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IDEME NWADA NA UNOR: A RIPOSTE TO THE MORALITY OF TRADITIONAL METHOD OF ADOPTION BY ANIOMA PEOPLE

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Abstract
This paper examines and defends *Ideme nwada na unor*, a traditional form of adoption practised by the Anioma people of Delta State, Nigeria, against the claim by some Christian moralists that it is immoral, primitive and sinful. In this custom, a family that has no male child may, through a communal decision, allow its first daughter, known as *Ada*, to bear a male child in her father's compound. That child is then adopted as the legitimate son and heir of her father, not as a grandson. The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual and critical method. It uses philosophical analysis and draws on Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics (Fletcher, 1966), existential insights from Heidegger (Heidegger, 1962), and African communal philosophy as articulated by Mbiti (Mbiti, 1969) and Gyekye (Gyekye, 1996). Findings show that Anioma morality is communal and pragmatic, rooted in lineage continuity and welfare, and that moral judgement cannot be detached from existential context. The practice is not driven by promiscuity but by the need to resolve childlessness, loneliness and fear of lineage extinction in a patrilineal society (Amadiume, 1987; Uchendu, 1965). When viewed through situation ethics, the custom is morally justified because it produces the most loving and responsible outcome for the family and community. The paper concludes that any morality that ignores the concrete problems of a people becomes artificial to them. It recommends reorientation of moral education, legal recognition of customary adoption that is not repugnant to natural justice, inclusion of African traditional values in school curricula, and further empirical fieldwork in Anioma communities.
Keywords: Adoption, Anioma, Morality, Situation Ethics, Culture, Patrilineal

Introduction

Life in any society is organised around shared ways of solving problems. When people face real difficulties, they create customs that help them cope and continue. Philosophy exists to look at those human problems and ask whether the solutions we have are reasonable and humane. This is why we must examine customs not just by asking whether they fit a foreign rule book, but whether they help people live better lives where they are. Among the Anioma people of Delta North in Delta State, Nigeria, one such solution is *Ideme nwada na unor*. Anioma is an acronym coined to bring together Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ika and Oshimili, the Igbo speaking peoples of Delta State. The Anioma are largely patrilineal. Lineage, inheritance of the obi, which is the ancestral house, and performance of burial and ancestral rites depend on having a male heir. When a family has no male child, the pain is not private. It is communal. It touches the extended family, the umunna, and the ancestors. People worry about who will keep the name, who will inherit the land, who will pour libation when the father dies.

To deal with this problem, Anioma tradition allows a daughter, usually the first daughter or *Ada*, to bear a child for her father. The child is adopted as the father's legitimate son. The community knows the mother. The biological father's identity is usually kept private and is socially irrelevant because the child belongs fully to the grandfather's lineage. The child is not seen as born out of wedlock. He is not called *nwa nkwo* or bastard in the local sense. He is welcomed as son and heir.

With the coming of Christianity from Western Europe and North America, a new moral judgement arrived. Many Christian teachers described this custom as sinful, promiscuous and primitive. They used a moral absolutist lens, the view that some acts are always wrong no matter the situation. This paper disagrees with that view. Its aim is to offer a riposte, a reasoned reply, to the claim that *Ideme nwada na unor* is immoral.

The central argument is simple. Morality must have a human face. A moral rule that cannot help people with their real problems will feel artificial to them. Drawing on Fletcher's situation ethics, which says love should be the final measure of right and wrong (Fletcher, 1966), and on Heidegger's idea that humans are thrown into situations they did not choose but must still respond to (Heidegger, 1962), the paper argues that *Ideme nwada na unor* is morally justified within its context.

This paper will first review related literature, then explain its methodology, clarify what the practice means, explain the Anioma worldview that supports it, discuss what morality means, compare Western and Anioma forms of adoption, present the Christian critique, use situation ethics to justify the custom, address honest objections about consent and stigma, and then conclude with recommendations.

Literature Review: Related Customs in Africa and Beyond

Scholars of African kinship have long documented flexible forms of marriage and adoption that solve problems of succession. Among the Igbo, the practice of woman to woman marriage is well recorded. Amadiume

(1987) showed that a wealthy or childless woman could marry another woman, pay bride price, and become the sociological father of that woman's children. The children belong to her lineage, not to the biological father. Uchendu (1965) and Basden (1966) also noted that Igbo customary law allowed adoption of children within the extended family to secure inheritance. These practices are not seen as sexual orientation but as social strategies.

In other African societies similar customs exist. Among the Nuer of South Sudan, a woman can marry a woman to obtain children for her husband's lineage. Among the Lovedu and Zulu of Southern Africa, female husbands are documented. Among the Kikuyu of Kenya, a childless widow may take a wife to bear children for her late husband. What these customs share is the idea that social parenthood can be separated from biological parenthood. This separation is not strange in Africa. It is part of a communal worldview where belonging is defined by acceptance and ritual, not just blood.

Western literature on adoption also shows that adoption has always been about social need rather than just biology. Even in Roman law, adoption was used to secure heirs for political reasons. Modern statutory adoption continues that tradition. It says a child can become full member of a family even without blood tie. If that is acceptable in Western law, then Anioma customary adoption which keeps blood tie through the daughter should be even easier to understand. It keeps both blood and social belonging within the same extended family.

Previous studies on Anioma customs are very scarce. There is little documented work that focuses specifically on Anioma tradition on its own. For this reason, one reliable way to understand Anioma culture is to look at Igbo culture more broadly, since Anioma is historically and culturally part of the wider Igbo world. Onunwa (1990) examined Igbo traditional religion and showed that customs around lineage continuity are closely tied to beliefs about ancestors. A man without an heir is seen as someone whose chain of remembrance may break. That is why families go to great lengths to secure an heir. This literature therefore supports the view that *Ideme nwada na unor* is not an isolated oddity, but part of a broader African pattern of using customary law to solve existential problems.

The gap in literature is that few philosophers have defended the practice explicitly against Christian moral critique using a clear moral theory. Most anthropologists describe it, but they do not offer a normative defence. This paper fills that gap by using situation ethics as a philosophical tool.

Methodology

This study does not claim to be a full ethnography. It is a philosophical defence that uses existing literature and cultural knowledge. However, it recognises that philosophy without attention to lived experience can become abstract. That is why it tries to stay close to how Anioma elders explain the custom. For example, elders in Ibusa explained that *Ideme* was not done in a hurry. The family would consult divination, pray, and discuss with the *Ada*. If the *Ada* was already married, the arrangement would be different. Sometimes a younger daughter who is not yet married would be asked. These details show that the custom was flexible and sensitive to circumstance, which supports a situation ethics reading.

Another methodological point is about language. Anioma dialect varies, and terms like *unor*, *obi*, *umunna* have nuances that English cannot fully capture. *Unor* is not just a house. It is a compound with ancestral significance. *Obi* is not just a building. It is the heart of the family and the seat of the ancestors. *Umunna* is not just extended family. It is the group that decides on land and lineage matters. Translating these terms simply as house, house and extended family loses some meaning. This paper tries to keep the Anioma terms alongside English translations to preserve that nuance.

Finally, the paper adopts a critical stance towards both Christian absolutism and uncritical traditionalism. It does not say every tradition is good. It says this particular tradition has a rational and moral basis when understood in context. It also says the tradition can be reformed to better respect consent and child welfare. This balanced approach is in line with Gyekye's (1996) idea of critical traditionalism, which says we should examine tradition critically and keep what is valuable while reforming what is problematic.

This study uses a conceptual, analytical and critical method, which is common in African philosophy. Conceptually, it clarifies the meaning of *Ideme nwada na unor* and the key terms such as adoption, morality and patrilineal. This is necessary because many readers outside Anioma may not know what the practice entails (Uchendu, 1965). Analytically, it breaks down arguments for and against the practice and examines their logic. Critically, it evaluates those arguments using moral theory. The paper is qualitative and based on secondary sources: published books on African philosophy and religion (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1996; Wiredu, 1980), classic works in ethics (Fletcher, 1966; Omoregbe, 1993), Igbo ethnography (Basden, 1966; Uchendu, 1965; Amadiume, 1987), and recent studies on customary law. It also draws on the author's familiarity with Anioma culture and informal discussions with elders in communities such as Ubulu-Uku, Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, though it is not a full ethnographic fieldwork report. The aim is to give a philosophical defence that is grounded in real cultural experience rather than speculation.

Conceptual Clarification: *Ideme Nwada na Unor*

Ideme nwada na unor can be broken into parts. *Ideme* means to make or cause to happen, *nwada* means daughter, *na* means in, *unor* means house or compound. So literally it means that my daughter should bear a child in my house for me. It is a form of customary adoption.

How does it work in practice? Suppose a man has only daughters and no son. The extended family, the *umunna*, meets. They discuss the lack of a male heir and what it means for continuity. With the consent of the man's wife and his first daughter, the *Ada*, it is agreed that the *Ada* will bear a child in her father's compound. The *Ada* may be unmarried or, in some older accounts, a widow who has returned to her father's house. The arrangement is not secret. It is open and is sealed with prayers and sometimes libation to inform the ancestors.

The biological father of the child is not presented as the social father. In many cases the mother knows who he is, but the community does not treat him as the owner of the child. This is different from Western ideas where biological paternity is central. Here social and legal paternity matters more. The child takes the surname and lineage of his grandfather, inherits from him, and performs his funeral rites. As Amadiume (1987) showed for Igbo societies more broadly, the positions of daughter, son, husband and wife can be flexible and are defined by social role rather than strictly by biology.

Who is the *Ada*? In Anioma, the *Ada* is the first daughter. She has a special ritual status. She is often called *Adaobi* or *Ada ebo*. She is respected and has responsibilities in her father's house. In some communities she can even represent the family in certain rites. Because of this status, asking her to bear a child for the family is not seen as degrading but as honourable, though it places a heavy responsibility on her.

Is the practice still happening? Yes, but less openly than before. Christianity, Western education and statutory law have reduced its frequency. Many families now opt for other strategies, including church prayers for a male child or reliance on statutory adoption. However, in rural areas and among families strongly attached to tradition, it still occurs. People may not talk about it publicly because of church stigma, but elders confirm it is still an available option.

Two important points help outsiders understand it better. First, this is not the same as a child born from casual sex outside marriage. That type of birth often carries stigma for both mother and child. An *Ideme* child is different. He is expected, prayed for and welcomed. Second, it is not incest. There is no sexual relationship between father and daughter. The daughter has a child with another man, and that child is adopted by her father. This distinction is often lost when critics quickly label it as immoral.

The Anioma Worldview and the Premium on Male Child

It is also worth noting that male child preference is not unique to Anioma. It exists in many parts of Nigeria and Africa, as well as in Asia. What is unique is how different societies solve it. Some resort to repeated childbearing in hope of a son. Some adopt. Anioma's solution through the daughter is distinctive because it keeps the child within the bloodline and within the compound. This shows cultural creativity. Instead of looking outside for a solution, the family looks inside, to its own daughter.

Philosophically, this creativity reflects what Heidegger (1962) called projectivity. Humans project themselves into the future and create possibilities. Factcity limits us, but we are not determined by it. We can transcend it through action. *Ideme nwada na unor* is an example of transcendence. A family that is limited by childlessness transcends that limit by creating a new kinship arrangement.

The Anioma worldview is communal. Mbiti (1969) famously said I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am. This captures the idea that a person exists through community. Gyekye (1996) also argued that African societies balance individual rights with communal responsibility. A person's problem is the family's problem. A family's problem is the community's problem.

In such a worldview, lineage matters a great deal. The patrilineal system means descent is traced through the male line. Land, titles and ancestral rites pass through sons. A man without a son may feel he has failed to secure his place among the ancestors. This is not just about property. It is about existential security. Who will remember my name? Who will keep my *obi* alive? Who will pour libation for me?

This pressure is visible in names. Anioma and other Igbo groups give names that celebrate male children. Names like *Okeibunor*, which means male child completes the home, *Okwudike*, meaning male talk is strong, and *Okechukwu*, meaning male child is God's gift, show how much value is placed on sons. Basden (1966), an early observer of Igbo life, noted the disappointment and anxiety that followed the absence of male children. Uchendu (1965) also explained that Igbo social organisation is built around the male headed compound and the need for continuity.

Does this mean female children are not valued? That would be an overstatement. Daughters are loved and are crucial for alliances through marriage. But in terms of lineage continuity in a patrilineal system, sons have a specific ritual role that daughters who marry out cannot fulfil because they join their husband's lineage. This creates what we can call existential anxiety for a man with only daughters.

It is also important to understand that African traditional thought does not separate the living and the dead. The ancestors are part of the community. Having a male heir who will perform funeral rites and keep the ancestral shrine is seen as a duty to both living and dead. Failure to do so is seen as breaking a chain.

The Notion of Morality

Morality refers to principles about what is right and wrong, good and bad in human behaviour. It helps us decide how to live with others. Omoregbe (1993) defined ethics as the systematic study of morality, concerned with human conduct and character. Morality judges human actions based on reason and the human purpose.

People often talk about morality as if there is only one set of rules for everyone everywhere. But philosophy shows us there are different ways to think about morality. Three are useful for this paper. First is moral absolutism. This is the view that some actions are always right or always wrong no matter the situation. Many Christian moralists hold this view. They say fornication and adultery are intrinsically evil, so any custom that involves a woman bearing a child outside Christian marriage must be sinful. This is the main position this paper argues against. Second is cultural relativism. This is the view that moral rules come from culture and should be judged within that culture. Wiredu (1980) and Gyekye (1996) have argued that African morality is rooted in communal welfare and human flourishing, not in abstract rules imported from elsewhere. Mbiti (1969) also showed that African religion and morality are deeply communal and practical. Third is situation ethics. This theory was developed by Joseph Fletcher, an American theologian, in his book *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Fletcher, 1966). Fletcher said there is only one absolute: love, understood as agape, selfless concern for the other. All other rules are useful guides, but they can be set aside if love requires it in a particular situation. For Fletcher, whether an act is right depends on whether it produces the most loving outcome.

There is also an existential dimension. Heidegger (Heidegger, 1962) described human existence as being thrown into a world we did not choose. We find ourselves in situations, facticity, that limit us. At the same time we have the ability to project into the future, existentiality, and try to make something meaningful. Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 1953) also reminded us that philosophy should help us see clearly the state of affairs before trying to solve contradictions.

Western Adoption versus Anioma Adoption

Western adoption as understood in statutory law is the legal process where a person or couple takes another person's child and becomes the legal parent. The court issues an order that severs the legal tie with biological parents and creates a new tie with adoptive parents. In Nigeria, this is governed by laws such as the *Child Rights Act 2003* and various state adoption laws.

Moral arguments for Western adoption usually include three points. First, child welfare. Every child deserves a stable, loving family. Second, parental autonomy. Biological parents who cannot care for a child are given a responsible alternative to abandonment. Third, family formation. People who cannot have children biologically can experience parenthood. Anioma adoption shares the same moral goals. It gives a child a family and a family a child. It prevents a lineage from disappearing. But its mechanism is different. In Western adoption the child comes from outside the family. In Anioma adoption the child comes from inside the bloodline, through the daughter. In Western adoption the state legitimises the process. In Anioma adoption the *umunna* and ancestors legitimise it. As Basden (1966) and Uchendu (1965) documented, Igbo customary law recognises various forms of adoption and woman to woman marriage as legitimate ways of solving problems of succession. Amadiume (1987) gave a detailed analysis of how Igbo gender flexibility allows a woman to act as a father or husband in social terms.

Another difference is about identity. Western thought often puts biology first. Anioma thought puts social role first. Who will perform the rites? Who belongs to this *obi*? This is why the biological father's identity can be private. It does not affect the child's social identity.

The Christian Critique and Its Limits

Christian critics raise two main objections. First, they say the practice encourages moral decadence and promiscuity because it normalises childbearing outside marriage. Second, they say it violates biblical injunctions against fornication and adultery and therefore is sin against God.

These objections sound strong at first, but they have limits. They assume that any childbearing outside Christian marriage is automatically promiscuous. That is not accurate for *Ideme nwada na unor*. The practice is deliberate, communal and procreative in intent, not hedonistic. Promiscuity implies casual, uncommitted sexual activity for pleasure. *Ideme* is the opposite. It is planned, discussed, prayed over and aimed at producing an heir.

The critique also ignores context. It applies a universal rule without asking about the situation. This is where Fletcher's situation ethics becomes relevant. Fletcher (1966) argued that moral rules are not absolute. What matters is whether an act is loving in its situation.

There is also a historical dimension. Christianity came to Africa with Western culture. As Mbiti (1969) and others have shown, missionaries often condemned African customs not because they were inherently evil but

because they did not fit Western Christian norms. Some customs deserved criticism, but others were misunderstood. *Ideme nwada na unor* was one of those misunderstood.

Of course, Christian ethics is concerned with holiness and obedience to God. That concern is valid for Christians. But the question is whether Christians should impose that standard as a universal civil law to judge a customary practice that predates Christianity in Anioma land and serves a clear social function. Gyekye (1996) argued that a moral system should promote human well-being and communal flourishing.

Situation Ethics as Justification

Fletcher's situation ethics offers a clear framework to justify *Ideme nwada na unor*. Fletcher said there are three approaches to ethics: legalism, antinomianism and situationism. Legalism says follow the law no matter what. Antinomianism says ignore all laws. Situationism says respect laws as useful guides but be ready to set them aside when love demands it (Fletcher, 1966). For Fletcher, love, agape, is the only absolute.

To illustrate, Fletcher gave a famous example from the Second World War. A German mother was separated from her family and held in a prison camp in Ukraine. The only way she could be released was if she became pregnant, because pregnant women were sent home for humanitarian reasons. She arranged to become pregnant with a fellow prisoner, not out of lust but to return to her husband and children who desperately needed her. After verification of pregnancy she was released, reunited with her family, and the child was loved as the one who saved the family. A legalist would call her an adulteress. Fletcher said her action was morally right because it served love and reunion. The situation made the act good.

This is the *kpim*, the central point, of situation ethics. The same act can be wrong in one situation and right in another depending on what love requires.

Now apply this to Anioma. The existential situation is male childlessness in a patrilineal society where lineage matters for inheritance, identity and ancestral rites. The man and his family did not choose this situation. It is facticity, to use Heidegger's term (Heidegger, 1962). The custom of *Ideme nwada na unor* is a situational response. It says let the daughter bear a son for the family so that love, continuity and responsibility are preserved. Just as Fletcher's German mother broke a rule about adultery to save her family, the Anioma family bends a rule about childbearing outside Christian marriage to save its lineage.

Does this mean anything goes? No. Fletcher insisted that situation ethics is not antinomian. You must still ask whether the act truly serves love and whether there is no better alternative that also serves love. In Anioma's case, alternatives today include statutory adoption, but statutory adoption does not solve the specific problem of blood lineage and ancestral rites for many elders.

Furthermore, *Ideme* avoids greater evils. Without a male heir, families face land disputes, social stigma and anxiety. Some families might resort to child theft, false claims of paternity or endless conflicts. Customary adoption provides a peaceful, accepted solution. It is, in Fletcher's language, the most loving thing to do in that situation.

Fletcher's book *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Fletcher, 1966) was published in 1966 and caused immediate debate. He identified four working principles, which include: pragmatism, relativism, positivism and personalism. Pragmatism means we should judge by what works in practice. Relativism means rules are relative to love. Positivism means faith in love as ultimate. Personalism means people matter more than rules. Critics said situation ethics was too permissive. Fletcher replied that it still requires careful calculation of consequences and genuine concern for the other. This approach aligns with African communal ethics. Gyekye (1996) argued that African morality is consequential and looks at whether an act promotes human well-being. Wiredu (1980) also said African moral thought is humanistic and concerned with harmonising social relations.

It is important to note that Anioma is not a homogeneous group. There are differences between Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ika and Oshimili in dialect and some customs. However, the practice of *Ideme nwada na unor* is known across these subgroups with slight variations in name and ritual. In some places it is called *idebe nwa ada* or *igba nwa ada*. The core idea remains the same: a daughter bears a child for her father's lineage. This shared understanding suggests that the custom is not an isolated invention but a deep seated response to patrilineal pressures in the region.

The fear of lineage extinction is not just cultural. It has economic consequences. In Anioma, land is largely held by families and passed down through male lines. A man without a son may worry that his land will be taken by distant relatives or that his daughters, who will marry out, will not be able to defend his farm. Having a son who stays in the compound and works the land provides economic security. It also provides social security in old age, as sons are expected to care for aging parents. These practical concerns make the custom more than symbolic. It is about livelihood and care.

From a philosophical point of view, the custom raises questions about what it means to be a person. In Western philosophy, personhood is often tied to individual autonomy. In African philosophy, as Wiredu (1980) and Gyekye (1996) argued, personhood is tied to community and responsibility. A person is someone who fulfils

duties to family and ancestors. A man without an heir may feel his personhood is incomplete because he cannot fulfil his duty to continue the lineage. *Ideme nwada na unor* helps him achieve personhood in the communal sense.

Addressing Honest Objections: Consent, Stigma and the Child

A strong defence must not ignore honest objections. Three are important. First, consent of the daughter. Does the *Ada* freely agree or is she forced by family pressure? In older accounts, communal pressure was strong and daughters had limited ability to refuse. That raises ethical concerns. Today, however, the emphasis has shifted. In Ubulu-Uku, Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, elders interviewed informally say they now seek the daughter's explicit agreement. Some families offer her elevated status, land or financial support. The moral defence of the custom today must include genuine consent. Without it, it would be coercive and would fail Fletcher's test of love. Second, stigma. Does the practice expose the daughter to stigma? In some Christian communities yes, she may be judged. But within traditional Anioma understanding, the reverse is true. An *Ada* who bears a child for her father is seen as courageous and honourable. She is praised for saving her father's house. The stigma around *Ideme* comes largely from outside the traditional system, from churches that label it as sin. Third, the child's right to know his biological father. Modern child rights discourse emphasises the right to identity. In Western law, a child may want to know his biological parents. In Anioma customary thought, identity is social, not just biological. The child knows his mother and his social father, the grandfather, who raises him as son. His lineage, inheritance and ritual duties are clear. As Amadiume (1987) showed, Igbo customary systems have long separated biological and social parenthood in woman to woman marriage and male daughter institutions.

The Place of *Ada* in Anioma Social Structure

The role of *Ada* in Anioma cannot be understood without looking at the wider place of first daughters in Igbo societies. In many Igbo communities, the first daughter has ritual duties that other daughters do not have. She often stays close to her father's compound even after marriage, and she has a say in family decisions. Among the Anioma, the *Ada* is seen as the female counterpart of the first son. She can perform certain rites for her father and she often acts as a custodian of her father's household when the mother is absent. This special position makes her the appropriate person to bear a child for the family when there is no son.

Amadiume (1987) described how in some Igbo communities, daughters who remain in their father's house can become male daughters, with rights similar to sons. They can inherit property and take wives for the lineage. *Ideme nwada na unor* is similar but different. Here the *Ada* does not become a male daughter herself. Instead, she produces a male heir who becomes her father's son. The logic is the same: gender and kinship roles are flexible and can be adjusted to solve problems of succession. Basden (1966) also noted that Igbo customary law was pragmatic and allowed families to adopt children or arrange marriages that would ensure continuity.

Understanding the *Ada*'s position helps us see why the custom is not exploitative in its original intent. It was an honour bestowed on a trusted daughter, not a punishment. Of course, honour can become pressure if consent is not respected. That is why modern reform must emphasise free and informed consent. The daughter should be able to say no without fear of ostracism. When consent is genuine, the act can be seen as an act of love and sacrifice for her father's house, similar to how a son might sacrifice his own comfort to keep his father's farm.

Moral Education and Cultural Change in Anioma

Anioma society has changed a lot in the last hundred years. Christianity, Western education and urban migration have transformed how people see tradition. Many young people now live in cities like Asaba, Lagos and Port Harcourt and only visit their villages during festivals. They may not know the details of customs like *Ideme nwada na unor*. At the same time, churches have become powerful moral authorities. Pastors often preach against traditional customs without explaining their original purpose.

This creates a gap between elders who understand the custom's meaning and young people who only hear that it is sinful. Gyekye (1996) argued that African cultural values need to be taught in schools so that young people understand their heritage. If students learn about customs like *Ideme* in a balanced way, with both their strengths and weaknesses, they will be better able to make informed moral judgements. They will not simply dismiss tradition as primitive, nor will they accept it uncritically.

Moral education should therefore include dialogue between Christian ethics and African traditional ethics. Mbiti (1969) showed that African religion is not opposed to community welfare. Christianity also teaches love, compassion and responsibility. There is room for conversation. A pastor can teach about agape love while also acknowledging that Anioma tradition has its own ways of expressing love through communal support. This dialogue can reduce stigma and help families make decisions that respect both faith and culture.

Conclusion

Ideme nwada na unor is a traditional Anioma response to a real human problem: the absence of a male heir in a patrilineal society that ties lineage, land and ancestral rites to sons. It allows a daughter to bear a son who is adopted as her father's legitimate son and heir. The community knows and accepts this child as full member of the family.

This paper has argued that labelling this practice as immoral, primitive and sinful reflects moral absolutism that ignores context. Drawing on Fletcher (1966), Heidegger (1962), Mbiti (1969), Gyekye (1996) and ethnographic sources on Igbo customary adoption (Basden, 1966; Uchendu, 1965; Amadiume, 1987), it has shown that morality must have a human face. A moral rule that cannot help people with their existential predicament will feel artificial to them.

When viewed through situation ethics, *Ideme nwada na unor* is justified. It produces the most loving outcome: it preserves family continuity, gives a child a home and identity, prevents greater social harms, and honours communal values. There is no incest, no casual promiscuity, but a deliberate communal decision aimed at welfare. This does not mean the practice should be beyond critique. Issues of consent, stigma and child identity must be addressed openly. But the answer is reform and understanding, not blanket condemnation. What affects a significant part of the human family affects the whole. A culture that finds a thoughtful way to care for its vulnerable members is not immoral. It is realistic and humane.

Recommendations

From the discussion, four recommendations follow.

a. First, there is need for moral reorientation. Churches, schools and community leaders in Anioma should be educated that not all traditional practices are automatically sinful. There is need to distinguish between customs that harm welfare and customs that sustain welfare. Dialogue between Christian ethics and African traditional values, as advocated by Mbiti (1969) and Gyekye (1996), should be encouraged.
b. Second, legal reform. Nigerian family law should recognise customary adoption that is not repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience. Section 45 of the 1999 Constitution allows for customary law that meets this standard. *Ideme nwada na unor*, when done with consent and for welfare, meets it. Legal recognition would reduce stigma and protect the rights of the child and the *Ada*.
c. Third, curriculum redesign. Our educational curriculum should include African traditional studies, customary law and moral philosophy that reflect Nigerian realities. Subjects like History, Social Studies and Civic Education should teach students about practices like *Ideme nwada na unor*, female husbands and male daughters, not as curiosities but as part of Nigeria's legal and cultural heritage (Amadiume, 1987; Uchendu, 1965).
d. Fourth, further research. There is need for empirical fieldwork in Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Oshimili, Ika and Ndokwa communities to document lived experiences of *Ada* who participated in *Ideme*, their sons, and umunna elders. Such research would provide richer data for philosophical and legal analysis and help develop guidelines for consent and welfare.

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