

Igba Nkwu Nwanyi Ceremony of Igbo People of Nigeria

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Abstract

Igboland, also known as Southeastern Nigeria and some parts of South Nigeria, is the homeland of the Igbo people. It is a cultural and common linguistic region in southern Nigeria. Geographically, it is divided by the lower Niger River into two unequal sections – an eastern and a western section. The states captured in this area includes: Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, and minor parts of Delta, Benue and Rivers states. The Igbo culture and traditions are filled with many colourful ceremonies that distinguish them from the other tribes in Nigeria. Igba Nkwu Nwanyi is one of the many colourful traditions of the Igbo people, and its intricacies vary from one area to another.

Keywords: Igba Nkwu Nwanyi Ceremony; Dowry; Unubi; Inyomona; Child-Groom.

Introduction

Igba nkwu Nwanyi, which simply means the traditional bride's wine-carrying ceremony, is the marriage rites and celebrations between the man and his bride in the presence of their family, friends and extended family, in the bride's family home. In the words of Umuigbo Unite Blog: it is an affair that joins a man and woman as well as their families and villages.

Marriage in Igboland is not just an affair between the future husband and wife but also involves the parents, the extended family and villages. First the groom asks his potential partner to marry him. Assuming that this is affirmative, the groom will visit the bride's residence accompanied by his father (or in some cases uncles, brothers, or even friends). The groom's father will introduce himself and his son and explain the purpose of his visit.

The process varies from one geographical area, even within the individual state to another but the major features which are common to all are the payment of dowry and wine-carrying. Now, dowries are common but the amount paid also differs from one area to another or even from village to village or town to town. The quantity of palmwine (the local wine tapped from palm trees, called *nkwu ocha*), also differs from town to town or village to village.

I will not forget the famous "list" on which the items in the right quantities or amounts are listed. Now that's the very first thing the groom asks for before he proceeds with anything concerning the ceremony. Without the "list," there is no guidance on the requirements for the occasion.

Dowry is simply the symbolic payment made by the groom, either as a wedding gift or an actual monetary payment from the groom to the bride's

family (usually the father of the bride, if he is still alive, or any other male member of the family or extended family). The amount paid also varies from town to town.

Ways of Dowry

Again this varies from place to place as over time, improvements and amendments have been done to the old archaic practices to add more colour and content to the ceremony and also to make it easier, more colourful (and affordable) in some places and to make it enjoyable.

I will take a town in Anambra state as a case study:

Igba Nkwu Nwanyi the Unubi way

Unubi is a town in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra state, Nigeria.

In Unubi, when a man has found a girl he wants to take as wife, he approaches her and if and when she accepts his proposal, he makes an unscheduled visit to the girl's family house on any day of his choosing. On this first visit, he goes alone to visit with the girl and her family.

This is the visit in which the father and mother of the girl get to ask questions like:

"what is your name?"

"where are you from?"

"which town and village in particular" (if it's a town or village they know very well or even a clan or kindred they know, they will ask him the name of his father and sometimes his mother's name too).

"what do you do for a living?" (In fact this would be one of the earlier questions as this would prepare their minds as to whether the young man is capable of taking care of their daughter and the home).

Then there is the 2nd visit during which the youngman comes with one or two or more of his people or friends to tell the father of the girl his intentions towards their daughter. This is called "Iku aka" or "Knocking." The girl is called out to answer if she likes the youngman and would accept to marry him. If she says yes, then the youngman and his people are asked to go home and await the family answer. During this visit, the young man comes with gifts solely for the girl and her friends. The gifts include, soaps, coconuts, bread, "Ikpakiri" a local snack made from corn, pepper and salt.

In the olden days, the visits are up to four times. This is to ensure that there is no change of heart. It is part of courtship before the actual event. These days, because of city/urban dwellings (the bride and the groom could be staying in distant cities, or the groom could be a native of a distant land), everything is squeezed into two visits.

This is the juncture at which the "list" is sent to the young man detailing the items in their right quantities and amounts he would provide as the custom and tradition demand for the *Igba Nkwu Nwanyi* rites and ceremony.

The items may include, in their right quantities, *Oji Igbo* (the native kolanuts), garden eggs, palm wine, crates of beer, crates of malt drinks, and other soda drinks, (the beer, malt drinks and soda are modern improvement as not everyone drinks the native palmwine), tubers of yam, mature and well fed goats, fowls, he also makes sure that the families and friends who attend the occasion are well fed and taken care of on the day of the ceremony.

Note that I keep using "*the youngman*" instead of "*the family*." This is because in most Igbo tradition and custom (if not all), although the marriage is between families, the man/groom is solely responsible for providing everything needed to marry his bride. This shows that he is of age, and he is also capable of providing and taking proper care of his home. It simply shows maturity.

There is also a tradition where a child groom is married for. This is a special case where the groom in question is an only child/son of family without any more hope of having another son (maybe the parents are old and the father does not want to marry a 2nd wife). In this case, a young wife is married for the young groom by the family (everything provided by the young groom's family).

On the day of the *Igba nkwu nwanyi*, the bride comes in accompanied by the "*ndi ogo*" (the in-laws) with 10litres of palm wine on her head which she goes straight to deliver to her mother. That drink belongs to the "*Inyomona*" the married women in the immediate and extended family. The in-laws are welcomed and given sips and the "*Oji Igbo*" native kolanuts are blessed, shared to everyone and eaten.

While all these are happening, the bride goes in to her father's house or family house to await the settlement or payment of the dowry, while "*Ndi ogo*" go into a closed door meeting and negotiation on the dowry. And until the amount is agreed upon and paid to the father or the representative of the family, she will remain in the confines of the family house.

At the agreement and payment of the dowry, in this case N15,000.00 (Fifteen Thousand Naira, only), the in-laws rejoin the seated guests and the celebration continues. As long as the father or the family accepts the dowry, this means that the girl has been married out to the groom and his family. It is good to note here that the amount of money the family accepts does not have anything to do with the value placed on their daughter; neither does it have anything to do with selling her. The dowry amount is just symbolic. In some cases, the father of the girl would put the money in an envelope and hand it back to the groom, charging him in a prayer to use it (symbolically) in taking care of his daughter. This is also the juncture where all the other items on the "list" are presented to the girl's family. They are scrutinized to make sure they are of the right quantity, quality, size, and so on.

As soon as everything is as it should be, the bride is then presented to the guests, radiantly dressed in any of the colourful Igbo women attire. She is then asked by her father with an "Oba", a native cup for drinking wine, filled with "Nkwu ocha" the native white wine, to locate and show the other guests, usually from their own part of the family, who her husband is. This is another fun part as the husband sits on another chair usually hidden from her. This means she goes about in the crowd with the cup of wine in her hands, accompanied by her friends in search of him. Other young men sitting around would stretch their hands to accept the cup, wishing it was for them, but the bride knows her husband and so she ignores these men, and continues the search until she finds her husband.

On locating him, there is a loud shout of joy and applause as she kneels before him and hands the cup of wine to him. After drinking, the groom rises up, helps his wife to her feet and together they return the cup of wine to the father of the bride with a token, (any amount of money he wishes). The father of the bride then says a prayer of fruitfulness in child-bearing and wealth, abundance, joy, etc on them while they are on their knees.

After the prayers, it is celebration galore as there is music and dance and eating and drinking. Usually, the bride's family celebrates till late in the evening after the in-laws have taken their bride home. The next day finds the "Umunna" the kindred people back at the bride's father's house to continue the celebration as the remaining drinks and meat would be shared accordingly.

The last event in this ceremony is the "Amarum ogo." This is event of visiting the groom's family to know or acquaint the bride's family with the knowledge of where exactly their in-laws live. This is done on a day selected and agreed upon by the two families. This time around, the groom's family is the host.

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