

## QGBANJE

Where no rational explanation appears for the origin of a phenomenon it is easy for superstition to arise. Thus, not so many generations ago in our own country an ugly, stupid or strange child might have been dubbed a "changeling": one who was substituted by the fairies (mythical beings) for the original child who would presumably have been attractive and charming.

An imaginative and elaborate set of beliefs on a similar subject has long existed in the traditions of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria and continues to find adherents to this day. Such beliefs could be psychologically useful, for example, to a woman who bore one child after another, only to see them die after a few weeks or months; or to a bereaved husband whose wife had died young, leaving her babies without maternal care; or to parents whose child subjected them to abusive behavior and temper tantrums. Such people would be told that they were victims of "ogbanje," meaning literally "one who travels back and forth."

A detailed description of 'ogbanje' traditions is given in "Ndi Igbo Na Omenala Ha" (The Igbo People and Their Traditions), by Dr. B. I. N. Osuagwu, a Professor of Igbo Language at Alvan Ikoku College of Education in Owerri, Nigeria. Following is a loose translation of the chapter which deals with this subject.

Frances W. Pritchett

March 28, 2003



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THE IGBOS AND THEIR TRADITIONS

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English translation by Frances W. Pritchett

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the students of Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerre, of the Department of Teacher Education in Igbo, class of June 1978, who joined me in research for the many things I have written here. I also take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Udeh, who did the typing for this book. My thanks go also to my wife, Nonye Amarachukwu Osuagwu, who supported me throughout the project, and to my brother, Joseph Ahamefula Osuagwu, who assisted in the proofreading.

Thanks also go to my other friends, who encouraged me in this work.

I salute you all.

Bertram I. N. Osuagwu

PREFACE

It is not easy to write this kind of book. One can write a book of stories or plays, but it is not so simple to write about the Igbos and their traditions.

The writing of this book required a lot of traveling around, asking a number of oral questions, and gathering many differing stories and observations.

It is said that "firewood is found where the villagers are cooking their food." The Igbo language varies. Not all Igbo people speak the same dialect. Their speech is different from one part of the land to another, whether they live in Bendel State or Anambra State, or in Nsuka, Abakeleke or Onicha areas, or in Umuahia and Owere in Imo State, or in Rivers and Cross Rivers State. Just as their dialects differ, so do their customs. "Those who gather firewood on their own territory will find that it helps to cook their food."

When one town is cited as an example in this book, it does not mean that that town is the only one observing that tradition. Many others may be doing the same thing, contributing variations or spicing them up in their own way, as it pleases them.

It does not follow that the villages or towns not mentioned by name are not included among the Igbos, or that their traditions are not firmly established. When a garment is sewn, such as a robe for choir singers, it will fit some of them well but will be a bit large or small for others. I hope that many writers will write about various towns and the way they observe their own customs. While we have written about some of the more unusual customs or beliefs, we know that many villages and towns have their own special traditions; however, we have not been able to include all of them here. It would be good if knowledgeable people would look them over

to see if they are really being practiced or if they are only things conjured up by the elders to frighten people into fulfilling their traditions.

I hope this book will be useful to anyone interested in the lives and traditions of the Igbo people. The traditions discussed here are numerous and pertain to many locations, so that readers who love Igbo, who are preparing to take examinations in Igbo, and who want to know how things are done in Igbo land will learn a lot and will broaden their understanding about the lives and traditions of the Igbos.

"Seeing is believing."

This book is for those in higher school and lower school and those who take G.C.E. ('O' & 'A') and for all teachers of Igbo.

Bertram I. N. Osuagwu

## 1. KOLA NUT IN IGBO LAND

### What is kola nut?

The Igbo kola nut is the seed produced by a tree called "oji." It does not taste good like other seeds. It is found in clusters, one cluster having five, six or more individual nuts. One single nut can be separated into two, three, five or eight sections or lobes, but Igbo kola nuts usually break into four sections.

### Importance of kola nut in Igbo land

Although the kola nut is small, it is very important in the lives of Igbo people. A person may come to his friend's house and the friend may kill a goat or chicken for him, or regale him with food and drink, but if he is not given kola, the guest will say that he was not warmly received. In Igbo life, the kola nut is a symbol of good will, love and open-heartedness in receiving a guest.

Someone who has no kola will make excuses to his guest by saying something like, "Please, don't say that I have no kola," or "Please, kola has filled the house."\* If it is night time, he might say, "The night has taken the kola."

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\*Ironic statement referring to the opposite condition.

handled exactly like this at all times and places. It is said that "it is the kind of animal it is that determines how it will be cut up."

In some places the kola is not taken all around the group. If someone brings out kola he takes it to the elder who is closest to him, who will call a child and tell him to show the kola to the people. The child will hold up the kola and say, "Friends, the kola has arrived."

In places like Isuikwuato and surrounding villages, after the kola has been carried around as described before, it will be presented to the oldest person there.

Throughout Igbo land, whenever kola is presented, if there is someone to whom the kola should properly be given and his people agree to offer it, but it is not presented to them, that person or group may become angry, because it is like being snubbed. There are some areas where a fine may be levied on a person who fails to follow the rules for presentation of kola. Sometimes, failure to follow the rules can actually cause a riot.

#### Blessing the kola nut

After the kola has been presented, the next thing is to bless it. In all gatherings, this is done by the oldest person present. If it is a gathering of kindred, the oldest of them blesses the kola. If it is a mixed gathering, the elder who comes from the host's area blesses the kola after

Let us please bless the kola--

Comrades, we will live . . . . . Amen

Who brings kolanut brings life,

Those who eat kolanut eat life . . . . . Amen

The hawk perches and the eagle perches,  
whichever tells the other not to  
perch, may his wing break.

What is good for a person is food  
for his friends . . . . . Amen

God created the world, deities large  
and small

Elders large and small

Spirits large and small

Come all of you and eat kolanut. . . . . Amen

Heaven and earth come and eat kolanut. . Amen

Whoever says that we will not live,

He goes to sleep before the chickens\*. . Amen

Whoever sees my child and remembers  
his own who died,

What happened to his child let it  
happen also to him\*\*. . . . . Amen

What we pray for is long life, health,

Wealth and comforts, love. . . . . Amen

Let everything we plant on our farms  
do well,

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\*Only a foolish man retires before locking the chickens into the compound for the night.

\*\*"if he wishes death to my child also" is implied.



this is done, he will call someone from the group to carry the kola around to the people.

In all of Igbo land it is believed that an older person should bless the kola because kola belongs to older people, and it is something sacred which deserves respect. This is why elders break the kola around Onicha and Oka. Even around Owere, Ngwa, Oduma and Umuhia where children break kola, it is the elders who give them the right to break it. Children do it in the same way that they run errands for older people. It is also believed that children have no evil designs. In addition, it prevents the elder from using his fingernails to put in poison to kill his enemy, and it prevents medicine, prepared by the elder to protect himself, from being neutralized by some other stronger man who might break the kola.

In many places in Igbo land the kola nut is cut around the width, but in some places, such as Ndeki, it is cut along the length. The important thing is that there be enough for everyone there to have some, because the Igbos say, "If there is not enough kola, where did your fingernails go?"

If a person is offered two or more pieces of kola, he will select one to put in his bag, because it is said that "when kola reaches home, it tells where it has come from."

### Sections of kola nut

As we said earlier, a kola nut can break into two, three, four, five, six or seven lobes or sections. One which does not break into sections is regarded as bad. It is a sterile nut, and is not eaten. The number of sections into which a kola nut breaks means different things to different people. If it breaks into three parts, it is said that it broke a strong man's hand. Four sections means long life, fruitfulness and wealth. In some places like Ngwa and Mbaise, the one who breaks the kola nut will take one section which he wants for himself, and break two other sections to share with the group.

If a kola nut breaks into six or seven sections, it signifies a good future, fruitfulness and good fortune. In places like Isuikwuato and Oduma, that type of nut is not eaten routinely, but is tied up and laid aside, and another nut is taken and broken open. On the day that the first nut is untied and eaten, people are invited, a goat or chicken is killed, and a special ceremony is performed. Those who attend the ceremony will donate money to the one who broke the kola nut, and of course they will eat and drink. The person who breaks a kola nut which has three or seven sections is greatly praised because he is regarded as one who has brought good luck to the others. And the one who breaks it into eight performs a special ceremony. In some places, it is one or more strong men--those who have performed some difficult feat,

who chew a kolanut that breaks into three. This is strong men's kola nut.

Kola which breaks into four sections is good for representing the four markets of Igbo land--Eke, Orie, Afo and Nkwo.

If kola breaks into five sections, the one who breaks it will profit .

#### Chewing the kola nut

The elder who has broken the kola nut will be the first one to take it before it is given to the others. Where children break the kola, the child who broke it will be the first to take his share. In some places they call this lobe of kola which is taken first the "aka oji" (sharer's portion). But in places like Ngwa, it is after the kola has been passed around and the others have taken theirs that the host finally takes his. Isuikwuato and surrounding villages do it this way. It is that kola the host took that they call "aka oji." In other places they take the sections which are the largest.

~~"The name that a person calls his dog is the one he answers."~~

The reason for the person bringing out the kola or the person breaking it eating it first is to demonstrate that there is nothing bad in the kola. Sometimes the one who brought out the kola will touch it slightly with his mouth to show that there is nothing questionable in it.

In some places the kola nut goes from elder to child. But in other places, after the elder takes his kola, it starts from his right and is passed around until everyone has had some.

The things that are used as accompaniments to eating kola are: alligator pepper, mmimi, and kola dip or oil bean.

#### White kola nut

The Igbos have ordinary kola and white kola. The one which is light-colored is called white kola. Even though agriculturists have a way of cultivating a special tree which bears white kola nuts, white kola is still very scarce. To give a person white kola shows great sincerity and special love. If an herbalist uses white kola in a sacrifice, the effectiveness of that sacrifice is guaranteed. Because of its scarcity, white kola costs more than the ordinary kind. It is broken in the same way as ordinary kola.

#### Regulations pertaining to kola nut

A woman may not climb a kola nut tree or use the crook to pluck its fruit. A woman is not offered kola when men are present, nor does she break kola when men are present. Only in a gathering of women alone does a woman break kola. If a male child is there, it is he who will break it. If there is no man present, the oldest woman there, or the one who is titled, can break kola. A woman can not on her own

initiative offer kola to a guest when her husband or her husband's brother is present. Kola is not broken inside the house and carried out to a guest. It is not presented or blessed where a person has died. In some places it is not presented at night, lest there should be a misunderstanding. In some places inlaws or relatives born elsewhere do not break kola. Before a person gives someone a piece of kola which he has taken out of his bag, he will first taste a bit of it to show that it is good.

#### Other uses of kola

1. It is used in making covenants. When two people have had such a big quarrel that neither of them will miss an opportunity to harm the other, they can use the kola to make a covenant (of peace?) by cutting themselves, dipping kola in their blood and then eating the kola.

2. It is used to find out if a journey will go well. If a person is dubious about a trip for which he is preparing, he can take a kola nut and discover how things will go for him. This is done by breaking the nut and tossing out four of its sections onto the ground. If they all turn face down on the ground, he knows that the journey will be bad, but if they turn face up, or if two of them turn face up, he knows that it will be good.

3. It is used in invoking a blessing. Before an elder comes face to face with anyone first thing in the morning,

he can invoke a blessing by breaking a kola nut, throwing out some of it to the ancestors and deities, and asking them to bring him good luck and a good day. After doing this he eats his own piece.

4. It is used to invoke spirits. If a person wants to ask something of the deities or spirits of his land, he does not go to them empty-handed. He will take kola to give to the priest of that deity, and then he can ask for the thing that he has on his mind.

5. It is used in performing sacrifices. Whenever a sacrifice is performed, kola is the first thing given to the deity because it is said that "when kola nuts are gathered in the hands the spirits are answered."

6. It is used to swear an oath. If a person is accused, for instance, of murder, he can defend himself by collecting in his mouth the kola nuts that had been placed on the corpse. (Implying that if guilty, fear would hold him back.)

7. In some places the kola nut is the first thing a man going to discuss marriage takes to the house of the prospective inlaws before he starts fulfilling the other requirements.

8. It is used for petitioning. If a child offends an adult or a woman offends her husband, he or she will take four kola nuts and four kola peppers and go to beg forgiveness. If they are accepted, the person knows that he or she is forgiven. This is why kola is believed to have a good heart.

9. It is used to settle arguments between people. Kola is purchased, and after the case is settled, everyone chews kola to show that there are no hard feelings.

10. It is used to give warning. If a person discovers that someone is doing him great harm, such as running after his wife, he can warn him by taking four kola nuts, going to an elder from that person's compound, and telling him to give that person a warning.

11. It is used in giving gifts. If a person is having a party, one who feels kindly toward him can buy kola and take it to him as his contribution toward the entertainment of the guests.

12. Kola is a stimulant, or sleep-chaser. People going on long journeys can chew it in the morning to give themselves energy, and those who are keeping vigil or studying can use it to stay awake.

All of these things show the position of respect, honor and importance which kola nut holds in the lives and traditions of the Igbo people.

## 2. EATING NEW YAMS

### Introduction

Igbo people are known for their traditions all over Nigeria, and even in other countries of the world. These observances fill Igbo land with activity from one year to the next and are a great source of enjoyment. One of these customs is the eating of new yams--a tradition of long standing. No one knows when it began, but clearly it goes back to ancestral times, "when high places began to be squirrels' territory and the tortoise began to answer to the name of 'cow-killer'".

### What the eating of yams is and what caused it

All Igbo traditions have reasons behind them, as Igbos believe that "a bunch of palm nuts does not fall to the ground without collecting sand" -- "there has to be a crack before a break." The yam-eating custom is observed each year in order to thank the god who created yams for providing a bountiful harvest and filling the cooking pots with new yams. Igbos believe that if they skip the festival in any one year, the god who created yams, who is called "njoku" or "ajokuji" or fiajoku", will cause beetles or other pests to eat up their yams and create famine in the land. They also believe that if a person eats new yams without observing the ceremony he will become very ill and might die.



The yam-eating ceremony has different names. In Umuhia, Afikpo and Owere it is called "iri ji ohu" (eating new yams). In Arondizuogu it is called "iti ogidi" ( ). The people of Idemili call it "ilo mmuo" (propitiating the spirits). Those of Udi, Onicha and Alo call it "fiajioku" ( ), and those of Achi call it "ime otute" ( ).

On this occasion all adult males thank their departed fathers for all the good things they have done for the households of the living, and petition them for the future.

The new yam feast is very popular. It is a time when family and friends in faraway places return home for reunions. It provides an opportunity for those who have offended the yam god by committing thievery, or by failing to perform their farm work according to the dictates of custom, to ask forgiveness. If someone owes a debt of sacrifice to the yam deity, he can take that opportunity to plead for pardon. The Igbos believe that anyone not carrying out the wishes of the yam god will die if he continues to eat the fruit of the earth.

#### Preparations for eating new yams

Igbo celebrations are prepared for in various ways. There are stated times for observing all traditions, so that no celebration catches people unprepared. In many locations the new yam feast takes place during the eight month of the year.

In some areas, certain practices are observed prior to the feast-day proper. These concern the worship of various deities and such things as fetching firewood for the sorcery pot, gathering yams into the barn, and dividing the yams. These things are done in Oshihiteukwu. In Umuchu and Umuomaku, which is in Aguata, the preliminary ceremonies are for propitiation of the "agwu" deity and of the ancestors; and they perform the "ime ala" (literally, "to do the land") ceremony just before the day of the new yam ceremony. The Aro-Ndizuogu people do the "ihe ji" (things of the yam).

The people of each Igbo town celebrate on whichever day they like, according to when their market day is, or whenever their yam god agrees that the celebration be held. When the time draws near, the chief priests sound a gong to let the people know that the new yam feast is at hand. At that time they will tell the people which day the diviner has selected for the ceremony. Before that day arrives, people will be performing sacrifices to the yam deity.

The townspeople give their priests money to use for buying chickens and all the other things used in sacrifices of thanksgiving to the "njoku" or the "fiajoku."

The chief will call together the elders to help him in approaching the spirits. As they go they sing special songs, using a nasal sound. When they arrive before the shrine of

the deity or the yam god, they kill a chicken and perform the sacrifice however they want to do it. When the priest is throwing out the wine before the shrine, he says a number of things in worship of the deity, such as:

- Our great yam god, we praise you . . . . Amen
- Goodness to the great and the small. . . Amen
- We brought food to you . . . . . Amen
- So that you should be the first to eat . Amen
- We are your children who eat yams . . . . . Amen  
    you gave us . . . . . Amen
- Keep us from all sickness. . . . . Amen
- Let our harvests be plentiful. . . . . Amen
- Let us have food . . . . . Amen
- Keep us from famine. . . . . Amen
- In this celebration of yam-eating. . . . Amen

After completing the required duties, they return home. In places like Umuahia, two or three days before the new yam feast everyone goes to his farm, digs the yams to be used for the feast, sets them aside and leaves them untouched until the day of the feast. It was done like that in the old days, but now there are not many people who wait until the arrival of the actual feast day.

In Afikpo and Mbaise, they dig their yams on the very day of the celebration. Before the feast day arrives, people

go to market to buy what they will need for the ceremony. (Around Afikpo and other places, nothing but yam is eaten on the day of the new yam feast.) On that going-to-market day, there is joy in every household because they have been spared to live another year.

Adult men have small sacrifices that they perform before the actual feast day. In Umuahia this is called "killing a chicken outside the compound wall." Other places have other names for it. Chickens, kola nuts, yams, wine, eggs, and other things are used for the purpose. The chicken's blood is sprinkled, its feathers are spread around, and raffia palm wine is poured out around the place. Afterward, the chief invokes the deceased forefathers. He holds up his gun, turns the muzzle upward and shoots it with a loud "bang."

Each town in Igbo land has a certain day selected to celebrate the new yam feast. In some areas it will be Nkwo day. The feast is celebrated for two days--Nkwo and eke. Or it may be Ori day that the chicken is killed outside the compound.

After everyone has completed all the preliminaries, every eye will be on the path, in expectation of the appointed day when "the eagle will perch on the target".

#### Gathering the yams into the "obi"

This is done eight days before the yam feast. It is a short ritual, done in the late afternoon of Eke day. In each

household the holder of ọfọ (a small stick, emblem of the god of justice) digs up four yams, gathers them up and places them in his obi (hut belonging to head of household). Using kola nut and pepper, he prays to the ancestors and throws out wine to them to tell them that he has gathered new yams into his obi. After doing this he drinks wine, takes the new yams and sets them aside. They will not be eaten until the ceremonial chicken is killed.

#### Splitting yams

In Osuihiteukwu this is done four days after the obi ceremony just described. Around Aguata the ritual is called "ihejiọkụ." Early yams, kola nut and pepper, wine, and one cock are used for it. The head of each household will pull off a banana leaf and cut it four ways. The yams are split four ways and placed on the banana leaves one by one. A small fragment of the ogirisi tree (a sacred tree) is also placed on each one, along with a lobe of kola nut. The ọfọ of the head of the household will be taken out and placed nearby. Then the chicken is killed and its blood is sprinkled over all of those things, and wine is thrown on them. The chicken's blood is also spread on top of the pile of breadfruit tree firewood which has been placed in the obi for the yam-eating ceremony. After all of this, the things are bundled up and placed, one at the head of the path, one inside the obi in

front of the ancestor shrine, another on top of the breadfruit firewood, and on eight bundles of firewood which have been hung on the fence. This is done four days before the new yam feast.

#### Eating yams

The day when new yams are eaten is a big one all over Igbo land. For some people it starts the day after their market has been held, but for others it starts on the market day itself. On that morning, the women and children will give the compound a thorough sweeping and cleaning. The houses will have been scrubbed and the areas around the compound walls cleared during the weeks just past. The head of the house will select four new yams and put them in a basket, along with one white cock, kola nut and pepper, and one pot of oil palm up wine. In Arondizuogu they call this "Ji Nkwọ-gaa-Nkwọ." These items are to be taken before the ancestor shrine. When the man has completed his preparations he takes his ọfọ bag, an elephant's tusk, and a wooden bowl of white clay and he enters his obi, where he arranges all these items. Sometimes other men will accompany him. He scatters the white clay before the shrine, splits a kola nut and places one of its lobes there too, then chews kola nut and pepper, spits it onto the ọfọ and strikes the ọfọ on the ground, telling the ancestors to come and chew kola.

He dips out one cup of wine, pours it out before the shrine and tells them to drink. He takes all those new yams and cuts off their tops, while facing the shrine. Then he takes the white cock, cuts its throat and places it on the shrine so its blood will drip on it. While the cock is still struggling, he recites:

O forefathers, come and eat new yam . . . Amen

Ala (earth goddess), come and eat  
new yam. . . . . Amen

Urasi (river god), come and eat  
new yam. . . . . Amen

We thank you for the way you guided  
us when we were working. . . . . Amen

Then see that we have plenty of food . . . Amen

We are going to eat new yam . . . . . Amen

Let our strength not fail at all,  
at all . . . . . Amen

Let our hearts not fail at all,  
at all . . . . . Amen

Every year we are eating it . . . . . Amen

After all this he blows his elephant-tusk horn--vaaa, vaaa, vaaa. Then he calls the people of his household to come and take the things away and start the cooking. The children will take the chicken out to the open spaces of the compound and remove its feathers. One new yam will be scraped, rubbed with oil and mixed with salt, pepper and "ogili" (seeds of a type of pumpkin) and roasted in the obi. One section of the

yam will be taken and broken into small bits to be scattered in front of the ancestor shrine. Some of it also will be thrown out into the compound. In some locations, everyone will be required to eat a bit of that roasted yam. Now the air is full of the cries of various animals--goats, pigs, and chickens, which will be used in the entertainment of guests. Smoke can be seen rising vigorously to the sky. Noise is everywhere because of the pounding taking place in the "okwa" (wooden pepper bowl) and the fufu mortar--clack, clack, clack, thump, thump, thump.

Around Ideato it is a "must" that cocoyam and snail stew be cooked on the day of the new yam feast. They call this "sacrificial snail." On that day they do the ritual of "i<sub>1</sub>rokw<sub>1</sub> ekwu," which is done with a special tripod used for cooking the new food. In Arondizuogu they do the "ihejioku" ritual on that day. For this, young palm fronds are woven before the ihejioku deity, a chicken is killed and its blood is spread over the deity image. A new yam is peeled and the tip is cut off and thrown before the deity.

By afternoon inlaws, friends, kith and kin from all over who have been invited have arrived, along with members of their households, and bearing wine as well. There are people everywhere. Nothing in Igbo land attracts more people than does the new yam feast. There are eating, drinking, storytelling, and smiling faces everywhere. And a person can eat



his new yams any way he chooses--roasted, pounded, in stew, or mashed. Children keep coming out into the compounds to play around, and teenagers will go and paint themselves with clay and don masquerade costumes for the entertainment of the guests. There may be other activities, such as wrestling in honor of the new yam god in Arondizuogu and eating fresh pumpkin around Aguata. Young girls take the opportunity to practice various dances. All this continues until nightfall, when the guests begin to leave. As they go they carry with them the empty wine pots, and bundles of meat which have been shared with them as gifts. Those who are unable to return home will stay overnight.

Then there is the meat from the chicken which was killed before the ancestor shrine according to custom. In Oshihiteukwu they take out both of its wings and place them together. At daybreak this meat is taken and those in the obi join their brothers in presenting it to the chief elder of the family in order to honor him and to ascertain if there is anyone who does not join in fulfilling the tradition, as it is believed that failure to fulfill this tradition can bring trouble to the town. The chief elder will give them as much wine as he can to thank them for their efforts. He will divide the meat into two parts and take up one. Pepper is pounded and mixed with oil and then the meat is eaten and the wine is drunk

while various things are discussed. In some places a ceremonial trip to market serves to finish off the new yam festivities. People make careful preparations, put on their best clothes, and go to stroll around the market, thus making it known that they have completed the new yam ceremonies.

#### Status of the new yam feast today

One of the advantages of the new yam festival in olden days was the opportunity it afforded to thank the various deities for all the good things they were believed to have done for the people, and to petition them for various needs--health, wealth, and certain gifts. Nowadays many people have converted to Christianity and do not care to participate in deity worship, resulting in lower regard for the new yam feast. In olden days, too, the festival brought friends and relatives together to eat, drink, and perform dances. Now people have other opportunities for socialization, such as Christmas and Easter holidays. Yet, not everyone is a Christian. In some places the new yam feast is held in such a way that church people can participate in it without deity worship entering into it. In such places the townspeople use the opportunity to counsel together about the progress of their town in this new era.

## 3. SHARING WINE

Traditions connected with sharing wine are found all over Igbo land. People follow their own sequences in sharing wine, and if the person sharing abandons that sequence and does it wrong, there will be trouble. The ceremony has several names, depending on the area. In some places it is called "ikụ mmanya." Around Ogwu and Enugu they call it "ike mmanya" or "igba mmanya." They all mean "sharing wine."

In many places, the wine-sharer fills the first cup and presents it to the person who provided the wine. But if that person is not present, he will give it to the closest relative of that person. This first cup is called "onụ mmanya" (literally, "mouth wine"). If the wine provided is not plentiful, only one cup will be drunk first before it is given to the others to take two each. But if there is plenty of wine, that first drinker must drink two cups before passing it to the others.

If the wine is being used to settle a case or to sacrifice to a deity, the first cupful is presented to the priest or to the oldest one there so he can pray for a blessing on the lives of all those present. After blessing with "ofo" he will sprinkle some wine on the ground while the people affirm with "ise--e!" or "iha--a!" Then he will pour out on the ground whatever wine remains in the cup. The one who is

officiating will then pour him two cups of wine and he will drink before the wine is poured for the others.

If it is wine for which everyone has contributed money to buy at the market, then the one who pours the wine will be the first to drink the "first cup" before he serves the others. After drinking it, he will start pouring for the others and continue until he reaches the dregs.

In some areas such as Olu it must be someone born in the town who drinks the "first cup." If there is no native son there, the head of the household who offers the wine will be the one to drink it. But if someone else has brought the wine to the house, that person will drink the "first cup" in the absence of a native son. If several cups are used to drink the wine, the person pouring it will first take one cup and fill it with wine, then shake the wine around in it so that it bathes all sides of the cup before the first drinker drinks. In Ubuluhejiöfo and around Ogwu, it is the "first cup" which is used for the sprinkling when the blessing ritual is performed. But around Olu it is the dregs which are used for the blessing. They call the dregs "uge mmanya."

#### Bottom or dregs of the wine

The wine is poured out completely and then the sharer will lift it up and announce to everyone that "what is being eaten has run out." If the wine fills the cup to the brim, the

sharer's name is praised and he is told that he has a palm wine tapper's rope. If he is not really a winetapper, he will be praised for sharing more than a winetapper. If there is not sufficient wine, he will be teased. When the dregs are poured out, it is presented to an elder. Around Ogwu, Ngwo and Umuahia, the elder can drink the wine, or he takes it lightly in his hand and passes it to the one next to him. If it is around Olu and other places, the elder will taste the wine, then bless it with "ofo" and then slowly pour it out onto the ground, making sure that it does not splash around. This is called "itu uze mmanya" (throwing dregs of wine).

#### Prohibitions connected with wine-sharing

1. According to tradition, one must not ignore the person who is entitled to the "first cup" or the dregs and give it instead to one who is not entitled to it.

2. One should not place the wine on the lap to pour it. It should be placed against the thigh or the knees.

3. When sharing wine it should be shaken from time to time so there will not be too much sediment. Whenever it is shaken, the dregs should be spilled on the ground before the wine is poured into the cup. If this is not done, the wine may cause upset stomachs.

4. If a woman drinks wine where men are present, she will stoop down and use both hands to take the cup.

5. A woman does not share wine when men are present.

6. A woman does not bless the wine with "ofo" where men are present.

7. One does not pass a cup of wine behind a titled person to give it to another. One must face him when passing the cup.

8. One does not take several drinks of wine if there is one cup used to share that wine. This is in order that no one person will drink more than the others do.

9. One does not skip a person to offer wine to another unless the person says that he is not drinking.

10. Children do not use one hand to drink wine where elders are present.

#### 4. CLEARING PATHS IN IGBO LAND

##### What is path-clearing?

Path-clearing is one of the Igbo practices concerned with cleanliness. It is done any time a path becomes so overgrown with weeds that people cannot tolerate it any longer. Clearing or weeding the path not only beautifies it but rids it of snakes or other dangerous animals which might harm a person who fails to look where he is stepping.

##### Kinds of paths which are cleared

Paths which are cleared are those leading to water, to markets, from one quarter of a town to another, and to workplaces.

It is usually men who clear workpaths, which they use to reach their farms; and in some towns it is mostly women who clear paths to water and to market. Sometimes men will join them in order to help with things which women cannot do. In some areas, adolescent boys and girls also help.

##### Methods of path-clearing

If it is observed that a path needs clearing, the village elders or the chiefs who supervise the village can bring this up at one of their meetings. If they agree that the path should be cleared, they will sit and consult about

how and when it should be done and the conditions to be laid down concerning it. Next, the village drummer is told to beat his drum to inform the villagers of which day has been chosen, who will do the cutting, the tools to be used, and the penalties to be applied for not showing up, for not arriving on time, and for coming but not working diligently. This may upset some people who have previous engagements for that day, but that does not excuse anyone. When the elders have spoken and laid down the laws, anyone going against them will find out that he is asking for trouble.

#### The morning of path-clearing day

Path-clearing takes place in the morning. On the appointed day, people come out with their knives and hoes, go to the beginning of the path, and start to work energetically. Sometimes the work is divided up, so that when a person finishes his own assignment he can go home; at other times all the people work together. During the clearing some people, especially those who are not very strong, will be gathering up the cuttings; songs with answering choruses are sung; and so the work proceeds. Those with strong arms work in places where others are unable to work. Some of the elders go on ahead inspecting the work to be done and deciding how it should be done. Sometimes children will come along



to hunt for rats, grasshoppers and other small creatures which come out and run around, themselves in search of rats and grasshoppers to kill. Some elders go around urging those who are not working hard enough to concentrate on their work so that everyone can go home sooner. The work goes along like this until the whole path is thoroughly cleaned.

In many Igbo towns, people with young babies, elderly men and women, and those who are in bed because of "uwa asi" ( ) or serious illness are excused from path-clearing work and exempted from the laws imposed on it. But in some places such people have some duties to perform in support of those who do work.

As was said earlier, if it is a work-path it will be cleared by men, usually at the beginning of the year when they mark out the portions of land where they will plant their crops. On the appointed day, all the men come out in the morning with their tools and start to clear the work-path up to the place where they will be working that year. After this they can go and start preparation of the land where they will do their own farming.

In some towns such as Mbaise, the path-clearing is treated as a regular tradition. According to their custom, if it is a path which two villages use in common for traveling

to work, the path will be cut every year. If one village clears the path this year, the other village provides them with food, as a way of thanking them for carrying out the observance on their behalf.

The following year the people of the village who prepared the food will go and clear the path and the others in their turn will provide the feast. People are invited to path-clearing ceremonies like this in certain towns. So the name of "path-clearing" can refer to a traditional observance or can simply refer to the clearing of paths alone.

#### Things done for path-cutters

Not all people in a town will come out to clear paths/ Those who do not come out have several things they do to facilitate the work of the others.

If mature women are clearing paths, the others will not sit back in silence, because that path concerns them too. They are pleased when it is clean. When these women come out to clear the path, the older women will cook food for them. The young girls will fetch water for them to drink while they work. Old men bring them wine or give them money to buy their own, or they bring them cocoanut or cassava if there is any nearby. These things can be enjoyed during rest periods. Sometimes their children run over and ask for money to buy things for them. This is regarded as a way to thank them for their work.

### Rules pertaining to path-clearing

Many village tasks, especially path-clearing, are governed by rules. If there were no rules, everyone would do as he pleased. The rule is that any mature woman, able-bodied man, and adolescent girl or boy is expected to come out and clear paths. Where the path is held in common with others, sufficient interest will also be shown to keep it clean.

In order to put "teeth" into the rules, villages have various ways of penalizing those who fail to show up for path-clearing. Sometimes fines are levied; or something of value is taken from the offender's home so he will have to pay something to redeem it; or there will be some other type of punishment, all of them designed to bring home the fact that everyone has a responsibility for this task.

Although the rule is that everyone must come, there are some circumstances for which the rule is suspended. If there is sudden death in a person's family, he may be excused on account of his sorrow. And if a woman has a newborn child or if she is pregnant and very close to the day of delivery, she will not be required to help with path-clearing.

### Advantages of path-clearing

Path-clearing has a number of advantages for the Igbo people which make them willing to spend their time at it.

It makes the walkways clean and beautiful to look at. It is said that "the eye admires something good." A clean path is a pleasure for everyone in town.

It enables the various groups in the village to make progress. It is a time when women can meet together and have a chance to chat about things which interest them.

Also, it contributes to the health of the workers, and keeps them from falling victim to frequent illnesses.

In some places where work songs are sung, the people may start to sing judgmental songs, which will shame anyone who has done a bad deed there, such as stealing. The perpetrator will then think twice about such offenses and will refrain from repeating them.

Path-clearing also makes it easier for travelers, such as market people, to reach their destinations. It helps people who go to gather firewood and look for water and go to work, because the clean path will have no impediments on which a person can stub his toe. People want to use paths like this.

In conclusion, it would be a good thing if this custom continued to exist, since it has nothing at all to do with invoking spirits, and does have many benefits.

5. THE OGBANJE  
(One who travels back and forth)

What is ogbanje?

The Igbo people believe that an "ogbanje" is an evil spirit causing people to die suddenly. Some also believe that ogbanjes are deities who come to the world and change into human beings, but because of a promise they made to their group (a group of their peers in the spirit-world) they do not stay very long in the world.

The Umuhia people call ogbanje "ntumonu-mmiri," while the Orumbas call it "iyiwa" and some people around Olu call it "ogbanuke." In Yoruba land people call it "abiku." White people refer to it as "changeling," which shows that they do believe in the existence of ogbanje. It is certainly a mystery in various parts of the world.

Before ogbanjes come into the world, they make certain promises to their group. Some decide that they will return to the spirit world during childhood, or that when they finish their schooling they will die so as not to be of any profit to their families. There are those who decide that when they have acquired a good deal of wealth, they will die without benefitting from it. Progress comes very quickly to people of this type. Some of the women among them promise

that immediately after marrying they will die before they have borne children or been of any benefit to their husbands. Again, some say that after bearing several children they will die and leave their children untended. Some say that after emerging from their mothers' wombs they will survive a couple of hours and then die, thus breaking their parents' hearts. There are others who stay a few weeks before they die. Some of the women decide that they will die in childbirth.

#### How to identify an ogbanje

Some ogbanjes are extravagantly beautiful--especially those called water ogbanjes. Some act insane; some grow like yam tendrils (fast!); some are constantly ill right from birth; some seem to have bright futures but do not live long enough to realize them. Some have bad moods all the time, so that one never knows what will bring on their fits of temper. These people are at odds with everyone, and show no respect to their parents. Some keep up a meaningless laughter, or a continual soliloquy when no one is around. Some frequently act startled, or answer calls when there is no one calling. Some will always surreptitiously throw a bit of food outside before eating. This behavior confuses and frightens people, and the ogbanje's family will be very upset over his condition. The family will go to the house of the "ogbanje herbalist" to find out if their child is indeed an ogbanje. Herbalists use various discovery methods. Some will place a penny in

the palm of the person's hand, then examine the hand, and they will know whether or not that person is an oḡbanje. If he is one, the herbalist will take the money he has been given and will use it to do certain things at the time he digs up the "iyiṣwa" (special token oḡbanjes are believed to have hidden). If he is not one, the owner of the money takes it back.

Some herbalists use chicken eggs instead of pennies to examine the hand.

#### How the herbalist finds out where the oḡbanje buried his token

The oḡbanje uses a token to symbolize his promise to his group. Sometimes it is an empty palm kernel which, when it is broken open, is seen to contain a human hair. Sometimes it is a smooth, round, shiny stone, or perhaps some seeds of a tree that have been planted in the earth, and whenever they sprout up, their oḡbanje owner will die. Not all tokens are buried in the earth. Water Oḡbanjes bury theirs in water. Some bury theirs in unused, open land, while others bury them around trees so that the trees can help to conceal them. Again, there are some who bury theirs in shrine areas. But anyone whose token sprouts above ground will surely die.

Some herbalists begin the search by placing medicine in the oḡbanje's eyes, mouth and nose, then winding a headpad and placing it on the oḡbanje's head (presumably to carry the herbalist's basket of tools). A small knife is put into the person's hand and he is told to show the place where the token is.

Some oḡbanjes comply quickly, but others stubbornly refuse unless certain promises are made to buy them clothes, shoes, bicycles, or other things they may want. Some of them, even when all these things have been done for them, will toss their heads and refuse to show where they buried their tokens. This indicates that they want to die. In this event, the herbalist may give the oḡbanje a sound scolding to fill him with fear, or he may beat him up so thoroughly that he consent to show the hiding place of his token.

#### How the herbalist cures the oḡbanje

When the token's burial place is known, the herbalist calls a young man with strong arms to dig it up. Many times he will have to dig very deep before it is seen. There are those whose tokens stay close to the surface, especially those whose time for death is at hand. (The water oḡbanjes bury theirs in water, which means that they are not dug up but are canceled within the body.)

The digger must be careful not to inadvertently throw out the token with the sand. Sometimes two or more tokens appear in one hold, belonging to oḡbanjes who promised that they would die on the same day. In cases like this, the oḡbanje will identify his own token and also call the others who buried their tokens in the hole with his; or their parents can be told to come and dig up those that belong to their children.



The herbalist will rub medicine on the token, or burn it in the fire, crush it, and pound it well like snuff. He will take this medicine, mix it well, tie it up, enclose it in a piece of leather, and push it up (between the rafters) where the smoke from the fire will engulf it. Some herbalists cut a mark on the ogbanje's hand or forehead, then take the powdered token and rub it in, in order to cause the members of his group to abandon him. It is expected that they will no longer regard him as one of their group because he is not the same as he was when they decided together on what he should do in the world.

As was said earlier, the water ogbanjes have their own ways of concealing their tokens. The herbalist gives the water deity a fee so that she will break the relationship between her and the ogbanje. Sometimes the herbalist has for sale the necessary items such as 8 kobo, 8 naira, a carved wooden doll, one bottle of soft drink (sweetened mineral water), a small plate, bracelets, necklaces, and a piece of white cloth. The herbalist will gather together all these things and pour them into the river or into any branch of the river where he says it should be done. These are gifts for the water deity which is troubling the ogbanje. Next, the herbalist says various things, including orders to the deity to remove itself from the ogbanje's body. A white goat or a white ram is killed, its blood is spread on the ogbanje's body

at the river bank, and the animal's body is thrown into the water. At departure time, the oġbanje is cautioned not to look back or to speak at all until they reach the herbalist's house. Then the herbalist will make a cut in the oġbanje's body and place medicine in it.

Female water oġbanjes have been unable to bear children or to marry, but when the herbalists finish their treatment, they begin to experience real changes in their ways of life.

An unusual thing happens in the case of a child who has promised that he will die young. If a man's wife bears a child who dies, and she has frequently lost newborn children, the man tries to find out if it is an oġbanje child coming and going to and from the world. A distinguishing mark will be placed on the corpse, or sometimes charcoal will be rubbed on it. If it is discovered that it is one person returning repeatedly to the world in this mischievous manner (presumably by finding the mark on the next child born), a rope will be tied to the corpse and it will be dragged around everywhere; then the flesh will be cut up into small pieces and the corpse will be burned or thrown into a rubbish ditch. This is thought to discourage the child from returning to the world again.

The puzzling thing about all this is that the herbalist's treatments are effective, even among Christians or highly educated people. The origins of the belief are unknown, but they are adhered to by people all over the world.