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The Role of Igbo Divination in Traditional Spiritual and Social Life

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Igbo Divination Vessel - ókwá ójì bowl - Nigeria

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The Igbo Divination deeply exists in the traditional spirituality and beliefs of the Igbo living in southeastern Nigeria. It is a strong system used to communicate with the gods, ancestors, or spirits, solve problems, and guide life decisions. It is unlike Western astrology or fortune telling that uses cards or stars. Igbo Divination is a spiritual practice involving rituals done by the dibias (priests or diviners). It shows how Igbo's views the world, that connects both physical and spiritual things, and where Chukwu (Supreme God), chi (personal spirit), ancestors, and alusi (deities) control life.

This explanation will discuss the main Igbo Divination Methods, the tools used, how they operate, why they are important, and how they are currently operating.

Main Things That Contributed to The Success Of The Igbo Divination

Igbo Divination is not just used for predicting the future, but to find the root of problems (illness, bad luck, fights) while providing solutions like sacrifices, rituals, or a change of behavior. The main beliefs are: Connection: The living, ancestors, and spirits are being joined together by the divination. Destiny and Free Will: Your chi can shape your life, but divination can also assist in changing or shaping it. Signs From Nature: weather, animal behavior, and spiritual messages guide the dibias.

The dibias are consulted for big decisions like marriage, farming, travel, or when faced with difficult cases. The dibias are those trained



spiritually, who pass messages to the spiritual world.

Afa Divination (Igba Afa) This is the most popular divination, like conversations with ancestors. Tools: Ofo seeds, palm nuts, Afa beads, or divination tray.

How it Operates Problems laid down by villagers, like (why is my farm not yielding well?), presenting little gifts like kola nut, palm wine, and money. The dibias prays to Chukwu, ancestors, and Chi and then throws seeds or beads to the ground. How it falls (up/down, close/far) will give answers based on knowledge of the dibia. Dibias explains the cause (e.g., angry spirits) and what to do (e.g., sacrifice to the Ala goddess).

Igbo Mmuo (calling spirits) This is a direct discussion with the spirit; sometimes, dibia goes into trance. Tools: Ofo stick, sacrifice (fowl blood, palm wine), drum/bell.

How it Operates: Shrines are set by the dibias, using drums or herbs to invoke the spirits.

Spirit communicates through the dibia or any possessed person. Spirits give answers to questions (e.g., "who cursed a particular family) Solutions might come in the form of sacrifices or cleansing.

Iju Ese (Reading signs) This is used to check natural things like animal movement or dreams. Tools: No special tools, just an observation, like flying birds, snakes crossing roads, or storms. **How it Operates** Through signs (e.g owl crying close to houses) the dibia will get to interpret if it is a bad or good omen. It can be a blessing or a warning based on the situation.

Ikpu Alusi (pleasing Deities) This is done to ask alusi (gods)for forgiveness when they are angry. Tools: shrines, sacrifice (yam, goat), cowries/stones.

How it Operates Dibia consults the deities (e.g, Agwu) about why it is



angry. If these signs display anger, dibia will prescribe a sacrifice (e.g, the killing of a goat)

Why It Is Important Spiritual connections: it joins the living and the ancestors. Community peace: If a problem exists in the village, divination brings Unity. Law and Morality: It shows if anyone breaks the law and commits atrocities.

How It Is Presently Affected by Christianity: Many Igbo have stopped practicing it because of its condemnation by churches. **Still Practiced By Most People:** Some dibias are active in villages, while some practice Christian prayers. **Not Believed By Youths:** Youths and those in urban areas are not practicing it like most people. **Some Want It Back:** Cultural groups and diaspora are trying to make it remembered again.

Igbo Divination Methods (Afa, Igo Mmuo, Iju Ese, Ikpu Alusi) is a strong spiritual practice that helps the people of Igbo solve problems and connect them to their ancestors. Though Christianity has reduced it, most people still use it, especially in villages. You must ask the dibias and elders who know the tradition for more information.

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An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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