

“ISEKA AKWUKWO URE” RITES IN ACHARA ISUOCHI: A PAROXETINE TO THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

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Abstract

Rites can be regarded as one of the realities of human existence and they usually wrought nexus between the religious, economic, cultural, political and social realities of every given society. This nexus has been an intriguing exercise within the society and academic circle. Rite being one of the socio-economic, cultural and religious practices has remained age long practices with a sustained and evolving universal phenomenon. This is an unbiased investigation into the history of the people of AcharaIsuochi in Ummunneochi Local Government Area of Abia state, the hermeneutical foundation of “isekaakwukwoure” rites and the prospects of employing its unique values in addressing the regrettable and avoidable leadership questions in Nigeria. Unlike other rituals and rites in some sensitive and pluralized religious and cultural environments across Igbo land, “isekaakwukwoure” rites havenot received the required historic and critical attentions even with some of its strong valuable heritages as exemplified in the culture of discipline, participatory governance and accountability and promotion of brotherhood. Adopting theBandura social learningtheoryand historical survey approach, the study also tries to analyze the implications of “isekaakwukwoure” rites in serving as model for the contemporary leadership questions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Paroxetine, Contemporary, “IsekaAkwukwo Ure”, Rites, Leadership, Question

Introduction

The idea of leadership and quest for purposeful and people's kind of leadership is replete with the human history. Socrates, Plato and other ancient philosophers from Greece propounded and advanced the concepts of democracy which adroitly summarized that political power emanates and ultimately belongs to the people. The introduction of the so-called democracy in Nigeria lately seems to suggest that the idea of democratic ideals are alien to Nigeria especially the people of AcharaIsuochi in Umunneochi LGA Abia State who have been very cultural with the doctrine of participatory and people's kind of government. Contrastingly, many analysts, philosophers, historians and authors have come to agree that Nigeria has no major problem except leadership. Attempts at solving this cancer seem to be creating further monsters for the country. For example, at independence, the country was foisted with parliamentary system of government and when it failed leading to the Nigerian/ Biafra war, then the country adopted the presidential system. This system was aimed at producing a strong leadership that will drive the country to the path of unity, justice, development and harmony. Arguably, this system seems to have produced strong individuals who are stronger than the country itself. But there is a communal system, a rite or cultural practices and leadership in AcharaIsuochi that has solved many nagging issues among her

people and fostered collaboration, cooperation and cohesion among the people. This work seeks to analyze the practices, exploring its values and suggesting how it will help in ameliorating the wobbling Nigerian leadership questions especially in recent times.

Explaining Some Words in the Theme

Paroxetine

In the view of Vermeulen and Berger (2024), paroxetine is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) used in treating several diseases including major depressive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder among others.

Leadership Questions- This is a combination of two words and while leadership can be described as the right and authority vested on an individual or group of individuals to direct and assist others in achieving expected results, “questions” imply the failure or absence of these expected virtues and impacts from leadership.

Contemporary Nigerian Society

Contemporary stands for what is recent, modern and current. This implies a conglomeration of states that were amalgamated in 1914, passed through colonialism and secured her independence in 1960 with the vision of a place where “though tribe and tongue differ” must stand on brotherhood, unity, progress, peace and justice. However, to many views, the union continues to manifest more of paradoxes than the virtues and strengths of a heterogeneous clime. These paradoxes are inflated by bigotries, primordial and irrational sentiments, promotion of impunity, enthronement of violent and fraudulent individuals in the palace of power. Unarguably, another tragedy with this union is that successful leadership has a notorious knack for appearing worse than its predecessors no thanks to the bizarre leadership recruitment methods. One needs no soothsayer to be told of its glaring attendant consequential fallouts manifesting in wobbling economic down turn, infrastructural collapse, political shenanigans and brigandage, unimaginable insecurity and palpable fears that are drifting the country close to a failed state. It is unexpected how a country that is so stupendously endowed with both natural and human resources have become so hopeless that her citizens will prefer remaining and dying of Israeli's bombs in Lebanon to coming back to the country. Contextually, “isekaakwkwoure” rites in AcharaIsuochi: a paroxetine to the contemporary Nigerian leadership questions implies an advocacy for exploring, exploiting and adopting the virtues and impacts of “isekaakwkwoure” rites and its leadership models of the people of AcharaIsuochi in ameliorating the poor and abysmal fallouts surrounding the leadership and general existence of Nigeria as a country.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Torre (2024) avers that Social learning theory is based on the premise that people learn not only through direct experience but also by observing others. Albert Bandura, a Canadian psychologist, developed this theory in the 1960s. His ideas about learning were different from those of strict behaviorists as he could not explain why learning can take place in the absence of external reinforcement. He identified three kinds of models: live, verbal and symbolic. A live model demonstrates behaviour in a person. A verbal model does not perform the behavior but instead explains or describes the behavior. A symbolic model can be fictional characters or real people who demonstrate behaviors in books, movies, television shows, video games or internet.

It is adopted because it explores how people acquire new knowledge and skills through observation and interaction with others.

Historical Approach

Madu (2002) describes historical approach as an approach that asks question about what was. From the past, the present situation of religion and rites is evaluated and future projection can be made (p.148). Nze (2009) said that historical approach emphasizes the systemic collection and objective evaluation of data related to the past occurrences in order to test hypothesis concerning causes, effects or trends of these events that may help explain events and anticipate future events (p.83). Ejizu (2013) avers that historical approach is essentially diachronic in nature, as it assists the students' attempts to contextualize beliefs; practices, objects and institutions in space and time and to unfold their dynamic evolution of realities over time and space (p.25). Therefore, the theory and approach make strong statement in appraising the valuable lessons from the "isekaakwukwoure" rites among the people of AcharaIsuochiUmunneochi Local Government Area of Abia state and employing the same virtues in checkmating the poor outcomes of leadership in Nigeria.

This study may not begin the discourse on cultural and religious issues anew but only recognizes the fact that "isekaakwukwoure" rites are recurrent ontological and social phenomenon worth being explored further. One acknowledges that a study of this nature can best be substantiated by a practical field experience since it is a fact that spanned within the community. Therefore, the researchers believe that the aura and values emanating from "isekaakwukwoure" rites will be of immense help in improving upon quality leadership in Nigeria and by extension ensure socio-cultural, political, religious and economic harmony on the generality of the people hence the need for further unbiased study.

Achara Isuochi In History

It can be argued that there is no tribe, race, group, community or people without a history. In other words, nobody or people just fell from the moon. The difference is that there are people whose histories have metamorphosed from oral tradition to well-documented narratives. It is not out of place to posit that the historical origin of Achara as a community falls on the former. AcharaIsuochi is one of the communities found in Igbo land and Igbo people as submitted by Nzomiwu (1999) live in the tropical region of Africa (p.1). It is one of the communities that make up the ancient Ochi kingdom. The name 'Isuochi' is historically an acronym for the name of the ancestor of the nine communities that make up the present day, Isuochi. Meanwhile, late Pa Nathan Madu in a personal communication (15th April, 2017) avers that Achara was the son of Egbebi and Egbebi was supposed to be the first son of Ochi. He said that Ochi had married two wives who simultaneously conceived. The first wife gave birth to Egbebi in the morning but the child refused to cry and being worried, Ochi could not take him into his Obi (semi palace) because he did not cry. But in the evening, Ochi's second wife gave birth to another son who cried immediately and Ochi took his gun to announce the arrival of his first son. He was named Abuga and as soon as the sound of the gun was heard, Egbebi who had been silent began to cry then Ochi became confused. His confusion stemmed from who he would present to the people as the first son among the two boys.



Pix 1. Showing the first place where Egbebi, the founder of Achara once lived.

Meanwhile, there arose a fierce positional tussle between Egbebi and Abuga but Ochi regarded Egbebi as his first son. However, Egbebi was a reputed warrior, hunter, wrestler and fearless man and his father; Ochi had fought series of wars with intruders who were invading his territory from all axis. Looking at all his children, he found Egbebi capable of contending with the invaders and sent him to their present place called Achara Isuochi. Egbebi fought gallantly to ward off the Ohafia and Enugu warriors. Egbebi begot Achara who in turn got married and had two children namely Umuokpara and Akporo. Umuokpara beget two children who were Okwelabo and Okpelu while Akporo had two sons who were Umumeze and Onuma Achara.

Achara community is bounded in the east by Ugwueme in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu state, in the north by Lokpanta in Umuchieze, in the south by Mbalaisuochi and in the west by Amuda all in Umunneochi Local Government Area of Abia State. The people are very industrious dealing in mostly subsistence farming. They take some measures of pride in providing their basic needs by themselves. They are good at digging, gathering and breaking stones, producing cashew nuts, palm kernels and other crops. Within the comity of other communities in Isuochi they are nicknamed “Acharaikpo”-an initially derogatory phrase to acknowledge their astuteness, honesty, strength, courage, fearlessness and physicality.



Pix 2. Showing heap of stone, one of the occupations of Achara people.



Pix 3 showing the forest called “Nkoro” where the “ibiniukpabi” deity once lived

Accentuating the Rites of “IsekaAkwukwo Ure” The Hermeneutics Of “IsekaAkwukwo Ure” (Tearing or Separating the Castor oil Leaves)

Odili (2013) suggests that hermeneutic should be involved in the study of human related activities (p.45). Mbonu (2013) argues that hermeneutics should not be reserved for sacred texts alone. According to her, hermeneutic is derived from the Greek word Ερμηνευτης (sic) meaning “interpreter”. In turn, it is related to the Greek god named “Hermes” whose role it was to interpret the message of the gods (p.97). Hermeneutics as the methodology of interpretation is concerned with problems that arise when dealing with meaningful human actions and the products of such actions, most importantly, word and text in a phrase, clause, statement or sentence. As a methodological discipline, it offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts and other meaningful material. In that case, it is all about interpreting a choice text in a statement hence the need to situate the phrase “isekaakwukwoure”.

The term “isekaakwukwoure” can be well understood if the hermeneutics of the words are briefly explained. Iseka is a word simply meaning to tear or separate something. In this context, it implies that there are issues that were unattended to during the previous times especially when some ceremonies were observed that needed to be cleared and handled. Similarly, “akwukwo” means “leaf” while “ure” simply means a castor oil. To understand what “ure” truly means, there is a need to explain that there is a popular meal with which the community and entire Isuochiare known for and it is called “iwu” or tapioca but some people from outside the community call it “abacha”. Known as Isuochiwelcome, is a special delicacy from cassava. As the name implies, it is a staple food eaten by the people of Isuochi in Umunneochi Local Government of Abia State. This particular product has over the years survived. This meal is usually garnished with special condiment made from castor seed usually known as “ure or

ogiri”. To have “ure or ogiri” in the preparation of “iwu”, the shelled seeds of castor oil are de-hulled and cleaned after which the seeds are wrapped in banana leaves and boiled for many hours mostly from night till morning until the seeds are properly cooked. The wrapped seeds are then placed near the fireplace or the hot sun to ferment for some days depending on the intensity of the fire and heat. Later, it is pounded and packaged in another particular leaf and allowed to stay after some days before being used to prepare the “iwu”(tapioca). Unarguably, the taste and delicacy of “iwu” is dependent on the quality of “ure or ogiri” hence it is to the people what water is to the fish. This meal is the first meal that is served after the presentation of kola and it usually serve as appetizer.



Pixs 4, 5, 6,7 &8 show the local castor seed, wrapped “ogiri or ure” from the cooked and fermented seed with people eating the dish.

In fact, it is a must serve dish and it is eaten with some sense of pride. The leaf(as shown on pictures 5,6,7) with which this castor oil (“ure or ogiri”) is preserved is thrown away after use and whenever it is thrown away, it implies that its usefulness is completed. Thus, the “isekaakwukwoure” rite becomes a paradox for settling a matter, sitting around the table to trash those issues that deserve to be discarded, forgotten and cast into the dustbins just the way the leaves with which the castor oil is preserved is thrown away after use. Therefore, the people accepts that misunderstanding, crises and misgivings are parts of human existence hence they create this rite as a platform for disposing nagging issues, clearing misconceptions and forming a new chapter going forward.

Features of “IsekaAkwukwo Ure Rites”

This rite is characterized by many features and these features are the reasons why it is very peculiar and legendary. Some of these features are:

- a. Evaluation of the just concluded ceremony:** It is customary that during any ceremony in the community, the kinsmen (umunna) will serve as the host of the ceremony. Normally, when a ceremony is fixed, the kinsmen are carried along in the preparations. Some kindred will hand over everything provided for entertainment to the kinsmen (Umunna). The Umunna often perform some marvelous jobs by ensuring that whoever attended the ceremony is entertained. They in their wisdom appointed people who were in charge of food and drinks and shared them according to the lists they were given mostly by the family where the ceremony is taking place. However, after the guests have gone, the following day, the kinsmen would converge at the family that hosted the ceremony to be entertained. Apart from the entertainment, they would use the opportunity to evaluate and review their performances.
- b. Petitions are treated:** During this meeting, petitions between individuals, groups and families are received and treated.
- c. Indiscipline is addressed:** At this meeting, the misbehavior of anybody is properly tabled down and dispassionately addressed. Depending on the gravity of the offences in question, penalties are usually served objectively.
- d. Dues are collected:** It is usually at this meeting that books are opened. These books vary. Some are for collective developmental projects others can be for the financial support due to the family that engage in the ceremony.
- e. It is divided into sessions:** The women will always have their separate session while the men will be at a different place usually the parlour. They can only come together where burring issues concerning everyone are discussed. The younger ones usually hang around to observe while children congregate to play among themselves.
- f. It is usually sensitive and delicate for the hosting family:** The hosting family usually strives to avoid having confrontation with the kinsmen especially where the proceeds of the ceremonies are concerned. Where it is not well managed, the kinsmen can abandon the “isekaakwukwoure” rites and move their meeting to a closer member's house to continue with their meeting. The consequence of that confrontation can lead to suspension, penalty or both depending on the gravity of what was involved.
- g. Might is not usually right:** “Isekaakwukwoure” rites try to immunize itself and the people from the platform and avenue for their leaders to manifest superiority mentality and sense of worshipping objects.
- h. It is often restricted:** While the ceremonies preceding the “Isekaakwukwoure” rites are open to virtually everybody, the “Isekaakwukwoure” rites are restricted to the adult kinsmen mostly those who are faithful to the ideals of the kindred.
- i. Ways forward are suggested:** This meeting hardly ends without opportunities accorded to members to freely suggest on the ways forward in keeping with the solidarity and collaboration that the community has been enjoying.
- j. Banter are exchanged:** Toward the end of the gathering, some (if not all) of them will engage in all manner of jokes and banter that outside there could be very expensive. They use it to laugh off anxieties while waiting for the next item.
- k. Entertainments:** At this point, the entertainments can be sumptuous depending on the status of the ceremonies held, what the family and in-laws came with and the amount penalty collected from offenders. This is because most of what is generated from penalty is spent mostly for this entertainment.

Leadership Questions in Nigeria

Acemoglu and Robinson undertook a legendary work where they summarily asked in 2012 “Why Nations Fail?” They believed that part of the reasons is because leaders neglect the crucial dynamics of building institutions that transcend their selfishness of extraction and primitive accumulation. But then, it needs to be noted that institutions are not that easily built hence the need to analyze the relationship between strong institutions and strong man. For example, Rwanda like many other nation states raises the possibility of an enlightened strong man committed putting in place institutional dynamics and parameters that would outlast him even when his democratic credentials and patriotism are seriously in doubt. From the accounts of Alam (2015), it can be posited that Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore also demonstrated how a strongman could facilitate the transformation of a state's governance and developmental apparatuses for the benefits of the citizens. The leadership questions in Nigeria are metaphors for probing the unpardonable dysfunctional system which poor leadership has wrought to Nigeria and Nigerians. It can be viewed as a contention against a barefaced corruptions, self-serving politics and policies, nepotism, weak institutions, constitutional abuse, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, insecurity, separatism movements, promoting mediocrity over competence, impunity, injustice, conspiratorial marginalization, infrastructural decay, religious and ethnic bigotries among others are the major problems affecting leadership in Nigeria.

Leadership Questions in the Contemporary Nigeria Vis-À-Vis the Paroxetine in “Iseka Akwukwo Ure” Rites

It was Maclver (1998) who aptly describes a leader as one who possesses the established rights within any social order to determine policies, pronounce act as a leader or guide to other men (p.25). Leadership issue is at the heart of the challenges facing Nigeria at the moment hence there is excruciating poverty, insecurity, political uncertainty, bad roads, youth unemployment and corruption to mention but a few. Attempts at checkmating dysfunctional and purposeless leadership as well as the promotion of responsible leadership have not been in the asking in Nigeria and African Continent in general. For example, the institution of the revered Mo Ibrahim Leadership Prize organized by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (MIF) locates governance and leadership at the center of the transformation of the continent. The foundation in the view of Olaopa (2023) sees leadership as the “ability to make choices, assess and take risks, define and order priorities” and the prize highlights exceptional role model by recognizing and celebrating African executive leaders “who, under challenging circumstances have developed their countries and strengthened democracy and human rights for the shared benefit of their people, paving the way for sustainable and equitable prosperity.” However, the leadership deficit on the African continent keeps deteriorating thereby leading to the increase prevalence of coups, the terrible sit-tight syndrome, enthronement of impunity, insecurity and under-performing democratic experiments. All these account for why the unfortunate gaps the Mo Ibrahim Leadership Prize has witnessed over the year. For instance, two awards were given in 2007 to Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique and another one in 2008 to Botswana's Festus Mogae. Then there was a two-year gap before Pedro de Verona Pires of Cape Verde won the prize in 2011. There was another two-year lull before the prize was awarded to Hifikepunye Pohamba of Namibia in 2014. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won it in 2017 and Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger won the 2020 edition. In all, only seven African leaders have won the prize in its seventeen years of existence. For close to five consecutive years now, the prize has not been awarded and unfortunately, no Nigerian political leader has won the prize and this talks much about the leadership questions in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, at the “isekaakwukwoure”rites of the people of AcharaIsuochi some of the leadership models exhibited there can help re-orientate Nigerian leaders. For example, proven and tested leaders are elected into offices people who have proved their mettle in honesty and capacity unlike in Nigeria where leaders use the people for experiment. Without delving much into the history, on 29thMay 2023 at the swearing-in ceremony of president Bola Tinubu in Abuja, made this historic statement “fuel subsidy gone” and since then apart from politicians, Nigerians have not and may not recover from the horrible impacts of that short statement. Many analysts have contended that it was not a well thought out policy and his chief of staff while in a meeting with the beleaguered Nigerian Labour Congress leaders over the policy reluctantly agreed that the policy was not part of his address. However, it became more insulting when his finance minister, Wale Eduntravelled all the way to the intergovernmental Group of 24 (G24) at WashingtonDC as reported by Obinna, Eromosele and Nume(2024) inferred that the policy and their likes were inadequately planned and “shouldn't be a question of afterthought”. With the “isekaakwukwoure” rites, an individual cannot use the life and feelings of the people for experiment. Meanwhile, at the “isekaakwukwoure” rites dissent voices and opinions are listened to, tolerated and analyzed and defeated with stronger arguments not with state brutality. Arguably, a bottled expression can be dangerously expressed through another route. Disputes and protests are resolved and tolerance is promoted unlike in Nigeria where dissent voices and protests are viewed as treasonable felony. One thing about a well-managed dissent view is that it energizes a leader(s) to think out of the box. It is important to note that people will always defend where their opinions are listened, discussed and addressed. During the “isekaakwukwoure” rites, injustices are dispassionately and objectively addressed unlike in Nigeria where both perceived and actual injustices are trivialized and promoted. At the “isekaakwukwoure” rites, honest accounts are rendered but in Nigeria the leaders believe and behave as if they are bigger than the people and therefore accountability is considered abnormal. The people are empowered through fully expressing themselves during the “isekaakwukwoure” rites but in Nigeria the people are conquered with state security apparatuses. At the “isekaakwukwoure” rites, the people honour and access their leaders. Their leaders usually move to show maturity, publicly good, courtesy and exemplary dispositions. Unarguably, these are serious qualities lacking in Nigeria contemporary. When last did Nigerian interact with their leaders? In recent times, the only leader who interacted with Nigerians on air through phone-in programme was Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Dr. Ebele Jonathan who did it once but what Nigerians are having since then are leaders who issue statements to Nigerians mostly through special advisers. They see themselves as gods, inaccessible, those deserving of worship, whose families and cronies deserve the best while the rest of Nigerians deserve servitude. During the “isekaakwukwoure” rites, bigotries and irrational sentiments are secondary unlike in Nigeria where irrational sentiments and primordial bigotries are elevated above reason and logic. Majority of Nigerians usually lose their sense of reasoning and criticism when their tribal or religious member is on the saddle. They mobilize every arsenal to defend even their in-defendable but at the “isekaakwukwoure”rites, an offender will be first blamed or castigated by his/her immediate family members.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse federation of thirty six states and the Federal Capital Territory. It is no more news that Nigeria and Nigerians are currently going through hell because of largely incompetent leadership and the problem include insecurity such as banditry and kidnappings, continued insurgency by terrorist groups and separatist agitations. Other paralytic-ileus of leadership in Nigeria includes ethnicity, religious bigotry, corruption, selfishness and the country is on the steady downward slide. However, the rites of “isekaakwukwoure” are peculiar with the people of AcharaIsuochi and if explored will help reshape the mentalities of many of the accidental leaders Nigeria. The culture of “isekaakwukwoure” has richly been a blessing to the

people of AcharaIsuochi. It has been a platform of ensuring social control, promoting purposeful leadership and sustenance of brotherhood and unity in the community. This rite completely runs the opposite of what Nigeria is currently going through today. Exploiting the aura and lessons of this rite will change Nigeria from a country where instability is considered a norm, selfishness is celebrated, looting and squandering of public resources is honoured, where might is considered right, where violent ethnic and religious jingoists are propelled unto political power. Therefore, the rites of Isekaakwukwoure” and its values of harmony, objectivity, justice, purposefulness, development, brotherhood, tolerance, accountability, leadership modeling and love be considered by Nigeria.

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LIST OF INTERVIEWS

S/NO	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	DATE OF INTERVIEW	ADDRESS
1.	Late Pa Simcon C. Amanambu	Adult	Farmer	12/08/2005	Achara
2.	Late Pa Nathaniel E. Madu	Adult	Farmer	15/04/2017	Achara
3.	Elder Theophilus Okoroafor	Adult	Farmer	14/03/2020	Achara
4.	Deacon Stephen Ekpereduru Okoro	Adult	Farmer	16/04/2020	Achara