a couple of Europeans. According to Ogunbiyi (1981: 69):

This community hall was used for performances and other social gatherings without prejudice from the church, which would not permit cultural events, except for European ones, in its facilities.

It is now a laid down fact that Nigerian theatre was influenced by two different traditions, rule and precept: that of the colonial master and of course, the traditionalist. According to Ukpokodu (1992: 25):

This, however, did not go down well with the Yoruba people. Upon discovering that missionaries required that converts to Christianity adopt western dress and culture, they found it revolting. Nigerian educated elites began emphasising both cultural and political nationalism to repudiate these phenomena. Yoruba Modern Travelling Theatre was born out of this development in 1945, pioneered by Hubert Ogunde (1919-1990), a former school teacher, church organist, and Nigerian Police officer.

He is considered to be the father of modern Nigerian theatre. Aside from the successful travelling theatre of the Yorubas which thrived under and after colonialism, there was the satirical drama of masked colonial figures performed by the Igbo. They also contributed to helping the rural Nigerians living in the eastern part of Nigeria create means of escaping the cultural extinction being perpetrated by the British government during this time.

As mentioned earlier, the Yoruba Travelling Theatre originated in the sixteenth century from a society of masqueraders. It almost yielded to the influence of Islam and

Christianity during the nineteenth century as a result. Additionally, the Yoruba language being the main language of the theatre was an advantage. Adedeji points out that:

The traditional Yoruba love of music, dance, and rituals prompted the creation of a new theatrical form based on the dying members of the old itinerant masquerade performances. During the first decade of the twentieth century, a number of breakaway churches (the African churches and later the Aladura or Apostolic churches) in Lagos produced the "native dramas" and "cantatas." These inspired the development of the Yoruba Operatic Theatre. This theatre was the most popular in Nigeria by the 1940s and 1950s. In many parts of the country, outdoor theatre was performed on improvised stages outside of town halls and schools.

The plays generated a lot of appeal to show that drama and theatre has evolved a lot. Accordingly, Barber (1997: 5) lends credence to this fact when he states that:

The popular theatre of Yoruba attracted audiences from every socioeconomic level. They could fill university theatres as well as village halls. The Nigerian 'Popular Theatre' contains the plays of Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, Moses Olaiya, Isola Ogunsola, Jimoh Aliu, Leke Ajao, Ojo Ladipo and other Yoruba operatic exponents.

Additionally, Barber also opines that in the early 1940s, Yoruba folk opera began to perform at theatres in western Nigeria, where they developed into a popular genre. He states further that:

It combined a brilliant sense of mime, colourful costumes, traditional drumming, music, and folklore. Directed towards a local audience, it used Nigerian themes, ranging from modern-day satire to historical tragedy. Although the plays were performed entirely in the Yoruba language, they could be understood and appreciated by speakers of other languages with the aid of a translated synopsis. (1997: 6)

For AwamAmkpa (2004), the belief is that the "Yoruba Travelling Theatre's use of indigenous themes and symbols within a framework of a multi-ethnic montage of Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa and others constructed by the English made it a celebrated populist dramaturgy Nigeria [has] ever experienced". Indigenous themes and symbols developed

by practitioners in Yoruba culture grew out of cross-cultural connections through trade, military engagement, and cultural encounters even before colonialism.

A mosaic of cultures has emerged through these theatre traditions, a compilation of cultural traditions that have been shaped by ancient human movement, incursions, displacements, intermixtures or successions, and the impact of these on the beliefs, attitudes and social organisation of the people living today. Okebalama (2003: 13) holds the view that 'drama is a reenactment of life'. He also observes that 'the Igbo find it convenient to express their feelings through recreational activities, rituals, myths, legends, folktales, ceremonies, festivals and masquerade play'.

2.5 Festival, Colonial Encounter and Cultural Identity

In this study, festivals have been defined severally and the different ways some scholars defined it has also been looked at. To sum it up, festivals are important to individuals, families, communities and nations.

In this sense, festivals can be said to be a celebration that is done to revive culture so that it does not become obsolete or extinct. It has also been shown from discussions above that traditional drama, performances and festivals are interlinked, if not the same.

Festivals are a product of the community and not of an individual. They are also veritable vehicles in instituting laws, mores, values, and order in communities. Furthermore, it has also been explored in the preceding sections of this study that festivals experience transformation either as a deliberate act by the community involved or just because the festival itself is resilient in nature. In whatever way the transformation and change takes place, it is all in a bid for the festival or performance to remain relevant and appear as an ever present reality. This subsection of the study aims to offer some insights into the effect of colonial encounter on African festivals and how this in turn, has affected the cultural identity of the people.

Various scholars have defined colonialism in different ways. Lyons and Papadopoulos (2002:1) have submitted that, 'few human communities have remained untouched by outsiders, in antiquity as in present'.

They (2002:1) also note that:

As a crucible of change in which differences between coloniser and colonised seem to stand in sharp outline, colonisation opens a window onto the condition that induced people to refashion their worlds.

In the African context, colonisation has been viewed as having negative effects on African culture. Oloruntimehin (2007: 4) writes that:

Colonisation as a process involves transformation of the worldview and values of the colonised... that the process involves a deliberate cultivation of a sense of inferiority on the part of the colonised, and re-orientation towards the goals and value systems of the dominated people.

Precious (2010: 3) corroborates this point by stating that: 'Colonialism is a suppressive form of cultural territorial slavery'. Ekwuru (1999: 11) posits that:

The acquisition of the sense of inferiority was done in the mission schools, where children were taught that all aspects of their culture is 'low' and 'inferior' and the only way towards cultural salvation is to discard their own culture and acquire the 'higher' and 'superior' culture of the coloniser.

In this regard, there is no doubt that colonialism with its properties such as Christianity has affected African culture and traditions negatively.

The Christian religion has ridiculed African culture and this has caused many contemporary Africans not to participate in traditional festivals. There is the gradual abandonment of African culture for that of the coloniser as a result of this. Duignam and Grann (1973: 3) capture this point in their submission:

Westerners are being accused not only of economic exploitation of the African continent but also of "cultural Imperialism". The erstwhile colonial rulers have been variously charged with ethnocentric bias, with having taken little or no interest in the history and culture of their subjects and with having perpetuated all manner of myths about the African continent.

Therefore, Africans became victims of gradual acquisition of Western culture and become depersonalised in their own land. The resultant effect of the abandonment of the African culture is loss of identity, cultural ambiguity and an emergence of identity crisis. The African is neither African nor European. According to W.E.B Dubois (as quoted in Jackson II 1999:1)

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

– W.E.B Du Bois, 1903

Furthermore, Jackson II (1999:1) postulates that 'The notion of self-division and its consequences has persisted since Dubois' statement in 1903 well into the 1960s and beyond. He writes that Du Bois in 1903 had predicted the "problem of the twentieth century as the problem of the color line" and spoke of ideas related to race, identity and dual consciousness – a divided sense of self among African Americans'.

This divided sense of self exists not only among Africans who have been relocated from the African soil but also among Africans who are still within the territory of Africa. According to Enekwe (1988: 12) in his analysis of Chinua Achebe's works, he affirms the author's concern as a novelist:

Achebe's main preoccupation as a writer has been to capture and interpret the momentous clash between traditional African and modern European cultures, so that his people can make meaning out of the configuration of socio-political and historical forces, which resulted in the African loss of identity, and lack of sense of worth and self-confidence.

Jackson II (1999:10) proposes that cultural identity is:

The sense of belonging to a cultural community that reaffirms self or personhood for the individual and is created by: the people, their interactions, and the context in which they relate.

He notes further that cultural identity is comprised of values, mores, meanings, customs, and beliefs used to relate to the world; it continually defines what it was, what it is becoming.

An individual or group must be able to be identified within a cultural landscape. Where this does not obtain, then that individual or group is almost nonexistent. In the face of current global realities, with the world trying to do everything it can to become a small village, identity is of utmost importance.

Jackson (1999:9) maintains that, 'identity is that which confers a sense of self or personhood. It also refers to self-definition'. He contends that, 'there is a direct relationship between identity and one's ability to define self and that 'every' definition of self includes culture'.

There is a need to restore the cultural identity of the marginalised as Hagan (2007) submits, 'a sense of cultural identity is becoming increasingly important in a globalised world'. Philipsen (1987: 249 cited in Fong) has defined communal identity as, 'the cultural function of communication, the use of communication in the creation, affirmation and negotiation of shared identity'.

Cultural identity preservation is very important as it can be used to arrest the challenges individual and group identity face today. To ensure the continuity of a community and a nation at large, there is a need to preserve identity. In this sense, festival preservation and promotion is key because it is one of the ways a people's cultural identity can be restored.

2.6 Cultural Transformation and the Challenges of Modernity and Globalisation

Pieterse (2009: 77) writes that:

The most common interpretations of globalisation are the idea that the world is becoming more uniform and standardised, through a technological, commercial, and cultural synchronisation emanating from the West and that globalisation is tied up with modernity.

Globalisation is, in fact, one of the most visible effects of modernity. As a result, all the processes by which people of the world become unified are facilitated. It is no doubt a creation of the West.

Pieterse (2009:79) argues further that:

There are several problems associated with the modernity/globalisation approach. In either conceptualisation, whether centered on capitalism or modernity, globalisation begins in and emanates from Europe and the West. In effect, it is a theory of westernisation by another name, which replicates all the problems associated with Eurocentrism: a narrow window on the world, historically and culturally. With this agenda, it should be called westernisation and not globalisation.

As Africans conform to the processes of westernisation and colonisation imposed on them, they are increasingly losing their culture, heritage and tradition. This loss ultimately brings about a loss in the identity of the African. As Toyin K. Tunde (2014: 62) points out:

Western civilisation which has suffused the African continent has brought with it a downside on the African culture. More and more people have embraced the new form of entertainment readily available on electronic media.

This aspect of westernisation is a major factor to the decline in the participation of festivals by new generation Africans. In several prominent conceptualisations, globalisation is the corollary of modernity (Giddens 1990 cited in Pieterse 2009: 79). Tunde (2014: 62) defines globalisation as, ‘the process of international integration arising from the interchange of worldviews, products, ideas and, other aspects of culture’

He describes it further as, ‘a Post Modernist concept concerned with breaking out from local societies and, connecting globally to a new world of total involvement through new electronic extensions’.

While Tor Lorapuu (2002:165) agrees that every human phenomenon is subject to change, he posits thus:

Even though it is inevitable that artistic expressions through which culture is projected must adapt to the changing

society, these art forms must maintain their cultural originality. Still culture in its dynamic state must continue to give its community a sense of continuity, identity, dignity and security that binds the said community together.

2.7 Hunting Performance in Igboland/ Hunting and the Igbo

Hunting is an occupation in all parts of the world. People earn their living from it because people make money from the sales of their games. Archeological evidence shows that the Igbo People were mainly farmers and hunters. The use of iron also shows the transition from the Stone Age (8,700 BCE- 2,000 BCE) to the Iron Age (500BC). This also shows the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture. This, however, does not mean that the occupation of hunting was completely abandoned by the Igbo. The material culture of the Igbo with reference to the roped pot, snail shell and other metal objects found in Igbo Ukwu give credence to the fact that the Igbo had met with this civilisation centuries ago. Dane guns which are part of the instruments used in hunting may have been products of the Igbo with which hunters carried out their trade. According to Ekpo Eyo (1977: 92):

The Igbo Ukwu bronzes are enigmatic...At the moment it is not certain whether the bronzes were made at Igbo Ukwu or nearby or whether they were trade goods exchanged for other items. However, that they are indigenous manufactures is in no doubt whatever. It is surprising that the Igbo Ukwu style is unparalleled in Africa

The Igbos have since branched out into many other occupations lately. So many reasons can be attributed to this. One of them is the fact that many of the forests where games were hunted have been converted to factories, industries and residences for the people. Technological advancement in societies has forced modern hunters and gatherers out of territories suitable for farming and herding. In many parts of the world, people still pay high for particular wild animals they have appetites for and the 'Bush meat' delicacy is still something that the people crave for. Hunting is not an easy thing because it involves high risks in which hunters lose their lives. Nneke (2011:15) observes same and defines a

hunter as, 'that man who has courage, endurance, bravery, readiness as well as a creative mind of hunting animals in the forest using arms'.

Hunters face a lot of hazards, they may be shot or shoot their colleagues in error. In addition, they also face the risk of being killed by wild animals. Apart from hunting being an occupation; it has artistic value and can present some form of aesthetics. This is the reason why in Igboland, hunters are grouped into organised associations and also have dramatic performances which are often displayed during community festivals and during members' funerals. During such occasions, miming, songs, dancing and chants are involved. Hunting was a predominant way of life for the Igbo. For the Irete people, *Nta* festival is an irreplaceable link to the past. If this occupation is almost vanishing due to modernity, then, the hunting performance should be preserved. The hunters' dramatic demonstrations and performances are always interesting while the ritual aspect serves the purpose of cleansing the land. In order for this experience which was primarily the way of their ancestors not to be lost, festivals such as the *Nta* performance are re-enacted for posterity. A reminder that for thousands of years, these societies maintained a remarkably stable relationship with their environments and, a highly satisfying way of life.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study is examined from the perspectives of Cultural theory and Performance theory. This is because it concerns aspects of culture and requires the appreciation of African culture, traditions and beliefs. The principles of Cultural theory make the study rich in depth and focus. The application of the Performance theory is due to the fact that African drama, theatre and festival is performance art. It is not like the western drama that is scripted before performance. African drama and festival focus on performance and are often not scripted. The combination of these two theories (Cultural Theory and Performance Theory) shaped the focus of this study and made it possible to come out with findings which are close to the source, aim and the objectives of the researcher. The features of these theories made it vital to be aware of the social context in which respondents are approached

According to Thompson et al (1990: 8), 'Culture theory assumes that people have multiple selves...that is to say, the ways of life to which an individual adheres can vary

with the social domain in which he or she participates. For example, a person may be more of an individualist at work, prefer more egalitarian relations in a classroom setting, switch to deep fatalism when supporting the Chicago Cubs baseball team or the Feyenoord Rotterdam football club, and act in a more hierarchical fashion with his or her children’.

In the 19th century, "culture" was used by some to refer to a wide array of human activities, and by others as a synonym for "civilisation". In the 20th century, anthropologists began theorising about culture as an object of scientific analysis. Some used it to distinguish human adaptive strategies from the largely instinctive adaptive strategies of animals, including the adaptive strategies of other primates and non-human hominids, whereas others used it to refer to symbolic representations and expressions of human experience, with no direct adaptive value. Both groups understood culture as being definitive of human nature. Kendra Knudtson in an essay titled “Social and Cultural Studies”, states that cultural theories examine people within a culture and tries to understand or predict how or why they act or react in a certain way. In one study, Marcus and Gould (2000) looked at several dimensions of culture and applied them to global web interface design. Cultural anthropologist Geert Hofstede (1997) outlined five dimensions of culture that Marcus and Gould used as a basis for understanding global web design. The dimensions of culture were power-distance, collectivism vs. individualism, femininity vs. masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long vs. short-term orientation.

Commenting on Cultural Expression, Austine Anigala (2005: 11) states that;

The thought patterns, attitudes, modes of communications, celebrations, etc, exhibited by an individual or individuals within a geographical orbit, express the cultural quotients of the community. These expressions can be manifested in the economic, philosophical, psychological and social dimensions. They constitute the parameter for assessing the individual’s or group’s conformity to the social ethics.

Taking a cue from the statement above, the cultural expressions of the African is different from that of the European, therefore what constitutes performance to the African may be different from that of the European. This justifies opinions of scholars who believe that Africans had native drama and theatre before colonialism. The application of the Cultural theory helped to appreciate what constitutes theatre from the perspective of

Africans. It also helps in understanding the performance of traditional African drama/theatre. This is the essence of the combination of both Cultural and Performance theories as theoretical frameworks of this study. A performance is better appreciated in performance. Schechner notes (2004: 23) that:

Performance theory is founded on certain key principles such as, presentation of self, restored behavior, expressive culture. His concept of performance asserts the importance of different 'systems of transformation', which vary enormously from culture to culture, and throughout historical periods and movements. He believes that drama is not merely a province of the stage but of everyday life.

Schechner argues further that these performative activities share certain features in common which include: a special ordering of time, a special value attached to objects, non productivity in terms of goods, rules that guide the processes and special settings set aside or constructed to perform these activities (2004: 24)

Nta festival is a performance that presents the people as they are and expresses their culture, even in its performance. Therefore, the festival can be situated comfortably in the performance theory of Schechner.

According to Schechner (2004: 11), 'people are always involved in role- playing, in constructing and staging their multiple identities. By means of roles people enacted their personal and social realities on a day to day basis'.

The Irete people are not exempt from this role playing. By infusing new techniques into *Nta*, they have resolved to keep this festival which is of cultural and social importance to them.

Schechner further corroborates this point when he points out that:

To do this, they deployed socio- theatrical conventions (or routines) even as they devised personae (sometimes consciously, mostly without fully being cognisant of what was happening) adapted to particular circumstances.
(2004: 11)

Schechner's hypotheses as an approach to performance appear to fulfill Shakespeare's oft-quoted phrase 'the entire world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'(Act 2, Scene 7*As You Like It*). Marvin Carlson corroborates this point. In

his submission, he agrees that a player can also be the audience without necessarily knowing, and, that the performance is always for an audience who recognises it as such. In his words, “even when an audience is one's own self, performance is still always performed for someone - an audience that recognises and validates it as performance” (1996: 6).

Similarly, Augusto Boal propounds that ‘we never really get to experience anything for the first time in our lives, we keep repeating things we have already done, habits, rituals, and conventions. Life is theatre’ (Boal cited in Schechner, 2013: 7).

Players are not the only ones who present self-contained performances with a beginning, middle, and end. In the public arena, Schechner observes,

various figures adopt strategies of performance and role play, including politicians, religious leaders, business people and women, who give public speeches seeking attention, adulation, and money. They all have their own strategies to accomplish their goals, and their performances are predicated on self-consciousness, similar to the theatre/performing arts practitioner (2002: 146).

In Schechner’s performance theory (2004: 130), he propounds:

That it is a basic human urge no matter where individuals or groups of people are located to move to a new position or status in social hierarchy. He argues that the urge may be denied or allowed. In such cases, crises can occur when any change in status results in a readjustment of the entire scheme. There are times when the readjustment is performed, and through that, the role of ritual and theatre is involved. The performance could be theatrical or ritualistic depending on where it is performed, by whom and under what circumstances. However, no performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment.

Going by the above submission by Schechner, *Nta* performance can be theatrical and at the same time, ritualistic. The processes of *Nta* discussed in the sections to come, adopt the elements of theatre and ritual as expounded by Richard Schechner in his theory of performance.

Furthermore, Schechner’s theatrical approach highlights the essential of drama in conflict and transformation. In this approach, he applies the essential of drama in the

model of Breach- Crisis- Redressive Action- Transformation. The Schechner Model is a representation of performance. It admits that due to the participation of modernity and Christian belief, which both view *Nta* as a "heathen" festival to be jeopardised, there is a breach in the concept of *Nta* festival performance. This led to a decrease in participation- the crisis. In order to increase the festival's acceptance among all social groups, the redressive stage would be evident in the reconstruction of the festival. In the transformation stage, people who previously would not have participated in the festival are drawn in. The main transformational stage occurs after the festival participants undergo psychological and spiritual transformation.

Richard Schechner has contributed extensively to the study of performance; therefore his interpretation of what constitutes performance is a guide for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Preamble

Research basically is an original contribution to the existing stock of knowledge and making for its advancement. Kothari (2004: 1) posits that ‘it is the pursuit of truth with the help of study, observation, comparison and experiment’. Ranjit (2011: 44) further explains that:

Research involves systematic, controlled, valid and rigorous exploration and description of what is not known and establishment of associations and causation that permit the accurate prediction of outcomes under a given set of conditions. It also involves identifying gaps in knowledge, verification of what is already known and identification of past errors and limitations.

This chapter outlines the methodology and Research Design adopted to achieve the objectives set for this study. The methodology describes the procedures adopted for data collection and data analysis. Under this chapter comes the following; research design and methodology, study population, sample and sampling procedure, primary method of data collection, secondary method of data collection, research instrument and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

The main function of a research design is to explain how answers will be found to a set of research questions. According to Ranjit (2011: 45) ‘the research design sets out the specific details of your enquiry’. Therefore, since faulty design research can result in misleading findings thereby wasting human and financial resources, this study has attempted to select an appropriate research design which is crucial in enabling the researcher to arrive at valid findings, comparisons and conclusions.

A qualitative research methodology involving ethnographic and descriptive dimensions is employed to carry out investigations in this study since this study employs a combination of textual analyses and ethnographic research designs. Qualitative research

is interpretive rather than statistical, therefore, it was useful in data gathering and analyses.

In adopting the ethnographic methodology, this researcher was involved in the participation of the activities of *Nta* festival. The subjects and their activities were studied in naturally occurring setting. This enabled her to collect data in a systematic manner without imposing her meanings externally. The use of ethnographic design gives objectivity to data.

This study made use of key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group discussions as primary sources of data. Textbooks, on-line materials, journals, etc formed the secondary method of data collection.

3.2 Study Area

The study area for this research is Irete Autonomous Community created in 1996, located in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State. They were formally under the Umu Nwaoha Autonomous Community. However, they were granted autonomy in 1996 following several agitations to become independent. They are an Igbo speaking community like all of the other towns and communities in the South Eastern part of Nigeria.

3.3 Study Population

The study population for this research is the Irete people in Irete community. However, because Irete people are widely travelled and have formed groups that are well organised outside Irete community, the researcher carried out in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with such diaspora Irete people in Lagos. This is because most of the stakeholders involved in the resuscitation of *Nta* Festival either live in Irete or Lagos. Also, there are a sizeable number of Irete people in Lagos under an organised body of Irete Community Development Union ICDU, Lagos branch. There are other groups in places like Port Harcourt, Abuja, Kaduna, Enugu USA, United Kingdom and so on, but focus was on Irete people in Irete community and the group in Lagos. For the purpose of details and gathering useful information, the study focused on Irete indigenes who are key people in the cultural resurgence currently on going in Irete. Therefore, interviews

included meeting with these people in Irete and Lagos. The main reason for choosing to focus on Irete people living in Irete community and in Lagos is because it is among these groups that you will find key people knowledgeable in the customs and traditions of Irete. Most of these people are also stakeholders in the *Nta* festival. I must mention here that the targeted people, that is, the study population was approached and that they agreed to collaborate with the researcher for the success of this study.

Some of these people are HRH Eze (sir) Ethebelbert Ekwelibe, the 1st autonomous king of Irete, Chief Dire (President General of Irete Community Development Union), Pa Victor Ojijieme, the oldest man in Irete community (who was about ninety-eight years old at the time), Onye Ishi Ala, Kelechi Ekwelibe, the Chief Priest of Irete community, Chief Benjamin Umanze, the Palace secretary, Chief Rufus Njoku, the Traditional Prime Minister of Irete, Ma Cordelia Akujokwu Duru, the Second Oldest Mgboto in Umuigolo (ninety-two years at the time of this interview), Mrs Ruth Umah the President General ICDU Women Wing, Reverend Father Cosmos Onukwugha of St Paul's Catholic Church Irete, Chairman and Chairlady ICDU Lagos Branch, Chairman/Chairlady Umunweju Family Meeting Lagos Branch, Mrs Agatha Onuoha, the oldest woman in Umunweju family meeting (Lagos Branch), ICDU Youth Wing Leader and other key stakeholders.

3.4 Sampling

3.4.1 Sample Size

Goddard and Melville (2007: 34) puts forward that: It is often not practical or possible to study an entire population...it is necessary to make general findings based on a study of only a subset of the population.

Based on this point, this study adopted the purposive method and dwelt on informants comprising mostly of those who are knowledgeable in the customs and tradition of the Irete people and the *Nta* Festival.

- **Twelve (12)** traditional title holders were interviewed. These include: HRH Eze Sir Ethelbert C. Ekwelibe, Kelechi Ekwelibe, Nze Rufus Njoku, Onyekienuka Azolibe, Pa Victor Ojijieme, George Ogbuehi, Casmir Akujobi, Oliver Duru,

Evarest Ononogbo, Ulueke Anyanwu, Oguzie Arindueme and Ichie Kamike Uzoegbu.

- **Eleven (11)** members of the Eze cabinet representing 11 out of the 18 kindreds in Irete were interviewed. These include: Chiefs Benjamin Umanze, Vitalis Ogbuehi, Barth Anugwolu, Lazbury Owuamanam and Bonn Ekewunwa, Ambrose Njoku, Basil Ekwelibe, Peter Duru, Alpho Ajuruchi, Aloysius Uzoigwe and Charlice Akuebionwu.
- **Five (5)** government officials, one each from the following government agencies located in Owerri - National Museum Owerri, Imo State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Owerri West LGA Chairman, Imo state House of Assembly member representing Owerri, two National Assembly members representing Owerri zone were interviewed.
- **Eight (8)** council members of Ndi Nze, Ndi Oki, Irete Hunters Union and Ndi Oha. These include: Chief George Ogbuehi, Pa Anyaegbu Umanze, Mr Leonard Njoku and Pa Lawrence Ekewunwa, Pa Onwuegbuchulem Ejiogu, Bonn Dimkpa, Nze Sunday Anyanwu and Casmir Akujobi.
- A total of **four (4)** focus group discussions were held, one was held in Lagos with the Umunweju family meeting Lagos branch. Another three were held in Irete with members of Irete Youth Association, Irete Hunters Union and Irete Christian Fathers Association. Each group had a manageable number of between 4 – 8 persons.
- **Six(6)** notable personalities who are stakeholders in the cultural reformation of festivals in Irete were engaged in in-depth interview: They are, Rev. Father Cosmos Onukwugha, Cy Amako, Chris Anugwolu and Livinus Nnanna Nwanebu, Duru Sunny George, and Christopher Agobi

3.4.2 Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling technique was utilised for this study; purposive sampling helped to gather in-depth information from a smaller number of carefully selected people. Some of these informants suggested other members of the community who had useful information relevant to the study.

The following was the criteria considered for selection of the participants for key informant interviews (KII):

- Must be an indigene of Irete
- Must be a traditional title holder or a Chief Priest of Irete or in the leadership of the town union
- Must be located in Irete
- Must be an adult male or female
- Must be willing and ready to discuss *Nta* hunting performance and related festivals of the Irete people, history, its hybridity and challenges
- Must be willing to participate in the group data gathering sessions proposed for the study
- Must be willing to give approval for the use of information gathered during the session.
- If pictures are taken, must be willing to sign off on the consent form for approval to use pictures.
- Must have been an active participant of previous *Nta* festivals.

The following was the criteria considered for selection of the participants for in-depth interview (IDI)

- Must not necessarily be an indigene of Irete either by birth or maternal affiliations
- Must be located in one of the study areas; Irete and Lagos
- Must be an executive committee member of either the Eze cabinet, council of Ndi Nze, council of Ndi Oki, Irete Hunters Association, Ndi Oha, one official each from the following government agencies- National Museum Owerri, Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, Nigerian Tourism Development Cooperation, National Council for Arts and Culture, National Gallery of Arts, National Orientation Agency, Imo State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Owerri West LGA Chairman, Imo state House of Assembly member representing Owerri, National Assembly members representing Owerri zone.
- Must be an adult male or female
- Must be willing to give approval for the use of information gathered during the session.

- Must be willing to share opinion and/or experience on *Nta* and other related traditional festivals within Irete and its environs.
- If pictures are taken, must be willing to sign off on the consent form for approval to use pictures.

The following was the criteria considered for selection of those that participated in the focus group discussion (FGD):

- Must be an Irete adult (male or female)
- Must be an indigene of Irete either by birth or maternal affiliations
- Must be located in one of the study areas
- Must be familiar with *Nta* hunting performance and other related festivals in Irete and its environs
- Must understand what *Nta* festival is
- Must be willing and ready to actively participate in the group data gathering sessions
- If pictures are taken, must be willing to sign off on the consent form for approval to use pictures.

3.5 Sources of Data

For the sake of validity and objectivity, primary and secondary sources formed the basis of data collection for this study.

3.5.1. Primary Methods of Data Collection

- * **Participant Observation:** This helped the researcher get more involved in the *Nta* festival, thereby, making the behaviors of the actors become more meaningful and understandable in their cultural context. Because the researcher observed live experiences participating in the people's activities, she became more grounded in and familiar with the different information that was given by the informants.
- * **Key Informant Interview (KII):** These set of interviews are of utmost importance in qualitative studies. The informants aided the researcher in making connections and ensured that the data collected is authentic. Some of the key

informants include the Eze Agubiam of Irete community, the spiritual leader of the community, wife of the Eze and members of the hunter's association.

In Depth Interviews (IDI): These set of unstructured interviews allow the informants express themselves freely without any impositions from the interviewer. The researcher employed interview questioning based on the objectives of the research.

- **Focus Group Discussion:** This is another method of collecting qualitative data. For this study, the researcher engaged a small number of people (four groups) in an informal group discussion that focused on particular issues. This helped to get divergent opinions from the members of the group.

3.5.2 Secondary Methods of Data Collection

Secondary sources of data collection for this study include:

- Textbooks related to the topic under study
- Journals, internet, newspapers and magazines
- Gazettes and government documents etc.

3.6 Research Instruments

- Pen and notebooks were used for taking notes in the field
- Tape recorder was useful in recording interviews. It complements writing in pen and as this is faster in getting every word spoken. It was useful when transcribing and during data analysis.
- The still camera: This was used in taking snapshots during proceedings of the *Nta* hunting performance.
- Video camera: This was also used to get details of the proceedings for added quality to the study.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is key in all stages of a qualitative research because of its descriptive nature. In a qualitative research, the volume of oral interviews, focus group discussions and degree of observation made during the field work can be enormous,

therefore, the researcher utilised interpretative method of data analysis for the study after transcribing all the generated data. Data analysis involves the organisation of what had been seen, heard and read. The data collected was transcribed and analysed through literal and interpretive readings. Primary data was presented logically with secondary data to back up the argument and ensure proper presentation of results.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preamble

This section of the study presents in-depth background information on the study area, Irete. Cultural elements which aid to the peaceful co-existence of Irete people and foster good social relationship, generally, are the focus. Emphasis is on geographical location of Irete autonomous community, belief system and ancestral worship, Irete political structure, family system, inter community wars, Osu caste system, land ownership and settlement methods, predominant occupation of the Irete people, economic activities and commerce, Irete festivals and traditional ceremonies. The information presented in this chapter provides insights into the ethnography of the people of Irete. In this chapter, the various research findings and discussions that make up the objectives of this study were also presented.

4.1 Geographical location of Irete Autonomous Community

Irete is located one and a half kilometres away from Owerri control post, along Owerri-Onitsha road. Irete is bounded on the North by Owerri main town in Owerri Municipal Council, on the North-West Irete shares common boundary with Umuguma and Okwukwu, while on the South, Irete is bounded by Orogwe and Ohi all in Umunwaoha. On the Eastern front of Irete are Amakaohia – Uratta and Egbeada while Ndegwu is on the West of Irete. Irete can be found on both sides of the road when coming either from Onitsha or Owerri Municipal. The town is divided by the federal highway leading in and out of Irete from Onitsha and Port Harcourt. It covers an estimated area of thirty square kilometres and comprises of eighteen villages or kindreds. Also in Irete are the following:

4.1.1 Infrastructure and Institutions

Irete Autonomous Community before its autonomy in 1996 already had two secondary schools, the Irete Secondary Technical School built by the community in 1980 and the Bishop Lasbrey Girls Secondary School that was established as a Teachers Training College in the 1950s. Some approved private secondary schools and commercial institutions exist in the community as well.

4.1.2 Primary Schools

Irete has two main public primary schools; Irete Community School and T.T.C. Practicing School Irete. Each of these schools predates the Nigerian independence. Today, several private schools abound in the community.

4.1.3 Secondary Schools

Irete has two Secondary schools, Irete Secondary Technical School and the Bishop Lasbrey Girls Secondary School.

4.1.4 Churches

Irete people are predominantly Christians. There are several churches located in Irete and these include St. Paul's Holy Family Catholic Church, St. Helen's Catholic Church and St. Peter's Anglican Church Irete. Today these Churches are Parishes. Thus, they are also called Umunwoha Holy Family Catholic Parish Irete, St. Helen's Catholic Parish and St. Peter's Anglican Parish Irete. In addition, there is the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Mount of Blessing, the Bishop Lasbrey Girls Anglican Chaplaincy and the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Irete (an out station of St. Helen's Parish). There are other numerous churches in Irete community.

4.1.5 Health Centre:

Irete Community has a well equipped and functional Community Health Centre with resident nurses that cater for the health needs of the ever-growing population.

4.1.6 Population

Irete is a cosmopolitan community harbouring a great number of visitors because of its nearness to the seat of Imo State Government and its peaceful nature. Irete people are highly hospitable. Irete community boasts of a population of over eighteen thousand people (18,000). In the last gubernatorial election, Irete recorded ten thousand voters.

4.1.7 Agriculture

Irete is an agrarian community. The natives practise subsistence farming. Major agricultural products are yam, cassava, okra, fruited pumpkin, melon, pear and maize. Irete people are great producers of cassava and vegetables. A negligible but steady growing number of Irete people are engaged in Poultry, fish farming and piggery.

4.1.8 Markets

Irete has two big markets. The Afor Irete Market is the main market and is situated at the heart of the town along Irete – Ndegwu road. The Orié market which is gradually becoming a daily market is the second market and it is located along the Owerri – Onitsha federal highway.

4.1.9 Industries

While some big organisations such as the Nigerian Bottling Company Plc, Vinal Aluminum, Roche Construction Company, Rhas Construction Company Limited and Roudo Construction Company Limited operate in the community's industrial layout; there are other cottage industries operating in the community. They are engaged in bread baking, Paint production and potable water production. There is a mobile police quarters, Police station, several housing estates such as the Chikoba Estate also located in Irete (supplement to Imo State Gazette No 1 VOL 35 Sept., 2000. Part A1 – A35 i.e. Imo State of Nigeria law 1999 No 3).

4.2 Origin of Irete People

Just like a vast number of stories abound concerning the origin of the Igbo, so also are there several accounts of how Irete came into being.

Even as controversial as is the claim that the Igbos are descendants of the Jews, some oral accounts of Irete origin have traced their roots to the Jewish people, which posits ancient Israel as the original homeland of the Irete people. Another version of the origin of the Igbo Irete is the Eri ancestor where the Igbo creation myth originates. The myth claims that the Igbo ancestral home is Nri in present day Anambra State and founded by Eri, the ancestor of the Igbos.

Coming down to the migration of the Irete people to their present location, there have been several accounts also. Of the several accounts relating to the origin of Irete and, its migration to the present site, the oral accounts which trace the origin of Irete to Aboha and Uratta are the most acceptable.

According to an oral interview with the Agubian 1, HRH Eze Ethelbert Ekwelibe on the 4th of January, 2017 in his Palace in Umueye in Irete autonomous community, he confirmed that according to the story handed down to him, Nwaoha migrated from Arochukwu and settled in the area where the Aboha village is located in present day Ohi.

In the same interview, he went further to say that another account has it that Nwaoha migrated from Owaelu in the present day Uratta in Owerri North Local Government area of Imo State.

Other sources which corroborated these stories are from Nze Sir Rufus Njoku, the traditional Prime Minister of Irete and, Pa Victor Ojjieme, the oldest man in Irete. In separate interviews held on the 21st of May, 2019 and 11th of January, 2017 in Irete respectively, they both affirmed these stories of migration. They said that even though these stories were not handed down in written form, the Irete people accept them because they have been passed down from generation to generation.

4.2.1 Order of Irete Kindreds

According to Ekwelibe (2017: 5)

What constitutes Irete today are a combination of splinter and immigrant groups

In his submissions, he grouped Elele, Agwu, Oba, Eye and Njo as being the descendants of Eregerenwa also known as Irete. He argues further (2017: 7) that:

The splinter groups include Nkweye and Mbe, brothers of Eye. They were sent out by their senior brother (Eye) to man or control the immigrants in the region of Umuoma. Nkweye was to take charge of Ohia and Eju, while Mbe was commissioned to take charge of Edi, Igolo and Akum and are till today called “Eye nchi ato”.

He continued further, ‘the splinter group Nwanlo emerged as a result of internal feud in Oba lineage’. Umunwanlo was attacked by their kin, Umuoba whom they defeated and claimed to have swallowed “anyi elole ha” which was what earned them the name Umunwalo, “those who swallow their enemies”.

The Ngada lineage, he continued, ‘emerged from a child picked out of a hole by the daughter of Eziama, the ancestor of Elele, Agwu and Oba. This child was rehabilitated by Eziama, grew up and married and thus established the Ngada lineage under the descendants of Eziama. Their original name being ‘Ngagara Ada’.

However, Pa Victor Ojjieme’s story on how the Ngada lineage came into existence differs. He claims that the Ngada lineage are children of Ada, first daughter of Eregeremwa, who was given a portion of land to stay with her children upon her return to her father’s home due to an unsuccessful marriage. Nze Rufus Njoku’s story on this order is in tandem with that of the Eze Agubiam 1. The three versions, however, agree that the Ngada lineage are children of a female descendant of Ubiam.



Plate 4.1: The researcher and Pa Victor Ojijieme, the oldest man in Irete with some members of his family during an oral interview, January, 2017.
Source: Fieldwork, January, 2017

Among the immigrant groups, the Oyo group are said to have come in two different periods from Achi with the Umungwenakoroche leading the Umuoyodumbogbo group. Ekwelibe writes (2017:8):

The Oyo immigrants were giant-like men who defended Irete against their Owerri neighbours during community wars. The Oma immigrants are said to have come from Nekede while the Ekwune immigrants migrated from Achi.

4.2.2 Irete kindred and village formation

Irete is made up of eighteen villages or kindreds divided into three blocs namely, Ezi-irete, Umuoma Etiti and Umuoma Azu. Under Ezi Irete, there are seven kindreds. (1) Umuelele (2) Umuoba (3) Umuagwu (4) Umungada (5) Umungwenakoroche (6) Umunwanlo (7) Umuodumbogbo. Under Umuoma Etiti, there are:

- 1) Umueye (2) Umunweju (3) Umunjo (4) Umunkweye (5) Umuohia (6) Umuorieji (7) Umuezeduru

While under Umuoma Azu, there are four villages namely:

1. Umuigolo 2. Umumbe 3. Umuedi 4. Umuakum

This formation, however, is at times grouped under Ezi-Irete and Amaikpu. When this is done, all seven kindreds under Ezi Irete come under the same umbrella while all eleven villages under Umuoma etiti and Umuoma azu come under the Amaikpu umbrella as one. In order of seniority and sharing, the 18 kindreds come in this order:

- 1) Umueye (2) Umuelele (3) Umunweju (4) Umunjo (5) Umuoba (6) Umumbe (7) Umunkweye (8) Umuagwu (9) Umuohia (10) Umungada (11) Umungwenakoroche (12) Umuedi (13) Umunwanlo (14) Umuakum (15) Umuigolo (16) Umuorieji (17) Umuodumbogbo (18) Umuezeduru

4.2.3 Occupation

From ancient times, the people of Irete engaged in subsistence farming, hunting and petty trading. Farming had been the major occupation of the people. Land belonged to families and was shared out to members during the planting season. Land was, more often than not, shared in order of seniority. Wealthy families also bought lands so as to cultivate more. The products were either sold and/or stored for family consumption.

Hunting was also a major occupation in Irete. Men, both old and young set their traps and sold their game while leaving some for consumption at home.

Some of the products cultivated in Irete include yam, cocoyam, cassava, maize, melon, fruited pumpkin, water leaf, pepper, okra, different kinds of fruits etc.

Due to development and land scarcity these days, most members of Irete community now engage in trading, real estate, hospitality and hotel business etc. Farmlands and hunting forests are fast thinning out giving way to houses, hotels, industries, schools, churches and so on. Also, because a lot of construction is going on in Irete presently, many Irete people have become artisans specialising in carpentry, bricklaying, welding etc. The economic activities of Irete community include trading, hunting and farming. In recent times however, white collar jobs have been included in the list.

4.3 Belief System and Ancestral Worship

The people of Irete community are very religious in nature. Before the coming of the Europeans and the introduction of western religions such as Christianity, Irete indigenes practised the Igbo traditional religion and worshipped Chukwu or Chineke (the supreme God), through their ancestors, gods and deities. The Irete people also believe in the existence of two realms in the world; the physical (uwa) and the spiritual (ala mmuo) realms. While they believe that man, animals and plants are in the physical realm, they group ancestors and spirits to be in the spiritual realm. The people made sacrifices and supplications to the supreme God through deities since they believed that man cannot communicate with God directly. They believe that there is life after death; therefore, reincarnation to the Irete person is real. In Irete, it is also believed that the ancestors never leave them and this is represented in the form of masquerades which come out

during traditional events in the community. With the advent of the Christian religion, many members of Irete community have converted to the Christian faith, but, there are a few who still engage in the indigenous worship system. There is also the existence of chief priests of different deities that keep the traditional religions going and ensure that traditional festivals are held to honour the deities.

4.3.1 Deities in Irete

There are two principal deities in Irete community. These are Ala (the earth goddess) and Ogbohodu (son of Ala). Ala is connected to fertility and is responsible for both the crop yield and as well as the gift of child bearing while Ogbohodu is the protector of lives and property and, the Irete god of war. There are other deities such as that worshipped by individuals, families and groups. One of such is the ‘**Nnenwachalu**’ (Mermaid Water Spirit) whose Priest belonged to the Chukwueke family in Umunweju village. The Chief Priest (Onye Ishi Ala) of the Ala deity is always chosen from the Umuogbunda lineage in Umueye while that of the Ogbohodu (Onye Ishi Ogbohodu) comes from the Umuokpanka lineage in Umuelele. The heads of the different deities all belong to the Oha secret society with Onye Ishi Ala as the head of the society. According to Kelechi Ekwelibe, the present Onye Ishi Ala (Chief Priest) of Irete, (personal communication, 11th of January, 2017, in his house in Umueye in Irete) he revealed that the Onye Ishi Ala is the head of all secret societies and the guardian of the shrines in Irete. Deities are appeased by making sacrifices to placate them. While some of the deities like Ogbohodu and Ala are collectively owned by members of the Irete community, some others are owned by families and individuals.

To appease deities, sacrifices are offered collectively and individually through the Chief Priests of deities. The Chief Priests and their servants clean, decorate, dress the shrines and carry objects of worship to centres. They are also diviners and can often foretell the future. For instance, before the *Nta* festival proper, the Onye Ishi Ala, often embarks on a trip to the Nkolo forest where he meets with spirits of ancestors and deities. In this Nkolo forest, the Onye Ishi Ala is often given messages concerning certain individuals and to the Irete community as a whole. These messages are given out (even though not in detail) upon his return from Nkolo. The Chief Priest and his men often

offer sacrifices to the deities to avert any foreseen calamities. These Priests also present petitions of worshippers to the deities; they preside over festivals and see to oath taking.

In traditional worship system handed over to Irete people, deities and spirits exist and are believed to mediate on behalf of human beings.

According to the Onye Ishi Ala, (personal communication with the researcher, 11th January, 2017) 'Chukwu or Chineke is the supreme, overall God who created man. There are deities and spirits through which the people reach God. There is also an individual spirit, (more like a guardian angel), who the Igbos call chi. This chi is a guide and is peculiar to each person. In some quarters in Igbo land, where traditional worship is still active, each individual worships his chi and makes sacrifices to the chi before leaving home every morning. When the person dies, the Ikenga which is often used to represent this chi is broken into two and buried with the person'. The Ikenga is characterized by two horns. It can be owned by an individual (mostly male), family or community. It is one of the most powerful symbols of the Igbo people believed to be a guardian angel. The placation of this chi is believed to bring good things to the individual, family or community.

Arinze (1970: 9) corroborates this point, he postulates that:

Most Igbos believe that each individual has a spirit, a genius, a spiritual – double, his chi, which is given to him at conception by Chukwu and which accompanies this individual from cradle to grave.

The relationship existing between deities and spirits and the Supreme Being is further illustrated with the diagram below by Ononogbo in his lecture titled: Ogwugwu: a Deity Abandoned or a Festival Unattractive, delivered during the *Nta* Festival of 2017.

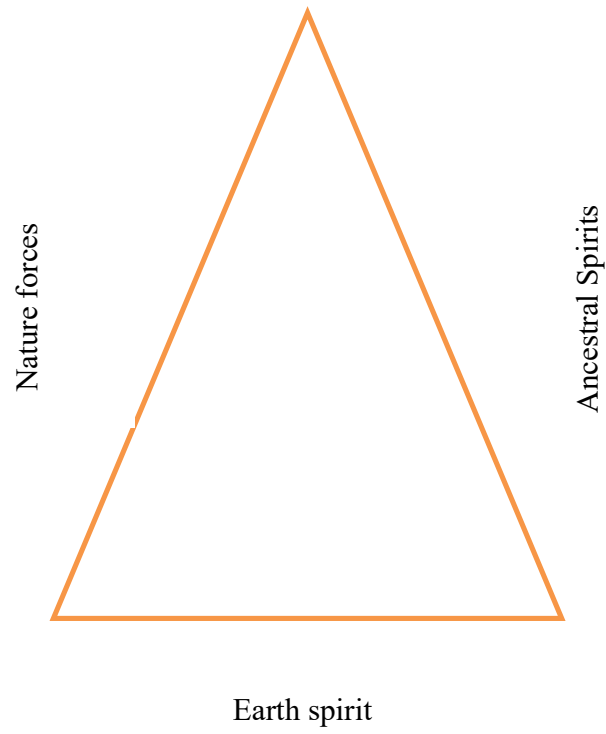


Figure 4.1: Triangle of Relationships

Source: - Speech delivered by Ralph Onunogbo on *Nta* festival of 2017

In this diagram, the earth spirit is at the base and is considered the most important spirit after Chukwu or Chineke at the apex of the triangle. This apex is the sky and is believed to be the abode where God, the Supreme Power dwells.

According to Arinze cited in Agbedo (2007), 'the Earth spirit is the Queen of the underworld, the owner of men and custodian of public morality in conjunction with the ancestors'.

Panrinder (1954: 3) propounds that:

The earth is the mother of plants, animals and men and is of great importance to the people... The earth is a mystical power of which everybody stands in awe because of its prohibition... It forbids bloodshed and so is a sanction of solidarity for the community.

In Irete, the earth is called Ala. The earth goddess is highly revered as an embodiment of life. It produces life and provides sustenance. The people of Irete believe that Ala gives and takes life. To the Irete person, Ala preserves the good man and destroys the evil one. Ala, it is believed, can reject an evil one even in death. Before the advent of Christianity, twins were regarded as evil and were often killed and thrown into the evil forest. Indigenes who have desecrated the earth often need to carry out appropriate ritual cleansing before Ala forgives them; otherwise they face the consequences of death. And when they die, their bodies are cast away to the evil forest. For this reason and more, the earth goddess is frequently invoked and appeased by members of Igbo traditional religion. This is the same among traditional worshippers in Irete, with the Onye Ishi Ala as the Chief Priest and the go between. In Irete, the people believe that they can communicate with their dead ancestors.

During oath taking, parties involved are requested to stand bare footed. This is to establish physical contact with the earth so as to make their oath more efficacious. At times, they are made to scoop a small quantity of sand during the process. Indeed Ala, the earth goddess occupies a sacred position in Irete culture and tradition and is highly revered among members of Irete community.

Even with the advent of Christianity, recently, difficult matters which cannot be handled successfully by other law providing groups such as the Umunna, Ndi Oki and

Ndi Nze etc are often referred to the Onye Ishi Ala. This is because of the position which the earth goddess occupies among the people.

The earth goddess, in Irete, helps in enforcing discipline, law and order. Some of the items used in the placation and worship of ala, the earth goddess include, kolanut, alligator pepper and local gin among other things.

4.4 The Family System in Irete

The family unit is an important one in Irete. Much emphasis is placed on family and family relationship. Irete is an egalitarian and patrilineal society. In pre-colonial times, Irete people appreciated large families. The men married many wives. Most times, they married even more than two. They could marry as many as ten, twelve and even more. The belief then was that having many wives will lead to plenty children and this eventually culminates into enough hands to help out in the farms. At this time also, yam barns were used to measure how wealthy a man was, therefore, it was just natural to have large families to cultivate the farmlands.

Most marriages at this period also were done within Umunwoha. This is to say that people preferred to marry from neighbouring villages. The general belief was that it was better to marry from around where cultures were the same. Therefore, there were a lot of intermarriages between people from Irete and Orogwe, Amakohia Ubi, Ndegwu and Ohi. It was more often than not, on an introductory basis. There was always a go between.

‘We rarely married people from far away. Our marriages usually remained within this Umunwaoha. This was one of the reasons why we were united and every one knew everyone. The chances of marrying an Osu was also very slim’ (Personal communication, Mma Akujokwu Duru on the 7th of January, 2017 in Umuoma, Irete)

As earlier mentioned, the Igbo society is highly patrilineal and Irete is not an exception. In Irete, land is the very existence of a man. Landed property is not bequeathed to women; therefore, a man always strives to give birth to male children. It is believed that a man’s name is gone and wiped away from the surface of the earth if he does not give birth to male children. Thus, deliberate efforts are often made to ensure the

continuity of the family unit. A widow who gives birth to a child after her husband's demise automatically gives the child to her late husband even as it is well known that a dead man cannot make babies. Equally, a man who is not capable of making babies can come to an agreement with his wife and family to bear children from outside. The family can also marry for a dead person (in the name of the deceased) and allow the woman to bear children in his name. Likewise, a man who has only female children can allow his daughters to procreate for him. In this case, the daughter can bear children from outside and bear them in the name of her father especially where there is no formal marriage between her and the father of the children. These happen in the case where a man does not have male children. The family must continue anyhow. A woman who falls out with her husband and bears children while they are separated will have to give them up to her erstwhile husband as long as her bride price was not returned. Isidienu (2016:3) sums it up in her submission:

Family is the smallest unit of political organisations in Igboland. Basically family to an Igbo man means a lot. It encompasses all that have blood relations, and quite different from the western idea of family.

The Igbo people believe that a large family is important and that a family name is lost if there are no male descendants to continue the lineage. Moreso, female children are not recognised during inheritance sharing. Therefore, a man without a son automatically loses out as land and other properties are not extended to his daughters. In fact, more often than not, his own properties are taken over by close extended family members upon his death.

4.4.1 Umunna

According to Raphael Ononogbo, in an interview with the researcher on the 22nd of July, 2017 at his residence in Umuagwu in Irete, 'the Umunna is a strong family unit of several nuclear families having the same paternal lineage. They see themselves as relations made up of different nuclear families. They are not to be involved in anything that will bring harm to a fellow Umunna. They cannot intermarry. It is considered a taboo to marry one's cousin or to have sexual relationship with them'.

Isidienu (2016:5) further affirms that:

People from the same Umunna have the obligation of protecting themselves. It is an abomination to be an accomplice against a fellow Umunna because he is your brother”.

In Irete, the oldest man is the head of the Umunna and keeps the Ofo Umunna (kindred's staff of office). The head of the Umunna is the most senior man from any of the families within the Umunna. His duties include but not limited to presiding over meetings, settling disputes, organising sacrifices and issuance of inheritance. He however does not make decisions in isolation. He consults with the various heads from the different families.

4.4.2 Opara- First male child

In Irete, the various nuclear families consist of a husband, wife or wives, male and female children. The head of the nuclear family is the husband. He often is the first male child who succeeds his father after his demise. He automatically takes over his father's building, other landed properties and assets. This is gradually changing though, these days, the first son is entitled to his father's house while other properties may be shared among siblings. In Irete, the Opara has the right to share his father's possessions if his father did not do so before his death. However, in recent times, a father may decide to leave a will where he would have stated how his properties will be shared. This happens especially in the case where the man is very wealthy and educated. He may do this to avoid his children fighting over his assets when he dies and, this will is expected to be followed to the letter. The Oparas represent the voices of each nuclear family within the Umunna circle and other gatherings. It is his duty to protect the family. Chief Benjamin Umanze (Personal communication in Irete, 9th January 2017) asserts that the Opara in Irete succeeds his father and is not contestable except in some cases where maybe the first male child is sick or deformed to a point that he cannot communicate or, where he is in prison etc. The Opara automatically assumes the role of his father the minute his father dies. In most cases, the Opara begins his training to assume this role from childhood.

4.4.3 Ndi Ngboto-married or unmarried daughters

These groups are women who are born to families from Irete. They are female children who are either single or married but whose fathers are from any of the eighteen kindreds in Irete. These groups of women often come to settle disputes in their paternal homes. When issues get very difficult to settle, Ndi Ngboto are often called upon to wade in. According to Mma Cordelia Akujokwu Duru (Personal communication, 2017), ‘an Ngboto is very well respected in her community. Infact, Ndi Ngboto wield so much power that they can even challenge male authority, which in Igbo land almost never happens. There have been instances where we have stopped the burial of some of our brothers and sisters because the deceased’s children have been accused of ‘not properly taking care of them when they were alive. As punishment for abandoning our brothers and sisters when they were alive, the children were levied and the funeral rites disrupted when they refuse to pay. In fact, we go as far as taking the corpse away with us if the children do not cooperate with us’. Ndi Ngboto perform several other social functions in Irete and are highly respected in their paternal homes.

4.5 Traditional Institutions/ Leadership in Irete

As earlier noted, in Irete and, in most Igbo communities, there is no centralised system of leadership. However, the advent of colonialism earlier mentioned has seen some communities coming under the leadership of a central body, such as the Warrant Chiefs, which in some parts of Igbo communities (as some scholars argue) has culminated into the Eze (kinship) system. Much as these Ezes are often ceremonial, they collaborate with other groups to run the affairs of the community. Much has changed in the leadership structure of Irete since the first Warrant Chief, Eze Eguzoribe Okenwa, was appointed by the then District Commissioner of Owerri, Sir Harold M Douglas in 1897. According to the Onye Ishi Ala, “Onye Ishi Ala was at the head of the elders’ council who made a final decision on all matters”. The indigenous system of government in Irete autonomous community is basically the same as that found in every Igbo community.

Ekwelibe (2017: 25) maintains that;

The indigenous Irete government at the village level consists of two political institutions namely; the council of elders (Ama – Ala council) and the village Assembly...The Ama-Ala consists of the heads of the various groups, the Nze title holders as well as the members of the Oha society.

The Town Assembly is an assembly of all adult males in Irete community, it constitutes of not only the members of the council of elders but also all adult males of the town. The town assembly constitutes the highest decision making body in Irete. Every adult male is allowed to express his opinion in the assembly.

Nze Rufus Njoku affirms this (Personal communication, 2018) ‘ Although the Eze can use his veto power in certain cases, he alone cannot make decisions on his own without consulting with the Ndi Oki, Ndi Oha, Ndi Nze and the general Town Assembly’.

Isidienu (2016:1) classifies this system as “the Democratic Village Republican” which represents much of the Igbo communities. She maintains that “it is a leadership form which is by consensus and where the heads are people of unquestionable character.

4.5.1 Ndi Oki- Council of elders

This group consists of the elders from the different kindreds in Irete community. This is the council of the first four oldest male members in each of the eighteen (18) villages in Irete Autonomous Community. The Council is known, called and addressed as Ndi Oki (Elders). Membership of the council is compulsory and limited to these four oldest members. The Council may request from the National Executive Council NEC of ICDU for two literate persons who are in the genes of Irete and or proven integrity for the posts of Secretary and Assistant Secretary or any other posts that require writing, where the members of the council could not provide such officers within themselves. To belong to the council of Ndi Oki, one must be among the eldest in his kindred. Ekwelibe (2017:18) reports that:

One does not belong to the Elder’s council because one is interested, you must be an elder of your village. In other words it is by divine providence that one becomes a member of the elders’ council.

The elders' council wields enormous powers in the day to day running of the affairs of the community. The functions of this council include: Settlement of civil disputes brought to it for hearing by persons or group of persons resident in the community irrespective of whether or not the person is an indigene. They consult and advise the Eze-in-Council on matters relating to culture, custom and tradition in Irete Autonomous Community. Ekwelibe states further that:

They help to preserve the history, customs and norms of the villages and the community in general. Council of Ndi Oki or Ama-ala is indeed a very important one in the political administration of Irete.

4.5.2 Ndi Oha- Priests of all deities

Members of Oha wear the traditional cap with red colour and no cockscomb. The Oha cult comprises of the heads of all deities in Irete. The Chief Priests and some notable members make up the members of this group.

The Functions of the Council of Ndi Oha

They are to perform sacrifices to the deities in the community and settle disputes relating to defilement of land. They mediate by placing Omu on disputed land if invited and, to consult and advise the Eze-in-Council on matters relating to culture, custom and traditions like the *Nta* and *Ogwugwu* festivals.

4.5.3 The Council of Ndi Nze

This is a prestigious traditional governing institution whose acceptance of membership is determined by the members only. In Irete, the Nze title is an important one. It is not hereditary, however, it is structured. Ekwelibe 2017:21 describes the Nze system in Irete thus:

Nze title system in Irete community has graded structure (Nze Ogbuehi and Nze Duru) ... the Nze title system in Irete originated at Umuokpanka lineage in Umuelele. The Title, 'Chief', applies only to a person who is so conferred by a government recognised traditional Ruler and is issued with a certificate by the same.

It is forbidden in Irete for any person to arrogate to himself the title ‘Chief’ in Irete Community unless he has been so conferred. Any person(s) found going contrary to this law, which is in the constitution of Irete community, shall face disciplinary actions as ascribed by tradition and constitution of Ndi Nze. The traditional cap of Ndi Nze is known and called ‘Nwagwu’. It has white and red stripes with large cockscomb. Its functions in the community are: Settlement of civil disputes brought to the council for hearing by a person or group of persons or villages. Placing injunction by planting Omu (raffia palms) for the purposes of separating warring parties whether or not invited. This is as an act of supremacy above other law enforcement groups in Irete. To place an injunction by planting Omu on disputed land when invited.

4.5.4 Onye Ishi Ala (Chief Priest)

As earlier discussed in preceding paragraphs, there are two principal deities in Irete namely Ala and Odo. While Ala is the earth goddess, responsible for fertility of crops and provision of children, Odo (also known as Ogbohodo) is the male son of Ala and is responsible for the protection of life and property. Odo is the messenger of Ala and along with some other deities and ancestors make up the Irete pantheon of gods.

The Onye Ishi Ala in Irete is the head of the Oha society, which is made up of all the heads of the deities in Irete. He is in charge of the Ala shrine and holds the Ofo Ukwu.

Before the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the Onye Ishi Ala served both as the spiritual and political head of Irete. According to Ekwelibe (2017:17):

His religious role endowed him with a subtle political authority in the hey days of pre-colonial era, for example, the council of elders, the Ama ala, headed by an elder from Umueye usually met at the home stead of the head of Ala (Onye Ishi Ala) as the Chief Priest of the town.

Even though the Onye Ishi Ala had no absolute executive or judicial powers, he was considerably significant in the running of the town’s affairs. For instance, it was in his premises that important decisions are taken on several matters. Decisions concerning inter-family or inter-lineage disputes, oath taking, banishment, land disputes etc were all done in his court before him as the head of the Oha cult. Nze Rufus Njoku (Personal

communication, 2018) confirms this, 'Before the advent of Christianity, Onye Ishi Ala served as both the political and spiritual head of Irete. Most decisions took place in his court and, to a large extent, he could use his position to influence matters. This is not the same anymore as people have embraced Christianity. He still serves as the spiritual head of Irete to an extent, as Irete still has a few traditional worshippers and he is still the custodian of the Ofo Ukwu'.

He is often from the Umuogbunda lineage in Umueye, where we have the present Onye Ishi Ala and the Agubiam 1 of Irete in the persons of Kelechi Ekwelibe and HRH Eze Ethelbert Ekwelibe respectively.

The Onye Ishi Ala is still from this lineage in Irete as in precolonial times. However, there has been a waterered down effect on the powers of the Onye Ishi Ala due to the advent of Christianity. Most Irete people are Christians with a vast majority belonging to the catholic faith. It is only in extreme cases that indigenes would take their matters to the court of the Onye Ishi Ala. They would rather go to the Reverend Father and, more often than not, his final decision holds. Some people, however, resort to the law courts, but, in most cases, this was always a last option.

This does not mean, however, that the Onye Ishi Ala no longer has any political powers. He is solely in charge of the *Nta* festival, especially, the spiritual aspect which involves consulting the spirit of the ancestors and interpreting the will of the dead for the living souls. Even the Eze cannot perform these rites, which may be termed the most important aspect of the festival.

Mention must be made also that there are indigenes of Irete who still practice the traditional Igbo religion and in this regard, the Onye Ishi Ala is their leader and they still depend on him to settle issues. Nze Rufus Njoku, however, says that those who still flock with the Onye Ishi Ala are heads of the smaller deities for which he is in charge (Personal communication, 2018).

4.5.5 Onye Ishi Ogbohodu

As mentioned earlier, Ogbohodu is the god responsible for the protection of life and property in Irete. He is believed to be the son of Ala, the earth goddess. This god is

popularly referred to as “Ogbohodu Irete”. According to Onye Ishi Ogbohodu in Irete, Onyekienuka Azolibe

“In Umuwaoha Ofo ise, the five descendants of Nwaoha all have their patron deities. Ohigide’s patron deity is Imo, Orogwe’s patron deity is Odu Ori, Ndegwu’s patron deity is called Ozurumba, Amakohia’s patron deity is Ezeala and Irete’s patron deity is known as Ogbohodu. All five children of Nwaoha have their deities according to the myth and legend handed down from their ancestors. They are still being worshipped by those involved in traditional worship in these parts” (personal communication at his residence in Umuelele, Irete, 12th January, 2017)

Before the advent of Christianity in Igbo land, the people believed so much in their deities as an avenue of reaching Chukwu. This is not different in Irete.

The Onye Ishi Ogbohodu who is always chosen from the Umuokpanka lineage in Umuelele is responsible for the maintenance of the Ogbohodu shrine which is presently located at ‘Afor Irete’ (the village market).

In an interview with Mma Cordelia Akujokwu, she told this researcher that in the olden days, Ogbohodu was the only god the people looked up to for protection. Therefore, sacrifices were made to the god by the Chief Priest individually and collectively with the people when the need arises. She, however, remarked that this was no longer the case as many Irete people had converted to Christianity.

To corroborate this story, Mrs. Nmaji Agatha Onuoha (in an interview on the 7th of August 2018 in Umuoma, Irete)affirmed that during the Nigerian civil war, the ammunition and food truck of the Nigerian Army which was parked at the village square just beside the Ogbohodu shrine went up in flames. She said the whole village believed that this was an attack by Ogbohodu in a bid to defend his children against enemy attack.

Nze Rufus Njoku, however, could not ascertain this story as he and his family had left Irete to Orlu for safety. He was able to state categorically though, that the Nigerian army occupied Irete and operated from there. He also mentioned that the Ogbohodu shrine was backing the St Paul’s Primary School (which presently faces the St Paul’s Cathedral) at the time but has been moved further away. It is now located at the centre of the Afor Irete market while the Ala shrine remains where it has always been, in the

compound of its Chief Priest in Umueye. He concluded by saying that the Ogbohodu shrine has never been the same since the Biafran civil war as most of the objects (including the community Ikenga and several objects of worship) in the shrine disappeared during that time.

The present Onye Ishi Ogbohodu is Onyekienuka Azolibe and he is from the Umuokpanka lineage in Umuelele. He works hand in hand with the Onye Ishi Ala and maintains the Ogbohodu shrine.

4.6 Colonial Administration and the Introduction of Warrant Chiefs among the Igbo

‘Igbo enwegh eze’ (The Igbo have no king) is a common aphorism among the Igbos. Many scholars have given credence to this saying in their works. Adegbulu Femi (2011:1) in an essay explores the veracity or otherwise of the claims in certain quarters, that the pre-colonial Igbo society had no centralised administration and so, the question of Eze or Igwe (king) could not have arisen. He finally comes to the conclusion that majority of the new Ezes or Igwes of Igboland must have been (or are) descendants of the warrant chiefs who got their offices during the colonial era. This claim tends not to be too far from the truth.

According to Nze Rufus Njoku (Personal communication, 2018), ‘Irete has never had a king. The town union, the Nze council, council of elders, religious leaders etc all combine to form the ‘government of the day’.

This “Igbo village Republicanism” as Adegbulu calls it, has been discussed extensively in previous sections of this study. Even though, as Adegbulu puts it that “there are exceptions to this general picture; Some Igbo communities, especially trading cities along the Niger, like Onitsha, Oguta, Arochukwu, Osomari and the holy city of Nri had elaborated chieftaincy institutions in pre-colonial times”, the people of Irete fall under the “village republican group”.

Adegbulu further postulates, ‘the archaeological findings at Igbo Ukwu seem to suggest the existence of a one thousand year old tradition of Nri sacred kingship and hegemony over large parts of Igboland’.

Nonetheless, many parts of Igboland practice the village republican system. Ekwelibe gives an account of how the Warrant Chief System was introduced into Irete as handed down by his ancestors. He narrates that (2017:71):

The necessity to have a representative of Irete community at Owerri as requested by the white man named Harold M Douglas (the District Commissioner) made the Irete council of elders to ask one Eguzoribe Ogbuehi (Alias Okenwa) to follow the white man.

Okenwa, as popularly referred to in Irete up till date, was to go as an errand boy and report back to the Chief Priest and elders of the community. According to Ekwelibe, this mission of Okenwa made him the first warrant chief of Irete in 1906.

It has been maintained in certain scholarly writings that what appears today in Igboland as Ezeship or Igweship is only a transformation of the warrant chief system. 'This metamorphosis', according to Adegbulu, 'saw the emergence of some descendants of the Warrant Chiefs as Ezes and Igwes'.

On the above, Nze Rufus (personal communication, 2018) submits that:

Even though the Eze we have now is a descendant of a onetime spiritual and political head of Irete, his ascension to the throne was by election and not selection. It is true that his father was a warrant chief but he contested with other indigenes of Irete for the position of the Eze. Peter Okenwa, on the other hand was Eguzoribe's son, he too became a native court chief. I cannot tell if it was because his father, Eguzoribe had been a warrant chief or not. At that time, it may likely be so.

In some cases, the first set of warrant chiefs were not necessarily from the council of traditional leaders in a community. As a matter of fact, they were mostly individuals who were seen as menace to the community and so they thought it will be a relief for such people to be taken away by the white man.

In Irete, such was the case as Ekwelibe (2017:72) reports that:

The intention of the elders in sending Eguzoribe Okenwa to represent Irete was not for good. The ulterior motive in sending Eguzoribe to represent Irete was to get rid of him. Eguzoribe was an arrogant man who was often resentful to the ideas of the elders. The elders who wrongfully

regarded the white man as the toeless white spirit believed that he would sell Eguzoribe into slavery in faraway white man's country.

Although Eguzoribe's appointment as Irete warrant Chief changed the traditional and political set up of Irete community, his tenure was not to last longer than 1925 as he was dethroned and his warrant certificate withdrawn in that year.

Ekwelibe reports (2017: 73):

He resorted to all sorts of intimidation, exploitation and fabrication of information to suit his exploitative tendencies. ... He subjected the entire Irete populace to serious social and political harassment. Some people lost their wives, slaves and cattle to the warrant chief Eguzoribe Okenwa. Refusal to his inordinate demands led to the imprisonment of many Irete people. It is said that Eguzoribe had his own prisons in his compound.

Nze Rufus confirms the above submission, (personal communication, 2018), 'Irete never had a king, but, I remember vividly that the father of the present Eze, HRH Agubiam 1 of Irete, Eze Ethelbert Chukwudi Ekwelibe coordinated the affairs of Irete. He was the spiritual and political head of Irete community. Eguzoribe Okenwa became the Warrant Chief of Irete because the elders wanted to do away with him; he was a stubborn and naughty man who would not allow the elders to carry out their duties peacefully; for he was always against them. However, things turned around in his favour, rather than be sold into slavery as the elders thought, he was made the first warrant chief of Irete in 1906 by the then D.C, Douglas. He became tyrannical on assumption of office and was later removed as the warrant chief and his certificate revoked'.

The next warrant chief of Irete was selected from the family of the then Onye Ishi Ala, Ijewuonwu IHEME, who had passed away some months before another replacement for Okenwa was sought by the District Officer. His son, Ekwelibe Ijewuonwu, became the next replacement for Okenwa and was made a warrant chief on the 5th of May, 1925.

There was an abolition of the warrant chief system in Nigeria and the creation of the Native Administration in the second half of the 1940s. According to Ekwelibe (2017: 74)

By 1947 Ekwelibe Ijewuonwu, Anozie Onugha and Onyeagocha Onwukwe all from Irete served in native courts and still carried on the dispensation of justice as in the style of the warrant chiefs. By 1961, Chief Ekwelibe Ijewuonwu and Chief Peter Okenwa (a descendant of Eguzoribe) were reappointed as the last set of native court chiefs or judges. During the introduction of the local government system in Eastern Nigeria, the first District Councillor was Mr. Dominic Onwuzegha from Umueye who was succeeded by Mr. Onwuka Chukwuneke Lawrence from Umunweju and then Mr. Nicholas Opara from Umuekwune. He was the last of the District Councillors before the Nigerian Civil war broke out in 1967.

4.6.1 The Emergence of Irete Community Development Union (ICDU)

Irete Community Development Union was created as a social and cultural organisation which will harness human and material resources for the progress and development of Irete autonomous community. ICDU may not be the sole governing body in Irete, but, it is one of those organs that help not only to develop Irete by undertaking projects but also serve as a regulatory body. For instance, they have the power to fine defaulting Irete indigenes, who have erred against the laws of the land and the ICDU constitution. ICDU has branches all over Nigeria and even abroad where Irete people live. For instance, there is an ICDU branch which used to be very active in USA.

As earlier mentioned, Irete community in Owerri West local government area of Imo State of Nigeria was granted autonomy in 1996. This is captured in the Autonomous communities' instrument published in the supplement to Imo State of Nigeria Extra ordinary Gazette No 2 Vol. 21, page 55 of 22nd April, 1996. By this declaration, Irete autonomous community is now a physical separate entity from Umunwoha Autonomous Community where it was excised.

Reports have it that ICDU was first created in 1975. Irete autonomous community has its motto as "Peace, Unity, Justice and Progress". The aims and objectives of the community include:

- a) To foster peace, unity and harmony in the community
- b) To maintain justice, equality and equity
- c) To ensure the security of lives and property in Irete

- d) To promote progress and general development in the community
- e) To promote the general welfare of the individuals and Irete as a whole.
- f) To promote good relationship between Irete community and all other communities in Nigeria in general and Imo State in particular.
- g) To ensure the revival, growth and preservation of the culture, custom and tradition of Irete.
- h) To promote, maintain and ensure any other objectives not herein stated but which in the opinions of the community is for the good governance, general development, progress, peace and security of Irete autonomous community.

The constituent villages of Irete autonomous community, their seniority order (which is still subject to further investigations according to the constitution) and the sharing order have been discussed in previous chapters.

Upon the creation of Irete Autonomous community, there was the establishment of a governing body known, called and addressed as Irete Community Development Union (ICDU). Membership of the town union is compulsory for all indigenes of Irete community who are eighteen years and above. They are to register in their respective villages and in addition register with the abroad branches for those living outside Irete. They are expected to pay monthly dues and levies as apportioned by the National Executive Council (NEC). The town union operates within the following underlisted organs:

1) The Home Branch

This constitutes the eighteen villages of Irete Autonomous Community and serves as its national headquarters with eighteen units.

2) The Abroad Branches

These are established outside the community. There are such branches in Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Abuja, USA and in any part of the world where there is a sizeable (often up to 10 members and not less) number of Irete indigenes. They are established after due compliance with the provisions of article (6) of the ICDU constitution.

3) The National Executive Committee

This is the supreme executive organ of the union and this organ ensures that there is progress that will enhance the well-being of the people in Irete, in terms of infrastructures.

4) The General Assembly

This is the supreme legislative and policy formulating authority of the union.

5) The Aladimma Ndom Irete

This is the women wing of the town union which sees to the peaceful coexistence of women (wives of Irete men).

There are six (6) standing committees in the Town Union namely:

- a) The works committee
- b) The Education and Culture Committee
- c) The Finance Committee
- d) Information and Social Development Committee
- e) The Judicial Advisory Committee
- f) The Security Committee

For the sake of this study, the functions of the Education and Culture Committee are listed here as these are employed in the analysis of the *Nta* Festival in the following chapter.

- i. The committee shall be responsible for the educational and cultural advancement of Irete Community
- ii. It shall liaise between all the Educational Institutions in the community and the union.
- iii. It shall recommend areas of co-operation with any such institutions provided that such institution is one approved by the government and it is serving the interest of the community
- iv. It shall recommend for scholarships award to deserving indigenes of Irete.
- v. Such scholarships shall be limited to the Secondary and Tertiary Institutions and tenable only in Nigeria
- vi. All modalities for the award of scholarships – the number of beneficiaries, duration, monetary involvement etc shall be recommended by the committee to the NEC.

- vii. The committee shall liaise with the traditional institutions in Irete Community to explore avenues for the revival of culture and heritage such as *Nta* and *Ogwugwu* etc.

4.6.2 The Aladimma Ndom Irete

The Aladimma Ndom Irete is the women's wing of Irete Community Development Union (ICDU). They have the power to produce a constitution of their own to regulate, control and manage their affairs following the structure, feature and pattern of the Irete Community Development Union (ICDU). They are responsible and accountable to the town union on matters relating to: Developmental projects, imposition of penalties, approval of constitution and its amendments among other duties. Mrs. Ruth Victor Umah, the President General of the ICDU women's wing (Personal communication, 2017) stated that 'Aladimma Ndom Irete liaises with and consults the NEC of the town union to report activities, programmes and projects embarked upon for advice, support and approval. Over the years, we have completed projects such as hall building and community health centre for our people. Every married woman in Irete, whether at home or abroad is involved in this project'.

4.6.3 Irete Youth Association (IYA)

The Youth Wing of the Town Union is known as the Irete Youths Association (IYA). The Association exists primarily at home for the youths only. It also has the power to produce its own constitution that regulates and/or controls the affairs of its members. It is responsible and accountable to the Town Union – ICDU – on matters relating to: Developmental projects, approval of constitution or its amendment, organising social activities approved by its executives in consultation with the NEC of the Town Union.

4.6.4 Political Structure of Irete Community

In Irete the political structure is not organised under one supreme leadership as may be seen in other ethnic groups such as the Edo, Hausa or Yoruba communities. This

is not only found in Irete, but it is a style peculiar to the Igbo in general. Several groups in Irete, who are also bestowed with leadership power, have been discussed in this study.

Isidienu (2016:2) quoting Isichei (1974) points out that:

Igbo people rule themselves in towns and in a democratic style that abhors autocratic leadership. The nature of democracy practiced in Igbo land takes cognisance of everybody's opinion.

In the same vein, Okodo (2006:40) quoting Taiwo and Olaniyan (1974: 348) corroborate Isichei's point as he maintains that:

The decentralisation of the administration of the Igbo people as families and lineages who belong to the same kindred usually associated and formed what we may call village groups, the village manage its own affairs. The village groups were held together by no central or coordinating authority. Each of them was linked not politically, but, by social ties to the units around it. The institution of chieftaincy has firm root of recognition among the Igbo people. Religious leaders, warriors, heads of villages combined to carry out the administration of the village.

In Irete, even though there has been the creation of an Eze (King) in council, this is purely for the government to be able to reach the community. His decision is not final as consensus must be reached before a final decision is taken on any matter. This part of the study also discusses the different groups which make up the political system of the Irete autonomous community and their varying degrees of importance.

4.6.5 The Eze Institution

The Eze Institution was established when Irete was given autonomy. He is charged to be the custodian of the culture, custom and tradition of Irete Community. The Eze Institution is a ceremonial institution in the community and is to work with these three traditional institutions for peace-making in Irete Community: The Council of Ndi Oki (Elders), the Council of Ndi Oha and the Council of Ndi Nze

4.6.6 The Eze Title and Nature

- i) The Eze Irete is known, called and addressed as the Eze AGUBIAM of Irete.
- ii) The first Eze Irete is addressed as Eze AGUBIAM 1 of Irete and the subsequent ones shall take their numerical cue from the proceeding Eze.
- iii) The Eze position in Irete Community is elective in nature and shall not be hereditary or rotatory.
- iv) The Eze position is invested on by:
 - a) A male indigene of Irete whose descent can be traced to the fourth generation of his lineage.
 - b) A man who is living with a wife or wives.
 - c) A man who is literate with a minimum qualification of First School Leaving Certificate.
 - d) An aspirant who is between the ages of thirty-five (35) and seventy (70) years
 - e) An aspirant who is mentally and physically healthy without any obvious physical deformity that could impair the effective performance of the Eze's duties.

4.6.7 The Functions of the Eze

Subject to the Imo State of Nigeria Traditional Rulers and Autonomous Communities Law, 1981, Section 17, the Eze Irete is:

- i. The Grand Patron of the Town Union.
- ii. Represents the community on all ceremonial occasions.
- iii. Receives important visitors to the community.
- iv. Presides at cultural festivals in the community.
- v. Advises the community on matters of culture, custom and tradition.
- vi. Assists in the maintenance of law and order in the community.
- vii. Take steps to reconcile disputing parties in civil matters whether or not such matters in dispute are brought to him for reconciliation are governed by law of the community.
- viii. Encourage developmental projects in the community
- ix. Assist the State and Local Governments in the collection of taxes and rates.

4.6.8 Judicial Rights of the Traditional Institutions and Individuals for Peace-Making in Irete

The three traditional institutions mentioned in this constitution are equal on matters relating to settlement of dispute except on the nature of the disputes. They are all courts of first instance and not court of appeal. No one of them should try a case that has been already decided upon by the other. However, the Eze in council can wade in whenever a conflict arises among them, where this happens, the decision reached is final.

Likewise, a complainant (plaintiff) may withdraw his/her case from any of these three traditional institutions while proceedings on the dispute have not been completed.

A complainant and/or a respondent have the right of choice from the three institutions that should hear his/her case. Either of the parties involved in a case may appeal to the Eze-in-Council if he/she is not satisfied with the decision of the body that delivered the judgement on the dispute. The trial institution is bound to give a written statement of its proceedings and judgement to the Eze's court and also to appear before it to testify if required by any of the parties. Neither the Plaintiff nor the Respondent has the right to take a dispute to the Eze-in-Council without first going through any of the three traditional institutions of peace-making.

4.7 Inter Communal Wars

Irete town shares boundaries with Owerri Municipal native community with which it fought prolonged wars in protection of its territorial integrity and preservation of its lands and environment. Irete defeated Owerri in most of these wars and secured its boundaries with the natural boundary provided by the Nwaorie river (personal communication with Eze Agubiam 1, January, 2017).

Eze Agubiam 1 reports 'We also share boundaries with Umuguma, Egbeada, and Akwakuma. And in the prehistoric period, Irete fought with these surrounding neighbours to secure its vast agricultural lands and rid it of uncontrolled encroachment. Today, Irete community occupies a vast area of land and harbours many Federal Government and State Institutions and Organisations such as the Mobile Police Base, the

new office complex of the State Security Services; including the Owerri-Irete Onitsha Road Industrial Estate', (Personal communication, 2017).

4.7.1 Land Acquisition and Ownership Pattern in Irete

In Irete, ownership of land is based on blood relationship before other things. Lands could either be owned by the whole community, by an extended family or they could be owned personally. Since Irete community is patrilineal, only the male children of a man inherit the land. A man shares his land among his sons according to the order of seniority. The same thing goes for lands that are community owned or owned by the extended families. The most senior person is given the largest parcel of land. Women do not partake in land sharing in Irete community. However, they could be considered if everyone agrees to accommodate them in the sharing process. A father can decide to share his land to his daughters, especially when that daughter is not financially strong or when circumstances like widowhood, sickness etc wade into the life of a woman. Her father and brothers may decide to give her portions of the family land to help her financially. Most members of Irete community used to be subsistent farmers before modernisation and urbanisation took over. Land has become very scarce in Irete as most families have sold out their farmlands to investors who come with plenty of money and eventually turn the farmlands to industrial sites.

4.8 Osu Caste System: Its Abolition in Irete

Generally speaking in Igbo land, the Osu is a person or a group of people who are separated from the freeborn and often dedicated to the deities of the land. People are classified into three classes of individuals in Igbo land namely: the Freeborn-Diala, the Enslaved Outcasts – Osu, Ohu or Oru and the Ume – those prone to die because they have committed a taboo such as male and female member of the same umunna producing an offspring together. Traditionally, Irete community, like most Igbo communities, was also stratified into the three groups mentioned above.

According to Onye Ishi Ala of Irete, Kelechi Ekwelibe (Personal communication, 2017), he affirmed that oral history handed down to him has it that outcasts were those who were sacrificed to appease the gods. They could surrender themselves to a particular

deity so as to avoid being sold into slavery or killed. They could also be slaves who were bought from other communities or taken as prisoners during inter-communal wars. People who were oppressed in the community could run off to a deity for protection and thereafter, become an Osu. The Osu in Irete was a very serious issue as they were not allowed any form of interaction with a freeborn. An individual could become an Osu by mere association. In a situation where a freeborn or Diala marries an Osu, he/she becomes an Osu automatically alongside his or her children.

With the advent of Christianity in Irete around the 1940s, some members of the community started to frown at the practice. Recently, top among these people are the Eze Agubiam I and his entire cabinet, Rev. Fr. Cosmos Onukwugha, other religious leaders of the Christian faith and well meaning Irete indigenes. They argue that no group of persons should suffer the kind of despicable deprivation the Osu suffered in the hands of the so called Dialas. They listed numerous disadvantages of the Osu as encouraging paganism, human trade/trafficking, social discrimination, inequality and stigmatisation. Hence, in 2018, the Eze in council resolved that the Osu caste system be abolished in Irete and gave reasons as follows:

- 1) That the Nigeria constitution recognises the equality of persons irrespective of sex, religion or birth.
- 2) That Christianity discourages such idolatrous or heathen practices.

(Ekwelibe, 2018: 76)

Therefore, each village was asked to send representatives to the Eze in council for final deliberations after having met in their various villages. A consensus was reached and on the 14th of July, 2018, the Ohu, Osu, and Ume Caste system was abolished. On the same day, a man, Isaac Ugorji of Umuekwune village, from an Osu family was decorated with a chieftaincy title of ‘Anyanwuoha Irete’.

Nze Rufus Njoku (Personal communication, 2018) reports that the caste system was outdated and, had to bow to present realities. ‘It was a practice encouraged by those consulting fortune tellers. I know a man in Umuekwune whose family are in Umunoha as Dialas, but due to circumstances, he is here in Irete as an Osu. I know that family very well. The Onye Ishi Ala was not involved in the abolition, probably because of his belief. I do not see how his intervention or non- intervention can hinder this course. He cannot

stop it. The Osu caste system is now a thing of the past in Irete'. Whether there was due consultation with every member of Irete on this abolition decision and, whether there really was a general consensus on the matter will be left for another research as this particular study is not based primarily on the Osu caste system in Irete. It is worthy to state here that the Onye Ishi Ala is not the only one who was not in agreement with the Osu Caste System abolition in Irete. Some kindreds such as Umuigolo (Home Based), Umuagwu, Umueye and Umuoba stated that the Osu Caste system is a hand down culture and tradition of the Irete people which should be allowed to phase off as culture is dynamic.

4.9 Cultural Festivals and Ceremonies in Irete

This section discusses some festivals and ceremonials in Irete community.

4.9.1 Iro Ihe – New Yam Celebration

All over Igboland, numerous activities are earmarked and carried out to usher in the new yam. Some have developed this celebration to the point where it can be called 'Festival'. It is also called different names in different Igbo communities. Some Igbo speaking communities in Anambra and Delta states, call it 'Iwa ji', in Imo and Abia, it is called, Iri ji, Iro ihe or Ifejioku. They all refer to a period of collective thanksgiving to Almighty God for His guidance and protection throughout the planting season. It is also at this period of the new yam celebration that the people come together to pray for a better harvest the following year. Iro Ihe in Irete community used to be a big cultural event that was celebrated by the people individually or together as a community led by the traditional and religious leaders. This is because, Yam as a crop played a very important role in the life of an Igbo man. It was a determining factor of wealth and status in pre-colonial Irete community. For instance, the number of yams in a barn tells how rich and wealthy a man was. To confirm this, Okere (1996: 40) propounds, 'yam is at the core of social and religious life and, therefore, occupies almost a sacred position in Igbo cosmology'.

Since yam was one of the most important determining factor of wealth and status in Igboland, setting up a young man with yam seedlings was a way to set him free. It was

common place to start off a young man with these seedlings and, with prayers from his benefactor; he would now start cultivating his own farm.

Iro Ihe is often celebrated between mid July and August in a very colourful event. Before the festival, the traditional title holders are forbidden from eating yam until the new yam is celebrated. Unfortunately, Iro Ihe is almost extinct in Irete due to Christian beliefs. However, the Eze and his cabinet have listed this festival among those to be revived.

4.9.2 Ogwugwu Festival in Irete – Thanksgiving

Ogwugwu festival takes place in October/November; it is often a period for the women to thank their husbands and all those who have helped on their farms during the year. It is also a day of thanksgiving to the almighty God who has provided the people with good harvest. According to the Eze Agubiam 1, HRH Ethelbert Ekwelibe (personal interview, 2017), ‘Ogwugwu festival starts off in Ezi-Irete bloc from the family of Ogbor who is the one in charge of Ogwugwu shrine. He is the one who declares the festival open before the celebrations kick off. He explains further that the day is marked with dances, singing and other events. The high point of the event is the shooting competition, where a mock Ogwugwu is tied to a stake and the best striker for that year is celebrated. This particular festival lost its popularity when the best striker for a certain year in the spirit of jubilation mistakenly shot and killed a girl; consequently, the shooting aspect of the festival was banned. Since then, Ogwugwu became unpopular among the people’. Ogwugwu festival is one of the festivals the Eze has listed as being in his list to resuscitate.

4.9.3 Igba Mgba Festival in Irete – Traditional Wrestling Festival

Back in the days, Iro Ihe period is that time when the Irete people usually organise their wrestling contests, especially the Amaikpu villages (personal interview with the Eze of Irete, January 2017). It was a major recreational and sporting event in Irete. The contests were organised according to age grade/group and held either at the market square or the house of the oldest man in the village if the space was large enough. In

Irete, it usually precedes the eating of the new yam. The Eze Agubiam 1 informed this researcher that Igba Mgba had been abandoned before he came on the throne, but that he and his cabinet are already working on its revival. He mentioned that a wrestler, Eva Madu from Irete, was at the Owerri West Local government area independence celebration (of 2016) where traditional wrestling contest featured, to represent Irete.

4.9.4 *Nta* Festival in Irete – Traditional Hunting Festival

Although *Nta* Irete is the focus of this research, I will introduce the festival here to outline its form. It is a hunting festival which takes place around June. Before the *Nta* festival, there is a one month holy period declared by the Onye Ishi Ala, within this period, Okuko (exchange of words), fighting and bloodshed are prohibited. Instead, reconciliations and good neighborliness are encouraged.

After the notice to the community in May, certain rites are performed on the ‘Afor Irete’ market day to alert strangers that the holy period has begun. He will also visit Nkolo forest with some elders from Umuelele, Umunkweye, Umunjo and Umuohia who will only escort him to a point where they will wait for him. While waiting, they continue to blow their flutes to keep encouraging him. Then comes the ‘Okpe *Nta*’ where the Onye Ishi Ala and his men arrive from the forest. He announces all that he has seen to the privileged members of the community who are already awaiting his return. This is followed by ‘Igba *Nta*’, the hunting expedition which is then followed by the ‘*Nta* celebration or festival’.

On this day, there is heavy celebration in Irete, as delicious meals are prepared, the Mgbotos, married daughters of Irete, must come with their husbands and children. Friends and well wishers from far and near, very gorgeously dressed come into Irete and the atmosphere is lit up with dancing, merry making, singing and different kinds of recreational activities. ‘Ikpola *Nta*’ rounds off the festivity of *Nta* festival, as ‘Ofo *Nta*’ is returned to Umuguma on the afor Irete market day. The Ofo *Nta* remains in Umuguma for safekeeping till the following year when *Nta* is to be celebrated.

Eze Agubiam 1 narrates that: ‘except for Christmas, there is no other festivity celebrated as the *Nta* festival in Irete. Although the festival was only marked low key since the 1980s to 2013, I have celebrated three *Nta* festivals in very elaborate forms

infusing modernity into the festival since my installation as Eze in Irete'. These new forms of *Nta* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

4.9.5 Okorosha Festival in Irete – Masquerade festival

In Igbo land, masquerades are used for entertainment. They are also believed to be spirits of ancestors; therefore, they come during different occasions. In Irete, masquerades come out during coronations, burials and during masquerade festivals. Masquerade is an important part of Irete culture and tradition. However, like every aspect of the Igbo culture, the masquerade culture of Irete has been very much affected by modernity and Christianity. Most members of the community now frown at the culture and disassociate themselves from it.

Masquerades in Irete played very vital roles in the community. They were used in settling disputes and it was very effective as oath taking was key during these settlements. If a party tells lies during the settlements, it is believed that the masquerades could cause harm to that person. They were used as a social unifier. During the masquerade performance season, sons and daughters return home to be a part of the celebration.

Irete masquerades are known to come from Umuekwune and Umuoma. In a bid to keep the tradition going, the youths of these two villages have inaugurated the Okorosha association and they have yearly activities during the Christmas and New Year period. Certain dates have been chosen for each of the two villages to line up their masquerades for display. On these days, the masquerades march to the village centers for theatrical display without harassing people. People come from far and near to watch the masquerades. This period is also when there is a high number of Irete indigenes back home on holiday. So it is always an interesting event as it spices up the holiday season.

4.9.6 Akuko Ifo – Folktales

Nwachukwu – Agbada (1991:32) postulates:

Igbo folktale narrative tradition serves to stretch children's imagination, to cultivate their intelligence, to enhance their artistic expressiveness, as well as put them in a simulated moral condition which calls for a moral decision. Importantly also, the Igbo folktale telling tradition seeks to

maintain some form of balance and harmony between individuals' desires, social norms and mores.

No doubt, Igbo folktales played an important role in not only entertaining children but also in instilling morals in them. Folktales are old traditional stories passed down orally from one generation to another among the Igbos. The characters may come in animal or human forms and are often told under the moonlight in the compound after dinner. Children are made to say what lessons they have learnt after each session. In Irete, children used to gather at the compound of the Oki (oldest man) in the village to listen to ifo or in their individual compounds. It served as a unifying factor and helped to keep families together. Sadly though, this aspect of the Irete culture has become extinct as present realities of life have taken over. Parents work long hours in their offices and may not even see their children in weeks. In the morning they are off to work again, leaving their kids to the house helps. Children on the other hand are often glued to the television and the social media. So telephones, televisions and the computers have all conspired to keep the folktale under the carpet in most Igbo communities, Irete inclusive.

There are other traditional festivals and ceremonies in Irete that promote good social relationships and help them to live peacefully among themselves in the past. It is important to present this information here since Irete community provides the space for the *Nta* festival which is the focus of this study.

That notwithstanding, it is pertinent to note that this study may not have discussed all the traditional festivals Irete had. However, most of the traditional festivals which are still remembered in Irete today have been mentioned. The study will now go further to discuss some of the traditional ceremonies which take place in Irete community during the birth of a child, marriage and burials.

4.9.7 Birth of a Child in Irete

The birth of a new baby in Irete community comes with a lot of celebrations. Once a couple gets married, the families of the man and woman begin to look out for procreation; for this is the major reason for the union. If the wife does not get pregnant as soon as two months into the union, her mother becomes worried and the intervention of the earth goddess may be sought. For those who do not practice the traditional religion,

they may often seek the intervention of a Pastor, Prophet or Reverend Father depending on their faith. Sacrifices are made by the wife and her mother while they are expectant of a positive result. If she is lucky enough to have her prayers answered and she delivers a child, this is announced with 'ibi oro' by her mother-in-law in her present home and same is also done by her mother in her paternal home. Ibi oro is a synchronised shout of joy often done by women when their daughters or daughters-in-law put to bed. Then comes the eight days naming ceremony and the 'iwu ji' (The woman who has delivered a baby is expected to give her fellow women some kind of yam feast). In Irete, up till date, a woman who does not host her fellow women to this yam feast has gone against the laws and tradition and is left out of the scheme of things until she performs this rite. This yam feast does not take into cognisance whether the baby is born during the yam season or not. It must be performed, therefore, postponement of the ceremony is allowed.

4.9.8 Igba Nkwu-Traditional Marriage

Marriage in Igbo culture is highly valued. It is one of the most important things that every Igbo family looks forward to, especially when their sons and daughters become of marriageable age. In the olden days, in Irete, girls as young as fifteen years or less could be married off. Often, parents are involved in finding suitable wives or husbands for their children. There was always a go-between. The two families will then find out if both spouses have good family background. This was a very essential aspect of traditional marriage then, mostly because nobody wanted an Osu, a thief or people with questionable character as in-laws. After making enquires and the results are satisfactory, the next stage is the 'Iku aka'. This involves the introduction of both families. The family of the prospective husband goes to make their intentions known with assorted drinks which include palm wine, kolanuts, beer, malt etc.

This is followed by 'Ime ego'. This is when the bride price is paid. After this is settled, because it often entails a very long process of haggling and arguing between the Umunna in the family of the bride and the Umunna from the husband's side and both parties are satisfied, they now fix a date for the 'Igba-Nkwu' ceremony. Sometimes, between these periods, the bride is sent to her new home for four to eight days on the request of her mother in law. This is the 'Test- Period' when she is tried out in her new

home under the supervision of her mother-in-law and other women in the house. At times, marriages could be terminated at this point and the bride price returned. But, if all goes well, the Igba- Nkwu is held. On that day, all groups like the Umunna, Mgboto, and youths and so on are given their entitlements which often are basically food, drinks, clothes and tobacco. A woman whose bride price is not paid cannot join the Mgboto Association and her mother will be denied all rights that normally come to Ndi Ndom-married women in Irete. She will be like an outcast among her peers.

These days, in Irete, everything about marriage ceremony may be done in one day. Couples may have even been living together before the Igba- Nkwu is done, although this is frowned at.

4.9.9 Ikwa Ozu-Burial Ceremony in Irete

A burial ceremony in Irete is just as important, if not more, than the birth of a new baby. This is because, it is the last rite given to a person to send him to join his ancestors. Therefore, to the Irete people, it is always important and a thing of pride for a dead person to be 'sent home well' by his family members.

Burials involve processes just like marriage ceremonies. When a person passes away, his or her children are expected to go and formally inform the Umunna. This is done with a bottle of hot drink by the first son of the deceased along with escorts who may be friends or immediate family members. After due consultations with the extended and immediate family, the 'Opara' the deceased's first son can now fix a date for the burial. These days, they have to also inform the church and liaise with the head of the church for burial date.

There are certain entitlements given to the different groups in the village like the Umunna, Ndi Mgboto, Ndi Ndom (wives) etc. These entitlements, basically food and drinks must be given, to the last letter, otherwise, a peaceful and successful burial may not be achieved. The Ndi Mgboto group is the most feared during burial ceremonies because if their requirements are not met, they may stop the burial from being held completely. Burial ceremonies come in different forms depending on the social, religious and economic status of the deceased and the financial status of his or her children. The most important thing, however, is to meet the necessary requirements of the various

groups, especially that of the Ndi Mgboto. It is always a thing of pride to be told at the end of it all that ‘you have buried him well, you have tried, and he will now rest well with his ancestors’. These words go a long way in soothing the children of the deceased.

4.10 Oji-Kolanut

‘Onye we ere oji, we ere ndu’ meaning ‘he who brings kola brings life’ is a common aphorism in Igbo culture. Kolanut is the symbol of life in Irete and Igbo culture in general. There is hardly any traditional, social or cultural event in Irete that does not start with the breaking of kola. It is used in oath taking, during ritual sacrifices, presented to guests as a sign of hospitality and acceptance, it is used during marriages, festivals and burials etc.

Kolanut is served in fanciful saucers, sometimes alongside garden egg, alligator pepper and groundnut paste. Women are not allowed to break kolanut in Irete where men are seated. Also, she can only be offered kolanut when all the males present have taken no matter how old the female is. The breaking of the kolanut is the duty of the oldest male in the gathering except he gives his permission to any other person present to do so.

4.11 Taboos in Irete

There are several things in Irete which are considered taboos, hence, people are forbidden from engaging in those things. Where a person is caught in these acts, various punishments are meted out by the authority concerned; depending on the offence or taboo committed. Taboos in Irete are numerous, but, a few are discussed in this study. It is taboo for a woman to sleep with her husband’s brother or Ummunna expect in the case where she becomes widowed and the husband’s brother decides to marry her and continue in the stead of his brother. Siblings or cousins are forbidden from having canal knowledge of each other. Women are forbidden from wearing masks or carry masquerade, Igba okorosha. Irete indigenes are forbidden from eating ‘una’ a particular kind of yam. Twins used to be killed or left abandoned in the evil forest to die. A freeborn was forbidden from marrying an outcast, and so on. In a situation where any of these happens, the offender is termed as ‘onye meru ru ala’ – ‘one who has desecrated the land’. He or she is asked to ‘kwa ala’ – that is, to make sacrifices to cleanse the land. For

a woman who is caught in adultery especially with the husband's brother, she and the man are asked to dance naked to the market. The necessary sacrifices are then carried out by the Onye Ishi Ala and elders. It is after these, that they can live, interact and mingle with members of the community again, otherwise, they remain ostracised. Different punishments and sacrifices apply to different offences. Some are more serious than the others. It is often according to the level of offence committed. Some even require blood sacrifices. In such a case, the offenders may be asked to bring goats, chicken, cow or ram for sacrifices. It usually depends on the gravity of the offence.

4.12 *Nta* Irete and Cultural Transformation

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the perception of the people towards the *Nta* Festival: the performance in the indigenous context; the hybrid nature it has assumed and the justification. The second part discusses the context of resilience of *Nta* festival; the performance theory in relation to *Nta* festival, change and cultural transformation of *Nta* performance, cultural identity and development. The third part examines the reconstructed *Nta* festivals of 2017 & 2018 and the challenges encountered. The fourth part brings to light the tourism and cultural potentials of *Nta* festival.

4.13 *Nta*: The Ideological Context

Hunting, in Irete, used to be one of the major sources of livelihood, the other being farming. Hunting all over the world has economic advantage in that it provides games which are sold for money and provides food for those who engage in it. It was a major source of wealth and status definition. In traditional societies, a hunter is highly revered. He is seen as very strong spiritually and physically. This is also evident in other cultures within Nigeria. Adeduntan (2006:1) submits that:

In traditional Yoruba society, the hunters were the elite on whom society depended for its security and intelligence. To date the same nominal Ode denotes hunters and security guard. In many pre-colonial societies the hunters constituted a high percentage of the army. In areas without specific military designations, hunters were simply pressed

into service anytime the community was threatened by invasion.

In a similar view, Ulueke Sunday Anyanwu, a member of Irete Hunters Association (personal communication, 2018) states thus ‘A hunter is believed to encounter strange and tough animals in the course of an expedition, therefore, any hunter who comes back alive is considered a hero. Names and titles were associated with hunting. Certain names and titles were given to ancestors who achieved great feats in hunting expeditions.

The hunters in Irete are grouped under a union called Irete Hunters Association and come out as a group during social and cultural ceremonies. They are further grouped under a larger body of Umunwaoha Hunters Association and Imo State Hunters Association. They display performances during funeral, marriage or coronation ceremonies of members and also take part in ritual activities and during sacrifices to the gods of the land. During *Nta* festival, the hunters are very well represented as members come out to give thanks and take part in the great hunting expedition that brings hunters from far and near. Ulueke (personal communication, 2018) states further ‘after the visit to Nkolo forest by the Onye Ishi Ala, the hunters go into the bush for the great expedition which produces the game used for *Nta* festival. As far as I know, the meat used to celebrate *Nta* can never be bought from the market or anywhere else, it must be hunted in the forest’.

The Ofo *Nta* which was handed down to Ubiam by his father signifies the importance of this age long traditional *Nta* festival. It is a very important one for Umunwaoha (Nwaoha’s five children) but lost its flavor and eventually becomes a festival being observed by only the Irete people. It will not be out of place to say that *Nta* festival helps not only to celebrate the people but also the achievements of the hunters. On a broader sense, therefore, it celebrates and documents the culture and tradition of Irete.

According to Pa Victor Ojjieme (personal communication, 2017). ‘*Nta* is the way of life handed down to us by our forefathers. It is an integral part of our culture and has been celebrated from the time of our forefathers’.

Ralph Ononogbo describes *Nta* as ‘one of those hand-me-down traditions which their forebears bequeathed to the Irete people in the firm hope that they shall keep them alive as it is passed from generation to generation (2007:3).

Nta festival therefore continues to create a common and shared identity of the Irete people as it is performed year to year. It is a form of social consciousness that holds a cultural meaning to the Irete identity.

There are several ways that the Irete people perceive *Nta* festival. However, some of the generally accepted perceptions are presented.

Nta festival takes place in June shortly before the Iro Ihe (New yam festival). It is a time of thanksgiving to the gods and peace keeping in the community. Before the *Nta* festival proper, there is a one month holy period declared by the Onye Ishi Ala where people are forbidden to fight, quarrel or kill. Ekwelibe (2017:33) maintains:

Before the celebration of *Nta* festival one month holy period is declared by the Onye Ishi Ala. Within this period, Okuko (exchange of hot words), *Ilu-Ogu* (fighting) and infliction of injuries that can cause bloodshed are prohibited. People are made to reconcile with their enemies. Anyone who commits any of the above mentioned offences is penalised by the Onye Ishi Ala and his group.

The Onye Ishi Ala (personal communication, 2017) states that ‘*Nta* brings love, peace and unity to the community; even death can be called back during this holy period. Some quarrels find lasting resolutions because of *Nta*, therefore, *Nta* serves as a means of peace-keeping and conflict-resolution mechanism’.

Nta festival is also regarded as a period of happiness, merriment and joy because shortly after *Nta* festival, comes the new yam. This is a period when thanksgiving is made in readiness for the new yam in August and in expectation of a better harvest season. Nze Rufus Njoku (Personal Communication, May, 2018) captures it this way:

This season is also used in giving thanks to the supreme God by the people in expectation of a new crop season, especially the new yam. Prayers and sacrifices are made to placate the Supreme God.

Nta Irete is a great period for reunions. The communal get-together, eating and merriment that comes with the festival is reflective of the world view as encapsulated in Ukachukwu Christimanus' (2007:258) submissions:

The communal get together and the sharing of food together...reflect the typical Igbo communitarian experience of the philosophy of *Umunna wu ike* (power is great when we are together).

He submits further:

Communal eating remains a cherished value among Igbo people. It is through eating together that Igbo people come to renew their commitment to the primacy and sacrosanctity of the blood bond and consanguine relationships in the kin group.

Nta festival brings home sons and daughters of Irete from far and near, alongside their husbands, wives, children and friends. It is indeed a great period of joy and merrymaking.

An informant, Chief Benjamin Umanze, a member of HRH, Agubiam I cabinet and the Palace Secretary narrates further (Personal Communication January,2017) 'Apart from fostering peace in the community and bringing our children and in-laws home, *Nta* festival helps to promote the Igbo language, dress and culture in general'.

To some other people, *Nta* addresses youth restiveness. Hon. Akujobi Ochiagha, Vice President, Irete Youths Association confirms (Personal Communication January, 2017) that 'Youths are seriously involved in Igba *Nta*. They carry out rehearsals for weeks, preparing masquerade performances, dances and cleaning of the community etc in readiness for the big occasion. These activities keep them busy and out of trouble. They channel their energy to something productive. The youths like *Nta* festival'

Nta festival is also one of those festivals used to keep the Igbo calendar. In Irete, before the advent of Europeans, certain ceremonies were used to keep and remember the calendar year. All round the year, certain events happen that reminds the people of the time and season, *Nta* is one of such ceremonies. According to Pa Victor Ojijieme (Personal Communication January, 2017) '*Nta* happens around June, while the holy period takes effect from May. Shortly after *Nta*, we begin to prepare for Iro Ihe- new

yam festival. Then Ogwugwu and other festivals follow suit. *Nta* helps to keep the calendar going’

Furthermore, some indigenes have been affected by *Nta* in different kinds of ways. In some quarters, *Nta* festival helps to improve the skills of the hunters.

An informant, Chief Sir Edwin Irechukwu Dire, the President General of ICDU (personal communication, January, 2017) states: ‘*Nta* means hunting. The essence of *Nta* is to show and improve the hunting skills of hunters in the community. When they go to the forest with other invited hunters from outside the community, they are geared towards better performance’.

For some women, *Nta* is a gender balancer. It involves everybody in the community. Unlike some Igbo festivals where women are relegated to the background, *Nta* festival recognises the women. Mrs. Ruth Victor Umah, the President ICDU women wing, (Personal Communication, January, 2017) ‘*Nta* festival is for the women. We are always happy to be involved in it. *Nta* cannot be complete if our daughters and in laws do not attend. Likewise, the merriment and food for that day is cooked by the women. All the meat gotten from the forest is prepared for eating by the women. On the festival day, one of the events is Traditional Cooking Competition and Dances, these also are done by the women. The Ugoeze (wife of the Eze) co-ordinates these activities and they are the high points of *Nta* festival and gifts are given to the best three villages in the cooking competition. Every woman in Irete looks forward to *Nta* festival. HRH, Agubiam 1 sees to it that women are not relegated during this festival as he involves us in the celebrations. We are really happy about this and we channel our energies and knowledge towards contributing to its success’.

On the whole, the people of Irete use *Nta* festival to propel themselves culturally and socially. They strive to put Irete on the world map through the celebration of *Nta*. *Nta* festival is used for thanksgiving to the gods of the land, peace-making, re-union, merriment, gender- balance, to acquire better hunting skills, to engage the youths and for keeping dates. Above all, *Nta* festival helps to protect the Irete culture and identity.

4.14 Igba Nta (festival) in the Traditional Context

Igba *Nta* in the traditional context is basically the form which *Nta* was celebrated before the advent of colonialism and Christianity. This is the traditional *Nta* festival of old, passed down from generation to generation, from time immemorial. This form is still, today, celebrated by members of Irete community who practice Igbo traditional religion. People like the Onye Ishi Ala and members of the Oha cult fall under those who believe that the festival should not be abandoned. Therefore, they continue in the traditional form of *Nta* festival not minding the dwindling number of followers. Though the festival is being reconstructed to accommodate every Irete indigene no matter the religious, political or social leaning, the traditional form explained earlier, is still being practiced by some people. It is this traditional form of Igba *Nta* that is presented in this section. Traditional *Nta* is done in the following forms; Ima *Nta* (announcement of the commencement of the holy period), Ije Nkolo (visit to the Nkolo forest), Okpe *Nta* (revelation and messages from Nkolo forest), Igba *Nta* (Hunting exercise), *Nta* (festival), Ikpola *Nta* (Ofo *Nta* returns to Umuguma).

4.14.1 Ima Nta (Announcement of the Commencement of the Holy Period)

Richard Schechner postulates that a performance is any behavior that is ‘twice-behaved’ or ‘restored.’ (2013: 52). By this, he conceives performance as an action or event that has been constructed by a human being, prepared and rehearsed, following a multi-staged process, which culminates in a heightened presentation or display in terms of framing, presentation, highlighting, or showcasing.

Each performance has a history - it is the result of processes of learning and transmission that have preceded it (and may succeed it). The second presentation of a practiced act or the third, fourth and so on, is a performance.

Certainly this holds true for the *Nta* Festival Performance where the Onye Ishi Ala, members of the Oha cult, and other members of the Irete community for years continually revise and re-present their identity through the *Nta* performance.

A month before the celebration of *Nta* (i.e. the *Nta* festival proper), the Onye Ishi Ala declares the holy period. During this period, often in May, on Afor Irete market day, between the 19th to the 26th of May, he calls members of the family together. In the

evening of the Orié market day before the Afor Irete, he calls them together and sings five special songs to announce the commencement of the holy period. These songs, believed to be songs of the spirits will never be sung again until the next *Nta* festival, the following year.

From that gathering, the families will sing the songs passing through the villages. Members of these villages will join the group and all the eighteen villages in Irete will be visited.

Certain rites are performed by the Onye Ishi Ala on the Afor Irete market day after the singing parade. One of the reasons for performing these rites on the Afor Irete market day is because that day is the main market day of Irete. Many people visit the market and thus, a good time to announce to the communities and people around that the holy period has begun. This process is called ‘Ima *Nta*. It can be said that *Nta* processes in the traditional context are also behaviors that have been prepared and are now being practiced, so they can also be viewed through the performance theory of Richard Schechner.

NTA SONGS

IGBO

1. E hia E A yoo wee
 Umuokoroblaatuolanjaelekiri
 Umuokoroblaatuolanjaelekiri
 Umuagboghobiaetuolanjaelekiri
 E hia E E A yoo wee
 2. Eshianyi Jerenga Opara Eke o
 O we wenele le Opara Eke
 ewerempinyeanyi mii
 Anyiewerempilolo mii

ENGLISH

Chorus
 Young boys are fully dressed ready for the day
 Young boys are fully dressed ready for the day
 Young girls are fully dressed ready for the day
 Chorus
 The day we went to Opara Eke’s house
 He looked at us
 Opara Eke gave us drink from the gourd
 We took the palm wine in the gourd

Umuokorobiaaburuegwu
 Umuagboghobiaaburuegwu
 Onyenwerenwannenaabuo
 Yaejilayaatu aka
 Iheonwun'eme di egwu
 O we yoo Owe ye yoo
 O we wenieleyoo
 3.Eshianijerenjaohakwe o
 Ohakwe were mgbawauhieya o
 Si anyikworogaanyiga – awu o
 Anylakworoga – anyiga – awu o
 Umuoorobia a chaana nu nwaekpeku o
 Umuokorobia a chaana nu nwaekpeku o
 Umuagboghobia a chaana nu nwaekpeku
 E hia EE A yoo wee
 4.Utu charaolee be A yoo
 Utu charaEzi – Irete A yoo
 O cha chaa la o charaekpekuAyoo
 Eluwuya A yoo
 Eluwuya A yoo
 5.Agbogho ondiolee
 E elerielele ho
 A gboghoEzi – Irete
 E elerielele ho
 Ha luchaa di
 E elerielele ho
 Di na – agu ha
 E elerielele ho

Young men went into a great dance
 Young women went into a great dance
 He who has two siblings
 Should not boast about it
 Death is terrible
 Chorus
 Chorus
 The day we went to Ohakwe's house
 Ohakwe gave us broken gourds
 Told us to carry it away
 We carried it away
 Young men gave way to the useless fruit
 Young men gave way to the useless fruit
 Young girls gave way to the useless fruit
 Chorus
 Where did this fruit ripen?
 It ripened in Ezi Irete
 The fruit is not ripe even though it looks so
 The fruit is useless, not good enough
 The fruit is to be thrown away,not good
 Which Ladies?
 Chorus
 Ladies from Ezi Irete
 Chorus
 After getting married
 Chorus
 They are still fornicating
 Chorus

During the holy period, there are certain things regarded as taboo in Irete. Okuko (exchange of words), fighting, bloodletting, infliction of injuries on anyone to cause bloodshed are to be avoided.

In the situation where someone has committed any of these offences, he or she is to be reported to Onye Ishi Ala and his group for onward penalty. It is equally a taboo for anyone to hide any offender. After the *Ima Nta*, the road to Nkolo forest is cleared in readiness for the visit.

4.14.2 Ije Nkolo – Visit to Nkolo Forest

In the middle of the night, Onye Ishi Ala is accompanied by some members of the Oha cult to the Nkolo forest. This forest is where the Onye Ishi Ala meets with spirits of ancestors and Irete patron deities. In his company are four Oha members from Umuelele, Umunkweye, Umunjo and Umuohia. They leave for the forest in the middle of the night when no one is expected to be outside so that they are not seen. Anybody who is unfortunate to meet or see them will die. These four men will escort Onye Ishi Ala to a point along the Nkolo forest road, and allow him to continue on his journey to the Nkolo shrine while they continue blowing their flutes. The sound of the flutes gives Onye Ishi Ala hope that he is not alone.

It is at this shrine that Onye Ishi Ala will meet with the spirits of ancestors. Some of the things that will be revealed to him by these spirits include those that will die within the year, whether there will be scarcity or plenty in the land, those that will have strange sicknesses and several other things that will happen in Irete that year. The people are made to line up and, go one after the other in front of the Onye Ishi Ala in the spirit realm. As they file past, he will try to beckon on them. It is believed that any one of them who turns to look at him as he beckons is saved from death in the real world.

From the day the road to Nkolo forest is cleared, Onye Ishi Ala stops making public appearances and also stops eating food cooked with palm oil. At this point, the only food he can eat is that cooked by his first wife. Four days to the day he will leave for Nkolo forest, Onye Ishi Ala will be out of everyone's sight. Now, he is believed to be fully in 'spirit'. Not even his first wife can see him. She gives signs to alert him when she is about to serve him food or to clear the dishes after he has eaten. She does not see

or taste what she is cooking. The kitchen is left in darkness. All these prepare him for his journey into the spirit world. From the point where he stops eating food cooked with palmoil and stops public appearances, it is believed that he has already started communing with the spirit of Irete ancestors.

After his journey to Nkolo, the Onye Ishi Ala and his group return to Irete on the Afor Irete market day between 10 am and 11 am. They will head straight to his compound where there are reserved seats for them. He will pin his Oji (long metal staff with bells) to the ground, followed by the others. With the staff of power and authority securely pinned to the ground, the Onye Ishi Ala can then continue with procedures of the return from Nkolo forest without anyone challenging his authority. The Oji is a symbol of power and authority and gives him the authority to represent both the people and the gods. One of them will blow his flute three times and on the third count, they will take their seats. After a little rest, two of the four escorts of Onye Ishi Ala will proceed to prepare the three big fowls sacrificed at the Nkolo forest. The Onye Ishi Ala and his men are the only ones who eat of this meat which is also devoid of palm oil. Any remnant is thrown away. This meal is sacred and is not to be shared with non members of the Oha cult. It is only to be shared with those four members who escorted the Onye Ishi Ala to the spirit world.

4.14.3 Okpe Nta – Appeasing the gods

Eight days after Onye Ishi Ala and his men return from Nkolo forest, there is another gathering. This gathering consists of Ndi Oki (elders), Ndi Oha (Chief Priests and heads of deities) and Ndi Nze. This gathering is on Afor Irete market day. They converge under the Udi tree near Afor Irete market. On this day, the Onye Ishi Ala narrates all he saw and was told at Nkolo forest. He will not be specific with names of people who the spirits of ancestors have revealed will die, but, will only say if there will be too many of such deaths or not. He will also say if there will be good harvest or not, diseases and general well being of Irete people specifically, and Umu Nwaoha people at large where there is need, the elders of the community perform sacrifices to the gods to avert such evil. This exercise is what is called 'Okpe Nta'. The elders then go their various villages to pass on the message from the Onye Ishi Ala to their people. Other

communities from Umunwaoha will often come to Irete to hear what message was brought from Nkolo forest for the year as they cannot visit the Nkolo forest before they celebrate *Nta*.

4.14.4 Igba *Nta* – Hunting Expedition

A few days to the *Nta* festival proper, four days precisely, hunters from different places are invited to come and take part in the hunting exercise. The invitations come from friends, inlaws and acquaintances that are from Irete. These hunters go on an expedition that lasts four days. Upon their return from this expedition, they give the Onye Ishi Ala one leg and half of the hip of all animals they kill. These parts are called ‘Utaka na ukwu anu’ (one leg and hip of an animal). There is also a sharing formula between the hunter and his invitee. This formula varies from one individual to another. It all depends on what they agree upon prior to the expedition. However, if a hunter comes on his own, he can go with the remaining meat after he must have given the Onye Ishi Ala ‘Utaka na ukwu anu’. The Onye Ishi Ala then proceeds to preserve his portion of the game from the expedition. This, he does by cooking and drying it in whole, using the local meat drying technology. The women of Umuogbunda lineage assist him in this process of preserving the meat. It is only the women of Umuogbunda lineage from Umueye, who have the exclusive right to join Onye Ishi Ala in the preservation of the meat.

4.14.5 *Nta* Festival Performance

Nta festival performance comprises of the whole activities that come with *Nta*, which this section of the study has discussed. Starting with the ‘Ima *Nta*’, the one month holy period, the visit to Nkolo forest, the ‘Okpe *Nta*’ up till the ‘Ikpola *Nta*’ (yet to be discussed) which ends the *Nta* festival. These are all the forms that make up *Nta* Irete. However, what most Irete people call *Nta* festival is the high point of the celebration. This high point is what is discussed in this sub section.

This is the *Nta* celebration, where everyone in Irete is involved. It is a day when several activities are put in place for merriment and socialising. This day is usually marked by cooking, entertainment of guests, gorgeous outfits, dancing and singing, and general merry making.

In traditional *Nta* festival, the affairs of this day are usually conducted by the Onye Ishi Ala and members of the Oha cult. However, there has been a dichotomy between the Onye Ishi Ala and the new Eze. Hence, the former participates in the traditional *Nta* celebration on a low key, while giving much attention to the ritual or religious aspect of *Nta*. The Eze on the other hand does not participate in the religious aspect of *Nta*, he only participates in the high point celebration which he and his cabinet in recent times have reconstructed to be a one-day festival. These two forms are discussed in the following sections.

4.14.6 Ikpola *Nta* – The return of Ofo *Nta*

Seven days after the *Nta* celebration (or festival), the elders, Ndi Oha and Ndi Nze will converge on the Orié market day, at the same venue where Okpe *Nta* was held. This time, to feast on the meat preserved by the Onye Ishi Ala with the help of women of Umuogbunda lineage. This ceremony marks the end of the *Nta* festival for that year. The ‘Ofo *Nta*’ is returned to Umuguma on the Afor Irete market day, which is eight days after the *Nta* celebration. Ikpola *Nta* is the returning of the *Nta* staff to Umuguma. The Ofo *Nta* is kept in Umuguma till the next year when *Nta* festival comes up again.

In this section of the study, the forms and the processes through which *Nta* is carried out have been presented. In this presentation, it has also been analysed, using Schechner’s theory of performance that performativity is central to *Nta* festival. Schechner asserts that, ‘Performances onstage, performances in other contexts (public ceremonies, for example), and performances in every day life are a continuum’ (2002: 143). It becomes difficult, therefore, to dispute his contention that we are all performers to some degree.

Performance theory combines popular culture, folklore, and ethnic diversity with the cross-disciplinary mix of theatre and performance in a way that is radical in its approach to these fields. Schechner observes that the social codes of our daily lives are adapted to greater or lesser degrees by everyone. In other words, people going about their daily lives cannot be themselves all the time. Their roles are predetermined, even to the point of being programmed in some cases. ‘Performance in everyday life includes all

kinds of activities, including solo, intimate performance, small group participation, and interacting with the crowd.' (2002: 175)

Ima *Nta* literally means 'Knowing *Nta*'. This is the announcement of the holy period which ushers in the *Nta* festival. It has a special ordering of time, usually in May, on the market day of Irete. The setting is the Market square. Five songs are performed by the lead actor, Onye Ishi Ala and members of his ensemble, the Oha cult. The audience is the people of Irete and any visitor who comes to the market on that day. The rites performed by the Onye Ishi Ala are role playing. Ije Nkolo (visit to the Nkolo forest), Okpe *Nta* (appeasing the gods), Igba *Nta* (hunting expedition) and Ikpola *Nta* (return of *Nta* staff) all employ the principles of Schechner's performance theory as mentioned above. Likewise, the festivities connected with *Nta* festival performance, being reconstructed by the Eze and members of his cabinet, fall under social drama. Richard Schechner's performance theory includes this inherently as an element. Goffman writes, "When we act out the same part for the same audience repeatedly, the role becomes more real, and the relationship between the actor and the audience is solidified, whether it is doctor to patient, police to criminal, or parent to child" (1956: 6). In addition to how ritual and theatre rehearsal work, Goffman showed that our daily actions and behaviors are structured similarly through rehearsal. Even our daily lives are choreographed.

4.15 Hybridity in *Nta* Festival and its Justification

With the advent of colonialism and spread of Christianity and its impact in Igboland, the culture and tradition of the people have been affected. Irete is not exempted from this influence. The average Irete person is a Christian (eighty percent in the catholic faith), who were made to completely abandon their traditional religion in order to have salvation. *Bridger (2012:17)* in agreement to this states that:

In general, and especially before World War II, nearly all mission-related churches required their neophytes to renounce almost all contact with their traditional systems of worship and related practices, including their art...proper European civilisation was Christianity, and the only way to bring about conversion was to establish this (European) cultural framework...indeed anything else was unthinkable.

Consequently, most Irete people, having embraced the new religion of the white man, began to see participation in *Nta* and other festivals as heathenic. Majority stayed away from the festival, thereby causing a serious decrease in the number of people who take part in *Nta* festival.

The availability of forest is a major necessity for *Nta* to be observed. The Nkolo forest is where the Onye Ishi Ala must visit to commune with the gods of the land and with the ancestors of Irete. He must visit Nkolo forest to make sacrifices and receive the revelations for the coming year. However, as a result of population explosion and urbanisation, parts of Nkolo forest no longer exist. Houses and industries are fast taking over. Hunting as a means of livelihood is fast fading as most members of Irete community have resorted to trading, white collar jobs, real estate, hospitality business etc.

Some of them have even migrated to other countries or communities in search of greener pastures. Between the early 1980s and 2013, *Nta* festival remained on a low key, being observed only by the Onye Ishi Ala and members of his cult. The above reasons contributed immensely to its low key performance. The Eze, HRH Agubiam 1 and his cabinet members upon assumption of office decided to reconstruct *Nta* festival to meet present day realities and accommodate every Irete indigene no matter the religious border and political leaning. By so doing, every aspect of *Nta* involving making sacrifices to the gods, 'Okpe *Nta*', 'Ima *Nta*' and every other aspect considered fetish were removed so that the people can participate in the festival and Irete identity and culture preserved on the long run. These aspects removed, however, remained the exclusive preserve of the Onye Ishi Ala, Ndi Nze, Ndi Oki and Ndi Oha. To these ones, *Nta* Irete will be incomplete without observing these forms of *Nta* as it was passed down from their forefathers.

As Irete is no longer a rural setting and, not remote to imported influences – large communities of members of Irete community can be found all over the country and in Europe, the U.S and Asia etc – stakeholders began to think it wise to retain aspects of the Irete culture and identity.

Therefore, in order to avoid total and irredeemable loss of their culture and identity, the Eze in council, and other stakeholders began to rethink and reconstruct the

Nta festival in relation to the new cultures and tradition they found themselves in. A shared sense of identity fosters individual and community integration.

As Nzouma (2008:203) puts it:

Within the black diaspora of France, it is the internet that has hosted the most vigorous debates on the conditions of blacks in France, black identity and the existence or non existence of a black community. These debates bear witness to attempt to create sense and elaborate strategies to face the loss of identity marks and roots.

Even in some African Diasporas, African cultures have become almost extinct and identities lost, the need for Africans to rediscover themselves is still rife. Nzouma (2008: 204) postulates further:

In these reconversion strategies, the social memory of immigrants is mobilised to construct either a new 'Africanity' or a new French citizenship...

Total abandonment of *Nta* will lead to loss of identity of the people of Irete, hence the need for its reconstruction in order to recover identity and re-invent traditions.

The culture and tradition of the people is deeply representative of Igbo life. Asagba (2004:16) postulates:

culture is the patterned activity of man which is invented and discovered to be socially learnt, shared and transmitted from one person to another and from generation to generation. Therefore, culture is dynamic. As man evolves, so does his culture and tradition.

According to the Eze HRH Agubiam 1 in an interview (personal communication, January, 2017), *Nta* has its essence and usefulness in the community but must be reconstructed. In his words:

Nta festival, like all other festivals of various communities in Imo State and Igboland, is being observed for a reason which cannot be overlooked. However, to satisfy every member of this community, the Eze in council and stakeholders of the community have decided to reposition *Nta* cultural festival by giving it a 'Christian approach' and orientation. This is to fall in line with the Oru Owerri, the Iriji Mbase, Itaokazi of Emii and the Isuuzo of Emekuku

etc. These sister communities around us now celebrate their festivals in a Christian way, thereby accommodating everyone. And they have been recording success with such innovation.

This view explains why some forms of cultural expressions continue to flourish throughout Igbo land, having been tied to an evolving modern Igbo identity. The Eze continued in this interview as he told the researcher that it was time for *Nta* to be reconstructed. He further points out that ‘the Nkolo shrine is no more, today, it does not exist as the forest has been cleared shortly after the end of the civil war. The Nkolo shrine is no more consulted before *Nta* festival because majority of the families where the ‘Ndi Oha’ come from have been converted to Christians. Because of this, no Christian will consult Nkolo shrine before celebrating *Nta*. It will be seen as heathenic and fetish. Everything has changed. And we also, as a people, must change with the time’.

This is not surprising though as it has been mentioned in several instances in preceding sections of this study that the people of Irete are mostly Christians. It is little wonder then, that *Nta* performance remained on a low key level, almost abandoned, for a long time. In a bid to reinstate the identity and culture of the Irete people against a culture and religion which was ‘usually hostile to non-European religions and culture, the Roman Catholic Church’ as Bridger put it (2012:17), *Nta* festival had to be moved to the church. The Eze Agubiam explains further (personal communication, January 2017):

Nta festival now kicks off with a Holy mass, we book a mass starting from the one month holy week and on the day of *Nta* festival, the Eze and members of his cabinet, the people of Irete, stakeholders, friends and families attend the church mass in the morning. There, we ask for a smooth and successful outing. We then proceed to the field where different social entertainment and merry making will follow. This Christian approach to our cherished *Nta* has removed all forms of fetish practices in the celebration and shall be strictly adhered to by Irete community. This approach also has put paid to all initial reasons why some members of our community decided not to partake in the festival.

He explains further, ‘we leave all religious rituals and sacrifices to the Onye Ishi Ala and members of the Oha cult. The *Nta* festival will be celebrated in a Christian way

by Christians while the Onye Ishi Ala and his group will celebrate the traditional *Nta* festival their own way too’.

Reconstructed *Nta* festival produced a unique Igbo Christian hybrid festival that represents a new model of religious and cultural expression in contemporary Igbo Irete. To further substantiate on this, Maffia (2010: 171) postulates that:

Ethnic identity can feed from different signs, accumulate many or retain only one of them, but it is clear that a group’s distinctive label can become an object of transformation, substitution or re-interpretation.

Therefore, Cultural forms such as *Nta* Performance, find articulation through the flow of behavior, or more precisely, through social action. Various artifacts and perceptions also hold it, of course; but they are derived from the role they play in a life-long pattern. Geertz (1973: 10)

Nta festival was selected for reconstruction because of its importance and the central place it holds in the Igbo Irete identity. *Nta* is a major ceremony of the people of Irete. Rather than it be lost, it has borrowed from the western culture and religion, thereby becoming an object of transformation and re-interpretation. This is a major justification for the hybrid nature *Nta* festival has assumed. The fusion of modernity and Christianity into traditional *Nta* festival created a social, cultural and religious syncretism that has helped the festival to resuscitate.

4.16 The Context of Dynamics in *Nta* Performance

Using Schechner's theory of performance, it had been established in previous sections of this study that performance may characterise any activity. Erving Goffman, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, opines that ‘performance as a restored behavior, projects a quality of life that can occur in any situation’ (Goffman, in Schechner, 2004). It is therefore selected on an individual basis and transmitted culturally rather than genetically. *Nta* performance is an activity, whether in its ritualistic or secular form. The activities of *Nta* involves restored behavior and it is also transmitted culturally from generation to generation

This section of the study examines the ways *Nta* performance has continued to negotiate and retain its relevance in the present among Irete people.

Kukah (2007:11) propounds:

A people's culture is the universe that incorporates the essence of life expressed in their songs, dances, dress, food, stories and so on...The gamut of life revolved around religion and culture.

This, perhaps, explains why festivals like *Nta* Irete will continue to remain relevant among the people. In the years, when *Nta* was really threatened, it did not go extinct completely. There were still a few who saw it as their prerogative to keep this age long, handed down culture and tradition alive. Kukah (2007: 11) stresses further:

In history, the preservation of any people's culture has always been central to their very existence and survival. Whenever or wherever this culture was ever threatened, people have always risen up in defence of all that they cherish.

Nta is one of those aspects of the Irete culture that binds the people together. *Nta* Irete on its own is resilient in nature. It is a unifier. For the growth and togetherness of the Irete people, *Nta* festival plays a very important role. Kukah corroborates this point '...in the face of injustice and the denial of human dignity, men and women have always had recourse to either culture, religion or both as a means of legitimising and reclaiming their lost honour and glory'. *Nta* belongs to this category of culture and religion. *Nta* is a means of re-discovering themselves as brothers, sisters and members of the same community. Indeed as Victor Turner puts it (Turner in Deflem 1991: 7), "a performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures"*Nta* performance reflects the shared humanity of the Irete people, while expressing the uniqueness of their culture.

Therefore, these attributes of *Nta* makes it resilient, not yielding to complete extinction, *Nta* festival for the Irete person is a means of identity, it gives him a sense of belonging and that is one of the reasons why it has been reconstructed so that it remains with the people.

Furthermore, *Nta* festival tells about the whole existence of a people. The ever changing trends seen in this existence also reflects in *Nta*. Thus *Filani* (2014:18) summarises it in this quote 'Culture is dynamic, ever changing and always re-inventing itself, culture is therefore a continuum...'

4.17 *Nta* Festival and Cultural Transformation, Identity and Development

Kukah (2007:11) posits:

...culture deals with the issues surrounding the identity of daily lives of individuals or communities. Culture is a toolkit of identities for our survival. Its component units are a common world view, a myth of common ancestry and identity, ethos and a set of rituals which give rhythm to life.

Nta festival surely gives rhythm to the life of the Irete people. It has been referred to in this study, among other things that *Nta* Irete is a unifier and a means of identity. However, because culture is learned and not a biological occurrence, it is dynamic. In other words, culture is a continuum. *Nta* as a cultural festival becomes dynamic. This is where the case of *Nta* festival as a cultural ceremony undergoes transformation basically, to meet the demands of present day realities and avoid abandonment or outright extinction.

Similarly, Onwuachi (1977:16) affirms that:

Culture is based on the process of learning and not biologically inherited. Central in every human way of life, of culture is the factor of ideology. This ideology constitutes the vibrant force that enables a people to define all that they do or need to do for objective existence.

Nta festival of the Irete people had to undergo transformation so that the majority of the people will continue to identify with it. *Nta* being an aspect of the culture of a people is dynamic, and therefore, will continue to yield to change. In this regard, the Irete traditional leadership and other stakeholders 'revived those positive aspects of their culture that promotes self-reliance, brotherhood and development'. (Babawale, 2007: 8).

In addition, Filani sums it up as he opines (2014:8) that:

African culture and artistic creativity are not characterised by entirely new paradigms, rather, what we are witnessing today are changing phases of basic indigenous canons of culture that are now defined by exigencies of modernity.

Nta festival of the Irete people is a culture that has been hit by modernity, westernisation and Christianity, thus the transformation.

The issue of cultural identity has been discussed in several academic writings and gatherings. More often than not, the negative effect of western civilisation on the cultural identity of the African has been mostly highlighted. Man continues to seek to identify with a certain group wherever he finds himself on the planet. For the Igbo, this group may be his kinsmen or tribesmen. Ononogbo (2017:2) submits:

Each and every one of us is identified by, and from, certain attributes of our culture. We often ask, “Onye ahu owu onye olee”? Meaning; (where is that person from?). We answer, “Owu onye Irete” meaning (He is from Irete)...we are characterised by our attitude to life, our behaviour, our culture.

Cultural identity for the African is the core of his existence. As Onwuachi (1977:16) propounds:

There is the feeling of belonging together in kin-centred social processes. The family patterns are extended families, and members are consequently forced to function collectively towards the fulfillment of existence and survival.

Nta festival of the Irete people is one of the major festivals of Irete. Irete community is known for *Nta* festival. One high point of *Nta* festival is the coming together in merry-making, of family members, friends and relatives from far and near. Therefore, *Nta* preserves and promotes the identity of Irete people thereby creating continuity of their culture and heritage as a people.

According to HRH Agubian 1 (personal communication, 2017), ‘We had to revive and reconstruct *Nta* festival to the level where we can use it as a tool for cultural development and tourist attraction’. In the last five years, *Nta* festival has left the ‘low key’ stage which it was subjected to in the early 1980s to 2013. In as much as we left the religious and ritual aspects to the Onye Ishi Ala, we and the other stakeholders came to the resolve that *Nta* Irete must not go extinct, neither should it be celebrated low key. This is because we realised that it has tourism potentials and in a way, it sustains our heritage as a people.

The reconstruction of *Nta* festival serves as a springboard for cultural development and tourism for the community. Filani (2014:18) posits that:

African countries must initiate mutual bonds of integration through culture. The 21st century should launch Africa as a continent into unique civilisation through proper culturalisation concepts, African leaders cannot afford to underestimate the relevance of culture for national development.

During the 2017 and 2018 *Nta* festivals in Irete, a number of activities were inculcated into the festival. Aside from the hunting expedition and feasting, there were other things such as “traditional cooking contest, masquerade displays, traditional dances, and for 2018, the abolition of the Ohu, Ume and Diala and Osu Caste system in Irete took centre stage. The *Nta* festival of 2017 and 2018 which have been celebrated under HRH Eze Agubiam 1 is presented in the next section.

4.18 *Nta* Festivals of 2017 and 2018

The forms of *Nta* festival of the Irete people has been discussed in earlier sections of this study. The study investigated ways in which the traditional *Nta* Irete was being performed by the Onye Ishi Ala in the past and, to some extent, in the present. Therefore, this section did not go back to describing traditional forms of *Nta* festival as this would amount to repetition. Rather, this section investigates the major forms of hybridity and transformation *Nta* has undergone during the ceremonies of 2017 and 2018. Here the study examined the ways HRH Eze Agubiam 1, his cabinet members and other stakeholders ‘modernised’ *Nta* festivals of these past two years to suit the needs of the people.

4.18.1 *Nta* Festival of 2017

It must be stated here that the present Onye Ishi Ala and HRH Eze Agubiam 1 are both from the Umuoghunda lineage in Umueye village, Irete. The Onye Ishi Ala, Kelechi Ekwelibe and the present Eze of Irete, HRH Eze Agubiam 1, Ethelbert Ekwelibe are cousins. As mentioned earlier in this study, the Umuoghunda lineage holds the Ofo *Nta* and Ofo Ukwu. It is from this family that the Onye Ishi Ala (Chief Priest of Ala deity – the principal deity of Irete) is always chosen. Due to this, the Onye Ishi Ala served both as the spiritual and political head of Irete in the years before the advent of modernity, western civilisation and Christianity. However, his power dwindled upon the selection of a warrant chief for Irete. The Onye Ishi Ala became restricted to being the

spiritual head of Irete. In recent years, however, his powers have even reduced the more as majority of the people no longer practice African traditional religion. A good number of the people have become Christians and will resort to the Rev. Father in settling family and land disputes, which ordinarily used to be the exclusive preserve of the Onye Ishi Ala. This does not mean that the Onye Ishi Ala's powers have been completely stripped off him. No, infact, there are some cases that await his final judgments. He still keeps the *Ofo Nta* and *Ofo Ukwu*, he still heads the 'Oha' cult and the issue of making sacrifices, cleansing the land when a taboo has been detected still rests in his care. When it comes to the ritual and religious aspects of *Nta* festival like 'Okpe *Nta*' 'Ima *Nta*', visit to Nkolo forest and so on, the Onye Ishi Ala is the only one who can perform these duties. In this regard, the *Nta* festival of Irete now has two phases. While the spiritual aspect is handled by the Onye Ishi Ala, the social aspect is organised by HRH Eze Agubiam 1, who as earlier mentioned, is from the same family as Onye Ishi Ala. Since the introduction of the warrant Chief system in Igboland, it appears that there has been a growing trend of some form of Ezeship (kingship) that was not peculiar to the Igbo. Lately, the introduction of autonomous communities to Igboland has made this kinship position a necessity.

When Irete was excised from Umunwaoha and given autonomy in 1996, there arose the need for an Irete king. It was not until 2013, that Irete was able to come up with an Eze in the person of HRH Eze Agubiam 1, Ethelbert Ekwelibe, the first and present king of Irete autonomous community. One of the reasons why it took so much time (and perhaps, the only reason) was because the Umuelele kindred of the Ezi Irete bloc claimed that an Eze of Irete should come from them as they claimed seniority among Irete descendants. This claim of seniority from the Umuelele kindred was however debunked by the Umueye kindred who claimed to be in possession of the two most important staffs of office (*Ofo Ukwu* and *Ofo Nta*) of Irete bequeathed to them by their ancestors. This tussle caused a delay in choosing an Eze for Irete autonomous community even after its creation. Eventually, in 2013, after an election of an open ballot system, an Eze emerged. The present Eze is the first for the Irete autonomous community.



Plate 4.2: The Eze being crowned as first king of Irete Atonomous Community by Reverend Father A.J.V. Obinna the ArchBishop of Owerri Catholic Diocese, Imo State.

Source: *Herald Grass Root/Community Based News Magazine, January, 2014*

He was chosen and presented by the Amaikpu bloc not only because he is from the Umogbunda lineage but also because he is said to be a man of integrity and a good Christian.



Plate 4.3: The Eze and Ugoeze (wife of the Eze)

Source: *Herald Grass Root/Community Based News Magazine, January, 2014*

However, his election and the Ezeship tussle divided Irete. The Ezi Irete bloc with seven kindreds, now agitate for their own autonomy from the Imo State government.



Coronation Of
EZE SIR ETHELBERT C. EKWELIBE
(AGUBIAM I OF IRETE)



PAGE 10

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

FRIDAY 27 DEC. 2013

1. 4pm Choral singing at the palace
2. 6pm 12.30am - bongo extravangaza

SATURDAY 28TH DEC. 2013

1. 6.30 5 gun salute at Eze's palace greeting umunwoha
2. 6.30 - 7.00 18 gun salute for eighteen Villages of Irete
3. 8.00 arrival of Ndi Okii and Ndi Nze and Oha at Eze's palace
For Eze's pre-coronotoin conference
4. 9.30 Departure to Church with his entourage
5. 10am Concelebrated High Mass at Umunwoha Holy Family Parish
Arrival of Archbishop 21 gun salute
- 6 11.00am - 12.noon: coronation of HRH by his Grace Archbishop
A.J.V Obinna followed by 21 gun salute.

SECOND SESSION

SATURDAY DEC. 28, 2013

- 1.1.30pm Introduction of Chairman, Distinguished Guests, their Royal Highnesses and invitees
- 2.1.30pm Arrival of Eze, escorted by Umuada, Ndi Nwa Nwa, Ndi Okii, Ndi Nze and PGs and CGC officers with 21 gun salute
- 3.1.45pm Opening prayers
- 4.2.00pm Address by Secretary/Head of Town Union.
- 5,2.15pm Citation of His Royal Highness EZE E.C EKWELIBE(ksm) by Joe Emereole
Followed by 5 gun salute.
- 6,2.30pm Cultural Dances
- 7,3.00pm Homage and appreciation by various groups and individuals
- 8,3.30pm Speech from the throne
- 9,4.00pm Goodwill message from the Government.
- 10,4.15pm Royal Dance Steps.
- 11,4.30pm Conferment of Chieftaincy titles and honour by HRH
- 12, 5.00pm Vote of thanks by Chief CY Amako (Irete Nke Mbu)
- 13, 5.15pm Closing Prayer
- 14, 5.30pm Music! Music!! Music!!!

SUNDAY 29TH DEC 2013

- 1, 9.00am Royal thanksgiving at Holy Family catholic church, irete.

Plate4.4: Programme of Events during the Eze's coronation

Source: *Herald Grass Root/Community Based News Magazine, January, 2014*

It is imperative to give a general overview of the Ezeship tussle and the issue of the Irete autonomy because reference is made to them in the subsequent sections and, also for a clearer understanding of the section which is examined.



AGUBIAM I

of Irete Autonomous Community, Owerri-West, Imo State.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

Eze Ethelbert Chukwudi Ekwelibe (KSM)

- EZECHIMERE -

Plate 4.5: HRH Eze Ethelbert Ekwelibe. First King of Irete Autonomous Community

Source: *Herald Grass Root/Community Based News Magazine, January, 2014*

There is a dichotomy between the Onye Ishi Ala and the Eze. From observations and interviews carried out, even though they are ‘brothers’ and come from the same lineage, they do not consult each other on matters affecting the people and the community. While the Onye Ishi Ala feels the Eze’s position is to usurp his position, the Eze believes that as a Christian, he cannot be involved in fetish practices, which, according to him, is what the Onye Ishi Ala is involved in. The outcome of this dichotomy, among other things, is the performance of *Nta* festival in two ways, the traditional and religious *Nta* Irete (carried out by the Onye Ishi Ala) and the social and reconstructed *Nta* Irete (as observed by the Eze in council and other stakeholders). This second aspect of *Nta* festival which has undergone reconstruction is what this section examines.

The *Nta* festival of 2017 as observed by the Eze and majority of Irete people kicked off with a mass at the Holy Family Church, St. Paul’s Catholic Church, Irete. Although the announcement of the *Nta* and visit to Nkolo forest had been done by the Onye Ishi Ala, the Eze had booked a mass for *Nta* for a period of one month starting from the Afor Irete day when *Nta* will be announced to the D-day when it will be celebrated as a ceremony. This is to ask for God’s divine intervention for the success in the whole process. The *Nta* festival was celebrated collectively by every member of the Irete community.

The Eze and his cabinet members and every other person who cared to, joined the Eze in church for the kick off of the festival. In this case, members of the eighteen kindreds through the ICDU are mandated to take part in the festival. All members of the Eze cabinet, all exco members of the three arms of the ICDU and members of the community who were available followed the Eze to kick start the celebration from the St. Pauls’ Catholic Church in Irete. The day, 17th of July, 2017 was the day the whole *Nta* culminated into a ceremony collectively celebrated by every member of the community. This celebration which the Eze and his cabinet call the *Nta* festival proper involved a lot of pre-planning. Involved in this planning are the Eze in cabinet, members of ICDU executives at the three arms, village heads and various stakeholders. The Eze who had, before now, constituted an *Nta* festival committee, was the chief host of the festival. The committee met several times to discuss budget, extending invitations to friends, relations

and well wishers of Irete community, creating sub committees to directly take care of food, drinks, chairs and tables, venue decoration etc.



Plate 4.6: The Eze making a speech at the *Nta* Festival of 2017

The *Nta* festival committee also saw to security arrangement, lecturer of the day and other cultural activities for the day such as masquerade performances, competition and traditional dance and music made available for *Nta* festival. Generally, this committee and sub committees made sure that the glamour and shine was not taken off *Nta* festival of 2017. The venue is the field of St. Paul's Primary school, Irete which had been cleared and kept clean for the celebration.



Plate 4.7: Members of the Eze cabinet representing the eighteen kindred during *Nta* Festival of 2017

The master of ceremony of the occasion who is also the Palace Secretary, Chief Benjamin Umanze, welcomed everyone to the event.



Plate 4.8: Chief Benjamin Umanze, official MC of the Palace

The various villages took their seats under the different canopies, which numbered up to 18, specifically for the eighteen kindreds. Although due to grievances emanating from the Ezeship tussle, not all members of Irete community were present. Some aggrieved villages did not turn up. Twelve out of the eighteen villages showed up and participated fully in the activities marking the *Nta* festival of 2017.



Plate4.9: Members of various villages under their canopies at the 2017 *Nta* festival

After everyone had been seated, the Eze, his wife and cabinet members, who arrived at the venue of the festival in a convoy of vehicles, marched into the arena in a most colourful manner, amidst singing and dancing. While they took their seats, everyone else stands to show their respect.



Plate 4.10: Members of various villages under their canopies at the 2017 *Nta* festival

This is followed by the opening prayer. The prayer leader prayed for a successful outing, and also for the safe arrival of everyone who is coming for the event. He also prayed for unity, peace and love among members of Irete community, Owerri west local government area, Imo state and Nigeria. He prayed further for more blessings on the sons and daughters of Irete autonomous community wherever they may be.



Plate 4.11: Members of various villages under their canopies at the 2017 *Nta* festival

This is immediately followed by the presentation of kolanuts. In Igboland, it is said that 'He who brings kola, brings life'. Therefore, there is no occasion or ceremony in Irete that does not begin with the presentation of kolanut. The importance of kolanut has already been discussed in preceding sections of this study. Kolanut presentation in any gathering in Igboland is a sign of hospitality to everybody present.



Plate4.12: The Chairman is seen giving his opening remarks during *Nta* Festival, 2017.

The Eze gave his welcome address and as very important guests arrived, the M.C continued to introduce and recognise them, while the flutist played and the people hailed them. As they arrived also, they were ushered to the high table where the Eze and notable stakeholders were already seated. They were welcomed by the Eze in the traditional Igbo method of hitting of hands by two people three times.

There was traditional dancing and singing display by young ladies from Umekwunne and by ICDU women wing, home branch. This was followed by another welcome address by the chairman of the day. He acknowledged the good works of the present Eze and admonished him to continue this way, noting that there was nothing as pleasing to our ancestors as bringing back our traditional festivals and cultures. ‘Obi ga ri ndi nwe nyi nma na ebe anyi nu’:- this will gladden the minds of our ancestors towards us if we do not do away with the good aspects of our culture because of the white man’s ways. He praised the Eze and his cabinet for resuscitating *Nta* Festival.



Plate 4.13: Some VIPs at the *Nta* festival of 2017

Drinks, garden eggs and groundnuts were shared out to guests and all present. The agwugwo, (mixture of peeled boiled corn and beans, cooked in jollof form with native ingredients), an Irete delicacy was also served to all present. This was followed by the lecture of the day titled: *Ogwugwu, a Deity Abandoned or a Festival Unattractive*, delivered by a son of Irete, Ralph U. Ononogbo. In his paper, he postulated thus (2017:8):

The Great conflict is not the central issue of this lecture nor do we intend to dwell on it to any great length. But, the conflict we refer to here is the onset of a new idea or belief (or the introduction of a new idea or belief) coming from outside that appeared to over-ride an existing internal idea or belief. The existing (internal) idea is our mode of worship of the supreme God and belief as a 'pagan' race. But who defines who is a pagan in the first instance?



Plate 4.14: Professor Ralph Ononogbo delivering his lecturer during *Nta* of 2017

He admonished the people of Irete to ‘find a midway’ through so that these ideas may co-exist’. He went further as he proposed that ‘when we bring this conflict home, we then can appreciate what works in our minds when we wish to observe *Nta*, for example, in its pristine form or to modernise it to conform with our Christian beliefs, to adopt Ogwugwu as it has ever been or give it a new code of names to align it with our Christian values. Sure we must evolve a *modus vivendi*’.

Ononogbo made a few recommendations to end his lecture. Among these, I listed those that directly concern this study. In the words of Ononogbo, below are some of his recommendations

- 1) Our culture is our culture, our way of life, a shadow that stalks us everywhere we go. The time has come for us to think outside the box or determine new ways of doing things.
- 2) Igbo beliefs, customs and traditions have a binding force on us. The way out is not to jettison them because the skunk cannot get rid of what smells in it. We must evolve new ways and means to live with them in the light of external culture foisted on us without necessarily losing our value within the wider context.
- 3) We need to come out of our shells, act as a united (or unified) Irete as we knew it during pre-independence and few years after, give ourselves deep introspection of who we are and where we are going and grasp the nettle of leadership that stares us in the face in our LGA.
- 4) We must grow beyond the shenanigans or squabbles that deplete our energies and intellect and think Irete, belong to it and, stop thinking of ourselves as coming from parts or sections of Irete. This default has denied us our role and place in our LGA.
- 5) Our deities shall remain our pride and substantial part of our beliefs, perhaps not in the sense that we shall bow to them and/or worship them. They stand as something symbolic and unique to us just as our language dialect stands us unique in our LGA. I often enjoy it when an Irete person says, “Ogbohodu Ire’e pu’a ngaa m eme ya’. And, that is a firm stand taken. That’s a symbol, not a worship.
- 6) *Nta* Irete is in the mould of Oru Owerri. Owerri is no bigger a town than Irete, state capital notwithstanding. Ogbaku, Amakohia-Ubi and Izombe with their *Owu*

festivals are still Christian towns, no less than we are. Their *owu* have turned to festivals without them worshipping any deities or spirits. As Winston Churchill would put it, “What I have I hold”. Isn’t it necessary that Irete holds what is has? Emii has emume okashi. Ogbaku has emume ero-usu. Mbieri has nnudo, Ubomiri has keleke, Egbeada, Ohii, Orogwe have Okorosha dance. We are no more Christians than they. Or, are we? Irete should get down to something indigenous to it, some sort of something to identify with.

- 7) Abigolo of Umuagwu and Umunwanlo, Uri opi of Umueye, akataka dance of Umuoyo, okorosha of Umunwanlo, where have these past-times gone to? Has Irete suddenly gone dumb? We need to revive them all, if only but to tick.
- 8) Ogwugwu Ezi Irete, Umuoma and Amaikpu have vestiges of merriment for the people and not necessarily pagan worship. Onu na-erighi ihe, a-gaghii ari ndu. We need that refreshment, get together via Ogwugwu festival. The Eze and his cabinet need to get to work in this direction. We are an oke mba, Irete ji mma gbue enyi.

The crowd applauded the lecturer as he concluded his speech. It was now the time for the traditional cooking competition which always serves as the high point of the event. This activity was under the purview of the Ugoeze (wife of the Eze Agubiam 1) and the women wing of ICDU. Women from the different villages are asked to prepare traditional meals which are presented to the judges at the venue of the festival. After tasting the dishes, the judges will come forward to announce the 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions. They base their judgments on the ingredients used and presentation. They encourage the use of local spices and kitchen ware. The dressing and body adornment of the presenter is also put into consideration. Some of the women come out with singing and dancing. For 2017, the women of Umuekwunne got the first position, Umueju came second while Umunjo came third. As the announcement was made, there was wild jubilation by the winners.



Plate 4.15: The Women of Irete during the cooking competition of Nta 2017

As all of these activities were on going, the different villages who had before now contributed money to host themselves were having a great feast, winning and dinning together with friends, relatives, in-laws and guests. There were masquerade performances organised by the youth wing of ICDO.

Awards were given to notable sons and daughters of Irete who had excelled in different areas and who had impacted on the community. No chieftaincy title was given out in 2017, even though this was also a period for title- taking.

The meat from *Nta* expedition was also shared by the Eze Agubiam to the invited guests and to the heads of villages present. The vote of thanks was given by the traditional Prime Minister of Irete followed by the Irete anthem and a closing prayer.

This was followed by an open floor of merriment, dancing, singing, masquerade performances as the VIPs and the Eze moved over to his palace and, to give audience to the media. It is important to note that the Onye Ishi Ala was not part of this *Nta* festival organised by the Eze Agubiam 1 and his cabinet members. The Onye Ishi Ala considers his own duties during the whole *Nta* performance as very important and, since he has his own followers, he shares the game from the *Nta* expedition with them in a ‘not elaborate’ ceremony. Not with the type of fun fair that the Eze Agubiam 1 encourages. It is also important to note that the eighteen villages in Irete are not mandated to join in the *Nta* celebration of Onye Ishi Ala as they are made to in the Eze’s version.

4.18.2 *Nta* Festival of 2018

In 2018, this researcher witnessed another attempt at reconstructing the *Nta* festival by the Eze Agubiam 1 of Irete, HRH Eze Ethelbert Chukwudi Ekwelibe. The date was 14th July, 2018.



Plate 4.16: A procession to the venue of the festival

The occasion was similar to the event of 2017 except for a few injections here and there. This time, Chieftaincy titles are conferred on certain people. However, the high point of this year's ceremony was the abolition of the Osu, Ohu, Ume and Diala Caste systems in Irete Autonomous Community. One of the Chieftaincy titles was given to Mr. Isaac Ugorji, whose family used to be an Osu.



Plate4.17: Chief Isaac Ugorji receiving his certificate of award from the Eze

The chieftaincy title being given to a former Osu was in line with the agreement by all members of the Community Government Council (New name for ICDU), the Eze in council and other arms of leadership, to abolish the caste systems in Irete Autonomous Community. Hence, the title was given in recognition of Mr. Ugorji's commitment and contributions to the development and progress of the community despite being an Osu. It was also to show that in truth, the caste systems had been eradicated, otherwise, no Osu, Ohu or Ume will ever be given a chieftaincy title in any part of Igboland as such was a taboo. Likewise in Irete.



Plate 4.18: One of the Chieftaincy title Recipients, Chief Isaac Ugorji being decorated with the title ‘Anyanwuoma Nke Irete’ (Sunlight of Irete) by Eze Ekwelibe

The award of the Chieftaincy title was the high point of *Nta* festival of 2018. The people (especially the so- called outcasts) jubilated and were appreciative of being taken back into the community as freeborn and not as ostracised individuals.



Plate 4.19 Chief Barrister David Orji of Umuekwune Village was also awarded a Chieftaincy Title

Another high point of this event was the launch of a book titled *The Osu caste System: The Myths, Realities and Its Abolition in Irete Autonomous Community* edited by HRH Eze E. C. Ekwelibe Agubiam 1 of Irete community.



Plate 4.20: Chief Professor Andrew Igwenma of Umuekwune was also awarded a Chieftaincy title

The book was in commemoration of the abolition and some guests and indigenes bought copies to show their solidarity with the course. It was indeed a grand occasion.

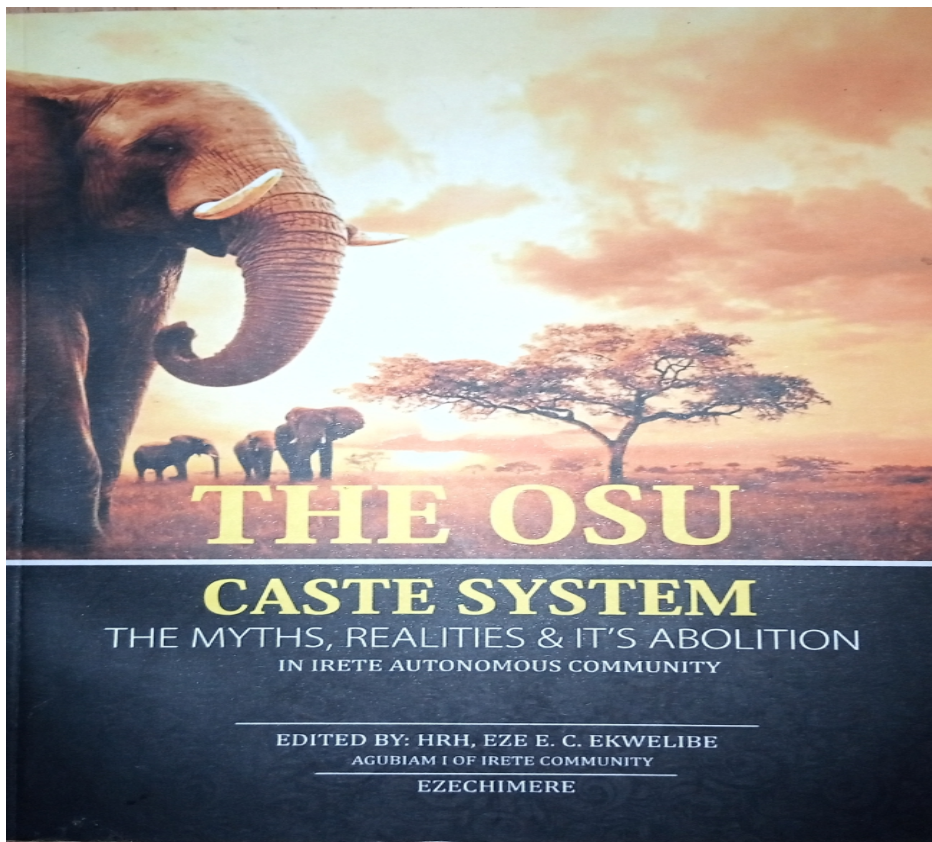


Plate 4.21: Book launched during the *Nta* of 2018

It is noteworthy to point out that the Onye Ishi Ala was not present at this festival. As usual, he was done with the spiritual aspect of *Nta* and would host his own group in his palace (in the usual low key manner).



Plate 4.22: Masquerade performances at the *Nta* Festival of 2018

4.19 Challenges Encountered in the Reconstructed *Nta* Festival

Due to natural and human occurrences, certain challenges are encountered in organising the *Nta* festival. Below are some of the identified challenges.



Plate 4.23: Cultural displays at the *Nta* Festival of 2018

4.19.1 The People's Perception of *Nta*

As earlier mentioned in this study, majority of the people of Irete are now Christians. Therefore, they see most cultural events as heathenic and would rather not take part in them. They claim that it is against their religion to partake in feasts which are fetish and, with heathens. This posed a major challenge as majority of the people still do not want to associate with *Nta* performance. Even though the reconstructed *Nta* of 2017 and 2018 were a bit encouraging as regards community participation, it would do better if more Irete indigenes get involved. This would really give it a festival outlook.

4.19.2 Power Tussle in various Quarters

Another major challenge to the smooth and successful *Nta* festival is the issue of power tussle. There was power tussle between the Amaikpu and Ezi Irete bloc bordering on who is the senior among the children of Eregerenwa, the ancestor of Irete. While the descendants of Umuelele claim to be the most senior, therefore, the Ezeship should come to them, the descendants of Umueye claim that the most senior male child in Igboland is always given the staff (Ofo). They claim further that since their ancestors had been in possession of the two major staffs (Ofo Ukwu and Ofo *Nta*) in Irete from time, automatically Umueye is the most senior son of Irete. This seniority tussle has also been discussed extensively in preceding sections of this study. The seniority tussle and the final election of the first Eze of Irete from Umueye led to the boycott of the *Nta* festival by some of the seven kindreds from the Ezi Irete bloc. The issues emanating from this tussle are yet to be resolved. As a matter of fact, the unity of Irete Autonomous Community is threatened as the Ezi Irete bloc now agitates for autonomy. They have written to the State Government and are seriously pursuing its materialisation.

Another power tussle is identified between the Eze and the Onye Ishi Ala. This has made *Nta* festival to be observed by two different groups, the Onye Ishi Ala group (who handles the spiritual aspect with a low key celebration) and the Eze Agubiam group. If these two groups can come together to observe *Nta*, it may become stronger and pull more weight.

These two issues are yet to be settled and the Onye Ishi Ala and the seven villages from Ezi Irete bloc are often absent at the reconstructed *Nta* festival of the Eze Agubiam

4.19.3 Finance

Financial challenges pose a big threat to the organising of *Nta* festival. Government at all levels is not involved. During this present Governor, Rochas Okorochoa's tenure, the local governments are without chairmen, so no financial assistance can be gotten. The little money the organisers have at their disposal comes from levies and, that given by companies and industries within Irete as corporate social responsibility. It could not do much.

4.19.4 Climate Challenges

Nta festival falls within the months of June and July. This is the peak of the rainy season in Irete. Traditional rain makers who are not employed for that day ensure that the rain does not stop. This weather condition often discourages friends and well wishers from gracing the occasion.

4.19.5 Bad Roads

The roads in Irete are in deplorable condition. There has been little or no intervention from government in this area. Recently, the community, through the creation of a whatsapp online group by some concerned youths, has taken up the duty of repairing the roads by themselves. Through this social media group, sons, daughters, in-laws, friends and well wishers of Irete community are asked to make voluntary donations to aid work for the progress of the community. During *Nta* festival, such calls are made and monies realised are used in the rehabilitation of the major roads leading to the festival venue. But this is just to make the road motorable for that day as it soon goes back to what it was or, even worse.

4.19.6 Security Challenges

In recent times, cases bordering on insecurity have flooded Irete. This is not peculiar to Irete alone, but, it is an issue that has bedevilled the South Eastern part of Nigeria and the nation at large.

Most Igbo communities are faced with kidnap cases, armed robbery, rape, murder and so on. Irete is close to the capital seat of Imo State. It has opened up to high influx of strangers due to industries, companies, churches, hotels, bars and restaurants etc. Urbanization comes with its own disadvantages and this is the situation in Irete community. During an interview with one of the chieftaincy title awardees during the *Nta* festival of 2018, Chief Isaac Ugorji who came in specifically for the festival from the United States where he resides, he said (2018 July 14 personal communication) ‘Due to the insecurity in the country, I had to make prior arrangements regarding security before I left the United States. I paid a lot of money to hire security operatives during my stay here. It is unfortunate, but for those of us who love our village, we will do anything to come home, especially during such festivals as *Nta*’. Although, the security challenges are being taken care of by members of the local and state vigilante groups, these measures have not solved the situation completely. Since no one would like to visit or stay in a community that is not safe, majority of Irete sons and daughters living abroad will rather not endanger their lives by coming home for the festival. No doubt, security challenges are a hindrance to the success of *Nta* Irete.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the concluding part of this study. The chapter is in four parts with the first part presenting the summary of the chapters, followed by the conclusion, recommendations based on the research findings and, the fourth part being the contribution to knowledge.

5.1 Summary

This study has endeavoured to examine the history of *Nta* festival of Irete community, exploring its forms, the way in which it has continued to retain its relevance through the reconstruction presently going on and, its significance to the people of Irete.

In chapter one of this study, the background to the study is presented. It affirmed that between the early 1980s and 2013, there was a rapid decline in the level of participation in *Nta* festival by the people of Irete owing to the advent of modernity and Christianity. The study in this chapter asserts that this decline in participation has caused the neglect of norms and values institutionalised by the festival. The chapter further justifies the importance of the *Nta* Irete which has not been given wide scholarly attention as other festivals in Igboland such as the 'Oru Owerri' and the 'Owu Amakohia Ubi'. It highlights the significance of the festival as fostering cultural identity, bonding the people, opening the community to tourism potentials and how the festival is currently being used as an apparatus for cultural reconstruction in Irete by the Eze Agubiam 1, ICDU and other stakeholders.

Chapter two presents a review of several researches which have been carried out by others on related subjects of this study. Literature on festivals, hunting performances, identity, cultural hybridity and transformation, modernity, colonialism, African consciousness and Christianity are reviewed. The chapter argues that while there is quite a considerable number of scholarly work done on festivals in Nigeria generally and

Igboland specifically, little work has been focused on the festivals in Irete especially *Nta* festival. More significantly, the chapter states that the processes of the ongoing reconstruction of the *Nta* Irete and the need for such reconstruction are yet to be properly documented. Since the importance of a reconstructed *Nta* festival cannot be overemphasised, it has become necessary to conduct this research in order to bridge the existing lacuna, with the hope that this will ultimately provide an in-depth knowledge for the stakeholders of *Nta* Irete on how to further develop the festival to meet current global realities and move it to the level of tourist attraction for both indigenes and visitors.

Chapter three of this study presents the research methodology employed in this research. The qualitative research methodology involving ethnographic and descriptive dimensions was employed in carrying out investigations in this study. A combination of textual analysis and ethnographic research designs were used. Since qualitative research is interpretive rather than statistical, the study made use of key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, participant observation and Focus Group Discussions as primary sources of data collection and it was stated in this chapter. Textbooks, online materials journals etc formed the secondary method of data collection. This was also noted. The field work was carried out in Irete Autonomous community, Owerri West local government area, Imo State between December 2016 and July 2018. Purposive sampling method was utilised in selecting informants for the data collection.

There was also the use of tape recorder, still and video camera in gathering data for this study. These data collection instruments helped to make sure that all necessary data needed for the validity of the research was collected. The study population was focused on Irete indigenes living in Irete community and selected diasporan Irete indigenes in Lagos knowledgeable in the customs and tradition of the Irete people and *Nta* festival in particular and, also stakeholders in the cultural reformation of festivals in Irete. All these were noted in this chapter.

In chapter four, the study presents all data collected and the analyses of these data based on the objectives of the study. Focus was on the geographical location of Irete Autonomous community, belief system and ancestral worship, Irete political structure, family system, inter community wars, Osu caste system in Irete, land ownership and settlement methods, occupation, economic activities and commerce, Irete festivals and

traditional ceremonies. The information presented in this chapter provides an understanding of the people, their world view and how these views have continued to define responses to the effect of outside influences such as western civilisation and Christianity. Through the data presentation and analysis of Irete political structure, it was realised that the people of Irete had no king in the past and most of the spiritual and political leadership role was vested on the Onye Ishi Ala until the coming of the Whiteman and the introduction of the warrant chief system in Igboland. These warrant chiefs have somewhat culminated into the recent Autonomous Eze introduced by recent governments. From the data gathered and presented, there is an understanding that the present Eze Agubiam 1 and the Onye Ishi Ala, though cousins, are not working in unison and this has led to the celebration of *Nta* by two different groups.

While the data gathered and analysed in this chapter gives an understanding of the roles of the different groups such as the ICDU, Ndi Oki and Ndi Oha, among others, in the celebration of *Nta* and its revival, there is also a clear understanding that the performance of *Nta* by two different groups, and its outright boycott by aggrieved members of the Eze Irete bloc due to Ezeship tussle poses a challenge to the reconstruction of the festival to meet international standards. As observed by Pa Ojjieme (personal communication, 2017) ‘*Umunna wu ike*’ meaning ‘there is power in unity’. This study, in this chapter, also highlighted the economic life of the people of Irete as having moved from subsistence farming and hunting to white collar jobs, trading, hospitality business and real estate etc. The reason for these shifts having been identified mainly as a result of urbanisation which in turn has led to the spiritual aspects of *Nta* festival not being duly observed. For instance Nkolo forest has been drastically reduced and houses have taken over most parts of the forest. Also, the hunting expedition that used to propel visiting hunters to come and show their skills was no longer available. Only a handful of hunters now attend and bring just a handful of games to the Onye Ishi Ala group, while the Eze Agubiam 1 buys meat to celebrate their own *Nta* festival.

Chapter five explains the forms of *Nta* festival both in the traditional and reconstructed forms in Irete community. It was observed and stated in this chapter that the traditional context of *Nta* festival is the exclusive preserve of Onye Ishi Ala, members of the Oha cult and Ndi Oki. This chapter affirmed that the whole process of *Nta* is

performed between the months of May and July which approximates the celebration to a two month ceremony. It begins with the *Ima Nta* (notice to the community), followed by *Ije Nkolo* (visit to Nkolo forest), *Okpe Nta*, *Igba Nta* (hunting expedition), *Nta* celebration (*Nta* festival proper) and *Ikpola Nta* (Return of *Ofo Nta* to Umuguma). It is pertinent to note that aside from *Igba Nta* which involves indigenes and visitor hunters and, *Nta* festival proper, all the other aspects of *Nta* celebration are either handled solely by the Onye Ishi Ala or he is accompanied by the Oha, Nze and Oki group members as the case may be. This chapter also brings to the fore, elements of the reconstructed *Nta* festival as carried out by the Eze in- council, members of the ICDU and other stakeholders. The justification and the effect of the reconstructed *Nta* festival were also highlighted. From the observations on the field and data collected, it was realised that the people leaned more towards the reconstructed *Nta* Irete due to Christianity and modernity because majority of the people no longer want to associate themselves with the traditional forms which they now termed ‘fettish’. This chapter exposed certain changes in the reconstructed *Nta* festival. For instance, the festival now has a Christian approach and has become more of a social event losing key aspects of traditionality and sacredness as bequeathed to Irete by its ancestors. These aspects played very important role in the world order of the Irete people. Even though, some of these elements are still observed by the Onye Ishi Ala, there are tendencies that they might be lost completely after the Onye Ishi Ala passes. Consequently, the cultural and religious syncretism that has come about as a result of the on going transformstion of *Nta* has its advantages, yet its disadvantages as well. Other challenges to the successful performance of *Nta* Irete such as insecurity, paucity of funds, bad road, weather condition (during the *Nta* festival) and power tussle, among other things, were presented and examined in this chapter.

5.2 Conclusion

This study revealed that *Nta* festival of Irete was about going into extinction and that the Eze Agubiam I of Irete and other stakeholders made a deliberate effort at reviving the festival. In doing this, they included various aspects of modernity to keep *Nta* in existence, especially the profane aspect which deals more with entertainment and tourism.

The study reveals that flagging the ceremony off from the church and, with the blessing of the Reverend Father, most people who had earlier abandoned the festival now observe *Nta*. This is because they now believe that the ‘fetish’ aspect has been removed.

The study shows that *Nta* Irete has been divided into two. The religious part, with the Onye Ishi Ala and the Oha cult fully in charge, and the social part with the Eze and other stakeholders in charge. While the religious aspect has helped the people to sustain the culture of their ancestors, the social aspect of *Nta* has helped to foster communal existence, social integration and development. The various high points of events marking *Nta* celebration such as the traditional cooking competition, masquerade displays and cultural displays has helped in re-instating identity. It has also helped to attract local and international visitors. This is an advantage in that it will attract development to Irete community. *Nta* Irete has added value to the lives of the people, strengthening interpersonal and intercommunal relationship. The study established that the new *Nta* Irete has rekindled the people’s interest in promoting their culture, fostering unity and tourism.

5.3 Recommendations

The study recommends the following based on the research findings:

- Cultural advocacy in the form of workshops, seminars and media usage should be organised for church leaders, traditional leaders and the general Irete public (indigenes specifically) on the importance of preserving one’s culture to foster unity, project identity and put Irete on the world map.
- The political and spiritual leadership of Irete should embark more upon adapting and reviving the threatened festivals of Irete rather than losing them completely. In this wise, there is need for the coming together of all factions, the Eze Agubiam faction, the Onye Ishi Ala and the aggrieved members of Ezi Irete bloc. This will aid in putting up a formidable front to focus on external threatening influences such as modernity, globalisation and Christianity. And by so doing, the people’s culture and identity is preserved.
- There should be a workshop or training programme to train members of the festival planning committee by experts on the field. This will go a long way in

the effective planning and execution of *Nta* and other festivals in Irete, making them a veritable tool for tourism attraction and cultural development

- Stakeholders, and by this, I mean, government (local and state), wealthy sons and daughters of Irete should come together and support Irete in the area of roads and other infrastructures that can make access to the festival easy and enjoyable. As noted in this study, members of the whatsapp online group of Irete are doing their best in the area of road rehabilitation, but, it is not enough. If Irete is going to be on the world map, and it can, through its festivals, more funds need to be gathered with proper execution and accountability to address the challenges of infrastructures such as roads, security and public conveniences.
- Stakeholders especially, the local and state government should begin to address issues bordering on Igbo identity and unity. These they can achieve by giving government agencies within Owerri the mandate for collaborations within their locations. Projects such as *Nta* Irete could be carried out in collaboration with government agencies such as National Museum Owerri, CBAAC, NGA and NTDC among others. These establishments are all few miles away from Irete (which is very close to the seat of power in Imo state). They could start with *Nta* festival of Irete community.
- Stakeholders should be carried along in the planning and execution of *Nta* festival. Proper accountability should be given after each festival ends. It should be open and audited. Aggrieved members should be called to a reconciliation table, because there is power in number.

5.4 Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes significantly to existing literature on festivals in southeastern Nigeria, generally, and Owerri, specifically. The study is the first to examine the dynamics of *Nta* festival performance of the Irete people, southeastern Nigeria. Clearly, the study provides more valuable information to existing studies, not just on the history and significance of *Nta* festival, but also on the reconstructed forms of *Nta* festival presently ongoing. Through a detailed empirical research, this study examined these processes of transformation through a careful examination of *Nta* Hunting Festival.

Additionally, the study was able to show the syncretism of religion in *Nta* festival performance and how they have contributed to it in achieving relevance. It has been shown that traditional Igbo religion and the Christian religion have become merged into the reconstructed festival in this study, as both forms are aspects of culture that have become modes of performance.

Hence, Schechner's concept of performance is further interpreted, which contrasts sharply with earlier, principally modernistic approaches to art. This study shows that people experience different "systems of transformations" throughout their lifetimes within cultural contexts, and across time periods and movements.

This study supports Schechner's opinion (2002) that performance can take many forms, such as fun, games, entertainment, and rituals, as well as professional roles, political personae, media, and the construction of race, gender, and identity in everyday life. Thus, performance studies has further developed into an academic discipline whose topics include acting in plays, dancing, and making music; playing different roles as friends, children, parents, students; pretending, making up, playing games, engaging in sports, presenting a case in court, and much more.

In addition, researchers and historians of performance and culture will be better equipped to understand the various ways in which festival performances can be shaped and re-shaped in Igboland, and how and why this transformation happens. While this study has helped in documenting the reconstruction and transformation pattern of *Nta* Irete, it also documents its challenges and coping mechanisms. As a result of the dearth of written documents on these aspects of *Nta*, this study is a valuable resource for future researchers in the area, as it provides abundant information on *Nta* festival performance. Moreover, the study also helps to preserve for future generations the history of the Irete people through the documentation of the oral data, which was retrieved during this research. In this study, the transformational processes of *Nta* festival performances are investigated and how they restore participation among Irete people.

Lastly, the study serves as a reference point for other researchers and students interested in studying the dynamics of *Nta* festival performance.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heineman Publications.
- Achebe, C. 1964. *Arrow of God*. London: Heineman Publications.
- Adedeji, J. 1971. Oral Tradition and the Contemporary Theatre in Nigeria. *Research in African Literatures* no 2
- Adeduntan, A. 2014. *What the Forest Told Me. Yoruba Hunter, Culture and Narrative Performance*. South Africa. Unisa Press.
- Adegbite, A. 2010. The Impact of African Traditional Dance. Orosun Example, *Journal of Mass Communications Studies*.
- Adegbulu, F. 2011. From Warrant Chiefs to Ezeship: A Distortion of Traditional Institution in Igboland? *Afro Asian (Redeemer's University) Journal of Social Science* 2, 2.2 Quarter II ISSN 2229 -5313
- Adeoye, J. and Jays, R. 2013. The Drama of Ahmed Yerima. *Studies in Nigerian Theatre. The Creative Artist. A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies*. ISSN: 2006-6910. Netherlands. Leiden University
- Aghedo, C U. 2007. Deities and Spirits in Igboland: The Elugwu- Ezike Cultural Perspective. *Journal of Religion and Culture*, 7.2: 1- 15
- Akintan, O. A 2013. Traditional Religious Festivals and Modernity: A Case Study of Female-Oriented Cults Annual Festivals in Ijebuland of South Western Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3.9, May
- Amankulor, N. J. 1987. Theatre in Search of Form, Modern Nigerian Drama and its Audience. *Nigeria Magazine*: Samfolly Press and Publications.
- Amankulor, J. 1976. Festival Theatre in Traditional Africa. *An Essay in Dramatic Theory*. First Ibadan Annual African Literature Conference.
- Amkpa, A. 2004. *Theatre and Post Colonial Desires*. London/ New York. Routledge
- Anigala, E. A. 2005 *Traditional Festival Drama in Performance*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.
- Aniago, M. 2015. Deities and Shrines in African Traditional Religion: The “Spark” in Igboland. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 23.9: 21983-2185.
- Arinze, F.A. 1970. *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion*. Ibadan. University Press Ibadan.

- Asagba, R.B. 2007. *Logotherapy and Cultural Development*. Ibadan, Nigeria. Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Azouma G. 2008. Identities in a Fragmented World. *Black Cyber Communities and the French Integration System* 203 1.2. Routledge. USA
- _____ 2009. *African and Black Diaspora*. 2. 2. Routledge. USA
- Babawale, T. 2010. *Cultural Rejuvenation for National and Sustainable Development in Africa*. Lagos: Malthouse Press limited.
- Banham, M. 1967. Nigerian Dramatists and the Traditional Nigerian Theatre. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 3
- Banham, M. 1976. *African Theatre Today*. London. Pitman Publishing limited.
- Banham, M. 2004. *A History of Theatre in Africa*. UK. Cambridge University Press.
- Barber, K. 1997 *Reading in African Popular Culture*. Bloomington. Indiana University Press.
- Bentley, E. 1975. *What is Theatre?* Boston: Penguin Books
- Bridger J. N. 2012. *Africanizing Christian Art. Kevin Carroll and Yoruba Christian Art in Nigeria*. Singapore: TienWah Press
- Brockett, G. O. 1964. *The Theatre: An Introduction*. USA: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.
- Carlson, M. 1996. *Performance. A Critical Introduction*. London. Routledge
- Chow, Hess et al. (eds) 1995. *Studying Women in Diversity Culture*. Sociology 4th Edition NY: MacMillan Publishers Co.
- Clark, E. 1979. *Hubert Ogunde. The Making of Nigerian Theatre*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Gudny, W. 2016 *Festivalisation of Urban Spaces. Factors, Processes and Effects*. Cham. Springer.
- Dasyuva, A. O. 2003. *Theatre Practice in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Atlantis Books.
- Deflem, M. 1991. Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30.1, 1-25.
- Deffuant, G and Gilbert, N 2011. *Understanding Complex Systems. Viability and Resilience of Complex Systems. Concepts, Methods and Case Studies from Ecology and Society*. Springer.

- Dioka L.C. 2007. The political system in Faluyi K. and Dioka L.C (eds) *Nigerian Heritage. The Igbo culture* Lagos: Rebonik Publishers.
- Duignam, P and Gann, H (eds) 1870- 1960 Vol. 5. Colonialism in Africa.A Bibliographical Guide to Colonialism in Sub-saharan Africa. London. *Hoover Institutions Publications*. Cambridge University Press.
- Edgar, A and Sedgwick, P. (eds) 1999. *Key concepts in cultural theory*. Routledge. London
- Eisler, R. 1988. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, our future*. San Francisco Perennial library.
- Ejiofor, P. N. 1984. *Cultural Revival in Igboland*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company.
- Ekpo, E. 1990. *Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art*. London: Ethnographica
- Ekwelibe, E. 2017. *Irete The People, Culture and Tradition*. Owerri. Joe Mankpa Publishers
- _____ (ed). 2018. *The Osu Caste System. The Myths, Realities and its Abolition in Irete Autonomous Community*. Owerri: Herald Publishers.
- Ekwuru, E. G. 1999. *The Pangs of an African Culture in Travail. Uwa Ndi Igbo Yaghara Ayagha (The Igbo World in Disarray)*. Owerri: Totan Publishers
- Ekwueme, L.E.N 2004. *Essays on African and African American Music and Culture*. Lagos. LENAUS Publishing Ltd.
- Enekwe, O. 1987. *Igbo Masks: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre*. Aniegria Magazine Lagos: Published by the Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture.
- Etherton, M. 1982. *The Development of African Drama*. New York: African Publishing Company Limited.
- Equiano, O. & Edwards, P. 1789. *The life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa The African*. London. Dawson of Pall Mall.
- Ewin, R. E 1991. *Virtues and Rights: the Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*. Oxford. Boulder.
- Fadipe, N.A. 1970. *The Sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan. Ibadan University Press.
- Fanon, F. 1974. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin

- Filani, K. 2014 *Leveraging on Indigenous Africa Culture and Artistic Creativity for Development. Legacies of Ambassador Segun Olusola*. Lagos. CBAAC.
- Finnegan, R. 1970. *Oral literature in Africa*. Clarendon: Oxford University Press.
- Getz, D. 2010. Residents' Attitude and Perception. *Journal of Event Management Research* 5, 1-47.
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Culture*. New York. Basic Books Inc.
- Goddard, W and Melville, S. 2007. *Research Methodology. An Introduction*. Second Edition. Landsowne. Jilta & Co Ltd.
- Goffman, E. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh. UK.
- Greene, R.R (ed) 2002. *Resilience: An Integrated Approach to Practice, Policy and Research*. Washington DC: NASW Press.
- Greenwald, L.M et al. 2002. *Longman Anthology of Drama and Theater: A global Perspective*, Compact edition: U.S.A. Longman.
- Hagan, L. M. 2007. The Revival of the Ulster- Scots Cultural Identity at the Beginning of the Twenty First Century. *Journal of Irish Scottish Studies*.
- Hauptfleisch, T et al (eds). 2007. *Festivalising! Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture*. Amsterdam. IFTR.
- Hess, U. et al 2000. Emotional Expressivity in Men and Women: *Stereotypes and Self-Perceptions, Cognition and Emotion*, 14.5609-642. Taylor and Francis
- Hofstede, G. 1997. *Culture and organisations. Software of the Mind*. New York. McGraw hill
- Idowu, E.B. 1973. *African Traditional Religion. A Definition*. London SCM Press
- Ilogu, E. 1985. *Christianity and Igbo Culture*. Onitsha: University Pub Co.
- Ilona, 2014. *The Igbos and Israel an Intercultural Study of the Burget Jewish Diaspora*. Street to Street Epic Publication.
- Ilogu, E. 1975. The Problem of Christian Ethics among the Igbo of Nigeria. *Ikenga Journal of African Studies*, 3.1 & 2
- Isidienu, I. C. 2016. Igbo Political Organisation and Impunity. Mgbakoigba, *Journal of African studies* 6.1. July 2.
- Isichei E. 1976. *A History of Igbo People*. London. Macmillan.

- Jackson, R. L 1999. *The Negotiation of Cultural Identity. Perceptions of European Americans & African Americans*. U.S.A: Praeger Publishers
- Jafari, J. (ed) 2000. *Encyclopedia of Tourism*. London. Routledge.
- Jefferess, D. 2008. *Post Colonial Resistance: Culture Liberation, and Transformation*. Toronto Buffalo London. University of Toronto Press Incorporated.
- Jeyifo, B. 1984. *The Yoruba Travelling Theatre*. Lagos. Nigeria Magazine.
- Kingston, W.H.G 2012. *How Britania Came to Rule the Waves*. United Kingdom. Luton. Andrews.
- Kottari, C. R. 2004. *Research Methodology. Methods & techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International (P) Ltd.
- Kuada, J. 2012. *Research Methodology. A Project Guide for University Students*. Prederksberg DK: Samfunds Literature
- Laing, J and Warwick, F (eds) 2015. *Rituals and Traditional Events in the Modern World*. London. Routledge Longman Anthology of Drama & Theatre.
- Lorapuu, T. 2002. From Aja to Komputa: An Example of the Changing Forms in Nigeria Dances. *The Performer, Ilorin Journal of the Performing Arts*. 4:165 – 178.Ilorin.
- Lyons, C. L and Papadopoulos, J. K (eds) 2002. *The Archaeology of Colonialism*. L.A: Getty Publications.
- Malomo J. and Gbileka S. 1993 *Theatre and Politics in Nigeria*. Nigeria. Caltop Publications.
- Maffia, M.M. 2010. Migration and Identity of Cape Verdeans and Their Descendants in Argentina 3.2 (Ps 171)
- Marcus, A & Gould, E. 2000. Crosscurrents: Cultural Dimensions and Global Web User-Interface Design. *Interactions*, 7, 32- 46
- Mbefo L. N. 1989. *Towards a Mature African Christianity*. Enugu: Snaap Press.
- Metuh, I. E. 1981. *God and Man in African Religion*. London: Geoffrey Chapman Pub.
- Nneke, C. A. 2011 An unpublished M. A. Thesis, Dept of Igbo, African and Asian Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.
- Nwaolikpe, O. N. 2013.Culture and Nigerian Identity in the Print Media. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*.Oman Chapter, 3.3: 63-71.

- Nwachukwu-Agbada, J. O. J 1991. The Igbo Folktale: Performance Conditions and Internal Characteristics. *Folktale Forum*. 24.1.19-35
- Nwoye C. M. 2011. Igbo cultural and Religions worldview: An Insider's Perspective. *International Journal of sociology and Anthropology* 3.9304-317 Academic Journals.Org.USA
- Nzewi, M. 1979. *Traditional African Practice*. Nigeria Magazine.Great Britain. The Pitman Press.
- Oduyoye, M.O. 1998. Festival. The Cultivation of History and the Celebration of History in E.A. Adeagbo (ed) *Traditional Religion in West Africa*. Ibadan: Daystar Press.
- Ogunbiyi, Y. (ed). 1981. *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Great Britain: The Pitman Press.
- Okebalama, C. 1991. The Hunter in Ûbàkala Igbo Life.*African Languages and Cultures*, 4.2, 177-187. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1771728>
- Okebalama, C.U. 2003.*Mkpolite Agumagu Onu Igbo*. Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd.
- Okodo I. (2006). The Igbo Traditional Polity as the Bedrock of Nigerian Democracy. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*
- Okpoko, P. U, 1990. The Role of Cultural Resources in Tourism in Nigeria. Cited in Andah, B. W. (ed) *Cultural Resource Management. An African Dimension*. Ibadan: Wisdom Publishers.
- Okpoko, A.I and Okpoko, P. U. 2002. *Tourism in Nigeria*. Nsukka. Afro- Orbis Publications limited.
- Oloruntimehin, B. B. 2007. *Culture and Democracy*. CBAAC Occasional Monograph No. 5. Lagos: Concept Publications.
- Olusanya, G.O. 1996. *We build in Vain*. Lagos. Obafemi Awolowo Foundation.
- Onwuejeogwu, 1981. *An Igbo Civilisation; Nri kingdom*. Indiana University Press.
- Opoku K. A. 1978.*West African Traditional Religion*. Accra: FEP International Private Ltd.
- Osanyin, B. 2002. *Adamu-Orisa Play of Lagos: A Study in Ritual Drama*. Lagos: Deocraft Communications.

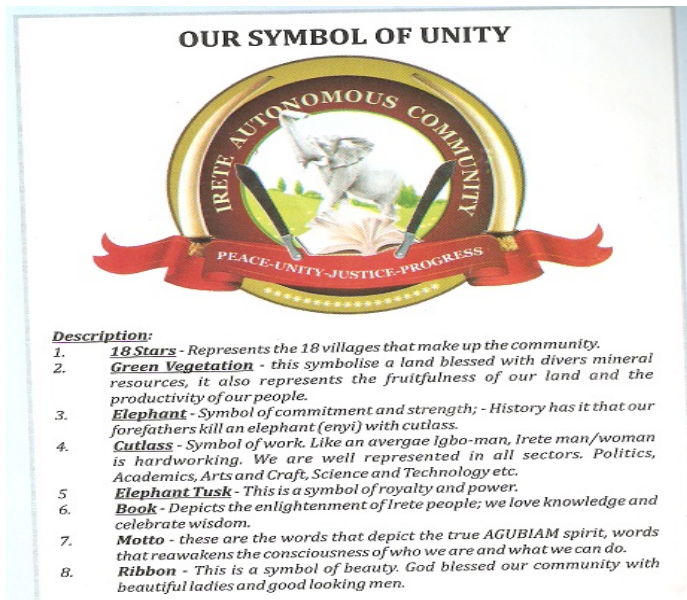
- Osanyin, B. 2010. *Let Me Teach You a New Thing* (A Posthumous Collection of Selected Essays) Lagos: Bookplus Publishers.
- Owusu- Frempong, Y. 2005. Afrocentricity. The Adaye Festival of the Akan. African American Festival and Intergenerational Communication. *Journal of Black Studies*.
- Parrinder, E. G. 1974. *African Traditional Religion* (3rd edn.), London: Sheldon
-----1990. *African Traditional Religion*. London. S.P.C.K Press.
- Pieterse, N. J. 2009. *Globalisation and Culture*. Global Melanger. Second Edition. USA. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Precious, O. U. 2010. *Globalisation and the Future of African Culture*. Philosophical Papers and Reviews.
- Ranjit Kumar. 2011. *Research Methodology. A Step to Step Guide for Beginners*. London, California. Sage Publication Ltd.
- Robin, M. 1974. *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Theatre*. England. Osprey Publishing.
- Salt, D and Walker, B. 2006. *Resilience Thinking. Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World*. Washington: Island Press.
- Schechner, R. 2002. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
_____. 2004. *Performance Theory*. London and New York: Routledge
_____. 2013. *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (Third Edition). New York. Routledge.
- Shakespeare, W, & Furness, H. H. 1963. *As you like it*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Soyinka, W. 1976. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, M et al 1990. *Cultural Theory*. New York. Routledge.
- Ugonna, N. 1981. *Standardising Igbo Festivals*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.
- Ukachukwu, C. M. 2007. The Sacred Festival of Iriji Ohuru in Igboland, Nigeria. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16.2: 244-260.
- Ukpokodu, P. I. 1992 *Socio-Political Theatre in Nigeria*. USA: Mellen Research University Press
- Ungar, M (ed) 2012. *The Social Ecology of Resilience. A Handbook of Theory and Practice*. Springer.

- Wanhill, S. and Jansen- Verbeke, M. 2008. Cultural Events as Catalysts of Change: Evidence from Four European Case Studies. Cited in Jansen- Verbeke, M. and Priestley (eds). *Cultural Resources for Tourism: Patterns, Processes and Policies*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Whiting, F. 1978. *An Introduction to the Theatre*. New York: Harper and Row
- Wilson, E. 2007. *The Theatre Experience* 10th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hil


Appendix i
Irete Anthem – Translation

E jim aka na chukwu ga agozi irete	May God bless Irete
Obodo mara nma n'etiti ala igbo	A beautiful town among its pairs in Igboland
Aka kam ga enye mba nile	I greet all nations
Ma obi mga enye irete	My heart will I give Irete at all times
Obodo mara nma amuru m na yaa	The beautiful town where I was born
Chorus	Chorus
Irete e, Obodo oma	Irete a beautiful town
Irete e, Chukwu gozie e	Irete, God bless you
Aka m ka m ga enye mba nile	I greet all Nations
Obi m kam ga enye Irete e	My heart will I give Irete at all times,
Obodo mara nma amuru m nag a aaa	The beautiful town where I was born

Appendix ii



Appendix iii

	<h2 style="margin: 0;">UMUNWOHA HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC PARISH, IRETE</h2> <h3 style="margin: 0; font-style: italic;">Sunday Bulletin</h3>	
	<p>PARISH PRIEST: Rev. Fr. Cosmas Onukwugha</p> <p>ASSISTANT PARISH PRIEST: Mr. J. Igwe</p> <p>CATECHIST: Mrs. Amarachi Amanze</p> <p>CATECHIZER: Mrs. Amarachi Amanze</p>	<p>SUNDAY MASSES: 6.30am, 9.30am (Center) & 7am (Orogwo)</p> <p>WEEKDAY MASSES: 6.30am (Center); 6.30am (Orogwo)</p> <p>SATURDAY MASSES: 7.00 a.m</p> <p>OFFICE: Tuesdays & Fridays</p> <p>CONFESSIONS: WEEK DAYS Daily (7am)</p> <p>INFANT BAPTISM: Last Saturday</p>
<h2 style="margin: 0;">15TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (A) 16/7/2017</h2>		
<h3 style="margin: 0; font-style: italic;">Masses Intention</h3>		
<p>6:30am Mass Intention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr/Mrs Sylvester Onwuzegha – Thanking God for guidance and protection upon their family and also asking for Gods continued Blessing guidance and protection and asking for forgiveness of sin (Novena mass 9/7/17-17/7/17) - Miss Virginia Onwuka – Asking for the repose of the souls of late Mrs Margeret Katukaoma Onwuka and asking God to fight their battle (Novena mass 9/7/17-17/7/17) - Mr/Mrs Augustine Igwemma – Thanking God for adding another year to the life of Mr Augustine Igwemma. They are praying God to grant him more fruitful years, bless their family and also to guide and protect their family. <p>9:30am Mass</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr/Mrs Kalu Nwabueze – Thanksgiving / Churching of their new born baby Miss Jessica Chidimma. They are praying for the good health of the baby and guidance and protection upon the family. - Mr/Mrs Herbert Iheanacho – Thanking 		
		<p>God for the healing and saving his sons, Joseph and Philip also praying for forgiveness of sins in their family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr/Mrs Oluigbo Justin – Thanksgiving/ Churching of their Twin babies, Master Meluin and Kevin. They are asking for the good health of the babies and guidance and protection upon their family. * - HRH Eze E.C. Ekwelibe and his Cabinet member- Thanking God for his protection and blessing upon the community throughout the year and praying God for his guidance and protection and good will during the celebration of their annual “Nta” cultural festival which holds on the 20th July (Thursday) 2017. - Mr/Mrs Livinus Anieke and family- Thanking God for his guidance and protection and also asking for peace and unity and good health upon their family (Novena mass 16/7/17–25/7/17). - Anonymous – Asking for forgiveness of sins and asking God to grant her heart desire. - Mr/Mrs Fidelia Uzoma – praying to God for the exams success of Ezinne Nwachukwu in her forth coming Exam.
		<p>1</p>

Appendix iv

Appendix v
NTA IRETE CULTURAL FESTIVAL 2017

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

1. Villages take their respective seats
2. Introduction of members of the high table and special guests by the MC
3. Arrival of HRH and Royal Train through the Afor Irete Market
4. Opening Prayer
5. Traditional Presentation/Breaking of Kolanuts
6. Chairman's opening Remarks
7. *NTA* Message from the throne
8. *NTA* lecture by Prof. R.U. Ononogbo
9. Cooking of Ofe Owerri Competition
10. Cultural display by Irete Agubiam Indigenes Club and others
11. Refreshments
12. Closing prayers

Appendix vi

SPEECH BY EZE E.C. EKWELIBE –AGUBIAM 1 OF IRETE EZECHIMERE, ON THE 2017 “NTA” CULTURAL FESTIVAL TODAY 20TH JULY, 2017.

ALL PROTOCOLS OBSERVED,

It is with joy and thanksgiving to the Almighty God that I, on behalf of the Royal Family, the Eze in council, the Community Government Council and the entire good and hospitable people of Irete Autonomous Community, heartily welcome our distinguished guests and all lovers of culture here gathered to this year's “*Nta* Cultural Festival”.

By this time last year, we tried to display some of our rich cultures but the rain marred our well packaged cultural activities. However, this year we pray God that it will not be the same again.

I want to use this year's celebration to mention some of the intimidating challenges that are staring us in the face. Foremost among these is the issue of security. The alarming rate with which cultism, lawlessness and robbery are trying to overrun the community is unacceptable. The recent introduction of kidnapping in the community which is unheard of calls for major concern.

The pride of liberty is internal vigilance, therefore I urge every village to implement to the letters the decision reached as contained in the communiqué of 1st April, 2017.

CREATION OF NEW AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY

The quest to have another autonomous community created out of the existing Irete Autonomous Community, has left that section of the community lose concentration and are not loyal to the stool. It is the Government that grants Autonomous Status to Communities by giving staff of office and certificate of recognition to the Eze of that Community. The proposal by the House of Assembly does not amount to granting of Autonomy until signed by the Governor. Until staff of office and Certificate of Recognition is given, to that proposed autonomous community, that community still remains as part and parcel of the existing community. The people of Ezi Irete should be advised to remain loyal to the existing autonomous community until the time the government grants them their autonomous status which we all pray for.

We thank God Almighty for giving us the strength, unity and peace that took us so far and pray that He rekindles the spirit of Agu-Ubiam in us all.

As we Christianised our “*NTA*” Festival, we have accepted our Lord Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace and that peace will abide in us and we carry it to our neighbours and preach it wherever we go.

We enjoin all our guests to relax and enjoy our hospitality. Our good Lord will grant you journey mercies as you return to your various destinations.

Amen.

HRH EZE E.C. EKWELIBE AGUBIAM 1 OF IRETE EZECHIMERE

Appendix vii

NTA IRETE CULTURAL FESTIVAL 2018

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

1. Villages take their respective seats.
2. Introduction of members of the high table and special guests by the MC
3. Arrival of HRH and Royal Train through the Afor Irete Market
4. Opening prayer
5. Traditional Presentation/Breaking of Kolanuts
6. Chairman's opening Remarks
7. *NTA* message from the throne
8. Book Launch
9. Conferment of Chieftaincy titles
10. Remarks by awardees of chieftaincy titles
11. Cooking competition
12. Cultural and masquerade displays by villages
13. Announcement of results
14. Refreshments
15. Closing prayers
16. Dance! Dance! Dance

Appendix viii

SOME VILLAGES AND THEIR SUBMISSIONS ON THE ABOLITION OF THE OSU, OHU AND UME CASTE SYSTEMS

Osu Caste System

By: Umuigolo Village- Home Branch

The Response of Umuigolo Village:

1. **CAUSE/ORIGIN:** The origin/causes of this practice can be traced as far back as many centuries ago. It can also be traced to the Bible to be the origination. Gen. 24:1-4
2. **THE BEENFITS THEN INCLUDES:**
 - a. Our fore-fathers then who were not Christians and did not know Almighty used the practice as a medium of appeasing their land and gods when the need arose instead of ordinary animal.
 - b. They use the practice to satisfy the idol deities in charge of their land for peace and stability due to the human sacrifice made.
 - c. Evil doers in the society and community were used for such sacrifices and dedications.

Now, the benefits in this present society were as good as the old laid benefits.

3. **THE DISADVANTAGES THEN AND NOW INCLUDES:**
 - a. Human beings were used as sacrifices to idols and deities
 - b. There is discrimination and stigma among people living in the same community
 - c. People were not given equal opportunity due to their origin as "Osu".
4. **Should it be retained "yes" reason:**
 - (i) It is biblical (Gen. 24:1-4)
 - ii. It is as old as creation
 - iii. If eradicated now it means bastardising our old age tradition/culture because of civilisation. No society gives away her tradition and culture easily.
 - iv. It will not be easy to be erased from the mind-set of the people, therefore will be impossible to be stopped now.
 - v. Allow nature to take its course

That is our stand.

Signed

Paulinus Akanya-Duru
Chairman

Eddy Nkwazema
Secretary

Osu Caste System
Lagos Branch

By: Umuigolo Village-

SUPPORT FOR THE ABOLITION OF OUTCASTE (OSU)

The above named family hereby strongly stands to support the abolition of outcaste (OSU) in our community.

As this will bring harmony in our community and eliminate discrimination amongst members of the community.

Signed

ALBERT AKUNEME
GOODLUCK
Chairman

DURU
Secretary

Osu Caste System
By: Umueye Village

ORIGIN: The origin of Osu Caste system lies deep into the forgotten past. However, from oral tradition, it is believed that in the olden days, before the advent of Christianity ancestral spirits and gods were making certain demands which if those demand were not met or attended to would bring untold calamities to such individual or group of individuals.

BENEFITS: The major benefits then were that person or persons who submitted to the demands of the gods were secured or had averted dangers from coming to them.

DEMERITS: In the present dispensation, there is virtually no benefit. Firstly, it has stigmatized some individuals and makes social interaction more difficult especially in the area of marriage.

Secondly, its practices negates core Christians teaching which emphasizes about equality of human beings before God Almighty.

WHETHER IT CAN BE RETAINED OR NOT

In our present time, the value system has changed. Greater numbers of Irete people are practicing Christians. The Christians tenets condemn in its entirety the old evil practice which Osu Caste system is one of them.

SUGGESTION: Umueye Village advocates that the system should be allowed to phase-out gradually on its own Christian teaching permeate into the heart of people. Culture is dynamic following this; Osu Caste system over a period of time will definitely go into oblivion. Let the system on its own gradually goes into oblivion not by force.

Osu Caste System
By: Umuagwu Village

The Osu caste system originated from time of our forefathers. We believe it is as old as Ala Irete. Therefore, Osu Caste system is not easy to fizzle out.

Ideally, the Osu Castle system should be abolished in Igbo Land and in fact, anything similar to it elsewhere. This will be achieved not necessarily by any legislation, buy by allowing time to sort things out.

To continue is dynamic. So as the Igbo culture continues to grow and transform itself, it will take time for Osu caste system to fizzle out.

In the world, they have this nature of people everywhere such as the Jews and the Gentiles. Also, the uncircumcised philistines, yet they have not abrogated them. Therefore, we have to allow time and nature to take its course.

Osu Caste System
By: Umuoba Village

I am directed by my village to react on the above subject matter whether the Osu caste system should be abolished or not.

We appreciate your efforts to review some Igbo culture like the above subject matter. It is obvious that the “Osu culture” is in Igbo culture and not Irete culture where you are a traditional ruler to. It is better to discuss this issue before other traditional rulers in Igbo land and take a stand on it before narrowing it down to the community. Since 95% of people in Irete are Christians rather than pagans, we should allow our individual faith to pray in our beliefs in certain issues.

For Instance, some heads of families are no longer associated with the customary staff of the office (**THE OFO**). The disassociation with the culture/custom does not deny them from their rights and privileges associated with the head of a family kindred or village. Therefore, the “OSU” caste system” and its belief should be allowed to individual believe. Discussing it will give more wide publication and allot of our children will be attaching much importance to it. It is culture we met around us. We therefore advice that the status quo should remain as we met it

Signed:
Mr. David Nnronko
(Interim Chairman)

Osu Caste System

By: Umungada Village

Referring to your request on the matter above, we wish to make our submissions according to some existing protocols.

Osu caste system as another Igbo people ancestral region

The Osu caste system is a strong concept among the Igbo traditional religion and it originated of Igbo race are, real full and free citizens, whole some other citizens are not free and have limited entitlements.

Those who have full citizenship right are called “DIALA” while those who’s entitlement are limited are termed “OSU”, “Ume” and some areas of Igbo community like in Enugu, they have what they called “MGBEKE” etc.

Those less citizens or Osu are people dedicated to family, kindred or village gods.

Thus it becomes one of the worst highest points of sacrifice among the igbo people as a religious attitude because some of their ancient divinities were benevolent to the commitments to a living one, as part of the blood of that human Osu is affirmed in a sacrifices while he is allowed to live.

A DISTORTING SITUATION

This system become the most precious human life sacrifice, because of their belief that the world of their dead one’s minor the world of the living, the sacrifices of human being regarded as Osu were encouraged to provide a retinue for the death in most cases for their kings and noble men.

It therefore became an interesting religious taboo, especially when we try to differentiate Osu from Ume.

An “Ume” a child born by an osu female in her parent’s home is both segregated by Osu and Diala, hence in conformity. Osu caste system is another institution which was distorted and corrupt, it entailed many arduous and difficult conditions which in most cases involved the delegation of slave as a sacrifice.

Osu Caste System

By: Umueju Village

PREAMBLE: The Osu caste system is one of the ancient idolatrous practice that was prevalenit throughout Igboland in the pre-colonial era i.e. before coming of the Europeans to Africa. Other such practices included the killing of twins, babies who first cut the upper teeth etc.

However, Europeans (early missionaries) abolished the killing of twins and other obnoxious practices but could not abolish the Osu caste system either because it was insignificant to them or their attention was not drawn to the practice.

To start with Osu is any person that is sacrificed or dedicated to a deity either gods or a goddess.

1. Causes or Origin: The causes or origin of Osu caste system in Igboland include:
 - a. Appeasement of the gods: Osu was used in those days to appease the gods or goodness of a village or community.
 - b. Aversion of the anger of a disturbing deity led the affected village/Community to seek for a way to settle the gods by divination hence a human being was offered for the purpose and the person so offered became an Osu.
 - c. Self Protection: Any person who felt threatened can willingly subject himself or herself to be an Osu.

BENEFITS OF OSU CASTE SYSTEM

A. THEN

- i. It helped to save human lives by averting the anger of the gods that demanded sacrifice
- ii. It also helped people to get into marriages.

NOW: To the best of our knowledge, it has no benefit now since Christianity has abolished all forms of pagan practice like human sacrifice.

DISADVANTAGE OF THE OSU CASTE SYSTEM

A. THEN

- i. Promotion of heathen practices or paganism
- ii. It also encourage trade in humans or human trafficking

B. NOW: The disadvantages now are:

It encourages social discrimination and social injustice.

It encourages to a large extent and the denial of social position to qualified persons.

SHOULD THE OSU CASTE SYSTEM BE RETAINED IN THE CULTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY?

We say emphatic NO to the above question.

It should not therefore be retained in the culture of our community, Irete in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State.

We strongly advocate that it should be abolished just like the earlier mentioned antisocial pagan practice of killing twin babies. The reasons for the above stand cannot be far-fetched and include:-

- i. It is unconstitutional to discriminate against anybody in society in Nigeria based on race, sex, religion or birth. The modern society is built on equality, fair play and justice which are negated by the Osu caste system
- ii. Christianity abhors heathen or pagan practices so any Christian practicing the Osu Caste System now is an idol worshipper.

Moreso, the shrines forest have been converted to big churches now and therefore do not exist hence the practice should no longer exist.

CHIEF V.N. OGBUEHI
(Secretary)
For and on behalf of Umueju Village

Appendix ix



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IMO STATE

Cabinet Office, Owerri

P.M.B: 1183, Owerri Imo State, Nigeria

Tel: 08037465413 www.imostate.gov.ng, e-mail: ssg@imostate.gov.ng.

Our Ref: SG/S.0097/T.6/116

Date: 10th July, 2013

**CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION AS
EZE OF AN AUTONOMOUS
COMMUNITY IN IMO STATE**

MR. ETHELBERT EKWELIBE

Irete

Owerri West

This is to certify that **MR. ETHELBERT EKWELIBE** on approval of His Excellency, Owelle Rochas Anayo Okorocho (DON) the Governor of Imo State is hereby recognized as the Traditional Ruler of **IRETE** Autonomous Community in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State in keeping with the Traditional Rulers Autonomous Communities and Allied Matters Law No.6 of 2005 as amended by the Provisions of Imo State of Nigeria Law No.17 of 2011 and Law No.5 of 2012.

This appointment/recognition is with immediate effect.

It is the prayer of His Excellency that your reign as EZE of your Community ensures Love, Peace, Progress and Development in your Community.

CONGRATULATIONS:


PROF. A.G. ANWUKAH

SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IMO STATE

Appendix x



**GOVERNMENT OF IMO STATE OF NIGERIA
OWERRI WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Council Headquarters,
Umuoama
Administration Department

Date: June 2013

Our Ref: OWWLG / AD / S.53 / Vol.1 / 225.


The Honorable Commissioner,
Ministry of Community Government and
Chieftaincy Affairs,
New Secretariat Owerri,
Imo State.

REQUEST FOR RECOGNITION AND ISSUANCE OF STAFF OF OFFICE

RE: EZE SIR, ETHELBERT EKWELEIBE

I am directed to present to you sir, Ethelbert Ekweleibe, as Eze elect of Irete
Autonomous Community in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo
State, for your Recognition and Issuance of Staff of Office.

Thanks for your kind corporations.


Hon. Prince Arnold I Nelson
Sole Administrator
Owerri West Local Government.

Appendix xi

file Copy

IRETE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UNION
(I.C.D.U)

81

Our Ref: ICDU/Admin/04/81

27th May, 1996

- To: All Chairmen
Village Family Meetings
Irete.
- Tc: All Chairmen
ICDU Branches
All Over Nigeria
- To: The Chairmen
Council of Elers
Council of Ndi Oha
Council of Ndi Nze
Irete.
- To: All Churches in Irete
- To: All Principals of Sec. Sch.
Irete.

Sir,

Autonomous Status for Irete Town

I am directed to refer to the Official Gazette, Imo State of Nigeria Autonomous Communities Instrument No. 2, Vol. 21 of 22nd April 1996 page 85 and to inform you officially that the Imo State Government of Navy Captain James Nwabueze, John Aneke, the Military Administrator of Imo State of Nigeria has approved Irete as an Autonomous Community with effect from the 23rd January 1996.

From the above date therefore, Irete is now a full fledged independent town made up of eighteen (18) villages.

However all former documents that identify Irete as part of Umunwoha autonomous Community shall remain valid.

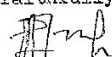
2. I am further directed to inform you that from the date of the publication of this Gazette, till the Eze Irete is selected, crowned and installed, the functions of an Eze shall be vested on and performed by the Chairman and the Executives of the Irete Community Development Union (ICDU).

Therefore all rights, privileges and obligations due to an Autonomous Community shall be directed to the aforementioned body.

God bless Irete Autonomous Community, God bless the good people of Irete

T h a n k y o u.

Yours faithfully,


L. A. Opara
(SECRETARY)

Appendix xii



THE PRESIDENCY

NATIONAL POPULATION COMMISSION

PLOT 2031 OLUSEGUN OBASANJO WAY WUSE ZONE 7 P.M.B 281 GARKI ABUJA
Imo State Office :Federal Secretariat Complex P.H. Road P.M.B.1548 Owerri.

OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL COMMISSIONER

08037091190

E-mail: conwaogu@yahoo.com

24/03/2014

Our Ref: ~~---NPG/IMS/CF/2014---~~

Date:.....

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

PROJECTED POPULATION FIGURE FOR IRETTE AUTONOMOUS
COMMUNITY IN OWERRI-WEST L.G.A.

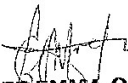
In 1991, the Census figures for the above named village are as follows:

	1991	2006(2.85%)	2013(3.2%)
IRETE	1,538	2,344	2,930
TOTAL	1,538	2,344	2,930

In 1991 Census Population figure for Irette Autonomous Community in Owerri-West L.G.A was 1,538 (One thousand Five hundred and Thirty Eight) persons.

From 1991 to 2006 the projected population figure for Irette Autonomous Community based on annual growth rate of 2.85% was 2,344 (Two thousand Three hundred and Forty Four) persons.

From 2006 to 2013 the projected population for Irette Autonomous Community based on annual growth rate of 3.2% is 2,930 (Two Thousand Nine hundred and Thirty) persons.


CHIEF EMMA O. NWAOGU(ENYIOHA)
HON.FEDERAL COMMISSIONER
NATIONAL POPULATION COMMISSION

Appendix xiii

Irete Community Development Union,
c/o The General Secretary
E. U. Ogbuebile,
Umuelele Irete,
P. O. Box 83,
Owerri, Imo State.

Date 3rd August.....1981.

His Excellency
Chief S. O. Mbakwe,
Governor Imo State,
Government House,
Owerri.

Dear Sir,

REQUEST FOR THE CREATION OF IRETE AUTONOMOUS
COMMUNITY OUT OF UMUNWACHA AUTONOMOUS COMMU-
NITY IN OWERRI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

We the entire citizens of Irete in the former Umunwaoha autonomous Community hereby present this application for a separate Irete autonomous Community.

For your information, we have made several applications and have been represented in all the chieftaincy panels held in Imo State for the creation of Irete autonomous Community. We put up this application in accordance with recent chieftaincy and autonomous Community Law 1981, Imo State Gazette No. 149 of 21st May, 1981 Section 11 refers.

Irete is the largest and the most thickly populated of the five towns that make up Umunwaoha with a population of over 17,000, with stranger elements of about 2,500 scattered in the following villages -

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| (1) Umueye | (10) Umueju |
| (2) Umuelele | (11) Umunjo |
| (3) Umuagwu | (12) Umuohia |
| (4) Umungada | (13) Umunbe |
| (5) Umunwanlo | (14) Umuakum |
| (6) Umuoba | (15) Umuedi |
| (7) Umunkweye | (16) Umuigolo |
| (8) Umuezeduru | (17) Umugwonakoroche |
| (9) Umuorieoji | (18) Umuodombogo |

Never in the annuals of our history, had one chief ruled Umunwaoha. In the colonial era, Irete had two Warrant Chiefs of her own and had never been ruled by any chief from any Umunwaoha town.

We have our own customs, Nta Irete, Ogwugwu etc. We have our own markets Afo Irete, and Orie College a daily market.

Our Churches, St. Peters CMS Church Irete, St. Helen's Catholic Church, Church of Christ, St. Paul's Catholic Church, the Holiest of Holies and two sects of Cherubim and Seraphins Churches and then with the population of Bishop Lasbery T.T.C. of over 1,000 population. The last but not the least Irete Secondary Technical School.

We carry out our development plans without resort to any other town in Umuwaaha our social norms and traditions mark us out as different. We are sure and have envolved ways and means of solving our social and economic problems, therefore, it will auger well if we are given free hand to push our development programmes instead of holding to the so called Umuwaaha conglomeration.

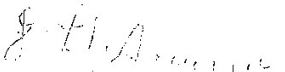
Irete is located 5 kilometres from Owerri Imo State Headquarters, this in short tends to push us more than any other town in Umuwaaha. Our market is being extended our Community School and T.T.C. Practising School require urgent attention so we cannot afford to waste time in the development programme before us. By our moves we have taken a lead and will never be grateful if anything takes us back. Our roads have been graded out of Communal efforts. Our college needs more buildings we cannot wait for Umuwaaha for the following reasons, Umuwaaha community water scheme before and after the civil war failed owing to disagreements. The Central School was abandoned to Orogwe in 1946 out of disagreement. Community hall, Maternity and postal agency all failed to take off as scheduled owing to disagreements.

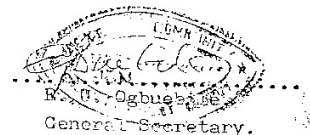
Irete town is qualified to be autonomous because some autonomous Communities are less populated when taken into account. We therefore need your consideration as a father.

If our request is granted we have agreed that our Eze elect will be Chief Ephraim Chukwuma Eluchie, an honest, diligent and trustworthy citizen of Irete.

We have the honour to be.

Yours faithfully,


.....
J. M. Anujue,
Chairman.


General Secretary.

Appendix xiv

IRETE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UNION

(I.C.D.U.)

7

Head Office
Irete
Box 14 Owerri.

Bankers
United Bank of Africa (UBA)
Owerri.
Progress Bank Nig. Limited
Amakohia Branch - Owerri.

Our Ref. ICDU/SR/4/92

Date 30th April 1993.

Your Ref. _____

The Honourable Speaker,
Imo State House of Assembly,
Owerri.

Sir,

REQUEST FOR THE CREATION OF IRETE AUTONOMOUS
COMMUNITY OUT OF UMUNWHOHA AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY
IN OWERRI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA.

We, the entire citizens of Irete in the Umunwoha Autonomous Community hereby present this application for a separate Irete Autonomous Community.

For your information, we have made several applications and have been represented in all the chieftaincy panels held in Imo State for the creation of Irete Autonomous Community.

We put up this application in accordance with recent chieftaincy and autonomous community Law 1981, Imo State Gazette No. 149 of 21st May 1981 Section 11 refers.

Irete is the largest and the most thickly populated of all the Five (5) towns that make up Umunwoha with a population of over 40,000 (Fourty thousand) with stranger elements of about 10,000 (Ten thousand) scattered in the following villages:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. Umueye | 10. Umueju |
| 2. Umuelele | 11. Umunjo |
| 3. Umugwu | 12. Umuobia |
| 4. Umungada | 13. Umuube |
| 5. Umunwanlo | 14. Umukum |
| 6. Umuoba | 15. Umuedi |
| 7. Umunkweye | 16. Umugologo |
| 8. Umuezeduru | 17. Umungonakoroché |
| 9. Umorieoji | 18. Umudombogo. |

Irete as well extends to the Federal Housing Estate and is the sole owner of the land where the Industrial Estate is sited.

There has never been in any period in our history when one Eze ruled Umunwoha as a whole. In the colonial era, Irete had two warrant chiefs of her own and had never been ruled by any Traditional Ruler from any Umunwoha town.

This is why the Irete Community regard this conglomeration of all the Five (5) Towns in Umuwoha under one Eze as not only a denial of our political right but a misdirection of our customary heritage. In this wise, the Irete Community has her own customs, social norms that give her a separate identity from the rest of Umuwoha. She has Two (2) markets namely: Afor Irete Market and the Orie College which is daily market.

The Community has over Seven (7) Churches of various sections namely: The St. Peter's Anglican Church, St. Helen's Cath. Church, St Paul's Catholic Church, the Holy of Hollies, the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Church of Christ, the Deeper Life Ministry and a host of others.

Irete as a Community has Two (2) standard Senior Secondary Schools and about Three (3) Government approved Commercial Schools. The Second Schools are the Bishop Lasbery Girl's Secondary School, Irete with a thousand population and Irete Secondary Technical School, the most developed, infrasturally, when compared with other Secondary Schools in Umuwoha.

We carry out development plans without resort to any other town in Umuwoha. We have evolved ways and means of solving our social and economic problems, as such we would require the encouragement from your Honour, by granting us our own Autonomous Community to enable us plan a execute our development programmes.

If Irete is made an Autonomous Community, it would be a healthy challenge to the people who would like to make the community a show place to other Autonomous Communities in Owerri Local Government Area.

Irete is located Five (5) Kilometres from Owerri, Imo State Capital. This tends to influence our social and economic developments at a faster pace than any other town in Umuwoha. Our Market - the Afo Irete market is being extended and planned for a daily market. Our Two (2) Primary Schools - the Irete Community School and the D.T.C. Practis School - and Irete Secondary Technical School require special approach, peculiar development programmes which Irete as an Autonomous Community alone can do. By our moves we have taken the lead in Umuwoha and will be grateful if your government will give us the recognition we deserve by granting our town an Autonomous status. It is evident from history that our joint development projects with other towns in Umuwoha have never yielded fruitful results.

For instance the Umuwoha Community Water Project before and after the way failed due to disagreements and non-challent attitudes of some towns in Umuwoha; the Umuwoha Central School was abandoned for Oroge in 1945 out of disagreement. The Umuwoha Community Hall, maternity and postal agency, all failed to take off owing to disagreements among the town making up Umuwoha as to where they should be site

The Irete Community is qualified by all standards of evaluation to be Autonomous because most of all the already Autonomous Communities within and outside Owerri Local Government Area are less populated and are less socially, economically and politically developed when compared with Irete Community. We therefore need your fatherly consideration.

We have no doubt that our request for autonomy will receive your due consideration and blessing.

Our Eze elect will be unanimously communicated to you after our request has been granted.

We have the honour to be,

Yours sincerely,

SIGNED:
MR. A. ANADI.
CHAIRMAN I.C.D.U.

SIGNED: *S.C. Opara*
MR. S.C. OPARA.
SECRETARY I.C.D.U.

For and on behalf of the Entire Irete Community.

Copy To:

Secretary to the Military Government,
Imo State,
Owerri.

Appendix xv

159

Umunwoha - Owerri
C/o I.S.K. Duru
Ohi
Owerri-West.

13th December, 1996

The Secretary,
Administrative Panel
On the Creation of Autonomous
Communities and Recognition of
Traditional Rulers from
January 1996 till date
C/o S.S.G's Office
Government House
Owerri.

Sir,

OUR STAND ON THE CREATION OF NEW
AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES IN UMWUWAHA

We, the entire people of Umnwacha, wish to use this medium to express our stand on the creation of autonomous communities in Umnwacha.

1. Umnwacha is made up of five big towns, namely, Ohi, Orogwe, Ndegwu, Amakohia-Ubi and lastly Irete. All of these were in former Owerri L.G.A. but are now in Owerri West L.A.G.A.
2. Each of these five large towns is qualified in all standards to be an autonomous community of its own - whether by population or land mass, whether by development or infrastructure, whether by tradition, custom or institutions.
3. Umnwacha has no basis for unity other than a faint distant ancestral father - "Nwacha". This can be illustrated from the facts that each of these five large towns has its own culture, and traditional practices in marriage, religion and burial rites; they have different schools, churches, markets as well as different warrant chiefs during the Colonial era. Before the colonial era and the advent of christianity they worshipped different dieties.
4. In 1976, contrary to expectations of our people, these five large towns were lumped together in one autonomous community called Umnwacha. This creation was cumbersome and unrealistic. Since then each town in this community has from time to time applied for the creation of its own autonomous community. Attached here are such letters for Autonomous Status by the various towns.

.../2

- 5. In this 1996, Irete, one of these five towns was granted an autonomous status. This we saw as hope rising and rejoiced together.
- 6. We therefore wish to add that this autonomous status be extended to all the other four towns now or in the near future. We are sure each town merits the status of an autonomous community.
- 7. Anybody suggesting to keep Umunwaaha perpetually into one entity is committing political murder against the five towns in Umunwaaha. We have grown in all dimensions and would like to be accorded the right to develop individually.
- 8. Our memory of Remembered History narrates that Ohi, Urogwe, Ndegwu, Amakohia-Ubi and Irete are descendants of one man called Nwaaha. These five are the germ of what developed as towns bearing their names today. If this is the only criterion by which collection of people in large numbers should remain as a Town Unit we must look around us to see whether this same parameter has been used in holding other people as one Town based on this background.

The Towns of Egbu, Awaka, Naze, Ihite-Ogada are sons of Alaenyi. They remain autonomous communities without let or hindrance from the Eze of any member in their group. The fact of their common ancestral descent remains for historical narratives and possibly festivities.

It is equally asserted that one man in history named Ara is known to have had Okwukwu, Umuguma, Avu, Oforla and Obinze as his sons. Through the years these sons became the fore-runners of the towns which today bear these names. The historical fact of their common descent was not applied against recognising any of them as an autonomous community nor was it used to stop Obinze, one of the towns from joining Nkeke-Ihiagwa group in the Old Native Court grouping in the early 1940's.

- 9. For administrative purposes, and if efficiency is the watchword, it is expecting too much from any single Eze to arrogate to himself the reserve of energy to administer such a large chunk of Umunwaaha. We therefore appreciate the good gesture of the commission that created Irete Autonomous Community and wish it will visit other towns grouped together as Umunwaaha with the same spirit. It is this wind of change that has recently carved out Amakohia-Ubi and Ndegwu into a separate parish in the Roman Catholic Church, and hopes to create more out of the remnant Umunwaaha Parish

Thank you and God bless.

- (1) OHII
 - (a) I.S.K. Duru
 - (b) Surveyor Gene Amakor
 - (c) Barrister M. O. Igwe

I.S.K. Duru Chairman
Gene Amakor Secretary
M. O. Igwe Leader

- (2) OROGWE
 - (a) Sir Ben Duru
 - (b) Nze Joe Enwerem
 - (c) Barrister B.C. Nzimako
 - (d) Nze B. N. Osucha

Sir Ben Duru Chairman
Nze Joe Enwerem Secretary
B.C. Nzimako Leader

- (3) AMAKOHA-UBI
 - (a) L. S. A. Ogbonna
 - (b) Emmanuel Opara
 - (c) Chief D. C. Nze

L. S. A. Ogbonna Chairman
Emmanuel Opara Secretary
Chief D. C. Nze Leader

- (4) NDEGWU
 - (a) Haycient Iwunze
 - (b) Paschal Iheme
 - (c) Ejikeme Uzoma

Haycient Iwunze Chairman
Paschal Iheme Secretary
Ejikeme Uzoma Leader

- (5) IRETE
 - (1) Nze E. C. Osuoha
 - (2) Mr. L. A. Opara
 - (3) Engr. H.E.G. Anyasodor
 - (4) Barrister C. N. Metu

Nze E. C. Osuoha Chairman
Mr. L. A. Opara Secretary
Engr. H.E.G. Anyasodor Leader
Barrister C. N. Metu Leader

(For and on behalf of Umunwacha Communities)

(1) OHII

- (a) I.S.K. Duru
- (b) Surveyor Gene Amako
- (c) Barrister M. O. Igwe

.....
 Chairman
 Secretary
 Leader

(2) OROGWE

- (a) Sir Ben Duru
- (b) Nze Joe Enwerem
- (c) Barrister B.C. Nzimako
- (d) Nze B. N. Osuoha

.....
 Chairman
 Secretary
 Leader

(3) AMAKOHA-UBI

- (a) L. S. A. Ogbonna
- (b) Emmanuel Opara
- (c) Chief D. C. Rze

L.S.A. Ogbonna
 Chairman
 Secretary
 Leader

(4) NDEGWU

- (a) Haycient Iwunze
- (b) Paschal Iheme
- (c) Ejikeme Uzoma

.....
 Chairman
 Secretary

(5) IRETE

- (1) Nze E. C. Osuoha
- (2) Mr. L. A. Opara
- (3) Engr. H.E.G. Anyasodor
- (4) Barrister C. N. Metu

.....
 Chairman
 Secretary
 Leader

(For and on behalf of Umuwacha Communities)

Appendix xvi

162
Irete Welfare Union,
P.O. Box 83,
Irete,
Owerri.
5th December 1979

The Commissioner for
Chieftaincy Affairs,
Cabinet Office,
Owerri.

Sir,

IRETE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY: REQUEST FOR

We, the entire citizens of Irete in the former Umunwoha Community present this petition praying for separation and recognition of Irete as an autonomous Community.

In making this request we are taking into consideration the administrative burden which an Umunwoha Community has created as a result of its unwieldly size and population. The attention of Ikwechegh was not drawn to this factor who assumed that Umunwoha was made of three towns leaving out two.

Irete is one of the five towns embraced in the Umunwoha concept, which Ohii, Orogu, Amakohia and Nlegwu make up the rest. In the former Ara - Umunwoha group, Irete came second to Okuku in population which has been granted autonomy. Irete is made up of eighteen villages headed by one Ofo each and one central Ofo. With a population of 14,000 including a Teacher Training College (Bishop Lasbrey College) and two primary schools, and located some five kilometres from Owerri Post Office the size and eventual growth of Irete can simply be imagined.

There are two Roman Catholic Churches, One Anglican Church (C.M.S.), one Church of Christ and two Seraphim and Cheurbim Churches.

There is one Secondary Technical College in addition to the Teacher Training College among the institutions and the Community School, one of the primary schools is the second largest populated primary school in Owerri Local Government Area.

There is a daily market (Orie College) and the eight days market (Afor Irete).

Among their festivities are the Nta Irete, - general, Nta Ozuzu, Nta Ogbu na Anyanwu, Ogwugwu Ezi Irete, and Ogwugwu Umu-oma. We observe Orie day for farming.

Our social norms and traditions mark us out from the rest of Umunwoha culturally. In the same way our economic and other social problems have always distinguished us from the rest of that conglomeration.

This has accentuated the appeal for separate and autonomous recognition by the administration, a fact which has been recognised by the various towns themselves. All we are asking for is the stamping of imprimatur to this already existing idea.

.../2.

163

It might look like stretching our argument too far by demonstrating how attempts to lump us together proved abortive.

Right from the Colonial era, Irete had a warrant Chief (Okenwa) till 1926 when he died. Later, we had two court sitting members. Every other town had its own Chief.

The old Umunwoha Central School at Orogwe was abandoned to Orogwe out of disagreements in 1946. I refer to Nekede/Iniagwa Central School issue of disagreements and the consequent recognition of each town by government.

The postal agency at Orogwe has been abandoned to, and inherited by, Orogwe for obvious lack of understanding among the faction as group. Similarly the proposed maternity cannot function as scheduled.

The initial deposit for water contributed on quota basis before the war has been abandoned because the group cannot agree among themselves.

Each town has set up its own Secondary School now.

Finally, the various head of Juju deities are autonomous and operate within their own towns. Thus in Irete we have the Ogbu-ehi - Odu as head deity. Ala - Uku Nwa ala nta, Amadioha afor, Amadioha Ukwu all peculiar to Irete and autonomous.

Meanwhile the bulk of development of the Capital Territory lies in the area of Irete. There is an upsurge in the population of the town and the size changes monthly. As a rapidly growing town, nothing short of autonomy for the town will suffice.

We are,

Yours faithfully,
Community Leaders

- 1. Chief F. N. Okenwa
- 2. NZE Sebastian
- 3. C. O. Nwagwu Council
- 4. Chairman (A. A. Onwogbo)
- 5. Mw. (John Mwanji)
- 6. NZE Okenyewa Dum
- 7. NZE Olce Oparah
- 8. Mw. (B. C. Opa)

On behalf of Irete People.