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NEW YAM FESTIVAL, IN OMUMA ORU EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF IMO STATE.

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Introduction:

New Yarm festival (Iri ji Ohuru) as the name implies, is an Igbo festival, it has its origin in the Igbo homeland and cultural world. In Omuma Oru East the narratives on the festival are widely transmitted in Igbo oral, history tradition religion and culture but the intricacies of the structures of the festival is done by the traditional ruler and the Chief Priest of Omuma deity. It is popularity known that the deity, the supreme God gave charge of yam is known as Ahiajioku, in many other areas have different names they call the deity and the festival as Emume Ifejioku Iwa-ji, Ime Ahiaolu, Omume. Ahianjoku, Iro Ofo or Ofala as the case may be. New yam festival is celebrated by all Indi- Igbo in chiding those that are in Diaspora. Especially those who are staying in non Igbo culture zone of Nigeria such as Britian, Belguim, Germany France and the U.S.A

The primary objective of Ahiajoku festival is to mark a New Year and new life as the inner part of yam is purely white in colour. The Omuma people also use it to discuss some important issues concerning the town, which include political, social, security, economic, and development of the town. As it's widely known that anybody or person that steals yam steals human being. The new yam festival is very sacred in Omuma and the festival is not child's play ritual. The festival has methodology, time, place and people that are involved in the ceremony (Ukazu 2012) let's take the above items in turn.

THE METHODOLOGY OF CELEBRATING NEW YAM FESTIVAL

New yam festival is a thanksgiving festival otherwise known by different names as earlier mentioned. The Omuma Community is made up of four major towns, Ozuh, Umuhu, Abia and Etiti Omuma, each town is ruled by one traditional ruler. The four towns always come together in the ceremony of new yam festival as they perhaps has one major market called Orié Omuma, Central Churches as Holy Trinity Catholic Church, and one Central Anglican Church

(St. Thomas). These Churches are sited at the centre of the town. The new yam festival rite is celebrated one day in the centre of the town. Irrespective of the four traditional rulers the Omuma Community has only one president general who oversees or controls the political state of the community (Omuma) as one entity and commands political authority in the selection of person or persons who will be involved in the annual event.

The rite is usually performed in the town hall which was built by the four towns. The most fattened yam tubers are donated by the four traditional rulers. A cow, a huge cock, several Kola nuts, alligator pepper, kegs of dry gin, and jars of Palm wine and other small ritual items such as Ogiri, palm oil, salt, utasi leaves are used in the preparation of the ceremony. The tubers of yam are roasted and cut into pieces by the chairman of the occasion which may be one of the traditional rulers, as it is rotationally done per, annum. The ritual speaker holds the piece of yam and prays as follows:

Cha! Cha!!! Cha!!!

Omuma Kwenu!

Imo State Kwenu!!

Nigeria Kwezuonuooo!!

Nke onye Chiri ya Zere

Onye huru anyi ebe

Anya miri akola ya n'anya

Onye biri ibe ya biri

Ndi nna nna anyi ha bia rie ji

Omuma ga- adi,

Naijiria ga -adigide.

Onye metara ihe o metara

Ihe o metara so ya.

Egbe bere ugo bere

Nke si ibe ya ebela

Chineke zi ya ebe o ga-ebe.

Nwa mmadu emegbula Nwa nmuo

Ma Nwa mmuo emegbula nwa mmadu
ubochi njo ukwu a putekwela anyi ezi
Anyi ga -adi ka echi,
Echi adighi agwua gwu.
Miri atala ma azu anwula
Anyi ga-eriji ohuru nke afo a n'udo
Riekwa nke afo ndi ozo di n'ihu
Ihe anyiga-eri, akola anyi
Ma ihe ga eri anyi aputakwala.
Ala anyi bu omuma ga-ejuputa
Na mmanu anu, uru, ihe oma na
Ndu ogologo
Ahiajoku nwe ji gbara oso bia
Qba anyi ga-ejuputa naji
Ulo anyi ga-ejuputa n'omumu
Nke a bu ji ohuru
Na ihe niile anyi jiri bia l kele chukwu Abiama, bi n'Igwe.
Etu o sirimee ka anyi hu taa
Ukwu onye jiri bia ka o ga-eji ala.
Ka chineke gozie anyi niile .o.o!
Ofo na Ogu ka anyijiooo!
Haa!.

After the prayers the yam is served to everybody present as mark of blessing, good heal and long life, it is also belief in Omuma that anybody who eats the blessed yam gets healed I he/she is sick, barren women becomes pregnant if se eat the yam. The community uses; the yam to settle dispute among members and neighbours.

Any of these incantations may be song, chanted or simply be said aloud during the ceremony. It is done in many Igbo communities across the globe in different ways. The essence of these chants is to invoke the holy spirit of our ancestors who intercedes in Omuma problems and give thanks to Chukwu- Abiama who is only pure that gives Omuma and ndi Igbo the knowledge to have this heavenly festival. The priest will also pray and acknowledge the role of Ala the mother of peace, Agwu the god that is in charge of rain fall. He will also acknowledge Amadioha the god of thunder that punishes law breakers to come and remove any unclean thing Or person in the land; mostly those that kill, poison, steal and do some atrocities in the community. The chief priest or the speaker as the case may be will not forget to acknowledge the deity Ahiajoku to continue to prosper the growth and cultivation of yam in Omuma and Igbo land in general. At the end of this libation and the spiritual contact with agents of God, he pours the wine on the ground for Ndi-iche to drink and pass the message to the Supreme Being. Immediately the congregation of 'Ndi mmadu' will respond by saying Iyaa!. This activity resemble the point of Igbo traditional marriage which the eldest or the most senior brother of the bride makes incantation to his fore fathers to protect the marriage and give the couple, (Nwa na umu)! Good child and children.

A traditional Omuma man does not eat new yam until the festival is conducted irrespective of the strength or the length of famine. After the general ceremony the individual person or within the day of the ceremony the traditional Omuma man conducts the mini ritual in his house to the Ahiajoku. He does this by prayers and libation to his shrine. The modern men normally book mass or dedicate a day for the prayers of the new yam with delicious soup before they will start eating the new yam for the year. Ukachukwu (2007) stated that from the structure of new yam ceremony one can see that it is an adult male ritual that takes place in an open Space under the shade of a sacred tree often located at the exit of or the entrance of the Ogbe, the kindred house clusters or village. The festival marks the beginning of the first harvest and the eating of new and fresh yams in most Igbo homesteads, He continued his statement that, "it is an appeasement ritual with thankful prayers in a rite marked by the slaughtering of live animals the pouring of libations and the invocation of the ancestral spirits and the local divinities"

In the traditional Omuma setting, it is absolutely forbidden for women to go to the shrine for new yam festival. Though yam signifies symbol of human being and signs of reincarnation to humanity. It is sacred, particularly given to man as special gift and mark of supremacy on the leadership of his family or community.

Yam is one of the best gifts a man gives his daughter during marriage ceremony, because head of yam, if planted produces male and female children. Provided the Supreme Being accepts the prayers and with clean hands.

Time of New Yam Festival in Omnuma.

Usually, the ceremony of new yam takes place during the month of August some Igu communities, celebrate the new yam by September or October as the case may be, the date determined by the leader of the community. The slated date is acknowledged by all the sons and daughters of the community. In recent time it had become the date of meetings of Ndi Igbo in diaspora. Women use the date as their annual general August meeting in their various communities in Igbo land today Ukazu (2012).

The essence of the Ahiajoku ceremony as Nwabueze (1988) states that of the communities comprised of in the geographical area now known as Nigeria, the establishment over them of a common government is perhaps the most momentum single event in history. It is particularly for Ndi Igbo and the re-organization and respect for the Supreme Being.

CONCLUSION

By reflecting back to all the activities, which take place during the new yam festival in Omuma oru East of Imo state and Igbo land in general, one will conclude that the new yam festival is not new ceremony, it dated from BC- Ad Ahiajoku festival brings Ndi Omuma both those that live in Diaspora and at home during August.

It is widely known by other ethnic groups within the country and the whole world that Igbo people cerebrates new yam festival.

It is also pertinent to mention the importance roles the Ahiojoku has played in the life of Ndi Omuma, such as unity, political, social, good economic planning, and exports of yam to African countries and beyond, respect and the acknowledgement of the Almighty God through prayers annually.

Finally, the ceremony establishes a cultural day for Ndi Omuma and Igbos in general.

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