

Igbo Traditional Life, Culture and Literature

Edited with an Introduction by

M. J. C. Echeruo
&
E. N. Obiechina

Preface by

S. O. Anozie

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THE CONCH

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PREFACE

"Hear him! He's got the conch!"

Wm. Golding, *Lord of the Flies*

"Have you IT?"

Gabriel Okara, *The Voice*

THREE years ago, CONCH declared itself "in favour of a more objective analysis and interpretation of the realities of human experience in traditional and modern Africa." In its third editorial, the journal also pledged "to encourage every serious, independent and objective investigation of *truths* (creative *systems*) in specific national cultures and literatures of Africa." The present Special Issue of CONCH is consistent with this policy. It provides, for the first time, what has been most neglected since 1900: a comprehensive and authoritative review of Igbo traditional life and culture. Whatever the true reasons for this neglect, CONCH is aware of one bad effect on the Igbo: that never before has any other single ethnic group in Africa been so much gossiped about by so many, but so little well known or understood by so few! As the poet of *Mortality* (1968) has put it, in a rather pan-African context:

Some stand today before the warped memory
Of a silent people;
And spin out fine the thousand profundities
Of my as-it-were good people.

CONCH's primary aim is to help dispel this unnecessary ignorance and these unacceptable distortions and so contribute towards an improvement of the Igbo image, mainly by emphasizing here the human and creative dimensions of their tradition, culture and literature. This Special Issue will no doubt be widely read and appreciated for the reliable insights it provides into, as indispensable to a better understanding of, one of Africa's most dynamic and controversial cultures. Contributors (most of them Igbo scholars literally at home in their subjects) have been drawn from various disciplines of the social (including behavioural) sciences and the humanities; the articles are designed to appeal to a wide range of readers: from the Secondary School graduate, the University student and professor to the diplomat and the businessman interested in Africa. The specialist and the research fellow will, besides, derive immense help from the bibliographical chapter at the end.

CONCH wishes to thank the joint-editors of the present issue, and all the contributors, particularly those at Nsukka, who at very short notice, and under very difficult working conditions, have nevertheless been able to keep the deadline. Thanks go also to all legal copyright owners of materials from which excerpts have been used in various chapters here. Finally, it is hoped that this Special Issue will generate a fresh interest in Igbo studies, and thereby create, for its audience, a new structure of compulsion, through cultural dialogue and communication, without which no truly independent Magazine like the CONCH can exist, much less justify its existence.

S. O. ANOZIE

FORTHCOMING ISSUE
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J. L. Greene, Structural Models in African Myths.
B. I. C. Ijomah, The Sociology of Language.
O. A. Ladimeji, Language, Society and Literature.
L. W. Brown, The American Image in African Literature.
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STRUCTURALISM AND AFRICAN FOLKLORE

Edited with an Introduction by
S. O. Anozie, University of Texas at Austin.

Contributors: Sunday O. Anozie, Dan Ben-Amos,
Claude Bremond, O. R. Dathorne,
Robert A. Georges, Veronika Gorog,
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INTRODUCTION

It may appear somewhat unnecessary, if not outright absurd, to introduce a Special Issue of *THE CONCH* magazine on "IGBO TRADITIONAL LIFE, CULTURE AND LITERATURE" with what amounts to an attempt at a justification. The open-minded and the cavalier might assume that the attempt is a sufficient justification for itself. Well might it be argued that a magazine is a freely expressive medium and therefore could carry what it liked and when it liked. Such a free and easy approach to the question would tend to ignore a crucial fact about the magazine medium: namely, that it is essentially a communication medium.

The Magazine, as communication, imposes certain definite, and often inevitable responsibilities on the editor (or editors as in this case), chief of which is the responsibility to clear all barriers that might impede the smooth flow of the matter of communication to the attentive reader. In this regard, and in the ultimate interest of facilitating understanding, it is much more to be preferred that editors err on the side of saying and explaining too much or the too obvious than that they allow thickets and tanglewoods of unexplained intentions and inaccessible assumptions to obscure the reader's view.

The most important single justification for devoting an entire issue of *THE CONCH* to Igbo life and culture is that Igbo life and culture have up till now been inadequately exposed. Very little precise knowledge about the Igbo exists and a good deal of this little is shrouded in the mist of half-truths, misrepresentations, myths and plain misinformation. In this the first special issue of *THE CONCH*, a number of Igbo and non-Igbo scholars, using the tools and techniques of their various disciplines, attempt to elucidate different aspects of Igbo life and culture.

It may be said that under-exposure and misrepresentation are the common predicament of traditional peoples and cultures moving into the mainstream of the modern literary civilization. Some might even suggest that such failings constitute the hazards of underdevelopment and are therefore not peculiar to the Igbo. It could also be said that the serious, and sometimes critical, problem of interpreting such peoples and cultures is often aggravated by an absence of permanent records and a reliance on such fragile elements as the human memory and the oral traditions and folklore. A slow and highly intricate process of "piecing together" of painfully built up evidence through archae-

ology, anthropology, sociology and oral history seems to provide the only viable method of unravelling and documenting the emergent cultures.

All this must be conceded of course but that the Igbo case presents a unique characteristic of its own must also be recognized. Whereas, time and the rapid advance in the social scientific research techniques have immensely helped the greater understanding of emergent peoples and their cultures in Africa and elsewhere, these factors do not appear to have made much difference to the massive ignorance about the Igbo and their life and culture. Indeed, one must be frank enough to admit that, if anything, what was earlier a mist of incomprehensibility about the Igbo and their ways has deepened, with time, into a sinister and impenetrable fog.

In 1921 when the British missionary and amateur anthropologist, the Reverend Dr. G. T. Basden, issued his book on the Igbo entitled *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, he was constrained to add, in parentheses, that his book was

"An Account of the Curious and interesting Habits, Customs and Beliefs of a little known African People by one who has for many years lived amongst them on close and intimate terms."

Half a century has since passed but the Igbo have remained "a little known African People." So that when the recent Nigerian civil war engulfed them (the Igbo) in a tragedy of unprecedented proportions, foreign observers were totally at a loss finding firm and full information about "those people." The question that was persistently asked on the pages of world newspapers and magazines as well as on seminar forums was, "who are these Igbo?"

Now, in the second half of the twentieth century, a question such as "who are the Igbo?" would have sounded ridiculous even in respect of a handful of emergent tribesmen. From the late nineteenth century, and especially since the past forty years or so, social anthropologists have made so much progress advancing the knowledge of traditional societies that no people in Africa, Asia and America, be they ever so few, have been without their special advocates and chroniclers whose major interest has been to expose their cultures and life-ways to the world in books and monographs. The Trobrianders have had their Malinowski, the Nuer their Evans-Pritchard, the Tallensi their Meyer Fortes, the Tiv their Bohanans and the Yakö their Daryll Forde. The truth, however, is that the Igbo, with a population of eight million people (according to the 1963 Nigerian census), are

no mere "handful" of tribesmen. They constitute one of the most populous ethnic nationalities in Africa. And yet they are among the least known of African peoples. Even though they are to be found all over the world, a certain uncanny providence has succeeded in shrouding their cultural identity in a near-perfect anonymity.

Curiously enough, ignorance about the Igbo and their ways does not appear to rouse much surprise, least of all among the Igbo themselves. The Igbo have become accustomed to remaining a people submerged in a shadow and whose full outline has never been seen with anything like clarity by the outside world. (In fact, the American commentator who suggested that the most serious problem of the Igbo as a people has been their predilection to losing themselves with an almost fatalistic enthusiasm within larger units and fusions might not be too far from the truth.) When the pressures of the recent Nigerian crisis thrust them inexorably forward into the full glare of universal attention, the sheer fact of their distinct existence hit the world with the impact of a rude blow; they became an awkward presence, like a bump on the forehead, something to feel ashamed of, maybe, but not to be altogether ignored.

The crisis itself, far from leading to a better understanding of the Igbo and their life and culture, gave rise to a spate of mythologizing which further obscured their image. Out of the welter of hectic image-making and speculative propaganda, the Igbo emerged as cherubic beings to half the world and plain devils to the other half. The realities of a living and suffering people with genuine human aspirations, dreams and hopes, loves and hates, fears and elations, virtues and vices, were cruelly hidden away from view and buried under a mass of sweeping generalizations.

The Igbo have in their recent history attracted widespread attention only at crisis points, when basic misconceptions arising from cultural and psychological misunderstanding generated overwhelming confrontations. Thus, the first time the British colonial regime in Nigeria began to take seriously the millions of Igbo people scattered over their thousands of villages in southeastern Nigeria was when in 1929 the Igbo women rose in rebellion against the British attempt to alter the existing socio-political structure of Igboland and foist on the people their new structure of domination. Like those who in the late nineteen-sixties were desperately casting about for books that would help them

find out who "those Ibos" were, the British administration hurriedly hired the services of anthropologists who were to enquire into the life and culture of the Igbo and provide the much-needed explanations for the recent, discomfiting explosion.

The weaknesses of enquiries stimulated by crises are too clearly obvious. Apart from the fact that a society in a state of turbulence as a result of a continuing crisis may not be as reliable an object of study as the same society in a relatively restful and therefore more equable condition, there is the other serious factor that the crisis itself might unduly narrow the focus of enquiry. Igbo life and culture have suffered most distortion because a good many studies of them were crisis-oriented. Words like "atomistic" and "acephalous" bandied about by the post-Igbo-Women's-Riots anthropologists have done much to misrepresent the life and culture of the Igbo, to obscure the institutionally integrated social and political structures of the Igbo. Thus, Dame Margery Perham was able to write some years after the women's revolt and with the findings of the establishment anthropologists as her main authority:

"In south-eastern Nigeria, a relatively sympathetic Government was dealing with one of the least disciplined, and least intelligible, of African peoples."

(*Native Administration in Nigeria*, London, 1937, p. 219).

Behind the misunderstanding of the Igbo way of life can often be traced what one might call an "aristocratic" conception of history and culture. For those who hold this conception (it is very highly developed in the British intellectual tradition), the hallmark of civilized human organization is the existence of hierarchies of roles and offices and the dominance of an aristocracy with incontestable administrative authority, discernible symbols and insignia of power, and elaborate ceremonials accompanied by much pomp and pageantry. This "aristocratic" school of thought, nursed by an attitude of conservatism and projecting the fiction that it is better far for the progress of humanity that a class of idle, hereditary power-mongers should permanently control the human and economic resources than that the resources and destinies of peoples should belong equally to all, could not but react with horror and unconcealed disdain to any racial stock on whom are pinned the opprobrious labels "atomistic" and "acephalous." The Igbo, in the eyes of such people, are no more than an anarchistic race subsisting within one of the most rudimentary and primitive cultures of the world.

Closely associated with the above view is another which more or less rationalizes it. It is the view that the lowliness of Igbo cultural life is proven by the fact that the Igbo have no common tradition of origin; which in turn is used to argue that they are a people without history.

Young Igbo anthropologists like Dr. Victor C. Uchendu (*The Igbo of South-east Nigeria*, New York, 1965), Dr. Ikenna Nzimiro (*Chieftaincy and Politics in 4 Niger States*, Frank Cass, London, a forthcoming book) and M. Onwuejogwu (important unpublished works on the Anambra-Nri civilization) are showing, through detailed and intimate researches, how wrong and ill-founded many of the views on the Igbo have been. The diversity as well as the complexity of Igbo social and institutional structures are beginning to be unveiled and the misrepresentations of the past are increasingly being stripped bare. The important archaeological finds in Igbo-Ukwu (Professor Shaw's monumental work on the subject is reviewed within) cannot but provide one of the decisive clues to the understanding of Igbo history and cultural movement.

A question may well be raised here, in view of our persistent claim that the Igbo have been misrepresented and misunderstood, about the scores of ethnographic and other materials about the Igbo. Why have these failed to do for the Igbo what similar records have done for others? Why have the Igbo failed to benefit from the tremendous curiosity of the world since the turn of the century to learn all that could be revealed about traditional societies?

One possible misunderstanding has to be cleared out of the way to begin with. We must not be understood to be saying, explicitly or implicitly, that the Igbo have never had their own chroniclers and special advocates. To say that would be untrue as well as being a display of uncalled-for peevishness. In fact, the Igbo have had a fair share of ethnographers and anthropologists who have done their best to expose Igbo life and culture. We readily call to mind G. I. Jones, an ex-administrative officer, who with Daryll Forde wrote the best ethnographic study about the Igbo entitled *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-eastern Nigeria*, Margaret Green whose *Igbo Village Affairs* was based on field work carried out in Umueke Agbaja between 1934 and 1937, C. K. Meek the official anthropologist who analyzed the Igbo political structure in *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, M. D. W. Jeffreys, another ex-colonial adminis-

native officer and anthropologist who did much useful work on the Umuudi divine kingship and the Ottenbergs (Simon and Phoebe), an American couple who concentrated their investigations mainly in the Afikpo and Abakaliki regions of Igboland. In addition to these specialist anthropologists, there were missionaries, colonial administrators and travellers like the Lander brothers, Baikie, Basden, Major Leonard, Sylvia Leith-Ross and a host of others who wrote about one or more aspects of Igbo life and culture.

The exposure of the Igbo through these well-meaning outsiders, however, reveals a number of problems and difficulties. A fair number of the anthropologists were called in as a "brains trust" to provide official reports after the Igbo women's rebellion. We have already said that the result of their researches show considerable distortion from the conditioning influence of the crisis. They could not easily lose sight of the fact that their findings were meant to help the resolution of an existing administrative problem. They had to view Igbo life in terms of its political manipulability and not so much in terms of its inner dynamics which would have revealed its integrative qualities as well as the intimate social values and moral ethics which had ensured its stable continuity over several centuries.

The case of administrative officers who combined their official duties with amateur anthropology was even more difficult than that of the official anthropologists. The official distancing which was an indispensable part of the colonial protocol made it difficult for the officials to get sufficiently close to the traditional people to see their cultures in anything approaching adequate detail. The case of Major Leonard sums up the kind of awkwardness that could and did develop, when the administrative officer assumed the freedom of the anthropologist to investigate his subject in close intimacy. Major Leonard was virtually dismissed from the colonial service for "mistreatment" of the natives. Some years later appeared his voluminous work, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes* (London, 1906) in which he studied in great detail the religion and customs of the Igbo and the Itsekiri. It is a work of tremendous insights whose grasp of the conceptual roots of the traditional religion is yet to be equalled or surpassed. Subsequent investigations showed that the "anthropological" Major was able to get at the bottom of his subject by mingling well with "the natives" and in fact marrying a number of them. He had the advantage of close interaction with all sorts of formal and informal informants. This meant that he also

breached one of the most solemn of colonial taboos which forbade undue familiarity with "the natives." The reason for his disgrace must be seen as simply "official."

The veteran British anthropologist, Malinowski, has summed up unequivocally the dilemma which faced the colonial administrator who might also be interested in the way of life of his subjects:

"The average British official tries to administer justice and to be a father of his wards. But is he from his point of view an integral part of the tribes? No. He was neither born nor bred to it, nor is he very conversant with any of its ideas; he is, in fact, a servant of the British Empire, temporarily working in such and such a colony, a public schoolboy, an Englishman, or a Scotsman. He has to watch over European interests in the colony, as well as maintain the balance of these interests as against native claims. To conceive the part played by European political agents in Africa in terms of a fictitious well-integrated community would blind us to the very definition of the tasks, nature, and implications of colonial administration."

(The Dynamics of Culture Change, New Haven, 1961, p. 16).

It would be unwise to dismiss this as the usual case of the 'pro' doing down the amateur. The difficulties facing administrator-anthropologists were formidable and had far-reaching consequences for the nature and quality of their works. Much of their sources were their own earlier political reports compiled "in the field" in a state of virtual confrontation between themselves and the colonial natives. With this fact in mind and the other fact that the majority of anthropologists who worked in Igboland were also colonial administrators, one is in possession of one of the key reasons why Igbo studies were in such under-developed and mutilated condition when even the most obscure little peoples were being given extensive build-up.

Another factor that harmed rather than helped the image of the Igbo and their culture before the world was the biased reporting of the Igbo life-ways by some missionaries. Perhaps one ought to give the missionaries the benefit of the doubt. They were not out to propagate the native institutions but to justify the eventual overthrow of them by the new missionary-oriented order. They may be excused therefore if in their attempt to discredit the old order they did not devote adequate time and attention to a detailed study of them. Again, because a fair number of the early studies of Igbo life and culture was by missionary writers, the image of the Igbo that emerged from them was debauched and grotesquely primitive.

One must be honest enough to admit that the Igbo have not been altogether lucky in their advocates. Hired anthropologists, administrator-anthropologists and zealously proselytizing Christian missionaries were hardly the kind of people to give objective airing to a subject people with a widely-differing way of life from that they were used to in their home country. After all, the ability to study and project other people's way of life is, in the final analysis, dependent on three major requirements—namely, a highly empathic power, that is, the ability of the student to assimilate himself well into the culture he is studying in order to see it as fully as possible from within; secondly, a highly developed sense of human worth, which enables the researcher to see the intrinsic worthiness of values of life which may differ or even contradict some of his own native assumptions; and thirdly, a highly developed rhetorical and persuasive power, which derives largely from the enthusiasm for the subject and the desire to infect others with this enthusiasm.

Seen in terms of these requirements, one must say, without any intention to disparage, that some of the works on the Igbo by the early foreign commentators are lacking in spirit, conviction and objectivity. There is often in them a certain ambivalence (sometimes amounting to outright hostility) on the part of the authors which indicates a non-total commitment and an undisguised skepticism which reduces the actual value and quality of the culture and diminishes the outsider's appreciation of it. Obviously, this is more the case with writers like Mrs. Sylvia Leith-Ross and some of the missionaries than, say, Jones and Major Leonard. But the point would be adequately made if we reflect that no work on the Igbo by outsiders in the area of social scientific studies has attained the same impassioned and committed utterances as Leo Frobenius' discussion of Yoruba religion and civilization or the conceptual vigour and detailed understanding of Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*, Fortes' *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, Nadel's *Nupe Religion*, Smith's *Government in Zazzau*, Bohanan's *Justice Among the Tiv*, Gluckman's *The Judicial Process among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia* or Maquet's *Premise of Inequality in Ruanda*. Placed side by side with any of these definitive works, much that is written about the Igbo appears fragile and unlikely to expose them forcefully to the curiosity of the world.

In more recent times, especially since the end of the second world war, the field of Igbo studies has been invaded by social

scientists from America and Europe. A number of these were business-like academics in quest for the precious Ph.D. The objective is no sooner attained than interest varies and the eye is trained in other directions for easier, and maybe, more rewarding booty. These American and European researchers are at least able to "stick it out" until the limited goal is attained, not so the British researchers. A number of them have appeared and disappeared in quick succession. One started what appeared to be a promising investigation in the Igbariam-Anam area and then suddenly dashed across the Anambra River clutching his sheafs of notes. The next thing you heard of him, he was safely cseonced in the Igala country. Another came out to work among the Nike people of Enugu but was hardly there at all before he fled into the Niger Delta to be fully submerged in the study of Kalabari river gods. Yet another made a brief appearance intending to study Development of Enugu. He paid a brief visit to Sierra Leone and has never come back. He is said to have turned right round and become an authority in West African languages. The list can be lengthened but that would serve no useful purpose. There is something in Igboland, whether one admits it frankly or talks diplomatically around it, which discourages certain species of foreigners from feeling perfectly at home there.

Dr. Afigbo in his piece, "The Igbo Under British Rule" has neatly pinned down that elusive thing. Colonial administrators, for the benefit of their peace of mind and the greater benefit of the empire would prefer their subjects to be humble, self-effacing and appreciative of the desirability of civilized foreign rule. They would find assertive, self-confident and libertarian subjects a heavy cross to bear and an ever-present threat to the continuity of the empire. As with the colonial administrators so with some social scientists. The foreign social scientist, without actually being aware that he possesses such an attitude, would prefer to work among a docile and grateful people rather than among those who would be determined to meet them on no other term than that of equality.

There are probably other, and perhaps more cogent, reasons (Dame Margery Perham, for instance, has mentioned the great diversity of dialects and the diffused nature of Igbo democracy) for the backwardness of Igbo studies and the fact that the Igbo remained for so long "a little known African People." But the truth of the matter is incontestable.

Reviewing the situation, Simon Ottenberg, in a discussion

itled, "The Present State of Igbo Studies" which appeared in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 2, No. 2, of December, 1961, revealed the poverty of Igbo studies and research since the end of the second world war. He writes:

"It appears on surveying the literature of this area that there has been inadequate research into the anthropology, sociology, and history of the Igbo cultures in this region. . . . The sense of the inadequacy of the present state of Ibo studies is fortified by the knowledge of the large size of this Nigerian group (more than five million persons), and by the important role that Ibo people have played in the economic development of Nigeria and in its political movements."

Even the little work already done he finds hardly significant and able to enhance the understanding of the Igbo and their culture:

"It represents peripheral information, or in some cases data collected by untrained persons. The general impression one gets is that while some of the published material is very useful, we are a long way from arriving at an overall picture of Ibo life and society, and that many of the research projects of recent years are too unrelated to provide a comprehensive view of the Ibo."

Ottenberg is quite emphatic in asserting that

"Although the postwar literature on the Igbo seems voluminous there is a redundancy of knowledge in almost every direction. Some research and writing have been done here and some there, but the sum total of the writings does not add up to a very substantial body of knowledge."

No fair-minded person can accuse Professor Ottenberg of not knowing what he was talking about. He had not only spent between 1951 and 1953 and again between 1959 and 1960 in Igboland engaged in field researches, but he is one of the few non-Igbo scholars who have taken more than a passing, opportunistic interest in Igbo studies. From the vantage point of full knowledge and commitment, he is able to see the entire field and to note the wide gap separating the rich promise of Igbo studies and researches from the paucity of actual realization. He sees the situation as challenging the intellectual enterprise of the Igbo and non-Igbo scholars.

We have up till now concentrated our attention on the non-Igbo scholars not because we are unaware that the Igbo scholars carry the heaviest responsibility for interpreting and projecting their people and way of life to the world. Rather, we have understandably concentrated on the non-Igbo writers first of all because, by virtue of their having entered the world literary civili-

zation at an earlier point in time than the Igbo, they have taken it upon themselves to act the special advocates of the Igbo. The Igbo are entitled therefore to say that they have or have not been properly represented, that their case has been well and forcefully put or totally muddled by their self-appointed advocates. But given literacy and the facilities of writing, the Igbo have been forward in projecting themselves and their life and culture.

The first Igbo to write about Igbo life were Igbo expatriates. By the accident of the slave trade they found themselves in foreign lands but their thoughts were often about home. Having learnt the mystery of the written word, they were able to give utterance to their deepest yearnings by recreating with tender care aspects of Igbo life they could still recall. The best known of these Igbo expatriates whose work has survived is the eighteenth-century ex-slave and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano. From his book *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* we learn that he was born about 1745, was kidnapped from his home in Igboland by slave-raiders in 1756 and after being shipped first to Virginia and later to England, bought his freedom, became a sailor for several years and later applied, rather unsuccessfully, to the Bishop of London to be sent as a missionary to Sierra Leone. He devoted his life to working for the abolition of the slave trade. The first part of his book is devoted to a childhood remembrance of life in Igboland. Looking at the picture presented of it, one is struck by how little rural life in Igboland has changed over the centuries:

"Our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance. We have plenty of Indian corn. . . . Agriculture is our chief employment, and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. Thus we are all habituated to labour from our earliest years. Everyone contributes something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness we have no beggars. . . .

. . . Our women too were in my eyes at least uncommonly graceful, alert, and modest to a degree of bashfulness; nor do I remember to have ever heard of an instance of incontinence amongst them before marriage. They are also remarkably cheerful. . . .

G. I. Jones has, using Equiano's name, the few vernacular words sprinkled over his book, as well as the geographical indication, been able to locate Equiano's exact home "in the northern Ika Ibo region." (Philip D. Curtin ed. *Africa Remembered*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1967, p. 61).

It is most interesting that as far back as the eighteenth

century the first Igbo to give an account of himself in writing as well as describe his people's way of life also recorded the fact that the territorial homeland from which he derived was called "Eboe" (Igbo). In the nineteenth century a great Igbo intellectual was to put a stamp of finality on the common identity of the Igbo people. He was Dr. James Africanus Horton, son of Igbo parents living in Sierra Leone and an M.D. of the University of Edinburgh. He writes in connection with the name itself:

"Egbo, Igbo, Ebo, and Ibo are the various spellings met with in books describing the race inhabiting this part of the Coast. Among the soft Isuama (Onitsha) and Elugu (Enugu), the soft Ebo and Ibo is used; but among the inhabitants on the coast, such as Bonny and Okrika, the harsher name Egbo is prevalent. In the interior north of the Territory, the nations are called Igbo, which approaches more to the original name of the inhabitants."

(*West African Countries and Peoples*, London, 1868, p. 171).

This sense of common ethnic identity already existing among the Igbo was by no means taken for granted by all West African peoples at the time Dr. Horton wrote. For example, about the Yoruba, Dr. Horton had a bit of difficulty in the section of his book titled: "Self-Government of Lagos and its Interior Countries—Kingdom of the Akus":

"From want of a more specific name and from the whole of the tribes being once subjected to the king of Yoruba, the Church Missionary Society has designated it (the Lagos hinterland) the 'Yoruba Country,' but as most of the tribes, such as the Egbas and Egbados, have objected to their being called Yorubas, and as there is no national name by which all the tribes speaking the same language but differently governed is known, I have employed the name which is given to the whole nation at Sierra Leone, and which is generally adopted in every part of the Coast—viz; the Akus."

Unless one is prepared to invest tribal myths of so-called common historical origins with the seriousness of proven scientific facts, one must regard the sense of common identity of the Igbo, expressed in a common name, in a linguistic affinity (in spite of the variety of dialects) and in basic common cultural traits (in spite again of local variations) as a much more solidly based criterion for establishing the intrinsicity of Igbo life and civilization than the dubious and highly suspect "aristocratic" fiction of the racial emergence from one commodious ancestral bosom. That the Igbo have always known themselves as a common people is a truth hardly needing a proof. Their concept of the totality of the world is embodied in the expression "Olu-na-Igbo," the

"Olu" being the riverain Igbo who were probably the latest immigrants into the Igbo territorial homeland while the "Igbo" were the hard-land natives on whom was vested the autochthony of Igboland. That is probably what Dr. Horton meant when he said that 'Igbo' "approaches more to the original name of the inhabitants." A sense of common ethnic identity, if any further proof of it was needed could easily be supplied by the fact that the Aros, the most ubiquitous and commercially minded Igbo, set up trading posts and pocket settlements all over Igboland.

With the above fact in mind, we are not at all surprised that long before the full penetration of Igboland by European travellers and British colonial and mercantile interests, the territorial extent of Igboland was fairly widely known. Dr. Horton's description of it was very close to the reality we know to-day:

"Situated between the Rivers Niger and Old Calabar, and bounded on the north by the left or Benue branch of the first river, on the South by the Atlantic, on the east by Old Calabar and the Dwalla Countries, and on the west by the River Niger, Benin, and Igara (Igala), lies this extensive and well-watered tract of territory which is included in the Empire of the Egboes. According to Dr. Baikie, Egboe extends east and west from Old Calabar River to the banks of the Niger, or Kwora (Quora), and possesses also some territory at Abo, in the west of the stream; on the north it borders on Igara and Akpoto (Idoma), and is separated from the sea by petty tribes, all of which trace their origin from the great race."

That last bit about the petty tribes of the Niger Delta tracing their origin from the Igbo, was, as Dr. Dike explains, a common belief among nineteenth-century writers, as a result of "the great influx of Ibo migrants which blurred the lines of earlier migrations." (*Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, 1830-1885, London, 1965, p. 29.) As for the accuracy of Dr. Horton's description of the territorial extent of Igboland, it could not be improved upon until Basden and later writers, with their advantages of recency and more detailed information.

Another area in which Dr. Horton's book reflects the sureness of an insider's view is in its description of the Igbo temperament. He writes:

"The Egboes cannot be driven to an act . . . but with kindness they could be made to do anything, even to deny themselves of their comforts. They would not, as a rule, allow anyone to act the superior over them, nor sway their conscience, by coercion, to the performance of any act, whether good or bad, when they have not the inclination to do so; hence there is not that unity among them that is to be found among other tribes; in fact, everyone likes to be his own master. As

POLITICAL CULTURE AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN TRADITIONAL IGBO SOCIETY

Michael S. O. Olisa

A comprehensive study of the cultural life and institutions of Igbo people, as of any people generally, cannot be complete without a proper understanding of their political culture. Although it is difficult to draw any clear-cut boundary between the political culture and the general culture of society, it is no more in doubt that part and parcel of the culture of any group refer to specifically political orientations and attitudes which govern political behaviour and citizen attitudes towards political institutions, as well as the rating of the citizen as an actor or participant within the political system. And now that African Studies are becoming more and more concerned with the analysis and interpretation of the patterns, strains and stresses of socio-cultural change, the concept of political culture assumes more importance as one of the most illuminating aids towards the analysis of the problem and prospects of political modernization and stability so crucial in the future of the new states of Africa. For, just as the culture and social institutions of human societies provide them with mechanisms of resolving conflicts and ensuring group coherence and continuity, so do their political culture and institutions provide them with a frame-work for resolving issues and conflicts arising from allocation and exercise of authority.

Political culture is defined as "specifically political orientations, or attitudes, towards the political system and its various parts, and towards the role of the self in the system." It assumes that "each individual must, in his own historical context, learn and incorporate into his own personality the knowledge and feelings about the politics of his people and his community."² For example, political culture explains why the American is obsessed with his rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness—things he holds as self-evident truths; why the British assumes the privileges of peerage and royalty as given and why the Igbo adult is more seriously concerned with the achieved leadership position, than with advantage of birth and ascribed leadership.

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, who have done more than most social scientists towards the formulation and popularisation of the concept of political culture, have put forward three pure types, namely the parochial political culture, the subject political culture and the participant political culture. The pa-

rochial political culture is characterised by strong attachment to primordial political and social structures—the family, the tribe, the clan, the kingroup—a very low conception of the nature of the political system and very low rating of the citizen as a participant in the system.

As the two scholars illustrated:

"the remote tribesman in Ghana or Nigeria may be aware in a dim sort of way of the existence of a central political regime; but his feelings towards it are uncertain or negative, and he has not internalised any norms to regulate his relation to it."³

The second pure type is the subject political culture. This is featured by a high level of passivity of the citizen towards the political system and its institutions as well as a low rating of himself as a participant. The colonial situation in Nigeria represents a good illustration of the subject political culture. In the situation it creates the citizen, like the Biblical Jews, argues that he has no portion in David and retires to his tent, leaving political activity to "they" who are concerned.

The third pure type of political culture is the participant political culture where there is a high level of citizen cognition of the political system, a high level of effect and evaluation as well as a high rating of himself as a participant. This type is represented by the established democracies of Europe and America and some of the political systems of the white members of the Commonwealth.

It is difficult to slot Igbo political culture into any of these three holes. Almond and Verba asserted that every political culture has a type of political structure within which it can operate most effectively, i.e., with which it is congruent. Thus, for example, the parochial political culture should be congruent with the small-scale lineage and kingroup structures of pre-industrial societies, while the participant culture should be expected in the universalistic large-scale structures of modern industrial societies. However, it is on this question of congruence that difficulties arise in the classification of Igbo political culture as well as those of other traditional African societies. This is because, in terms of congruence—and therefore stability—the traditional Igbo communities had no serious problems. The adult Igbo had sufficient cognition of his political system, had sufficient attachment or commitment to the system and had clear ideas about the extent and limit of his roles within the system. The type of "they" and "we" relationship which characterised colonial rule in Africa did

not exist. Therefore the Igbo political system, because of the congruence it provided between structure and culture, also made for political stability not in the sense that conflicts were non-existent but in the sense that the system provided sufficient mechanisms for resolving conflicts. These mechanisms will be spelt out in the course of this discussion. The writer has in another place¹ argued that the type of political culture which gave coherence and stability to the pre-colonial traditional African political systems should be called "communal political culture." This is because, as will be described at length below, Igbo society, (like other traditional societies) was based on community life. It was small in scale, which in turn made it possible for everyone to know nearly everyone else, to enjoy group activities in most social and political matters and to know most of what went on at all levels. The Igbo citizen lived and moved and had his being in the community.

The general description and discussion of Igbo culture to which we shall turn now is in effect an elaboration of a communal political culture in a purely traditional milieu. Later on some space will be given to the relevance of the traditional cultural ethos to the understanding of the problems of political change and modernization in the Nigerian context, problems which still make political integration and stability distant dreams in the new states of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Structurally, Igbo society belongs to the segmentary lineage type of African societies. There are no large-scale kingdoms comparable to the big Emirates of Northern Nigeria or the Yoruba kingdoms headed by Obas. Even among the River Niger Igbo (Onitsha, Asaba, Aboh, etc.) and in Igbo parts of the present Mid-Western State (Issele-Uku, Ibusa, Agbor, etc.) where there are Obis and hierarchies of chiefs functioning in the Obis' palaces, the size of the average Community headed by an Obi is comparatively small, numbering five to ten thousand persons as against a hundred thousand to a quarter of a million population quite common among the Hausa and Yoruba kingdoms.

Igboland is peopled by four to five thousand communities generally referred to as village groups,² or communes or towns, with population averaging between several hundred/and several thousand persons in each group. Every Igbo town jealously cherishes and maintains a high degree of autonomy and therefore behaves as a self-contained entity with internal affairs and general relationship with the other neighbouring communities.

The largest single unit, the village group (*Obodo, Ala*), is segmented into sub-villages (*Ebo*), villages, kindreds (*Umunna*) and extended families (*Umunne*). Authority and leadership are exercised at the village-group level by a loosely-structured council of elders who direct discussions and sum up decisions in the assembly (town assembly) of the whole village group. At the sub-village level, down to the extended family, the *Okpara* (elder) of the relevant unit is the leader and his leadership is based on his being the oldest man as well as the keeper of the *Ofor* of the unit he leads.

The *Okpara's* leadership is essentially a moral one for he cannot take any decision alone and cannot enforce the decisions taken by his people with any form of coercion. Government at all levels of the social structure is thus based on consensus of members of the group concerned.

Relationship between the segments is also governed by consensus rather than coercive authority, in the absence of an overall political machinery for taking decisions and enforcing them. All these will be dealt with in some detail later.

Gods in the Affairs of Men

Igbo social and political life is highly influenced by a pantheon of supernatural powers which operate within the human sphere in various ways and to various degrees. The supernatural forces are grouped by the people into two broad categories—those which occupy and control the heavens and led by the God of the High (*Chineke* or *Obasi di elu*) or Almighty God; and those that occupy and control the Earth under the general superior supervision of the Earth Goddess (*Ala* or *Obasi di nala*). In comparative rating the Igbo would regard the God of the High as more powerful and omnipresent but in actual direct intervention into the affairs of men they would rate the Earth Goddess as more powerful. And because of this the worship of *Ala* is not only one of cultural phenomena that are most universal among the Igbo but one that governs thought and action in more perceptible ways.

The Igbo hold most sacred the Earth on which they tread and from which they draw vital resources for life—food and other crops, water, multitudes of other plant resources for tools, herbal healing, magic herbs and roots for charms against evil forces and for good fortunes; above all, it is to the earth that the individual returns on death. They believe that certain human

actions could pollute the land and offend *Ala*, the Earth Goddess, whose reaction would come in the form of famine, pestilence, defeat in inter-communal feuds, sudden deaths, reduced offsprings and such other evils. Actions that offend the *Ala* are therefore termed abominations (*Aru* or *Nsor Ala*—what the land abhors) and could only be obviated, when committed, by specified rituals for “cleansing the land.” Socio-political actions which are rated as abominations in many areas of Igboland include:

altering land boundaries secretly; giving information to enemy towns engaged in war or dispute with one's town; homicide involving one's kinsman or townsman; theft of certain crops or livestock, (e.g. yams or chickens in many towns around Onitsha); killing or eating animals held as totem by the town concerned; giving improper funerals to titled persons or priests.

In all these and in other acts of abomination, too numerous to name here, the offender is held as guilty by the community in general once the act has been committed.

Thus in the community dealt with in Chinua Achebe's novel¹ the chief character of the novel, Okonkwo, although a popular hero of his people, had to “flee for homicide” (*gbaa osor orchu*) for the stipulated seven years before becoming eligible to return and live among his people. Abominations have no defense and relatives, kinsmen or clansmen, however powerful or well-placed, are powerless to help any of their members who commits an abomination. Sanctions about abominations bind alike king and subjects, the *Okpara* and his fellow kinsmen, rich and poor, men and women, adults as well as children. This is because once an abomination occurs, the Earth Goddess, *Ala*, holds the entire community collectively culpable and dispenses her judgments indiscriminately, just as she distributes blessings indiscriminately when the members of the community consistently keep the land clear of abominations.

The Earth Goddess is ministered unto by the *Ezeala* or *Ezeani*, the priest of the Earth Goddess. To him belongs the ritual cleansing of the land after an abomination has been committed. An *Ezeala* is not necessarily a medicine man although he could be one by coincidence. One of the initial signs that a man is “called” to assume an *Ala* Priesthood is the manifestation of “*Agwu*” in his life, a mild display by him of mental abnormality in which he sees visions and has supernatural communication with all sorts of spiritual forces. After

undergoing this experience the Igbo often initiate and confer on him the title of *Ezeani*. As ministers of *Ala* the *Ezealas* observe numerous ritual avoidances, are expected to hold special *Ofor* and lead the society in uprightness, boldness (especially in declaring actions abominable), and in being absolutely impartial in all disputes between groups of individuals. One could go further and regard them as the genuine philosophers of Igbo traditional life. *Ezealas* generally live lives of severe austerity if not poverty and are hardly bothered about worldly affluence and influence.

It is on account of their calling and qualifications that the *Ezealas* are given great respect in society, and people dread as well as trust them. They declare abominations as well as cleanse them; they conduct the occasional communal eating of kolanut (*ita orji ala*) by all adults at the local shrines of *Ala* as an affirmation of their faith or as an act of absolution when an abomination has been committed and the culprit is not easy to detect. In their vital roles as keepers of the seal, as it were, of *Ala*, the *Ezealas* of Igbo traditional society perform important political and social functions which ultimately ensure preservation of solidarity, value systems and continuity of the community.

Of great importance too in the socio-political life of the Igbo is the believed participation of ancestors in the daily life of the living. The Igbo regard all the dead members of the community as alive in the spirit world and alert on what goes on daily in their former abodes in the world of men. Thus elders would pour libation with palm-wine or liquors, throw pieces of kolanuts outside, throw lumps of food or chicken blood on ancestral shrines, all in the conviction that the ancestors share in the consumption of all these and would be offended if not given their portions. In much the same way the Igbo believe that next to the Earth Goddess, *Ala*, the ancestors wield tremendous powers of blessing and curse over their relatives living on earth. It is on the basis of his position as living representative of the ancestors that the *Okpara* of the kingroup derives whatever authority he wields over the members of his lineage. As has been pointed out, one of the measures of punishment he can exercise is refusal to offer sacrifices to the ancestors on behalf of a recalcitrant member of the lineage group. In much the same way violation of settlements or agreements reached by invocation of the sanctions of the ancestors is prevented. Descent from ancestors provide the basis of social groupings and political

functions within the society. The small kingroups can often trace their ancestors within living memory, the larger lineage groups like *Ebo* (Sub-village) and *Obodo* (the village group as a whole) continue to trace the ancestral lines to the remotest possibility. Rules of exogamy, incest, feuds, ownership of land and settlement areas are all determined along the net-work of ancestral origins within the community.

Concomitant with the general belief in *Ala* and the ancestors as the ultimate sources of political authority and sanctions of political decisions, is the day-to-day belief in use of the *Ofor* stick as the physical medium for the invocation of the powers of *Ala* and the ancestors. The *Ofor* stick is a short thick piece of a special tree cut into proper shape, smeared with blood and some mud and stuck with some feathers; at the end of all these the stick is believed to be impregnated with supernatural powers. The *Ofor* symbolizes truth, purity and uprightness and is treasured by every *Ezeala*, every *Okpara* of the kindred or village or town, and by every medicine-man. Some other individuals could, if they wish, procure *Ofor* for themselves as a weapon against evil spirits, but the individual *Ofor* is not common among the Igbo. Knocking the *Ofor* several times—often with chanting of choruses of affirmation—puts a sacred seal on decisions of a group whether it is the family, the kindred, elders or the whole town, and any violator of these decisions courts the punishment of *Ala*, the ancestors and indeed the generality of all the spirit forces that govern the community. Oaths sworn over the *Ofor*, like those sworn over other fetishes, provide final solutions in judicial matters, agreements or pledges between parties or even alliances between one village community and another.

It can therefore be seen that gods and the supernatural in general, play dominant roles in Igbo political life although the society is quite far from being regarded as theocratic. The supernatural powers conceptualized in the Earth Goddess, the ancestors, the *Ofor*, the Supreme God (*Chineke* or *Obasi di nlu*), and other minor spirit forces provide legitimacy for political decisions, confer moral and spiritual sanctions on political authority as well as procuring political obedience in a society where physical coercion was rarely applied because of strong belief in the sanctity of human blood and human life.

Pressure Points of Authority

Igbo political system is not centralised in the same way as the political systems of the Hausa and Yoruba are centralised. There are therefore no kingdoms or emirates, no chieftains who exercise political dominance (no matter how nominal) over large areas of territory or sizes of population, and no unified hierarchies of political functionaries owing allegiance to political overlords. What one finds in traditional Igbo society are pressure points of political power and authority rather than a recognisable centre of such power and authority. These pressure points include the *Ezeais* who have been discussed above, the titled men or societies of title holders (i.e., holders of *Ozo* or *Ekpe* or *Eze* titles, names differing from area to area), women societies (often of the daughters of the kindred married outside it), age grades, fraternities or medicinemen, secret societies, as well as the lineage group themselves.

Each of these pressure points feature in the political system from time to time depending on the situation which has arisen. In the Cross River Igbo areas (Ohafia, Item, Abriba, Abam, and parts of Umuahia area) the age grades feature more actively and more coherently in the public affairs of the community. The initiation rites of age grades are important annual festivals and age grades provide easy channels for competition and achievement so basic in Igbo culture. A powerful age grade can take the lead in the defense of the town in inter-town feuds, another could take up the construction and maintenance of the town's vital roads, another could be responsible for the maintenance of premises of shrines, precincts of the town's streams or of the town's main market.

In present transitional situations the competitive and achievement talents of age grades are manifested in such projects as the erection of modern hospitals, schools, colleges, post offices and so on for the community as well as in the award of various scholarships to brilliant youths from the community. Occasionally an influential age-grade, such as that which has proven heroism in times of emergency, could initiate new measures in the town or village and pressure the elders and other organised groups into adopting these measures for the town as a whole. Such powerful age-grades must be consulted in all matters of importance otherwise they could feel slighted and make it impossible for any decision on the matter to be carried out. Age-grades often insist not only on group excellence but on individual excellence. For

example, an adult male who reached a certain age in Ohafia and Abriha must "cut" a human head either through calculated ambush or in a feud. A man who has not cut a head could not marry (as girls would reject him as coward), nor put on the "GEORGE" type of loin-cloth—if he did, his fellows could legitimately strip it from him in public.

Titled men as individuals or groups provide leadership in Igbo society. Apart from its being an evidence of outstanding individual achievement, a title also symbolizes a high level of wisdom, sanctity of person and responsibility in words and deeds. Titled societies have numerous do's and don'ts which govern their members; they have also certain established privileges attached to their titles, such as having precedence over commoners in choosing things and speaking at meetings, being given special funerals when they die, and being greeted and addressed by their title names at all occasions.

At all levels of Igbo community, political decision making is highly influenced by these societies of titled men to which almost all the town's elders naturally belong. They feature more prominently than other groups in the town assembly, in the kindred and family meetings (most *Okparas* are title holders) as well as in the town's market where they have special corners or houses in which they assemble every market day to drink, discuss matters of public interest and sometimes settle minor disputes.

Although space does not permit of treating each of the pressure points of authority listed earlier, it is important to mention the women who, surprisingly in a society where male superiority and authority is never in question, wield considerable political influence. The *Umuada* or *Umuokpu* (daughters of the family married outside, or, in some areas all the adult women of the kindred) are perhaps the most powerful of the organised women groups. Their customary function is to provide strong teams of mourners on the funeral of every deceased member of the kindred. On such occasions they have to wash the dead body and prepare it in state, and pass several nights—often four—with the bereft family before they finally disperse.

A member of the kindred who offended the *Umuada* in his lifetime and did not settle with them is deprived of their services on his death. The same penalty is imposed on members of the kindred who refuse to pay fines imposed by the kindred meeting for proven offences. If a wife of a member of the

kindred is known to be bad the *Umuada* could stage a court for her and impose penalties which if not carried out would result in their not featuring in her funeral on her death.

As no Igbo could afford not to be given a proper funeral at death he cannot also afford not to carry out the penalties imposed by his *Umuada*. Occasionally the *Umuada* step in to settle long-standing kindred disputes which the male members have been unable to settle. They could also impose collective penalties on the male members and could compel them, for example, to conform with any measures decided on the town level which measures they might have opposed.

"What Touches All . . ."

The mechanism of the political system of the Igbo is based on ideas reminiscent of the great statement of Edward III of Britain in summoning the First Parliament, namely that "What touches all must be approved by all." Traditional Igbo, on account of this, is thus often spoken of as practising primary democracy similar to that of the classical Greek states. At all levels of society every adult male is entitled to direct participation in the task of political decision making.

The assembly of the whole town or village group is the highest platform for political decision and action. All adult males can attend and participate in the meetings of the town assembly. In the town assembly the titled elders presided over affairs, deliberated over general discussions in a separate caucus consultation called *igba izu* and finally announced final decisions which quite often won a general vocal approval of the people. Occasionally the final decisions of the elders are rejected and fresh efforts are started towards winning common consensus.

Common consensus at the town level depends on the nature of issues which are at stake and on the nature of the interested parties. As the agreement of all the sub-villages and the kindreds is very important, political crises often result when lineage groups or blocks of such groups disagree with the decisions of the town assembly. Issues which often create risks of disagreements on lineage levels centre on such matters as ownership of land, disputes over land boundaries, reparations for marriages and homicide (on a member of the lineage concerned). As has been pointed out earlier, issues concerning obvious abominations are hardly disputed.

Open disagreements between the town and sections of it, in their extreme forms, could lead to feuds or internal violence as well as cause the aggrieved sections of the town to break away and form new village groups. If this happens the whole lineage group leaves the parent body and moves to a new settlement area. This type of situation partly accounts for the dual kinship system discussed by G. I. Jones⁷ as well as the dual nomenclature of Igbo towns depicting such historical backgrounds as:

OBODO UKWU (great Obodo)/OBODO NTA (small Obodo)

OBODO ULO (home Obodo)/OBODO-OHIA (new Obodo)

Sometimes the new town is named after the person or patriarch who led the group to the new settlement, e.g., *Umuokwei* (descendants of *Okwei* where *Okwei* was the leader of the break-away group). Other factors than disputes have led to the creation of such divisions but it is important to note in our present context this possibility the significance of which is that Igbo political system has no mechanism for enforcing political decisions at certain levels. Traditional political authority had therefore to depend very largely on consensus.

Another way of looking at this phenomenon is to say that because of the absence of centralised authority there is no effectively organised force which could enable the highest political authority, the town assembly, to enforce its decisions on a large scale.

The situation where one section of the town could break away over issues with which they seriously disagree is also illustrative of the egalitarian nature of Igbo political culture. As a matter of fact no lineage group regards the other as entitled to exercise dominant authority, although in matters like sharing things and assignments, an order of precedence based on ages of lineage or the times of their settling on the land is recognised. Each characteristic of Igbo political culture—lack of centralisation, egalitarian attitudes and individualism—thus enforces the other and the overall result is the primary democracy in which consensus must be achieved before decisions could be effective.

These limitations should not however be overstressed in such a way as to give the impression that collective authority or collective punishment is entirely absent in Igbo political system. Breaking away and migrating to new areas are not pleasant

experiences and lineage groups do not take to those extremes easily. Usually pressures are exerted at all levels and from various sources on the village or lineage which challenges the authority of the whole town. This is one of the occasions when such interest groups as the *Umuada* or the age groups (*Ebiri*) could play very important roles; for the *Umuada*, for example, could persuade if not compel their kindreds to make amends with the whole community as continued recalcitrance would cause the *Umuada* loss of face or respect in the various units into which they were married.

Apart from the extreme cases of sizeable sections of the town being subjected to the decisions of the town assembly, regular matters which come before it often concern individuals or small groups or non-lineage associations. In these areas the town assembly could more easily apply the established sanctions which include fines in terms of livestock, measures of food items, measures of palm wine and money (in the form of cowries, in the people's later pre-colonial and early colonial history). Sanctions could also involve such penalties as selling the offender into slavery, mutilation, swearing of oath over fetishes believed to have powers of safety and disaster, banishment to another land, or ostracism—which is the most dreaded of all punishments whether it concerns individuals or groups. Because it touches the very roots of communal life without which the individual or the group finds no meaning in life, ostracism is also reserved as a weapon of last resort in the process of group coercion among the Igbo. Usually the offender is given several alternatives and a long period of re-thinking before the penalty of ostracism is applied.

The political processes which operate at the town level repeat themselves with minor variations and smaller proportions at all levels of society down to the extended family. The extended family, the kindred and the sub-village group have each their own meetings presided over by the *Okpara* who traditionally holds the *Ofor* of the unit concerned. The meetings are open affairs and sanctions also take the form of fines, invocation of spirit and ancestral powers, exclusion (ostracisation) from the group. Fissions within the group are rare at these levels because of their size and closer lineage bonds; but in the rare cases when they occur, they are limited to splitting of property (like land) commonly owned, or customary functions (worship and ownership of ancestral shrines, observation of festivals, ownership of markets and village squares) hitherto performed in common.

Conclusion: Political Stability:

Traditional Igbo political system is thus rooted in the very structure of Igbo society itself which is featured by democratic orientations, individualistic achievement motivations, egalitarian tendencies and lack of hierarchical centralisation. In spite of all these, however, the system has a high degree of coherence beneath the apparent anarchy, and a high degree of stability beneath the apparent picture of compartmentalisation. Because of this, Igbo socio-political system like other pre-colonial societies has been, in the words of Professor Drake

"adequate for coping with most of the problems which faced them; the settling of personal and group disputes; the maintaining of peaceful markets; the mobilisation of community resources for communal purposes; the taking of decisions as to peace or war with neighbouring people. . . ."

As has been pointed out earlier, political stability does not necessarily mean the absence of conflicts, but the presence of mechanisms and institutions for effectively resolving conflicts. Much of the present problems of political modernisation in the country (Nigeria) can be attributed to the eradication or weakening of the traditional bounds, sanctions and value systems which provided built-in restraints and moral standards which governed political action and political authority before Western European contact and which can no more operate effectively within the Western large-scale political structures introduced by former colonial powers and retained, albeit modified, after independence.

What David Apter has called "political institutional transfer"¹ has thus taken place without the necessary political cultural transfer so indispensable in sustaining the new structures meaningfully. Much of the present instabilities in Nigeria as in other new developing nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America have much relevance to this cultural lag between tradition and modernity.

NOTES:

¹Almond, G. A. and Verba, S.: *The Civic Culture* (Free Press of Glencoe, 1964) p. 13.

²Pye, L. W. and Verba, S.: *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton University Press, 1965) p. 7.

³Almond and Verba Op. cit. p. 19.

⁴Oliisa, M.: *Tradition and Change in Nigerian Political Development* (Unpublished doctoral thesis for the University of Cambridge, 1964).

¹Forde, D. and Jones, G. I.: *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (International African Institute) p. 9.

See also Ardener, W.: *Kinship Terminology of a Group of Southern Igbo* (*Africa* 26, 1 January 1956 pp. 17-28).

²Achebe, C.: *Things Fall Apart* (Hienemann, 1958).

³Jones, G. I.: *Dual Organisation in Igbo Social Structure* (*Africa* 19, April 1949, pp. 150-166).

⁴Drake, St. Clair: (in PASSIN and JONES-QUARTEY: *Africa: The Dynamics of Change* (Ibadan University Press, 1963) p. 12.

⁵Apter, D.: *Ghana In Transition* (Atheneum Paperback edition, 1963) p. 123.

THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF SATIRE AMONG THE IGBO

D. I. Nwoga

Sylvia Leith-Ross, reporting her research in the Province of Owerri in 1935 wrote:

"Should [a girl] have intercourse with her fiancé or at any rate conceive by him before the proper time . . . she would be looked down upon by her companions 'who would make her a song.' This 'making a song,' i.e. bringing shame and ridicule on the victim by means of more or less ribald improvisations concerning his or her personal appearance, character and conduct, is a popular and very effective form of Igbo punishment."

What is the nature of this punishment? In other words, what is expected to be the effect on someone of being the victim of a satirical song? Chinua Achebe, describing a village meeting in *Things Fall Apart*, tells of Okonkwo saying to an untitled man who had contradicted him "This meeting is for men"; and he comments "Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit." To what extent does this metaphor have its source in any actual belief, now or in the past, in the magical power of satirical words?

The study of the past beliefs of the Igbo in this connection is severely handicapped by the absence of any written Igbo literature of any long standing. And the dynamic nature of oral traditions restricts the inferences that one can draw from current practice as elements and attitudes which develop in one area of life quite easily influence the practice in other areas. Besides, anthropologists and ethnologists who have studied Igbo life and culture have not had enough interest in this subject to say much about it. It is possible, however, to draw some circumstantial conclusions from the more obviously traditional situations and uses of satirical language about the past concept of the power of satire.

The use of satire in ritual survives in Igbo practice. During festivals connected with childbirth in the Owerri area, women are likely to break into satirical songs against men like:

Uwa la ara ndi nwoke
Ndi nwoke la efe juri juri la okporo
Uwa la ara ndi nwanyi
Ndi nwanyi la asu biam biam la ekwu
Adikwam chim, adikwam chim
Adikwam chim
Owu okwu onu ka owu ego.

They might also sing songs against young men who are not married or against spinsters who want to take their husbands from them. And in the Okigwe area, part of the *iva akwa* (lit.: putting on cloth) ritual by which youths are initiated into the adult stage consists of two neighbouring villages who celebrate the ceremony together engaging in lampooning combats in which the language varies from the serious to the obviously obscene. In the *Ovuruzo Odo* festival in Aku town of Nsukka Division, there is resort to derision of the *Odo* at certain stages. It is not quite clear whether the *Odo* is deistic or ancestral in its nature, but it is a benevolent "spirit" serving as a uniting force for the whole community and its arrival marks the beginning of the new year every two years.

Phoebe Ottenberg has reported that "Although the *ogo* society (Men's Society of Afikpo) is taken very seriously by both men and women, who are convinced that its spirit has the power to harm or even kill persons who offend it, a vein of humor runs through its activities, from the *penetrating satire of its songs* to the joking and horse-play of some of its secret activities" (my italics).²

The tradition of satire being part of ritual is not exclusive to the Igbo in Africa. For one example, Dr. V. W. Turner has narrated that during the puberty ritual of girls among the Ndembu of Zambia, the senior women of the novice's own village dance around the *mudyi* (milk tree). Only women and not men may dance there, "and the women attack the men in jeering and lampooning songs. Moreover, for a long time the girl's mother may not approach the *mudyi* tree, and when she finally does so, she is mocked by the senior women."³

The possibility does exist that satirical songs were introduced into ritual at a stage when satire had developed as a distinct form. But the case is more likely to have been the opposite. The general hypothesis of the ritual origin of satire has been argued convincingly for societies where written literature of primitive peoples has made categorical investigation possible.⁴ Moreover, certain forms of wish expressions, which are akin to satire, survive in other rituals and their use indicates their innateness within the ritual. In the ritual of *iva oji* (breaking cola), along with the expression of the wishes for good to befall individuals and the community, there are always some imprecations against those who either wish others evil or behave in ways which could harm the community. In *isu ofo* the elders after praying for the

good of the community also exorcise the bad wishes of the society's enemies and utter curses against evil doers.⁸

It might also be argued, against the proposition that satire is sometimes part of Igbo ritual, that the ritual complex could be divided into the ritual proper and the celebration which is peripheral to it, and that the satire belongs to the celebration. This might be the modern situation in which the secularisation of various verbal forms has been established. But whereas, for example, it might be possible to separate the festival from the childbirth ritual, like the naming ceremony (*Igu Afa*), in time sequence,⁹ it is not possible to separate the satire from the *Odo* race ritual in the *Aku* event mentioned above (or in the puberty ritual of the Zande) into separate stages of the ceremony. But even where they are separable, the heightened emotions deriving from the ritual complex must be admitted to give an atmosphere to the words which places them above the level of mere discourse.

Moreover, there is the close affinity between satire and the curse. This becomes clear when the object of the satire is one that evokes deep emotion. The force of invective would be a factor of the depth of animosity. The following song is an example. It arose out of a situation in which a village had assumed supremacy over another and the resistance of the second village to this had created hardships and even death. Ikeako and Mbogu are the leaders of the bigger village and Agaba the leader of the resisting village. The resisting village sang:

He who made himself a king
 We are calling Ikeako the dupe
 He who made himself a king
 Agaba
 Let fear not touch you, let terror not catch you
 Go forward, you and your warriors, with a brave heart
 Your supporters at home are staunch people
 We have put our case before the Creator
 Mbogu is now dead
 Only Ikeako is left, the crazy one.

The sarcastic reference to Ikeako as the one who made himself a king, the derogatory epithets, "dupe" and "crazy one," contain the directly satirical elements of the song. And yet the total, conceived as one song, shows to what extent malediction is combined with invective. The gloating in the penultimate line, the confident

expectation in the last line, both give the impression of faith in the ability to call down death on the object of satire.⁷

The ritual context of satire lends support to the hypothesis that at some stage in Igbo traditions there was belief in the magical power of satire. This hypothesis is further buttressed by some other considerations. There is some belief among the Igbo of the magical power of the poet. A relic of this belief survives in the form of an old woman poetess in the Mbaise area of the old Owerri Province. This woman believes, and she certainly is not the only one who so believes, that she was possessed into becoming a seer and poetess. She knows and visits the gods of the surrounding villages and is the concubine of the first son of *Onyirioha*, the god of a neighbouring town. She narrates with a faith which brooks no disbelief, of a terrifying visit which she had from *Amadioha*, the god of lightning. She was mistaken in her fear, however, for *Amadioha* had only come to hear her sing: he had not heard her sing since he inspired her with the power of song. She also talks of two occasions on which she cursed people with disastrous consequences. One was a man who robbed her of four chickens beside the market where her concubine lives. The man died within two weeks. On another occasion, she was cheated out of a chicken by a family of four men. She called upon the god of their town who asked her to beat a gong and recite curses through the town. Three of the men died. The other went mad and still wanders through the town till today, claiming everybody's property as his own. The fact of these claims does not influence the argument here. Belief by her and others in their truth does support the hypothesis of a period in which magical power was attributed to satire.

Another factor supporting the hypothesis is the use of satirical songs in warfare. Bruno Nettle, in *Music in Primitive Cultures*, writes about "... another tribal experience in which music is functional: war. Although war songs are connected with religion in many cultures (they may solicit supernatural aid to assure success in battle) and are once in a while of a narrative nature, they occasionally take a special form among primitive peoples similar to our cheers in athletics. Among the Ibo of Nigeria, the following incantation is used to rally the warriors before an attack: 'The Ibo people are like the elephants.'" In his account of the Niger Expedition, Rev. J. C. Taylor, describing a skirmish at Onitsha wrote "The spies on the tops of the trees, with their piped instruments, congratulated

any man when he fired and killed another.” And Basden describes the Igbo on a warpath—“When on a warpath, the company marched in procession, the leader bearing the calabash containing the “medicine” which was to protect the party from the guns of the enemy. In the centre were the buglers, those who sounded the call on the *akpele*. . . . With it a series of notes and calls were blown; it served as a bugle.” Those “piped instruments” or “bugles” were not of course just playing symbolic music but reproduced actual speech and songs.¹¹ And if continuing practice is anything to go by, they must have, in addition to congratulations for the achievements of their men, chanted some satires against their opponents.

The argument up to this point has tried to establish that Igbo did attribute some preternatural powers to satire. What was satire supposed to achieve and by what means was its power harnessed to this end?

The positive function of satire as a means of social control is commonly admitted and has been commented on by various writers on Igbo life. Forde and Jones, for example, have written that “Women associations express their disapproval and secure their demands by collective public demonstrations including ridicule, satirical singing and dancing and group strikes.”¹² Phoebe Ottenberg speaks of the “often scathing social commentaries” that abound in Afikpo singing,¹³ and in their *Cultures and Societies of Africa*, Simon and Phoebe Ottenberg repeat the statement about the texts of songs being composed for specific occasions and being “essentially creative commentaries on the present social scene.”¹⁴ Topical comments do abound in Igbo vernacular songs and the subjects range from pressing and current political situations to individual behaviour within the community.

But the salutary social function of satire is merely a side effect. Central to the concept of satire among the Igbo is the idea of punishment through words. It is anger with a person or a group, rather than the sense of offended morality which is the principal urge towards satirical expression. Self-expression rather than communication is the main objective.

The nature of the punishment might vary in different situations, but it is always within the range of the possible effects arising from the fact of wounded pride of spirit. To be put to shame was a severe punishment among the Igbo. In the combat situation there must have been the belief that it was possible to at least weaken the power of the enemy through satire. The

example already given indicates a faith tending towards death through satire. But that was an extreme situation driving the singers towards extreme wish expressions. The more general forms do not ask for the death of the enemy but the weakening of his force.

There is an affinity between some satirical usages and name magic. Talbot reported that "Among some Ibo, especially the Ngwa, three or four 'doctors' are called in and given presents of kola; these summon the soul of the man, against whom the grudge is borne, to enter into some small creature, such for instance as a lizard, which is then caught, tied up and shot at with arrows, as a result of which he dies." (*Southern Nigeria*, Vol. II: Ethnology, Oxford 1926, p. 179). The satirical singers do insist on calling the names of those being satirised and quite recently, some women were confidently expecting that somebody, an enemy at a distance, whom they regularly satirised, would run mad.

But even without the name calling, satirical derisions or taunting does continue to be used in combative situations which do not have the venom of past tradition. In the game of draughts, for example, it is usual for heavy doses of taunting to accompany the game.¹⁴ This anticipatory form of satire must be seen to share the nature of the curse and the spell. It does not take the place of the "medicine" or "charm" which has actual physical operative power, but serves to supplement the effect by hitting at the spirit of the victim. And this is in line with other forms of verbal expression accompanying objective action. Witches and wizards, for example, did not rely on their curses and spells for the fulfilment of their objectives. They used curses and spells to weaken, blindfold or detain their victims while they assumed other forms to get in contact with their victims to do the actual damage. Similarly, incantations were used to confer preternatural power on medicines but it was the medicines that acted on the body.¹⁵

The satirical words therefore are aimed directly at the spirit of the victims. And in the anticipatory aim seen above, it is supposed to operate on the body through the spirit to weaken the resistance or aggressive force of the enemy. Outside the combative situation, the general aim is that of punishment, of making the culprit suffer for his or her action by being ridiculed. The effect of satire operates on the basis that the Igbo have a shame culture. Victor C. Uchendu, writing in *The Igbo of Southern Nigeria* af-

firms that "The concept of the good life among the Igbo is so built on the transparency theme that the individual dreads any form of loss of face. The major deterrent to crime is not guilt feeling but shame feeling."¹⁰ And Margaret Green, much earlier, had reported that though the elders of the village where she was doing her research were quite afraid that she might take their land from them, they were yet anxious that she did not go away from them because they would be ridiculed by their neighbours.¹¹ And this indeed is the source of the salutary social effect of satire: the fear of being made an object of ridicule. The common punishment for those who committed small felonies like stealing chicken was to parade them through the town with what they had stolen hung around their necks, the whole village, particularly the women and children, crowding round them, chanting shame at them and occasionally spitting at them. This public disgrace was considered enough punishment. (More serious offences of course received punishment beyond disgrace.) After the act of public disgrace would come the satirical songs which prolonged the punishment.

The seriousness with which satire is taken is some indication of the hurt it can create. On the outside is the modern tendency, common in Africa where words have still so much force, to curb the freedom of the press particularly in matters that have to do with criticism of the persons of the political elite. And indeed, it was difficult for even an educated African overseas to understand how the holders of power in say, Britain, could allow satirical plays and revues on stage and even sometimes attend and applaud. Have they lost all sense of shame? In the Mbanasa area of Nkwere Division, the elders have recently placed an embargo on a form of dancing and singing. This was of a group of young men and women who, in the evenings and into the night, would meet in the village square, formulating songs and broadcasting them about any person of their age group who was involved in any action contrary to their mores (particularly against girls who got pregnant before marriage or were free with themselves—occasionally against somebody who had been caught stealing). The possible general salutary effect did not save this dance (*Kiss* or *Oshaka*) from being banned because, the elders said, the songs, by passing into currency, were continuing the punishment for the crime for too long—and indeed fights had taken place in the village because of the satirical songs. It is now an act punishable with a fine of ten shillings to sing any of the songs.

The malefic effect of satire led to a mixed social attitude towards people with satirical powers. Though, in most cases, everybody enjoyed the humour and wit of the satirist, particularly where the offence was generally recognised, people who composed the satires were referred to as having "bad mouths." They were kept at a respectful distance tinged with fear."

Satire then is a form of verbal attack directed against individuals or groups who have offended either through personal injury or through breaking the mores of the community, distinguished from the curse and spell only because these later call for some supernatural powers to inflict harm on the victim while satire works directly on the spirit of the victim.

Because it is less intimately connected with the supernatural, it has been easily transformed into a form of social entertainment. Much of the venom has been abstracted from most of its popular uses and more humour introduced. The case of the reaction in Mbanasa mentioned above shows how seriously it can still be taken. But generally—probably because the society has become more permissive and moral standards have become less certain—satire has become less virulent and at the same time more popular and people can bear being satirised. It has become a literary activity, the level of its literary validity being often related to the form which the satire takes.

Forms of Satire:

Words are only a part of a complex of factors which create the personal and social force of the satire. The imagination is subordinated to the will. The organisation of words is dominated by the expected impact. It is therefore possible, in certain situations to create the effect of satire by simply calling the name of the victim. But this is not distinguished from the name curse except in intention. It can hardly therefore be considered a literary form of satire.

Brief categorical statements come next in the order of brevity. Much depends here on the credence which can be expected from the audience on the derogatory nature of the affirmed attribute or action of the victim. But more generally, even in these brief statements, it is possible for the clever practitioner to insert enough emotive expressions which have instant impact because of striking chords deep in the consciousness of the group so that the effect is immediately felt by the audience. This form of satire often depends too directly on the homogeneity of the audience

group to come out into the open field of literature for appreciation. If we take, for example, the following song:

Unu were mkpisi nyerem Mmadie
A ya la Regina go igbu ozu
Onu woko owu ugu
Onu nwanyi owu ugu.

(Please take a stick [give a warning] to Mmadie / she and Regina will commit murder / By the voice of men it is a terrible thing / By the voice of women it is a terrible thing.)

Obviously this does not say anything much to a stranger. And yet it was extremely effective in its attracting of audience appreciation when it first came out, and provoked, even if temporarily, a large measure of discomfort to Mmadie and Regina (they still quarrel I understand). It does not say much to an outsider because it relies heavily on the audience being aware of the total situation (Mmadie and her daughter-in-law Regina were always fighting and quarrelling) and so the composer advanced the story beyond the facts to suggest a terrible consequence for the known situation, without establishing the fact of the situation. The rest of the effect was then derived from the use of exclamatory expressions which in the village context have an extreme effect. 'Ogu' is a concept with metaphysical radiations. It applies to an individual's position vis-à-vis the cosmic order. So that "to give 'ogu'" to somebody is to warn somebody to desist from some act of hostility because the giver considers the action as one that could lead to catastrophic consequences and he (the giver) denies all responsibility, by giving the 'ogu,' for those consequences. "To have 'ogu'" implies that the speaker is declaring justice on his side, his innocence as a provocator, in a conflict. All these other usages, bearing on the given usage in the song—"owu ugu"—which declares the situation as bad enough to be contradictory to the order of nature, declares the seriousness of the satire to the homogeneous audience.

Another form of the brief statement relies on the audience's recognition of the gravity of a stated course of action in addition to the composer's direction for reaction. For example:

Nwachukwu anughalam ozo
Anughala m ozo
Bertram lugha nwanyi na ulo
O lugha nwanyi na ulo
Omere ihe aru.

(Nwachukwu, I have heard a new one / I have heard a new one / Bertram is marrying at home / He is marrying at home / He has committed an abomination.)

Bertram's incestuous action calls for its own reaction. The final statement of the song about the abomination of the act merely reinforces the satire and declares the composer's agreement with the audience in the reaction which the act itself must have provoked.

The brevity of this form naturally demands that the act being satirized has to be described in one central image. Generally, these images are referential and depend for their effect on the shared experience of the audience and the singer. Occasionally, however, they achieve metaphorical levels which carry their effects in the irony within the imagery. One does not have to be as impressed with the need to marry and have children as the singers to laugh at the spendthrift unmarried youth who is satirized as:

Onye iberibe

Ojere zuo oke okwe tii la cup si o na amuru ya nwa

(imbecile one, he bought a male rat and closed it in a cup, expecting it to yield issue.) And it is easy for even a sympathetic person to forget the individual suffering of a young woman in childbirth and share in the general satirical mirth at her weakness involved in the following slightly expanded form of the short statement:

Nwa ogbede gbaghere akpi turu ime
ya gbaghere akpi muo ya
ya cbekwle ka nwa eghu
maa! maa!

(A young girl that opens her waist to take in a pregnancy / should open her waist to deliver the baby / And stop crying like a young goat / maa! maa!)

The effective element in the diversion of sympathy is in the phrase, "gbaghere akpi," which indicates a too free opening of the waist. The implication is of course that having recklessly enjoyed the act by which she got pregnant, the young woman should expect no sympathy at the pains of childbirth.

The brief form yields itself most readily to the diversification of use. Because its form does not demand an extended statement,

the satirical element can be easily inserted and surrounded with one or two lines expressing the required emotion (often invective, question, or malediction). As it is often used in situations directly opposing personal or group enemies, once the right form of words has been found, it is repeated on and on, gaining power with repetition.

The following sequence illustrates the point. The individual songs must be seen as coming against the background of inter-village warfare in the past though they were recorded in a funeral situation. Traditionally, when a married woman died, her people came to carry her corpse. They had to be adequately compensated by her husband's people, for, after all, it was a living woman that had been married, and now a corpse was being handed back to them. In this given instance the relatives of the woman from Aguneze had not been adequately compensated by the people of Ezeala and a fight threatened. Some of the songs are more in praise of the relevant group, but others can be seen as directly satirical. Both however partake of the intention to weaken and punish the opponents. (The relatives of the woman are represented by A in what follows, and the husband's people as B):

- A. Eh, lele ndi ogu, ya!
 Mba ogu okwere nwoko nkwe
 Eh, lele ndi ogu, ya!
 Mba ogu okwere nwoko nkwe
 Ndi anyi na hi gbara ihuru ihe mmere ha
 Mba ogu okwere nwoko nkwe
 Alike Obowo inuru ihe mmere ha
 Mba ogu okwere nwoko nkwe
 Mgbucha nwoko chara ya amu ya
 Mba ogu okwere nwoko nkwe
 Chara amu ya gwere ede anwuru ma
 Mba ogu okwere nwoko nkwe.

(To the chorus of "Boasting befits a man!" the leader said: Eh, behold real warriors, yes! / Eh, behold real warriors, yes / Did you see what we did to our neighbours? / Did you hear what we did to Alike Obowo? / Beat a man and cut out his penis / Cut his penis and ground it for my tobacco pouch.)

- B. Umu anyi owa ndi la eme owhoa!
 Owagha ndi la eme owhoa

Owagha ndi la eme owhoa, mgborogwu!

Owagha ndi la eme owhoa

Ezeala owagha ndi la eme owhoa!

Owagha ndi la eme owhoa.

(My people, are we people terrified with a shout? / These are not people you terrify with a shout, tap roots / Ezeala people are not terrified with a shout etc.)

- A. Ndi ebea me hie
 Nwoko di ime nwanyi di ime
 Ndi ebea me hie.

(People here do strange things / their men are pregnant and their women are pregnant / People here do strange things.)

- B. Urekere nwoko
 Urekere nwoko kwuru ihea
 Urekere nwoko
 * Ezeala gwam oto m ji emie eme
 Urekere nwoko etc.
 Ezeala biko bia la hie emena
 Urekere nwoko etc.

(Decayed man / This was said by a decayed man / a decayed man. Leader—Ezeala tell me what is to be done. *Chorus*. Leader—Ezeala please gather, something has happened. *Chorus*.)

- A. Elee nwoko kwuru ihea
 Anya cha ya uhie
 Elce nwoko kwuru ihea
 Anya cha ya uhie.

[Where is the man that said that, his eyes will get red—(obviously meaning that he will be beaten 'black and blue,' to use a cliché).]

- B. Nneckwu kwuru ihea
 Owula okokpa ama m ahana onu
 Nneckwu kwuru ihea.

(It is a hen saying this / If it had been a cock I would have replied / It is a hen saying this.)

- A. M marana
 Ma eghu bere ma aturu bere
 M marana.

(I don't know / whether it is a goat bleating or a sheep bleating /
I don't know.)

B. Ute ogwula la ahia
 Aguleze jiri mgbarala mere otule
 Ute ogwula la ahia.

(Are mats finished in the market? Aguleze uses the earth for the bottom; are mats finished in the market?)

All these had been chanted by the men to the accompaniment of shouts and ululations from their women—which shouts and ululations were calculated to interfere with the audibility of the opponents' attacks and encourage their menfolk. At this stage, Aguneze people had had the worse of the word battle. They had been attacked in their manhood, their malehood, and finally in their property resources. They now departed (without carrying their sister's corpse) "bravely" chanting defiant sounds (*ovuru gbalagha*) at the Ezeala people. The latter pursued them with a final taunt:

B. Ndi anyi kwere ugu
 Ndi anyi kwere ugu uche agha ha aba
 Owu anyi mere ha.

(We offered them a fight / We offered them a fight and their minds fell into confusion / We are not responsible for their state.)

These songs or chants were not invented or composed for this given occasion. They have a currency which perhaps antedates all the participants in the drama I recorded, but this long currency had not diminished their effect on the victim."

The shorter form above successfully conveys the feelings of the composers or the users, but often the brevity of expression does not give the scope for the development of the subject in such a way that the audience, particularly that audience outside the experiences and ethos that provoked its expressions, can share the emotion intended beyond the recognition of the feelings of the composers or users. The expanded form gives this scope and though one appreciates the sharp wit of the former, the latter is much more satisfying to the imagination of the audience.

Two types may be distinguished in the expanded form. Let me for brevity refer to them as types A and B. Type A is normally performed in the pattern of leader and chorus, the leader giving the satirical content in, more often than not, single lines

and the chorus responding with a standard chant, sometimes meaningful, at other times some onomatopoeic sound carrying some of the significance of the expected moral response to the criticism. Type B on the other hand is performed in a continuous form, the leader completing the whole stanza and the chorus repeating the stanza. In type A, practically every line by the leader is a complete satirical statement by itself. The total is therefore built up by an accumulation of individual brief statements which expand, contrast or deepen themselves into a full satire. In different performances the lines are interchangeable and the whole may be shorter or longer depending on the memory and expertise of the leader. Type B songs are, on the contrary, complete and self-contained compositions, built up logically to a climax of drama or statement. The parts remain fixed and are not interchangeable. Often they are narrative.

An example of each type will illustrate the point:

- A. Mary Rose imakata mma ga lywa onwegi ina anụ o
 —Mary Rose ashawo, ofe onugbu atogbuole onwe ya
 Mary Rose m biakwa alụ gi mmiri buru ego m ina anụ o
 —Mary Rose ashawo, ofe onugbu atogbuole onwe ya
 Agbogho mara mma gara be di ya na eti nne di ye ihe
 —Mary Rose ashawo, ofe onugbu atogbuole onwe ya
 Agbogho mara mma gara be di ye na aba mmamiri na ute
 —Mary Rose ashawo, ofe onugbu atogbuole onwe ya
 etc.

The Chorus here is meaningful—"Mary Rose, nymphomaniac, *onugbu* soup is very sweet"—apparently Mary Rose would do anything to have a meal of bitter leaf soup. The leader treated Mary Rose to a jibe in each line:

- Mary Rose you are very pretty but you will have to marry yourself
 Mary Rose If I come to marry you may all my money get lost in the sea
 A beautiful girl beat her mother-in-law in her husband's home
 A beautiful girl urinated on her mat in her husband's home, etc.

Type B. Osicha okere oha nwunye Okpekaogu
 Ole whe ijiri le Okpekaogu tuo mkporo
 Owu si Okpekaogu enwegh ego

Ọwụ si Okpekaogu enwegh ọnụ
 Gịrị kara gị obi
 Silivesita nwa diala ya kara gị obi
 Iko ụlọ jọ njo
 Iko ụlọ emene Okpekaogu aga mkporo!
 "E oh" Okpekaogu ebewele
 "Agalam Owere
 Ebemla enweghim nwanna enweghim nwanne
 Agawalan gbo"

Translation:

She that cooks and distributes to the public,²⁰ wife of
 Okpekaogu
 Why is it you have sent Okpekaogu to prison?
 Is it that Okpekaogu has no money?
 Is it that Okpekaogu has no mount?²¹
 What hardens your heart?
 Is it because of Sylvester, son of the soil, that your
 heart is hardened?
 Having a lover within the kindred is bad,
 Okpekaogu has gone to prison because his wife had a
 lover within the kindred!
 "Alas!", Okpekaogu cried,
 "I am going to Owerri"²²
 As I have no kindred and no brothers
 I am gone."

The expanded form has become the most popular in dance and song, a result both of the greater secularisation of the satirical mode (it is certainly less pointed and directed than, say, the combat type of the short form) and the increased interest in critical and typical songs as a form of relaxed entertainment. The commitment persists even if less emotively pursued, but the expression is the value. Satire no longer kills the spirit of the victim as much as it gladdens the heart of the audience.

NOTES:

¹*African Women*, London 1935, 1965, p. 361.

²⁰"The Afikpo Ibo of Eastern Nigeria" in James L. Gibbs, Jr., ed., *Peoples of Africa*, N.Y. 1963, p. 15.

²¹"Ritual Symbolism, Morality and Social Structure among the Ndem-bu," *African Systems of Thought*, Oxford 1965, p. 88.

²²cf Principally, R. C. Elliot, *The Power of Satire*, Princeton University Press, 1960.

⁸cf Margaret Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 1947, Cass 1964, p. 121.

⁹cf Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 1938, Cass 1966, p. 175.

¹⁰A recent example of this in the written literature of Nigeria is Wole Soyinka's poem, "Malediction, For her who rejoiced" (*Idanre and other Poems*, pp. 55-6).

¹¹(*Niger Expedition*, 1858, p. 334).

¹²*Niger Ibos*, p. 383.

¹³cf. Dr. W. W. Echezona, *Ibo Musical Instruments in Ibo Culture*, Ph.D. Thesis 1963, Michigan State University.

¹⁴Daryll Forde & G. I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of Eastern Nigeria*, International African Institute, London, 1950 (1967), p. 21.

¹⁵*Op. cit.*

¹⁶*Cultures & Societies of Africa*, N.Y. 1960, p. 68.

¹⁷For a fictional representation of this, see Isidore Okpewho, *The Victims*, Longman 1970, Chapter 9.

¹⁸cf Talbot, *Southern Nigeria*, pp. 159 ff.

¹⁹*The Igbo of Southern Nigeria*, New York 1965, p. 17.

²⁰*Igbo Village Affairs*, p. 282.

²¹For a comparison from another African group, cf. Evans Pritchard, "Sanza, a Characteristic Feature of Zande Language and Thought," *Essays in Social Anthropology*, Faber, 1962, pp. 204-228.

²²They have, through long use, acquired the stability of formulae which, because of the tonal quality of the language, can be used by simply humming. They have also been adequately transferred into drum or flute music. (cf. W. W. C. Echezona, *Ibo Musical Instruments in Ibo Culture*, Ph.D. Thesis, M.S.U. 1963, p. 48 ff.)

²³Image of sexual promiscuity.

²⁴Idea here includes both that Okpekaogu (the name itself means "it is better to discuss than to fight") cannot speak for himself and that he has nobody to speak for him.

²⁵The prison is at Owerri.

RELATIVISM, PRAGMATISM, AND RECIPROCITY
IN IGBO PROVERBS

Austin J. Shelton

Although Igbo proverbs have attracted the attention of Africanists, much of this interest has resulted largely in collection,¹ description of the most general sort,² and explanation of the employment of proverbs traditionally or by modern Igbo writers.³ There has been very little detailed analysis either of proverbial form and structure or of the content of proverbs.⁴ This paper is an attempt to contribute to the study of certain recurrent themes in Igbo proverbs, to illustrate some important aspects of the Igbo *Weltanschauung* (en).⁵

I wish to deal with three overlapping subjects which contribute importantly to the Igbo world view: (1) cultural relativism (*ñkénnyị bụ ñkénnyị, mà ñkémụ bụ ñkémụ*), (2) the pragmatic sanction of behavior, emphasizing the practically reasonable (*Enwè sị na ọkà nà-ekwu ọmụ ẹsị ọtá yá*); and (3) the distinctions among powers and power-groups, including the important principle of reciprocity in human affairs (*Dịbeà gwólu ọzọ, ọzọ gbuli díbeà*).

In all this I am attempting to penetrate somewhat into collective rural Igbo thought which is generally not formalized but which nonetheless has an internal consistency which may or may not be equally known by all Igbo groups nor even by many Christianized Igbo people. Although many of the values expressed in Igbo proverbs might be paralleled by the values of other African peoples (e.g., the *Ọkpọtọ, ọkwuú héyí tá gínú-ń*: "Buttocks do not before the head enter a house"), the present study is concerned only with values of Igbo rather than with generalizations about other peoples however valid or interesting such generalizations may be.

No one person, let alone an outsider,⁶ has heard "most" Igbo proverbs, for the actual number of Igbo proverbs cannot be known, since many of the proverbs vary from locality to locality and from one dialect to another in Igboland. Even in a given rural locality, moreover, very few persons will be masters of proverb oratory, although many grown men and elders might now and then, even frequently, lace their speech with proverbs or proverb-type figures of language (*ńkwúkwà*). Many of these have become so commonplace that they are hardly noteworthy, calling for no special ability, and it is accordingly not accurate

to say or imply that all Igbo elders are adept at proverbial oratory. In fact, some are dumbly clumsy, many relatively adept, and a few others superb in their breadth of knowledge and truly artistic employment and recitation of proverbs. This study therefore is not intended to be exhaustive, but is meant to indicate some areas of Igbo thought which might be explored and analyzed further by other scholars, especially Igbo themselves.

Cultural Relativism

Ọdị	mmá	íra jeré	Ènwè	mmányá
It is	good to send		Monkey [to get]	palm wine, [but]
onyé	gà-éwè [chí]	ghá	udu [itè]	mmányá?
who	will bring back		the wine pot?	

The assignment of tasks is not dependent solely upon caprice or the chance suggestion of one unfamiliar with the complicated matrix of the society, the context in which those tasks occur and function. On the contrary, each has his own place, his own things to do, his own responsibilities, and although good will might incline one (perhaps in the yeasty throes of palm-wined headiness) to include the outsider among one's own, it is a mistake to do so, for the outsider has his culture, and we have our own. To the Igbo, "Our thing is our thing, but my thing is my thing," a principle expressed in a very common *ilú*. It emphasizes cultural difference, obvious between Monkey and Man, perhaps less obvious between one group of people and another human group.

Many Igbo proverbs emphasize cultural relativism: what is good, true, and beautiful in one culture might not be so valued in another culture. To express such relativism, Igbo proverbs often use animal characters or make references to animals, partly to avoid the flatly unpoetic expression of the ideas and partly to add a touch of irony and attention-holding humor to what otherwise could be quite serious and even dull. Important among the *ilú* which express notions of cultural relativism are those dealing with esthetic differences. Monkey (*Ènwè*) appears in many of these.

ènwè	sị	nà	ọ ịọdụrú	hwa nnti,
Monkey	says	that	he would have remained	a little child,
mà	ikú	arúó	yà	mmá.
but [his]	cycbrows	produced	his beauty	[adult appearance].
(Óbèle ihè	nà-ébibi	nnúkwú	ihè.)	
(A small thing	remains	a great thing.)		

In this amplified proverb, the point emphasized is that adulthood develops naturally (in the sense that one matures, not necessarily that responsibility automatically grows). What accounts for the adulthood and adult beauty of Monkey is his maturation, indicated by the growth of his eyebrows. To Monkey this is very important, for it does after all lead to *his* adulthood. Yet to the human person, mere maturation does not make the adult; what is equally or even more important is the development of character and all the responsibility which adulthood among Igbo implies (e.g., *írú dī mmá, mà ázú ka*: "Beauty is good, but strength is better."). So in matters of adulthood, humans have one measure, Monkeys another; similarly in matters of beauty there is a vast difference between societies:

Ènwè sị nà mmá zúrú [. . .] yà àrú.

Monkey says that beauty nourishes his body.

(Preferably: Monkey said that his beauty is enough for him.)

Furthermore,

Ènwè siri: "Írú m gàrá ádigh

Monkey said: "My face [beauty] would stop [end] if not
ógólógó ágírí isi m gàrá iruà m n'ónú."
[were] the long hair of my head [were] to reach my mouth."
("I would lose all my beauty if my long head hair were to reach all the way to my mouth—i.e., and hide my face.")

Monkey's vanity satisfies his needs, perhaps, but that is Monkey's way: he sits with his fellows, each preening the other for hours on end, even male Monkey more self-conscious than the vainest of the eligible young human girls ordering their features with camwood, indigo, and new coiffures. This attention which he gives to his looks is Monkey's right, moreover, and the relative judgment itself is based upon a pragmatic sanction: What works for Monkey (*nk'ènwè*: "Monkey's thing") is proper for Monkey. Its propriety is not transferable to others' behavior, however, for it is not *hké mmádú* ("person's thing"). What is transferable is the principle: as man differs from Monkey, so men differ from one another, and all judgments about cultures have to be made in the terms of the given culture. This applies broadly in the study of cultures. Another African, not Igbo, in this general connection remarked that

. . . the West, by virtue of its advance, has been too ready to be a judge in his own cause. . . . Man cannot be a judge in his own cause without misusing his power."

As Monkey is often used as a symbol of vanity to illustrate cultural difference, so he is a symbol of other sorts of behaviors, some bordering on foolishness.

Monkey says that [when] he copulates he eats in order to
Ènwè sị nà yà mà kà yà ra wèé
 maintain the seed of his penis.
nòò ñkpúru útù.

Similarly:

Ènwè tarà ójé yá n'órù mmíli [i.e., *mámmíli*].
 Monkey always chews his kola when he passes water [i.e.,
 urine].

In these cases Monkey's behavior is not based upon values merely different from those of Igbo, but is even further removed, for to Igbo it represents proscribed behavior. In such proverbs (and other references, such as the explanatory story, *ákúkkó*, Monkey falls into the category of trickster heroes such as Tortoise or Hare in Africa, or Coyote and Raven in North America, who are able to engage in countless actions forbidden to and usually considered shocking by people.

Although commentators have often described the cultural and psychological functions of these events⁹ indicating the cathartic values of the depiction of forbidden behavior or demonstrating how such portrayals function to support social structures, to my knowledge the interpretation of these materials also as indices of peoples' beliefs in cultural relativism has been neglected. But it is just this sort of interpretation which often makes all the difference in understanding many oral testimonies, particularly among Igbo. Monkey's eating while copulating, or chewing kola while urinating, are not merely "wrong" behaviors, although this lumping together of behaviors which the rural Igbo feel should be separate is "wrong" to Igbo themselves. Nor are Monkey's behaviors used merely as inverse examples to teach youngsters what proper behavior is, although here and there this too may be done, even if it is far more common for rural Igbo to teach children "right" behaviors by direct precept and example rather than through possibly confusing parables. The proverbial reference to such improper behavior of course reinforces what rural Igbo know. But beyond all this it transcends value judgment. To paraphrase the old proverb, what it does is illustrate that

nk'ènwè bụ nk'ènwè, mà nkémù bụ nkémù.

Monkey's thing is Monkey's thing, but people's thing is people's thing.

Monkey may do certain shocking things, but that is *his* way, not the Igbo way; indeed, turned about, perhaps the Igbo way is equally strange to Monkey (although I don't think rural Igbo ever bothered to speculate upon this). Certainly what is indicated is not simply that Monkey does forbidden things, or that people should not perform proscribed actions, or that Monkey is somehow "evil" while people are "good," but that *Monkey is different from people*, and Monkey's behaviors themselves are not transferable properly to human behavior, although some might be analogous and even acceptable. In any case, humans must decide very carefully, and not presume that what is good for one group may be good for another group.

This concept has possibly far-reaching consequences in relation to the oft-expressed Igbo adaptability to social and cultural change, which is presumably a greater adaptability than many other peoples may manifest.¹⁰ Depending upon the incidence of such expressions of cultural relativism one might hypothesize (if the belief in cultural relativism is fairly high as indicated by a high incidence of such references) that peoples such as the rural Igbo were not merely "flexible" as Ottenberg has indicated, although this applies, but that they did not erect such rigid cultural barriers as some other human groups, but considered each human group to have its own culture *which was good for that group*, and *which could be partly good or partly bad for Igbo*, depending upon Igbo assessment of those particular aspects of the alien culture which interested them. If such were the case, one might conclude that groups which make too strong a judgment about the superiority of their own culture often by this very judgment erect rigid cultural barriers and, although they might impose (or attempt to impose) their own culture upon others, they are fairly resistant to acculturation; whereas those groups which believe more strongly in cultural relativism may have less rigid walls constructed about their culture, and be relatively willing to assess other cultures on those other cultures' merits to see if aspects of that other culture might be usefully adopted or sensibly rejected.

Cultural relativism is expressed often in Igbo proverbs through other characters as well as Monkey. For example, Okonyia¹¹ cites the proverb in which Bat, not merely recognizing

esthetic differences between groups, is depicted as especially accommodating to human sensitivities:

Úsú sì nà yá málú kiyá, sì jónjọ
 Bat says that he knows his own body, says it is ugly [so]
ówè wélue [nà] anyási n'efe.
 he waits until night to fly.

Toad (*Áwọ̀*), generally a despised creature among rural Igbo, is also used in numerous proverbs, including the following:

Òkìlìkìlì bù ìje áwọ̀.
 Round and round is the journey [of] toad.

and:

Áwọ̀ sì nà ónyé nyalu ọkọ̀ bùlùgòlì.
 Toad says that the person who goes close to the fire becomes strong.

The first of these usually is intended to suggest that a speaker get to the point of what he is saying, and it means that although a toad might go in circles, this is not the best sort of movement for human conversation, since man's thing is not Toad's thing. The second in a different way also emphasizes cultural relativism: although fire is beneficial to both man and Toad, to the latter—a cold blooded creature—warmth is virtually the only means enabling him to function, so he would obviously rate fire even more highly than man might. What to man is comfort, to Toad is the source of power, each group placing its own value upon the thing considered. The following proverbs reinforce the foregoing:

Ízizi j'ákwa, mà Ngwèlè bù ọtọ.
 Fly goes in cloth, but Lizard is naked.

Ájii mul'ụmụ sì ñké bù ụmwá
 Crocodile bears children, says those who are her children
solusi mmili; ñké nẹbụlu ụmwá
 follow her to the river; those who look like other children
 go upwards [i.e., onto the land].
sì enú.

Éwú nọchibé jí, ọgbụè liè.
 [If] Goat sits near yams, he cuts [and] eats.

Mbè sị nà Chínéké [or ụmụnnà yà] mere yà
 Tortoise says that God [or his lineage] did for him [did
 [émekà] ihéomá wèé nye [yibe] yà ụwé igwè.
 well] a good thing by giving him clothes of iron

One could list many more which serve similar functions and express the same notion of cultural relativism, but it is my purpose to suggest a pattern in Igbo thinking and attitudes, not to exhaust the topic.

Nevertheless, there is one more example which needs to be examined briefly:

Ègbé bèlụ, Ûgó bèlụ; ònyé sị íbè yà
 Kite perches, Eagle perches; whoever says the perch is his,
 "Èbend!", ñkù kápù yà.
 "Do not perch!", his wing may it fall off him.

In itself this proverb points up the Igbo belief in the right of large and small to have their own place and their own rights, so it is further reinforcement of the points I have been stressing about cultural relativism. But it is unlike the other proverbs in that it is associated with some of the most essential aspects of Igbo life: religious ancestralism and prayers of cleansing. For example, Arinze¹² indicates how this proverb is employed in the reconciliation ceremony of *íla ójì àní* ("eating the kola of the earth") and is tagged onto many prayers. In many daily (usually morning) prayers to the lineage ancestors or to ancestral forces (in Nsukka, *áruà*), and now and then in morning prayers to independent *àlusi*, this proverb is included, particularly if the lineage or village has been experiencing difficulties between segments. The very frequency of its use, then, tends to indicate that its sentiment is quite important in the values of Igbo peoples.

What are some of the implications of this cultural relativism? I will discuss this later, but now what most certainly must be said is that it should not be taken as any sort of absolute, but rather as a common attitude generally applicable in Igbo experience. Furthermore, Igbo rightly realize that although cultures differ and "each has his own," as it were, analogies exist between the behaviors of different groups, and there are numerous likenesses even among superficially assimilar groups. It is this awareness, above all, which helps to account for Igbo "adaptability," for if the notions of cultural relativism were too absolute they could block acculturation just as effectively as other sorts of cultural barriers, for people would hold that no matter how

attractive or good or useful another culture's behavior might appear, although it is not superior or inferior it is completely inappropriate for one's own life. A belief in the irrelevancy of strange cultures then would constitute a solid wall blocking culture change from the outside. But the pragmatic sanction is such an important determinant of rural Igbo belief and behavior that, coupled with the well-developed and finely formulated concepts of cultural relativism, social and cultural change was always possible. Despite being custom-bound people, the Igbo are not blinded by their own culture, but are receptive to others' ideas, and ready for change should circumstances indicate its necessity or desirability.

The Pragmatic Sanction

Most commentators on proverbs in general, and on Igbo proverbs in particular, have rightly stressed the prudential value of these forms of literature. Gnomie lore is encapsulated wisdom, reinforcing the enculturation of a people and stressing survival virtues, manifesting prudence. But beyond this, Igbo proverbs stress the pragmatic sanction underlying traditional behavior: *What works is proper*. It must be noted that to interpret too narrowly or to universalize what is pragmatically sanctioned lead equally to error. Each culture's pragmatic sanctions are its own: what "works" in Igbo belief may not "work" in Yoruba belief, just as Chameleon is a positive figure to Yoruba but a negative one to Igbo.

Hardnosed realism sometimes employing irony bordering on cynicism characteristic of much Igbo thought is expressed in numerous proverbs, among which the figure of the diviner and medicine maker, the *dibea*, often appears.

Dìbeà *ókè* *ókwú; ódìgh ágbàrà*
The diviner distributes the [human] words; he is not
ónyè *óri* *àfà*.
the spiritual person who eats the [divination] words.
(Although the message has been sent, it has not necessarily
been received.)

Again:

Dìbeà *ka káráá* *àjà; ó tinye*
The medicine maker is greater than the sacrifice; he puts
nké *áká yá*.
into the thing his own hand [i.e., ability].

Again:

Dìbèà *òjòq* *n'ágba* *àsà* *òjòq*.
Diviner [who is] evil makes divination [which is] evil.

These examples illustrate a common feature in many human societies: the awareness that rituals are performed for their ritual value, that one restrains one's doubts so that credibility is maintained, in order that changes of behaviors which usually seem to work are not forced upon the people by the very act of doubting.

Important in customary societies is that the system be maintained so long as it works most of the time; when it does not work, the complexity of the mechanisms or behaviors involved in the system can be called to account, and rituals can be repeated until the desired end is attained or until a stage is reached which can be rationalized by other kinds of evidence or argument. For example, if a person is suffering from a disease thought to be brought on by a demanding spirit and the *dìbèà* divines that it is Spirit *A* yet after the appropriate sacrifices are made to Spirit *A* the victim does not improve, the efficacy of sacrifice to spiritual beings is not doubted. Instead, the *dìbèà* and the people presume that the diviner made an error somewhere along the line, so he casts the *àsà* again. If the victim gets well, it can be presumed that the divination was successful, the spirit having been satisfied, and the system is once more validated by this experience. If the victim dies, however, instead of the belief system's being doubted, the mechanics of the divination are suspect. The *dìbèà* may be mistaken, or he may simply be incompetent, for as the proverb says,

Dìbèà *nà-àkùwányé* *òkilikó* *m̀bè*
The diviner who keeps tapping the "cup" [shell] of Tortoise
òdigh *àfuwányé* *ndé m̀m̀m̀d̀.*
no longer sees the spirit people.

If the *dibea* is not suspect, and the mechanics of divination seem to have been orderly, the people will interpret the death as a sign that, although offerings were made the aggressive spirit wanted the person dead, and that is all there really is to it. Obviously, if one cannot appease an aggressive spirit, it will cause destruction. This is shown by such proverbs as

Chúkwi *gbq* *ògù* *ilé d̀bèà*
[When] God lops off the palm frond, the *dibea's* tongue

ǫbulu éziókwi.
carries the truth.

And especially by this:

Mmáǫ byaly ígbu mmádú ná-ási yà: "Wèrǎ
The spirit who comes to kill a person tells him: "Bring
mpi nkíta."
the horn of a dog."

Thus what works is proper; what fails is improper. And what works is very often strength, the prudent person being one who recognizes the dangers facing him.

Mgbè díbeà gwọkọtarà ọgwù k'ọwa
When the medicine maker mixes together medicine to send
Ọkúkọ ọchì; sì mara ná ọgwù
out Chicken goes back, saying he recognizes that medicine—
ọ mara ọgwula.
it knows how to kill him.

The foregoing materials are related to the overall emphasis upon prudence in customary societies. Many societies may have much prudential wisdom yet do not link it with pragmatism but explain it in other ways (e.g., right reason as a virtue in one's service to God, as among the Christians). Rural Igbo, on the other hand, placed a high priority upon success measured by accomplishment and acquisition which in turn depend upon survival in this life and the possibility of return to life through reincarnation in one's progeny. For the first, one needs yams and other crops in abundance, and money and related wealth; for the latter, one needs children. To get wealth and children one needs to know what methods succeed and to pursue those means while avoiding anything which will thwart one's movement toward success, so pragmatic considerations guided behavior—all, of course, determined by custom, but custom which includes thorough awareness of cultural differences and only minimally erects barriers against the outside. Being simply pragmatic in general, however, is not sufficient: one has to know what to be especially prudent about or toward. Because of this, or resulting from this, rural Igbo traditionally have been interested not only in the differences but in the relationships and degrees of powers.

Relationships Among Powers

Awareness and acceptance of the differentness of groups, animal, human, or spiritual, can lead one to appreciate not only

the inherent rights and responsibilities of those groups but their relative powers as well. Such awareness is important in a pragmatically-oriented society, for clearly the more powerful is likely to aid one's achievement to a greater extent than the less powerful. Man obviously is limited. The Asaba proverb says that

Ójìfẹ̀ jẹ́ mímúò.
One cannot walk to the spirit world.¹³

Again:

Mmúǫ *n'ókà* *n'élú* *ògbòdò* *ékpọ̀*
The spirit that is superior and is above a town gathers
ya *ìzàzà*.
until is has enough [takes what is pleases].

Further, in the hierarchy of powers, man like Vulture is subject:

Ụdèndè ́adajụ ọkọ ́mmụọ.
 Vulture does not refuse the message of spirits.

Among rural Igbo prudence and pragmatism were associated with beliefs in the relative powers of beings and things. When it is said, for instance—

Íyí ọcha *ẹgbunẹm;* *Ọnẹm* *Íyí* *òjì?*
White goddess doesn't kill me; how much the Black goddess?
[i.e., will]

—there is no doubt in one's mind that a belief in a hierarchy of powers exists: some things (e.g., White goddess) are stronger than others. The intelligent person will not offend the weaker beings, but he will be doubly sure that he remains on good terms with those who possess most power.

The problem which faces a person, and which a child must be taught, is how to select the strong rather than the weak without at the same time offending the latter. That importance is given this problem of selection is pointed up by a cluster of proverbs with almost the same structure:

results in
Event A (minor) profound *reaction*,
 so what sort of results from
Reaction *Event B (major)*?

Examples:

Event A: *Gĩná kwákwa ná nnégi j'áfia mmádù;*
You cry because your mother went to the market
of people;

Event B: *óbuzia n'òjè nkémúò,*
[If] she went on a trip to the place of spirits,
agháasime?
then what?

Event A: *Ónyé ógbwara mbwá ná bù ndù;*
A person ran away from wrestling which is life;

Event B: *ónábà ógq ná bù ǫnwù?*
[does he] go to enter war which is death?

Although the Igbo like other rural groups place a great deal of emphasis upon the powers of different classes of beings, their cultural relativism causes them also to stress the reciprocal nature of the relationships among such groups, the focus being upon the relationship between man and his presumed betters. The principle of reciprocity is a modifying element enabling Igbo to avoid slavish subjection to spiritual forces; it appears to have resulted from careful observation and realistic evaluation of things observed, and is paralleled by beliefs of many other peoples. I am immediately reminded, for example, of the Kalabari custom of removing a god from power by referendum of adults in a village, and of the Igala proverb:

Ónú n'òjá k'òjá n'ónú.
The Chief owns the people, as the people own the Chief.

Reciprocity in itself is a common theme of Igbo proverbs, but it appears in others which also emphasize something else—for example, the relativity of beauty or correct behavior, as in some of the proverbs we have just examined. One of the more common concerned with the principle of reciprocity is:

ákà nrì kwqq ákà èkpè.
Right hand washes left hand.

Slightly more to the point, it is believed that events in the land of the spirits parallel those in the world of people, so basic similarities occur, although undoubtedly many spirits have greater powers. The Asaba proverb said that,

Ọ́nụ́ ọ́mádu bẹ́mmádu, ká ọ́dị́nà bẹ́mmú.

As it is in the land of persons, so it is in the land of spirits.

Accordingly,

Ọ́nụ́ ọ́mádu bụ ọ́nụ́ ọ́mú.

The mouth of persons is the mouth of spirits.

This means that when persons eat sacrificial offerings, they are doing what the spirits want them to do, thus are in a way satisfying the spirits; more important, since ọ́nụ́ meant "altar," this proverb refers to the fact that when offerings are placed in the "mouths" or altars of the ancestors, who were persons, it is spirits who receive those offerings, and those spirits are persons who receive as people receive, but who perhaps can demand more because of their seniority and their special powers (e.g., over the health of the lineage, or the fertility of the people). Throughout, it is understood that powers are in many ways reciprocal:

ńwá ọ́mú ẹ́megbulẹ ńwá ọ́mádu;

The child of spirits can lift and carry the child of humans;

ńwá ọ́mádu ẹ́megbulẹ ńwá ọ́mú.

The child of man can lift and carry the child of spirits.

This does not indicate that they are equals, but that there is a mutual dependence, neither being wholly independent of the other. For example, the living need the dead ancestors for the maintenance of health and fertility, yet the dead ancestors can be starved by the living in retaliation for apparently not aiding the lineage. Although it seems rather shocking, it is nonetheless not unknown for a man—usually *Ọkpube* (lineage elder) or *Ọnyishi* (headman)—to deliver scarcely veiled threats to the ancestors that unless they work harder to help the lineage or clan to grow and prosper, offerings will fall off drastically. Presumably when the ancestors are reminded of their responsibilities and they renew or increase their aid to their living progeny, the living reciprocate by especially generous offerings, so that when one hand is bettered the other hand is not neglected, when one mouth is fed the other does not starve, when one world is pleased and calm the other world is not angry and roused up.

Some Conclusions

In this short study I have indicated how relative powers, as well as reciprocity amongst and betwixt powers (including man) are of concern to rural Igbo. Linked with cultural relativism

and pragmatism, the relativity and reciprocity of powers constitutes one facet of the four clusters of traditional Igbo values:

1. Life and reincarnation to life as the core of values.
2. Prudent judgment about those powers which are most useful in life, and pragmatic alliance with them.
3. Pragmatic sanction: what works to preserve, enlarge, and succeed in life is thereby "good" and "true."
4. Recognition and acceptance of the differences between groups, without emphasis on ingroup superiority or outgroup inferiority.

The important key to all the values lies in the fourth of these, for many other peoples have emphasized life as their center of focus, have tried to link themselves with strong spiritual forces, and have developed prudence as a major virtue aiding people in furthering life and attaining success in this world. But although many societies may possess concepts of cultural relativism, such concepts are usually affected by value judgments about the cultures concerned: normally the speaker's culture is considered to be "better" than other cultures, the degree of differentness of those other cultures indicating to the speaker the degree of their inferiority.

Naturally Igbo had a tendency at times to fall into this sort of value judgment, too, for it is normal for people to value highly their own way of living; yet Igbo also placed much emphasis upon the simple differentness of groups, eschewing value judgments about those differences as much as possible. Even in religious matters, when the groups concerned are the spirits or the ancestors or the gods, the Igbo typically do not feel that they are "good," regardless of their identity. What really counts in pragmatic Igbo thought is that such groups are *powerful*: they can do as they please. If not, one need not really worry about them, for omnipotence (or at least superiority) of God is really all that matters. In human affairs, again, "What is ours is ours, but what is mine is mine" at first may sound self-centered, but it is modified by reciprocity: I cannot really have and maintain "mine" unless somehow I can accommodate "yours" as well as your own share of "ours."

It is no longer fashionable for ethnologists to attempt to trace the origins of human behaviors by the study of relatively contemporary events, but I might suggest that if we cannot ascer-

tain the origins of this form of cultural relativism we can at least try to answer the question: "What does it do for the Igbo?" Cultural relativism is what cultural relativism does, to paraphrase Evans-Pritchard on religion. In the case of the Igbo who traditionally lived in politically segmented kin clusters in generally autonomous farming villages, with fairly large populations and extensive use of land for farming, the possibilities of intergroup conflict were enormous. Indeed, even today it is probably no exaggeration to say that in any Igbo farming village at any time one will find that a land (or other intergroup) dispute is or recently has been in progress. If group identification were so strong that outsiders simply by being outsiders were despised (whether this group believes in cultural relativism or not, for one can believe in distinctions leading to superiority-inferiority rather than simple differences among equals) then potential conflicts would increase and would very often result in conflict, with the possible development of larger conquest groups and the disappearance of smaller conquered groups.

But what is most typical of Igbo political and social organization is that groups become clustered into "towns" or village-groups, the segments of which tend to retain their identification and their independence. This occurred because of the very important application of the principle of cultural relativism: groups differ, and each has its right to live in its own way, so long as it does not infringe upon the rights of its neighbors. Thus segmentation of kingroups continued throughout time, a great deal of conflict was avoided (although admittedly a "live and let live" policy often is difficult to maintain perfectly in real situations¹⁴), and Igbo were rendered by their own values particularly amenable to social and cultural change even with much cultural retention.

Migrations and the growth of new communities could easily enough be accommodated by the system, for a segment could migrate and retain its integrity as a group, paralleling the larger group from which it came and to which it continued to trace its descent; and as a rather vulnerable new community it would be safe from being swallowed up by its larger neighbors because of the constantly reinforced notion of cultural relativism. When Igbo encountered certain other large groups, however, most notably the British, they were face to face with a people who did not believe in their sort of cultural relativism: certainly the British held that Igbo were *different* from British, although not

merely different but inferior. The early contact period reveals some disturbances in Igbo communities, and I do not wish to suggest that the Igbo were easily colonized; nevertheless, when the Igbo became aware of the powers of the British, as Ottenberg has clearly indicated,¹ their pragmatism influenced them most strongly to acquire some of those powers, which they set about to do. The result was that very quickly (easily by World War II) Igbo had outstripped other Nigerian peoples in their number of European educated individuals and, in turn, of educational and political leaders, the Nationalists. Throughout the process, although many culture and personality changes occurred, it was not common for the Igbo to think of himself as an "assimilated" person, nor perhaps even to desire anything like assimilation (which the British never pushed, regardless, for they believed that Igbo as their inferiors could not become "black Englishmen"), but rather considered himself a person who simply had acquired some abilities which he valued and which his own culture could not at that time furnish. His choice was guided by pragmatic considerations; but his ability to make that choice was a result of the value which he placed upon the simple and non-evaluated differentness of different cultures.

NOTES:

¹See F. C. Ogbalu, *Ilu Igbo*. (Onitsha: University Publishing, 1961).

²See Okogbule Nwandi, "Ibo Proverbs," *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 80 (March, 1964), 61-62; M. N. Okonkwo, *A Complete Course in Igbo Grammar*. (Onitsha: Ikeagu Bookshop, 1957), 35-38; C. Okonyia, *Igbo Grammar and Composition*. (Onitsha: Etudo, 1962), 71-76; F. C. Ogbalu, *School Certificate Igbo* (Onitsha: Varsity, 1952), 56-57, 77-80, 106-112.

³See A. J. Shelton, "The Articulation of Traditional and Modern in Igbo Literature," *The Conch*, I, No. 1 (March, 1969), 30-52; A. J. Shelton, "The 'Palm-Oil' of Language: Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's Novels," *Modern Language Quarterly*, XXX, No. 1 (March, 1969), 86-111; Bernth Lindfors, "The Palm Oil With Which Achebe's Words are Eaten," *African Literature Today*, I, No. 1 (1968), 2-18.

⁴Cf. Okonyia, *Igbo*, 68-71; Shelton, "Articulation . . .," 38-40.

⁵Perhaps even to argue that Igbo peoples possess a World-View as do all other human groups, despite some rather strange objections to this notion put forth by one Christianized Igboman who should perhaps not be named.

⁶A proverb says that *Ọdèbù jì ẹgosi ọnyẹ gwu*: "One does not dig up yams to show to the man who planted [i.e., their owner]"—that is, outsiders cannot explain to owners.

⁷From Ogbalu, *Ilu Igbo*, 18. The bracketed commentary is an Aesopian addition not commonly spoken in Igbo proverbs.

*Alphonse Diop, "Address," in *Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists of Rome, 1959* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1960).

*Cf. for example such excellent studies by T. Beidelman as "Hyena and Rabbit: A Kaguuo Representation of Matrilineal Relations," *Africa*, XXXI, No. 1 (Jan., 1961), 61-74; and "Further Adventures of Hyena and Rabbit: The Folktale as a Sociological Model," *Africa*, XXXIII, No. 1 (Jan., 1963), 54-69.

*See especially Simon Ottenberg, "Ibo Receptivity to Change," in W. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits (eds.), *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1959), 130-143.

*Okonyia, *Igbo Grammar*, 76.

*E. A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1970), 103-104.

*Northeast W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria* (London: Harrison & Sons, 1914), VI, 59.

*Reinforcing this is the proverb: *Q hūrō kà ńyị bụ kà ẹrịi*, "Maybe we are those who eat together (but that doesn't mean that we have to love one another)."

*Ottenberg, *op. cit.*, 137.

IGBO THOUGHT THROUGH IGBO PROVERB: A COMMENT

Michael J. C. Echeruo

Dr. Shelton's purpose in the preceding article—"to penetrate some what into collective rural Igbo thought"—is clearly an important one. My comments are not directed at this purpose or at his methodology but at the consequences of his mistranslation (and misunderstanding) of the proverbs themselves, a failing which is ultimately traceable to the quality of Dr. Shelton's acquaintance with Igbo language and culture. One consequence of this failing is that though the conclusions read well, they invariably bear no relation whatever to the proverbs from which they are supposed to derive. His very first proverb ("It is good to send Monkey [to get] palm wine, [but] who will bring back the wine pot") is a case in point. Dr. Shelton says the proverb points to the fact, that, in the Igbo world-view, "the assignment of tasks is not dependent solely upon caprice or the chance suggestion of one unfamiliar with the complicated matrix of society, the context in which those tasks occur and function." In fact, the proverb says no such thing. *Ira jere Enwe mmanya* does not mean "sending the Monkey to get palm wine"—that is assigning a task to the Monkey, but "giving him palm wine (presumably in a wine pot)." The point of the proverb is not, therefore, in the apportionment of tasks, but in the difficulty of recovering the vehicle of our generosity. The Igbo may have a proverb which illustrates Dr. Shelton's conclusion, but it is certainly not this one.

The translation error in this case is not even as serious as many others in his article. The monkey, as most people in Africa know, is a proverbially ugly creature, though (in the subtle ironical wit of proverbs) only the monkey appears unprepared to admit this. The saying, *Enwe si na o foduru nwa ntinti ma iku aruo ya mma* is just one example of this irony. The Monkey, the proverb is saying, thinks his bushy eye-lashes nearly cost him his beauty. In other words, the ugly monkey thinks he is, without question, still beautiful in spite of his embarrassingly unseemly brows. *Nwa ntiti*, which Dr. Shelton translates as "a little child" is the Igbo intensive for "just a little; by a hair's breadth." There is, in consequence, nothing in the proverb to justify the deduction that "adulthood develops naturally" or that "what accounts for the adulthood and adult beauty of Monkey is his maturation indicated by the growth of his eyebrows."

Indeed, Dr. Shelton's next Monkey-proverb, *Enwe si na mma zura ya aru*, is a necessary background for the entire set of proverbs on the "beauty" of the Monkey. This proverb does NOT mean (as Dr. Shelton translates it) that "Monkey says that beauty nourished his body" but that he is "beauty all over"—literally "that beauty covers his body." It is against this background, too, that the Monkey can explain away the fact of his longish face. As Monkey says in another proverb, were his face not as longish as it actually is (*iru m gara adigh ogologo*), his long locks would be touching his mouth—which is a way of saying that his long ugly-looking face has its kind of functional beauty.

Dr. Shelton is right, certainly, in describing the Monkey as "a symbol of vanity" though he is wrong in linking this specifically with his argument about cultural relativism: ("a symbol of other sorts of behaviours, some bordering on foolishness.") In fact, the opposite is nearer the truth, because the Monkey's vanity is deliberate and self-protective. Monkey may be ugly, but he is no fool and certainly does not hate himself. He certainly takes advantage of his own characteristics and features as monkey. Hence, though most people (especially children) will not swallow the *mkpuru utu* which is a fruit with a large seed (and seed will have to be passed out through the anus), the monkey can do so any day any time. As the proverb says the monkey *ma ka ya ra*: he "Knows how big his anus is" (lit.: how big he is).

In this regard, the Monkey is contrasted with the Bat who is too honest to himself to pretend he is not ugly. Knowing fully well how really ugly he is (*Kiya si jonjo*), the Bat waits till nighttime to fly—an honest and sensible decision for one who knows his limitations. Is this then a recognition of "esthetic differences between groups" or an "accommodation to human sensitiveness?" Hardly. Even wise (sensible) men learn to adapt their public conduct to their circumstances!

Perhaps "cultural relativism" is the wrong phrase to use for the implications of these proverbs. For, to *admit* (which is what proverbs do) that there are other facets to experience, other ways of looking at a thing is not to say that any one thing is as good as another of its kind. There is, in Igboland, what is called the *ugoli*—a kind of song of joy. A man breaks into it when he is happy with himself and the world. It bespeaks his total sense of well-being. The toad, coldblooded creature he is, is almost always in covert, never has those moments of ecstatic joy when he feels like breaking out into the open with

song. Only the man who has warmed himself by the fire breaks into this song of joy, the toad says, in self-defence, *Awo si na onye nyalu oku bulu ugoli*. Dr. Shelton's comment that "What to man is comfort, to Toad is the source of power" thus misses the point. The Toad's argument is indeed validated by the experience of men.

In section on the "Pragmatic Sanction" Dr. Shelton argues that for the Igbo, "*what works is proper*." Shouldn't he really have said, '*what works, works?*'" Dr. Shelton cites the proverb: *Chukwu gboo ogu, ile dibea obulu eziokwu*. His translation of this is completely wrong; even so, it is clear from the proverb that it is the God who through his actions makes the diviner's (doctor's) tongue (efficacy) carry nothing but truth (potency). When God intervenes to resolve a problem (lit. to stop and settle a fight), the proverb says, the doctor's powers cannot be gainsaid. This view, as Dr. Shelton points out, may be "hardnosed realism employing irony bordering on cynicism." Yet the effect of this realism is not to endorse the worship of the pragmatic sanction, but to enforce commonsense. A tediously garrulous priest (*Dibea oke okwu*), one proverb says, does not divine for a thief.

Similarly the priest who talks too much while offering sacrifices (*Dibea ka karia aja*) is likely to add his own [words to those from his gods]. Both proverbs are asserting that there is a norm of ritual sufficient for a given ceremony of divination, and the incompetent diviner can be identified by his prolix divination style. As one other proverb puts it beautifully, though Dr. Shelton translates it horribly, "The medicine man who after a prolonged effort at curing [a patient] provokes the [sacrificial] chicken to laughter should know that the medicines he knows are finished." I would suggest, in this connection, that our interest should not be unduly diverted by the consideration of the question of Igbo pragmatism from recognizing the distinction which these proverbs make between the oracle and the medium, between the essence and the form. For the Igbo, the diviner is, after all, still human.

The relationship between man and the spirit world is complex in Igbo society, one should imagine; and the Igbo take the trouble, as Dr. Shelton says, "to appreciate not only the inherent rights and responsibilities of those groups but their relative powers as well." However, in respect to the proverbs cited, the Igbo seem to recognize not only their own limitations

as men, but the predicament of the gods themselves as beings above-men. No traveller, however practised, ever gets to the spirit world (*Ojije je mmuo*). All the same the spirit (or masquerade) who stays out (that is, in the world of men) for too long, may find the uninitiated throwing sand and dust on him (*Mmuo n'oka n'elu ogbodo* [those not initiated into the masquerade] *ekpoo ya izuzu*). The spirits remain a complex set of beings, just as well as capricious, benevolent, malicious even outright deceitful. Man does his best to be on their good books, to avoid offending them, to appease them, even to praise them. But when they mean to kill, they will do so. *Mmuo byalu igbu mmadu na-asi ya 'weta mpi nkita!* The god who has come to kill will tell [the victim] 'Bring me the horn of a dog'—which is an impossible order. And a pious *ilu* which derives from this calls for a kind of cosmic code of fair-play: the gods and men (lit. the son of gods and the son of men) should not cheat each other. *Nwa mmuo emegbule nwa mmadu, nwa mmadu emegbule nwammuo.*

To understand Igbo thought, even to know what Igbo proverbs mean, one has first to understand the Igbo language. There is absolutely no other way. One gets the impression that Dr. Shelton may have relied a bit too much on dictionaries and word-lists—which explains why *nwa ntinti* ("just a little") comes out as "a little child"; *zuru ya aru* ("covers all his body") as "nourished his body"; *mkpuru utu* ("seed of *utu*") as "seed of his penis"; *kayara* ("how big he is") as "when he copulates"; *ka karia* ("talks too much") as "is greater than" and *tinye nke aka ya* (lit.: "adds that of his hand," "his own") as "put into the things his own hand [i.e. ability]." But, of course, Dr. Shelton meant well and his article will surely provoke other scholars to "explore and analyse" other areas of Igbo thought with a similar enthusiasm—and an appropriate thoroughness.

IGBO LANGUAGE STUDIES: PROBLEMS AND PRINCIPLES

P. A. Nwachukwu

Igbo Language studies have had a hard time taking off first because of the basic problem of an orthography, and secondly because of the question of a standard dialect. These problems, and some others which go as far back as the late 20's, have defied solution. The unfortunate consequence of this situation is that while the study of other languages in West Africa has advanced quite considerably, the study of Igbo is still concerned with basics, and even then is scarcely authoritative or comprehensive.

Take the question of an Orthography. With the advent of colonialism and its twin sister Christianity, the early missionaries especially those of the Church Missionary Society of Nigeria—came to the conclusion that if the new religion was to take root, it must be given to the people in the language which they understood. In order to carry out this important assignment on which the success of evangelical work depended, the Protestant Missions in the Eastern Region of Nigeria adopted a system of six vowels signs for Igbo (the consonants have never been a source of trouble): i, e, a, u, o, ɔ . and used them in the production of early protestant Bibles.

But in 1929, the so-called New or Africa Orthography was adopted by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures on the occasion of the visit to Nigeria of the German linguist, Professor Westermann. Whatever might have been its other limitations, this new Africa Orthography had the one outstanding quality: it recognised the existence of the all-important Vowel Harmony in Igbo. It represented the language more accurately than the old Church Orthography, making use of 8 instead of 6 vowels in the old Church.

A comparison of the two sets will show the relative merits and demerits of each of them.

Old-Church Orthography (Prior to 1929)	New or Africa (1929-1961)
ĩ	ĩ
—	e
e	ɛ
a	a
u	u
—	ø
o	o
ɔ	ɔ

As would be expected, the New or Africa Orthography met with a lot of opposition from the Protestant Missionaries, who would, at first, have nothing to do with it. On the other hand, it was adopted by Government and by Catholic Schools, where there had been no standard orthography in existence. This New or Africa Orthography remained in operation until the adoption of the official Igbo Orthography in 1961.

It was thus as late as 1961 that the problem of orthography—so basic to any language—received the attention of the government of the day. And when the former Eastern Nigerian Government decided to set up a Commission to look into the question of Igbo Orthography, it chose a Medical doctor, Dr. Onwu, as chairman! Hence we have today the "Official Igbo Orthography as recommended by the Onwu Committee in 1961."

There is nothing by way of official records to show what the terms of reference of the Committee were. There is even nothing like a record of the deliberations of that Committee nor an indication of their criteria for arriving at the 8 vowel symbols which now are part of official Igbo Orthography.

We know that the adoption in 1929 of the New or Africa Orthography was guided by at least three objective considerations, viz:

- (a) To represent the essential sounds of the language by separate letters,
- (b) To get rid of diacritics as far as possible,
- (c) To simplify spelling as far as possible.

Perhaps, the Onwu Committee adopted principles (a) and (c) while rejecting principle (b) which aims at avoiding the use of diacritics. The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures had valid reasons for doing away with diacritics. The most important of these is that diacritics are apt to be left out in writing since they have not been part and parcel of any traditional system of writing with which the native speaker is familiar. The omission of a diacritic in writing is a spelling mistake which is likely to lead to misunderstanding. Moreover diacritics can be bad for the eyes, if they become too many, and are expensive in printing because they wear out and break more easily than the letters to which they are attached.

But the Onwu Committee categorically recommended the use of diacritics. It is worth while comparing the official with the earlier Igbo Orthographies.

Old-Church Orthography -1929	New/Africa Orthography (1929-61)	Official/Onwu Orthography 1961-
i	i	i
—	e	i
c	e	c
a	a	a
u	u	u
—	ə	u
o	o	o
o	ɔ	o

After the problem of Orthography, the greatest setback to Igbo studies is the absence of any definable standard literary dialect to which all writers conform. This problem had started receiving attention from European linguists and anthropologists as far back as the early thirties. This quest led European linguists and anthropologists to pin their hopes on the possibility of "Union Igbo" emerging as a dominant and, consequently, literary dialect of the Igbo people. Union Igbo was a creation of European Missionaries whose sole aim was to make the Bible available in a form of Igbo that had a general appeal in all parts of Igboland. Hence the synthesis of materials drawn from five areas: Bonny, Owerri, Arochukwu, Ngwana and Onitsha.

But Union Igbo disappointed the hopes of its creators for very good reasons: it was no man's dialect; it was a "composite picture" artificially constructed and comprising vocabulary from five different areas; it had a mixed sound system as well as a mixed grammatical system; it was, as a result, incapable of growth and development in any particular direction.

When the hopes placed on Union Igbo as a possible literary standard were dashed, the next step taken by Europeans was to look for a dialect area with minimum dialect divergencies. The greatest champion of this minimum-divergence dialect area was Ida C. Ward whose visit to Nigeria in 1933 coincided with that of Miss M. M. Green. Both of them products of the London School of Oriental and African Studies, they worked together to carry out what dialect survey they could with their limited time and resources and inadequate knowledge of the Igbo Language. The whole idea of a Central Igbo dialect is theirs, the conclusion to their research work in Igboland.

Central Igbo covers all the dialects spoken in what used

to be Old Owerri Province. These dialects definitely have greater affinity with the Northern or border dialects of Nsukka, Udi, and Eke than with Onitsha dialect to which these border areas used to belong politically. The Central Igbo dialects are therefore spoken by the greater majority of Igbo speakers and "Central Igbo" was therefore expected to have a good chance of providing a literary standard for Igbo.

Emerging from Ida Ward's research are three pertinent all-important recommendations which needed to be implemented, if the concept of a Central Igbo dialect was to have any meaningful basis. "If Ibo is to be used as a means of real education and develop into a literary medium, three steps are necessary, viz.:

- (a) agreement on the dialect to be tried;
- (b) agreement on orthography;
- (c) a systematic plan for propagating both dialect and orthography, not leaving the matter to chance development or non-development.

The whole question is likely to go by default if there is no organised scheme to work with practical plans for carrying it out."*

The non-implementation of two most important of the three recommendations meant that the Central Igbo idea was bound to be stillborn.

The multiplicity of dialects has, no doubt, been a big drawback to Igbo language studies. We certainly have not had those potent factors which are responsible for dialect levelling as well as for the establishing of a dominant dialect which eventually wins acceptance as a common standard. These factors include the prestige or importance belonging to a Capital, the presence of strong and predominant chief or a central authority the language of whose area acquires a political, social, practical and consequently economic value. These, too, are the factors that promote the emergence of a standard language.

For instance, the standard English which we study today is the dialect of London, itself the Capital of England, a Commercial centre, the seat of Court and centre of the social and intellectual activities of the country. The standard French of today is the dialect of Paris, and standard Spanish, the dialect of Castille.

Coming nearer home, we discover that the Yoruba language has been more fortunate than the Igbo Language. Yoruba lit-

*Ida C. Ward. *Igbo Dialects and the Development of a Common Language*, Cambridge: Hefler and Sons Ltd., 1941, p. 17.

erary standard or the Ovo dialect is the dialect spoken in and around Ibadan—the political capital and seat of learning and, to a certain extent, a commercial centre, and definitely the most populated indigenous town in Africa. One can equally make the same assertion of Hausa and, perhaps, Efik. What should impress one is the fact that in each of these cases cited above, a standard has naturally emerged in the process of history. The standard has not been created out of a number of dialects. We in Igboland seem to have been asked to reverse the course of linguistic history by trying to create our own spoken and literary standard instead of helping one to emerge.

Admittedly the linguistic process is essentially one of creation, rather than of discovery. Yet all conscious efforts at creating living languages have so far failed. **ESPERANTO**—man's only near-successful attempt as a synthetic language—had died a natural death. **UNION IGBO**—that composite dialect of Igbo which people thought had a good chance of growth and development because of the social mobility of its speakers—died a natural death, or rather lives only on the pages of unread Bibles.

It seems, therefore, a logical conclusion that in order to grow and develop a language must be authenticated in a socio-cultural milieu where it must rise or fall in accordance with the changing fortunes of that society.

The result of our efforts at creating a common standard is that today Igbo studies continue to suffer from the absence of a specifically literary dialect which should form the basis for a detailed description of language. The few existing books on Igbo Language pride themselves on being written in the Official Igbo *orthography* approved by the Onwu Commission in 1961, but not in the official or standard *dialect* itself. After this announcement by way of Prefaces, what follows is an apologia for the dialect used and this apologia takes this form: that to be meaningful, any descriptive grammar of Igbo has to be based on one dialect of the Language and that from this description, speakers of other dialects than the one described can make the minor adjustments necessary to adapt the Grammar to their own dialects.

It is, of course, perfectly right to base grammar of a Language on one of its dialects, but to talk of making the necessary adjustments that can adapt the Grammar of one dialect to other dialects is to make light of the vast differences that are found as one moves from one dialect area to another. The differences

are so vast that some of the dialects are almost mutually unintelligible. The differences are such that native speakers of Igbo insist that some border dialects of Igbo definitely qualify as separate languages on their own right. This underscores the point that the dialectical differences of Igbo are such as cannot be eliminated by mere adjustments of the grammar of one dialect. Those who talk of adjustment of one grammatical description to suit other dialects are those for example, who feel that the differences between Onitsha and Owerri Igbo lie in the presence of nasalised sounds in Owerri and the absence of them in Onitsha, or in some minor phonemic distinctions such as the use of an /h/ in Owerri where Onitsha employs an /f/ or the use of /r/ in Owerri in place of Onitsha /l/.

To arrive at these dialect distinctions, one requires a thorough dialect survey of Igbo, which nobody claims to have done so far. I strongly feel that a dialect survey of Igbo is the only foundation on which an effective study of the Language can be based. Such a survey has many advantages: it will tell us how many dialects there are in Igbo and how far apart they are. It will reveal to us whether the designation "Central Igbo" is geographical or linguistic or both. If it is both, as is likely, how many dialects are covered by this level? If there is more than one, how close are they, and which one of them can we conveniently adopt as the standard? This is a decision which will be based on the sole criterion of which dialect shows minimum divergence from the rest of the members of the group.

The absence of any dialect survey of Igbo has led writers to make statements about Igbo which are at variance with the language as it is spoken by natives. One such statement is about the status of Affixes in Igbo. In the *Descriptive Grammar of Igbo* by Green and Igwe, Igbo affixes are dismissed as lexical items which serve only as meaning modifiers and have no part to play in the grammatical structure of the language.

Let me briefly define the two words, grammar and lexis, before developing my argument further. By lexis is meant the vocabulary items in a language such as can be found in a dictionary or lexicon. Grammar, on the other hand, is concerned with the relationship of these items in any stretch of utterance, that is, in a communication process. This relationship includes agreement between subject and verb, tense formation, and word order.

Now back to the position of Affixes in Igbo. There is no

doubt that a great many affixes in Igbo are no more than lexical items, whose sole function is to modify the speaker's attitude. The language abounds in them, and native speakers use them so much that at times the subtle shades of meaning which they suggest tend to defy rendering in a second language. We often hear people say:

Ò bù gíní kà ànyí gá èmekwanu? (Onitsha)
 Ò wú gírí kà ànyí gá èmekweni? (Owerri Igbo)

An analysis of this one statement rendered in Onitsha and Owerri Igbo will reveal that both -Kwa/-kwe and -nu/-ni do no more than modify the meaning of the statement. As a matter of fact, we could do without them, though in practice, we generally do not. They give the language its beauty and character.

But there are a handful of them in most, if not all, dialects of Igbo that are associated with certain tenses. These include:

- (a) The time Suffixes: ra (in Owerri) and lu (in Onitsha) and Há gára áhyá: fá jèlù áfiá (They went to market)
- (b) their negative counterpart:
 Há ágaghí áhyá : fá éjérò áfiá
 (Owerri) (Onitsha)
 They did not go to market.
- (c) the perfect ending: -lu (Owerri) and -go (Onitsha)
 Há ábyala (Owerri) Unu ábyalá—You have come
 fá ábyago (Onitsha) They have come.
 Unu ábyalá—Welcome (greeting) (Owerri)
- (d) the Negative Imperative ending -la (Owerri) and -na (Onitsha) as in ebele (Owerri) ebèná (Onitsha):
 Don't cry
 áfulá (Owerri) ápùnà (Onitsha): Don't go out

From these examples, it is observable that apart from the simple past, all other simple tense formations in Igbo make use of:

- (i) an inflectional open vowel prefix a-/e-
- (ii) inflectional prefixes.

*Key to Tone marks:

- (a) / signifies a high tone (b) \ signifies a low tone.
- (c) — signifies a down-step high or mid tone.

This is true of all the major dialect areas: Onitsha and Owerri whose speakers I have personally used as informations.

Let it not be construed that I am merely trying to set the hand of the clock back by using traditional labels for describing the Igbo Language. I am quite aware that tenses in Igbo, especially in narration, are not as clear-cut as they are in English; yet we cannot afford to ignore obvious similarities in an effort to describe our language uniquely. The essential point to bear in mind is that in Igbo, there are a host of affixes which are no more than lexical items, but a few which are grammatical in function. Those few must be given their right place in any accurate description of the Igbo Language.

The danger in such statements as the one about affixes is that they have been made in the only standard work of reference on the Igbo Language, and since this is the book on Igbo likely to find a place on the shelves of most libraries, readers will be tempted to regard the dialect described in that book as a representative Igbo dialect. This is very far from the truth. It is therefore infinitely better to restrict such statements to the dialects described until such a time that detailed study of many more dialects can throw more light on the status of affixes in Igbo. But then the *Descriptive Grammar* of Igbo is intrinsically, the product of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and its hasty generalisations may perhaps be overlooked.

The question of a standard dialect settled, we can then turn our attention to another problem area—Igbo numeral.

Most native speakers of Igbo still find themselves confused whenever Igbo numerals above a hundred are mentioned over the radio. They struggle to determine how many *ōgū/ōhū/ōrū* there are, in two, three, or four hundred and above. For four hundred, the Igbo numeral, *Nnū*, is quite precise, but the moment we approach a thousand, we find our numerals painfully inadequate for our purposes. There is no need to talk of million because that cannot be easily rendered in Igbo. How many *Nnū* and *ōgū* make one thousand and consequently one million, which is a thousand squared?

You can only get a vague idea of large numbers which does not mean much unless you know their English equivalent. There is no doubt that our numerals constitute one of the problem areas in the study of Igbo Language.

Fortunately for us, Nsukka dialect has the answer to some of our problems in numerals. This dialect is unique in its

possession of single word numerals for hundred and thousand. Nsukka has the following words for a hundred and a thousand:

- (a) ^ˈ^ˈ^ˈinari — hundred
 (b) ^ˈ^ˈ^ˈadishi — a thousand.

Obviously these are two simple and handy words that can save us the pain of the present system of multiplication in Igbo numerals, multiplication which becomes so very vague as we go from such high numbers as five, six, seven, eight, nine hundred to one thousand. There is no point talking of a million—since this is incapable of precise expression in Igbo. With “inari” we can conveniently count from one hundred, two hundred (inari abuo) to nine hundred—then to one, two, three, four, five and so many thousands. What a precise way of expressing large numbers! All we need to do is to adopt these and any other numerals that make calculation easier. Having adopted them, we should then devote our energies to popularising them.

This we can easily accomplish through the radio and other mass media of information as well as through books on Igbo grammar and literature.

If we are to succeed in these tasks, we must try to do first things first. Let us determine the scope of our language through a dialect survey. Only this can help us to determine the standard literary dialect from the host of dialects covered by this label—Central Igbo Dialect. Having determined this, we must set up an effective machinery that will ensure its popularisation and spread.

Igbo Numerals present another problem area. Again a survey of Igbo dialects will reveal to us that the dialect of Igbo has enough by way of precise numerals. These we can adopt into the standard literary dialect for necessary popularisation.

This is the time for a major break-through; this is the period for placing the Igbo Language firmly on the Linguistic map of the world. Surely the worshippers of the Sun are not necessarily unmindful of the Moon. We in this part of the world are not so receptive to change as to neglect the unique badge by which we are known: our language badge.

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IGODO AND OZO FESTIVAL SONGS AND POEMS

Romanus N. Egudu

INTRODUCTION:

(a) *Igodo Festival*

Igodo is the most important of the festivals which, in Oha-Odo-na-Ozo section of Udi Division, mark the period of the *Odo* masquerade. Literally, *Igodo* means "Igo-Odo," that is, worshipping the *Odo*. Though there are other forms of worshipping the *Odo*, *Igodo* assumes this title because of its importance. The *Odo* itself is, at a purely human level, nothing more than a masquerade and shares a lot in common with other types of masquerade, such as *Omaba* in Nsukka area, *Manwu* in Ezigu area, and *Muo* in other parts of Igbo society. But the *Odo* has some mystic significance which these others do not possess. In *Oha-Odo-na-Ozo*, only a tenuous divide separates the living from the dead in the traditional pattern of the people's belief. One can easily move across the low threshold of either world, and this situation creates a whole set of vital values translatable not only in terms of the practical human experience, but also, and more importantly, in terms of mysticism. The dead are, therefore, not actually dead in the sense of passing into incommunicable eternity, but are living, even if occasionally invisible, side by side with men, for whom they provide something more than the shadowy protection of imagined wraiths. These all powerful, all influential dead are the *Odos*, who are gods and are therefore worshipped in diverse ways, the *Igodo* festival being the most important one.

There are three significant features of the *Igodo* festival: the Sacrifice, the Dance and the Song. In the morning of the festival day, every family sacrifices at least a cow or a pig—two animals that are sacred to the *Odo*; for the occasion is one of spiritual rejuvenation and rededication to the *Odo* cult. Like most other ceremonies in Igbo society, this one is characterised by competition and healthy rivalry. Some opulent men on their own each sacrifices a cow or a pig, or both. The heads of the animals sacrificed by all the villages are assembled in groups accordingly in the shrine of the *Odos*; and a census of each group is taken. The village that has sacrificed the greatest number of animals is revered by the others and rewarded greatly by the *Odos*. Also those individuals (often the *Ozo*-title holders)

who have each sacrificed an animal, are praised by the singers of the *Igodo* song.

The second major feature of the festival is the *Igodo* Dance, which takes place in the afternoon. It is a ritual in which only those fully initiated into the *Odo* cult, the *Ozo*-title holders and the candidates for the title can participate. It is a test of virility for the young men and a proof of fulfilment for the *Ozo* men. The music is supplied by the elders with various sizes of wooden drums (*ekwe*). Among the young men, the dance is competitive, and the champion for every year is highly regarded in the town.

The famous *Igodo* Song is the last feature of the *Igodo* festival. It is a song peculiar to the *Igodo* festival and therefore cannot be sung on any other occasion. Only men do the singing; one of them is the lead-singer, who sings the solo, while the others form the chorus responding with a regular refrain to every statement made by the soloist. Some of these beat the *ekwe*, *ogene*, and *udu* (musical instruments used for accompanying the song). The lead-singer is essentially an inspired being, and as a prerequisite for the inspiration he gets, he abstains from all defiled things the day before the festival and on the same day visits the sanctuary of the *Odo* shrine, where he is fortified against antagonistic spirits and their agents.

The content of the song reflects the religious spirit and the joy of the occasion. The soloist makes references to the animals sacrificed to the *Odo*, and to the supernatural status of the *Odo*, who is being worshipped. The song, being a ritual, maintains the spirit of praying and blessing. Besides, it praises the *Ozo*-title holders who have sacrificed fat animals to the *Odo* during this festival; it praises and blesses others who have demonstrated devotion to the cult of the *Odo*, especially those who are doing the singing. The lead-singer occasionally becomes personal and praises himself and his voice, but this is not mere egotism: such a praise of self or personal quality is done in appreciation of the power the *Odo* has given to the singer; so that in praising his own voice, he is in effect praising the *Odo*.

Serving as the common denominator of all these aspects of the content of the song is the use of proverbs. Proverbs are used principally for philosophising, and for making the song beautiful. They reflect in the piece the essential beliefs and values of the people. The significance of *Ofo* as a symbol of justice, for instance, is emphasised in the song; for justice should exist

between the *Odo* and human beings, and between men in the society. The poetic effect of the proverbs can also be seen in their picturesqueness. Each proverb is often an image or a series of images, entirely drawn, of course, from the indigenous culture and the environment. The *Igodo Song* is therefore a ritual, prayer and poetry—an expression of life and joy.

(b) *Ozo Title-taking Process:*

One other major *Odo* festival is the *Ife-Odo*, during which donations are given to the *Odo*. A special kind of *Odo* called the *Okwu-Ikpe* visits the families of all the men who will take the *Ozo* title in the following year, and the wives of these *Ozo* candidates are expected to demonstrate their devotion to their husbands with gifts of large sums of money for the *Okwu-Ikpe*. The gifts are also meant to signify the depth of gratitude which the candidates and their family owe to the *Odo* in general for having provided them with enough means for the taking of the title. The *Okwu-Ikpes* are often regarded as the great ancestors of the candidates. This donation ceremony is the very first stage of the title-taking process.

The *Ozo*-title is one with social and economic significance, and in its untainted traditional form, it is very closely associated with idol-worshipping, which gives it some mystic shades. Its mysticism is centred on the symbolic number, 9, which is regarded as a male number and sacred. Most of the items required for taking the title are often assembled in nines or multiples of nine. For the sacrificial aspect, therefore, there are

- 9 cocks
- 9 x 9 yams
- 9 x 9 coco-yams
- 9 pots of wine
- 9 x 9 eagle feathers
- 9 x 9 *Ogulusi* leaves
(a sacred tree by that name).

In saluting the *Ozo* men as a group one is bound to start by stating that they are the men fulfilled in processes of "nine times nine."

Ideally, the Chief Priest of the occasion, who confers the title on the candidates has to be a native of Nri—a town in Awka Division of Igboland; for the people of this town are traditionally known to possess the divine right of ownership of

the *Ozo*-title. But nowadays, for no identifiable reason the *Oha-Odo-na-Ozo* people do not invite an *Nri* man to confer the *Ozo*-title on them. But there is a family in each town whose members have inherited the right; and only the oldest man at any time in that family can confer the title on any candidate in the town. And, if an *Ozo*-man dies, it is the same man who must perform the burial rites and offer the same sacrifices in sets of nines or multiples of nine as when the title was conferred. For as in the case of the *Odo* cult, life and death are related, though in quite a different way.

Qualification to take the *Ozo*-title follows closely the principle of the "Divine Right" theory. One who though he may have genuine claim to legitimate birthright, happens not to descend from a lineage of *Ozos*, does not qualify for the title; nor does one who is a slave or descends from a slave family. It has been known in the modern times, though, that some wealthy persons have succeeded in "purchasing" the right to the *Ozo*-title—this being a corruption resulting from the western "civilization." But even at that, among the *Ozos*, there is discrimination against such *Ozos* whose "roots," it is said, are not in the "blessed soil," but in the fleeting air. As for those who inherit the legitimate right to the title, all their male children hold the right to one or more of the nine stages of the title; and if the father of the family dies, the children have to give nine cows to all the *Ozos* of the town in order to resuscitate (or "wash-up" as it is called) the dead father's *Ozo*-title. This means that the eldest male child of the family can take the title with a further minimal expenditure.

The *Ozo*-title, being the highest title in the *Oha-Odo-na-Ozo* area of the Igbo, endows every full-fledged holder with the highest social status and concomitant rights and privileges. He becomes a member of the aristocracy, who rule the land and control the judicial system. Like the aristocracy of other times and places, they control also the wealth, and the lands of the community, and dispense justice in it. Psychologically, the title brings with it an ensured sense of security; for the *Ozo*-title is synonymous with opulence, wisdom and power. It insures the holder against insults and indignities both in private and in public. For instance, it is strongly held that the *Ozo*'s back never touches the ground even unto death. Thus, no man, no matter the reason, should "floor" an *Ozo*-man. This is the reason why when an *Ozo*-man dies, he is buried in a sitting position.

Not only the title holder, but also his wives and his mother acquire some honour and prestige from the title. Of the wives, the first, who is often the oldest, has the greatest share of honour. She carries for the *Ozo* the most important symbol of the title, and that is a cow-hide bag, when they are attending official ceremonies. She, as well as the other wives, wears the title cotton-strings around each of the ankles as, of course, does the *Ozo* himself. The mother of the *Ozo* is held in especial esteem also. She assumes a title, *Adukwulu*, which means one who has lived to be blessed; for it is a blessing for her to be alive when her son takes the title. She is henceforth greeted by that name. Furthermore, from the title-taking day on her breasts remain covered with a specially woven clothing material. This is called *akwa-obi*; and only such a woman can wear it. The significance of this *akwa-obi* is that the breasts that nurtured a dignitary such as the *Ozo* has become, should not be expected to feed any more children; nor should they be exposed for the ordinary eyes to look at. The woman has attained a kind of maternal fulfilment.

It is clear from the economic implications of the *Ozo*-title that importance is attached to wealth. One spends a lot of money to get the title; and, in turn, the status offered by the title generates for the holder a lot of money whenever other people subsequently take the title. Because of the exorbitant nature of the expenditures involved, the groups of names which the titled man assumes from the day of fulfilment on are often associated with his sources of income. Other sources of the names are the man's personal experiences which have made him wiser; the sense of achievement which points to the dignified position of the *Ozo* in the society; and the sense of physical beauty which is regarded as the crown of natural perfection. Each of the names is a sententious, aphoristic statement, having rhythm and beauty and expressed imagistically. These qualities among others make them real poetry.

The Igodo Song

(a) Anyị abịa n'Igodo
d: d: d: d.d: s.d:—*

Umu Odo ukwu—ngwu
Metu ukwu n'ani
Nde d'onye na-ekwuo?

*This is hummed by the Chorus after every line.

Nde d'onye na-aguṛ?
 O bu nwa Odo ukwu-ngwu
 Odo nkwo na-ekwuṛ
 Odo nkwo na-aguṛ
 Nde d'ihe eji eme-e?
 Anu-efi na anu-ezi

(b) Ozo — gada — gidi Ozo
 Ozo nwa obodo-ngwu
 Ogbu ebune ude
 Aji ebune bu ude ya
 Mpi ebune bu ike ya
 Ogbu ebune ude
 Nde d'ihe eji eme-e?
 Opi-ozala gi di ebe-e?
 Isi efi gi di ebe-e?
 Isi ezi gi di ebe-e?
 Metu onu n'opi
 Odo nkwo na-awa gi
 Isi-Inṛ na-awa gi
 Odo ukwu-ngwu na-awa gi
 Metu onu n'opi

(c) Ani anyi were ofo
 Were ofo goba
 Ugwu anyi were ofo
 Were ofo goba
 Ugwu abu ogwugwu
 Were ofo goba
 Ofo ka anyi ji eme-e
 Oji ofo ato n'uzo
 Onye ji ofo ji nemne
 Onye ji ofo ji nine
 Anyanwu na-ene-e
 Igwe n'ani na-ene-e

(d) Umu okwemgba
 Metu aka n'ogene
 Metu ukwu n'ani
 Okwemgba m nṛ we-e?
 Kwewelum nu Igodo
 Obu onye na'ekwuṛ?
 Mu bu onye na-ekwuṛ

Mụ nwa Odo ukwu-ngwu
 Mụ nwa ọnu Odo nkwo
 Mụ bu uturu na-aguo
 Mụ bu onu ka opi
 Onu m bu onu ogene
 Okwemgba m kwe we-e
 Ndi ọgu m Kwe we-e
 Kwe we kwe we-e
 Umu Odomagana
 Ndi mu na ha na-aguo
 Ndi mu na ha na-eje-e
 Anyi ekene ndi nwe Obodo—
 Ndi Ozo itenani itenani—
 Mu bu onye na—ekwu-o
 Mụ bu ọnu na-ekwulu ọha
 Obu m na—ekwu-o
 Mụ nwa Odo nkwo
 Obu Odo na—ekwu-o
 Odo-magana na-aguo

- (c) Umu Odomagana
 Anyi eliwe Igodo
 Anyi aguwa Igodo
 Anyi akuwa Igodo
 Anyi etewe Igodo
 Egbene akwakwa nu
 Okwa akpokwa nu
 Obialu ije nwe una
 Anyi efekwa nu
 Ukwu akpokwana unu
 Ugwu anyi duwe unu
 Anj anyi duwe unu
 Odo anyi cewe unu
 Cewe ikwu n'ibe unu
 M'unu jide ngigo ọfo
 [end]

Translation:

- (a) We've come to sing Igodo
 (Chorus)
 Sons of Odo living near Ngwu tree
 Do the dance with your feet
 But who is it who is saying it?

But who is it who is saying it?
 It's the son of Odo living near Ngwu tree
 Odo living near Nkwo-market is saying it
 Odo living near Nkwo-market is singing it
 But what is it done with?
 Beef and pork.

- (b) Qzq fulfilled as Qzq!
 Qzq of Ngwu-town
 Killer of famous Ram
 Ram's hair is its fame
 Ram's horn is its strength
 Killer of famous Ram
 But what do you do it with?
 Where is your musical horn?
 Where is your cow-head?
 Where is your pig-head?
 Blow the musical horn
 Odo by Nkwq market inspires you
 Four-headed Odo inspires you
 Odo by Ngwu tree inspires you
 Blow the musical horn
- (c) Let our Earth take ofq (sacred staff)
 Take ofq and pray
 Let our Hills take ofq
 Take ofq and pray
 A Hill is never a valley
 Take ofq and pray
 Ofq is our weapon
 One holding on to ofq is never lost
 One holding on to ofq possesses truth
 One holding on to ofq lacks nothing
 Sun is watching
 Heaven and Earth are watching
- (d) My chorus-singers
 Beat the gong with your hand
 Do the dance with your feet
 Where are my chorus-singers?
 Sing me *Igodo* song
 Who is it who is saying it?
 I am the one saying it

I son of Odo living near Ngwu tree
 I son of Odo living near Nkwo-market
 I, uturu,* am singing
 I with voice better than musical-horn
 My voice is gong's voice
 Let my chorus-singers respond
 Let my band respond
 Sons of Almighty Odo
 My band of singers
 My band of sojourners
 We salute owners of the land—
 Ozo-men fulfilled nine times nine—
 I am the one saying it
 I spokesman for the rest
 It is me saying it
 I son of Odo living near Nkwo-market
 It is Odo who is saying it
 Almighty Odo is saying it

- (c) Sons of Almighty Odo
 We are celebrating Igodo
 We are singing Igodo
 We are drumming Igodo
 We are dancing Igodo
 Cock has crowed (about 4:30 a.m.)
 Bush fowl has chanted
 He who visits has to depart
 We have to fly off (i.e., have to disperse)
 May you not stumble
 Our Hill escort you (i.e., god)
 Our Earth escort you (i.e., goddess)
 Our Odo guard you
 Guard your relations
 While you adhere to rite of ofo
 [End]

*A bird noted for singing; the equivalent of the Nightingale.

The Ozo-title Poems

(According to custom, each poem begins with
"Abụ m" i.e, "I am")

*I. Poems connected with Occupation**(a) Based on Farming:*

Abụ m!
Egbulie m ugwu
Ọ pa ji eche anị
Mma na-asụ ọffia
Ọba dị ife
Ọffia dị akụ
Ọffia dị ụgọndụ
Ọffia dị egwu
Agụ egbu onye ji ọgụ

Translation:

I am:
One who tills hills
One who with yams challenges soil
Knife that clears bushes
Barn that is wide
Bush that yields wealth
Bush that is colossal
Bush that is fearful

(b) Based on Wine Tapping:

Abụ m:
Enu dị ulu
Agbụ na-cme eze
Mma na-egbu ego
Ụba si n'enu.

Translation:

I am:
Height that is fruitful
Climbing-rope that makes king
Knife that harvests money
Wealth from height.

(c) *Based on Hunting:*

Abụ m:
 Ogbu agụ
 Agụ na-awa edu
 Mgbọ na-cnye ndụ
 agụ dị ngam
 Eze bi n'agụ

Translation:

I am:
 Killer of Tiger
 Tiger that roams in wilderness
 Bullet that gives life
 Tiger with claws
 King of wilderness

(d) *Based on Trading:*

Abụ m:
 Afo ka Ubulu
 Nkwọ dị ulu
 Nkwọ vù aku
 Eke dị ebube
 Enyi vù aku
 Ugbo vù aku

Translation:

I am:
 Afo-market that is greater than Ubulu-market
 Nkwo-market that is fruitful
 Nkwo-market that carries wealth
 Eke-market that is admirable
 Elephant that carries wealth
 Vehicle that carries wealth.

II. *Poems connected with Personal Experiences*

Abụ m:
 Nna bu enyi
 Nna tubelu ugo
 Nwanne di omimi
 Amụ kenebe nna
 Chi na—etu ugo
 Ego eju anya
 Ibe tube eze . . .

Translation:

I am:
 One whose father is elephant*
 One whose father gave eagle-feather**
 Brotherhood that is mysterious***
 Heir grateful to father
 One to whom personal god gave eagle-feather
 One who is never tired of making money
 King accepted by neighbours . . .

III. *Poem connected with the sense of Achievement:*

Abụ m:
 Agụ na-ece ibe
 Eze di oha mma
 Ude ekwu n'aka
 Eluchie ideyi
 Ekuhelu oshimili
 Aku na aka anya
 Nwata kwoca aka . . .
 Ije galu nwata . . .

Translation:

I am:
 Tiger that defends neighbours
 King that is liked by public
 Fame that never wanes

Author's Explanations:

*"Elephant" is a symbol of opulence, dignity and renown. It is taken to be the king of animals. In the same way, the *Ozo* regards his own father as the king of men for having provided him with the right to take the title and the money for footing the bill.

**"Eagle-feather" is a symbol of glory and nobility. As the eagle is regarded as the noble king of birds, so is the *Ozo* regarded as the glorious, noble king of his community. Every *Ozo* man therefore wears an eagle-feather on the right hand side of his hat.

***"Brotherhood that is mysterious" is a negative name. It implies that the *Ozo* was not assisted by his brothers when he took the title. That is to say, although other people may think that his brothers were brotherly to him, yet behind the facade of consanguinity, it was all hatred and lack of cooperation among them.

The last line is an uncompleted name.

The idea is that if one is accepted as a king by his immediate circle, outsiders will naturally accept him as such.

Hand that can't be improved
Heart that can't be returned
Wealth that goes wisdom
Child with wasted hands . . .
Child that accomplished a difficult journey
quickly

(The last two lines are often left hanging, but people generally know the complement. The full lines conveyed by the lines are as follows:

- (a) A child who has wasted his hands clean should sit at table with the adults.

The One in this context looks upon himself as a child who has attained the status of those much older than he is.

- (b) A child that accomplishes a difficult journey more quickly than normal is often regarded as a prodigy; and people say that he operates under a supernatural influence. Similarly those who do not particularly like the man who has taken the One title much earlier than expected often allege that he got money by some supernatural means.

IV. Poems concerned with Physical Beauty:

Abunni
 Eye skill
 Eye man
 Eye two Upo
 Eye anyone
 Upo di mbana
 Ugoke eye

Translation:

I am:
 King to be admired
 King of Beauty
 King of Ugoke
 King of Sunshine
 King of community
 Mirror for neighbours.

("Ugoke," "sunshine" and "mirror" are all symbols of beauty.)

FUNCTIONALITY, SYMBOLISM AND DECORATION: Some Aspects of Traditional Igbo Art

Obiora Udechukwu

My aim in this article is to examine briefly some well-known examples of Igbo art—masks, statuettes, *mbari* houses— and the other arts of wall decoration, body painting, door carving and pottery, with a view to assessing the extent to which religious and other related activities accounted for the existence or creation of these works of art. I also hope to give some thought to the part played in their production by the innate drive in man to create, to fashion things, to decorate—the aesthetic principle and the will to form—for “ . . . while about 80 percent of African art has a ritual function, i.e., is connected with some religious or magical cult, in nearly all tribes the ritual objects are, or may be embellished in response to what clearly are aesthetic impulses.” This brief discussion will be an opportunity to verify the truth of Fagg’s assertion in the above quote.

The religiously-oriented Igbo society had, apart from the Great God (*Chukwu*, *Chineke*, *Osebuluwa*) who was conceived as transcendent and incomprehensible, a pantheon of lesser deities like *Ane* (Earth goddess), *Amadioha* (Thunder god), *Ifejioku* (Yam god), *Otammiri* (River goddess) and innumerable *alusi* or nature spirits associated with groves, streams and markets. The activities of these were closely woven into the life of the people; they protected them, and controlled their actions, public ethics and beliefs. These deities in turn were, to some extent, controlled or rather influenced by man. There were also the personal cults of *chi* and *ikenga* which were not communal but individual. Each spirit and the figure representing it ‘belonged’ to an individual, that is, they were tied up with his own life and destiny, and not with that of the community at large.

As in other religions where the gods are abstract concepts and forces, it was necessary to give concrete form to the abstract, to create symbols for greater psychic impact and to establish a focus for concentration in worship.

Invariably, the Igbo artists who were commissioned to fashion these symbols resorted to anthropomorphic idiom, creating highly stylized male and female figures and occasionally animal forms (alone or in conjunction with human form). The *ikenga* (Fig. 2), for instance, which was commissioned by every fulfilled man, represented the right arm which a man used for wielding the hoe,

the matchet, axe or gun and so symbolized the genius of his strength, achievement, success in farming, trading, hunting, fishing or warfare. A typical *ikenga* consists of a man seated on a stool, carrying a knife (the means) in the right hand and a skull (the end) in the left. This is simply anthropomorphic. But then ram's horns are introduced on the head, thus doubling and extending the power motif.

The *ikenga* stood for fortune, hence the owner made offerings to it from time to time, when he succeeded in a venture, when he got good crops, if he became rich, each time he was about to set out on a journey. When he escaped from danger he made sacrifices to his *ikenga* which was 'awake.' And he believed in it as long as the going was good. Men set upon by hard luck usually abandoned their *ikenga*, and made new ones (there have been instances of a community abandoning an *alusi*—the tutelary deity—when it has failed to offer protection).

Traditional Igbo art was thus an art of belief. Once a statuette was carved and consecrated, which involved all sorts of rituals, it was believed that the spirit or god portrayed informed it. It was no longer a piece of wood but the spirit itself. Thus, carving was essentially a sacred activity. It was often carried on away from public gaze.

The numerous festivals, most of which were directly or indirectly connected with religion, provided further impetus for creativity. They featured dancing, music, painting, drawing and masquerade shows. The masks, ranging from the cubistic, the surrealist, to the abstract, cannot really be isolated from the play and still retain their original impact because they depend for effect on the combined impact of mask, costume, music, dance and poetry; for if we accept masquerade art as dance drama in which the 'transformed' or 'possessed' performer enacts a role, then this combined impact becomes more understandable when we remember that the masks represented the spirits of human beings and animals, and that the costumes and movement of each masquerade agreed with its role. An *Agboghomo* (Fig. 1), for instance, was conceived as a symbol of feminine beauty; the mask shows the head of a maiden spirit elaborately decorated with *isi mkpo* hair-do, carved combs and mirrors, and *uli* body painting motifs. When that was joined with the costume elaborately patterned with organic motifs and finally synchronized with spare musical melody and delicate dance steps, the concept

of ideal feminine beauty was conveyed in almost flawless language. Other-worldness of the maiden is also conveyed.

The traditional Igbo artist, therefore, concerned himself chiefly with creating images based on the symbols accepted and understood by the society, symbols influenced by function and consolidated over the years. He was an integral part of his society, a man endowed with finer sensibilities, the creator of Igbo iconography.

Mbari houses of Owerri division, however, were functional up to the point that they were built at the instance of *Ala* (Earth goddess) (Pl. I) or any other god, as a kind of celebration of its beneficence. Described by G. I. Jones as a " . . . combination of a temple, an art gallery and a wax work"³ it consisted of a mud, storeyed house (sometimes with other out-houses) with a multitude of mud-and-polychrome figures of the main gods and goddesses—*Ala*, *Amadioha*, *Ekunocha* (a fertility goddess represented as a woman with children clambering all over her) and so on; legendary creatures like *Okpangu*, the gorilla-man and the lecherous woman, *Mgbeke Nwekpere*; representations of aspects of contemporary life and culture—school boys, District officers, Court messengers, policemen, Hausa traders, white man emerging from a hole,⁴ soldiers from the "German" war, a maternity home complete with telephone and almost anything one could think about. Colourful geometric patterns painted in earth colours were used in decorating the walls and created a rhythmic background for the sculpture which were also painted.⁵ Well-known objects, like the umbrella, gun, printed cloth, were placed side by side with abstract geometric shapes which, however, were derived from organic forms.

Restriction of the artist was minimal in the area of symbol or form and he stretched his imagination as far as he could. It is interesting to note that the deities in recent times have been portrayed in Western dress, to show status, and one *Mbari* house featured *Amadioha* riding a motorcycle, the sound of which agrees with the roll of thunder god.

Mbari was thus an eloquent testimony of the people's dynamic world view. Each new house reflected the character of the time.

Though sacrifices were made to the patron deity before building commenced, and the priests assumed extraordinary powers during the period of erecting the house, all cases in the society being referred to them and the 'jury' of *ndi mgbe* (the builders

appointed to erect the house), *Mbari* was chiefly a means of giving vent to the people's creative urge and has been cited by some people as an excellent example of *l'art pour l'art* in Africa. The importance of the act of creation as opposed to the end product, if one may use this expression, underlay the *Mbari* attitude of abandoning the house once it had been unveiled.

I have, in passing, touched on the freedom of the traditional Igbo artist, his free use of the imaginative faculty. Let us look more concentratedly at the manifestation of that primordial striving for beauty, in Igbo society, the extent to which it was modified by the functional nature of art, and the effect on Igbo art in general.

A survey of Igbo life reveals that there was always a striving to infuse poetry into life, to create and live in joy and beauty. From the modes of greeting, the patterns of names and praise names, the ordinary household effects, to man himself, nothing was ever left as nature made it. Everything was decorated. Pots, cooking utensils, carving boards (*Ugbo*), stools, doors, walking sticks, knives, mirrors, bags and houses. A ladle featured a burnt-in design, which might be just a simple motif, a curvilinear triangle or a ring round the handle, two circles or anything. But that created a new arrangement of space and offset monotony. People enhanced the beauty of their bodies by employing *Uli* painting, intricate hair-do, teeth-filing and cicatrizations.

The decoration of household objects was not very elaborate. It is when we come to ceremonial objects like the Igbo-Ukwu vessel (Pl. II) that we are in direct contact with high ornamentation bordering on extravagance. We are let into the realms of lyrical symbolism—sinuous, curvilinear and geometric shapes which have specific names and are in fact, derived from natural forms; and animal forms, mostly reptiles, simple in form but elaborately decorated. This distinction between the decoration of ordinary objects and ceremonial ones illustrates the effects of use on design.

The practice of distinguishing the ordinary and the specialized, was not restricted to religious objects. Titled men showed their social status by the more elaborate fashioning of their carved door panels and posts. An *Ozo* man, one who had gone through all the stages, was allowed to decorate two sides of his house with carved panels. He sought out a competent and renowned artist to carve his stool, and the size of his *Ikenga* and other figures, usually larger than the common man's, gave ample

scope for the free play of the artist's imagination. Having made the basic symbolic statement required by tradition (in the *Ikenga*, the two horns), the artist set out to explore form and space, subjecting the piece to elaborate embellishment to reflect a visual eulogy and testimony of the patron's affluence.

The artist, in any tradition, operates from two poles. Either he is satisfying his inward desires to create (in Igbo art, this is most manifest in decoration) or he is commissioned to create. In the latter, what he does is regarded by C. S. Lewis as "work," because not "inspired." The artist draws from the repository of artistic forms but ultimately getting "involved," he creates a genuine work of art.

Igbo functional art eventuated through this process and the subsequent establishment over the years of a tradition, symbol-wise, within which the artist committed himself to the past. This raises the question of the extent to which traditional Igbo society imposed strict limits on the originality of the artist. William Fagg has this to say, that

"... the rigidity under which the tribal artist worked was not appreciably greater than in the more or less religious art of the Renaissance—Italian painters of religious subjects, for instance. That is to say, the tribal and Renaissance artists both worked in a classical tradition, classical in the sense that it is related to the common experience, and not romantic in the sense of most European art of the last century and of this century."⁸

Painting a picture of Christ, for instance, the Renaissance artist introduced a halo round the head; a traditional symbol which made for communicability. Even though the origin of the halo symbol was unknown to the artist, he was "compelled" to use it to establish correspondence, that is, if we accept that valid art should necessarily communicate. But beyond that, the stamp of individuality would be quite evident in the arrangement of shapes and colours and in the chromatic scheme of the picture.

In traditional Igbo society, this arrangement was operative, though the adherence to tradition stemmed from the so-called ancestor-worship which was more of a pious maintenance of *omenani* (customs of the land), what Mbonu Ojike called "Omenanism." The Igbo artist commissioned to make a statue, first considered the function of the sculpture which called for an appreciation of the relevant symbol used by his predecessors and subsequently how to reconcile that with his original vision. The *Ikenga* can serve to illustrate this process and the aphorism

what "Art begins where function ends," showing a full range from the literal interpretation to the symbolic abstraction (Fig. 2).

"The essential thing . . . is that it must have two horns—like projections and apparently, it is sufficient for its purpose if it consists only of these two projections set on a base. However, there is in practice great variation among these *ikenga* and the great majority of them are much more elaborate than they functionally need to be, commonly taking the form in one area of a seated human figure with two very fantastic horns rising from the top of the head and holding various objects in the hands. Sometimes they take an almost abstract form, recognizable as related to the human figure only by a very rudimentary face in the middle, but still with the two protuberances."

The artist was restricted in the area of primary symbol, not form. For instance, it would be revolutionary, almost sacrilegious to alter the number of horns. The artist could play with form. He could vary the objects held; in one instance, the objects were a knife and an ivory tusk. And he could introduce many more features.

In the decorative arts of door-carving, body painting and wall-painting, traditional symbols were also used but there was no rigid control; there, the artist was freest to attempt imaginative exploration of form and space.

Symbolism was a veritable quality inasmuch as the motifs had been definite names and stood for known objects. In wall painting we have the basic shapes which appeared in several variations in the different decorative arts. These symbols (Fig. 3) range from the archetypal shapes—dot, line, curvilinear triangles and rectangles (*isinwaoji*), circles (*oloma, onwa*), and crescents, their extensions in concentric coil (*agwolagwo*) derived from a snake, double triangle (*mho agu*)—leopard's claw and lion. Wall painting featured, in addition to these basic abstract shapes, vegetable, animal and other forms rather stylized but still having clear semblance to the original models. These were the recurrent symbols used by the traditional artist in covering space where decoration was either a subordinate element as in *ndari* houses or constituted the *raison d'être*.

In the Nri court house painting (Pl. III) the right half of the picture is devoted to phenomenal representation; in a canoe, a masquerade in patchwork costume "holds" a fowl in its left hand, while two men smoking pipes paddle. The left half shows abstract patterning—sinuous, swinging lines, triangles, circles, bold shapes broken with dots. Ignorance of the symbolic significance of the motifs employed does not impair one's "enjoyment" of

the painting. The aesthetic quality—the manner of laying out shapes in space, colour orchestration, the dynamics of lined forms, the lyrical aspects—stands out.

A most interesting aspect of this picture is that it illustrates the existence in traditional Igbo art of the realistic and the abstract approaches to art, with symbolism as the common denominator. It also shows the imaginative power of the traditional artist; notice how the window is incorporated into the design.

In spite of the sketchiness of this essay, certain conclusions can be made.

The language of Igbo art was a language of symbols. In the functional there was a movement from the abstract (idea) to the concrete or real; in the decorative, a reversal of the process—the artist started from natural forms, reduced them to simple statements of triangle, circle, oblong, line, which he laid out in space to constitute an aesthetic pattern, an abstract.

The extreme artist-society relationships are possible. In one there is complete societal control. The artist has no freedom to invent but imitates and repeats. This gives rise to an art of dogma and decay. In the other, he is totally detached from society and there can be no meaningful dialogue between himself and his society. Communication breaks down. In a dynamic and healthy society, however, the artist balances his obligations—to self, and to society. This is an ideal condition for truth which is the highest attribute of art, of art that communicates.

In the traditional Igbo society the artist's first loyalty was to his society. The society provided patronage and impetus, gave the artist his symbols, and he let the society into his private visions, his interpretation of reality. In this sense, the Igbo artist can be regarded as a true example of "people's artist." He was a spokesman for his society, an interpreter of Igbo world view.

NOTES:

¹William Fagg, "Perspective from Africa: Summary of Proceedings" in *The Artist in Tribal Society: Proceedings of a Symposium held at the Royal Anthropological Institute*, ed. M. W. Smith, London 1961, p. 117.

²G. I. Jones, "Mbari Houses," *Nigerian Field*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1937, p. 77.

³It was formerly believed in the Owerri area that the white man originated from a hole in the ground.

⁴Much of the sculpture was painted and there was a very thin line between drawing, painting and sculpture.

*William Fagg, *Article cit.* in M. W. Smith, ed. *The Artist in Tribal Society*, London 1961, p. 101.

*Ibid., p. 117.

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11. NTOKON, "Awka Wood Carvers," *Nigerian Field*, No. 2, December 1931, 35-39.
12. SHAW, Thurstan, "The Mystery of the Buried Bronzes: Discoveries at Igbo-Ukwu, Eastern Nigeria," *Nigerian Magazine*, No. 92, March, 1967, 55-74.
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14. "The Painted Court House of Inre," *Nigeria*, No. 16, 4th Quarter, 1938, 288-89.
15. TOVEY, D. C., "Umuome Inyi Pots," *Nigerian Field*, No. 7, April 1933, 29-38.



Fig. 1. Head of a woman.

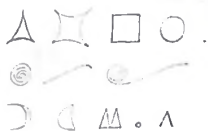


Fig. 2. Symbols of the Iroquois.



Fig. 3. Ceremonial staff of the Iroquois.



PLATE I



PLATE II

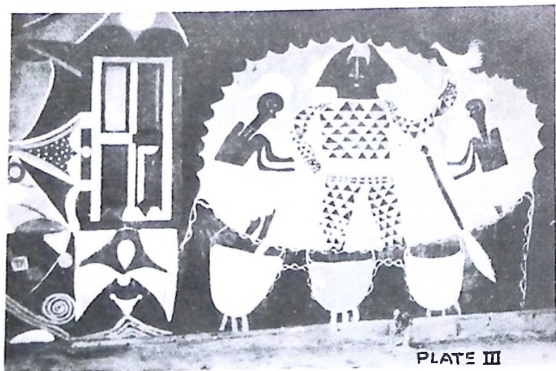


PLATE III

REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESERVATION OF IGBO FOLK LITERATURE

Helen Peters

Igbo folk literature is essentially oral literature. Francis Lee Utley defined folk literature as "orally transmitted literature wherever found among primitive isolates or civilized marginal cultures, urban or rural societies, dominant or subordinate groups."¹ From this definition it seems that for any literature to be folk it must lay claim first to an oral tradition. Folk literature may be found in urban or rural societies according to Utley. To the average Igbo man, urban Igbo folk literature is not Igbo folk literature at all. This is because its base is not native or village-drawn. Urban folk literature among the Igbo then is regarded as the product of foreign indebtedness.

It is relatively easy to distinguish real Igbo folk literature from city-oriented Igbo folk literature. Take for instance these two proverbs from Ogbaru:

1. "Ogbei a lo nlo oskapa, kalu ngadji?" "The poor does not dream of a rice dish; where is the spoon for it?"
2. "Anu enyi a dalu ogbei." "The poor never comes by an elephant carcass."

The borrowed elements in the first proverb are apparent and these point to its urbanness and hence, its relative newness. "Rice," "spoon," these are new to the diet and eating habits of the Igbo. The second proverb relates to the time and that is a long time ago—a century ago—when elephants were still rampant in the forests. Elephants are big hunts and an elephant carcass is a rich boon to the hunter. Elephants are known never to rise again should they fall, hence anyone meeting such a happening actually steps into money. Both proverbs actually mean the same thing—the plight of the poor man, who never is lucky enough to meet an elephant carcass and who cannot dream of a rice dish because he can't afford it (from where will the spoon come?). To the Igbo man the second proverb by virtue of its link with the past—its antiquity and its direct relevance to the culture—qualifies as authentic Igbo folk literature. There is bias for the rural, old and traditional in the Igbo assessment of what is Igbo folk literature and what is not.

The Igbo have a high regard and near veneration for their folklore, folk literature inclusive. Knowledge of Igbo folk litera-

ture is one thing and its practice is another. Because of this high regard the Igbo have for their folk literature they are wary of practising it for fear of malpractice and abuse. An irrelevant proverb or a wrongly-worded proverb reveals the ignorance of the user and thus exposes him to much ridicule and embarrassment. Folk literature practices have to be the real thing, anything short of this is not worth it all.

And now it is worthwhile to consider the genres of Igbo literature beside the above background and the preservative process. The prevalent genres of Igbo folk literature are: the folktale, (Marchen) myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, food recipes, folk speech like praise names, set phrases that accompany certain ceremonies or rituals like the breaking of kola nuts or the event of birth or death. The above are prose narratives. Igbo folk literature also includes folk verse ballads and folk drama. Folk literature from the above can be seen as folklore expressed in words. The above genres are the prevalent ones in Igbo folk literature but some are more prevalent than others when prevalence is determined by its currency and thus preferential use by the Igbo of some of these genres more than of others. The folktale, (with particular reference to the animal tales), myths, proverbs and folk speech enjoy a wider currency and usage than the other genres. Popularity and wide usage have largely accounted for the large number of these genres that are found among the Igbo today.

The proverb comes high on the list because of its literary attribute of being figurative, colourful and terse and its earthy quality of containing truths, hard facts borne out by experience.

"A na lu uka mgba ma ani di." "You don't argue about wrestling when there is land." The proverb is an integral part of the Igbo language—it is an indispensable tool in authentic Igbo discourse. The proverb's popularity among the Igbo is also due to its embodying mature seasoned philosophy and wit. The proverb is short and static and this makes for good retention. The proverb's relevance among the Igbo also stems from its various functions as advice, a teaching device, insult, praise, lament or as an allusion. These various uses which it serves make the proverb enjoy current usage. With the proverb, therefore, its preservation to date lies in its form and the different functions it fulfils.

Myths also enjoy great currency mostly in the villages because of their function as political, religious, social and literary

history. There is a story behind every odd physical phenomenon in Igboland. The lone silk cotton tree in the market place or the 'Ojih' has a myth surrounding it which invariably ends up with some religious significance of its being the dwelling place of a particular god who reached some eminence among the people because of the aid it gave the people in warding off some invasion from a neighbouring people. Such examples abound in Ogbaru division. Many Udala trees in Igboland are the abode and playing ground of spirits. These myths will circulate as long as these objects are there whether or not the tellers or the hearers actually believe in them. The preservation of these myths stems from their function.

Folk speech features in such everyday happenings as blessings, breaking of kola nuts, praise names, nicknames and onomatopoeia. An example of a salutation and praise name as addressed to a woman of royal and noble descent—"Eze-uli, nwa Akamanya Nzedegwu, nwa Onumonu eze Uchi, ogbu onye mbosi ndu na guya."

These praise names are stereotyped phrases that have been passed down and not coined anew. "Ogbu onye mbosi ndu na guya"—literally means one who kills one the best day of one's life or the day one cherishes one's life the most. This is a cliché and used on one who deserves such praise—by virtue of his birth, valour and renown or of the birth, valour and renown of his or her ancestors. As long as there are people deserving of such praise names and as long as they have followers ready to greet them, thus this aspect of folk speech will continue to be practised. So that in this case, preservation is achieved by such continuity. Praise names are used as exalted salutation as a form of gratitude by the benefactor. They are also used in the event of title taking, certain feasts, and at the event of death.

The folktale is the vastest and commonest of Igbo folk narratives. It is also the most popular and the most widely known. It is closely followed by the proverb in popularity but it surpasses the proverb in wide usage because the folktale has no age or sex limitations on its users as the proverb does. In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, after the day's chores, Ugoye on her children's request tells them a folk story. Proverbs are used by adults and even at that, in Igboland men are more proverbious than women and still in the male adult category, male elders are more proverbious as of right, by virtue of their age, wisdom and social standing, than younger male adults.

Folktales then that are popular among the Igbo are animal

tales (the fable and aetiological animal tales). These animal tales have the basic characteristic of featuring the trickster more often than not. The tortoise is the animal trickster among the Igbo. These tales are told for entertainment, for instruction, for stating morals and for propagating history and culture. The folktale is popular among the Igbo but few Igbo practise its telling nowadays. This is because few can tell a story well, few can remember the facts of the story to tell and few would be bothered to tell folktales either for entertainment or for didactic purposes. Among the educated Igbo, folktales are important so far as they are telling remnants of our past culture, the norms and belief systems of our forefathers and how they lived. (Most of Igbo folktales are based in "Obodo Idu" with its chief as "Oba Idu." Obodo Idu has been identified as Benin.) These various uses the folktale serves account for its currency and aliveness today. But unlike the brevity of form and conciseness of expression which the proverb enjoys and which make it easily remembered, the folktale's long and episodic form, its dramatic flair and light reproduction do not make for easy retention and confident practice. As written for the present-day educated Igbo the folktale is worth remembering for its cultural purposes. If as sole entertainment the Igbo folktale would have long been a relic of the past.

Most of Igbo folk literature is orally transmitted and has been so preserved. Only a negligible little has been committed to writing. It is literature that has passed down from mouth to mouth down the ages. And herein lies the great distinction between Igbo folk literature (African folk literature as a whole) and Western folk literature with particular reference to Germany and England. How does the Igbo child learn about his folk literature? By going back to the village and hearing it told or recited from his aged relative or friend. How does his English or German counterpart learn about his folk literature? By picking up books on it from the shelf and then probably reinforcing this knowledge by a few checks on those he feels may know about it, i.e., the aged. For the Igbo child, his first and to a great extent his only contact with the folk literature of his people is oral. This is easy to appreciate because the Igbo have no written tradition. In our society, we have devices and ways of combating culture decay. This is done through practice, re-enactment and memory committing. As we had court historians who can recount lines of kings, heroes, family connections, boundaries, wars

and treaties, so we have known active folklore bearers, people with creditable memory who are endowed with the ability to tell a story well. The Igbo society is a traditionally oral society; words thrill us a lot so we have emphasis on the ear, the tone and ways these words are said. Hence a good folk story teller or a proverbial adult is a thriller. A folk story not well told, a proverb not aptly executed is as good as a story or a proverb not told at all. And so in the villages, occasions for story telling, for riddling, for proverbial were created in leisure hours, (moonlight nights), clan meetings, serious discussions, e.g., bride price meetings. There was then no written tradition because hitherto there was no need for one. Society was not as disrupted and diffuse as it is today. There was no urbanization, no population drift and culture values were static and uniform. Practitioners of the folk literary tradition were very interested in it and so were their audience. Hence folk literature preservation was enhanced, not handicapped.

In post-independent Nigeria tastes have changed, cultural values have been modified, and traditional literature too has changed roles. It is no longer prominent in the lives of the people because there has been a change of context. Who wants to fill one's leisure telling folktales when there are such entertainments as the cinema, music and dance sessions. And in terms of preservation who would bother to retain by memory a folk literature which he does not practise anyhow, and a folk literature which he can save himself the trouble of committing to memory since the society offers such preservative devices as tape recorders and scripts?

It would appear that our traditional literature especially the folktale and riddle, "our gold crop is sinking ungathered." It is still practised in the villages nonetheless but it is these same villages who have been drained of their population by the cities. Now mostly the old, and farmers and non-literates live in the villages. When this old generation dies off, will that then be the end of our traditional literature as a living art? One would say, collect them and put them down in writing, that would preserve them forever. But it is writing as a way of preserving folk literature that presents a problem. Igbo folk literature by its very nature and the background and culture of its coiners, cannot be adequately and validly preserved in set writing but can only be subjected to such a preservative form as may present its very life and art accurately. Recording on tapes and discs are at present ways of collecting and preserving folk literature: e.g.,

Children's Fairy Tales, Aesop's Fables, The Dahomean Narrative, 1890's Legends. These anthologies of folktales do not reflect the true life context and practice of these folktales as oral narrative forms. The scenes and information of their telling are lost to the reader and this does not offer accurate representation of these tales. It can be concluded that limiting to a collection device will capture the totality of the experience, words, audience, movement, facial expressions, etc. But here countermeasures for the present generation is to go to a cinema in which non-sophisticates tell stories and then our province just for the fun of it!

A more effective if idealistic way of preserving Igbo folk literature as a living art is by encouraging the contexts and situations that stimulate and activate their practice. And now one can envision the new post-war generation and appreciation of Igbo culture, language and traditional literature by Igbo themselves. Once more, the Igbo is looking into himself rejoicing while reassessing the wealth of his folklore. He now uses his language often rather than before—in schools, making it as an examination subject, in churches using it to praise his God and singing songs to Him. And now the educated educated Igbo man is no longer to who can speak only the Queen's English or fluent French or German, but he who is educated in all these is knowledgeable in the Igbo language and tradition and can prove it. Igbo traditional literature now grows in the emphasis. And this generation is this lucky in getting the opportunity of a remedying an almost one-sidedness in terms of our traditional literature enhancement.

It takes present forms of Igbo folk literature preservation are also in societies like The Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture, where in meetings the Igbo language is used as a rule and members are encouraged to use such linguistic and figurative embellishments as proverbs and folk idioms in their speech. Such practices would perpetuate alive folk literary sources in our society. Such burdens will no longer be vested only on the old folk in the villages or on folk literature collectors and researchers.

Also, the average literate Igbo man is being reminded of his literary tradition in some of our novels. Such preservation of Igbo folk literature is seen in novels whose setting, situation and scenes are based in Igboland. A good example is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow and Sorrow* or *God in which* are featured a rich variety of proverbs, songs and folktales. Good examples of such Igbo folk literature perpetuation abound as in Flora Nwapa's

novels, *Idu* and *Efuru* and Onuora Nzekwu's *Wand of Noble Wood*. The great usefulness of such works lies in the fact that the folk literary genres they feature are presented in context and not in isolation. As such their true essence and use are well portrayed. They become alive again for the man who has been away from his village for a long time and so lost the tradition. It is as it were a life presentation.

Whereas before what preserved Igbo folk literature was its various uses (entertainment, advice, etc.) and its relevant contexts, now what preserves it is pride of ownership, a feeling of this is mine, it is good and I will keep it. This kind of preservation is the only preservation that would keep Igbo folk literature and indeed Igbo folklore as a living art, not as a dead or once-alive art to be remembered only in the archives or museums.

It is known if not anticipated that tastes change, that time too ushers in such changes. But the genres of folk literature are so fixed that changes are anticipated more in the content than the form, and additions of new genres are anticipated rather than structural alterations of old ones. There are some basic forms that are associated with the folktale and proverb-like motifs for the former and static precise form with the latter that cannot be readily changed by time. Hence it is less feasible and more of a loss to lose whole genres like the folktale than to lose one form of the folktale, i.e., animal tales and have it substituted by numskull tales or to lose such embellishments in the folktales as songs.

Preservation of Igbo traditional literature lies in the preservation and use of the Igbo language. As G. T. Basden writes: "Proverbs, fables, and stories enter very largely into the ordinary conversation of the people and some acquaintance with them is absolutely necessary in order to take an intelligent interest in any subject of discussion. Some hundreds of proverbs are in frequent use and answers to questions are frequently given in this form."²

NOTES:

¹Francis Lee Utley, "Folk Literature: An Operational Definition." *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 13.

²G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966), p. 273.

THE RHYTHM OF DANCE IN IGBO MUSIC

Meki Nzewi

Igbo music is, generally speaking, the music of the dance. Each musical piece is a synthesis of many fabrics, one or two of which dictate the dance steps and movement. The exceptions to this rule are the isolated cases of non-dance-accompanied and non-dance-prompting musical pieces associated with some types of ceremonial music—divination music, for instance.

Even though there are semi-professional dance groups trained to their particular organised and systematized dances, practically every Igbo man or woman can usually respond properly to any piece of music within their particular intra-ethnic heritage. Igbo dances—and one can say this of all dances in Africa south of the Sahara—are rhythm dances. There is always an element of the musical texture, which excites the inherent dance tendencies of an indigene, whether trained for the dance or just an onlooker. That element of the musical texture which directs and distinguishes the dance steps and movements of a particular musical piece, constitutes its "rhythm of dance." And for our purpose, here, "dance" includes any spontaneous physical or gymnastic response to, or appreciation of a musical performance. This spontaneous reaction may take the form of a couple of forward dance steps by an on-looker wishing to embrace a member of the performing group, or to offer the dancer money and compliments. Or it could be the unconscious limb and body movements in rhythm and rhyme with the dancers of the music. These are the unrehearsed dance urges which identify the spectator with a musical performance and Igbo music with Igbo audience.

This "rhythm of dance," or the rhythm that calls the dance and dance movements, is generally identified as that rhythmic or melodic line which is distinguished from the rest by its varying or extra rhythmic nature, and is usually found in the melody or percussion instruments.

A typical example of the "rhythm of dance" is found in the music and dance of the famous "Atilogwu" dance. In every structural movement of a performance of this dance, each instrument takes up a rhythmic phrase and keeps repeating that phrase with little or no modifications till the end of the movement. The exception to this is the master instrument or dominant instru-

ment (in some cases, two instruments) which directs the dance.*

In the Atilogwu dance music, the two instruments which determine the rhythm of dance are a short vertical flute with a melodic range of a sixth called *oja* and a bass gong called *alo*. During the opening or the transitional intermissions between one structural dance movement and the next, the next dance movements are called on this flute. At the end of this call, the bass group player and the dancer work in close co-ordination. The rhythm of the bass gong (inclusive of strong, weak and displaced beats) synchronises with the rhythm of the dance steps. The choice and combination of legs, head, hands and other accompanying body movements are the complements of the dancer and the choreographer. The illustration below is a rhythm of dance diagram showing a typical dance sentence.

Bass Gong	: 4 j j j j j j j j j j j j j j j j :
Feet Movement	: 4 $\frac{R}{L}$ L L L $\frac{L}{R}$ R R R $\frac{L}{R}$ R $\frac{L}{R}$ R R $\frac{L}{R}$ $\frac{L}{R}$ $\frac{L}{R}$ $\frac{L}{R}$:

Explanation of Symbols:

j - crochet beat (one pulsation)	
z - crochet rest	$\frac{R}{L}$ or $\frac{L}{R}$ - both feet together
- - strong (low) beat	R - right foot
u - weak (high) beat	L - left foot

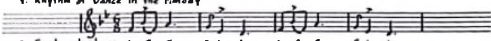
The first bar's *rhythm of dance* is taken on the left foot, hopping gracefully to the left. In the second bar, the same movement on the right foot brings the dancer back to the point of departure. The last two bars are taken almost at a spot with appropriate body sways. Of course, while the dancer's feet and the base gong are engaged in the above exercise, the flute, which is the master instrument in the whole ensemble, is not idle. It normally complements the bass gong by enriching the *rhythm of dance*, or it could take up an independent melody rhyme with the gracefulness of the body movement of the dancer or dancers. The particular game in which the two instruments and the dancers engage does not affect the other instruments which as a rule maintain their appropriate rhythmic phrases throughout the particular dance movement.

The promenade entrance dance of a typical young female group "Egwu Erico" family of dances, provides an example of

*In Igbo folk music, a master instrument is usually present as a substitute for the voice in the absence of or in addition to it. And in many cases, it is the vocal line that provides the "rhythm of dance."

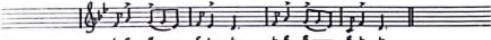
the *rhythm of dance* present in the vocal/melodic rhythm. The illustration shows an essentially eight bar sentence, with a two bar "rhythm of dance" phrase that is repeated during the entrance promenade stage.

1. Rhythm of Dance in the Melody



2. Feet selections: L R R R L L L R R R L L

3. Step descriptions: step step stamp step step stamp (simile)



The melody is of the responsorial type in which the chorus repeats the 8-bar solo statement. Both the soloist and the chorus are also dancers. The dancers enter the arena in a horse-shoe formation with the soloist in front, followed by supporting soloist, (if there is one), the prompter, the lead dancer and finally the rest of the dancers. The group may then take a round of the dance circle, before they hand over the essential *rhythm of dance* to the second instrument. In the case of the "Egwu Erico" family of dances, this instrument is a pot with circular opening at the base of the neck and possibilities of glissando tonal effect. The pot may be capable of internal variations, but these are not employed at the entrance stage. Its rhythm at that stage is following 4-bar rhythmic phrase, which also shows the rhythm of the wooden clappers, the metal gong, the bass gong and hand claps.

Pot	$\frac{6}{8}$				
Knocker	$\frac{2}{4}$				
Metal Gong	$\frac{6}{8}$				
Bass Gong	$\frac{2}{4}$				
Hand Claps	$\frac{2}{4}$				

When the dancers have all entered, the pot, which takes over the rhythm of dance from the voice, leads the rest of the instruments in an instrumental interlude for the vigorous and stylistic "hot dance" which continues and concludes the promenade dance. Its *rhythm of dance* is subsequently as follows and in a faster tempo:

1. Rhythm of Dance in Part



For each subsequent dance movement, this pattern is followed in handing over the *rhythm of dance* from the voices to the pot during the climactic "hot dance" (or strictly instrumental) stage. The prompter may supplement the pot by calling out rhythmic and hortatory vocalisations during the percussion passage. During this non-vocal stage, the lead singers and the prompter move into the centre of the dance circle, while the lead dancer closes up with the rest of the dancers to form a dance circle in a "face to back" formation. Where a group sings while dancing, the dance is "called" by the lead cantor after each dance movement or dance session.**

A majority of Igbo dances and dance patterns are linked directly or indirectly with a *rhythm of dance* concept which is given to one or two instruments of the ensemble, including the human voice. It then follows that polyphony, or polyrhythm, even though found in abundance in Igbo folk music is primarily of musical essence, and has no direct bearing or relationship to the dance. The purpose of all other rhythmic and melodic elements of dance music is mainly to provide a rich textural background support for the *rhythm of dance* and the dance itself; while the latter two in combination with the elements previously mentioned give us the polyphony and polyrhythm of dance.

A note on cross-relations in Igbo dance rhythms. These occur when a dancer (a female dancer, usually) does the *inu nkwe* coquettish walk-dance irrespective of the basic rhythmic organisation of the dance. This walk-dance, whenever it occurs, is a solo super-imposition of extemporised rubatic or free rhythm dance manouvres over strict tempo rendition and group choreography. This cross-relation makes the uninitiated rhythmically restless, no matter the latentness of our high rhythmic orientation.

⁶⁶The practice of "calling" the next dance affords the dancers and instrumentalists an opportunity to rest in between dance movements.

But the *ita nkwe* dance is the culmination of artistic and aesthetic perfection in body movement in the Igbo dance culture. The rhythmic cross-relation it provides equally achieves the highest complexity in rhythmic unity of dance organisations, especially when the performer, after several bars of such walk-dances accompanied with equally coquettish vocalisations, resolves her gambols with a flourish into the essential rhythmic organisation of the ensemble.

INDIVIDUALISM IN AN ASPECT OF IGBO RELIGION*

B. I. Chukwukere

In this paper I want to explain the notion of *chi* (best rendered in English as "personal god") in the cosmology of the Igbo-speaking peoples and to relate my interpretation to a predominant trait in their social behaviour or attitudes—individualism.

The gist of the argument can be embodied in three main hypotheses. First, underlying Igbo social organisation is an individualistic principle, which is, in fact, a pervasive trait in Igbo culture. This principle is clearly institutionalized in the concept of *chi* or "personal god," which is a pronounced aspect of Igbo religion. But I am not hereby implying that other Igbo social and cultural institutions do not reveal this fundamental character of individualism; rather it is noteworthy with reference to the religion of a nonliterate people because individualism is contrary to the general notion of "elementary" religion, brilliantly handed down to sociologists by Emile Durkheim and the adherents of functionalism, as a collectivistic and integrative force. However, the relation of a religious concept or ethos to social organisation and individual attitudes is nothing new. It is the main question raised in Max Weber's classical juxtaposition of Protestantism and (Western) capitalism.

Second, the idea of *chi*, essentially a centrifugal force, has apparently receded in the wake of Igbo adoption of Christianity and allied Western cultural imports into a holistic centripetal force identifiable with the omni-God of Christianity.

Third, despite this apparent fusion of *chi* and God the underlying principle of individualism in the former remains a dominant Igbo motive of action. Here I wish to allude to contemporary Nigerian socio-political events, which constitute in a sense an epitome of the unintended consequences of urbanisation of that country. (Urbanisation lies at the heart of social change in Africa.) The roots of Igbo conflict with some other ethnic groups and peoples of their country—a conflict that goes back to the early years of political nationalism although the series of crises culminating in the recent hostilities seem to have accentuated it—lie deep in the atomistic, competitive and equalitarian

*This article is based on a paper first presented at a meeting of the Ghana Sociological Association in Legon, Dec. 1967. The general theme of the Symposium was "West African Traditional Religion and Social Change," and this is reflected in the general structure of this essay. *Author*

features of Igbo culture and temperament. But I shall play down this more or less controversial (narrowly political) aspect of the proposition, for what should interest us here, *qua ad hoc* sociologists of religion, is the simple fact that the above-mentioned socio-cultural traits are well marked in the Igbo picture of the universe, peoples' relationship with its unseen inhabitants and mundane social relationships as well.

A summary of Igbo social structure would be desirable at this juncture. The Igbo-speaking peoples occupy a large portion of land east and west of the great River Niger. Their territory stretches from north of the Niger delta region through a thick belt of tropical rain forest which gradually gives way to a quasi-grassland vegetation. The Igbo number over 7 million. Agriculture is the basis of the traditional economy.

It is rather difficult for one to treat the Igbo as a unified group, with common traditions, institutions, myths of origin *et cetera*. The main features of the social structure can be very well summarized as "social fragmentation" and a strong accent on achieved status. By the former we mean, first and foremost, the acephalous, independent village-based political system. Igbo social organisation is characterized by a multiplicity of social units, more or less autonomous entities in all aspects of their relationships, which look up to no common higher authority or even symbol of authority as a unifying force. But there are, in addition to a common language, some overt cultural similarities existing between the numerous social units; and in any case behind the welter of socio-cultural differences lie fundamental similarities. The notion of *chi* and the *ofo** symbol, for example, are as universal to the Igbo as the emphasis on achieved as opposed to ascribed status. According to Dr. Uchendu, referring to this aspect of Igbo social organisation, "There are no restraints, human, cultural or supernatural, which cannot, theoretically, be overcome."

Igbo religion, one of the cardinal principles of which is the concept of *chi*, rationalizes achieved status coupled with its concomitant features of individualism. In Igbo "society" the largest political unit is a village-group. This comprises a number of villages that can trace real genealogical connections several generations back. A village-group possesses a guardian deity

**Ofo* is the Igbo symbol of authority, political and ritual. Usually represented as a short piece of wood its power derives from association with the ancestors. It is the Bible of communal oath-taking. Author

in the same way that each village, family and individual has one. Therefore one would assume that Igbo religion postulates a pantheon of gods. The paradox of this phenomenon, however, is that there is no hierarchical ordering of the pantheon in the "action sphere" of Igbo peoples' relationship with these gods and other spiritual beings. Here the semblance of religious unity implicit in the fact of a common village-group guardian deity forcefully, as it were, gives way to an atomistic "organisation" of gods, each manipulating its relationship with Igbo mortal beings in order to secure more power and influence in the very same way that the latter themselves manipulate their own social relationships for material and spiritual benefits.

In the above sense Professor Evans-Pritchard's general conclusion from his study of Nuer religion that "in all societies religious thought bears the impress of the social order" is relevant to our thesis. The author shows that the Nuer conception of a Supreme Spirit whom they invoke as "Spirit of the universe" (*kwoth ghana*), below whom is a number of hierarchically arranged lesser spirits described by him as "refractions of Spirit by the social order," is a reflection of Nuer politico-lineage fragmentation. A close resemblance exists between aspects of Nuer and Igbo social structures, and Evans-Pritchard's abstraction of spirit-refraction might prove a useful tool in the analysis of Igbo speculation on divinity. But this I would only dare hint at in this paper.

Let us now examine documentary sources for some clarification of the meaning of *chi*. The term can be a rather ambiguous one. Rev. Dr. Basden, a missionary of the '20s, whose two quasi-empirical studies of the Igbo are in a sense exceptional, describes *chi* at length as follows:

- i. A generic term for God i.e. Supreme Being. Later Basden qualifies it as "almost a generic word for god."
- ii. Combined with a qualifying attribute *chi* becomes a distinctive god. For example, *Chineke* = *Chi* "who creates"; *Chukwu* (*Chi-ukwu*) = "big" *chi* i.e. the great God.
- iii. "*Chi* is a sort of guardian deity deputising for *Chukwu*." Considered thus it is usually symbolized by a stick or piece of wood cut from a "sacred" tree, or at times one plants a tree in front of one's house to represent *chi*.

It is in the last form—as a guardian or sort of benevolent ancestral spirit—that the personal nature of *chi* is best exemplified. Thus, every human being has his or her own *chi* although in practice a child, for example, shares his father's *chi* until he is old enough to "obtain" one for himself.

It quickly dawns on any perceptive student that Rev. Basden is unable to clear the ambiguity around *chi*. At times the reader cannot know precisely which meaning of the term the author intends. For example, he claims that "there is no form of direct sacrifice to the Supreme Being," and that only "malevolent spirits" are offered sacrifices. Therefore, he concludes, an annual feast held in honour of *chi* "is not a proper sacrifice, rather it is a service of penitence for sin." And, he warns, the *chi* on this occasion is not to be confused with *Chukwu*, the "Supreme Being." In the same breath, however, Rev. Basden claims that *chi* may be "worshipped" anytime by the sacrifice of a fowl; that people pray to him for their needs, material and spiritual.

I do not intend to go into the controversial distinction which Basden above implicitly makes between "proper sacrifice" and "service of penitence for sin." As I understand it, he seems to have been forced to it by the contradictions immanent in the situation in which he erroneously claims that sacrifices are exclusive to "malevolent spirits." Hence, following this premise, since *chi* is not in this category an annual feast held in his honour must be a non-sacrifice.

On the contrary I suggest that sacrifices are not the prerogative of evil spirits. Benevolent spirits, including the Supreme Being, *Chukwu*, do welcome sacrifices and in fact may demand them. I further claim that at least one aspect of the annual rite referred to by Basden is a sacrifice, and that *chi* here may be an intermediary between the giver of the sacrifice and another deity (*Chukwu* not excluded). In other words, if what the suppliant asks for is beyond the executive province of *chi* the belief is that the latter will advise his *protégé* to make a direct appeal to a more relevant (i.e., influential within the context of the request) deity. Therefore, the position here is that since the Igbo do not have a clear-cut picture of an operational hierarchical ordering of deities, the relative proximity of *chi* makes its value as a primary source of knowledge regarding some of the mysteries of the supernatural or invisible world priceless. In this sense *chi* can easily take on the role of *agent provocateur*, thus establishing a relationship of manipulation between itself and its owner. This fits in with our broad picture of Igbo social

organisation—a chess-board of manipulatory relationships where men and spirits interact on a theoretically equal basis, each side theoretically motivated by intense self-interest (limited, however, by traditional canons). But although *chi* and the owner can manipulate each other, in theory the Igbo strongly believe that it is they who strike the tune and expect their *chi* to keep time. If the latter fails, inadvertently or otherwise, the Igbo believe they can alter the rhythm by sacrifices or any other prescribed forms of mollifications, depending on the advice or injunctions of diviners or oracles.

My criticism of Basden's interpretation should not be stretched too far, for he is not alone in the frustrating experience of grappling with the "exact" meaning of the phenomenon of *chi*, which even to the native Igbo could prove enigmatic in the circumstances of a sociological analysis. M. M. Green's later book, which unlike Basden's is based on advanced social scientific (anthropological) research methods, corroborates the ambiguity surrounding the notion. She seems to despair in the following statements: "It is difficult to know what the real Igbo significance of the word is. *Chi* and *Eke* together create an individual, but each person is thought of as having his own *chi* and whether, over and above this, there is any conception of a universal *chi* seems doubtful." However, as I have already indicated above it is this elusive attribute that makes *chi* a highly characteristic, and therefore very useful, Igbo deity. *Chi* and the owner are responsive to mutual manipulation, a process in which the Igbo-man is aware that he has the upper hand.

Finally on documentary sources, let us make a brief survey of the most distinctive (in my opinion) element of *chi*—its very personal or individualist nature. Basden rightly comments on the ubiquity of *chi* in the Igboman's daily life and life-cycle—in secular and "sacred" activities, sickness, adversity, death, etc. Thus Igbo proverbs, microcosms of social morality, emphasize the individualism immanent in *chi*. A few examples will suffice:

1. *Oka onye ka chi ya* = "if you are greater than one you are also greater than his own god" (*chi*)
2. *Ebe onye dalu ka chi ya kwatuluya* = "where one falls there his *chi* pushes him"
3. *Ofu nne namu ma ofu chi adieke* = "children born by the same mother are not created by the same *chi*" i.e. every individual has his or her own characteristics.

From Chinua Achebe's fiction we derive a corollary to this individual aspect of *chi*—Igbo ambivalence to the god. (The im-

plications of taking sociological data from fictional works could be inconclusively debated at length. I am not here, by referring to *Things Fall Apart*, assuming that its data on *chi* are social facts *per se*. I am encouraged by the conviction that good fiction, especially, the novel, invariably mirrors real life. And *Things Fall Apart* belongs to this good category.)

The fluctuations of the fortunes of Okonkwo, the hero of the story, provide suitable situations for comments on the shifty character of *chi*, and the resultant Igbo ambivalence to it. Okonkwo's phenomenal rise from an obscure and inglorious family background to the revered status of a "lord" of the clan is explained in terms of the benevolence of his *chi*. But *chi's* role is not absolute, for "the Igbo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed."

This appears very early in the story. Later, when the hero's ambition to reach the peak of greatness is frustrated by a tragic accident, for which he is forced into exile for 7 years in his mother's hometown; he laments the misfortune in terms of "his *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*. The saying of the elders was not true—that if a man said yes his *chi* also affirmed. Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his own affirmation." Later still when Nwoye, his eldest son and last hope, gives up "traditional sanctity" for "the poetry of the new religion"—Christianity—the hero ruminates over all his calamities thus: "Why . . . should he, Okonkwo of all people, be cursed with such a son? He saw clearly in it the finger of his personal god or *chi*. For how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile and now his despicable son's behaviour?" Subsequently, towards the end of his long penance when Okonkwo gets very heartening news about his flourishing crop economy at home, he readily affirms that "his *chi* might now be making amends for the past disaster."

From this fictional treatment of the notion and role of *chi*—a treatment that is only incidental to the novel, for Achebe was not compiling sociological data on Igbo religion—we can corroborate our postulates above. *Chi* is an Igbo social fact; its dynamics highlight a strong element of individualism, which is a marked feature of Igbo social structure.

The scope of Igbo belief in the manipulatability of their relationship with *chi* is widened to embrace all other supernatural beings or powers, and projected to ordinary social relationships

as well. In the words of Dr. Uchendu, "Not only deities and spiritual forces . . . but human beings and social relations are also subject to manipulation." In other words, the Igbo people conceive of the relation between their social and spiritual worlds in the idiom of market bargain.

I have so far attempted to paint a broad picture of *chi* against a wider canvas of Igbo social structure. To this end I have concentrated the analysis on the first of the three hypotheses we started with, namely, individualism as a controlling principle of Igbo social behaviour receives most eloquent expression in Igbo cosmology and belief about divinity, the basis of which is *chi* or personal god. By so doing I am conscious of the fact that I have neglected the two other propositions, concerning the impact of Christianity and the disruptive ethnic conflicts endemic to Nigeria. Paucity of empirical data and, (more relevant in the present context), the limitations imposed on us by the conference schedule preclude a comprehensive scientific discussion of the latter.

In spite of this apparent defect in the general approach we would not deny that the exposition so far has made it easy for us to claim that with such a flexible, outward- and forward-looking culture, in which the individual has so much scope to manipulate not only social but also spiritual relationships, Igbo "receptivity to change," as Ottenberg has put it, is a force to reckon with.

Hence some aspects of colonial rule, the introduction of Christianity and urbanisation got quick and zealous responses from the Igbo. These three closely related agencies in African social change provided multiple alternatives to the circumscribed norms and limited occupations characteristic of the traditional social structure. Schools, hospitals, pipe-borne water, large-scale trade and commerce, motor roads and all other observable evidences or symbols of Igbo notion of progress ("things that help a town to get up") became associated—and rightly so—with the white missionaries and their "brothers" in the government and the commercial houses. Consequently the Igbo revered (as they would in the traditional social set-up) the evidently superior material achievements of the white strangers, whom they in turn tried to emulate. Thus schooling and allied formal training, commercial enterprise and migration into emergent urban centres became popular. The Igbo embraced Christianity, at least its external manifestations, in large numbers. It would be revealing to contrast

at this juncture its progress with that of Islam, which came in through the northern part of Nigeria. Whereas the latter has gained considerable ground in Yorubaland, South-western Nigeria, in Igboland, South-eastern, the gain is geometrical, in favour of Christianity. Even in the case of those Igbomen who migrated temporarily or permanently into Northern Nigeria the greater majority have remained staunchly Christian or "traditional," but *not* Muslim. Despite the so-called "African" texture and flavour of Muslim rituals and beliefs, particularly prescriptive polygyny, the religion hardly appeals to Igbo emotions and intellect because, I think, Islam bears no evident symptoms of material progress and "modernity" in terms of the emergent "national" social structure, which is largely a result of African contact with Western rather than Islamic *culture*.

It is, therefore, understandable that with this malleable attitude to social change, which in this context is largely synonymous with the material aspects of the change, the Igbo have apparently merged their notion and practice of *chi*, or individual god with the Christian conception of deity. The fusion is logical in the context of our understanding of Igbo accommodation of change.

Paradoxically, however, despite the apparent recession of *chi* its ethos remains a vital force in Igbo social behaviour, which is characterized by an attitude of "everyman is the architect of his own fortune." In the words of Simon Ottenberg (referring to the paradox of Igbo receptivity to change), the Igbo "have probably changed the least while changing the most. While many of the formal elements of the social, religious, economic and political structure—have been modified through culture contact, many of the basic patterns of social behaviour, such as the emphasis on alternative choices and goals, achievement and competition . . . have survived and are part of the newly developing culture." This comment is in tune with our own observations on the changing notion of *chi* which nevertheless continues to provide a spring of action for the Igbo.

Igbo traditional equalitarian, competitive behaviour is opposed, in varying degrees, to that of other Nigerian ethnic groups the Igbo have been in close contact with: the Hausa, Yoruba, Efik, Ijaw, and Bini. What is worse, this individualistic goal-getting drive is more in tempo with the developing social environment of the towns, the civil service, schools and commercial houses, where the Igbo willy-nilly interact with their fellow countrymen.

Thus, Igbo conflicts with neighbouring ethnic groups can be seen, first and foremost, in terms of the former's relatively high socio-cultural value on individualism, an aspect of which is the reverence for achieved rather than ascribed status. People who go by such competitive, *laissez-faire* standards and values are susceptible to superciliousness in their relation with others who judge mainly by ascriptive criteria and are, by the nature of their own social structure, averse to hot competition.

To conclude, I must stress that I did not aim at making a case of peculiarity for the Igbo people. Rather, I would invite comparisons with aspects of the religions of other societies. In this respect it would be instructive to juxtapose the Igbo with a society that has a similar structure but no institutionalized idea of personal god, and conversely one with a dissimilar social structure but an equivalent of the *chi* phenomenon.

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THE CHI, INDIVIDUALISM AND IGBO RELIGION:
A COMMENT

D. I. Nwoga

The basic conflict raised in my mind by Mr. Chukwukere's paper is that it pursues a concept of *chi* based on an over-emphasis of individualism among the Igbo. It therefore does not consider the problem of how people who, to use Mr. Chukwukere's example, in the Nigerian context, can be so much in clash with others because of their pushful competitiveness, nevertheless hold together in mutual, kindred and clan cohesion. Because, if the concept of *chi* is such an individually liberating religious concept, Igbo society should be chaotic.

I believe a clearer concept of *chi* would derive from the position of *chi* in the pantheon of Igbo religion than in using it in context of Igbo versus other communities.

The problem with much of the discussions on *chi* arises from the supervening picture of the personalised Christian or Hebrew or even Islamic God. I would postulate that there is nothing to indicate the belief in a personal individual God in traditional Igbo religion. Rather, there is a supreme, dominating and pervading force which is a cumulation of the forces of the various identifiable and personalised deities rather than a power directing them. And this perhaps explains the predominance of devotees of individual deities over devotees of a supreme God, if any such existed in tradition. It is the individual local gods that function—and they act towards a person according to his disposition towards them and towards the ultimate forces.

The various adjectives that are attached to *chi* are therefore functional descriptive rather than ultimately identifying. And *chi* is never used without a qualifier. *Chukwu*, *Chineke*, which are now used as proof of the Igbo belief in a God similar to the Christian God, are capable of being seen in the terms of functional description suggested above. The identificatory aspect must have come with Christianity as St. Paul gave a name to the unknown God of the Greeks. This non-personality of the ultimate *immanent*, not transcendental God, is not exclusive to the Igbo. It is probably what Teilhard de Chardin was looking for when he rejected the old landlord God of Europe sitting up there in heaven, and spoke of "the need to propose a new side of the 'old' God." (T. de Chardin: *Pilgrim of the Future* (Libra 1966, p. 49.)—"the major event in our world is a certain change in the face of

God (God becoming a loving centre of the universal evolution, rather than the big 'landowner' of yesterday)." Is it perhaps not surprising that de Chardin wrote this (1950) after travels and work in Africa?

If we appreciate this distinction between *Chi* as a centre, a force, and *chi* conceivable as an individual existence, we are less likely to fall into the error of considering the individual's *chi* as an individual spirit either manipulating or being manipulated by the individual human being.

The personal *chi* is then understood as a refraction of the universal force, a personification of his allotted role in the universal motion towards the ultimate goal. So each person's *Chi* is "good" or "bad" according to whether the individual's appointed role enhances or diminishes his position in the scale of values which are consonant with his society's ultimate goal. A person exerted himself to achieve the promise of his good *chi*. If he did all in his power and yet made no progress, he could take consolation in being resigned to his own *chi*. And there is no contractual relationship between a person and his *chi*.

I think it is also necessary to point out the distinction between *chi* and other deities. Whereas the tutelary deities, like *Ala*, are male or female, stand in a contractual relationship with human beings, have particular prohibitions and demands, and can be mollified by sacrifice, the *chi* is absolute and encompasses the natural order. The resort to *chi* in extreme cases of human gratitude or fear or sorrow speaks of man's yearning for a sense of universal stability. Peter Palangyo writes in *Dying in the Sun*: "The deepest of our prayers are never really said to God or anybody in particular; they simply come as incoherently broken desires and hopes that can never be verbalized" (HEB African Writer Series, p. 53). This represents a parallel of the Igbo man's relationship with his *chi*. He desires, he hopes that *Chi's* destiny for him is good—but he cannot know or control it. As an Igbo proverb says, "the chicken in the claws of a hawk squawks so that its voice may be heard, not that what holds it will release it."

It is indeed not feasible to think of a person's *chi* as a go-between between the person and other deities to which *chi* is superior in its different and ultimate nature. And it is also significant that whereas in rural areas, Christianity got rid of minor tutelary deities the people still hold on to their personal *chi*; so that some

person who escapes an accident and says in English 'Thank God' will say in Igbo that he has a good *chi*.

The extent to which the concept of *chi* can buttress individualism, therefore, does not go beyond the recognition of individual destinies. And since the personal *chi* is a refraction of the Central Force, the individual destiny has to be seen within the context of the society's concept of the universal goal. Igbo traditional society, though fragmented in its political structure, was not chaotic in political or social organisation within the units. The achievements of individuals were after all measured against established societal norms. The freedom of the individual was circumscribed by the demands of social cohesion and progress. The meaning of freedom given by the society was the opening out of opportunities for the individual to achieve the dictates of his *chi*. If one must therefore seek a religious counterpart of the Igbo mentality, it has to be seen as consonant with a situation of social stability rather than aggressive individualism.

COSMOLOGY IN THE NOVELS OF CHINUA ACHEBE

Carolyn Nance

Oddly enough, western man is only just now beginning to realize his provincialism in considering cosmology to be merely a branch of the natural sciences. As the *Encyclopedia Britannica* points out, although "western man has been for some time immersed in an era characterized by the scientific outlook, . . .":

Cosmology, in the broadest sense of the word, is that branch of learning which treats of the universe as an ordered system. . . . Cosmology is that framework of concepts and relations which man erects, in satisfaction of some emotional or intellectual drive, for the purpose of bringing descriptive order into the world as a whole, including himself as one of its elements. . . . The resulting cosmology will accordingly reflect the sociological, philosophical or scientific predilections of the individual and his group.¹

For western man, cosmology has been elevated or perhaps restricted to that rarified area in which scientific terms such as "four dimensional cosmic system," "nebular universe," and "Einstein's model of the universe" are heatedly debated, or at least bandied about as status-making chatter at cocktail parties. We have forgotten since the rise of scientific empiricism that for much of mankind, the physical ordering of the universe is more than a matter for scientific investigation. It is the unifying principle of the cosmos by which man delineates order and finds his place in it, and as such, varies tremendously among societies:

Cosmologies, as may therefore be expected, run the gamut from simple pictures projected from the everyday objects of a primitive society, through the metaphysical constructs of various philosophers, to the sophisticated mathematical models presented by modern science.²

In traditional Igbo society, cosmology was the concern of every man. Each had a unified picture of the cosmos and his place in it, explained by a system of concepts which ordered the natural and social rhythms. As Mbonu Ojike, himself an Igbo, put it:

If it is necessary to give a name to the African religious system so that it may be more clearly understood by those who like definitions, the word is Omenana. It is a system which holds that man's activities are limitable by what is good for all. The name comes from the word *ana*, which, . . . means the earth, the soil, the land, and also custom, tradition, law, constitution. . . . For us, religion and law are unalterably interdependent. Religion establishes the

social reason for an ideal, while law or government regulates how the ideal can be attained."

This outlook emphasizes the traditional Igbo balance between the spiritual and the pragmatic, the moral and the material. Geoffrey Parrinder has even found African religion to be the basis for the interpretation of the complete universe as perceived by African conceptualization:

... African religion can roughly be depicted as a triangle. At the top, head of all powers, is God. On the two sides of the triangle are the next greatest powers, gods and ancestors. At the base are lower forces, with which magic and medicine are concerned. Man is in the middle, and must live in harmony with all the powers that affect his life, family and work.⁴

In Europe, it was only slowly that cosmology became compartmentalized into the many areas of specialized knowledge such as physics, theology, and biology. However, the celebrated "universal men" of Golden Greece and the European Renaissance were presaged by primitive societies in which "universal men" were common, for it was the function of elders to interpret the universe in a system of concepts, to impose order on the chaos of detail, and to discern a framework within which man could live in harmony with the universe. It is exactly this balance of cosmic forces which Ojike has described with the single word *Omerana*.

It is enlightening to consider the four novels of Chinua Achebe in terms of cosmology as we have just defined it, for in each of the novels, the universe in which man lives is different. I do not imply such in terms of setting, characterization, or artistic success, for although these vary, it is the basic picture of the world presented which metamorphoses.

Achebe's four novels, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1966), all deal with the Igbo experience in the face of colonialism, its resultant reordering of old clan ways that actually change the aspect of the universe, and the search for integrating new methods with old in a viable new balance between the moral and the material. In Achebe's novels, the old world falls out of its cultural balance at an ever-accelerating rate as the explosively forced and potentially threatening onslaught of new concepts rushes the clan beyond traditional cosmology into a modern arena where materialism seems to be the dominant goal and ethical

values are posed in terms of questions rather than as the comfortable dicta of traditional life.

It is interesting to contrast Elechi Amadi's novel, *The Concubine*, with Achebe's earliest village novel in order to realize just how much Achebe dares in attempting the subject of clan versus colonialism. In Amadi's work, the intricate and exquisitely-textured plot takes place and is resolved within the context of pre-colonial Nigeria. It is self-contained. Amadi's characters do not have to contend with change imposed beyond the demands of their own social practices, and as a result, although Amadi's book is more satisfying aesthetically, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* rings with a deeper timbre of philosophic grandeur.

I propose to discuss the novels of Achebe in thematic order rather than in the strict chronological order of their publication. While the first and third novels deal predominantly with village life, and the second and fourth novels concern themselves primarily with urban environments, each novel is set within a recognizable time period. Taken within this sequence, Achebe's work reveals an amazing panorama of the changes that have been happening to the Igbo people since the arrival of colonialism. He shows ways in which their world view has been modified, both through necessity and by their own dynamic curiosity.

Achebe is a consummately matter-of-fact writer. He performs the valuable function of rendering living history into the emotive language of art. Through his skill, one is able to gather at least a portion of empathic participation in the Igbo experience. However, the distance of fiction bestows a focusing lens through which the vision of Igbo life is caught and edited by one observer, Chinua Achebe.

Achebe is quite willing to admit that he is writing more than "art for art's sake." His purpose is two-fold: artistic and educative. He wants to state:

... African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity.⁶

Achebe is quite clear on his primary concerns as an African writer. He even has a ready answer for those who promote style above content:

Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind.⁶

How then, does Achebe go about transforming his ideas into concrete actualization? How does he operate to portray the society of the Igbo during the periods covered by his novels? It is clear from the very first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (whose action culminates at the turn of the twentieth century), that Achebe does not intend to depict pre-colonial days as an age of total beauty, harmony, and ease; he does not incline toward the romanticisms of Negritude as a philosophy. Rather, he chooses in *Things Fall Apart* to depict a man of heroic but flawed character who lives in a village society abundant in both human beauty and error, a society which manages to function efficiently within its traditional clan practices.

The tragedy of the novel comes from elements both within and beyond the boundaries of the village society. Okonkwo's personal tragedy stems from an inability to discern the difference between strength and cruelty. Driven by a shame for his father, who was a gentle and musical ne'er-do-well, Okonkwo has determined that he will not also die without title or a proper burial; nor will he leave a heavy debt bequeathed to his heirs. Quickly Okonkwo climbs the rungs to success, acquiring two titles, two barns full of yams, and three wives. As Okonkwo has accomplished all this at an early age, and from a less-than-even economic beginning, the feat of his labors seems all the more surprising:

And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered.⁷

It is through Okonkwo's obsession with success that his downfall begins. His strength becomes brutality; his courage, foolhardiness. In a succession of four events Okonkwo calls down the judgment of Ani, the earth goddess, his own personal god or *chi*, and the will of the people against his vanity in strength, his *hubris*. In the first event, he beats his third wife during the Week of Peace, an act that horrifies his neighbors and brings the priest of Ani to Okonkwo in remonstrance:

You have committed a great evil. . . . The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish."

It is important to note that Ani, in traditional clan life, was an extremely important goddess; she represented the ethical side of man's nature, as well as being the source of all fertility. According to Achebe, she symbolized morality:

Ani, played a greater part in the life of the people than any other diety. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct.⁹

Okonkwo's second offense is also against Ani. During the Feast of the New Yam, Okonkwo falls into such a rage at his second wife that he shoots her with an old rusty gun. Fortunately he does not harm or kill her, but the insult to Ani has been effected. The people have begun to whisper that Okonkwo's apparent lack of remorse shows he has no respect for the gods of the clan. He is trying to challenge his *chi*, or personal god, in a contest of strength.

A third blunder demonstrates Okonkwo's fear of repeating his father's weak character, with the resultant over-compensation into cruelty. A young boy from a neighboring village has been given to Okonkwo's clan in sacrifice to avoid incipient war and bloodshed, and the boy, Ikemefuna, has even been placed in Okonkwo's personal safekeeping. After Ikemefuna lives in Okonkwo's home for three years, the Oracle of the Caves and Hills decides it is the proper ritual time to kill the boy. Yet the oldest man in the village cautions Okonkwo to take no part in the act itself:

They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you Father.¹⁰

It is typical of Okonkwo's nature to wind up being the man who delivers the final, fatal blow:

Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak.¹¹

After such alienation of the goddess Ani, the Oracle, and his own *chi*, it seems inevitable that the fourth incident, a mere accident, should occur and lead to his downfall. During a funeral ceremony, the dead man's sixteen-year-old son is killed by the explosion of Okonkwo's faulty gun. The result is catastrophic for Okonkwo. Although it had been an accident, his only recourse is to flee the village.

It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land.¹²

There is a crucial point here. Although no such event had ever happened before in the tradition of Umuofia, the people among themselves managed to devise a way to rectify the impure act. Their social mores could tolerate the strain of innovation.

For seven years Okonkwo is obliged to live in the land of

his mother's kinsmen. He works in hope, repairing his material fortunes which have been destroyed with his banishment. He knows that he may return absolved in seven years to his native clan, and it is his desire to begin life again in the old village as he knew it.

It is at this stage that Okonkwo's personal flaw and the crisis of colonial intrusion begin to merge. During his seven years, Okonkwo has obeyed the codes and sanctions imposed on him. He has every right to expect reinstatement in his society, for he has done penance to Ani. Simply, it is theoretically possible for Okonkwo to effect a rejoining with the harmony of the universe as his clan has defined it. The dictates have taken into account human error and provided man with many methods by which to put individuals back on the course ordained by clan custom. Throughout the novel, one is struck by the innate wisdom of the Igbo elders who use proverbs to teach their kinsmen the sanctioned paths. In fact, Bernth Lindfors has pointed out that Achebe's use of proverbs is actually a stylistic device which differentiates between village and urban conceptualizing, and the tenor of Achebe's proverb usage can be taken as a metaphorical indicator of Achebe's breadth of characterization, enabling him to portray a wide spectrum of personalities within the Ibo culture, and "... a thoroughly African world in thoroughly African terms."¹³

However, during Okonkwo's exile, the old clan cosmology has been slowly breaking down. Missionaries have come to Umuofia, built a church, and begun to make converts. Mostly they are among those who were always on the outer fringes of society, the outcast and poor, who were lumped together under the name *efulefu* or worthless, empty men.

When Okonkwo returns to his native clan after exile, the ways of the village have changed beyond recognition. Even men of title have begun to join the church. Okonkwo's own eldest son, Nwoye, has been converted to Christianity and taken the name of Isaac—a conversion brought about at least in part by revulsion at his father's brutality in killing Ikemefuna, and also by the clan's rigid enforcement of such rules as abandoning all twins to die at birth in the Evil Forest.

It is at this juncture that one begins to realize that Okonkwo can never be reconciled with the clan's cosmology. The awful truth is that village unity has broken down, friends are divided on many issues both major and mundane, and the impact of

colonialism is now beginning to alienate kinsman from kinsman. Okonkwo can no longer realistically expect to fit into the old society as he knew it, for as a friend points out, the society no longer knows itself:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.¹⁴

But intransigent and locked in the old ways, Okonkwo cannot really believe that the times are changing. In a series of incidents, as the white men come to demonstrate and then to reiterate their power over the Igbo village, Okonkwo is outraged. He cannot believe that his own courageous people will not fight against such invasion. In the middle of a meeting gathered to decide just what course of action should be taken concerning the white man, a messenger arrives and orders the meeting to cease.

In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body.¹⁵

In the reaction of the crowd, Okonkwo finally realizes that clan values have dissolved from the unity he understood. Rather than gather behind him and kill the other messengers, the crowd disperses into a milling throng.

They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking, "Why did he do it?"¹⁶

The bitter end of Okonkwo's life ironically recalls that of his own father. Okonkwo hangs himself in disgrace, shamed that he and the ways of his people have fallen so far asunder. Since suicide is an abomination against the earth, he too cannot be buried by his own people; only the white strangers can touch the body of this hero who forced his own strength to the limit by pitting it against inevitable change. Abiola Irele sees Okonkwo's suicide as the death of traditional clan cosmology:

Okonkwo's suicide is a gesture that symbolizes at the same time his personal refusal of a new order, as well as the collapse of the old order which he represents.¹⁷

In *Things Fall Apart*, conflict within a personality and crisis within a social order have merged to form the tragic climax of the novel. The universe of the Igbo people is broadening, be-

ginning to take in new concepts even though it goes against the grain of such die-hards as the obstinate Okonkwo. In an interview with Robert Serumaga, Achebe himself says:

I mean my sympathies were not entirely with Okonkwo—this is what I think you're getting at. Life just has to go on and if you refuse to accept changes, then tragic though it may be, you are swept aside.¹⁴

Achebe's second novel dealing with tribal life, *Arrow of God*, takes place in the early 1920's. The protagonist, Ezeulu, priest of Umuaro, is one of the most noble and admirable characters to be found in fiction of the last two decades. Many consider *Arrow of God* Achebe's best work to date, in fact, for the portrayal of Ezeulu shows an extraordinary man torn by his own vision and intelligence. Ezeulu is a man of unwavering loyalty to his god, but he at the same time possesses an insight that shows canny worldliness. Unlike Okonkwo, who blindly and obstinately sticks to the old ways like an old dog set to learning new tricks, Ezeulu is an extremely self-conscious, analytical character who probes his own motives as acutely as he scrutinizes others'. It is Ezeulu's ability to get at the heart of truth which has made him so respected in the village.

The first pages of the novel show that Ezeulu is a man of few self-delusions. Twenty years after the time of Okonkwo, Ezeulu is able to sit pondering over the power he holds, whether it exists in imagination or in fact:

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman. . . . No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival—no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it couldn't be done. He would not dare.¹⁵

This introspective representation of Ezeulu presented so early in the novel has a two-fold purpose: it is a commentary on the reflexive, yet dynamic nature of the man, and it foreshadows his fate. For Ezeulu is eventually to do just that thing which would be unthinkable—refuse to name the day of the New Yam feast.

Ezeulu is the only "native" able to capture the admiration of the District Commissioner, Winterbottom. For during a war

between villages over a piece of land, it was only Ezeulu, in Winterbottom's opinion, who could speak dispassionately on the issues of justice, and eventually the decision of Winterbottom went against Ezeulu's own village. While the village begins to think Ezeulu is currying favor with the white man over the needs of his own clan, Winterbottom at the same time decides to appoint Ezeulu Warrant Officer for the entire region, thinking that he will be wise enough to rule it better than any other man.

An important problem arises from the fact that the Igbo people have never established the idea of king or political chief within its society. Thus as the British came in with their concept of Indirect Rule, or figurehead government, only those Igbo on the outer fringes would agree to fill a post so repugnant to their whole concept of government. Such an attitude does not mean a lack of initiative or organization; it merely implies a democracy of individual prerogative.

The Ibo of Nigeria and the Ewe of Togo had no widely ruling chieftaincies properly belonging to their tradition, yet no African peoples are today more nationally self-conscious or striving more eagerly towards self-government.²⁰

Through a series of ironic flukes, the invitation from Winterbottom to Ezeulu appears to arrive in the form of a summons. The villagers have been alienated by Ezeulu's apparent over-friendliness with the white man, and are puzzled at the course Ezeulu should take in replying to the summons. To compound trouble, Ezeulu's own second son, Oduche, has been sent to missionary school and has turned ambivalent in his attitude toward his father and the religion he symbolizes. Ezeulu's original purpose in sending Oduche to missionary school was wise, almost prescient:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow.²¹

But Oduche has even gone so far as to try to kill a sacred python by covert means. All these factors make the people puzzled and suspicious of Ezeulu's intentions. They wonder whether he is trying to manipulate his god, the white men, or even themselves.

Upon arrival at Winterbottom's office, Ezeulu discovers that

the DC has been struck down with a bout of malaria that will eventually last for two months. His subordinate, Clarke, arrogantly locks Ezeulu in prison for deigning to come at a less-than-seemly haste toward such an important summons. The outcome of the whole event is that Ezeulu refuses the Warrant Chieftaincy and remains in prison for two months, for the hospitalized Winterbottom decrees:

Leave him inside until he learns to co-operate with the Administration.²²

When Ezeulu finally returns home, his clan is welcoming but suspicious. During imprisonment he has accepted help from the jailor, a man from the clan of the enemy village Umunneora. They are pleased ". . . about his refusal to be white man's chief . . .," yet in general, they cannot cope with resolving the complexities in Ezeulu's behavior. And Ezeulu does not choose to explain himself. It is at this point that one begins to wonder whether Ezeulu himself can do so anymore. He is at the divide between canny foresight of the way the white man's culture will inundate the future, and an abiding loyalty to his priestly function. In a nearly pitiful scene near the end of the novel, Ezeulu asks his son Oduche to learn to write with his left hand, for that has been the most marvelous feat he has witnessed during his imprisonment:

When was in Okperi I saw a young white man who was able to write with his left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. That is why I have called you. I want you to learn and master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. You must learn it until you can write it with your left hand. That is all I want to tell you²³

In an extraordinary climax which dramatizes Ezeulu's priestly loyalty to the old religious ways versus the easy new materialism possible from adopting Western ways, Ezeulu finally opts for the path of upholding his religious function. After all, he was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god.²⁴ Ezeulu balances the material and the spiritual, and finds the spiritual to remain just as important as ever. He cannot see the ethics in the white man's ways—only opportunism, materialism, and territorial domination.

Ezeulu makes his move as the time for the New Yam feast approaches. For two months, the sacred yams that demark

the months of the year have not been eaten while Ezeulu was in prison. Now Ezeulu calmly states that the yams have not been eaten; therefore it is not really time to begin the yam harvest and feast. People strive to convince Ezeulu to skip formalities, eat the yams hurriedly, and allow the people to commence with the digging of the new year's crop. But Ezeulu refuses. Elders remonstrate with him. The season will pass, the land will grow hard, the yams will wither and rot in the ground. They say Ezeulu could alter this merely by adjusting his calendar on the pragmatic basis of eating two yams. He answers:

You have spoken well. But what you ask me to do is not done. Those yams are not food and a man does not eat them because he is hungry. You are asking me to eat death.²⁶

The Christian church capitalizes on the resultant famine by declaring that the true and Christian god wants his people to be fed and happy; to harvest at the customary time would both enable the people to live bountifully and allow them to show gratitude to God in a church harvest service. Many people convert to Christianity out of exigency. Starvation takes many who do not. Even Ezeulu's oldest son dies from overexertion during a ritual burial because of his weakened state due to malnutrition. The woes of Job have fallen on Ezeulu's head:

Ezeulu sank to the ground in utter amazement. It was not simply the blow of Obika's death, great though it was. . . . Why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and cover him with mud? What was his offence? Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it?²⁷

The denouement of the novel finds Ezeulu deserted and insane, living in ". . . the haughty splendour of a demented high priest . . .," as destroyed as the god he serves, for now the people have turned in greater numbers to Christianity. Some think that the god Ulu has taken sides against his headstrong priest and brought him down.

If this was so then Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold this wisdom. In destroying his priest he had also brought disaster on himself. . . .²⁸

The bare outline of this novel cannot begin to indicate the richness of relationships depicted in village life; however, it can indicate the direction in which the Igbo people are going. Ottenberg, an anthropologist, rather understates the case in remarking:

Western culture left its mark on the people's life and values in the

areas of economic and vocational aspirations, marriage, and family life."²⁰

In Achebe's village novels, one feels that a native culture dynamically balanced by a rich blend of moral concern with pragmatic realism is giving way to a new life which promises more materially, but is yet to find its spiritual concomitant.

Achebe's second novel, and the first book to deal with an urban environment, *No Longer at Ease*, finds Obi, grandson of that obdurate Okonkwo, beginning his civil career in Lagos after a period of study abroad. Obi is a feckless boy who scorns the values of traditional ways while he at the same time ridicules those ambitious co-workers who ape the customs of the whites. Obi is caught in an emotional no-man's land. Unable to choose a side and stick with it, or to formulate a composite new frame of references which will function in the realities of Lagos society, Obi fails in the most diverse ways and for the most ridiculous reasons. His affair with Clara, a well-educated young nurse, goes sour as Obi's parents discover that she is *osu*, or a member of an old outcast group which served as religious slaves to the gods in clan days. Obi's ambivalence about his own real evaluation of Clara, despite his protestations of being an educated man "in the middle of the twentieth century," is greatly influenced by the words of his parents. When his mother, with whom he has special ties of affection, declares from her sick bed that she will kill herself if Obi marries Clara, the whole notion seems to fade from his mind as a real alternative he may follow. Clara's pregnancy and eventual abortion finally dissolve the relationship in an atmosphere of mutual distaste.

Obi fails his clansmen in the city, the urban workers who have banded together under the title Umuofia Progressive Union, Lagos Branch, and who have even sent Obi through school by dint of a hard-saved garnering of small contributions, and which in turn expects to be repaid so that other students may receive his same opportunities. Ottenberg remarks:

A type of association that has come with European contact is the improvement association, . . . These were usually loan associations in which each member paid monthly dues that were pooled in a fund from which loans were granted to members. These groups included a few educated men, but the majority were unschooled traders, farmers, and fishermen.²¹

Obi alinicates his benefactors by an utter lack of diplomacy which is astoundingly naive. He treats his elders like querulous

ignoramus rather than the kind, concerned though uneducated, old men they seem to be from their own remarks. One can only surmise that Obi has learned abroad to think of uneducated people as inferiors, even when they are of his own kinship. He cannot turn back to the ways of his youth; yet at the same time, he cannot bring himself to adopt white ways completely. The resulting ambivalence causes him to show hostility toward both factions. He annoys and excludes his white secretary Marie by speaking pidgin English or Igbo in the office on several occasions. He mocks his immediate supervisor. Yet at the same time he will not accept the bribes from fellow Igbo who are seeking information or help in the climb toward better education through scholarships.

Obi is caught in a quicksand of shifting values. He cannot discern the practical path, nor the ethical path, nor even a relinquishment into mere sensual pleasures. He has not defined himself except by negativism. He will not be clannish. He will not ape the white man's ways. He will not marry Clara and settle into responsibilities. It is only inevitable that when a man this far along in life has not yet taken positive steps toward self-definition, he will make errors as he begins to try. Obi manages to fall into the one error most apt to catch him in the system he so despises. Obi decides to begin taking bribes and through a lack of finesse, or of practice, is immediately caught. The trial follows, or perhaps precedes, for the novel begins with the trial, and its remainder is in flashback, showing how this "young man of great promise" really fails in the positive definition of his life once back in Nigeria.

Obi has become the victim of his own unassimilated education. He has a lot of facts perambulating about in his head, and no way to put them on their feet in the real world. Obi fails because he cannot find himself in the plethora of materialistic new concepts which have left a moral vacuum. He longs for balance as a hunger left over from the old culture, but he cannot accept the definition of the spiritual as represented by the old than part of the warp and woof of society.

Achebe's fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, tells the story of Odili, a young member of the Nigerian intellectual elite who becomes increasingly disillusioned with the corrupt government in power, especially as represented by its Minister of Culture, Chief M. A. Nanga. Odili, a young grammar school teacher in an out-of-the-way village, is taken up by Nanga as a special protegee destined for greater things than his present position. At

first aloof and skeptical, Odili becomes fascinated and then, almost against his will, awed by the personality and drive of Nanga. Nanga's double dealings slowly begin to emerge through the facade of charm and affability. Nanga is a master politician, a true man of the people who knows how to talk with ease in any group of the multi-faceted society he is supposed to serve. Slowly it becomes clear that Nanga's grass-roots psychology is used to his own ends. He bilks the nation under the guise of serving it. Odili begins to realize the depth of Nanga's corruption at the same time as he grows to understand his own character better. Odili admits to the siren call of ill-gotten wealth. On the first night of Odili's stay at Nanga's home, Odili remarks:

All I can say is that on that first night there was no room in my mind for criticism. I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me.²⁰

It is Odili's own sympathy with various temptations that helps us to understand the manner in which Odili's character is deepened and strengthened by his contact with Nanga. Gradually Odili comes to see that Nanga's moral corruption is not worth the wealth it has brought him; Odili resolves to resist Nanga in order to gain his own self-respect.

A second motive for the growing antagonism between Nanga and Odili is charmingly downright in presentation. Odili wants Nanga's second wife-to-be, a graceful and decorous village girl named Edna.

Nanga and Odili square off in a battle of political party against party at the next election, with Odili running for Nanga's post. Of course, owing to his long experience in brutality, propaganda, murder and general unethical means, Nanga wins. But his victory is brief, for with her parents' blessing Edna casts her own lot with Odili. In any event, while Odili is still recovering from the vicious beating he has received from Nanga's henchmen, Nanga's government itself is overthrown in a military coup. Suddenly everyone begins to agree aloud that Nanga's government was corrupt, and prudently they cast their lots with the new order a stratagem that annoys Odili, for he has little more faith in a military coup than in the previous manner of Nanga's rise to power. He can only conclude that on a village level, democratic pressure for ethical methods and practical ends once worked; they have not been able to achieve this national balance in a common ownership and responsibility for the good of the whole:

The owner was the village, and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless.²¹

It has been my effort to demonstrate that in the progression of Achebe's novels, the cosmology has moved from unity within a tight little universe of moral and material balance to a modern overwhelming greed that leaves justice, honesty, and integrity limping along behind at the rate they can muster. G. D. Killam describes the phenomenon as a dichotomy of male acquisitiveness gaining precedence over female moral restraint.²² Achebe himself phrases the problem more generally in "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation":

The success of the (Igbo) culture was the balance between the two, the materialistic and the spiritual. . . . Today we have kept the materialism and thrown away the spirituality which should keep it in check.²³

Undoubtedly the world of the Igbo people has changed. Their cosmology has moved from a primitive yet stable interpretation of the universe and man's place in it toward an ever-expanding, bewildering, exciting, and often threatening cosmos in which is jammed a hodgepodge of old religious ways versus new, magic versus science, proverbs versus a written literature, economic self-dependence to world commerce. In sum, one cannot call Achebe a writer of pessimistic vision. Rather, he deals with harsh realities in novel form, refusing to glamorize or gloss over facts in the past or present. He does show the dangers, merits, and possibilities inherent in change. As only one example of benefits accrued, his novels are part of a written rather than the old oral literary tradition, and as such, they can share his vision with the world. They could only have come into being with the change in Igbo society and the broadening of its cosmology.

NOTES:

¹*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. VI (William Benton, London, 1963), p. 582.

²*Idem*.

³Mbonu Ojike, *My Africa* (London, 1955), p. 150.

⁴Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Mythology* (The Hamilton Publishing Group, Ltd., London, 1967), p. 15.

⁵Chinua Achebe, "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation," *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 81, June, 1964, p. 158.

⁶Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher," *New Statesman*, January 29, 1965, p. 162.

⁷Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Astor-Honor, Inc., New York, 1959), p. 9.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 128-9.

¹³Bernth Lindfors, "The Palm Oil with which Achebe's Words Are Eaten," *African Literature Today*, No. 1, 1968, pp. 3-18.

¹⁴Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 183.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹⁶*Idem.*

¹⁷Abiola Irele, "The Tragic Conflict in Achebe's Novels," *Introduction to African Literature*, Ulli Beier, Ed. (Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 171.

¹⁸Chinua Achebe in interview with Robert Serumaga (Recorded by the Transcription Centre, London), *Cultural Events in Africa*, No. 28, 1967.

¹⁹Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1969), p. 3.

²⁰Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (Hutchinson's University Library, London, 1954), p. 71.

²¹Achebe, *Arrow of God*, pp. 50-1.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 199.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 237.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 260.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 261.

²⁸Phoebe Ottenberg, "The Afikpo Ibo of Eastern Nigeria," *Peoples of Africa*, James L. Gibbs, Jr., Ed. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, 1965), p. 34.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁰Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967), p. 34.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 140.

³²G. D. Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (Africana Publishing Corporation, New York, 1969), p. 30.

³³Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," p. 179.

ADAM AND EVE: IGBO MARRIAGE IN THE NIGERIAN NOVEL

Juliet I. Okonkwo

A number of objective accounts have been written by foreign anthropologists and missionaries about marriage among the Igbo.¹ The contribution to growing knowledge of Igbo culture has been immense. However, the difficulties which can prevent a foreigner from a full appreciation of the culture of an entirely different race are being more and more realized. In particular, the European's vision of African culture and history is quite often skewed by the distorting lenses of assumed race superiority. Thus Placide Tempels, in *Bantu Philosophy*, recognises the limitations of some interpretations of Bantu ethics by Western Europeans: "Some, however, would concede that the Bantu are at pains to maintain the social order or peace within the clan; declaring, however, that their care in these matters is devoid of moral content or of universally accepted ethical norms. Such authors are doubtless speaking under the influence of Western moral theory, according to which the social order is mere conformity with conventionalized behaviour. Such morality and moral laws are evidently empty of fixed beliefs or unshakable principles and held from conviction. Ethnologically speaking, we have scarcely moved forward at all in presenting as Bantu ethics a bundle of moral precepts shot through with our own ethical concepts. We must get to know what the Bantu thinks. We must see whether the Bantu, from their point of view, go further than or even contrary to, current practice in accepting transcendental norms of good and evil."

A few examples from Basden's *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* on the subject of marriage will demonstrate how the limitations in intercultural penetration can result in confusion. He writes:

The word "love" is not even found in the Ibo language. The nearest approach to the idea is "ifu nanya," i.e. "to look in the eye" in a favorable manner.²

Since Western European philosophers, psychologists, social theorists (among others) are still at great pains to define satisfactorily the essence of Love, Basden's statement starts from a very dangerous kind of oversimplification. As far as many Igbos are concerned, "ifu nanya" means "love" as it is vaguely used in English. Basden's misrepresentation gains greater force by an unnecessary

exhibition of some literal *knowledge* of the Igbo language. The interpolated "even" creates an attitude that is far from favourable and reveals the writer's viewpoint. Basden later remarks that:

After marriage the woman is ranked with the other property of the husband with a proportionate value attached, but little greater than that of the cows and goats.³

The misrepresentation here is that this custom is presented as peculiarly Igbo and further localized with the contemptuous reference to "cows and goats." A review of marriage relationships in most countries of the world, including Western Europe, reveals that such practice is common in most pre-industrial societies, until women have achieved economic freedom and consequently an equality of status with men. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, English women and whatever property that came in form of dowry with them, were by law, the property of their husbands. Moreover, this practice is still upheld until today in some parts of Southern Europe.

This discussion has therefore deliberately avoided reference to the objective accounts mentioned, although in many places the observations coincide. The writings of Nigerian Igbos form the basis of the study, especially the novels where the treatment of marriage (being only incidental to the narrative) may be assumed to be as representative as possible.

The earliest written account of traditional Igbo marriage is by Olaudah Equiano in his reminiscences of "My Early Life in Eboe." Since it is a fairly short account, it will be quoted in full:

Their mode of marriage is thus: both parties are usually betrothed when young by their parents, (though I have known the males to betroth themselves). On this occasion a feast is prepared, and the bride and bridegroom stand up in the midst of all their friends who are assembled for the purpose, while he declares she is thenceforth to be looked upon as his wife, and that no other person is to pay any address to her. This is also immediately proclaimed in the vicinity, on which the bride retires from the assembly. Some time after she is brought home to her husband, and then another feast is made to which the relations of both parties are invited; her parents then deliver her to the bridegroom accompanied with a number of blessings, and at the same time they tie round her waist a cotton string of the thickness of a goose quill, which none but married women are permitted to wear:

She is now considered as completely his wife, and at time the dowry is given to the newly married pair, which generally consists of portions of land, slaves, and cattle, household goods, and implements of husbandry. These are offered by the friends of both parties, besides which

the parents of the bridegroom present gifts to those of the bride, whose property she is looked upon before marriage; but after it she is esteemed the sole property of her husband. The ceremony being now ended, the festival begins, which is celebrated with bonfires and loud acclamations of joy accompanied with music and dancing.'

Marriage is obligatory on all Igbo males. It is so much assumed that often the first thoughts about it are by parents. Chiaku's day-dreams revolve around her son Nnanna's future, his being "the husband of two and father of many." Danda's father, Araba, having recovered from an almost fatal illness and fearing for the leadership in his household should he suddenly die, calls Danda "into the obi and asked him what he thought of marrying." Ekwueme's parents act even faster than many others and "Ahurole was engaged to Ekwueme when she was eight days old. Ekwueme was then about five years old."

Marriage is a symbol of man's maturity, his ability to live separately from the rest of the family and cater for himself. Araba therefore tells his son, Danda, (who for the greater part of his youth had shirked any form of responsibility, preferring indulgence in wine, women and song): "You are no longer young. It is time you had your own home" (*Danda*, p. 160). After the engagement of Onuma, Danda's brother, "Onuma was left with his father. Both were satisfied but for different reasons. Araba was proud that his name in Aniocha had been enhanced. Onuma was pleased that he had won the approval of his father" (*Danda*, p. 122). Both sons of Ezeulu have separate houses built at their marriages, thus emphasizing the solemnity of the undertaking:

Edogo's homestead was built against one of the four sides of his father's compound so that they shared one wall between them. It was a very small homestead with two huts, one for Edogo and the other for his wife, Amoge. It was built deliberately small, for, like the compounds of any first son it was no more than a temporary home where the man waited until he could inherit his father's place. Of late another small compound had been built on the other side of Ezeulu's for his second son, Obika. But it was not quite as small as Edogo's. It also has two huts, one for Obika and the other for the bride who was soon to come."

Because marriage is evidence that a man is serious-minded and ready to assume responsibility in his society and can be reckoned with in Igboland, the prestige of a family is reflected by the progress of its male members in the institution of marriage. So when Ishiodu, Adiewere's brother, 'a ne'er do well' shows no signs of stability, "It was Adiewere who had arranged his marriage, it

was Adiewere who had built the house he was living in and who constantly supported him." Araba pays dowry for Danda's wife. In order to hurry Obika's marriage, his father Ezeulu urges other members of the family to help complete the cocoyam barn because "A new wife should not come into an unfinished home-stead" (*Arrow*, p. 15). After marriage, Danda curtails his buffoonery and "was seen, hoe on shoulder, long basket on head, walking to the farm. He had taken off his belled cloak and it was a little difficult to recognize him without it" (*Danda*, p. 170). For Ekwueme, the transition is of very great significance and "At one stage he decided to look as serious as possible. He moved about with a solemn air and wore a crease-tortured brow. . . . He improved on his stock of proverbs and practised saying them in a slow deliberate drawl with a chunk of kola delicately poised between his lips" (*Concubine*, p. 169-70).

The resolution to marry is a very solemn one, since it is central to a man's life, for on the marriage so many other infra-structures are built.

When a young man thinks he is ready to take a wife he goes to his parents and makes his intentions known to them. If his parents are no longer living, he confides in his nearest relative.

The latter invites friends and relatives and tells them of his sons noble plan to rear a family of his own. He charges them with the duty of looking for a young girl, who is still a virgin and whose character is untarnished.¹⁰

Finding a suitable bride is most often undertaken by relatives and not the suitor himself. This is because of the conviction that certain dispassionately observed qualities are more reliable and can stand the test of time better than an impression formed by emotionally charged relationships. Onuma writes home sending money and requesting his father to find him a girl who has been to school (*Danda*, p. 92). In Ekwueme's case he was too young to be consulted; his father simply contracts the alliance (*Concubine*, p. 129). Members of Danda's age group 'the Uwadiegwu now combined to seek a wife for Danda' (p. 163). Most often this takes the form of a quest, starting from families which are respected in the area.

Chiaku's first thoughts run on "Nwada's first daughter" 'What about Odu's daughter? I mean Odu of Isieke village.' 'She is from good parents—I'm sure about that. The family is Obi, without doubt' (*Son*, pp. 67-68). When Ogbenyeonu, Ishiodu's wife turns out badly, the natural tendency is to ask "Who is she

like? Her mother is a good woman, respectful, but poor" (*Idu*, p. 88). Great care is taken to ensure that no blood-relationship, however distant, can be traced between the two contracting parties.

The girl's character and accomplishments next come under scrutiny. Chiaku "had already inquired extensively about the character of the girl who was going to be her daughter-in-law. She felt she had inquired sufficiently now" (*Son*, p. 84). One nominee is turned down in Danda's quest because "Learning is all very well. But it will be no good for Danda. He has never looked into a book since he was born" (*Danda*, p. 163). Generally, people look for good looks, good behaviour (i.e., modesty, meekness, politeness) good health and resourcefulness. Particularities depend on the individual whims of the suitor. One of the most fastidious, Chiaku, for instance, thinks of everything:

Silent, Chiaku studied the features of the girl that was to be her daughter-in-law. Yes, she was the right type, she said in her mind. Just the age. She was tall and erect, therefore she would produce tall children, Nnanna being tall too. The hip was broad; therefore she should not find child-bearing difficult. She had a healthy look; she would not bore her husband to death with complaints about pains here and bites there (*Son*, p. 84).

Most men insist on virginity in their brides. According to Umeasiegbu:

Just as the mother of the baby girl remained a virgin until the day she was married, so also is the daughter expected to remain a virgin till such time as she is married. It is the sacred duty of the mother to instruct and guide her daughter so that she may not fall a victim to the traps set by men. (*The Way We Lived*, p. 9).

Chiaku's approval of Ego for her son Nnanna embraced such evaluation as that "The girl was virtuous—she was probably untouched. . . . However, you couldn't be too careful, the elders told you again and again, as if it was the refrain of a wife—hunting hymn" (*Son*, p. 87). So much does the man's honour depend on his bride's virginity that some form of communication about the outcome is made to her parents after the marriage has been consummated. Until then, a prospective bridegroom is haunted with the fear of a possible deception. Obika's mind on the day of his marriage cannot find peace for wondering whether he would find his wife "at home—as the saying was—or would he learn with angry humiliation that another had broken in and gone off with his prize?" (*Arrow*, p. 146). He means to send his mother-in-law a very large goat should the result be favourable.

Ogbanje Omenyi's husband on the contrary "was said to have sent to her parents for a matchet to cut the bush on either side of the highway which she carried between her thighs" to salve his angry humiliation (*Arrow*, p. 151). Ihuoma refuses to marry Ekwueme, urging him to find a "young maiden." "Do not cheat yourself," she says (*Concubine*, p. 117). Pressure is brought to bear on Nwafo by his friends not to marry a girl from Umukurushe because "the women of her land are free" (*Danda*, p. 86).

Before the search party commits itself to the final step of commencing negotiation for a bride, they have to find out somehow whether the girl and her parents are agreeable to the proposition in order to avoid unnecessary embarrassments. Ihuoma and her parents spurn Madume's moves to marry her (*Concubine*, p. 6) Ogbenyeonu is persuaded by her mother against her own better judgment to marry Ishiodu (*Idu*, p. 71); the parents of Danda's bride elect were ready to marry her off if they approved of her suitor (*Danda*, p. 163); Ahurole's mother reassures her by declaring that "Ekwueme is a nice boy and should make a good husband" (*Concubine*, p. 126). Chiaku discusses the prospects of her son's marrying Ego with Ego's mother privately before an official approach is made (*Son*, pp. 88-89). An opportunity is usually given to the principals to have a prior glance of each other. Chiaku arranges a meeting between Ego and Nnanna in form of a ruse:—

She had arranged that Ego should come to the house on that day and at that hour. The idea was that Ego should meet Nnanna alone, at the hour when people were very busy at work and there was great quiet in most homes. Nnanna would see the girl stepping into the yard, a pot of water on her head, her budding breasts bare and prominent, beads bouncing on her waist. Receptive adolescence would thrill at the sight and the impression would register firmly. . . . That was the usual way: it began with a pot of water, or a bundle of firewood, or fodder for goats, from either side (*Son*, pp. 85-86).

Since Ekwueme and Ahurole were engaged in infancy, it was not until the beginning of the proceedings when she is made to serve food to the bridegroom's party that he sees her for the first time (*Concubine*, 155-6). A girl, following her mother's coaching, usually pretends indifference to the marriage in order to show that she "hated to think about leaving her parents to live with a man. Such behaviour, far from being disappointing would help to confirm the impression that she was a virtuous girl" (*Son*, p. 91). Ego turns her back on Nnanna until reprimanded by her father.

Ahurole would not even stay to talk to Ekwueme when he seeks her out in her mother's room (*Concubine*, pp. 158-159). Such demonstrations notwithstanding, a girl has to indicate in a symbolic gesture that she is well disposed to the transactions before any further progress can be made. Ego therefore accepts a proffered coconut from Nnanna (*Son*, p. 91).

For the actual negotiations, a marriage guide is normally appointed from the girl's side whose duty is to introduce the prospective bridegroom to important members of the bride's family. He intervenes when demands become excessive and "more important still he fights tooth and nail to slash down the bride price. Although related to the bride, he is expected to side with the bridegroom in all things" (*Concubine*, p. 157). This aspect of the proceedings is protracted. Chiaku thinks that "there would be no harm at all if the marriage programme took as many as three or four years to complete" (*Son*, p. 91).

For Ahurole, the period is six months because Wigwe, Ekwueme's father, is in a hurry to forestall any indiscretion which might result from Ekwueme's confessed attachment to Ihuoma. Ekwueme himself is duly impressed by the tortuousness and expense of the undertaking.

Gradually Ekwueme's respect for married men grew as they made more and more journeys to Omgwe. They accomplished very little on each occasion but it cost them no small amount of money. For one thing they carried three kegs of palm wine on each subsequent visit; for another Ahurole's relations were by no means few and many of them were entitled to something from them. (*Concubine*, p. 158).

To mark the conclusion of proceedings, a final wine-party takes place to which a large crowd from the bridegroom's side comes bringing palm wine. The bride's people provide variously cooked food and meat (*Concubine*, p. 160). At the end of the feast, the bride goes with the bridegroom's entourage to spend four days with his people. She has thus an opportunity to get acquainted with members of his family and other villagers who normally would be curious to see for themselves (*Concubine*, p. 161).

So expensive are the marriage proceedings that at the end, Onuma goes bankrupt and can hardly pay his way back to town (*Danda*, p. 123). Consequently he develops an aversion to his wife and "in the time of waiting, he stood apart from his family glancing with distaste at his wife" (*Danda*, p. 133). He never

recovers from this expenditure and two weeks later sends her back to his father with a note:

Onuma had no money to keep his wife. He had crossed into the French territories to look for a good job. Would Araba take care of the girl for sometime? (*Danda*, p. 139).

That, however, is an exceptional case. Normally everything culminates in the home-coming of the bride who brings with her enough property to compensate for the bridegroom's lavish expenditure in the previous months or years. Obika's wife arrives with her mother, girl friends and mother's women friends:

Most of the women carried small head-loads of the bride's dowry to which they had all contributed—cooking-pots, wooden bowls, brooms, mortar, pestle, baskets, mats, ladles, pots of palm oil, baskets of cocoyam, smoked fish, fermented cassava, locust beans, heads of salt and pepper. There were also two lengths of cloth, two plates and an iron pot. (*Arrow*, p. 143).

Ahurole's bridal train is even more impressive consisting of i.e. all that went to make the home of a young couple comfortable. Even goats, chickens and a she-dog were included' (*Concubine*, p. 168).

The bride's arrival is occasion for lavish feasting, dancing and general merry-making in the bridegroom's home and involves the entire village. Danda's takes place in the market and in keeping with his colourful personality,

A large crowd from the ten towns attended. From morning till noon laughing, gaily-dressed dancers, musical bands, fluters came into Aniocha market. Danda's numerous friends, acquaintances, minstrels from the hill villages, raffish masqueraders from the wet valleys, rascals, hardy loafers, men of doubtful reputation, all the motley crew with which Danda had knocked about in his picaresque career rallied to see him marry (*Danda*, p. 167).

The bride puts on her best adornments and dances to music made by the friends and as she dances "her husband-to-be and other members of Ezeulu's family broke through the circle one or two at a time and stuck money on her forehead" (*Arrow*, p. 143).

The re-marriage of widows is rare. When they have children by their first marriage, they dutifully stay in their husband's house and devote the rest of their lives in bringing up those children. This was the initial resolution of Chiaku (*Son*) and Ihuoma (*Concubine*). When they remarry, it is the result of mutual agreement between them and the suitor. Chiaku and Okere carry this out in quite unobtrusive meetings. Since she has severed

ties with her first husband's family, she moves to Okere's house when she is ready (*Son*, pp. 178-182); otherwise the suitor discusses his intention with the male relations of the widow's husband for "Marriage proceedings in respect of a widow were not protracted. The main thing was the payment of the bride price to the family of the deceased husband" (*Concubine*, p. 260).

The primary purpose of the Igbo marriage is to raise a family. The economic factors which necessitate a great emphasis on numerical superiority notwithstanding, children are looked upon as a sign of God's favour, a notion similar to that stated in the Psalms of David, 128:—

your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Lo thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.

Ezeulu prays: "May our wives bear male children. May we increase in numbers at the next counting" (*Arrow*, p. 7). To the widowed Chiaku's question, "who would propose to your sister at this age?" her friend replies "What do you mean? Can't your womb still carry and your breast still feed a child?" (*Son*, p. 148). When teased by his friends over his desire for another wife, Nwafo retorts "Well, every man wants to have one more wife if he can. . . . How many of you would not like to fill your Obi?" (*Danda*, p. 185). Chiaku's endeavours are prompted by the desire to have "images of him. Yes, she should begin to look for a good girl who would produce his images, sweet restless things whom she could carry in her arms and lap, or hug to her breast, and who would grow up to call her Big Mother" (*Son*, p. 63). Araba's sudden decision to have Danda married is partly to allay his anxiety "at not having grandsons. Most men of his age already had many. He had decided therefore that he would marry Danda to a wife" (*Danda*, p. 160).

Flora Nwapa's *Idu* and John Munonye's *Obi* highlight the strains which undermine an Igbo marriage which threatens to be childless. Consequently both novels are punctuated with expressions, emphasizing the preoccupation with children:—

He has given me four sons. What else do I want? Some days I go hungry, but I see that my children eat. That is the important thing.
Idu, p. 122.

What we are all praying for is children. What else do we want if we have children?

Ibid., p. 150.

What else matters if her child is doing well?

Ibid., p. 206.

What was all the property worth when there was nobody—his own flesh—to inherit it? That was what Chiaku was thinking.

Obi, p. 31.

We've seen the wife you brought home. We were angry with you at the beginning for marrying a stranger; we no longer are. We think she's well-bred. And she's beautiful too. But then, what use is a kolanut tree if it fails to bear fruits?

Ibid., p. 99.

Normally, adultery in Igbo society is punishable by death¹² but so crucial is the child issue that it is condoned if the purpose is a conscious effort to have children in a childless marriage. Akukalia, aware of his impotence gives out his two wives secretly to other men to bear his children (*Arrow*, p. 28). Anna's friend, the headmaster's wife, advises her to take a lover in the person of Mr. Ejim, the Agricultural Superintendent at Eziko since "his wife has had seven children of whom only one is a girl" (*Obi*, p. 152). After six years of childless marriage with Amarajeme, Ojiugo commits adultery with Obukodi and has a baby (*Idu*, p. 145). Obviously adultery is a remedy only in a situation where a husband is impotent or infertile.

The most traditional of marriages are invariably polygamous and a man's *obi* is sure to be filled with children. The tragedy of childlessness in such situation is limited and more focused on the wives whose position in the family can only be secured through male children. With the encroachment of monogamy, both husband and wife become affected. The man's friends and relations, especially the female relations, consider it even more their business. After three years of childless marriage between Adiewere and Idu "many people had advised him to marry another, but he had refused. He was not at heart a polygamist" (*Idu*, p. 16). Onyemuru and Nwasiobi discuss the problem at great length and advise that Idu should allow her husband to marry again, or better still "marry" another wife for him as others like Uberife have done (*Idu*, p. 33-34). As a result when finally Adiewere takes a second wife "it was Idu who insisted on another wife because she did not have a child" (*Idu*, p. 49).

The problem takes a more dramatic turn in the case of Anna and Joe, probably because he has moved forward into christianity and his relations therefore have a stiffer resistance to combat. The first signs of conflict come from Joe's mother, Chiaku, who undertakes her first visit to the returned couple mainly to assess her daughter-in-law's progress towards motherhood. She feels bitterly cheated by what she observes and throws back at

them their gifts to her and minces no words in explaining to them how much they have defaulted. The episode ends on a note of wry humor.

As for what she had said in the night, Chiaku had no regrets at all. For it was her belief that such taunts would annoy the son's wife into being a mother. (*Obi*, pp. 32-35).

But to Anna "what worried her more than anything else was the attitude of the women who were Joe's relatives, especially the things they now said publicly, sometimes in her hearing" (*Obi*, p. 145). The *umuada* (daughters of the family) provide a far more potent irritant. They lead a delegation to discuss the issue with their "brother," declaring: "Of course we can't call her own wife yet. Not until she's produced for us" (*Obi*, p. 100). They have no qualms about Anna's feelings in the matter and dictate in no uncertain terms. 'We want you to marry again.' They evoke the same arguments that are found in *Idu*, not failing to fish out an example to silence Joe's christian compunctions in the story of a church man Daniel of Ujiji who 'married two other wives when he found that his first wife was not going to bear children' (*Obi*, p. 101). This harassment culminates in an open confrontation between Anna and Adagu (leader of the *umuada*) who in final desperation tells Anna that "we'll have no objection if you bring your own sisters for him to marry, provided they bear for us" (*Obi*, p. 144).

Because of the value placed on children, pregnancy is highly honoured. Okaka is toasted by his friends for getting his wife pregnant (*Son*, p. 59). Danda shelves his plan to send away his wife "for she was found to be pregnant. And everybody now honoured her" (*Danda*, p. 177). Obika temporarily abstains from palm wine before his wife's pregnancy because of "the knowledge that too much palm wine was harmful to a man copulating with his wife" (*Arrow*, p. 242). And Matefi's jealousy of Ugoye, her husband's second wife, is aggravated by attempts of Ezeulu to make Ugoye pregnant.

Although children are generally desired, boy-children are preferred. This is a direct consequence of inheritance being only through the males. In the olden days, particularly, men were needed for wars and more strenuous work connected with farming, building and general protection of the clan. Ezeulu solicits the gods specifically for "male children" (*Arrow*, p. 7). Amanze prefers Obieke's mother to whom he gives the praise-name *Obidia* (Her Husband's Heart) "because she had three boys

and a girl" while Adagu's mother had "only a girl" (*Son*, p. 10). Madume can hardly tolerate his wife who "bore him four daughters—a most annoying thing" (*Concubine*, p. 5). Adiewere's wife has eventually given him a son. When she becomes pregnant again he tells her "If you give birth to this baby and it is a boy again, my heart will be filled with gladness" (*Idu*, p. 204). Danda can hardly disguise his rapture when his wife gives birth to a baby boy. "People of my land, it is a man," he announces to the world (*Danda*, p. 179).

In the traditional Igbo marriage the husband is a pater-familias, maintaining a similar relationship with his wife or wives to that of Adam and Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, IV, 296-299:

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valour formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace;
He for God only, she for God in him.

He sets himself apart from the rest of the family. Ezeulu (*Arrow*), Amanze (*Son*), Wigwe (*Concubine*), Araba (*Danda*) have their own houses apart from the wives and children. Each wife lives in a separate hut with her own children. Equiano remembers that "the Head of the family usually eats alone" (*Travels*, p. 5). He rules his family with severe imperiousness. Ezeulu scolds Matchi for bringing his food late: "if you want that madness of yours to be cured, bring my supper at this time another day" (*Arrow*, p. 11); "if you want this compound to contain the two of us, go and do what I told you" (*Arrow*, p. 75). Madume resorts to flogging his wife when she crosses him (*Concubine*, p. 5). The wife is to all intents and purposes servant, though considerable affection exists between her and her husband as with Ihuoma and Emenike, Wigwe and Adaku (*Concubine*), Chiaku and her first husband Okafor (*Son*). Ezeulu, the archetype of the traditional husband expatiates on relationships between a husband and wife:—

Every man has his own way of ruling his household, he said at last. What I do myself if I need something like that is to call one of my wives and say to her: I need such and such a thing for a sacrifice, go and get it for me. I know I can take it but I ask her to go and bring it herself. I never forget what my father told his friend when I was a boy. He said "In our custom a man is not expected to go down on his knees and knock his forehead on the ground to his wife to ask her forgiveness or beg a favour. But, "my father said 'a wise man knows that between him and his wife there may arise the need for him to say to her in secret: 'I beg you.' When such a thing hap-

pens nobody else must know of it, and that woman if she has any sense will never boast about it, or even open her mouth and speak of it. If she does it the earth on which the man brought himself low will destroy her entirely." That was what my father told his friend who held that a man was never wrong in his own house. I have never forgotten those words of my father's. My wife's cock belong to me because the owner of a person is also owner of whatever that person has. But there are more ways than one of killing a dog. (*Arrow*, pp. 212-213).

Being a wife in a traditional Igbo marriage is no easy matter. Not only is she expected to forget her father's home when she marries since "when a woman marries a husband she should forget how big her father's compound was. . . . A woman does not carry her father's obi to her husband" (*Arrow*, p. 12), but she is also not fully accepted into her husband's family. Amanze often reminds Chiaku "that the son was yet a child and that she herself was a woman, a stranger in the family" (*Son*, p. 11). Chiaku herself tells Joseph who wants Nnanna to go and live with the priest at Ossa: "Go and tell the men: I'm only a woman, a stranger in the family" (*Son*, p. 187). Anna's refusal to deal directly with her husband's *umuada* stems from her assertion: "You seem to forget that I'm a stranger in Umudiobia. They are your sisters; it's you who should speak to them." (*Obi*, p. 145). A woman can, however, take her children back to her own father's home where they are always welcome. Chiaku does take Nnanna back to Nade (*Son*, chap. 11), Joe and his mother similarly fly from Umudiobia to Nade (*Obi*, p. 13).

A wife's greatest challenge comes from the mother-in-law and the *umuada* (the daughters of the family who normally would be married elsewhere). Chiaku assumes a proprietary air over her son Joe when she visits the couple and "the next morning she ransacked one of the trunk boxes and removed a pair of earrings, a necklace and a brass bangle" as of right (*Obi*, p. 34), and announces with authority: "these I have decided to take. . . . Give me the ones you showed me last night" (p. 35). Of the *umuada*, Obiekie speculates, "They behave as if they owe us some grudge for sending them away from the family, to their husbands. We of course are used to their tongue" (*Obi*, p. 104). The interference of the *umuada* leads to the first ripple in the harmonious relationship between Joe and Anna (*Obi*, p. 145).

The progress of christianity and education has eaten into the fabrics of traditional marriage. As Umeasiegbu notes in his preface:

Practically all the customs detailed in this book are now obsolete and are nowhere to be found amongst the Ibo today. They have been put down here for record purposes. The rate at which changes are being effected in our society is alarming.

Of the novels mentioned in this discussion, Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Nkem Nwankwo's *Danda*, and John Munonye's *The Only Son* present the traditional marriage in as original a form as possible, although Ihuoma's relationship with Ekwueme is far from traditional.

In Flora Nwapa's *Idu* and John Munonye's *Obi*, some changes are already asserting themselves. Idu and Adiewere not only live together, but develop a degree of companionship and intimacy with each other which makes the neighbours comment that "God created the two of them together and said that they must be husband and wife. Do you know that if one is sick the other one becomes sick too? It is strange" (*Idu*, p. 150). The lone occasion when Adiewere behaves almost like a traditional husband is not only short-lived, but easily explained. "Adiewere was merely making a fuss. All he wanted was some petting from his wife" (*Idu*, p. 174). His wife's childlessness, though disturbing, never makes him frantic.

The changes in *Obi* are even more spectacular. There is no indication that Joe and Anna consulted their relations before they married. Thus all the elaborate and expensive preliminaries have been shed. Whatever arrangement there was in bringing the two together takes place between the foreign sister of Anna's convent and Father Smith, the parish priest of Ossa. The very first sentence of *Obi* pitch it at an emotional level which is different from the traditional one:

Joe glanced at his watch. He shrugged. 'Anna . . . Anna . . . Anna . . . His voice was low and affectionate. Each time he called he nudged with his left shoulder.

The reader is prepared for the intimacy between them, his loyalty to Anna in her childlessness and his spurning of advice and pressure from all quarters to marry another wife. During the period of their forced separation, Joe is overwhelmed with loneliness and a sense of deprivation:

Back in Umudiobia Joe felt solitary and abandoned, because of Anna's absence. The hours dragged and the days were dreary. It had not been like that at the time he was angry, before he went to Ania to see her. Those days had, besides, been full of activity and there were really no lonely moments. Now that they had been

reconciled, he longed for her presence and he felt awkward without her. This was especially so in the hours after supper—the time they usually sat and talked intimately and he told her his plans. (*Obi*, 183).

That, clearly, belongs to a new tradition.

NOTES:

¹Notably in Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women*, London 1939, Margaret Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, London 1947, G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, London 1921, C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 2nd Impression, London 1950.

²G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, London 1966, p. 68.

³*Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴Paul Edwards, ed. *Equiano's Travels*, London 1969, pp. 2-3.

⁵John Munonye, *The Only Son*, London, 1966, p. 63; subsequently cited as *Son*.

⁶Nkem Nwankwo, *Danda*, London, 1964, p. 160.

⁷Elechi Amadi, *The Concubine*, London, 1966, p. 128.

⁸Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God*, London, 1964, p. —; subsequently cited as *Arrow*.

⁹Flora Nwapa, *Idu*, London, 1970, p. 14.

¹⁰R. N. Umeasiegbu, *The Way We Lived*, London 1969, pp. 13-14.

¹¹John Munonye, *Obi*, London, 1969.

¹²*Equiano's Travels*, p. 2. Also *Danda*, p. 98.

THE IGBO UNDER BRITISH RULE:
ASPECTS OF THE HUMAN DIMENSION

A. E. Afigbo

The time was 08.00 hours, the date 11 April, 1968. To the motley crowd of former pro-consuls of the British Empire the voice rang out loud and clear; "May F. D. L. now enter the hall and tell us briefly what he knows in the case: *The Igbo vs Britannia*." The smallish man with piercing eyes and a bushy moustache stepped forward and moved towards the hall. In spite of a determined effort to bear himself in a soldierly manner, he drooped slightly to the left, a little weighed down by the thick array of medals which he had won in the service of the Empire first as a lawless frontier soldier and then as an administrator. As he stepped into the hall he came to a sudden halt, obviously taken aback by its apparent emptiness. Then a still small voice said to him deliberately and distinctly: "F. D. L. advance to the witness box in front of you and read your evidence." The smallish man who had been waiting for this moment for exactly 23 years moved up to the witness box, pulled his written statement from the side pocket of his black heavy coat, spread it out in front of him, cleared his throat and read out as follows:—

'I must confess that I have been hampered in the preparation of this statement by the lack of any full scale study of the Igbo under British rule. All we have are a number of works which in dealing with different aspects of the making of Nigeria have treated fitfully the matter presently under examination. Two main attitudes have dominated such works. Those written by our colonial apologists have generally told the story of our triumphant realisation, amongst the Igbo, of the sublime ideals of our civilizing mission in Africa. In this tradition we have works like Ellen Thorpe's *Ladder of Bones*, Sir Alan Burn's *History of Nigeria*, Frank Hive's *Justice in the Jungle* and so on. In my time I personally encouraged the production of such works believing that they contained a clear and unanswerable statement of our case. But after considering this matter over the last 23 years, I have come to hold a different opinion. I now regard books in that tradition as pious nonsense!

'Opposed to the attitude delineated above is another whose origin is traceable to the publication of *Trade and Politics in the*

Niger Delta by the Igbo Professor, K. O. Dike. Books in this tradition have preferred the story of British action and Igbo reaction in a bid to destroy what the authors consider the imperialist myth of an inert Igbo mass. The latest, though by no means a very successful, attempt to apply this thesis to Igbo history in the colonial era can be seen in Professor Anene's *Southern Nigeria in Transition*. Each of these two approaches has its peculiar shortcomings all of which it would be unnecessary for me to detail here. The most serious in my view, however, is that they have tended to ignore the human side of the story.

'It is known to all candid students of African affairs that we, the British, show great attachment to our former colonial peoples. With the Igbo, however, the situation seems somewhat different. From the beginning of our direct contact with this people, relations have been marked by suspicion and tension as a result of which we have found it impossible to extend to them that fatherly love and care which characterise our relationship with and policy towards our other former wards. It was apparently the Women's Riots of 1929 (popularly misnamed the Aba Riot) which thrust this fact rudely in the face of an admittedly heavy-footed colonial office at the time and inspired an attempt on our part to get to the root of the matter. It was to this end that we poured social anthropologists into Igbo land to help us discover the secret to the Igbo situation. Some of these anthropologists in the course of their work got their own independent evidence of this mutual distrust which often led to psychological tension and to open violence. Writing in 1947 out of her personal experience in Igbo land between 1934 and 1937, Miss M. M. Green said:

No one can stay in that [Igbo] country without being aware of the element of psychological tension that exists between (the) English and (the) Igbo.¹

'Miss Green sought to explain this conflict in terms of temperamental differences, using Dr. Murdo Mackenzie's analysis of the mental drives that determine the temperaments of individuals and even homogenous social groups. According to Mackenzie's theory of the psychological components and dynamics of the human mind, the individual mind is driven by two temperamental forces, each of which is a pair of opposites. There is the time pair made up of what he calls the forces of immediacy and deliberation (*immediacy/deliberation*) and there is the pair of space forces made up of amplification and simplification (*ampli-*

fication/simplification). According to Mackenzie every mind is driven by a combination of two of these forces, and only four combinations are possible.³ They are

immediacy/amplification
 immediacy/simplification
 deliberation/amplification
 deliberation/simplification

Immediacy and deliberation, continues the theory,

are opposites in the sense that the immediate thinks in terms of the present, seeks to raise the intensity of the actual moment, functions best in a crisis, the deliberate's mind works best in terms of the past and future, resents being forced into the present, seeks to diminish the intensity of the actual moment, and needs an atmosphere of peace for its best functioning. The immediate works in terms of the actual, the deliberate in terms of the potential. The former rejoices in society and makes quick social contacts, the latter tends to like a good deal of solitude and to make fewer and slower social contacts than the immediate. When immediacy and deliberation clash instead of combining and the mental forces are thrown into defence, there is in one case an aggressive response and in the other a pacific one.⁴

In the same manner amplification and simplification are opposites. While "simplification suggests the process of contracting the facts into a unifying principle, amplification" suggests the process of "ordering the facts into a chain of evidence."⁵

'Applying this psycho-analysis of individual minds to the two racial groups involved in the culture-contact situation created by the extension of our rule on the Igbo, Miss Green came to the conclusion that the native Igbo mind (whatever that means) is driven by the forces of immediacy and amplification while our mind, your mind (whatever again that means) is driven by the opposite and contrasting forces of deliberation and simplification. It is to this fact of contrasting temperaments, argues Miss Green, and that one must attribute the conflicts and tensions which characterise our relationship with these now unfortunate people.

'I was inclined to approve of this application of Dr. Mackenzie's thesis to the colonial situation in Igboland. But since I was called upon to prepare the presentation of this statement and have had more time to think deeply on it, I have come to regard it with amusement. In this I find myself unhappily in the company of a number of other students of the colonial situation in Igboland. Reviewing Miss Green's book in 1949,

Mr. G. I. Jones described the characterisation of Igbo temperament presented above as

not very helpful, anyhow in distinguishing Ibo from Ibibio, Yoruba or most other West African peoples with whom we are familiar. It takes no stock of the characteristically Ibo attitudes of extreme aggressiveness which enables this people to co-operate and live peacefully together in over-enlarged village communities in the most over-populated area of Negro Africa.⁵

'Also it is necessary to point out that one cannot but regard Miss Green's 'Ibo mind' and 'British mind' with as much suspicion and scepticism as now attach to such artificially standardized abstractions as "national character," "group spirit," "the spirit of the times," etc. which historians and sociologists of an earlier age invented to take the blame for the follies and foibles of specific historical characters. The problem which she, like other social-anthropologists who worked on the Igbo at this time, was faced with was to determine why our policies in Africa produced different and, to us, unwelcome results among the Igbo. Having like others before her rightly excluded the possibility of error on our side, she found herself coming to the same conclusion as her predecessors in the field—that the trouble lay with Igbo social structure. It was probably while she was asking herself where the originality of this thesis lay that she stumbled upon Dr. Murdo Mackenzie's work on *The Human Mind*. Referring to this book, she wrote:

I only came upon it after my return from Ibo country, but I have found it of great use in reflecting upon the material I gathered there.⁶

'It was with the discovery of this book that Miss Green saw the opportunity for an original contribution to the Igbo debate. And so she concluded that "the Ibo situation could not be understood, without reference to Ibo temperament."⁷ This conclusion was thus an artificial imposition by Miss Green of a hypothesis of uncertain validity on her Igbo material. To my mind it fails to explain the cause of the conflict between us and the Igbo.

'For an alternative and more satisfactory explanation we have to consider a classic parallel from a Semitic legend. According to the Jews, a Semitic people to whom the Igbo have often been compared with reference to their culture, stiff-neckedness and experience, their high-god, Yahweh, made their eponymous ancestors (Adam and Eve) in his own image as the

supreme achievement of a six day creative process. After which he left them to roam the Garden of Eden in a state of rustic but perfect happiness and innocence. In spite of direct instructions to the contrary, Adam and Eve perversely went on to believe that every fruit which blossomed in the Garden was for them to enjoy. Under the influence of this error they easily fell victim to the ill-motivated advice of the serpent whom Yahweh had short-sightedly allowed into his Garden. The result was that they ate the forbidden fruit of knowledge. This opened their eyes and they found they were naked. Yahweh then discovered that Adam and Eve and their descendants could not after the event be expected to serve him with the unquestioning meekness he wanted. He was also awakened to the danger of continuing to leave Adam and Eve in the Garden. They might eat the fruit of life and achieve immortality like Yahweh. To prevent this catastrophe he banished them from the Garden into the outer darkness where they had to sweat for their daily bread and perpetuate their kind by the tedious and laborious process of conception, pregnancy and child birth. Jewish history ever since has been determined by this irresoluble conflict between Yahweh's plan for the Jews and the latter's plan for themselves. In this conflict Yahweh in all his greatness has punished the Jews as he pleased. He has sent them into exile twice. He has allowed them to suffer persecution and even pogrom. The latest episode in the drama is that the Jews have insisted on returning to their original home land to found a state, apparently against the wishes of Yahweh. Is it any surprise that he has not spared them the inveterate enmity of their Arab neighbours?

'All the recondite details of this Jewish national legend may not be applicable to the case of our relations with the Igbo, but the basic moral of the tale is relevant. And I think we can, without any suggestion of irreverence, say that the Igbo fell from our grace when they refused to leave their destiny in our experienced hands. A quick look at the facts will help.

'The imposition of our rule on the Igbo offered this people the opportunity to escape from the long and uneventful dark night of their past and make a fresh start. This was almost tantamount to a creation. On the eve of our rule Igbo land was under the regime of satan itself. Slave dealing, infanticide, cannibalism, human sacrifice, superstition and disease were rife. Then our mighty imperial hand intervened, to save the Igbo in spite of themselves. It is one of the sad facts of the story that

we had to fight the Igbo for a period of about two decades in the process of dragging them out of their wretched condition into our imperial estate where they now enjoy the benefits of modern civilization. Prominent among these campaigns were the Aro Expedition (1901-1902), the Ezza Patrol (1905), the Ahiara Expedition (1906) and the Onitsha Hinterland Campaign (1906). At Ahiara, for instance, the Igbo were so perverse that we were compelled to nearly raze the village-group to the ground.

'It did not bother us what excesses we went to in order to bring the Igbo into our empire because we knew that once they came within it, they would be the gainers. We had a grand design for the salvation of all our subject peoples. This plan grew out of the maturest and noblest experiences of our imperial past. The philosophical system on which this plan was based can be found fully stated in my early but still valid book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. Put bluntly, the plan was to confer on all subject peoples only such of our national cultural attributes as would enable them to serve us loyally and fervently in our bid to exploit the natural resources of their territories to the advantage of humanity in general. For generations those immense resources had remained neglected through their ignorance and disinclination to work, thus denying to humanity a sizeable portion of the riches with which it had been endowed by nature. While it was our responsibility to help all such benighted peoples to partake in the glory of membership of our empire on which at that time the sun never set, it was their duty to place their human and material resources at the disposal of mankind—the exploitation of this immense wealth being carried out under the guidance of our strong, virile and magnanimous race. Under the system the attributes we intended endowing them with included the Anglo-Saxon love for law and order, respect for a hierarchically ordered society in which each man knows and remains in his place under the directing genius of our people, love of hard work and then a measure of practical education to enable them till their fields and gather their harvests as their contribution to the welfare of humanity. It was our intention to look after the affairs of this large imperial estate directly. But as part of the machinery for running it and in preparation for the distant future when we might choose to become absentee landlords, we decided to raise and groom a class of attorneys chosen from the ranks of the traditional ruling elite through whom we were to supervise in detail the work being

done in the estate. This class was to resist all changes and innovations which we did not prescribe and champion. Appropriately we called this system indirect rule or native administration. I took a personal interest in perfecting this system and in applying it to a not inconsequential area of our imperial holdings in Africa.

'We applied this scheme with a fair measure of success in most of our non-white colonies. In the Uthmaniyya caliphate the people and their rulers found it particularly satisfying. But in Igboland the story was different. This formless and primitive mass of humanity would not for over two decades, as already mentioned, concede us political control of their area. By 1906 or so, most of the ancient and reputed empires and states of West Africa had submitted to our rule. But up to 1917 we were campaigning forwards and backwards in Igboland, fighting tiny, inconsequential villages which on one day would profess friendship and on another perfidiously raise the standard of rebellion. In 1926 they were still disputing our right to impose tribute on them. In that year a group of their leaders at Onitsha and Okigwi had the temerity to tell Resident W. E. Hunt that it was understandable if the British were taxing the Hausa whom they had conquered but bewildering that they also intended to tax the Igbo whom they had never conquered. This type of nonsense would have been easier to endure from an imperial and cultured people like the Fulani, the Bini, the Yoruba and the Ashanti. Coming from the Igbo who were sprawling in political and social morass at the time of our advent, a people whose history is summarised by the phrase 'culture none, religion none,' it was exasperating.

'They adopted the same recalcitrant and unsubmitive attitude towards other aspects of our grand design. They would not permit us to implement amongst them our policy of raising a class of attorneys through whom to govern them and direct their future advance. They felt the creation of such a class would give us an undue hold on their society. When we asked them for their traditional rulers they pushed forward criminals and nonentities whom they were in no sense prepared to obey. When we succeeded in laying hold on their traditional rulers, they turned their backs on these regarding them as traitors and defectors. The result was that we never were able to obtain a reliable leverage on Igbo society. Every effort made along this line only led to more confusion. I took a personal interest in this matter be-

tween 1912 and 1919, applied all my ingenuity to it but was frustrated, partly, it must be admitted by the slow-moving colonial office and by the unadventurous officers who served in the Igbo provinces but mainly by the recalcitrancy of the Igbo themselves. I tried to refashion their society through giving them chiefs and I honestly believed that it was only in this manner that they could come to know true progress under our imperial guidance. But they would have none of it. The plan I mapped out for realising this end was continued under my successors. But these men had neither my nerve nor my subtlety of approach. The result was that they overreached themselves in 1929 and gave the Igbo the opportunity they had been looking for to overthrow our authority. For the first time in our imperial history we were faced with and insulted by mobs of irate women who marched up and down the country decrying our rule and pulling down local institutions of our authority. The infection even spread to the neighbouring Ibibio areas. When the women would not listen to peaceful argument we had to bring them to reason with machine gun and rifle fire. We could not sit idly by while naked primitive women sought to upset our imperial apple-cart!

'What was most distressing about this episode was that the Igbo women showed the basest ingratitude to us. They failed to appreciate what we had done for them. Instead they blamed us for all their woes, even for the usual instability of prices for unprocessed produce in the international market. The depth of their ingratitude could be guessed from their promise to do away with every evidence of our rule if we accepted their invitation to quit the country. They called on all whitemen "to go to their country so that the land in this area might remain as it was many years ago before the advent of the white man." When asked to remember the benefits they derived from our rule, especially the easy means of communication by rail, they replied with a promise "that after driving away everybody they would remove the rails."

'In spite of those reckless and seditious utterances we continued to accommodate the Igbo in the Empire. We even went all out to study and understand them a little more. We also reorganised the system under which they were at the time being governed in an attempt to evolve institutions that would be acceptable to them and enable them derive the maximum benefit from our tutelage. But the reorganised system met with no better luck. By April 1945 when I was called away from the scene,

it was already evident that the new administration would not achieve the desired result, so perverse are the Igbo especially over the issue of alien political control. In my view Miss Margery Perham summarised the situation cogently and succinctly when in her book *Native Administration in Nigeria* she wrote as follows:

In south-eastern Nigeria, a relatively sympathetic Government was dealing with one of the least disciplined, and least intelligible of African peoples."⁹

'And what was worse, from my point of view, they would not concede us the right to prescribe for them what aspects of our Western education and learning they should imbibe and to what extent. Like the Jews of the legend already mentioned they had burning in them an uncontrollable desire to know as much as their maker and to rival him. We knew that too much learning was dangerous for the African, and that for a people as primitive as the Igbo it was even more so. But the Igbo would not agree with us. They believed they could take care of themselves. Unfortunately for us we had, like Yahweh, failed to exclude the serpent from our Imperial Garden. The wrong-headed missionary was as harmful to us as the proverbial serpent. He came dangling western education in all its ramifications before the Igbo. The latter being unduly ambitious lapped up everything the missionary had to offer and soon their heads were swollen with such ideas as democracy, equality, fair play, political sovereignty and all-what-not-ideas which are dangerous in a primitive people suddenly thrust from barbarism into civilization.

'Why the Igbo were so insistent and keen on embracing these pernicious alien ideas which we were anxious to spare them has been endlessly debated. Mrs. Sylvia Leith-Ross thinks it is certainly connected with the Igbo lack of their own cultural achievement which they could be proud of. Lacking a past, she argued, the Igbo young man is content to have a future,' and this future has to be the result of close identification with Western achievements in science and thought. On another she wrote:

In Nigeria . . . the Ibo speaking people are the most numerous, the most adaptable, the most go-ahead, the most virile, and at the same time the most primitive. In the process of adaptation to modern life, this last fact is of inestimable advantage. Starting at scratch, they have nothing to unload; no institutional religion, no traditions, no caste or other hide-bound social system. Possessing intelligence, potentially equal to the average European, the Ibo is ready to plunge forward into Western civilisation.¹⁰

'One finds it difficult, though, to agree with Mrs. Leith-Ross entirely. If a primitive state of existence qualifies a people to step out straight from barbarism into premature civilisation, the fragmented and primitive pagan peoples of the Bauchi Plateau should do the same. If the Igbo had the intelligence of the average European, why were they living in such squalor until the advent of our rule?

'Miss Green thought Igbo avidity for alien ways is connected with their psychology which has already been briefly analysed in this statement. She wrote:

Also symptomatic of immediacy, with its tendency to live in the present, is the ready Ibo adaptability to new ideas, the adoption both for better and worse, of new standards, the eagerness to be with the stream of progress.¹¹

It was in the concluding part of her book *African Women* which is about the Igbo women that Mrs. Leith-Ross gave an explanation for this Igbo craze for the Western secret for success which I am more inclined to agree with. She wrote:

But one thing is certain: the Ibo does not think very much of us. Dissociated from our inventions, the gramophones, the cars, the rifles, the thermos flasks and the riches he imagines we all possess, he sees little in us. When he strives to copy us, it is not because of the courage or wisdom, the virtues or the talents he may see in us, but simply because we represent to him success. In ourselves we do not interest him except in so far as we contribute to his own interests.¹²

'This is the root of the matter. We incorporated the Igbo into our empire to give them an opportunity of serving a higher purpose, of contributing to the realisation of the noble ideals of the Dual Mandate, but they see their membership of that great imperial family as an opportunity to use us as a ladder to mount to more and more selfish and restricted achievements. Not only are they in this way frustrating the realisation of the objective of our imperial mission, but they go further to accord us no more recognition, no more respect, no more reverence than a workman accords to his instruments or his tools. And there can be no doubt that were they ever to find themselves in a position where they no longer need us, they will cynically consign us to the garbage heap. In all my study of the literature on this matter, I have not come across a better statement of our case against the upstart and ambitious ingrates known as the Igbo than that with which Mrs. Leith-Ross rounds off her book

already mentioned. And I intend to quote her *in extenso* as I do not think I can improve on the flow of the argument and the choice of words. She said:

In the north (of Nigeria,) where a hunched horseman shouted 'Lion' and the crowding throng yelled 'Bull elephant,' when slaves ran before one picking up the pebbles over which one might have tripped and bending back the branches that might have brushed one's face, when 'Way, Make Way!', clamoured the red-robed guard and the long brass trumpets blared to heaven, one could have had illusions about one's importance. Not so among the Ibo. I never ceased to wonder at and be a little disturbed by their lack of reverence . . . for any one superior to them . . . True democrats no one was better than themselves, yet they were somehow better than any-one else. This self-assurance was sometimes a little frightening. The Ibo men and women are so continually in the right and so busy proving that everyone else is in the wrong. They want to learn from us but only such things as may be materially productive as soon as possible. They tolerate us because they need us. They do not look upon us resentfully as conquerors but complacently as stepping-stones. What will happen when they can or think they can, mount alone and have no further use for the stepping stones, no one can tell.¹³

'I leave it to humanity and reason to condemn the Igbo for base ingratitude, over-weening ambition, and all the baser forms of selfishness. One may ask why we did not expel this vermin from our imperial heritage when we found out that they had eaten the fruit of knowledge and erroneously believing that they had been stripped politically and economically naked reached out for the rag of nationalism to clothe themselves with. We did not take that step because we did not enjoy Yahweh's unrivalled autocracy. The region beyond the frontiers of the British empire was not the darkness of toil and sweat. On the contrary, immediately bordering that empire were the French, Belgian and Portuguese empires. And even beyond those was what the African erroneously believed was the sunlit zone of glorious political independence. We could not banish them to any of those regions. Furthermore we are a historically-minded people and we have been deeply impressed by the fact that no one heard of the Garden of Eden any more after the expulsion from it of Adam and Eve. This explains our decision to redefine the purpose and organisation of our imperial system in order to provide room for even ungrateful, ambitious, upstart and rebellious peoples like . . . x

At this point the still small voice cut in and said:

'I am afraid F.D.L. I have to cut you short at this point. You were called away from the scene on April 11, 1945 and

you are not allowed to comment on events which happened after that date. We have witnesses enough to cover that period and we shall recall them from the scene of the drama in our own good time. From all I can gather from what you have said you seem to confirm the statement of Olaudah Equiano that the British attitude of hostility towards the Igbo people derives from a feeling that the Igbo are uppish, out-spoken, anxious for self-government and unprepared to make a fetish of any people. It is to the British resentment of what they call "Ibo gut" that he attributed the decision to exclude him at the last moment from participation in the plan for re-settling his people in Sierra Leone. Jaja of Amigbo and Opobo also made the same case. Because, he argued, he was considered a dangerous commercial rival to British trading interests he was done out of his inheritance and left to die in exile. In short the issue comes down to the claim in the Igbo proverb that

Enyi mara
Ihe enyi mara
Ha anagh adi na mma

and which rendered in your tongue reads:

They are never good friends
Who are equally clever.

'However I still have to be convinced that uppishness is a peculiar Igbo trait. For now we are conducting only the preliminary investigations. You will now turn right and move straight in front of you until you enter the adjoining hall where you will find your predecessors in the British imperial service. There you will wait patiently until we call you again. As you have to stay there until the drama of Anglo-Igbo relations has attained its final denouement, and that means infinitely much longer than you have waited already, you may consider disencumbering yourself of those medals won in the service of the British Empire. Here they are not recognised.'

NOTES:

¹Green, M. M., *Igbo Village Affairs* (Frank Cass Reprint, 1964), p. 235.

²*Ibid.*, p. 237.

³*Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁹Jones, G. I., "Dual Organisation in Ibo Social Structure," being a review of M. M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs in Africa*. Vol. 19, No. 2, 1949.

¹⁰Green, M. M., *op. cit.*, p. 235.

¹¹Afigbo, A. E., Review of *Igbo Village Affairs* by M. M. Green (Frank Cass Reprint) in the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1967.

¹²Perham, M., *Native Administration in Nigeria* (Oxford, 1962), p. 219.

¹³Leith-Ross, S., *African Women*, p. 54.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵Green, M. M., *op. cit.*, p. 252.

¹⁶Leith-Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 357.

THE IGBO IN THE MODERN SETTING

Ikenna Nzimiro

INTRODUCTION:

The emergence of the Igbo in the modern scene is an event as dramatic as it has proved decisive in its implications. Colonialism, growth of new urban settlements, development of a new economic system based on the cash nexus, introduction and spread of literary education and the establishment of Christian religion, these factors have contributed, individually and cumulatively, in the defining of the modern outlook of the Igbo. It is hard to separate out each factor from the others since all are interwoven in the matrix of social relationships which have developed within the entire Igbo social structure. The Igbo have embraced the new capitalist possibilities that came in the wake of European colonialism with as much enthusiasm and aplomb as they have espoused modern education and appropriated the Christian religion. They have issued out of their ethnic base in search of new habitations, new experience and new economic openings in the new urban settlements that developed from the colonial activities. Until the recent Nigerian crisis, characterized by return to the home base, the Igbo were to be found in all modern centres of population within, and even beyond, Nigeria. They were engaged in administrative, missionary, trading and commercial activities. The story of the modern development of Nigeria is firmly tied up with the fact of the Igbo commitment to the principle of modernity and modern progress typified by their single-minded pursuit of things modern.

(b) *The Economic Factor:*

The Igbo movement from their traditional base into the modern setting was motivated by these complex factors but principally by the economic consideration, that is, the desire to participate in the economic activities which brought more monetary reward than the traditional agricultural activities which, as the incursion of money into the economy developed, could not yield as much reward as those provided by the new occupations. The Igbo began to train and undertake independent crafts such as carpentry, smithing, tailoring, radio/bicycle/watch and motor mechanics, wholesale and retail trade, masonry and associated building trades, bakery, confectionery, tin-canning and metal works, all of which sprang up within the urban milieu to serve

the interest of the urban communities. Possibilities of employment in state, mercantile and missionary enterprises attracted those Igbo youth with school-leaving or West African School Certificates to move into the urban settlements and new centres of employment.

These economic incentives induced millions of Igbo people to set up one of the greatest migrations from the rural homeland to new centres of population within their geographical borders, as well as to other parts of Nigeria. The degree of this Igbo migration can be graphically illustrated in the following statistic:

**IGBO URBAN PRESENCE OUTSIDE IGBOLAND:
EARLY 1950's**

CITY	INDIGENES	PERCENTAGE OF IGBO IN NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION
LAGOS	YORUBA	44.6
BENIN CITY	EDO	53.5
SAPELE	URHOB0	46.9
CALABAR	EFIK	50.7
KANO	HAUSA	38.0
ZARIA	HAUSA	39.0
KADUNA	MIXED	40.7

SOURCE: Population Census of the Western Region of Nigeria 1953 (Lagos: Government Statistics 1953-54); Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria 1953 (Lagos: Government Statistics 1953-54); Population Census of Northern Region of Nigeria 1952 (Lagos: Government Statistics 1952-53).

The figures indicate that the Igbo constituted more than one-third of the non-indigenous population of the urban centres in the Northern and Western Nigeria. As the figures in the table reveal, the proportion is much higher for several non-Igbo cities. The figures, James Coleman argues, are important not only as evidence of the extensive, rapid, and widespread urbanization of the Igbo people, but also as a partial insight into their vanguard role in the nationalist movement.¹

The Igbo moved to all parts of the Regions and constituted in the North the bulk of the population in the Sabongaris in Zaria, Jos, Kafanchan, Sokoto, Kano, Maiduguri, Kaduna, Fun-tua, Bida, Makurdi, Gombe, Bauchi, and several other communities. In these areas they controlled to a large extent, most of the urban economic activities, trading, carpentry, smithing, mechanics

of all types, building contracts, as well as providing the largest numbers of non-local people in commercial and merchantile houses, and in government and local government establishments. They were the mainstay of the urban economy and agents of acculturation in Northern Region, but they constituted an out-group within these communities most of which were hybrid urban centres segregated from the traditional towns that were dominated by the in-group Hausa-Fulani ethnic communities.

Within the turn of the last decade, Igbo presence in Western Region was felt in Lagos capital city where they appeared in all spheres of economic activities. They were owners of retail stores, landlords, transport owners, professionals, workers in private and state institutions.

In the then Eastern Region, Igbo presence and influence were conspicuous in Ibadio-Efik-Ogoja areas and also in the Rivers divisions (some of whose people are Igbo). Then there was the Igbo heartland itself whose economy was being rapidly modernized by Igbo enterprise and unswerving industry. In this latter area, the accelerated economic development was closely related to the rapid growth of the urban centres in Igboland. As far back as 1931, there were no Igbo cities with a population of more than 20,000 but by 1952, however, there were four cities—Onitsha, Aba, Port Harcourt and Enugu each with a population of 50,000 of which 85% was Igbo. Between 1921 and 1952 the rate of population growth in these urban centres was 68.8% far higher than anywhere else in Nigeria. For example, the rate of population growth of Onitsha within these decades was as follows:—

1921	1931	1953	1960
10,319	18,084	76,921	96,000

In the Eastern Region as a whole, the 1953 census showed Enugu at 62,764; Aba 57,787; Port Harcourt 71,634; Onitsha 76,921; and Calabar 46,905 of which greater numbers were Igbo.⁷

(c) *Capitalism and Igbo Society:*

Pre-capitalist Igbo society was a community-oriented society with ownership of land, the chief factor in traditional economy, vested in the group which acted as trustee for the ancestors. The principle that no man was without the economic factor was possible only because of this collective ownership of land. The economy as described was self-sufficient. Individual needs were

limited and the principle of self-help was accepted within the kinship group. Markets helped to reinforce agricultural economy and to facilitate exchange of commodities even though trading activities were limited by the quantity of goods sold being so insignificant. That meant that trade remained merely ancillary to agriculture in Igbo economic life and that capital accumulation, in the way we have come to know it, was not only undesirable but impracticable.

The pattern of Igbo traditional economy changed with the injection of money into Igbo society. The response to the new economic system, the capitalist system, induced the Igbo to a greater pursuit of money-earning activities. The movement away from their homes to other areas was a reaction to the new monetary stimuli. Unrestricted by any structural system, Igbo individualism reacted positively to the individualist philosophy of capitalism. The achievement orientation of the Igbo traditional society predisposed the Igbo to play a prominent part in the capitalist competitive system set up by the colonial power in Nigeria. It is in this sphere of open competition, the struggle for the acquisition of wealth and property, that the Igbo have come into conflict with other non-Igbo ethnic nationalities, particularly their rising bourgeoisie who, unable to understand this phenomenal success in the acquisition of private property by the Igbo, have singled the Igbo rising bourgeoisie out for attack and calumination.

In the sphere of trade, the traditional pattern which made trade the affair of the women changed since what was being traded were no longer the goods produced in the home from farmland but merchandise that were imported from abroad and needed distribution in expanding Nigerian urban societies. The urban population needed not only food products but new merchandise and goods manufactured in Europe and elsewhere and the Igbo quickly discerned the immense opportunities represented by overseas trade and distributive activities. Moreover, commercial agricultural products like palm produce which were formerly marketed alone by the big foreign produce firms were later marketed by Igbo produce buyers. In cocoa and rubber producing areas in Yoruba and Benin areas, Igbo labourers offered their services and in Northern Nigeria they engaged in the marketing of those commercial crops that brought financial rewards.

Urban markets became the main centre of trading activities and the Igbo quickly moved into these markets both in their home urban areas and outside Igboland. "Professional" petty traders

grew in large numbers. Exporters and importers formed small firms to handle foreign merchandise. Some traders became agents of the large foreign firms and distributed the goods allocated to them.

Systems of apprenticeship developed all over Igbo area. The distant Igbo trader had links with those at home so that goods purchased in far places, like Northern Nigeria and Lagos, were sent down home for marketing, while goods such as foodstuffs from Igboland and environs were relayed back to the North. The apprenticeship system enabled the recruitment of young villagers, often kinsmen of established traders, into the "trade" business. The apprentices passed periods of trading tutelage whereby they acquired expertise before they set up their own private business. This system enabled the withdrawal of lineage members into urban areas in pursuit of particular economic activities, making such activities seem as closed to particular Igbo groups. It created a form of economic monopoly, the sort that never developed among the non-Igbo competitors. It left the Igbo distant urban traders with some advantage. For example, Nnewi traders were noted for the trade in imported motor parts and Onitsha market, the largest in West Africa before the civil war, was a centre for the distribution and sale of motor parts. As this market served traders outside the Eastern Nigeria, Nnewi distant traders through their trade link with kinsmen at home marketed these vehicle parts and at one stage seemed to have a monopoly of this trade. Dr. Ukwu describes this "chain-relation" of Igbo traders in this vein—

"A successful trader has a hard core of devoted customers whose loyalty he cultivates by economic inducements such as credits, advance information and first option of fast lines, as well as by spheres of personal friendship. Formal links exist in the inter-regional trade with Lagos, the Western Region and the Northern Region. These traders in the chief commercial centres in Iboland have corresponding agents in some of the main centres. Their distribution is suggested by local concentration of Ibo-speaking peoples in these areas, the most important being Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Jos, Zaria, Lafia, Maiduguri, Gusau, Minna, Kafanchan, and Makurdi. The correspondents and agents in Lagos keep their Ibo contacts informed of the latest arrivals in Lagos and often buy and store goods for them to come and collect. With the correspondents and agents in the Northern and Western Regions the relationship is symbiotic."³

At home the urban markets were controlled by Igbo traders and they diffused their activities to the rural areas where those

at home came and purchased in the urban centres and marketed in the chain of Igbo markets in the hinterland.

The system of apprenticeship which characterized distant urban trade in the West, North and Midwest areas was also a dominant factor in urban trade at home and Dr. Onyemelukwe shows that one implication of the apprenticeship system is the domination of a particular ethnic group or clan in certain lines of foodstuff trade. This mainly arises from the common practice of the trader picking his "boy," or the would-be apprentice choosing his "master," from his own village or clan, if not from his relatives within the extended family.⁴

Money acquired through trade and economic activities has been invested by the Igbo in the education of their children and kinsmen and women and in the acquisition of private property in land, particularly in the urban areas where they have migrated throughout the country. Capital accumulated is therefore invested in productive enterprises and with the emergence of Nationalist Governments, Igbo middle class professional and commercial groups benefited immensely by becoming prominent members of the new political class. They have also become contractors, transport directors and owners, hotel proprietors, merchants, owners of small scale industries, proprietors of secondary schools, professionals of all descriptions—lawyers, medical practitioners, dentists, pharmacists, engineers of all branches, University teachers, school teachers, nurses, surveyors, architects—white collar job workers, business executives, permanent secretaries and senior executives in public and state enterprises and establishments, bankers and in fact, there is no profession into which the Igbo have not ventured. This was the position before the out-break of the civil war.

(d) *Education:*

Antecedent to this acquisition of money through trade is the recognition by the Igbo that education is an essential ingredient in the acquisition of skills for the 'white man's job' (*olu Oyibo*). Western-oriented education itself penetrated Igbo society rather late in the day. It began, like the white man's penetration, from the coastal belt and spread into the hinterland. The first European foothold in Igboland was the setting up by the Church Missionary Society of an outpost in Onitsha. The missionaries came up the River Niger. In 1857 they made the initial contact and in 1869 opened three church centres in the Onitsha inland

town and despite initial and vigorous opposition survived. Following the example of the C.M.S., the Catholic Missionary, Rev. Lutz arrived in 1885 and concluded agreements with the king of Onitsha who was happy to receive the new organization. The king offered it a piece of land in the inland town, but the Catholics preferred to stay at the waterside and by the help of Bishop Crowther of the C.M.S. Mission, a piece of land belonging to the C.M.S. and situated at the waterside was allocated to the new mission. The land treaty was concluded by the two church leaders in 1886.¹

Educational activities were confined to teaching the pupils how to read and write so as to absorb the contents of the Bible and communicate same to others. It was the Catholic Bishop Shanahan, who actually realised that the conversion of the pagans could be possible through the education of their children. Catholic Missionary activities were therefore concentrated in spreading education into the interior through the establishment of schools in all mission centres in the interior. Education was therefore left to the missionaries and the Niger Company till the surrender of the latter's political powers to the British in order to concern itself mainly with commerce. When the colonial government took over, it adopted a nonchalant attitude to education which it conveniently left in the hands of the missionaries. The two missionaries were confronted with this task and the early converts at Onitsha and the Niger towns were used as catechists and headmasters to spread education into the interior. Onitsha became the cradle of missionary education in Igboland.

The Catholic Church established parishes under white Reverend Fathers. The parish headquarters became bases for missionary educational and church activities in the village-groups that came under the supervision of each parish priest. The parish headquarters were developed as modern centres of church civilization.

The C.M.S. and other Protestant sects spread their parishes and by the first quarter of the present century the missionaries of all denominations had established their influence in all Igbo areas. They had a monopoly of primary schools and employed virtually all the teachers. The grammar schools which began in the first quarter of the century were again sponsored by the missionaries. Dennis Memorial Grammar School (1924), Saint Mark's Teachers' College, Awka (1924), Saint Charles Teachers' College, Onitsha (1928), Christ the King College, Onitsha

(1933), were the earliest secondary and teaching training colleges in Igboland. The phenomenal rate of growth of educational institutions and school population took place after the post-war (1939-45) years, when at Onitsha two Nigerian citizens broke through the monopoly of the missionaries and established their own private secondary and primary schools. These colleges the African College and New Bethel College were the early pioneer colleges of their kind at Onitsha, but prior to their appearance, the distinguished Igbo educationist, Alvan Ikoku had founded Aggrey Memorial Grammar School in his home town, Arochukwu. That was one of the first six oldest secondary schools in the whole of the former Eastern Nigeria. These early efforts in private school and college proprietorship were followed by the founding of numerous voluntary Nigerian-owned secondary schools. Different Igbo communities taking the cue from enterprising individuals, also began to set up schools and colleges for the benefit of their members as well as for others.

The urban centres received the largest number of these schools and by 1960 Onitsha had already become the vital educational centre in Igboland. The educational statistics for 1960 showed that over twenty thousand children were at schools of various grades in Onitsha alone.

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Population</i>
Primary	36	17,929
Secondary	8	2,249
Secondary Commercial	6	2,151
Teacher Training	2	310
Modern Secondary	1	72
	—	—
Total number of Schools of all grades	49	22,711
	—	—

Source: Nzimiro, I. "Urbanisation in Onitsha," paper presented to the International Seminar on Population Problem and Policy in Nigeria: University of Ife, March, 1971.

In the Old Eastern Nigeria, educational statistics included those within the various ethnic groups that made up the region, but the preponderance of the Igbo in all these schools was a factor of their numerical strength and their migration to urban as well as

rural areas outside Igboland. For example, the 1958 government statistics of education in Eastern Region showed the following picture:

(a) *Post School Certificate Courses*

Igbo area	5
Ibibio-Efik	2
Rivers	1

(b) *Approved for West African School Certificate (WASC)*

Calabar Province	10
Ogoja "	2
Onitsha "	11
Northern Onitsha	9
Owerri Province	13
Rivers	6 (of which 5 were at Port Harcourt)
Summary — Igbo Area	33
Ibibio-Efik	12
Rivers	6

(c) *Recognised by Government but not approved for WASC*

Calabar	5 (2 mixed)
Onitsha	14
Owerri	16
	} Igbo 30

(d) *List of Teachers Training Institutions*

Calabar Province	4
Onitsha "	10
Owerri "	10
Ogoja "	2
	} 20 Igbo

(e) *List of Technical and Vocational Schools*

Igbo	17
Rivers	1
Ibibio-Efik	2

Source: Government Statistics of Education 1958.

The rise in the number of primary school enrolment in Igbo area was year by year and so also had the pressure of this on the rise in the enrolment in the secondary schools increased:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Pupils</i>
1960	4,178	845,287
1961	4,084	1,834,597
1962	3,966	1,143,951
1963	3,583	873,179
1964	3,568	641,862

The figures cover the 12 Igbo Provincial Areas.

Source: Government Statistics of Education.

We cannot explain the sharp drop in year 1963 and 1964, but on the whole there was a definite increase in the years 1962 and 1963.

In the Secondary Schools the figure was on the steady increase:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Pupils</i>
1960	67	12,421
1961	80	14,627
1962	127	18,487
1963	144	24,458
1964	160	30,491

Source: Government Statistics of Education.

The figures above are only for the Igbo speaking areas in Eastern Region. In the North, Igbo people sent their children to missionary schools in the Sabongari and they formed the predominant number in most urban areas.

At Kano and in some Northern areas, they established Igbo National Schools for their children especially since local schools were sometimes barred to them. In most of the missionary secondary schools, Igbo children were found in considerable numbers.

In the Higher Institutions of learning, the Igbo were not prepared to lag behind; their children were found and in good numbers in all the national higher institutions. They have the highest percentage of students in the University of Nigeria which is located in Eastern Nigeria. They also had, before the civil war, high enrolment figures in the five other Nigerian universities as a result, no doubt, of the high percentage of Igbo children graduating annually from the grammar schools.

The Igbo man's belief in the efficacy of education is total and unequivocal. Parents, whether they are peasant farmers,

unskilled labourers or educated professionals, will endure every conceivable hardship and make every conceivable sacrifice so as to be able to give their children good formal education. They accept you do not stand any chance in the modern world unless you have mastered the mystery of modern learning. Those parents who cannot read and write strive desperately to save their children from "the curse" of illiteracy and those who have already benefited from modern education do not want their children to slide down the social ladder from the heights they themselves have attained. The driving passion of the Igbo is to keep the momentum of progress and to go on building on the achievements of yesterday. Education is one factor recognized by all as helping this upward trend.

Igbo traditional value system has indeed been affected by this acceptance of Western educational values. This is further tied up with Christian ideas which are absorbed from missionary educational institutions through which many Igbo elite have passed.

The acquisition of education has helped the Igbo to master the new skills needed for securing jobs in the labour market and this quest for new occupational positions in the state and private institutions has been one of the dominant points of tension between them and the Yoruba on one hand, the Yoruba and the non-Igbo on the other hand, and the Northerners and the Southerners.

Nigeria is a capitalist society, a free enterprise economy and its constitution recognizes the right to property and the freedom of movement. The Igbo have taken advantage of these opportunities to improve their material circumstances by recognizing that property could be acquired through education and cultivation of special skills as well as by trading.

(e) *Patriotic and Improvement Unions:*

One further phenomenon of Igbo movement from a traditional to a modern setting remains to be mentioned. This is the so-called Patriotic and Improvement Unions. Associated with the rise of new urban settlements in Nigeria and the massive flow of Igbo populations from villages into them was the evolution of clan and "town" associations catering for the interests of the Igbo urban migrants and providing a link between them and their rural base and rural culture. The urban situation into which the Igbo (essentially a village living people) found themselves did

not provide them with adequate social adjustment. The Improvement and Patriotic Unions (or Associations) seemed to fulfil this need and help them adjust to the rigours of the new setting by, among other things, making available to them ideas and attitudes with which they were familiar in their rural base.

For those who were outside Igboland, these associations based on the lineage structure of Igboland were important centres for readjustment and for contact with "home" people. Conversely, since the bulk of these urban members were literate or exposed to the new urban social life, the associations became the channels through which urban cultural ideas and habits were transmitted to the Igbo villages. They were forward in the establishment of modern institutions such as schools, hospitals and maternity homes and pipe-borne water. They were also active in setting up markets, community halls and recreational facilities for their "towns." They even interested themselves in the building of churches and in aligning their "towns" shrewdly to the "desirable" political parties, desirability determined largely by what political party was most likely to promote the social welfare of their towns.

Within the urban setting itself, these associations provided basic helps and securities for their members. An association organized visits to "welcome" newly arrived clansmen or townsmen, helped to secure employment or provide succour during unemployment, helped to provide legal aid for members in trouble, buried the dead members and bore costs of funerals in case of bereavement. In return for all these benefits members were expected to support the associations fully and enthusiastically, to pay their regular and incidental dues and to be punctual and present at meetings. Much of the achievements recorded by the Igbo by way of educational institutions and modern amenities were a result of the single-minded exertions of the Patriotic and Improvement Unions.

CONCLUSION:

We have discussed the structures of Igbo society in its modern form and have shown that urbanism, capitalism and education are factors which have influenced the Igbo people, changing their traditional value systems and making them adopt new outlooks and new values. Long distances from home, longer years away from Igboland without returning home led to some Igbo setting up permanent homes outside Igboland. This was

the case in Northern Nigeria, in the Cameroons and in some other West African countries. The extent of Igbo migration outside the homeland was felt during the communal disturbances in 1966 when over three million and a half Igbo migrants returned to the heartland. Most of the returnees, "refugees" they were labelled then, were reabsorbed into their kinship groups and children born and bred in the urban areas outside Igboland began to learn of their kinship relations and the kinship terminologies, and to live the culture of the rural society which was quite different from what they had been used to before. Since culture is a social and not inherited attribute, the youths who were back home in many ways felt cultural ambivalences. But the ethos of the kinship system was not entirely lost. The feeling of belonging was soon picked up by those who had returned and self-help and communal assistance were evolved as means of resettling the kinsmen and women from distant lands. The remarkable and easy way in which these millions were absorbed within the extended family system was one of the bewildering social phenomena that shattered the foreign anthropologists' much-spoken-of ideas of 'detrribalization.'

Professor Mitchel tells us that "change has not penetrated equally to all sections of culture and belief and the adoption of a new set of customs and beliefs in one context does not necessarily imply a corresponding modification of custom and belief in another. A change in one aspect of social system may alter one institution completely, modify yet another, and leave a third relatively unaffected." One could say that this evaluation applies to the contemporary understanding of cultural change taking place in Igboland as a result of the factors already discussed. The quick assimilation of the Igbo "returnees" into the traditional kinship system illustrates it. The organization of Improvement Associations in urban areas typified it; it was one way by which the urban people kept in constant touch with those at home since many of these organisations made it compulsory that all those 'abroad' returned 'home' at specific periods such as Easter or Christmas. Town Halls were built by many of these associations in their home towns to symbolise this unity between those at home and those abroad and the numerous community projects sponsored by these bodies reminded them of their loyalty to their homes. In these urban areas, they organised cultural dances to reintegrate them with their cultural background and in some cases

those at home were invited by those abroad to stage dances for which those abroad felt very proud.

Capitalism helped the Igbo entrepreneurs to acquire money and property and to reinvest these in the education of their children and kinsmen. The new rich sought for leases in the urban areas and acquired property in land and became landlords, behaving like landlords anywhere else in the world. They glorified the acquisitive society and went ahead to 'grab' in keeping with the capitalist ethics. The spirit of capitalism dominated the Igbo elite who in all spheres of life became dedicated to the pursuit of wealth. With money acquired, they attained status in their traditional communities, in the leadership of urban organisations, in the political parties, in the professional organisations and in parliament and Regional Assembly. Their role as a political class dominated the political scene during the civilian regime and they collaborated with their like in all spheres of life to wield power and authority in Igbo society.

The Igbo bourgeoisie and their supporters constituted the 'leaders of thought' in organisation set up by the civilian regime of the then Eastern Region. The composition of these bodies was essentially of the middle class and in one of their meetings they desired the purchase of state shares in industries originated by the state with the tax-payers' money, particularly those owned by the state through the investment of money earned by the labour of the rural agricultural peasants who produced the marketable palm products that earned foreign exchange. So that even though the Igbo have been known to live and operate a common culture, incipient class manifestations are beginning to appear based on wealth, education and degree of success within the modern setting.

The Igbo National Unions set up throughout the country were dominated by the Igbo middle class who used them as instruments for consolidating their leadership among the Igbo at home and abroad. The leaders came into conflict with the bourgeoisie of other ethnic groups with whom they were in competition for capitalist acquisition, for control of jobs in the state enterprises, private concerns, professional activities and Universities. The sorrows of the bourgeoisie of these ethnic nationalities were projected as the sorrows of their innocent urban and rural poor, even though in their (bourgeois) attitudes towards the urban tenant, they went out to exploit them through rack rents.

Igbo society was shaken by the tragic civil war which ex-

posed the class contradictions and unveiled the hidden ulcers within the old Federation of Nigeria. Today, the Igbo have learned after the war to settle at home, to invest and trade at home and to regard their homeland as theirs. It does not mean that Igbo migration has ceased altogether, but the general distrust engendered by the civil war makes it, at the moment, difficult for people to settle 'abroad' as was the case before the events that led to the civil war. This does not mean that their pan-Nigeria spirit which led them to settle everywhere in the Federation, to build permanent homes, to contribute to the growth of urban economy in those far areas, and to wield such agitational power in the hey-days of anti-British Colonial struggle have died out entirely. As a people, they fear no competition, are forward-looking and unruffled and would, given a better understanding among the ethnic nationalities of Nigeria, make substantial contributions in the forging of a united, dynamic and prosperous Nigeria.

NOTES:

¹Coleman, J., *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, University of California Press, 1958, p. 77.

²Nzimiro, I., *Pre-War Urbanisation in Eastern Nigeria: A Case Study of Urbanisation in Onitsha*, Paper presented at the International Seminar on Population Problems and Policy in Nigeria, University of Ife, March, 1971.

³Ukwu I. Ukwu., *Markets in Iboland*. University of Ibadan Press, 1969, p. 175.

⁴Onyemelukwe, J. O. C., "Aspects of Staple Foods Trade in Onitsha Market," *Journal of the Geographical Association of Nigeria*; Vol. 13, Dec., 1970, p. 125.

⁵Nzimiro, I., *Family and Kinship in Iboland*; Cologne, 1963, pp. 36-37.

⁶J. C. Mitchel, *Tribalism and the Rural Society*, OUP; 1960, p. 20.

TROY

Pol Ndu

*"If you were not the swillage of pigs and could
read the writings of wiser men,
I would show you the magnificence of the
destruction of a beautiful city."*

Wole Soyinka

Reason insists
Culture protests
Treason rebels
waving pale placards through high portals
of Troy

the miscalculations of mathematics
and computer science
protect concupiscence and conscience
on high horse
trampling the heart that loves
bruising the head that is bowed

Love, Butter, Flies fluttering in the lull
alternating carnage and plunder
rape and hope on the quicksand of power:

Hear alarms
from the halls of Usher
shatter the desecrated silence
in ruin and frustration
and only this coldness retains
the whiteness of bleak nothingness
with weird laments
distilled into silence and mist
over mankind
sprawled
like wet rag
in blood and muck

**IGBO LIFE & ART; IGBO LANGUAGE &
LITERATURE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHIES**

Joseph C. Anafulu

INTRODUCTION

A glance at the available literature shows that until recently Igbo art did not receive the attention it deserved. For instance, the standard work on Igbo ethnography describes Igbo art in two paragraphs, and suggests that the Igbo "have never been noted, like their neighbors of Benin, for artistic achievement in metal work" though it concedes that Awka blacksmiths have been renowned for a long time.¹ In a biographical review of Igbo studies nine years ago, Dr. Simon Ottenberg drew attention to existing literature and made suggestions for future research. No mention was made of art, though Dr. Ottenberg acknowledged that the areas he outlined were not necessarily the only useful ones.² This apparent lack of interest had led to the belief among many that the Igbo-speaking people have a poor artistic heritage.

The situation today is very different, however. The archaeological discoveries at Igbo-Ukwu in Awka Division have proved that some of the earlier assertions about the artistic heritage of the Igbo are false. Professor Thurstan C. Shaw, who began digging at Igbo-Ukwu some twenty years after curious objects were discovered there in 1939, says that "the most remarkable manifestations of this culture are in the form of copper and bronze objects of considerable artistic virtuosity, accompanied by highly decorated pottery and accumulated riches. . . ." He adds that the art of Igbo-Ukwu is "utterly unlike those at either Ife or Benin." Radio-carbon dates show that the culture which produced these magnificent works of art flourished in the 9th century A.D., and that they are therefore of considerable antiquity. Whether Igbo-Ukwu is an isolated case will be determined when the results of excavations now going on elsewhere in Igboland become available.⁴

Meanwhile, scholars have continued to write about contemporary Igbo art⁵ and a detailed study of the Mbari art of the Owerri Igbo is in progress.⁶ Ulli Beier, who has made a comparative study of Igbo and Yoruba art, concludes that one cannot be said to be superior to the other. He suggests that the characteristics of the people are reflected in their art: Igbo art is dramatic and energetic, whereas Yoruba art expresses harmony and repose.⁷

In contrast to the plastic arts, other areas of Igbo studies have received greater attention, though the volume and quality of the material are still far from satisfactory. No history of the Igbo people as a whole exists; there is no full study of Igbo political systems; and even though several papers have been published on various aspects of Igbo religion, there is still no composite study. In 1961, Ottenberg noted an increasing interest among Igbos in recording their own customs and history.⁸ There has been no upsurge in this interest, and the main volume of Igbo studies by *Igbos* remains the work of amateurs with very little scholastic training in their chosen subject areas.⁹ The time has come for Igbo scholars to take a greater interest in the study of their own life and culture.

It has been said that unlike their Yoruba counterparts, contemporary Igbo writers have failed to exploit the rich "results of the theatrical potential in their culture."¹⁰ But perhaps as a result of the recent Nigerian Civil War there is now an awareness of this heritage.¹¹

So far, little interest has been shown in the study of both oral and written Igbo literature. Indeed, most existing bibliographies of Igbo studies have overlooked works in the Igbo language.

The accompanying lists are intended to supplement the following bibliographies which take the subject up to 1960:—

1. Forde & Jones: *The Ibo and Ibibio-speaking peoples of South-eastern Nigeria*. London, 1950. Bibliography: p. 61-65.
2. Simon Ottenberg: "Supplementary bibliography on the Ibo-speaking peoples of South-eastern Nigeria," *African Studies* 14, 2(1955) pp. 63-85.
3. Simon Ottenberg: "The present state of Igbo studies," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, 2(1961) pp. 211-230.

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ARRANGEMENT is alphabetical by author within broad subject groups.

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Ibo Society in the mid 18th century by an Ibo slave.
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II: IGBO LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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¹Daryll Forde & G. I. Jones: *The Ibo and Ibibio-speaking peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*. London, 1950, p. 15.

²Simon Ottenberg: "The present state of Ibo studies," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, 2 (1961), pp. 211-230.

³Thurstan C. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu; an account of archaeological discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*. London, Faber, for the Institute of African Studies, Ibadan, 1970. Vol. 1, p. 39.

⁴The work of Thurstan Shaw is being continued by Donald Hartle who has identified other archaeological sites around Nsukka, Afikpo, and Awka (See his reports in the following lists).

⁵See for example: Frank Starkweather: *Traditional Ibo art, 1966*. University of Michigan Publications Office, 1968.

⁶H. M. Cole: "Mbari is life," *African Arts* 2, 3 (1969), pp. 8-17.

⁷Ulli Beier: "Ibo and Yoruba art: a comparison," *Black Orpheus*, 8 (1960), pp. 46-50.

⁸Ottenberg, op. cit., p. 217.

⁹There are a few notable exceptions: In History, Religion, Literature and Ethnography.

¹⁰Philip Bordinat: "Dramatic potential among the Ibos," Paper read at the Conference of the Modern Language Association of the U.S.A., December 1969.

¹¹A group known as 4-D Productions has recently staged 'The Lost Finger,' an Igbo opera fusing traditional and Western cultures. Performances were held in Enugu, Nsukka, Lagos, Benin, and elsewhere in Nigeria.

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BOOK REVIEW

ON THE THRESHOLD OF IGBO HISTORY:

Review of Thurstan Shaw's *Igbo-Ukwu*

Field archaeology is in more than one sense a rescue operation. It recovers cultural artifacts which otherwise would lie buried in the ground and interprets them with a view to enriching our knowledge of the past of man. Through a number of unexpected but spectacular finds it rescues many despised peoples from historical oblivion and assigns them their proper place in the story of the chequered march of man from "barbarism to civilization."

With regard to the latter, one clear case in point is that of the African continent, in particular of Negro Africa. Until about the 1940's Africa was generally considered as lying in the backwoods of human history. The tag "Dark Continent" which became another name for sub-Saharan Africa meant not just the land whose interior was unknown to Europe for centuries, but also the land whose supposedly bleak history was unrelieved by even a cheering instance of noteworthy human achievement. But with the work of the archaeologists Dr. and Mrs. Leakey and their other colleagues in East Africa, sub-Saharan Africa has come to occupy a prominent place in the pre-history of man. It has now been demonstrated that the first man most likely came into existence in East Africa, that the first technological breakthrough in human history took place there and that African societies far from being static had an inner dynamic of their own which gave them an immense capacity for adjustment to their changing physical and other circumstances. It is now known that for the greater part of human history sub-Saharan Africa occupied the centre of the stage and led the rest of the world. The Garden of Eden has now moved decisively from Damascus where medieval christian mythology placed it to the region lying within an imaginary circle, 250 miles radius and with the Lake Victoria as centre.¹

The second case in point is that of the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria and that is the one that I am concerned with in this paper. Until Professor Thurstan Shaw's excavations at Igbo-Ukwu in 1959-1960, Igholand was tacitly, if not expressly, regarded as the unpromising arid desert of West African cultural history.

One curse of Western colonialism in black Africa was its lack of interest in the finer aspects of its subject people's culture probably because these did not aid the work of administrative consolidation and economic exploitation. Or to put it differently, because to give value and validity to the culture of a subject people would be to equip them with the moral and psychological armour to fight for their rights as men. This, perhaps, explains why all the early finds of ancient cultural artifacts in and around Igboland were not followed up. If anything these finds were converted into a convenient whip with which to beat the Igbo people. Instead of the early finds of 'lithic' tools being taken as likely evidence that the Igbo and their neighbours have lived where we now find them from at least about the Neolithic phase of African prehistory, it was assumed that these finds clearly argued the essential backwardness and primitiveness of these peoples through showing that they perversely clung to the Stone Age until a few decades before the messianic advent of Western colonialism. As a result the antiquity of Igbo settlement of Igboland as of their cultural attainments were brushed aside. In 1926, Dr. P. A. Talbot, the colonial administrator and anthropologist, invented the magic date 1000 A.D. as marking Igbo invasion of this region. Also Dr. M. D. W. Jeffreys, another administrator/anthropologist, decided in 1934, by a process unknown to science, that the Nri theocratic civilization originated around the fifteenth century.²

In 1939 some bronze objects were found at Igbo-Ukwu in the process of digging a cistern. The story of how this came about has been told so often and does not need to be repeated here. What is important for our purpose is that this chance find was not followed up. Writing over twenty years after this event Professor Shaw said:

Ever since the original discovery, Mr. Field and Mr. Kenneth Murray hoped to dig at the site, but the opportunity never presented itself.⁴

This explanation merely goes to emphasize the point already made about the colonial masters' lack of interest in such matters. Over and over again, as the need arose, the colonial government was able to appoint and maintain a team of anthropologists charged with laying bare the inner springs of indigenous political authority so that these could be utilised for the political control of the people.⁶ But this same government was unable to retain an archaeologist to follow up the accidental finds at Igbo-Ukwu.

Eventually the colonial masters did nothing in this regard. In 1956 the Eastern and Western Regions of Nigeria attained internal autonomy. Northern Nigeria followed suit in 1957. By 1958 full independence for the country was round the corner. The nationalist movement had apparently triumphed and the nation's leaders were in a position to determine policy and its implementation. This change in the political and intellectual climate of the black man affected all aspects of national life, though in varying degrees. In any case it affected decisively the archaeology of Igboland which is our main interest here. The result was, in the words of Professor Shaw, that

In 1958 the Director of the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities, Mr. Bernard Fagg, asked me (Professor Shaw) if I would excavate the site (of the 1939 finds) on behalf of the Department. This I did . . . in the dry season of 1959-1960 being resident on the spot from 8 November, 1959, to 15 February, 1960.⁴

The point to note here, and which I consider vital to the case, is that archaeologists had not suddenly come to cost two for a penny, nor had the length of the day or the week or the month or the year been suddenly specially extended to provide the opportunity. The action came to be taken because through the political triumph of nationalism and imminent rise of *negritude* people who cared for every trace of the ancient civilization of the black man had taken over political control.

There was a fortunate sequel to Shaw's excavation of the 1939 site. The rich and rewarding finds which were made and the publicity which the excavation drew led to the revelation that even earlier in 1920, some bronze objects had been dug up in the process of digging mud for making compound walls at a point quite close to the site of the first excavation. As a result Professor Shaw returned to Igbo-Ukwu in 1964 and also fruitfully excavated the site.

Archaeologists had for long come to recognise the part which ethnographic research could play in helping them to interpret their material. The place for such ethnographic background was recognised in connection with the Igbo-Ukwu scheme. To meet the need, a research fellow in ethnography was appointed in 1964 to work among the Nri people in order to provide the necessary subsidiary material needed by Shaw for the analysis of his finds. But the appointee could not take up the job owing to ill-health. Another research fellow in the same field, Mr. M. A. Onwuejeogwu, was appointed for the same purpose but

his work was interrupted by the Nigerian Crisis. The effects which these accidents had on Shaw's interpretation of his material will be dealt with later.

Fortunately, however, Professor Shaw was not at the receiving end in the crisis and was able to carry out the study and interpretation of his finds undisturbed. His final report has now been published in two volumes as *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in eastern Nigeria*. In the first volume Professor Shaw has described with meticulous care and precision the history of the sites, the delicate and complicated negotiations which had to be gone through before the right to excavate could be granted by the Anozie family of Igbo-Ukwu, the process of excavation, and the numerous artifacts which were found. He also grappled with the analysis and interpretation of the finds and a reconstruction of the culture which produced and gave meaning to them. The second volume is devoted to the plates.

On the whole Professor Shaw excavated three sites, all lying within the premises of the Anozie family. The first lay in Isaiah Anozie's compound and has been christened Igbo Isaiah "in accordance with the perversity of archaeologists." Shaw described the finds here (which were laid out in a systematic manner at the same ground level) as "neither a burial [tombstone] . . . nor a pit hurriedly dug to receive hidden treasure," but "a store of . . . regalia and ceremonial objects, carefully packed and preserved, but for some reason abandoned." In another publication, *Lectures on Nigerian Prehistory and Archaeology*, Shaw likened the "small building" in which these objects were laid out, but which eventually collapsed burying its holdings, to "the modern Ibo *Olu*." The second site lay in the compound of Richard Anozie and, following the same formula of archaeological nomenclature, has been called Igbo Richard. This was identified as "the burial chamber of some dignitary." De-scribing this more graphically in the *Lectures*, Professor Shaw said:

The chamber appears to have been lined and floored with wooden planks joined together with iron clamps and nails and on the floor there were traces of matting, as well as other textile in contact with some of the copper objects. . . . By noting carefully the positions of the things and all the objects it was possible to conclude that the person had been buried sitting upon the stool, the arms supported by the two copper brackets and with the fan-holder and the fly-switch in his hands. It had been dressed in a rich array of beads and with a beaded head dress, ornamented by a crown, and with the pectoral plate suspended on its chest; on each wrist there was a beautiful

wristlet some 6 inches long made up of panels of blue beads set in a copper wire framework.¹¹

The third site was in Jonah Anozie's compound and has been called Igbo Jonah. It was identified as "a disposal pit in which pottery, bronzes, animal bones and burnt materials had been intentionally deposited."¹² Shaw also identified the discoveries from the three sites as clearly belonging to the same culture.¹³

But what culture created and gave functional significance to these artifacts? On this Professor Shaw said:

The most remarkable manifestations of this culture are in the form of copper and bronze objects of considerable artistic virtuosity, accompanied by highly decorated pottery and accumulated riches in the form of ivory tusks and thousands of imported beads. Igbo-Ukwu must have been the centre of a social institution which attracted to itself considerable wealth. It is probable that this institution was an office which combined the attributes of priest and king, and which was recognised over a considerable area; the ceremonial vessels and regalia recovered belonged to its functioning.¹⁴

No one who goes through these volumes can fail to be impressed by the scientist in Professor Shaw—his anxiety to live up to the ethics and the latest methodological requirements of his discipline, his reluctance to go beyond what the facts at his disposal would support. To make absolutely sure that no one failed to appreciate the scientific motivation of the work, Shaw stated plainly that:

The main purpose of the present work is to provide a definite description of the archaeological material from Igbo-Ukwu and the evidence available concerning it. Speculation about its interpretation and significance is of secondary importance at this stage since it must be acknowledged that it will only be possible to attempt this satisfactorily after further evidence has come to light.¹⁵

Nonetheless Professor Shaw found it necessary to attempt to fit the Igbo-Ukwu culture into the early history of the Igbo people. To the historian and other non-archaeologists, it is here that the importance of the book lies. After all, the end of concern for an accurate method is to arrive at a valid and meaningful conclusion. Archaeologists may disagree over the particular method of excavation adopted, over the description of the various artifacts and the analysis of the art-styles, but the crucial questions hinge around what the book tells us about the early history of the Igbo people. There is, for instance, the question of whether this resplendent Igbo-Ukwu culture was an Igbo achievement.

Professor Shaw dealt with this question rather diffidently and in two stages. He saw a close parallel between Nri culture described by M. D. W. Jeffreys in an Intelligence Report written in the 1930's and the culture he excavated at Igbo-Ukwu. On this he wrote:

The parallels with what was found in the burial chamber at Igbo Richard are as obvious as the differences are interesting. It is tempting to suppose that there has been a basic continuity of underlying ideas, but a modification of details in the course of centuries. Nor is it difficult to envisage the vessels and regalia found stored at Igbo Isaiah having been used in connection with the coronation exercise of the office of an Eze Nri in the past.¹⁴

But then, went on Shaw,

It would seem . . . that the traditions of the Umundri (Nri) group can be summarised as indicating an intrusive culture from a northerly direction. Of considerable interest is the tradition that the Umundri were responsible for the introduction of agriculture and metal working.¹⁵

In other words the Igbo-Ukwu culture, though found in Igbo-land and though still surviving in a substantial form in a large part of Igboland after more than a thousand years, was probably an alien imposition.

What, one is bound to ask, was the basis for this conclusion? It is in answer to this question that we see how unfortunate it was that the ethnographers associated with the Igbo-Ukwu scheme could not do their work in time to make their findings available to Shaw while he was studying his material. In the absence of ethnographic information collected according to the empirical methods of modern anthropological science, Professor Shaw was painfully forced to rely on the anthropological report which Jeffreys wrote on the Nri about 1934. In order to understand the character of this latter work, it is necessary to give a brief socio-historical analysis of the circumstances in which Jeffreys wrote. In the 1930's when this report on Nri was compiled, the Hamitic hypothesis still enjoyed credence in learned circles as the sociological and historical explanation of much in the past of the black man on this continent. Jeffreys and those of his fellow political officers in Nigeria who showed interest in matters anthropological and historical, subscribed to this hypothesis and freely employed it in the explanation of the culture history of the Nigerian peoples. The Fulani, the Jukun and the Aro who were regarded as culture carriers were assigned

a Hamitic ancestry and regarded as responsible for all the "higher traits" in the culture of all the different Nigerian peoples. The ruling aristocracies of Yoruba land, of Benin and of Igala were all said to derive from this Hamitic caste. Igala was said to owe its culture directly to the Jukun who in turn were said to have come either from the Nile Valley or Yemen."

To Jeffreys Egypt was the main inspirer of the Negro world, and of the Igbo in particular. He traced dual organisation in Igbo society as well as the divine kingship of Nri to Egypt; these Egyptian influences having come in the case of Nri via Idah." These were the hypothetical assumptions with which Jeffreys worked and he reached his highly controversial conclusion that Nri culture was of non-Igbo origin. And it was this conclusion which influenced Shaw. In the light of this analysis Shaw's phrase "northerly direction" could be read as Idah. Two questions arise here. Firstly, what critical criteria did Shaw use in assessing the reliability of Dr. Jeffreys's conclusions? Surely Shaw could not have been unaware of the fact that the theoretical assumptions on which this report was based have been completely discredited by recent research. Secondly, the culture in the "northerly direction" which could have inspired Igbo-Ukwu culture must have flourished earlier than the ninth century, the date of the Igbo-Ukwu finds. Is there as yet any archaeological or other evidence of such a culture? Have we any evidence of the age of Igala culture?

This brings us to another conclusion of Professor Shaw's which a modern historian of the Igbo people cannot but query. One of the questions which perplexed Shaw in the interpretation of his Igbo-Ukwu material is why the store of regalia and ceremonial objects found in Igbo Isaiah "should have been abandoned intact." After conceding that many answers were returnable on this matter he said:

The most likely reason would seem to be that the place was overrun by warfare or slave-raiding and the sacred storehouse was either missed by the invading party or else left alone as being too dangerous to tamper with since it was clearly the repository of other men's gods.²⁰

Or, he continued, it could have been that the people who owned the sacred store-house panicked and fled on hearing of a raid which later did not take place. This view is in consonance with the traditional European idea of life in pre-colonial tribal Africa being determined to a large extent by wars and rumours of wars. This view was very popular in the colonial period when the pre-

sumed need to impose law and order and rescue the black man from a Hobbesian state of nature was one of the legitimising arguments of colonialism. But recent studies have shown that, in Igboland at least, such wars and raids were not as frequent or as devastating as put forth by the apologists of European imperialism. On this matter Mulhall and Jones have correctly observed that:

Although very large numbers of Ibo were exported as slaves from Bonny, Old Calabar and other Oil Rivers ports, these were not obtained in slave-raiding expeditions or wars but were mostly debtors, criminals, those who had committed abominations in their villages and other people whom their groups wished to be rid of. . . . Wars have been unimportant and almost entirely confined to inter-village land fights in which the casualties have been few.²¹

Surely some other explanations than those offered by Shaw are possible or even more likely. A warring band that had successfully defeated and expelled its enemies was not likely to have any respect or regard for the latter's gods which had failed to protect them. There is an Igbo proverb that *Onye ka madu ka chi ya* (one who is stronger than his adversary is stronger than his [adversary's] god). The raiders were less likely to succumb to sentimental or superstitious fears where such a rich store, as Professor Shaw described, was in question. The answer to the question could probably, for instance, lie in the Igbo belief that a community could live in a manner so out of tune with the wishes of its gods that the land they inhabit could decide to "expel" them—this expulsion order being issued in the form of certain flying insects called *Obi-na-ala* escaping from beneath the floors of their houses. A people so afflicted had to leave with only their personal effects and find a new abode where they could adopt new gods or re-establish the old ones without necessarily having to use the very symbols and regalia formerly associated with them. A later generation could, after the original homeland had "cooled down," perform some propitiary sacrifices and then return to it. Or another group of people could come to settle there without knowing why that particular bit of land was abandoned to the bush.

Another problem which Professor Shaw had to deal with in attempting to interpret Igbo-Ukwu culture was that of establishing where the bronze objects he excavated were cast. It is Shaw's view that "in spite of the distinctive character of the Igbo-Ukwu bronze work, it forms part of the West African bronze

and brass casting continuum and was made east of the River Niger and south of the River Benue."²² Again this is one of those questions that could have been answered differently if the intensive ethnographic work projected for the Nri culture complex had been completed before Shaw wrote his book. What is surprising, however, is that on this matter Shaw did not apparently try to follow up a lead provided by Jeffreys as early as 1941. Around that date Mr. G. I. Jones had asserted, on what evidence we do not know, that the Igbo knew nothing about bronze casting. Dr. Jeffreys replied to this satisfactorily as follows:

Mr. G. I. Jones also says that the Igbo know nothing about bronze. I enclose a photograph of two bronze bells that were cast for me at Akwa when I was there in 1930-31. Nos. A and B were cast for me: Nos. B and C I bought. All are now in the Wellcome Museum, London.²³

Professor Shaw was aware of this particular ethnographic information. But in his *Igbo-Ukwu* he dismissed it as: "The allegation that the modern Ibo know nothing about bronze casting has been refuted" by Jeffreys.²⁴ Mr. Onwuejeogwu has resumed his anthropological study of Nri since the end of the four-year crisis in Nigeria. In a personal communication he told the present writer that he has come across information that within the Nri culture complex there was a community of bronze casters and that this art still survives. The bronze casters apparently did not pursue their craft as a profession, but merely undertook it to meet the ritual requirements of their civilization. The answer to the question, therefore, would seem to lie within the Nri culture complex itself.

These observations notwithstanding, Professor Shaw's *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in eastern Nigeria* is bound to revolutionise Igbo historical studies. One very important fact is the establishment, by the scientific process of radio-carbon dating, of the age of the materials excavated at Igbo-Ukwu as lying in the ninth century (c. 850 A.D.). This shows, whether Igbo-Ukwu culture was of alien or Igbo origin, that by that date a large portion of Igboland was already the scene of highly artistic culture centred on the institution of a divine king based, no doubt, on highly developed religious ideas. This culture, as Shaw himself has convincingly shown, derived its sustenance from an economy based partly on agriculture and partly on wide-ranging commercial contacts with the outside world.²⁵ In the context of sordid Nigerian politics which is at

times conducted on the utterly unfortunate and misguided principle that only the so-called anciently cultured should have a place in the sun, *Igbo-Ukwu* is perhaps the best thing that has happened to the Igbo since the imposition of British rule. Only the decadent live on their past. Yet for the Igbo, after the tragedy of the past four years, and in the gloom of the present, it is heartening to hear that there is a rich past on which to build for the future.

But the importance of *Igbo-Ukwu* lies not just in this, but in the wider horizons which it has opened up for Igbo studies. Exploiting and expanding the discoveries which Professor Shaw has made, Mr. Onwuejeogwu is presently engaged in the process of pushing the frontiers of our ignorance of Igbo history further back. Applying a method of dating oral tradition which he has called chrono-ethnogenealogy, and working forwards and backwards from the date 850 A.D. established by the Igbo-Ukwu finds by the carbon-14 method, he has been able to build a number of bold hypotheses on the periodisation of Igbo history and the evolution of Igbo culture. In a note sent to the present writer he said:

The significance of my work is as follows: I have identified ethnologically some of Shaw's and Hartle's excavated objects and collections with objects now existing in Nri culture. I have illustrated that there is a strong continuity in material culture between Nri culture of 850 A.D. as excavated by Shaw and that of contemporary time and it has been shown that Hartle's undated Nri objects, those from Ezira, fill one of the gaps between 850 A.D. and today. In the study of Nri I have evolved a system of dating Nri oral tradition by combining the techniques of ethnography, genealogy and archaeology.

I have named this method of dating chrono-ethnogenealogy. . . . By . . . this technique . . . I have been able to build a chronology for the Ibo culture area.²⁴

It would appear that the Igbo are now on the threshold of their rich but long forgotten history. And it is not intended as an unfair comment to say that they have been brought there not by Professor Thurstan Shaw, but by the carbon-14 method of dating. After the excavation in 1959-60 the experts in West African archaeology and art-history were astounded by the richness and artistic excellence of the finds. Mr. Field dismissed the finds as probably "not more than a hundred years old."²⁵ Another authority, this time an art-historian, argued that because the bronze objects showed superior craftsmanship to the hitherto more famed bronzes of Ife and Benin, they must be of

a later date, coming at the end of the development of the West African bronze and brass art. In his first report on the finds in 1960, Professor Shaw piped an identical note, saying:

A good deal of uncertainty at present remains with regard to the date to be assigned to these finds; more light may be thrown on this when all the evidence has been examined, but it is probably too recent for carbon-14 to be much help. Perhaps the date lies somewhere in the seventeenth century.²⁸

This clearly demonstrates one of the serious limitations of arguing from the known to the unknown. If these finds had been made before the perfection of the method of dating archaeological material by the carbon-14 method, these sophisticated guesses of the experts would have held and the makers of the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes, no matter who they were, would have been dismissed in history books as later day imitators of Ife and Benin. And what would have been worse, the conclusions which Mr. Onwuejogwu is arriving at by starting from 850 A.D. would have been out of the question. And in any case we would not have been discussing Igbo-Ukwu today. Nor would the cultural history of West Africa have been any the clearer.

But as it is because of carbon-14 and the date returned, the Igbo are already entering the history books as other than just the supreme example of a politically fragmented people and of avid hankerers after modernisation and western ways. One example of the way in which the age established for Igbo-Ukwu culture has improved the image of the Igbo in history books will suffice to prove this point. In 1955 Dr. J. D. Fage wrote his *Introduction to the History of West Africa*, a book which treated West African history from the earliest times to the rise of nationalist politics. In that book Dr. Fage was unable to find a historical excuse to mention the Igbo, not even in connection with King Jaja of Opobo whom he was satisfied to describe as of slave origin and not as an Igbo. Yet the tribe is inserted, though inaccurately, in the map on p. xiv as one of the principal peoples of West Africa. But in the story of the making of West African civilization the Igbo were "found" to have contributed nothing and so were not mentioned, not even in the edition of 1961. Yet even small clans of other tribes were mentioned. In 1969 Professor Fage revised his book calling it a *History of West Africa*. By then the Igbo-Ukwu excavations had been widely advertised and scientifically dated. In this edition not only are the Igbo correctly located in the

maps (e.g., see map facing p. 1), but one of the many entries about them reads.—

... the Ibo were second to none in fields like the development of agriculture, technology and art (which last have been most dramatically demonstrated by the recent discovery at Igbo-Ukwu of brass work fully as fine as that of the Yoruba, though in a quite different tradition).²⁸

Another great contribution of Professor Shaw's work at Igbo-Ukwu is that it has helped to focus attention on the key position which the Nri culture complex occupies in the study of early Igbo history, a job which Major A. G. Leonard had sought to accomplish in his book *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*. According to Major Leonard who made one of the earliest efforts, amongst our erstwhile European masters, to study the traditions of origins of many Igbo clans, most of the Isuana Igbo claimed descent from Nri or Nshi. Considering these claims of descent from Nri, the reverence in which the Nri were held throughout Igboland, the fact that they were widely known as "king-makers" and enjoyed the sole right of removing ritual pollution in Igboland, Leonard came to the view that:

It is in certain measure evident that some were in the locality of Isuama, in which the purest Ibo is said to be spoken, is to be found the heart of the Ibo nationality; consequently it is quite reasonable to look among its people for the original fountain-head from which all the other clans have sprung.²⁹

The researches of Mr. Onwuejogwu are also revealing that the detailed archaeological, ethnographic, linguistic and historical study of the Nri culture complex may light up the remote past of the Igbo. There is an Igbo belief that all the souls of their dead pass through Nri in their journey to the land of the blessed. Recording this tradition in 1906 Major Leonard wrote:

The street of the Nri family is the street of the gods, through which all who die in other parts of Iboland pass to the Land of Spirits.³⁰

One may now add that it is probably through the corridors of Nri history that the Igbo will come to occupy their proper place in the majestic story of the rise of Negro civilization.

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NOTES:

¹D. L. Wiedner: *A History of Africa South of the Sahara* (Vintage Books, 1962), p. 13.

²Intelligence Report No. EP.8766.

See Also T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of archaeological discoveries in eastern Nigeria* (Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 271.

³T. Shaw: "Excavations at Igbo-Ukwu. Eastern Nigeria: An Interim Report" *Man* No. 210, Nov. 1960.

T. Shaw (ed.), *Lectures on Nigerian Prehistory And Archaeology* (Ibadan, 1969) hereinafter called *Lectures*.

T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of archaeological discoveries in eastern Nigeria* hereinafter *Igbo-Ukwu* (Faber & Faber, 1970).

⁴T. Shaw: "Excavations at Igbo-Ukwu etc." in *Man* No. 210, Nov. 1960, p. 162.

⁵Among the anthropologists were Northcote Thomas, H. F. Mathews, P. A. Talbot, C. K. Meek and M. D. W. Jeffreys. Political Officers were also encouraged to combine with their routine assignments, anthropological inquiries. In addition to these, other "unofficial" anthropologists were given assistance and encouraged to study the Igbo. The most prominent among these were Miss M. M. Green and Mrs. Sylvia Leith-Ross.

⁶T. Shaw: "Excavation at Igbo-Ukwu etc." in *Man* No. 210, Nov. 1960, p. 162.

⁷The phrase is from Oliver and Fage: *A Short History of Africa* (Penguin, 1969), p. 16.

⁸T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu* p. 263.

⁹T. Shaw (ed.) *Lectures* p. 40.

¹⁰T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu* p. 39.

¹¹T. Shaw (ed.) *Lectures* pp. 41-42.

¹²T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu* p. 39.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 266-267.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹⁸For an extended statement of this hypothesis, see Seligman: *The Races of Africa* (Oxford, 3rd Edition 1957). For applications of it to the Nigerian scene, see Temple: *Notes on Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria* (Cape Town, 1919).

See as well the following memos by H. R. Palmer, Lieutenant Governor of Northern Provinces (of Nigeria)—the file Conf. No. 80/1920 (Kaduna Archives) see minute dated 28.9.21; Memo. on the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria attached to 3014/1921/90 of 19.6.28 in the file No. 15911 vol. I (Kaduna Archives).

¹⁹M. D. W. Jeffreys: "The Umundri Tradition of Origin" *African Studies* vol. 15, No. 3, 1956.

M. D. W. Jeffreys: "Ichi scarification among the Ibo" in *Man*, 48, June 1948, p. 89.

M. D. W. Jeffreys: "The Winged Solar Disk or Ibo Ichi Scarification" *Africa* vol. 21, No. 2, 1951, pp. 93-111.

M. D. W. Jeffreys: "Dual Organisation in Africa," *African Studies*, Nos. 2 & 3, Vol. 5.

²⁰T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu* p. 264.

²¹G. I. Jones and H. Mulhall: "An Examination of the physical Type of Certain Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria" in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 79, 1949, p. 11.

See also Talbot and Mulhall: *The Physical Anthropology of Southern Nigeria* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 5.

²²T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu*, p. 271.

²³M. D. W. Jeffreys: "The Oweri Mask" in *The Nigerian Field*, vol. 10, 1941, p. 142.

²⁴T. Shaw: *Igbo-Ukwu*, p. 272.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 268-285.

²⁶Personal communication. Some of the results of Mr. Onwuejiegwu's researches at Nri, are in the process of going to press.

²⁷T. Shaw: "Excavations at Igbo-Ukwu etc." in *Man* No. 210 of Nov. 1960, p. 161.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 164.

²⁹J. D. Fage: *A History of West Africa* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 44.

³⁰A. G. Leonard: *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes* (Frank Cass Reprints, 1968), p. 35.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 37.

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