# Traditional Divination as Index for Social Classification in Okpu Umuobo Ancient Kingdom, Osisioma L.G.A Abia State.

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**Abstract**

The focus of this paper is to investigate the various classes of diviners in Okpu Umuobo of Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria in precolonial times. How did the guild of diviners serve as a social maker? What role did they play in Okpu Umuobo traditional society? What is effect of modern change on the guild in contemporary society? To tease out these questions, the functionalist theory of Emile Durkheim will be deployed as a theoretical framework. Data were generated by participant observation and oral interviews and complemented by extant literature. The findings show that Okpu Umuobo had institutions and social structures such as the guild of diviners which served as social classification and social norms for peace and stability before Christianization and Westernization. The study also shows the resilience of traditional institutions and the tenacity of the guild of diviners to survive in the face of social and modern changes.

**Key words: Divination, Social classification, Functionalist theory, Social change, and Westernization.**

## Introduction

In Ngwa land every human activity is believed to be controlled by one spirit being or the other. Divination is one ritual aspect in Ngwa traditional religion whereby people consult the oracle to know the will of Chineke (Supreme Being) or a deity in order to solve the existential problems life such as sickness, barrenness, witchcraft, poverty, et cetera. In the traditional Okpu Umuobo life is homogenous; they consult diviners to meet their essential

needs of life. The diviners are respected and held in a very high esteem. Because of their centrality in Ngwa religious life, visitors from far and near come to Okpu Umuobo to access their services. Indigenous knowledge of diviners is intricate and well mystical. In fact, sometimes their functions intercept and overlap. For example, it is difficult to distinguish a herbalist from a diviner or medicine men for that matter. This notwithstanding, the social classification of the diviners is very important in the community as an important religious and political elite in precolonial times.

Divination is art of foretelling the future, or revealing the unknown, or finding out the wish of a divinity or spirit, or explaining what is wrong in a particular situation and proffering solutions to avert the situation; if it is untoward (Njoku Athanasius, 1994: 28). Thus a diviner is one who practices the art of divination. The cult is practiced by both man and woman who have trained in the art by a professional diviner. According to Osuagwu Evurulobi (oral interview, 2022) they are revered as important members in Igbo traditional society, Okpu Umuobo among them. Generally, in Igbo land diviners are widely consulted where decisions are difficult to arrive by mortal men. Sometimes, they are consulted before decisions are taken in all important occasions in peoples life such as deciding on a trade to embark or what course of action to take or what name to give to a new born baby et cetera.

Since there exists social differentiation among diviners, it is important to know which diviners to consult. This could be challenging task, but the way out is to determine what sort problems the individuals are confronted with. In most cases, the belief witchcraft is a motivational factor for the consultation of diviners. To be a diviners, it is believed that one must be called by the Agwu divinity. The training involves the mastery of the language and the use of ritual objects and the taboos associated with their functions.

Generally diviners are either men or women, Anyanwu (1999:30) added that they are important members of the society and are consulted by people when they are in trouble with a view to finding a lasting solution to those problems. Ugwumba Agu (oral interview, 2022) submitted that in Okpu Umuobo ancient kingdom, people consult diviners when member of the family is seriously sick, or when a woman is barren, or when robbers made away with a valuable property, or when they want to embark on a journey. Eneogwe Sampson(oral interview 2022) added that an Okpu Umuobo man would consult a diviner to know the will of God especially when the family wants to move into a new site to live. They also consult diviners in moment of crisis, during pregnancy, child birth, naming ceremony, when one had a nightmare or when death occurs. Ohuonu Ajagba (oral interview 2022) posited that every Okpu Umuobo person believes that divination is an

social reality and as such, life being an invaluable gift of God should be cared for when bewitched by either a fellow human being or by spirits. The general view of an Okpu Umuobo man about divination is that man is unable to do anything without the power of the supersensible world and the supernatural being. The diviner in this context becomes the supernatural being and whatever he says is the final truth. The fact remains that each class of diviner is relevant and important in his or her area of calling and specialty and they perform their duties as assigned to them by their calling.

Social differentiation is based on three broad kinds of trait namely: -

i. Physical trait which consist of the skin colour, physical appearance, age, sex etc.
ii. Social and cultural trait which involves differences in etiquette, values, manners, ideas, ideologies etc.
iii. Cultural traits which consist of status.

Social differentiation has been classified into two basic types namely intra-group and intergroup differentiation. Intra-group differentiation represents a division of the group into sub groups that perform different functions in the group without being superior or inferior to each other. Social stratification on the contrary is a form of social inequality That means that all societies arrange their members in terms of superiority, inferiority and equality. In traditional Okpu Umuobo divination serves as means of social stratification. Because in Okpu Umuobo people believe that nothing happens without a cause, hence they expend their energy trying to restore the ritual purity that existed before the problem. This explains why the people of Okpu Umuobo consult different classes of diviners and religious functionaries solve their problems.

**Divination as a Social index for differentiation**

Divination is an important aspect of the people's culture. A quick survey at the traditional setting of Ngwa man reveals a deep belief of a typical Ngwa man in vital forces or spiritual powers which they believe function in secret. As I mentioned earlier, there are social differentiation or class distinction among diviners in Ngwa land. Ikenna Enwereji (oral interview, 2022) posited that there exist four kinds of diviners in Ngwa land. The first in the list is *Dibia aja* – the one who acts as a "high priest". He offers sacrifices and leads in officiating special sacrifices such as atonement of the earth goddess where abomination is committed. He equally reveals the unknown or explains what is wrong in particular situations. Dibia aja rubs Nzu in his eyes to enable him see far beyond the physical world. He foresees the future and prescribes remedies. He does the work of a seer or prophet. He is seen as a charismatic and natural leader of his people with enough spiritual courage to lead others to the presence of the deity. He knows, hears and speaks to the deity. Among

this class of diviners are those who swallowed the heart of ram (Ndi loro obi evuru). These ones hold the ofo and ogu – Symbol of Justice and innocence. Before they handle any matter that has to do with human life, the complainant would be compelled to express his or her innocence over the matter and over the defendant. It is believed that (dibia loro obi evuru) diviner priest that swallowed rams hearts seldom shed innocent blood or kill at all. Ikenna Enwereji (oral interview 2022) added that the diviner priest that did not swallow ram's heart is known as '*Otinkume'* is the opposite of what the diviner that swallowed ram's heart is. In other words, *Otinkume* can do anything for a pay (oral interview, 2022) disclosed that Otinkume Dibia can un-earth or excavate buried charms he can kill and shed innocent blood, he can bewitch people with sickness and misfortune. That is to say that he can harm people through sorcery. Diviners who swallowed rams heart are more responsible and decent in behaviour and character according to my informant who chose to remain anonymous.

**Initiation Rites into the Guild of Diviners**

Initiation rite into the guild begins after the training of the diviner. The training is an arduous matter (Parrinder 1962:101). It involves seclusion from the public, abstinence from drink, gossip, quarrel, fight and sex whether married or not. The training last for four (4) years in Okpu Umubo Ancient kingdom. The prospective diviner frequently sleep on hard or bare floor with insufficient food and without bathing for days but smeared with whit native chalk (Nzu) all to learn and bear hardship and discipline. The training is done by the senior experienced and renowned diviner priest. The training among other things involve learning of prayer (invocatory prayers or incantatory prayer), dances, songs, ritual, skill and craft and other things related to the profession in the first year of the training, ceremony ablutions feature prominently at this stage. The curriculum for the second year include lecture for the diviner bag (Akpa Dbia). The third year lectures are centered on incantation, invocations, skill of divination etc.

The training of a diviner priest (*Dibia*) in Ngwa tradition religion is expedient. The moment the prospect has consented to become a diviner his training commences. Parrinder (1962:101) averred that the training of a diviner priest is an arduous matter. Tasie and Okinedo (2005:128) added that the training may involve seclusion from the public in which case the novice may be confined to the shrine or secluded areas in the forest. To further authenticate the intensity of the training Awolalu and Dapoma (1979:141) reported that the Ashante priest during training abstain from drinks, gossip, quarrel, fights, and must not salute his elders by bending the right knee and touching the ground with the right hand. Formerly, he must not invoke his divinity to harm anyone and must not go out at night. Nwokoro (1995:33) reflecting on the duration of the training submitted that in

Dahomay and Ghana, the training may last two or three years and this period the neophyte would have no sexual relationship, whether married or not. That is to say that they would be diviner preist (Dibia) must observes chastity and strict taboos of food and actions. He frequently has to sleep on hard or bare floor with insufficient food and without bathing for days but smeared with whit native chalk (Nzu) all to learn and bear hardship and discipline. He/She is regarded as married to the deity.

Usually, the training is done by the senior experienced and renowned diviner priest (Master Diviner) and the training involves learning of prayers (Invocationary prayer or Incantationary prayers), dances, songs, rituals, skills, and craft and other things related to the profession. Mbiti (1961:188) observed that what informs the lengthy training of the diviner are the depositories of national customs, knowledge, taboos, theology and oral history of the people. This wide exposure to knowledge qualifies them to act as political heads, judges and ritual experts. The training of diviners differs from place to place and could be simple or complicated depending on the nature of priesthood. According to Kingsley Ocheaku, a diviner himself said that training to become a traditional healer (herbalist) last for four years in Ngwaland and to train to become a diviner last four years as well. For one to be trained to function on dual capacity as healer and diviner, he must have to spend eight year in training. Tasie and Okinedo (2005:127) posted that where priesthood passes on from father to son in quick succession or to the eldest member of the priestly family, training is mostly by observation. In this case, the novice or would-be diviner priest understudies the father\master diviner by observing what he does and by participating in the ritual process perhaps when the incumbent is indisposed by illness or other contingencies of life.

But, where the call is by possession, the novice in his altered state of consciousness might be taught by the deity directly. Ohuonu Ajagba further explained that the neophytes in training have 56 divination seeds to master but admist the number, only sixteen (16) are being used frequently for divination. The trainee may live with the master diviner or may come from his home if it is very near. He added that the sole aim of the training was to acquaint him with the new system of the profession and life (Ohuonu Ajagba, oral interview 2021).

Another respondent –Ahiwe Nwanjoku opined that in the first year of the training, the trainee brings two goats (male and female), four white fowls, four jars of wine, eight kola nuts, Alligator pepper, and two naira, give to the trainer. After this payment, the diviner takes two palm nuts and a cowry shell, sacrifices one white fowl on them and gives to the

apprentice after rubbing them in palm oil. This serve as a charm to the apprentice as the diviner's son or the son of the cult.

Nevertheless, ceremonial ablutions feature prominently at this stage, which comprises washing with various mixtures of leaves, herbs, barks of trees, and roots sacred to the Agwu divinity. Some of the leaves however are to strengthen the ankles for dancing. Others are rubbed on the eye so that they may see very clearly and beyond the ordinary. Others are to awaken the Agwu deity, plants are usually plucked from the grave yard and they are used on the apprentice to enable him communicate with the Ancestors. These physically and psychologically affect the apprentice who incidentally becomes estatic and begins to shake. According to Ahiwe, the trainees often sit by the shrine and tries to listen to the voice of his god with his hair left uncut during the period of training. He also carriers the "*Akpa dibia*" or diviner's bag for his master wherever they go for medical or divinatory assignment (Ahiwe, Nwanjoku, oral interview 2021).

Concerning the second year of the training, Okezie Ujo (a traditional doctor) in oral interview disclosed that skills for the second year includes instructions about the diviner's bag (Akpa dibia) and the content and making frantic effort to acquire his own before his initiation. According to Okezie, Akpa dibia contains numerous things which invoke awe. They are Agwu and the symbolic image of Agwu, Udele-statue of vulture, uchie- a moderate wooden drum, and udu-nta- miniature clay pot: mkpo-nnabe- (tortoise shell), ofo- (symbol of authority) etc. Buttressing his points further, he added that more instructions on the laws and taboos of the Agwu divinity are given to the apprentice while in training. The instructions include: Abstaining from fighting and quarrelling, abstaining from moonlight plays, abstaining from invoking his god to kill anyone irrespective of the level of provocation, Abstaining from public eating and drinking (OkezieUjo, oral interview 2021).

In his own contribution, Caleb Nwanka, adduced that the third year of the training and apprentiship is centered on lectures on incantations, stories and proverbs associated with divination. After the trainee had learnt the incantations and invocations peculiar to diviners, he learns the practice of divination as well as all the subsisting rites of the cult. At the end the diviners in Ngwa land (Ohangwa dibia) will come round and eat, drink make merry with the new diviner for a successful completion of his training. After the entertainment by the new diviner, he is led to the groove where he learns the final secrets of igba aja (divination).

After this, the next stage is the ceremony of initiation. Chijioke Nnaemeka resounds that if one is chosen by the Agwu divinity and he accepts the offers and is trained for it, the other diviners in Ngwa land will come around and initiate him. Initiation is therefore the process of introducing a diviner into the Agwu cult after has training. After the training of the novice, he invites his parents and some of his household informing them that he was about to be initiated into the Agwu cult. It should be noted that some of these his relatives must have been initiated into the Agwu cult before. They will give him '*ofo'* a symbol of authority to carry out his divinatory function, pray for him and bless him by calling on the Ancestors to protect him from all forms of danger. This process is known as "*otutu ebe Agwu''* or "*ido agwu''* in Ngwa parlance.

The next stage is uruagwu or ekwesu agwu or 'imaogwu' meaning mastering of herbs and roots. This implies that the novice has actually decided to minister for the Agwu divinity. Chijioke Nnaemeka further said that each of this initiatory stages is accompanied by some rituals for the first stage 'otutu ebe agwu' or 'ido agwu' the ritual is performed at the base of some sacred trees such as osisi anyasi, osisi uha, osisi ari, osisi dum dum mmiri. The same is applicable to every other stage of initiation for the ritual, a small earthen pot is buried at the base of these trees with Azu ikwere, ofo, cock and hen, Nzu (cohise chalk) water, gun, palm wine. The cock and hen will be four in number respectively. Another small clay pot (oku) will be placed over the buried items containing water and Nzu (cohise chalk).

About the second stage, the Ekwesu Agwu Uruagwu or ''ima ogwu"osisi ogugu that is raffia palm stick installed a midst the sacred trees planted in another position within the compound either in front or at the back of the family house. The raffia palm stick is installed with a life fowl tied or staked on it and left to hang and die and decompose by itself.

It will be recalled that the diviner who trains the novice invites others diviners in Ngwa land (Ohangwa – Dibia) Ngwa diviners association to the initiation ceremony, he offers four jars of palm wine, four white fowls, eight kola nuts, alligators pepper etc. after eating and drinking they jointly call upon the Agwu divinity to bless and protect the new diviner. They erect ''uloagwu'' for the new diviner after performing the necessary sacrifice. The process is called ''avo-agwu'' or ''Nchilata-Agwu''. this ritual is fortified with a tortoise (nnabe), he goat (mkpi), Dog symbol of Agwu-carved wood image of a man and a woman placed in a basket with blood of chicken smeared on them. In the words of Chijioke, any command given to the Agwu with gun or palm wine, cola nut, dog, is speedily honored by the Agwu spirit. This ritual is an indicator that the new diviner and the old diviners

and the Agwu spirit have entered into a covenant relationship. This shrine according to Chijioke is built in front or behind the family house and it is called ''ihu agwu'' some plants as earlier explained are planted around the shrine such as uha, anyasi, dum dum mmiri, opete, ebube dike, Ububa, Osisi Ari etc. all of this plants have their symbolic significance. The Ngwa people believe that ''*uha*'' symbolizes ''*ihejionye ya ha ya*'' meaning whatever thing that is holding anybody spell bound should leave him alone.

Osisi Anaysi: signifies darkness, thick and fair darkness beclouding the client should disappear. Osisi ari-siginifies a place for the invocation of ancestors, it signifies come let ancestors come and render a helping hands osisi du dum:-signifies anything that water touches keeps alive- so all we are praying for is life and longevity to the client. At the shrine, a small oval clay pot called "oku" is dug at the centre. Fowls are killed, blood is smeared all over the shrine, libations poured and prayers said "|All these are done to appease the spirit and inform the deity about the altar for the new diviner. The oldest diviner in Ngwaland performs this ritual (Chijioke Nnemeka, Oral interview 2021). This ceremony leads to the next one "Itu Anya".

For the "Itu Anya" ceremony Abel Nwankwo a respondent declared- the new diviners had to provide the following for the ceremony; two he goats, sixteen white fowls, two yards of white cloth, two yards of red cloth, one big box of gun powder (nsi-egbe), one big sleeping Mat, sixteen big tubers of yam, Npi Nnama (Cow Horn), Kola nut, sixteen jars of palm wine and a sum of 15,000 Naira. The chief priest comes in to pour libation invoking the spirit and the ancestors to come for their assistance. The itu-anya ceremony is conducted by three most elderly diviners one of whom must be the "God father" of the new diviner.

According to Abel no ritual or ceremony is performed on Eke day because it is a day set aside for the veneration of the ancestors. So the Itu-Anya ceremony is carried out in the evening proceeding the Eke market day. The initiation rite includes; massaging the initiate with pepper and other spices to keep him fit for endurance, rubbing his ears, tongue and eyes with concoctions to make him see beyond the ordinary. when the researcher asked for more clarification on the substance used in preparing the concoction, he made mention of "Abuba iche na ugo" meaning parrot feather and eagle feather. A mixture of the two feathers plus other substance will help the diviner see into the spiritual realm ; hear the spirit and discuss with them and then speak the truth to the people ; Other rites include: Asking the initiate to deep his hands into a boiling pot filled with hot water to collect something at the bottom of the pot , making some marks and scars on the body with heated red hot knife smeared with some concoction, compelling the initiate to find a hidden thing with the help of "ebi" without eating anything for all day . Ebi is the spine of a porcupine

on it's body by a diviner for finding hidden things and for recovering of debts. The aim of " ituebi" is to purify the initiate so that he might be able to see clearly the future event and communicate with the Gods , spirits and ancestors. The "ebi" or "ngugu" is believed to fight his enemies and enable him to know the secret of the past , present and future.

About the "ituebi"or "isa-aka" as it is popularly called, Abel explained that the procedure involves: abstaining from bathing during the period, abstaining from sexual intercourse with any woman, sleeping on bare floor or flat wooden plank, Abel continued, They are trained as a group and any member that breaks the rule automatically affect the others and they have to start afresh. The initiates build a cult called "*Ogba*" with sticks and palm fronds round it the palm frond signifies holiness, peace, and as a warning to non-member to stay clear of the area. The initiate contribute money to buy a common clay pot and alligator pepper etc . Different types of herbs and roots are put into this pot and the blood from the hen's mouth is smeared on the concoction. The initiate will enter the "*ogba*" and the concoction from the pot is poured on their hands while rubbing them , the diviner who initiate them will be making some invocation . This implies that he finds hidden things and reveals secret things under the direction of *Agwu* spirit.

The next process is the collection of divination seed (Mkpuru okwe). During the process of discovery of "ebi", the diviner would be dropping some seeds in front of the major shrine in Ngwaland. such as *Amadioha*, *Agwu*, *Ala, Ogwugwu Nnemmiri* etc . The chief priest will go round with the new diviner (novoice ) and collect the seeds (okwe) from the various shrines . These seeds are stored in the tortoise shell for involved is sixteen but only four or eight (as the case may be ) are used simultaneously for easy checking . The sixteen seeds represented the igbo four weeks (izu ano). This collection of seed is followed by the handling of the image of "Agwu"

The next stage is the presentation of the image of Agwu. The chief diviner present the novice with the image of *Agwu* and initiate him there. The image of Agwu is the human status carved out of wood or form with plastic of a man and a woman (Agwu nwoke na agwu nwanyi ). The agwu images are donated the diviner in the community and beyond who are well wishers to the new diviner . The chief diviner selects the four major carved images representing the father "ikenga *agwu*" the wife *"lolo agwu"* the son "*udele agwu"* and the daughter "*akonuche*". These four images are very significant because they represent the patients that consult the diviner by the end of the ceremony , all the images are spread out in front of new diviners altar and two white fowl are killed , their blood is smeared on the image and the feather of the fowl are spread on them , thereby blessing the images and allowing the spirit to dwell in them ( Abel Nwankwo, oral interview 2021).

Ikenna Enwereji posited that the two last stage are *Ima mmiri* ceremony and *ifu ahia mmuo*, for ima mmiri, the notice is taken to the nearby stream here he jumps into the river, washes himself and see people of the underworld and their ancestors . He may not reveal whatever he sees in the water . He is led back home by the diviner with songs and music on this final day of initiation the novice carries a long basket (avo agwu) on his head and a tortoise (nnabe) hanging on his neck . He will visit all the shrine of agwu divinity in the community with songs, fluke and music by other diviners. When they reach at the shrine of any Agwu divinity, the person is laid on the ground facing the sun. A Fowl is killed and the blood put inside his eyes. A lot of medicine is put in his body, the mock burial represents death of a profane life and a new life to a sacred life.

During the initiation ceremony, the initiate is painted with Nzu (cohise chalk ) and uhie (cam wood ). Nzu and uhie represented the dual nature of the diviner .Nzu signifies that his alive – that is why it is rubbed on a new born baby . Uhie signifies that he is dead , That is why uhie is part of the embalmment spices used in the mortuary. The diviner initiate puts on the diviner's robe and given a wedding ring with the Agwu he is being married to called (olammuo) which establishes a special relationship between the agwu divinity and him . The ring is worn at the ankle or in the ear.

Oliver Onwubiko was right when he identified four different rites performed during the installation of a priest :

_ The rubbing of one part of the priest initiate with Nzu and the other with Uhie .
_The wearing of the priestly gab of the deity .
_The third rite is the wearing of the anklet (olammuo) of the deity
_The fourth rite is the carrying of the sacred symbol of the deity in a sacred pot or basket of the deity to the deity's market . This is called ifuahiammuo.

Speaking further Abel Nwankwo concluded that the last stage of the initiation ceremony is the ifu ahia mmuo. In this case, the initiate is taken to such public places like market and village square . By so doing, he is declared a full fledged diviner. After this rite, he begins to divine. The significance of the divination in the market square has two fold – one is for perfection in the office, two is for the preservation and endurance of ordeals. The successful divination in the market square shows that he is nature enough to stand the test of real divination. it should be noted that even at the market place, people with different charms might try the weight of the new diviner with charm to see if he would fumble but where they fail, the new diviner will be applauded by all and called praise names such as Ebube dike, Anyaano, Akwaa Akwuru and things like that. The next section will handle the origin of divination in Ngwa land.

**Diviners and modernity in Ngwa society**

The five hundred years period of Igbo contact with the European world had tremendous negative and positive effect on the traditional religion of the Igbo and it cultural way of life. The missionary movement, which constituted the third European movement, into Africa after slave trade and colonization, completed the attack on the traditional religion of the Igbo. While the first two movement debased and dehumanized the people, the third completed the destruction of the Igbo cultural way of life. Firstly, let us begin with the negative attitudes expressed by the early Europeans towards the Igbo culture and religion in their writing. Using the school system as their main weapon of destruction, they were able to destroy and reject the traditional religion and cultural way of life of the Igbo, in that, none of the children who went to school was allowed to go back to the traditional religion they could no longer associate with their age grade for the rite of initiation nor participate in any of the cultural dances. Those who had call to be diviners were discourage from answering the call. The missionaries condemned polygamy which enhanced the social status of the family and seemingly lighten their domestic chores particularly farming which was the man source of sustenance before the advent of the white man. They equally destroyed the ritual of second burial with regard to some of evil practices associated with it such as burying chief and other important person with slaves. This is one of the positive things the clash of culture achieved in Igbo land but the issue of second burial is what the Igbo have not fully accepted. This is because the practice was to bury an elderly person soon after death with preliminary ceremonies. Then after a year or less, the second burial would take place with a lot more would take mace with a lot more elaborate ceremonies than the first. The culture clash helped to stop the killing of twins in Igbo land and by extension Africa in general. It was an irony that god's gift to humanity was so badly trusted. Kudos to Christianity.

The society is dynamic and not static so is religion. Divination which is an important element of the tradition and culture has been affected by the advent of Christianity and western civilization in Ngwa land.

The diviner (Dibia-aja) was highly honored in ngwa society before advent of Christianity. Their house was a focal point of meeting among the different classes of people, and according to their faith in the oracle, they are bound to obey and perform the prescribed measures once given.

In the pre colonial Ngwa society, the diviner interpret the mysteries of life, convey messages of the gods and ancestors, give guidance in daily affairs to uncover the past and to look into the future. But with the advent of Christianity things have changed. The

traditional religion is no more a primary issue and it has rivalry with challenges and suspicion. The Christian faiths see traditional religion as a great obstacle in the spread of its gospel thereby challenging, condemning and criticizing everything about traditional religion. Hence, divination is seen as superstition. The new Christian converts pick up courage to question the source to question the source and authenticity of divination because it is approved by approved by Christianity.

Before the advent of Christianity and westernization in Ngwa land, the diviners were consulted to know what the future holds for them and to solve some of their problems. But now, people seldom go to the diviners for such inquires. Majority of the Ngwa prefer going to white garment churches or Pentecostal churches where prophecies concerning their lives and destiny are likely to be released. Members of the mainline churches such as Anglicans, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist United Evangelical etc go to their mid-week prayer meeting where prophesies abound to investigate into their future.

Often times the faithful are taught and indoctrinated to pray to God directly telling him all their problems and it would be solved for them. This point is evidenced in the Christian church songs which read.

Kpewe ekpere, yoba chineke ka onyere
Gi aka iyoba umu mmadu odighi onye gaje inyere
Aka.

(This means by interpretation always pray and ask God to help you, no human being can help or save you).

The Christian doctrines which projects God as the 'omni' the almighty the healer, the yoke breaker, the burden lifter, the prayer answering God, the man of war, the wonder working God, the savior, the all sufficient God, the eternal God, the only true God, the ultimate reality, the creator and preserver of all mankind, makes it difficult for the people of Ngwa to consult diviners. But the few who do, do its secretly for fear of being ostracized or suspended by the church.

In naming ceremonies, diviners are no more consulted to know the name that should be given to a child. They are now given Christian (Baptismal) names in the churches which sometimes makes no sense to an Ngwa man. The concept of reincarnation is totally unacceptable to the Christian religion and western civilization. It is seen as superstition and primitive. Western civilization has proved that genes are responsible for the physical resemblance in human beings. Thus the diviners gradually lose their clients.

The building of seminaries and convents by the Christian mission has made the training of the traditional priests, diviners, and prophets in a private cult a thing of the past. Many people in Ngwa land now do not send their children to learn divination instead they send them to these seminaries and convents built by the Christian missions to become priest and reverend sisters.

Besides, many cults belonging to some diviners in Ngwa land have been destroyed by the over-zealous Christian converts who condemn them as fetish. Some of the diviners too have abandoned their calling and cults and have joined the church.

Science and technology has also contributed in making divination unacceptable to the people because it is regarded unscientific. They argue that the divination messages lack empirical proof. Secondly, they argue that no diviner has ever predicted the day he would die.

Westernization, urbanization and industrialization have undermined the traditional knowledge of divination. Truly, science and technology have enhanced the people's lifestyle as they enjoy a more comfortable life. Only few farmers will pray to the god of fertility when fertilizer will make his crop grow well. Nonetheless, infant mortality and belief in witchcraft are on the decline due to good hygienic environment. All these make divination a superstitious belief.

As a result of urbanization, people from the rural area like some remote parts of the Ngwa land, migrate to the urban centers like Aba, Omoba, Abayi, Ekeakpara, Alaoji et cetera in search for jobs. Others go as far as Lagos, Onitsha, Owerri, Umuahia, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, more developed cities in Nigeria in search of greener pastures has denied the guild of its rich Cultus. The old fears of the divinities that are quick to anger are replaced with the notion of God who is slow to anger and I even ready to forgive even more than man is prone to sin.

Spiritual churches pose a great threat to divination. Some of these churches have succeeded in mixing some elements of traditional religion with Christianity. The result of this syncretism is a church where ecstatic stuff ritual, seeing of visions and dreaming of dreams and making of predictions are dominant. These make them popular among the people, especially the marginal elements of the society (Njoku Athanasius 1994:65).

Worst still, the African independence churches such as the cherubim and seraphim, the church of the lord, the apostolic church, etc claim to give oracles and perform miracles, the

prophets among them give visions and interpret dreams. They use holy water, sacred oil, ashes, candles, incense to heal and to prevent diseases, to the detriment and popularity (Njoku Athanasius 1994:66).

Paradoxically, the advent of Christianity in Ngwa land has not fully solved most of the people's problems as the people still wear protective traditional objects prepared by the diviners and medicine men. These protective medicines are sometimes hung ant entrances of villages, house, farmlands and shops and markets. The Christian converts still straddle between Christianity and their Ngwa traditional worldviews. Christianity is therefore practiced with a sly a problem of Christian conversion in Africa, and elsewhere ( Gbule 2011)

**Conclusion**

Diviners are important members of Okpu Umuobo community. In Okpu Umuobo diviners are called in different ways such as in dreams, visions, by hereditary, by apprenticeship and by Agwu possession. The *Agwu* spirit (spirit of divination) possesses people he chooses. Some people are possessed knowingly and some unknowingly. The signs of possession are noticed through some abnormal behaviours such as confusion, forgetfulness, leaking pockets (Aka ocha), barrenness of the possessor's wife. If the person resists serving the *Agwu* spirit, he may be struck blind, or visited by terrible sickness or death. After the call to be a diviner, they are trained an initiated into the traditional guild of divination. There is social differentiation among diviners in Okpu Umuobo. Each member of Okpu Umobo with challenge knows which class of diviner to consult for solution to his or her predicament. Hence each class of diviner has his own area of specialty, even though often times their roles overlap. We rehearse for emphasis that divination is alive and well in Okpu Umuobo despite the forces of social change and modernity.

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**Oral Interviews**

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Dike Maduforo (oral interview, 2022)

Eneogwe Sampson (oral interview, 2022)

Ikechi ihesuilo (oral interview, 2022)

Ikenna Enwereji (oral interview, 2022)

Okechi Egbulefu (oral interview, 2022)

Onyelucheya Nwafor (oral interview, 2022)

Stanley Onyekwere (oral interview, 2022)