

'For the gods and our pockets': The Beginning and End of the Ofite Festival in Awka

Alex Amaechi Ugwuja, PhD
Department of History and International Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

The advent of Christianity in Awka, like in many African societies, produced many social upheavals that battered and bruised the primordial forms of existence of the people. Festivals were vital aspects of the socio-cultural life of traditional Igbo people. Igbo traditional festivals, apart from providing religious functions, also provided social, emotional, and aesthetic values for the people. Traditional Awka society was known for its numerous social exhibitions manifested in group dances, title-taking, and religious and cultural festivals, among others. One of these festivals was the Otite festival, which was celebrated in the seventh month (Onwa Asaa) of the local calendar. The Otite festival provided the platform for each family to thank their family gods and personal gods for safeguarding the family members and, especially, for bountiful blessings in the outgoing year. Besides this, the Otite festival economically impacted the town since every Awka person abroad compulsorily returned home; these returnees repatriated significant resources to the town. The importance of such a festival in traditional Awka society cannot be gainsaid. However, the advent of Christianity in Awka in 1904 pitched the Otite festival against the teachings of the missionaries, who summarily declared an all-out war against the festival. This study examines the clash of Christianity and the Otite festival in Awka. The study argues that the decline of the festival had robbed the community of the economic and strategic benefits that accrued from the festival. It recommends a revival of the Otite festival.

Keywords: Otite, Christianity, Civilization, Awka and Culture

Introduction

One of the greatest debates among Western liberal scholars began in 1992 with the publication of Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of History and the Last Man.' Not only was the title of the book pointy, but its central argument, which was that the end of socialism and the free rein of liberal democracies and its Siamese twin, free-market capitalism, represented the endpoint of humanity's sociocultural evolution presented a vexed contestation to the whole of the social thought of the twentieth century. History, in Fukuyama's estimation, had gone full cycle and had returned to its equilibrium – socialism extinguished and capitalism triumphant. As was to be expected, Fukuyama's work sparked extensive debate and criticism, notably from various scholars and intellectuals who may be seen as his contemporaries, including his academic mentor, Samuel P. Huntington.

A year after Fukuyama published his controversial study, Huntington released an article, which was later expanded into a book in 1996, and argued that the future conflicts in the world would not primarily be ideological or economic, as was the case during the Cold War, but rather cultural and civilizational. He further contended that the fundamental sources of conflict will arise from differences in culture and religion. For instance, he suggests that the West will face challenges from Islamic and Confucian civilizations, creating tensions based on cultural identities. Huntington also emphasized the role of religion as a key element in shaping civilizations and fueling conflicts. He posits that religious differences are often more pronounced and more difficult to resolve than ideological differences.

These differing viewpoints have contributed to rich discussions in most of the disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, illustrating the complexity of understanding global history and conflicts. While both thinkers have made significant contributions to political discourse, their divergent views reflect deeper philosophical and theoretical divides about the nature of

progress and conflict in the modern world. Huntington was, in fact, closer to the point. His only misstep was the pegging of the primacy of cultural and civilizational matters to the end of the Cold War. The fact that cultural and civilizational matters have been at the forefront of most historical occurrences: the Atlantic slave trade and European colonial imperialism in Africa were triggered in the main by cultural factors in Europe, and the quest to impose these cultural forms on other peoples of the world have been creating conflicts since the sixteenth century. Wherever they sought to impose their way of life, inevitable civilizational conflicts ensued. This was most noticeable in the religious sphere. European Christian missionaries tried to recreate the African world.

The above debate was practicalised in Awka society long before both Fukuyama and Huntington set pen to paper. This is because, akin to many African societies, traditional Awka society socialized a great deal, and they gave expressions to this socialization through group dances, title-taking, and religious and cultural festivals, among others. In fact, within the twelve-month traditional calendar, only one month passed without a festival celebrated.¹ These festivals afforded the people the opportunity to take stock of issues in their respective villages and provided the opportunity for a village's population census exercise.² One of such festivals was the Otite festival. The Otite festival served as a period for reunion and homecoming for all Awka indigenes abroad. The festival also provided a platform for each family to thank their family gods for safeguarding the family members, especially for bountiful blessings in the outgoing year.³ However, the advent of Christianity in the community led to the gradual decline and eventual demise of the festival. The Otite festival could not survive the attacks against it from the Christian fold, and thus, the festival not only went into oblivion but virtually disappeared from Awka customs.⁴ While several historical works have been written about Awka, the Otite festival has hardly received any significant attention from historians of Igboland. Thus, this study examines the Otite festival, especially its clash

with Christianity, which was to eventually lead to its decline and eventual demise.

The study is organized into five sections. The introduction is followed by the second section, which historicizes the Otite festival. The third part examines the origin of the festival, while the fourth part considers the function and relevance of the Otite festival for traditional Awka society. The penultimate chapter discusses the clash of Christianity with the Otite festival. The study is concluded in the sixth section.

The Otite Festival in Historical Perspective

Festivals were vital aspects of the socio-cultural life of the Igbo people. This is because the worldview of the people involved not only the living but also the dead, who acted as agents between mortals and the ancestors and gods. To celebrate and commemorate the assistance of both the immortal ancestors and the gods in their everyday lives, the Igbo traditional society evolved many festivals.⁵ The traditional Awka community was no exception to the above praxis. Thus, the traditional community contrived numerous festivals, one of these festivals was the Otite festival.

The Otite festival was a period mapped out (the seventh month of the local calendar) in honor of the patron gods of the individual Awka person. On the first day of the feast, the head of each family in Awka had to sacrifice to the individual patron gods of the members of the family. The sacrifice consisted of a cock for the male children and a hen for the female children.⁶ If a man had twelve children, he had to sacrifice twelve fowls on account of each of his twelve children. The essence of the sacrifice to the Chi of all his children was to acknowledge the patron god of his children for protection and any other blessings in the outgoing year.⁷

The above does not imply that the Otite festival was for sacrificing to the patron gods of only children. Every able-bodied man, it should be noted, had to sacrifice to his Chi.⁸ However, a

family that witnessed bereavement or any calamity was not obliged to make any sacrifice.⁹ The logic could be that the family gods did not live up to their end of the bargain and were, therefore, not deserving of any sacrifice. However, on most occasions, “even families that witnessed bereavement usually attributed such calamities to human errors and not necessarily any whimsical evil by the gods; and in any case, they still had to propitiate their Chi for any errors on their part.”¹⁰ Only in rare cases did the Awka man rebel against his personal Chi.¹¹ The belief that the supernatural and the natural were intertwined and inseparable was engrained in the social worldview of the primordial Awka man. The Otite festival, therefore, provided the opportunity for a spiritual/psychic fellowship between the living and the dead.

The Awka community comprises two broad sections – Ezi and Ifite. This appears to have been so for a very long time. These two sections produce the seven quarters that make up the town – Amaenyi, Nkwele, Ifite-Awka, Amachala, Amikwo, Ezi-Awka, and Agulu Awka.¹² These quarters, in turn, produce the thirty-three villages of Awka. The Otite festival was not celebrated by the entire Awka at the same time. The festival was celebrated by the Ifite section of Awka on the 13th day of the seventh month (Izunato), while the Ezi-Awka section celebrated it on the 21st day of the new moon (Izun'ese).¹³

The Otite festival had a special meal that consisted of roasted yams and ukpaka.¹⁴ The ukpaka (oil-bean fruit that was locally prepared), usually ground with a pestle (odo) in a mortar (okwa), would be mixed with palm oil, salt, and pepper. The roasted tubers of yam were sliced into sizeable pieces and mixed with the ukpaka sauce and presented for savoring.¹⁵ However, before feasting on the delicacy, the head of the family had to throw a morsel of that food to the altar (uluchi) of the Chi of each member of the household. After this ritual, the remaining food would then be ready for human consumption. Often, the Otite meal was accompanied by large kegs of palm wine for merriment

by the people.¹⁶ Additionally, if the head of the house or any other person had made a special promise to his Chi, or any other deity for that matter, if it was a goat that had been pledged, it was killed over the father's altar and shared that same day by the males of the extended family. Such a goat is called “eghu mmuo”.¹⁷

Importantly, all the fowls killed on the first day were not eaten that first day; these were eaten on the second day. The women prepared pounded yam with onugbu soup for the family after they had finished the day's sacrifices at the altars of the patron gods. The children collected the feathers of the fowls and spread them on the roads leading to their family's compounds. This indicated that such a family was celebrating the Otite festival. A family that did not spread these feathers was not usually associated with them; they were seen as ingrates who were too stingy to sacrifice to their spiritual protectors.¹⁸

In the sharing of the Otite meat, elders were allotted special parts of the meat. This was referred to as “ivbe nru”.¹⁹ “In Awka,” explains P.H. Dike, “people above a certain age, perhaps above eighty years or it could be by being the oldest person present in the ceremony, was given special parts of the cooked meat. This was a mark of honor for age and longevity....” Dike further explains that “for livestock, for example, “run” consisted of the animal's neck, a single part of the fleshy covering of the breast bone and gizzard....”²⁰

The Otite festival, especially the sacrifices that it entailed, was not done at the individual household levels alone. There is evidence to show that what was done in an individual family's 'obu' was also replicated in the 'obu' of the extended family. The head of every family comprising the extended family took a fowl to the extended family's 'obu.' After sacrificing the fowl at the altar of the common ancestor of the extended family, each family head took back the fowl he had brought the previous day, which would have been cooked. Afterward, the fowls were shared according to

age. Having dispensed with the ritual aspects of the festival, palm wine was brought, and the merriment continued into the night.²¹ The Otite festival, it should be noted, did serve some other crucial functions aside from the obvious – religious, which proved immensely useful to the overall well-being of the traditional society. We shall return to this theme shortly.

Origins of the Otite Festival in Awka

The origin of the Otite festival in Awka is difficult to fathom. This is partly because of the absence of written records in Awka until the advent of the Western missionaries and also because of the antiquity of the festival. This challenge perhaps explains why all the historians of Awka history shunned the question of the origin of the Otite festival like a vampire shuns the cross. Godwin Morah traces the origin of the festival to the halcyon days of traditional Awka society. "I cannot actually say when the Otite festival began in Awka, and I do not believe that any person alive can, what I know is that its origin is as old as the Awka society itself."²² In any event, the attempt at unraveling the origin of the Otite festival in Awka history can, at best, be speculative and tentative. Isaiah Chinweuba opines that the origin of the Otite festival cannot be fully explained outside of the religious tendencies of the traditional Awka society.²³ Being a society where the supernatural and the physical were all interwoven and where every average male adult was supposed to propitiate and revere his personal god called Chi, a communal period for venerating all the gods - higher and lower, including personal gods is not imponderable among such a people.

Besides the above, it is possible that the Otite festival was instituted primarily to ensure community integration and cohesion following the growth of the Awka blacksmithing industry. On this count, Samuel Chinwuko observes that,

The origin of the Otite festival has much to do with the coming of age of the Awka blacksmithing

industry. The growth of the Awka-smiting industry led to a trade-related dispersal of the Awka into several areas of Nigeria. Enterprising and quite adventurous in plying their trade, the Awka blacksmiths traveled to as far as Nembe, Forcados, Okitipupa, Idah, and Ejule. Most of these smiths were also native doctors.²⁴

Furthermore, Chinweuba informs us that,

In those days, it was taboo for able-bodied men to be found in Awka with the elderly people, children, and women – one must go for what we called Uzo – ie. In all of this, the Otite festival must have been carefully designed by the elders to serve as the only mandatory period when all Awka people in Uzo-Ije must return home to their land of ancestry.²⁵

There appear to be more reasons to suspect that the Otite festival was established in the wake of the growth of the blacksmithing industry in Awka. Without such a period of homecoming, social cohesion in traditional Awka society would have proven very difficult, if not a herculean task. Most Awka blacksmiths would have settled down permanently in their places of Uzo-ije (sojourn).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the origin of the Otite festival in Awka history has remained speculative, at best. The origins of most festivals in Igboland are speculative "a matter of conjecture as folklorists believe that the earliest festivals arose out of the anxieties of the early people's lack of understanding of the forces of nature and, therefore, wished to placate them (the forces). Arguably, most festivals and feasts were associated with planting and harvesting and/ or honoring the dead".²⁶ Interestingly, unlike other festivals that mainly satisfied religious purposes, the Otite festival had economic and strategic utilities, apart from

religious functions. To these, we now turn attention.

Functions and Relevance of the Otite Festival

The Otite festival was not only a celebration, a revelry that added not much value to the overall functionality of the Awka society; rather, it provided more than religious functions to the traditional Awka society. The Otite festival provided the opportunity for Awka people who had gone to ply their smiting skills in far and near towns to return home to tend, worship, and appease their guiding spirits (Chi) in the land of their birth. As Godwin Morah puts it, "The worship of one's personal patron god (Chi) is better worshipped at the land of one's birth. The tradition still subsists that no place is better qualified for reverence or propitiation of one's Chi more than in the uluchi in one's ancestral homeland".²⁷ P.H. Dike drives home the point better when he notes that "notwithstanding the daily reverences of these gods in the places of their peregrination, the sacrifices at home were more fervently observed, perhaps in propitiation of new 'blessings' during the next round of peregrination."²⁸ The fact that the worship of personal gods was of utmost importance in the traditional religion cannot be overemphasized. Thus, the Otite festival served the function of providing a time for the community to worship the personal gods of the members of the community. This did not only foster religious harmony alone; it also provided some psychological leverage for the Awka people. This explains why Isaiah Chinweuba asserts that "any Awka man that is in harmony with his Chi did not have to fear any whimsical evil by any supernatural force because "onye chi ya adighi n'izu onwu adighi egbu ya".²⁹ (One whose patron god did not sign his death warrant, does not die).

Economically considered, the Otite festival provided a basis for the economic growth and development of the Awka community. The Otite period was, as noted earlier, a time for the mass return of all Awka indigenes on Uzo-ije (sojourn). No adult male indigene of Awka could afford not to return to Awka during

Otite. The penalty for failure to return during this period was usually a heavy fine.³⁰ Such an annual mass return, therefore, provided the opportunity for the entire Awka community to discuss and proffer solutions to problems that confronted their community. On this point, Ikechukwu Nnebe observes:

The Otite festival was a period for homecoming. Each village usually fixed its annual general meeting during the Otite festival because this was the only period one could see all Awka indigenes at Awka. Before and afterward, it was almost taboo for any able-bodied person to be found in Awka without going to Uzo-ije. Economically, the Otite festival helped to propel the economy of Awka. A lot of Awka indigenes returned home with much wealth from plying their smiting skills and trading all over the country.³¹

P.H. Dike contends that "the homecoming sojourners repatriated their earnings, which in turn helped to bolster the economy of the city-state as well as the economic power of the people... just as the occasion was important for organizing community self-help projects – the community taking advantage of the influx of returnees".³² Furthermore, the Otite festival provided young people the opportunity to search for spouses and negotiate and contract marriages.³³ No one can deny that such marriages would add a fillip to the local economy of the people since palm wine had to be sourced, food items had to be bought, and livestock, especially goats, among others, had to exchange hands. More important in boosting the traditional Awka economy was the penchant of the Awka people to erect their houses during the mass return that Otite offered. Udegbunam Okoli informed us that "most Awka returnees who needed a house would simply give the contracts to elderly relatives who had retired permanently to the town. Such contractors would then hire young boys who had not begun their own Uzo-ije to work on the relative's house... through these means, the young lads made money to support their

households, and some young men often made enough money to marry wives for themselves”.³⁴

Additionally, the Otite festival served other functions other than religious and economic. It also had political and strategic functions. For example, the festive period was also a period for headcount or census in Awka. Being that everyone was obliged to attend the Otite festival, it provided an opportunity to conduct a census in the town. Besides, the Otite festival was utilized by Awka blacksmiths and traders to assess how they were treated by other communities where they sojourned. This provided them the rare opportunity to synergize their responses to those communities who were not favorably disposed to their interests. It was during Otite festivals that traders and blacksmiths resolved to increase the use of the fame of the Agballa oracle of Awka and the 'Ushi' practice to protect their business interests.³⁵

Much like the Aro, the Otite festival provided the Awka sojourners the opportunity to annually(re)develop an intricate web of strategies or 'tricks' on how to relate with their neighbors with regard to advancing their commercial interests. These annual meetings were to give rise to the development of a language called 'aba' or, better still, an esoteric code for controlling the trading and smiting networks of the Awka people. We are informed that “much as the Aba language was regarded as an exclusive language of the Awka people. It was, in fact, developed by the generation of the blacksmiths of the time, and they used it mostly as a trade language, popularly, to protect “trade secrets.”³⁶ It can, therefore, be seen that the Otite festival served the traditional Awka society in many ways. Its annihilation as a result of the activities of the missionaries who worked in Awka was not only unfortunate but robbed the Awka society of some of the utilities derivable from the Otite festival such that today in Awka, there is no such thing as a mass return, a truly and compulsory mass return of all the Awka persons abroad.

Christianity and the Decline of the Otite Festival, 1904-1970

With the consolidation of Christianity in Awka in 1904, there was a sustained attempt by the missionaries to stamp out the African traditional religion and all its manifestations. Without a doubt, one of the cultures of the Awka people that faced an immediate attack from the missionaries was the Otite festival.³⁸

Unlike the Imoka festival, which was lucky to survive the attacks from the missionaries and had to adjust to the tide of events, the Otite festival was condemned by the early Christians in Awka. In this regard, Godwin Morah admits:

The Otite festival, in the eyes of the missionaries, was nothing other than a high-level idolatry that stood antithetical to the message of the Cross. The missionaries failed to appreciate any deeper meaning of the traditional religion of the Awka man and, thus, did everything in their power to stamp out such a seemingly 'offensive' and 'idolatrous' festival. The case of Imoka, which was seen more or less as a barbaric carnival, did not evoke the same feeling as the Otite festival... this inability to appreciate the deeper essence of the traditional religion of the people is what eventually jeopardized Christianity in Africa. Most are Christians only in name.³⁹

Specifically, the most potent weapon used in exterminating the Otite festival out of Awka was Western education, and in this regard, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) played a crucial role. Having declared an all-out war against the Otite festival, the CMS, who were initially the leading missionaries in the educational sphere in Igboland, began to refuse to admit pupils whose parents were 'pagans.' All observers of the Otite festival were readily labeled 'pagans,' and their children were not allowed to be enrolled in CMS schools. Considering the enormous socio-political and economic dividends that Western

education portended in the emerging colonial order, many Awka people began to distance themselves from the Otite festival so that their children could be enrolled in schools.⁴⁰ P.H. Dike reasons that:

Inevitably, and to profess his faith, after embracing the 'new religion,' the Awka proselyte (laden with mind control) labored to show himself as 'liberated.' Thus, he would stop at nothing to run down traditional institutions and whatever they stood for. Imbued with the new zeal, he characteristically condemned the customs of the people and publicly ridiculed the place of deities and shrines in Awka life.⁴¹

Believing that 'darkness' was responsible for the numerous uluchi (altars) that pervaded Awka, the missionaries began to double their efforts in the domain of Western education. The Revds. G.T. Basden and Smiths played a crucial role in this regard. They contended in their preaching that darkness could only be expunged with light; they equated the Otite festival with darkness and Christianity with light.⁴² Ikechukwu Nnebe observed that before a pupil could be allowed to commence school, he or she must have been baptized, and at baptism, a candidate is asked, "Have you rejected Satan and all his works?" to which the candidate must answer in the affirmative. Such a question ostensibly meant to discover whether the candidate had rejected all aspects of the traditional religion and, notably, the Otite festival. Nnebe informs us that the missionaries linked traditional religion with Satanism.⁴³ In this connection, anyone who celebrated the Otite festival was seen as a worker of Satan, and since darkness and light have no connection, the missionaries were often found not hesitant in sending anyone who still clings to 'paganism' from their fold.⁴⁴ What is more, it is suggested the Awka society, in its step to transition to the new colonial order, provided the source for Chinua Achebe's Things *'Fall Apart.'* Recall that Chinua Achebe's father was trained at St. Paul's College, Awka,

and did work there as a church teacher.⁴⁵

On January 11, 1904, the Niger Mission, through the efforts of the Reverend Smith, established the first educational institution in Awka St. Paul's College, Awka. This, according to Ifeanyi Anagbogu, was regarded as "the key to the success recorded by the European Missionaries in the period, 1904 – 1920".⁴⁶ From the 1910s onwards, the CMS began to have an exponential increment in the number of trained church teachers and ministers. Most of these new church teachers hailed from Awka town and environs. The new church agents fell on Awka customs and traditions as a vulture does on a decaying carcass, and, as expected, the most attacked was the Otite festival.⁴⁷ Dike notes:

No sooner than both schools – Government School and St. Faith's Primary School – began to produce literate pupils, the route to traditional heritage became vivid. Having acquired knowledge and imbued with the spirit of the new age, the products of the school system began to alienate themselves and tended to look down on other members of their community (not excluding their parents. Many of them began to denigrate the values of their land as if they had never been part of it. A lot more became bigotry [sic] and seemed to have no limits. A general change of attitude was, thereby, painfully brought on the society.⁴⁸

In the above situation, the Otite festival began to gradually lose its meaning to society such that by 1970, the festival had ceased to be celebrated on any meaningful scale at Awka. Apart from the ready weapon that Western education provided in the fight against the Otite festival, another system used to fight the festival was the open crusade system. Isaiah Chinweuba thinks that the C.M.S and later the Catholics, beginning from the 1930s, resorted to open evangelical crusades.⁴⁹ In these evangelical activities, the Christian missionaries openly condemned the

traditional religion of the Awka people, which they referred to as idolatry, and often were seen challenging the deities to a spiritual duel, and usually, the deities were not seen raining instant calamities on the 'impostors.' "Most people," opines Chinweuba, "abandoned the traditional religion when they felt that the old gods and deities were either intimidated or cowed by the 'god' of the missionary or the deities had altogether abandoned the people to their fate".⁵⁰

The provision of healthcare services by the missionaries also proved a formidable weapon in the hands of the missionaries against the aspects of Awka customs, which they felt were 'heathen.' Hospitals, clinics, and health centers established by these missions were fully deployed in waging war against the Otite festival. First, most of the ailments that distressed the traditional Awka society and for which a supernatural cause was often attributed were easy for the missionaries to cure. It was a big wonder to the Awka people how easily the missionaries cured such dreaded ailments like otolo (diarrhea) and ibammou (high fever), among others.⁵¹ The missionaries would have no time for people who continued to worship idols in the form of the Otite festival when they came seeking medical assistance.⁵² Through this means, a lot of converts were won to Christianity, and for every new convert, the Otite festival lost a celebrant.

The above observations should not be misconstrued to imply that the missionaries and Christianity did not do any good to the Awka society. Nothing could be farther from the truth, as, in fact, a lot of studies have been done on the societal transformation brought about in Igboland by the missionaries, however, in their zeal to plant Christianity in Awka, the missionaries, especially the CMS were too quick to dismiss as idolatry and barbarism most of the customs of the people. The CMS, most especially, was very hostile to the people's traditional system and culture and did not seek any avenue to adopt the good aspects of these cultures in building a new order. The CMS Niger Diocese even attempted to

ban the Ozo title in 1970 and threatened to excommunicate its holders from the church. It took several community crises, including one at Awka, before the Niger Diocese could rescind its decision.⁵³

The Catholics appeared to have been more accommodating to the people's culture than the Anglicans. However, because the Anglicans had already laid the basis for the attack on the Otite festival in Awka before the arrival of the Catholics, the Catholics joined the chorus, and concertedly, these missionaries continued their war against the festival without a thought on how to sieve it of its 'idolatrous' hue and use its other social and economic benefits.

Conclusion

In the "*River Between*," the Kenyan writer Ngugiwa Thiong'O wrote that "a religion that took no account of people's way of, a religion that did not recognize spots of beauty and truth in their way of life, was useless. It would not satisfy. It would not be a living experience, a source of life and vitality. It would only maim a man's soul".⁵⁴ The missionaries were ethnocentric and culturally bound, and they saw as repugnant anything in Awka society that did not conform to their assumed notions of advancing civilization, epitomised in Christianity, which they aimed to plant in the land to replace the old traditional order.

In this situation, the Otite festival, which had served the Awka society socially, religiously, economically, and strategically, faced an imminent extinction by way of the attacks from the Christian missionaries, especially the CMS. In any case, efforts were not made to sieve the Otite festival of its seemingly 'idolatrous' aspects to appropriate the social, economic, and strategic benefits of the festival. The missionaries, in their cultural superiority complex, continued preaching against the Otite festival and used several weapons, such as their newly introduced Western education and healthcare services, to intimidate and

cajole the people away from their traditional forms of existence.

In concluding this study, it is necessary to highlight some of the implications of the demise of the Otite festival on Awka history. First, the decline in the Awka blacksmithing industry owes a lot to the demise of the Otite festival. This is because the Otite festival provided all the Awka blacksmiths on uzo-ije used the opportunity of the mass return to strategise and strengthen their trade networks against competitors. The death of the Otite festival robbed the blacksmiths of the veritable opportunity to put heads together against competitors and, most importantly, develop their Ushi art and the Aba language, which helped to spread the fame of the Agbala Oracle. The end of the Otite festival, therefore, implied the beginning of the decline of Awka hegemony via its once-thriving blacksmithing prowess.

Furthermore, the socio-economic benefits derived from the Otite festival, which were highlighted in this study, such as the annual repatriation of economic resources, among others, were lost to the Awka society. Without a doubt, the advent of Christianity in Awka came with positive benefits, but its negative dimensions are as lucid as the positive. Being that the missionaries were impatient to understand the nexus between Christianity and the traditional religion of the Awka people, they quickly condemned the traditional religion. Today, it is clear that Christianity cannot explain all social phenomena in Africa. Being helpless in this area, the Awka Christian often finds himself involved in different traditional religious practices. This is why, despite the positive impacts of Christianity on the culture and life of the Awka person, it has not succeeded in making the people more religious than before. Christianity has rather created room for syncretism, where many Christians now operate under two worlds, that is, the world of Christianity and the world of traditional religion.

Endnotes

1. Chukwudiegwu Nwangwu, c73 Years, Retired Civil Servant, Interviewed at his residence, Umuayom-Awka, 2nd March 2016.
2. Chkwuemeka Ekeh, c65 Years, Traditional Bone-Mender, Interviewed in his residence, Umuoramma-Awka. 12 February, 2016.
3. Samuel Orji, c63 Years, Trader, Interviewed at his residence at Umubele on 12 March 2016.
4. Nwangwu, Interview, cited.
5. Benson Okafor, c72 Years, Interviewed at his residence in Umuike, Awka. 20th April, 2016.
6. Nwangwu, Interview, cited.
7. Nwangwu, Interview, cited.
8. Orji, Interview, cited.
9. Nwangwu, Interview, cited.
10. Nwangwu, Interview, cited.
11. Orji, Interview, cited.
12. P. Hezekiah Dike, *Awka: 1800 – 2000, A Survey of the History and Traditions of the Ancient City – State*, (Awka: Chocolate Gate Publishers, 2013), 47.
13. Orji, Interview, cited.
14. Dike, *Awka: 1800 – 2000...50*.
15. Orji, Interview, cited.
16. Orji, Interview, cited.
17. Nwangwu, Interview, cited.
18. Nwangwu, Interview, cited.
19. Amanke Okafor, *The Awka People* (Chudan Graphic press, 1992), 24.
20. Dike, *Awka: 1800 – 2000...55*.
21. Okafor, Interview, cited.
22. Godwin Morah, c70 Years, Community Leader, Interviewed at his Residence at Amikwo, Awka, 1st February 2016.
23. Isaiah Chinweuba, c77 Years, Community Leader, Interviewed at his Residence at Amikwo, Awka. 5th May,

- 2016.
24. Samuel Chinwuko, c. 78 Years, Herbalist. Interviewed at his residence, Umubele, Awka, on 16th June, 2016.
25. Chinwuko, Interview cited.
26. C.N., Nwagba, *Awka and the Biafran War*, (Awka: Sellyoak International Press, 2005), 67.
27. Morah, Interview cited.
28. Dike, *Awka: 1800–2000...75*.
29. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
30. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
31. Nnebe, Ikechukwu, c65 Years, Retired Civil Servant, Interviewed at his Residence at Amudo, Awka. 1st February, 2018.
32. Dike, *Awka: 1800–2000...55*.
33. Udegbumam Okeke, c67 Years, Trader, Interviewed at his Residence at Awka 6th April 2016.
34. Okeke, Interview cited.
35. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
36. Dike, *Awka: 1800–2000...75*.
37. C.C. Agbodike, J.E. Madu, N.E. Ojiakor, A.U. Igwe and N.J. Obiakor, *The History of Obosi from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Ibadan: Mosuro Publishers, 2015), 67.
38. Onuko, Theresa, c55 Years, Priestess (Eze Nwanyi), Interviewed at her Residence at Amikwo Awka. 4th April, 2016.
39. Morah, interview, cited.
40. Morah, interview, cited.
41. Dike, *Awka: 1800–2000...106*.
42. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
43. Nnebe, Interview, cited.
44. Nnebe, Interview, cited.
45. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
46. Ifeanyi Anagbogu, *The Origins of Awka*, (Enugu: Swell Publishers. 1986), 43.
47. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
48. Dike, *Awka: 1800–2000...110*.

49. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
50. Chinweuba, Interview cited.
51. Ibeka Obunabo, c67 Years, Trader, Interviewed at his Residence at Umubele, Awka, 3rd May 2015.
52. Obunabo, Interview, cited.
53. Obunabo, Interview, cited.
54. Ngugi wa Thiong'O, *The River Between* (Nairobi: Heinemann Books), 3.