

**THEATRE OF LIFE: RITUALS, TRANSITION AND PROGRESSION
AMONG THE IGBO**

by

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Thesis Abstract

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The Igbo are perpetual celebrants of life. Their need to celebrate life means that the Igbo will ceaselessly try to make the best of life, because they believe that although life may be full of uncertainties, such uncertainties are only temporary. So, the Igbo will celebrate whatever fortune brings in the knowledge that tomorrow will definitely be different. It is this insight into the transitory nature of things that makes the Igbo celebrate life, aware that time has the ability to obliterate uncelebrated memories.

In the researcher's opinion, this work has succeeded in establishing the fact that the study and understanding of rituals do not have to be a schematic nightmare neither do they have to prove that they belong to either the dramatic or theatrical genres - rituals are just what they are - performance. Rituals reflect life in action, and this study has demonstrated that these rituals can be better understood by breaking them down into various categories and clusters (families). From such sub-division will, hopefully, emerge specific attributes which can enable us to determine the cluster each ritual belongs to. Furthermore, the analyses of rituals, ritual agents and performance styles bring out the real flavour of Igbo performance. These make it evident that Igbo performance is vibrant, symbolic and full of life, and that conversely, Igbo life is equally vibrant, symbolic and full of theatre and rituals that need to be constantly performed. It is hoped that Igbo theatre practitioners and users (playwrights, directors, producers and actors) would find the ritual categorisation and explanation of ritual symbols useful in enabling their work to be as meaningful as possible.

This study developed and used the concept of Triangle of Life (ToL) to facilitate the emergence of the real nature of Igbo theatre because it enabled the classification of Igbo rituals into clusters of either passive, controlled active or active. These adjectives as used here, refer to the extent of the performer's involvement in the ritual action. However, while for the performer(s) a ritual can either be passive, controlled active or active, it is always active for the participatory spectator- audience or participant.

The ToL is an equilateral triangle (three equal sides marked as A-B, B-C and C-A axes), and from plotting the rituals along the axes of the triangle, it becomes evident that Igbo theatre is in two main phases - the theatre of the living, and that of the dead - this means that while at any time any of the phases is dominant, it still has undertones of the other. For example, the rituals on the A-B and B-C axes belong to the theatre of the living, and these are performed in readiness for life after death in the ancestral realm. However, the C-A axis is made up of rituals in which the dead are made to rest and empowered to re-incarnate and re-appear at point A. This axis is equally important to the living because in empowering their dead, the living ventilate painful emotions through mourning and in so doing, they are healed not only of the departure of the deceased, but also of the most of life's pent up pains. This is a demonstration that the theatre of the living and the dead are both two sides of the same coin - none is more important than the other. In Igbo theatre, therefore, we come in direct contact with the core of Igbo dualism in which the human being operates as a spirit, and vice versa. A full appreciation of this form of theatre will depend primarily on how willing one is to remain open to the way the Igbo see, interpret and live their lives. In view of this, I shall throughout this work, continually strive to achieve the following:

- (a) to use the study of Igbo ritual performance to add to the picture of Igbo life

(hence, Igbo theatre) which archaeology, oral tradition and observation from the Europeans gave little or no insight into,

- (b) to use Igbo rituals as a practical framework for understanding aspects of Igbo performance
- (c) by the end of this work to be able to have contributed a model that can be applied to the study of most ritual performances, and in doing so, to provide a cross-cultural perspective in ritual performance, theory and practice.

Chapter 1 traces the origin of the Igbo, their entire belief system and encounter with, and progression through Christianity and colonialism. It is important that this chapter be read as dispassionately as possible, for it is only in this manner that the full effect of dualism on Igbo performance can become clearer. Chapter 2 examines some existing theoretical perspectives in relationship to ritual practices in Igboland. Chapter 3 and 4 contain the main thrust of the work because they apply the information gathered during the fieldwork to enable a better understanding of the performative structure and process of Igbo rituals.

A lot of Igbo words have been unavoidably used in order that the full flavour and essence of the work is savoured. Most of these words have been explained.

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This work started with the realisation that the Igbo perform life through rituals. These rituals exist to enable them to socialise and inculcate in their children relevant Igbo values. The structure of the performance that develops reveals a unique form of Igbo theatre and highlights how through rituals, they make life as understandable and as memorable as possible for their people.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other university award.

This study was self-financed except for an Israeli government grant which paid for my accommodation during my one week stay in Tel-Aviv while attending the IFTR/FITR Conference in 1996.

Two relevant conferences were attended at which work presented; external institutions were visited for consultation purposes and several papers prepared for publication.

Other forms of creative work: Poetry

Presentation and Conferences attended: (1995) ALA Conference in Ohio
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Signed M. B. Katoe
Date 27 March 1998

CHAPTER 1

IGBO LIFE AND THEOSOPHY - A BACKGROUND TO AN ACTIVE PERFORMANCE

Life among the Igbo is a gift from Chukwu-Okike/Chukwu (God-the-Creator). So, no matter how uneventful life may turn out, it is celebrated with elaborate rituals in thanksgiving and to keep the Igbo in favour with Chukwu. This statement sums up the Igbo view of life which begins at the time of conception. From the time a woman conceives (and all through the entire gestation period) until about six months post-delivery, she is regarded as sacred because she is carrying and nurturing a new life. Her happiness and well-being are the primary responsibility of her entire family and community who take great care to ensure that her physical and spiritual health are sustained. She is shielded from all fearful and ugly sights, for example, she is discouraged from viewing corpses or grotesque masquerades because the Igbo believe that foetuses are impressionable, and as such have the ability while in the formation stages to copy the attributes of things and people that the mother sees. As such, both expectant mother and unborn baby are actively protected from harm from some diabolical forces. The expectant mother's diet is carefully chosen and she is closely monitored by her two mothers (her own and her mother-in-law), to ensure that she does not eat anything that may later on have an adverse effect on the baby. For instance, pregnant women are advised against eating snails as they are believed to produce excessive salivation that will make the baby drool. Furthermore, she must be spoken to in the kindest of manners so that she may not become upset. In fact, she is exempt from any chores that she does not wish to engage in. Age commands great respect among the Igbo and while a woman is pregnant, she is accorded the same respect and love only reserved for the elderly. Hence a pregnant woman is fondly referred to as *agadi nwanyi* (old woman) - a summation of the amount of love,

care and respect her state confers on her.

The gestation period is also a time for active consultation with various deities, oracles and ancestral spirits to enlist their protection for the expectant mother. All these activities are geared towards ensuring the safe delivery of the infant, and are deeply rooted in the Igbo belief that the precious gift of life from Chukwu can be tampered with or impacted upon by evil people and spirits. As such, it needs to be protected from those evil forces that may prove inimical to human progress as planned by God. Therefore, through divination, the Igbo get to know who or what wields these forces and proceed to neutralise, placate and/or fortify the expectant mother against them. Furthermore, they believe that the birth of a child is Chukwu's prerogative - and that it is not dependent on what material attributes couples may possess. For example, it is a common belief that no matter how intelligent, powerful, rich, beautiful or brave couples may be, they cannot influence Chukwu into giving them children, nor can they influence his decision about the sex of their children. So the Igbo would use names given at birth as a testimonial to affirm (a) the pre-eminence of children. for instance, *Ginikanwa* (what gift is greater than a child?), *Ifeyinwa* (nothing compares to a child), *Maduka* (a person is more important than riches) and (b) to acknowledge God as the giver of life, and names like *Chinwendu* (God owns all life), *Chinenyenwa* (God gives a child), *Chinyelum* (God has given [this child] to me) demonstrate this fact. Moreover, the Igbo are patrilineal and as such, male children ensure continuity and couples who seek a particular sex may or may not have their wishes fulfilled. In either case, they would still use names to express either gratitude or submission to the will of Chukwu. Such names as *Chukvuebuka* (God is great) will normally be given to express gratitude at the birth of a male child while others like *Amaogechukwu* (who knows God's timing) or *Kosisochukwu* (the way it pleases God) express resignation to the will of the Creator.

Having said that, every child is a unique blessing and is treated as such. This is why the Igbo would say that, "*ofu nne n' amu, mana ofu chi ada eke*" (children are born of the same mother but created by different gods [destinies]). So among the Igbo, each child's life is a unique opportunity for celebrating Chukwu's benevolence, and in honour of the individual's material existence from birth to death. The term "material existence" is used because the Igbo believe that at any given time the soul exists on two planes - *muo na mmadu* (the spiritual and the human). The material plane covers an individual's life on earth, and even while on this plane, the Igbo realise the extensive interplay between the material and the spiritual, hence the detailed attention paid to maintaining the delicate balance between the more visible material aspect of their being and the less visible, but subliminal spirit plane.

The Igbo, therefore, go through life knowing that life is not an end in itself, but a passage to the higher ancestral realm. This must not be seen as a pessimistic view, but a philosophical and optimistic one born out of the belief that at death, the spirit plane predominates and becomes empowered depending on how individuals (while on the material plane) made use of the attributes Chukwu endowed them with at birth (see Chapter 3). Hence, when at death the spirit essence becomes liberated, it embarks on a perilous journey to the prestigious land of the revered ancestors. However, this journey is not a smooth passage because the Igbo believe that along the path there are forces inimical to the progress of the departed (or his/her family) that will fight to detract the spirit from ascension. Thus, Igbo separation and ascension rituals are specifically formulated to enable the departed individual to single-mindedly achieve two objectives. First, to sever all forms of earthly attachment that may hold the spirit earth-bound. And second, to constantly remind the departed of their expected ascension and, to symbolically fortify them against harmful forces (see Chapters 3 & 4). For example, the Igbo bury their dead ensuring that the corpse

faces *owa/owuwa anyanwu* or the rising sun (the East) so as to ensure that the spirit sees and remembers to rise with the rising sun - if not, the departed may be made to 'oversleep' by its enemies, and thus will forget to embark on that important journey to the ancestral land. The consequence of missing the prompt from the rising sun to embark on this ultimate journey is that the spirit will not be able to reincarnate. To the Igbo, the failure to re-incarnate is a disaster.

The concept of reincarnation within the Igbo world view deals with the possibility or/and ability of the spirits of men and women who had led fulfilling lives while here on earth, to return after death to be born again. These souls return with a mission and they have the freedom to either re-incarnate in their original families or in different families and places. It is the responsibility of the family to whom the child is born to find out what the child's mission is through *Igba agu* - a special kind of divination ritual performed by the *afa* priest, during which the *afa* (oracle) informs the family of the identity and mission of the re-incarnated soul are (see also Chapters 3 & 4). This insight gained from *afa* forms the blueprint for the new individual's earthly existence.

Hence for the Igbo, the material and the spirit planes are two sides of one existence that unite to form one great performance on which there is an interplay of both the seen and unseen forces surrounding and impacting on human performances. These performances involve different people and stages but with a common theme - the celebration of the great gift of life. The importance of celebrating life for the Igbo demonstrates that nothing is too great to be employed in these celebrations as individuals, their family and friends use their various talents - songs, music, dance, mimes, arts and craft (painting, sculpture, woodwork) etc in thanksgiving to Chukwu. This is what Igbo rituals are about, and through these performances people answer

their various needs to belong to a group, affirm themselves as part of a bigger universe, distinguish themselves using the gifts that Chukwu bestowed on them at birth; and finally use these gifts as vehicles to enable them to ascend to the ancestral realm when their work here on earth is concluded. This is the central idea underpinning Igbo rituals - a unique form of performance that enables individuals to move from the human to a more sublime spiritual realm.

Having established the background to the different levels of existence, the remaining part of this chapter lays the geo-historical, ethno-philosophical, religious, socio-economic and political framework for the study of Igbo ritual performances. This holistic approach has been chosen to enable an understanding and appreciation of the Igbo, their way of life and the logic that underpins their interactions and relationships with the universe. It is a method of inquiry that offers a better insight into Igbo theatre - a theatre embedded in rituals.

Geography and history of the Igbo

Igbo people are one of the rain forest agrarian peoples who inhabit the South Eastern part of Nigeria, which is an area within the rain forest belt. The homeland of the Igbo is between the Niger and Cross Rivers, while some also live west of the River Niger. They, like a lot of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, have no naturally defined boundaries. To the northern fringes, they merge with the Igala, Idoma and Tiv; to the west, with the Ishan and Urhobo; to the south east, the Arochukwu Igbo merge with their Ibibio neighbours; and finally to the south with the Ijaw and Ogoni (see appendix A). Traditionally, the Igbo were a non-migratory people who nevertheless had some degree of internal geographical mobility born out of their need to create an ecological and demographical balance. For instance, people could move away from

the centre into more remote farm lands if their immediate surrounding became overpopulated to the point that the availability of adequate arable land for their increasing family size became a problem. At other times, movement could result from the agricultural practice of crop rotation - where extensive pieces of farmland may be left to lie fallow to enable the rejuvenation of natural resources that may have been depleted due to years of farming. Where this happened, people would also relocate to be nearer to distant farmlands.

From the earliest times, their main cash crop in Igboland was the yam seedling cultivated by the men. Women grew (and still grow) cocoyam and vegetables, and they enjoyed (and still enjoy) a great deal of economic independence because apart from farming, they were (and still are) involved in petty trading.

The statement that the Igbo are non-migratory in no way suggests that their geographical boundaries were fixed. In actual fact, the Igbo were flexible with their geographical boundaries, as well as the ease and hospitality with which they adopted new cultural boundaries. As a result of this flexibility, people in the Igbo society have over time merged, intermarried and exchanged aspects of their culture with those of their non-Igbo neighbours. Sometimes, due to this cultural mix, the Igbo would import and worship the deities of their non-Igbo neighbours, that is, those gods that were not traditionally theirs. Furthermore, it is still common in most border towns like Ogwurugwu and Igala (to the north) and Agbor (to the west), to find people with linguistic traits that are neither Igbo nor their neighbour's - a reflection of their years of harmonious co-existence.

The history of the Igbo can be divided into three major phases - the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Beyond written history, the beginning of the

Igbo, like that of a lot of other West African peoples, is shrouded in uncertainty, and as such, no one is sure how long they have been in their present homeland. Isichei (1973) is of the opinion that linguistic evidence suggests that the Igbo and their ancestors have lived there for a long time:

Available evidence suggest that the Ibo (sic) and their forbears have lived very much in their present homes from the dawn of human history. The fact that they and their neighbours speak very different but related languages points to this conclusion (19)

Before this time, Armstrong (1962) had attempted using Igbo linguistic structure to trace the origin of the people. He argued that the Igbo language has some primary root words with the rest of the Lower Niger language group collectively known as the *Kwa* language group. But Onwuejeogwu (1987), a trained and experienced ethnographer and anthropologist, cautions against the use of such linguistic parameters to define the borders of the Igbo and the time of their origin in South-East Nigeria. According to him, the use of such argument may seem

straightforward, easy and convincing while indeed it is the most complex and unconvincing evidence to handle, especially by the untrained (9).

His caution is based on two reasons. First, is that the *Kwa* linguistic group covers an estimated three hundred and twenty kilometres extending from the Guinea Coast into Liberia, then to Cross River State of Nigeria. Onwuejeogwu argues that the vastness of the area covered has, so far made it impossible for linguists to carry out an all-inclusive study of languages within this geographical expanse. Secondly, that "linguists are still debating what criteria are useful for identifying the Lower-Niger languages" (9) suggesting a lack of agreement in the use of such methodology.

Although attention needs to be paid to this note of caution, it is also worth acknowledging, that there really are still some similarities in some Igbo and Urhobo

words. For example, *obala/obara* (blood), *ogo/ogo* (in-law), *ndoo/doo* (I am sorry/well done), *ugegbe/ujegbe* (mirror) to mention a few. Yet, Urhoboland is approximately fifty miles from Agbor, the last Igbo border town to the west of the River Niger. The researcher is, therefore, sympathetic towards Armstrong's view, and hopes that before long linguists will have carried out more inclusive studies that will qualify the use of linguistic traits in deciding the origin of ethnic groups such as the Igbo.

It is important to note that there are dialectical variations to the Igbo language from one geographical location to the other. Hence, a word like *ana* (earth) is variously called *ani*, *ala* or *ali*, depending on which part of Igboland it is used in. Almost all Igbo words follow this dialectical pattern and most Igbo words in this work will usually reflect such variations. Some exceptions to this dialectic variation are three out of the four market days (*Eke*, *Oye (Orie)*, *Afo*, *Nkwo*) which are called the same all over Igboland, the yam (*ji*) and the kolanut *oji*. These words that defy geographical boundaries share common symbolism and use in Igbo social and religious rituals and differ only slightly in the level of importance associated with them in different places. Their symbolism and use suggest a common origin and a closer relationship among the Igbo. Apart from their language, much of what is known about the Igbo come from three main sources, namely:

- a) myth and oral tradition
- b) archaeology
- c) observation by the Europeans

Myth and oral tradition

Until the early part of the 20th Century, the Igbo society was a non-literate one in which oral tradition was the principal form of telling and re-telling their historical past. The little that was known about people in traditional Igbo society, before the accidental discovery of some archaeological sites, was from their myths of origin (Appendix B). According to the version of the myth collected by Onwuejeogwu (1987), *Chukwu* or *Chi Ukwu* (the big Chi) the Creator sent Eri (his messenger) down from the sky. On arrival, Eri sailed down the Anambra River, where he met "an autochthonous group who had no living memory of their origin" (7). Onwuejeogwu describes the term autochthony as "a claim of origin from the spot of present habitation by maximal lineage generally named *Umudiani* (children of the earth" (7)

Eri, became the first king of *Aguleri* and maintained a cordial relationship with *Chukwu*, and offered sacrifices each time *Chukwu* demanded him to do so (at some point he sacrificed his first son and daughter) In return for his obedience, *Chukwu* gave him the cash crops (yam and cocoyam), numerous wives and many more children besides the ones he had already offered in different sacrifices. One of his children *Nri* became the founder of *Nri* - which is still the spiritual centre of the Igbo. He also established the *Ozo* title (see chapter 4) and the four Igbo traditional market days. In effect, he established the Igbo calendar. Below is an extract from the myth:

Nri migrated to the forest south
Through *Amanuke* he sojourned,
To found *Enugwu-Ukwu* and settle at *Agukwu*
He took the *Nri* title and became *Nri Ifikuanim*
He established the *Ozo* title
And *Chukwu* was delighted
He sent four *Alusi* to *Eze Nri* (Onwuejeogwu:1)

Simply stated, an analysis of this myth of creation offers a better understanding of the importance of numerology and symbolism among Igbo people. For example during different rituals, the number of kolanuts presented depend on the deity being venerated, and what is acceptable to it. Furthermore, this myth establishes the origin and the primary place of the yam seedling which is used during all types of ritual negotiations either as a form of payment, or eaten as ritual meals. For now, it suffices to note that this myth establishes the origin of an important aspect of Igbo life - the correlation between submission to the will of *Chukwu-Okike* and increased human resources.

Evidence from oral tradition is the second factor to be considered in establishing Igbo origins. The researcher acknowledges that in this age of empiricism, the validity of admitting oral tradition in works such as this may be questioned. However, this attitude will not be unique to this work because Finnegan (1976) notes:

The concept of an *oral* literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which, like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition. In the popular view it seems to convey on the one hand the idea of mystery, on the other that of crude and artistically undeveloped formulation (x).

Having said that, the researcher wishes to argue that oral tradition can be admitted in evidence because it is an art form extensively used by non-literate societies to hand down their history, by word of mouth, from one generation to another. In pre-western Igbo society, oral tradition was an authentic mode of learning through which continuity was ensured. Children were encouraged from an early stage (through participation in repeated forms of libation and rituals), to learn the importance of the correct rendition of their ancestry, and they spent years of apprenticeship under renowned bards. Furthermore, oral tradition is a research methodology that is accepted in the fields of history, sociology and anthropology as an authentic source of information.

Turner (1977) seems to support the validity of oral tradition when in his description of Celtic bardic utterances when he notes that:

such a device... is all the more necessary in cultures without writing, where the whole cultural deposit has to be transmitted either through speech or by repeated observation of standardized behavioural patterns and artifacts. And I am beginning to wonder whether it is not the structuring of functionless elements in myths and ritual patterns which preserves such elements through centuries until they find a socio-economic milieu in which they may become functional again (241).

Thus, oral tradition should be accepted as a valid source of information because through it people re-told the myth of their existence and actualised their history.

Eliade (1956) notes that the process of re-telling their origin made people feel more a part of a bigger universe:

... for religious man of primitive society, myths constitute his sacred history, he must not forget them, by actualising the myths, he approaches his gods and participates in sanctity (106).

Archaeology

Archaeological evidence is the third source of information to be considered.

Onwuejeogwu (1987) identified four main excavation sites namely *Ugwuele*, *Afikpo*, *Nsukka* and *Igbo-Ukwu* (5), and he is of the opinion that objects excavated from these sites suggest that Igbo people have been in their present home for more than 4000 years - from the Stone Ages (dating from about 20,000 BC to 5000 BC - evidence from the *Ugwuele* stone artifacts), through the Neolithic Age (5000 BC - 200 BC - evidence from the *Nsukka* and *Afikpo* pottery artifacts) to the Metal Age (400 BC - AD 1500: *Igbo-Ukwu* metal artifacts). Most of the artifacts excavated were made from bronze and copper which suggest that people in traditional Igbo society were mostly bronze and copper smiths - apparently, their bronze and copper art work withstood the test of time better than their wood carvings.

Excavations from Nsukka (to the north) and Afikpo (to the south east) indicate that Neolithic men lived there as early as 3000 BC, making stone axes and pottery - suggesting that they were mainly hunters. So far, only a few of these archaeological sites have been excavated, but their results have been very helpful in enabling a better understanding of pre-colonial Igbo life. Furthermore, Isichei (1973:21-22) informs us that results from radio-active tests on some excavated materials dated back to the Nok civilization, suggesting that knowledge of bronze and copper smithing probably reached present day Nigeria and environs by 300 BC or earlier. A combination of archaeological and historical facts suggest that Igbo people grew gradually from hunting and gathering to horticulture, agriculture, and finally, to market and exchange economy.

However, written history of the Igbo shows they have fought numerous wars, been invaded and invaded others, assimilated and acculturised other cultures. Therefore, the Igbo evolution would be incomplete without mentioning the arrival of the foreigners from western Europe against whom Igbo people rebelled and organised movements to resist their occupation. In spite of these resistance movements and wars, the foreigners finally subdued and amalgamated them into one conglomerate, Nigeria. Citing Ogali A Ogali, Isichei (1977) notes that British troops sometimes used considerable force to quell some of this organised resistance:

... the colonial conquest of Igboland was accomplished at great cost, both in human lives and in property. The many deaths, the looted farms and livestock, the houses razed, the trees cut down, are adequately documented even in British records, and are remembered with poignant emphasis in the traditions of the Igbo community concerned. The people of Ameka in Item still annually observe the day, in 1916, of conflict with the British - 'the blackest time of Item when one of the four principal villages was turned into a desert (137)

The legacy of the Igbo before and after they became part of Nigeria has been one long struggle against different forms of oppression, beginning with slavery which Onwuejeogwu (1987) refers to as "the trans-atlantic slave trade [that] shattered them

[the Igbo] to shreds" (69)). This was soon followed by colonialism and Christianity, and finally between 1967-70, a civil war in quest of an independent homeland - *Biafra*.

Having attempted to establish how far back the Igbo have lived in the area now known as Igboland, this research will cover those Igbo people who remained in their ancestral homeland, and neither migrated nor got carried away into slavery. Slavery depleted the population of Igboland because the slave markets in South Eastern Nigeria were mainly supplied from the Igbo hinterland. This meant that a lot of the Igbo were captured, sold into slavery, and finally taken to the New World. Therefore, in discussing the Igbo, it is with respect that we remember those to whom Isichei (1973) refers to as:

the Ibos (sic) of the diaspora, the thousands of men and women who went as involuntary emigrants to the new world in the era of the slave trade (11)

Isichei also notes that descendants of some of these ex-slaves from Igboland can be found in Sierra Leone and parts of the Caribbean, while Cooley (1972) informs that they are also in different parts of Nigeria. Both Isichei and Cooley agree that some have retained a strong sense of their Igbo identity and still bear Igbo names. Cooley cites Archdeacon D.C Crowther's 1880 encounter with a 14 year old former slave at the creek town of Okirika:

My name is M'beke (Mgbeke), me papa's name is Okori - and my mother's M'leafo (Mgbafor), all of us belong to Omoji (Umuoji). There was war at Omoji, and "me papa" sent us little children to Onitsha for safety. I stayed more than two years there with a convert woman called Awansia-de... After the war was over at Omoji, we were taken home. One day four of us went to cut wood in the farm, two men met us in the bush and said that "me papa" owed him, and caught me, the rest of the girls ran away. I was taken to Mkpo-ho (Mkpo), then sold to Umutshuku, then to Bende, then to Oloko, then to Akwete and Igoni (Ogoni) and was lastly bought by Chief George of Okirika... (1)

The researcher is of the opinion that these ex-slaves' ability to maintain such a strong sense of their original identity was probably because they had undergone specific rituals while still in Igboland. This is because at the time in question, ethnic identification through rituals would have been the only legacy a lot of slaves left their motherland with. There is no doubt that collective and individual identity can be preserved through rituals even in the face of the inhumanity which slaves were subjected to. This goes to demonstrate the efficacy and resilience of ritualised performances, a fact which Turner (1977) notes in his discussion about the processes and symbols in myth and ritual:

These symbols, visual and auditory, operate culturally as mnemonics, or as communications engineers would no doubt have it, as "storage bins" of information, not about pragmatic techniques, but about cosmologies, values and cultural axioms whereby a society's deep knowledge is transmitted from one generation to another (241).

Observation from the Europeans:

This is the third source of information regarding traditional Igbo society. Basden (1966) notes that:

The IBO NATION ranks as one of the largest in the whole of Africa.... Their readiness to travel and tenacity of purpose, especially when seeking employment, have carried many of them far beyond their native environment. When abroad, they maintain close contact, cemented and sustained by a strong tribal bond of union (xi)

This was the scene in colonial Igboland which Basden met on his arrival, and where he remained as a District Officer for the next thirty five years. Pre-colonial Igbo society was based on a set of commonly accepted beliefs and values, deeply rooted in Igbo theology and philosophy - a "humanistic" philosophy based on "linking the past, present, and future" (Onwuejeogwu:64). These three levels co-exist together in the same time and space.

Furthermore, the myth of Igbo origin throws some light on how the Igbo universe was organised. From this account, *Chukwu* (the great *Chi* or *Chukwu Okike*) sent his messengers which were other lesser *chi* (gods and deities). The Igbo use these deities as emissaries to channel their communication to *Chukwu*. This is because at some point in this myth, *Chukwu* seemed to have decided to distance himself from direct contact with human beings by the introduction of the *alusi* - *Eke, Oye, Afo and Nkwo*. Their entrance into the original relationship between *Chukwu* and *Eri* marks the beginning of a new level of interaction between the Igbo and their God - with the deities as intercessors.

In the myth, four strangers appeared (apparently they were deities sent by *Chukwu* to test *Eze Nri's* wisdom), and they would not disclose their names. *Eze Nri* patiently watched these deities, then he hatched a plan to put rats in their baskets (possibly in the hope that creating some fear in them would make them speak more to each other, while he in turn hoped to gain some information about these strangers). He then waited patiently for his nameless visitors' reaction, and on seeing the rats, they started calling out to each other (by their respective names) to announce that they had found rats in their baskets. Having outwitted these deities, *Eze Nri* was extolled, and as a mark of respect for his wisdom, the deities set up the four traditional market days that make an Igbo week. This explains the mystic significance of the number four, and its multiples in Igbo numerology - as representative of the four market days established and named after the *alusi*. One can only wonder what would have happened had *Eze Nri* not been cunning enough to find out the names of the deities. Would these deities have been as willing and as generous as they were when their secret was eventually found out? This also demonstrates another Igbo belief that *Chukwu* will endow his blessings only when an individual is able to demonstrate that he or she really needs that blessing, and he or she is equally able to deal with the

ensuing responsibility. Sometimes also, *Chukwu* would send these blessings as a test of an individual's integrity.

From this myth, *Chukwu* gave *Nri* mystical powers as a reward for the latter's obedience. This is still the prevalent view in present day Igbo society - the Igbo believe that because all life belongs to *Chukwu*, that he alone has the prerogative to decide where and when to send an individual on the sacred journey of life (just like he did with *Eri*). While on this journey, the Igbo also believe that they would ensure *Chukwu's* blessings (like *Eri* and his children did) through total obedience to his will, and by offering regular sacrifices. This explains the place of daily libations, invocation and thanksgiving to *Chukwu* who in turn gives health, wealth and wisdom to the Igbo.

Igbo theology and philosophy

The attitude of *Eze Nri* is typical of how, sometimes, the Igbo relate to the forces around them. Where possible, the Igbo would manipulate them into working in their favour. Nothing is ever taken for granted as the Igbo seek to know and understand the forces that interplay in their daily existence. This forms the core of Igbo theosophy - that individuals can transcend and achieve limitless heights when in complete obedience to the will of *Chukwu*, and in harmony with all the other seen and unseen forces of the universe. This implication of this belief in the way the Igbo interpret events in their lives is varied. As earlier mentioned, the pre-colonial Igbo were agrarian and as such, they were in daily material contact with the elements, and depended on them for their farm yields. For them, the correct interpretation of these natural elements was as important as knowing and understanding which forces was at play at any given time. To do this, the Igbo depended extensively on divination - consultation with these unseen forces through an oracle.

As a result of the many forces (some benign while others are malevolent) at play in the Igbo world, superstition was rife and any new phenomena that did not fit into the people's time-tested belief pattern were regarded as unnatural and viewed with mistrust. In many ways, their world view was like that of the Tabwa of Congo Orange Free State described by Robert (1988):

Tabwa consider that unfortunate events of minor importance such as fleeting illness may be "the path" (or nowadays, "the writing") of God, can be treated in a matter-of-fact manner... States of being are caused... the first step toward understanding what, as Westerners would say is "happening" is to determine what agent is causing the distressing phenomenon (123)

For people in pre-colonial Igboland also, things were either done for or against them. For example, the birth of twins was a phenomenon not understood by the Igbo and as such was "done" against them - a sign that the gods were angry. To have a set of twins was a curse - an abomination. As such, these innocent children were either instantly put to death or abandoned to die in the "evil" forest. The same fate befell anyone who suffered any unexplained affliction, and most contagious diseases like leprosy, small pox, tuberculosis, any disease that caused the body to waste or distend were in this unexplained category. Sufferers were usually cast away to die alone in the evil forest without any transitional rites. Casting away the afflicted was a way of fumigating the living and their environment against the vengeance of the deities that may be defiled should the diseased individual be left to die within the homestead. Top on the list of deities revered and protected in this way (by many traditional societies, to which the Igbo was no exception), was the ecological cult of divine Earth - variously referred to as *Ani/Ana* or *Ali/Ala* in different parts of Igboland. It was a mark of respect to Mother Earth not to bury corpses that died of unspecified causes within her bowel. Any form of defilement was seriously guarded against, as it was important to keep the Earth sacred and unsoiled as the sustainer of all life and farm yields. Eliade (1956) notes regarding this relationship between most traditional societies and Mother Earth:

the earth too is transparent, it presents itself as a universal mother and nurse. The cosmic rhythms manifest order, harmony, permanence and fecundity (123)

With this kind of world view, it is understandable why families were willing to let their loved ones die ignominious and lonely deaths instead of offending divine Earth, and consequently the whole community should the "cosmic rhythms" be upset.

The coming of the Europeans

It was into this corporate traditional framework that the early European visitors entered, either ignorant of/or unwilling to understand the people's relationship with their universe, their way of life and their relationship with their gods. Instead, the foreigners regarded these traditionalists as heathens who were in need of salvation. To these foreigners, salvation meant a total undermining and dismantling of all bonds that held the people and their world together before the Europeans arrived. Consequently, total anarchy ensued, and Basden (1966) had this to say regarding the Europeans' lack of understanding of Igbo life:

The downright truth is that the European finds it difficult to fathom the native mind; he is generally ignorant of the native's mode of thinking, and he is seldom possessed of the essential spiritual element, which will equip him to unravel the intricacies of ancient native law and custom. We can write of what we actually see and hear, but cannot always follow the ramifications of the native mind (xiv)

What Basden describes as the "native mind" can be better understood through pre-colonial Igbo religion and belief in duality - the law of equal and opposite which manifests in dualities such as heaven and earth, day and night, rain and fire, good and evil, man and woman etc, the concept that nothing exists in isolation. The summation of duality is in the Igbo saying that "*ife kwulu, ife akwudebeya*" (literarily meaning that when a thing stands, something else stands next to it). It is this dualistic essence that Okagbue (1993) describes when he writes that traditional Igbo religion is:

Pre-colonial Igbo society was a very religious one in which *Chukwu-Okike* came alive in, and spoke through natural elements and the people responded to this awesome power with reverence. The essence of *Chukwu-Okike* was to be seen in the elements, and these natural elements contained surprises, terror, marvels and miracles. Abstract forces became personified and were given live roles in an active world. Thus, the Igbo would describe the forces of wind, thunder or sun as the "spirits" of wind, thunder or sun respectively. For them, when the spirit of nature came alive, it was neither inert nor opaque, but active and transparent. If the gods were angry, it was apparent and, so also when they were happy. People could tell when they were in harmony with these unseen forces, because they resonated with life, felt a sense of oneness with their surrounding and thus gained insight into their own spiritual essence. They worked untiringly to maintain this equilibrium. As Eliade (1956) puts it, the individual "finds in himself the same sanctity that he recognised in the Cosmos" (67). Therefore the sanctification of, and communication with the gods were central to the Igbo quest for life's meaning and through these, they were able to understand their place within the cosmic framework.

Tied up with their understanding of the universe was the revered place given to the divine or Mother Earth, as the primary source of fertility and sustenance. She was treated with utmost respect and caution, and all abominable acts were expiated. For example, the spilling of human blood (even accidentally) meant that the guilty individual and his/her immediate family were sent into a year's (and in some places, seven years') forced exile. This gesture to appease Mother Earth for the defilement was a collective indication that the community did not condone such action. In

Achebe's (1969) fictionalised representation of Igbo life during colonialism, this form of exile finally destroyed Okonkwo - the hero of Umuofia and protagonist of the novel.

Other forms of cleansing rites (*ikpu alu*, meaning the cleansing of abomination) were performed on different occasions in propitiation to the Earth. For instance, in Umuoji, Nkpor, Ogidi, Obosi and in all other towns belonging to the late Idemili Local Government Area, *eke Idemili* (the royal python) is still revered as the child of *Idemili* - the river goddess. This specie of python has evolved into a harmless creature because of the protected status it enjoys, and as such, both indigenes and visitors know that they are not to be harmed. If, however, anyone accidentally kills this python, she or he must ensure that it receives a befitting burial as is stipulated by the custom of the land. The burial rite involves a number of cleansing rituals which are performed for three reasons. First, to appease the Earth on whom the python had been killed; second, to appease the goddess *Idemili* whose "child" was killed and third; to protect the family of the offender against the anger of other deities who may be in sympathy with *Idemili* over the death of her child. Therefore the exiling of, or the imposition of cleansing rituals on the offender ensured that the entire community was safeguarded against the wrath of Mother Earth which usually manifested in poor crop harvests, floods and/or drought and sometimes epidemics, diseases and deaths. Any of these natural phenomena on any agrarian society, amounts to annihilation or ruin.

However, this whole corporate sacred scenario was breached by the arrival of the missionaries and colonialists who began a sustained and systematic attack aimed at destroying anything they could not rationalise. The *Chukwu* of the Igbo and the cult of Mother Earth came under a sustained and relentless attack, because they were at

the core of the Igbo traditional religion which the missionaries wanted to wipe out as they saw it embodying the exact opposite of their Christian precepts. In fact, the European missionaries found the Igbo gods quite threatening as they conflicted with their teaching of a monotheistic Christian God. The damage to Igbo life was extensive as the Europeans imposed their own God. According to Onwuejeogwu (1987):

Traditional Igbo religion was subjected to countless humiliations. The *Chukwu* of the Igbo was abandoned for the God of the Anglican and the Roman Catholics. The *Chukwu* of Igbo religion described as creator of all things was rejected. Some even went as far to argue that the concept of *Chukwu* was a missionary innovation. The *alusi* and their moral injunctions were burnt, down-graded and abandoned, and lastly the ancestors were destroyed and buried (70)

With the Igbo *Chukwu* desecrated, the missionaries probably thought that their work was half done. Little did they know that the total conversion of Igboland was not to be an easy task - much to their shock, anger and disillusionment. This was because the Igbo were so engrossed in their own forms of religious worship which involved all other aspects of their lives - the social, political and economic - with the result that the Europeans would have to destroy the Igbo to separate them from their religion. Isichei (1973) notes the frustration of one of the early missionaries to Obosi, a town south of the Niger thus: "we had some progress, yet progress is painfully slow and the great mass of heathenism is still untouched" (46-7)

While it was true that some unimaginable practices existed that needed to be changed among the Igbo (for instance the killing of twins), available evidence show that the missionaries arrived with neither awareness nor willingness to gain any insight or respect into the people's way of life. Instead, they set about giving them a "new life". What emerged was an uncontrolled confusion and destruction of well-established and time-tested systems which had worked for and sustained the Igbo in

their inclement forest environment. Writers such as Basden and Isichei note that a majority of European administrators came to Igboland already prejudiced. Isichei described them as mostly disgruntled men who saw Africa as a way forward into the career moves which they could not achieve elsewhere:

Iboland's administrators came to Africa in search of change and adventure, or in pursuit of a career they had been unable to make elsewhere. Their writings mirror their inflexible sense of caste, their incomprehension and disdain for the people they ruled - sometimes, indeed, to the point of Kipling's imagery - "half devil and half child" (54)

With such misinformed administrators at the helm, the Igbo resistance to this alien culture was to prove disastrous. With the total destruction of what the people stood for, a combination of economic, political and spiritual crises was created. The implications are yet to be fully explored as more scholars, like Onwuejeogwu, become aware of the extent of decimation that went on in Igboland in particular and Africa as a whole wherever there was an attempt to resist the colonialists.

The impact of Christianity

Christianity made some positive impact on traditional Igbo life. First was the introduction of western-type education that enabled the Igbo to understand the language of their colonial masters, thereby, limiting the kind of destruction that happened prior to the adoption of a *lingua franca* shared by the Europeans and the Igbo. The acquisition of this type of education will later afford the Igbo the opportunity to become more involved with scientific and technological development all over the world. Second, a modern form of medicine was introduced, and with this came improved medicare. Consequently, a lot of people who would have died from unexplained and then incurable illnesses such as *kitikpa* (small pox), *ekpenta* (leprosy) and *otolo* (cholera) were given longer leases of life. Third, the killing of twins which

was a phenomenon not understood by the Igbo was stopped. A combination of the Christian religion and modern medicine helped in curbing superstition and opened up alternative ways for interpreting the Igbo universe. Fourth, travel and commercial opportunities became more varied as remote places became more accessible with the introduction of motor vehicles and steam engine trains. With increased economic activities, came more wealth and improved quality of life.

Having considered some of the benefits that came with the colonisation of the Igbo, there is evidence to show that before the coming of the Europeans, the Igbo had their own type of civilization, education, currency and even handwriting (*Nsibidi*). The researcher's opinion is that given time, and with the level of trade and commerce the Igbo were involved in, they would have been possibly been exposed to different but more benign foreign cultures which could have influenced them in the same (if not a better) way than the Europeans did; but without essentially destroying the hinges of the Igbo belief system. For instance, Isichei (1977) notes contact with the Europeans halted any further development of the *Nsibidi* (Appendix C):

Nsibidi took the form of formalised pictograms, like Chinese. Had not the experience of colonial rule deflected the Igbo and their neighbours from their own patterns of development, it seems likely that, as in other societies, a knowledge of literacy would have become ever more diffused in society as a whole and that, like Chinese, the script would have acquired more character, becoming a richer and more flexible vehicle of literary expression. Its form meant that, like Chinese, it could be used by speakers of different dialects or even languages (37-8)

The impact of the negative effect of Christianity and the extent of the damage done was on such a large scale because on arrival to some parts of Igboland, the Europeans met with some resistance. They set about using tactics ranging from manipulation to sheer brute force to crush such resistance. Further resistance was silenced using their military might. Examples include the Ekumeku uprising in western Igboland from

1898-1910, Udi and Ikwo uprisings in 1914 and 1918 respectively, and the Aba Women's riot of 1929. (Isichei:121). Coupled with the effect of these revolts was the impact of Christianity on the agricultural life of the Igbo. Before the Europeans arrived, polygamy was a pragmatic way of life, and success and wealth were measured in terms of the number of farm hands an individual could boast of within one's own family network. Men, therefore, married not just for the love of marriage, but as a means of economic and social survival. Given the people's experience with slavery and warfare, polygamy helped ensure continuity, and also became a means of increasing and securing their wealth, their socio-political as well as religious standing within their community. It must be remembered that even to this day, the Igbo measure wealth more in terms of the human than the material resources at an individual's disposal. Hence, they give names like *Madukaku*, *Nwakego* (meaning a person or a child is worth more than riches) and *Igwebuike* (there is power in numbers).

When, therefore, the Europeans introduced their own non-agricultural commercial products and routes, agriculture suffered. Participation in these trade networks set up and controlled by the Europeans became a bait exclusive to those who were ready to play by the missionaries' rule. Trading with the European who had the economic power became an exclusive club to their Christian converts. Most of these traders became the elite group and their masters' voices and were known for their over zealousness in attacking traditional Igbo life. Adults were allowed access to trading and their children access to western education only when they renounced the traditional way of life, especially polygamy. Before long, farming which was the people's mainstay was destroyed as more and more people became converted to Christianity, most of them did so due to economic considerations. Converts were forced to send long-standing wives back to their in-laws, and in traditional Igboland,

wives were only sent back to their parents when they were guilty of such gross misconduct as adultery or when these wives died. Onwuejeogwu (1987) sums up the destruction caused by Christianity thus:

Similarly, Igbo economy was destroyed. The agricultural techniques and know-how that took the ancestors of Igbo people thousands of years to develop were abandoned for working in the White man's rubber and cocoa plantations in the West, in railways, marine and government offices. Between 1920 and 1960 thousands of Igbo, left Igbo land believing that they could not make a living in Igbo land.... In a multi-ethnic oriented society like Nigeria, a rapid dispersal into the territory of others, was bound to generate conflict (70)

The conflict Onwuejeogwu was suggesting came to a head when in 1966 alone, with the onset of the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, when uncounted number of the Igbo were killed in Northern Nigeria in some very gruesome manner, [in what today would be termed ethnic cleansing]. In the civil war that followed between 1967-70, millions of Igbo lost their lives in their struggle for an independent homeland called Biafra.

The European missionaries succeeded in re-defining wealth in Igboland monetary terms. The trend was not unique to the Igbo as Robert (1988) notes the same about the Tabwa:

To a significant extent, an older ethic of egalitarianism and community interest was replaced by the capitalist focus upon the individual. Success in the colonial political economy was based upon individual initiative, talent, and achievement. In many contexts, group solidarity and corporate identity became less important than personal status, accumulation of wealth, and its attendant attainment of personal power (123)

Socially, the colonial masters also became involved in fuelling fratricidal wars already escalated by broken marriage contracts in which innocent wives and husbands were rejected for no reason other than that wives or husbands had become Christians and as such, were entitled to only one spouse. Most of the intricate networks of social contracts, friendships and relationships established through betrothal and marriages

became possible sources of disagreement and conflict. These led to a breakdown in communication and the foreigners capitalised on these widespread social dislocation and soured contracted relationships to instigate one group against the other. They would eventually provide their favoured side with sophisticated (compared to traditional) ammunition, stand aside and watch the vanquishing of the unco-operative communities. These disagreements precipitated wars during which extensive farmlands away from homesteads were left derelict as people were too scared to venture too far away from their villages for fear that they would either be kidnapped or killed when attending such distant farmlands. Consequently, trade in farm produce slowed to a halt and starvation set in. People were forced to either join the Christians or migrate elsewhere to make a living. The former option proved more favourable as it meant more security while protected by the might of the foreigners. This sense of destruction and dereliction was summed up in the plight of men from Arochukwu, who were not only great farmers, but also traders and warriors. Isichei (1973) notes that:

The men of Arochuku (sic), similarly, with their oracle destroyed and their trade routes falling into desuetude, faced the same unpalatable alternative - to emigrate in search of work, or to stay home, to face increasing economic stagnation (36)

Coupled with this wanton destruction of an entire nation were the effects of western education, which were to prove quite extensive over time. Most of the intellectual elite progressively detached themselves from the patterns of traditional culture, and what emerged was a society split into sections. Members of this nouveau elite were sent overseas to be educated as a way of "rubbing in" the consequences of their unwise decision to those who had resisted joining the missionaries earlier on. Most of these individuals educated by and in the West would return to flagrantly condemn traditional ways. They were to become, in many years to come, their masters' voice for the final and unabated denigration of Igbo culture. This was especially so because

on their return to Igboland, they joined the civil service, held positions of authority and had the power to recruit others (who were by now more interested in white collar jobs). Basden (1966) notes regarding the impact of the newly educated Igbo:

Chiefs of the old type are being rapidly replaced by their educated sons, educated, that is, in the sense that their fathers never were nor could be. The younger generation is learning to read and write and to adopt European ideas and fashions in every detail of life, clothes, houses and pastimes....At the moment, the balance of life has been, and is being, seriously disturbed. The younger generation has shed old manners and customs freely, and somewhat hastily. They are ardently grasping at all things new and foreign (xii)

The effect of this unprecedented shift of life style were that foreign ideas was also felt politically. Traditionally, the Igbo believed that a person's worth was measured only by the sweat of their brows. Inherited wealth and position commanded little or no respect. This meant that anyone who depended solely on inherited wealth or position was scorned and derided. For instance, a man's worth was judged by the number of wives he married himself (not those inherited from his father or brother[s]), and consequently, by the number of children from such unions that he could cater for. Age also had a lot of respect and elders from different clans were elected to represent their people and to make important decisions. Isichei (1973) describes traditional Igbo society as "a small democratic society" with a network of intricate political systems in which age commanded a lot of respect. It was a system known for its flexibility in motivating younger individuals who had proved themselves to remain socially and politically upwardly mobile. Hence the Igbo proverb that "*nwata kwo aka o solu okenye lie nni*" (when a child washes his hands clean of dirt, he will be allowed to eat with the elders from the same source). Furthermore, moral astuteness was valued more than any other achievement in traditional Igbo society. This is noticeable in the Igbo saying that; "*ezi afa k'ego*" (a good name is worth more than riches). Isichei (1973) confirms the importance of age and good name when she writes that:

Ibo communities were in practice ruled by titled men of mature age. These titles were purchased, not inherited - though the recipient of a title had to satisfy other conditions as well, and be of good character (37)

Politically, the Igbo were organised as interrelated states grouped into clans, united by "the agnatic charter of a common ancestor" (37). People occasionally came together to satisfy common needs, for example, to defend themselves against invading neighbours. These forms of contracts ended with the entrance of the Europeans. Community works such as road building, clearing the path to streams and rivers and general maintenance works were carried out by the young men organised into age grades. The age grade system which is still in existence in most of Igboland functions by organising people born within any three consecutive years into one age grade to form a formidable governing and human workforce. These age grades are usually named according to historical events and for a people whose four-market week calendar had not the means of counting the years, these age grades served as historical reminders of events. For instance, *ogbo influenza* (the influenza age grade) and *ogbo Okono* (O'Connor age grade) refer to the age grades that were born in the years when there was an influenza epidemic and those born in the year when the District Officer O'Connor came to Umuoji, respectively. Okafor (1973) writes about the age grade system thus:

our study not only shows the age grade as community-integrative mechanism, but also a dominant politico-judicial system of the Umuoji community.... While the family and extended family formed the political units at the lower levels, it is the age grade that dominates the wider and top-level Umuoji political system ... (iii)

However, the Europeans also found this system of government by elders impossible to adapt because negotiations were prolonged, as each elder bargained to ensure that his clan got a good deal. The Europeans finally undermined this system of government by the introduction of paramount chiefs. These were mostly men who were hand-picked because they were sympathetic to the cause of Europeans, and the chiefs were given enough financial muscle to enable them, on the one hand to

galvanise people into action when needed, and to undermine the authority of the elders, on the other. Above all, they were made judge and jury in community cases which they were legally ill-equipped to preside over. As a result, established legal and social orders became dislocated. The Igbo legal system was such that after judgement by elders, any individual who felt that he/she had been unfairly judged could appeal to higher authorities for adjudication. In extreme cases, people would run unto the patronage of a deity for protection and justice:

Among the Igbo law, *Iwu*, is based on rules which are enacted by the elders and sanctioned by the ancestors *ndichie*. An infraction of a law does not constitute the breaking of a taboo. Those who break the law are punished or fined. Igbo concept of law is rooted in Igbo jurisprudence which is a body of complete argument of ethical principles. The principles (sic) that a person is not totally guilty in a case gives room for dialogue, discussion and appeals through a hierarchy of lineages before appealing to the town *obodo* or *eze*... (Onwuejeogwu:63)

Thus the final arbiters were the various deities to whose shrines an accused could run for succour and protection. Whenever this happened, the individual was automatically protected by the deities, and no matter what the outcome of the case being judged may be, no one dared to harass any person(s) protected by a god. In traditional Igbo society, these individuals would never again return to live among their kindred or clan although they would be in the same town. They were, however, allowed to live at the shrine, but they were not allowed to intermarry with those whom they fled from, and who were free citizens. Such individuals who fled to the gods for refuge belonged to a special caste that the Igbo call the *osu* (children of the gods). The Europeans also found it difficult to understand that an individual could run to the gods, and consequently be free of punishment. They dismantled what in their judgement was a flawed legal system which allowed this type of recourse. However, as time went on, people found it more impossible to resist the Europeans, what with their combination of military might and sometimes manipulation, new ideas and irresistible technology. This was to be the final death of an inherited order. A

new order had been fully established which profaned deities, destroyed traditional religious symbols without any immediate consequences, as people stood by and waited in vain for their deities to fight back. Prior to this time, the Igbo knew their gods to always act swiftly to inflict pain and even death on anyone who dared desecrate them. Thus began a history of loss of self-esteem among the Igbo, especially with the onslaught from Christianity following almost immediately after years of slave trade and colonialism. A predominant feeling began, of inadequacy and inferiority about their entire culture in the face of constant put-downs by a more financially viable, manipulatively superior and powerful culture. Material and spiritual life became differentiated and thus, meaningless. This for the Igbo whose existence was dualistic, was catastrophic. This feeling of inadequacy has persisted into the present day Igbo parlance to the extent that the adjective *igbotic* is derogatively used to qualify any person, place or thing that are deemed outmoded or unsophisticated in western terms. Eliade (1956) notes that when such things as these happen, people are bound to feel that God has failed them and that nothing sustains any meaning when natural rhythms are destroyed:

the periodical sanctification of Cosmic time then proves useless without meaning. The gods are no longer accessible through cosmic rhythms. The religious meaning of the repetition of paradigmatic gestures is forgotten (106)

Repetition emptied of religious and ritual content lead to what Eliade describes as a "pessimistic vision of existence" (107). To a large extent, this was and has remained the legacy bequeathed to the Igbo by colonialism and Christianity - the destruction of values and the replacement of traditional institutions with nothing comparable. The forced conversion to Christianity - a religion the Igbo understood little or nothing of, became a problem as it did not fit into their overall scheme of things. Faced with this dilemma and, out of the need to relate to a supreme being they understood and felt

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part of, and in their quest for a higher meaning to their own existence yet forbidden by the fear of the whiteman's wrath, there emerged (and still exists) a form of Igbo eclecticism - a personal synthesis of the old and new.

Meanwhile, a majority of those already converted to Christianity but who had found it inadequate in explaining their universe, returned to their abandoned deities and ways of life. They re-claimed those wives they had rejected, consulted their oracles and attempted re-building their independence. The difference this time was that they had realised the futility of a direct confrontation with this invading power. So while they remained traditionalists, they sent their children to join the missionaries in order that they may obtain western education. For the people in traditional Igbo society, obtaining western style education was the only way of understanding and containing the type of power the whiteman used to destroy them. In their own wisdom, they had come to accept that an open confrontation would lead to a further destruction of their gods, their people and their land. In a nutshell, they had come to the realisation that if not treated with caution, the whiteman had enough vengeance and purpose to write them off the pages of history.

The decision in most families that the ageing members remained traditionalist was a reflection of the fact that faced people within traditional Igbo society. In most cases, this decision was taken to ensure that whichever side that finally won in the contest between tradition and Christianity, the Igbo would not lose out. This brand of eclecticism clearly exemplified the insecurity that marked Igboland at the time. Because of their experience, the Igbo were, and would remain for a long time to come, a people caught between two worlds.

In a conference paper, "Rituals: A Theatre of Therapy and Affirmation, (1995), the researcher argued that this alienation from a proven way of life (and beyond that, a history tainted by slavery) will eventually give rise to a noticeable percentage of people with little or no self-esteem and no meaningful understanding of their place in the cosmic scheme of events.

In all this confusion, one aspect of Igbo life which persevered and remained untouched was their belief in, and the need to affirm and celebrate life. The Igbo are active celebrants who view life as one long performance during which they seize every opportunity to give thanks to God for the gift of life. They have evolved their rituals to celebrate their communities, different deities, ancestors, history and individuals achievements. Communities celebrate the changing seasons; the coming of the rains marking the start of the farming season, and the coming of the dry season to mark the beginning of the harvesting season. During these performances, different communities stage and invite neighbouring towns to attend as their guests, as for instance, during *Ifejioku* (yam festival) which is celebrated throughout Igboland or to more regional ones like *Ene MMA* in Nkpor, *Nwafor* in Ogidi and *Uzo-Iyi* in Umuoji. To the Igbo, the successful negotiation of any personal challenges calls for celebration, and these include births, attainment of puberty, initiations, marriages and deaths. History has proved that nothing can stop the Igbo from celebrating life.

This celebration of life is holistic, and the Igbo will employ all the elements of theatre - performers, participants, music, mime, mask, elaborate costumes, make up and dance - at their disposal to affirm and celebrate their oneness with the universe. From conception to death, life is celebrated with very elaborate rituals through which people disengage from the hustle and bustle of their daily existence to reflect on those aspects of life that do not usually get looked into. Hence, in the quiet of ritual,

people are afforded a glimpse into the real nature of the *Chukwu* of their ancestors whose greatness they partake of. In the ritual process, the Igbo re-awaken the God essence they possess, and by partaking in this unseen holiness, they gain back their self-esteem. For the Igbo whose confidence and self-esteem have been negatively impacted upon by slavery and Christianity, rituals are therefore, their way of affirming themselves and their oneness with creation. Without rituals and the elaborate performance that they involve, life would become devoid of meaning. However, the reason for Igbo performance and the form it takes can easily be lost on the outsiders being embedded as it is in rituals. It seems that the bruising experience the Igbo had with slavery, colonisation and Christianity brought about a heightened need to preserve their heritage through a process of selective dissemination, hence aspects of their culture (performance inclusive) are coded in rituals. For example, during the *ima muo* ritual, male children are not only taught, but they come in direct contact with aspects of Igbo manhood symbolised by the courage, strength, kindness and decorum they encounter and display during their contest with the initiating spirits/masks. This also marks the beginning of a life-long learning process in the art masquerading - the carving of the mask, different musical instruments, costumes, dance, songs, music and the different performance styles and decora of masking. For a long time Igbo people have used ritualised performance not only as a means of socialisation and education, but as a coded storage of valued aspects of their culture which if unprotected would be destroyed through contact with external influences.

Unfortunately, in present day Igbo society, most rituals are quickly losing their pride of place and this is reflected in societal values in which age no longer commands any respect, honoured positions and titles are bought and paid for with riches acquired through questionable means and young men and women shy away from formal education because they regard it as a waste of their time. The negative influence of

the 'cult' of individualism introduced by the Europeans is at its peak, and in direct conflict with communal though capitalist fabric of Igbo life. The result is that self-worth is now determined by material possession, and this has overtaken the need for good reputation and hard work. Education - both traditional and western - is derided as a waste of valuable time that should be spent making money. As a result, a vast majority of the younger generation are unschooled in any form of ethical conduct.

Sadly, the destruction of what remains of pre-Christian Igbo life is being completed, especially by the new wave of Pentecostal churches under the new leadership of indigenes, who engage in a wanton destruction of those aspects of Igbo life that mainstream Christianity left untouched. Many interviewed by the researcher during her fieldwork believe that the Igbo society is evolving, but that the rapid and unpredictable pace of evolution is in itself destructive. As such, they fear that unless the Igbo act fast by single-mindedly exhuming, re-examining, owning and recording aspects and patterns of their lives, that there will be little that is authentically Igbo, that the generations yet unborn can identify with and lay claims to.

From this researcher's experience, there is no doubt that unless the Igbo people stop to re-discover and re-evaluate their roots in relation to where they have been, where they are at present, and where they want to be in the future and in what role, it will be challenging to share Onwuejeogwu's (1987) optimism about the Igbo nation:

My forecast is that Igbo-speaking people are mobilizing their forces and energy in Igbo land towards a scientific revolution characterized by inventions and innovation in different fields of human endeavour that will enable Nigeria plunge into a new era of industrialization. This will help Nigeria free herself from the economic yoke placed on her by the Western and Eastern blocs. But this can only be achieved when the Igbo cities might have discovered their roots and how these roots are related to the roots of their ethnic groups in Nigeria. Understanding their roots will enable them regain confidence in themselves, develop the spirit of self-reliance, inventiveness and creativity lost by the intervention of slave trade and colonialism (71)

The answer to the present challenge facing the Igbo is to be found within rituals. Igbo rituals have proved resilient, and it is hoped that this study will not only unearth and strengthen them, but that it will lead to a greater understanding of the mechanics of Igbo rituals in general.

CHAPTER 2

A PERSPECTIVE ON IGBO RITUAL PRACTICE

Igbo rituals are unique both in their nature and their performance context. The study of rituals has been very revealing, because it enabled the subtle distinction between rituals from other types of performance, such as social action. By nature, Igbo rituals are unlike social action because rituals are predominantly spiritually oriented. Every ritual has stipulated and agreed objectives that can be monitored against set performance criteria, whereas social action are those activities which individuals perform within an unstructured space and time in order to personalise and thus own the lessons learnt during rituals. So social actions involve the unconscious transfer and application of rituals lessons into the non-ritual milieu of daily existence. For example, while initiations into the masquerade cult (*ima muo*) and into womanhood (*iso ebe*) both involve special preparations and the separation of intended participants from the community, social action such as knowing how to cater for the family herd (*igbo nni ewu*) and involvement in moonlight play (*egwu onwa*) happen without specific preparations of the participants. In addition, at the end of every ritual, participants are re-integrated into their various communities while social action form a non-differentiated aspects of every day living.

Furthermore, the study of Igbo rituals provide the framework for illustrating some relevant ritual theories with an aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Definition

Since 1908, when van Gennep's Rite of Passage was first published, theatre practitioners (such as Kolawole Ositola), theatre anthropologists (Richard Schechner, Victor Turner and Eugenio Barba) as well as anthropologists (Anthony Grainger, Margaret Thompson Drewal, and Richard Werbner) to mention a few, have contributed immensely to the study of ritual. It is important at this point to note the contributions made by Turner and Schechner in bringing performance to the centre stage by highlighting performance as an all-encompassing genre. Their contributions have succeeded in freeing rituals from the drama-theatre debate between some Igbo scholars [Echeruo (1973), Obiechina (1978), Amankulor (1981), Enekwe (1981)], and many others were involved in that debate during the 1970s and 80s in response to some euro-centric claims made by especially Horton (1963) and Finnegan (1970). This debate questioned the authenticity of Igbo rituals as either drama and/or theatre using the Greek theatre as the main model. Essentially, there were two parallel debates going on at the same time. The first one was between this group of Igbo scholars and the euro-centrics, while the other was between the rest of Igbo scholars on the one side and Echeruo and Uka on the other. Basically, Echeruo insisted that although the euro-centrics were wrong in assuming that African theatre was "quasi", he argued that what the African needed to do was what the Greeks did with their own drama - free it from its submergence within rituals.

However, the researcher is of the opinion that Igbo rituals are a unique form of performance and that they should be judged based on whether they fulfil performance criteria. So in as much as these scholars have made immense contributions to the understanding of Igbo rituals, the researcher feels that getting involved in their debate will only limit the scope of this work which views Igbo rituals as belonging to the

more encompassing performance category. Above all if rituals are culture-specific the researcher wonders what use there was in using the Greek-Dionysian festivals as a yardstick for judging the authenticity of Igbo rituals as either drama or theatre. Above all, the debate in question was valid some twenty to thirty years ago and does not have much relevance today. However, these scholars seem to be in agreement about one thing: that rituals are culture specific performances devised around the assessment, containment and resolution of life crises.

Life crises are those biological and/or occupational progression that occur throughout an individual's life and they include for example, "births, puberty, marriage, father/motherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death" (van Gennep, 1908:3). At close examination, the crises mentioned above all follow a basic action and reaction pattern. This means that new changes would affect and disturb the normal or existing equilibrium, thereby necessitating the negotiation of a new order. These negotiations use what van Gennep describes as "special acts" which are ritualised performances through which individuals and communities acknowledge, assess, negotiate and contain those crises brought about by the very nature of their existence.

Furthermore, the resolution of these crises have a natural sequence that can be plotted against the basic biological development of an individual, and as a result distinct but interrelated ritual clusters are observable. Among the Igbo, for instance, the period of gestation is marked with a flurry of activities (starting with divinations and consultations with the various oracles and traditional medicine practitioners) which are performed to ensure that the expectant mother and foetus are protected from all evil persons and/or spirits. All rituals in this period of life are performed with a common aim in mind - the well-being of the expectant mother and the unborn baby.

So, although the pregnant woman may not think that she is in need of protection, her mother, mother-in-law and other relatives will nevertheless continue to seek protection on her behalf. This need for protection stems from the Igbo belief that diabolical forces can be unleashed on people's lives by either/or humans and spirits; and also because of the belief that during pregnancy, the woman is both vulnerable and susceptible to harm due to her delicate condition. Any interference with the well-being of an expectant mother could, the Igbo believe, result in foetal malformation, stillbirths and in extreme cases, the death of the expectant mother herself. However, the birth of the child marks the end of what can be appropriately termed maternity rituals, which then ushers in the birth and infancy rituals which are geared towards the severance of natal ties and re-connection with Mother Earth. These rituals include *ini nhe* (separation in the form of the disposal of the placenta), *ibe ugwu* (circumcision) and *iba afa* (naming ceremony marking the conferment of personal identity on the child and its incorporation into the family and society at large).

At close examination of these ritual mentioned above, the Gennebian tripartite structure of separation, initiation and incorporation become clearly evident. This makes one wonder whether the possession of a tripartite structure qualifies any performance as ritual, or if there are other characteristics to be on the look out for. From the research performed, it can confidently be asserted that for any performance to qualify as ritual, it must be meaningful to a level where its performance is a *sine qua non* for the people within any particular cultural milieu in which that performance exists. In addition, all rituals must be performed within a given time frame with all actions following stipulated guideline(s), and that the consequences of non-performance is usually felt, if not immediately but later in life as Ositola (1988) notes:

some people may have obstacle (sic) in their lives...nobody has given them a proper initiation into life....By losing this important heritage... they will be a burden to himself, to the parents and the household, and to the society at large because he will misbehave. (32)

From the foregoing, rituals can be defined as those symbolic performances which have great socio-religious essence and consequence which follow an already agreed order, in a set time and place for/by a qualified individual or group of individuals . During rituals, the participant(s) embark on a symbolic journey in the knowledge that by the end, these reversible and sometimes irreversible actions would enable them find personalised answers to whatever challenges they face. In the ritual framework, every participant is confident that these complex performances have some intrinsically subliminal and powerful attributes through which they are enabled to gain insight into, and partake in the true nature of their unseen otherness. Rituals are essential performances which are believed to have dire consequences when suspended, or not performed using the prescribed format. The implication of a transition delayed or denied for individuals and communities may be that they may remain in a state of suspended animation - unable to move forward or backwards. Rituals are, therefore, meaningful strips of action that link up to form an extended bridge on which the participants can safely cross the deep waters of life, without necessarily stepping or coming into too direct a contact with its cold reality.

For example, all girls born within a family in Igboland are called the *umuada/umuokpu*. Young women are expected to be married, and Igbo mothers and families invest a lot of time ensuring that their daughters are well brought up (domesticated, morally astute, polite, etc) because if not, there will be nobody to marry them when they are ripe for marriage. It is a shameful situation when a full grown woman does not attract suitors. On the contrary, the married daughters of the family are accorded great respect in their father's compound, and when the need

arises, these daughters return to arbitrate in cases that may arise in their birth families. They wield such social and political powers that they alone have the authority to impose fines and/or sanctions on whomsoever they pronounce guilty. It is socially suicidal for anyone to go against the counsel or decisions of these collective arbiters, who are held in indescribable awe by the wives of the family. So, when at a certain age a woman remains unmarried and continues to live in her father's compound, the wives in the family would naturally feel threatened and view her with mistrust and suspicion because she is seen as the "ears" of the married *umuada*. This is because she may be passing information which otherwise the *umuada* would not have known about living as they are in their own marital homes. So, the easiest means of discord in any family is to have a grown unmarried daughter living within the family. The fact is that in Igboland, marriages save grown women from the ridicule that they may otherwise be subjected to if they remained unmarried. The marriage ritual in Igboland, therefore, bestows respect and saves women from coming in direct conflict with the harshness of remaining in their fathers' compounds.

The role of ritual

In most societies, rituals play the threefold role of being an agent of cohesion, a means of education and perpetuation of society life and values. Haralambos (1992) states Durkheim's view that society can

survive only if there exists amongst its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands. Without these 'essential similarities', cooperation, social solidarity and therefore social life itself would be impossible. This involves a commitment to society, a sense of belonging and a feeling that the social unit is more important than the individual (230)

Among the Igbo, this homogeneity is ensured in the way they use rituals to identify, own and instruct their children from an early stage. For instance, the first ritual performed at the birth of any child is called *iti mkpu nwa/ichi oga* (shouts of joy), and its purpose is to inform the whole community of the birth, and to informally prepare them for the numerous spontaneous celebrations that accompany the birth of any child. So, through this single act, the community comes together to celebrate their common bonds. In Igboland, these types of gathering are common at births, marriages and deaths. Furthermore, Durkheim argues that such level of homogeneous spontaneity is only possible if from the beginning, the society fixes in its children the "essential similarities which collective life demands". The vital task performed by the different rituals like the naming ceremony, initiations into the masquerade cult, traditional marriages and burial ceremonies is that they enable "welding a mass of individuals into a united whole, in other words, the creation of 'social solidarity'. This involves a commitment to the society.... " (230)

This is a point Robert (1988) seems to agree with when he writes regarding the cohesive power of divination thus:

Through divination and related rituals, people remember, revise, rearrange and reconstitute elements of history to understand and cope with present difficulties, so that a better future can be negotiated (123)

Ritual is like life itself in the sense that people do not start to understand and cope with difficulties unless they are enabled (as in counselling) to look at the causes rather than effects. This is the role that ritual plays - it removes the smoke screen and gets people involved in the serious business of delving deeply into their lives. Thus, in going through the ritual process, individuals are enabled to process and re-arrange their various life experiences into easily accessible compartments and stages they can make sense of. Robert continues that during rituals:

individual actors attempt to understand, cope with and take action to redress crises of health and social welfare. People reflect upon the way life is and how it works in moments of performance. They do so in heightened contexts of crises, when failure to take action, or rather failure to take proper action may lead to intense suffering, death or destruction (123).

What rituals do for us is that they offer us a structured space and time in which to deeply dwell on issues which may be perplexing to us, but which in our everyday life we do not have the time and space to contemplate. For the Igbo who believe that the human being is a material as well as a spiritual entity, their rituals are designed to satisfy a deep sense of longing to understand their place within the cosmic order. The sheer nature of this dualistic existence of the human being in one united spiritual and material dimension engenders a lot of crises from conception right through to death. Therefore, it seems that most Igbo rituals exist to enable individuals to answer those needs born out of their spiritual and material make up as they strive to relate and live in harmony with the seen and unseen forces of the universe. So it can be imagined how amidst these uncertainties generated by the diametrically opposed nature of being just humans, rituals provide a steadying keel that enables people to focus and decide on their next course of action. Grainger (1974) notes that: "myths and rituals are the ways in which society reassures itself: they bolster society up. They are voices out of the past, part of a cultural heritage. This is why they exist".

(2)

For example, when an Igbo man performs the *iwa oji ututu* (morning prayer and breaking of the kolanut), he does this, first, to thank Chukwu for his blessings all through the night. It must be remembered that night time (even in present day Igbo villages) is synonymous with impregnable darkness, unseen and capricious evil forces and harmful creatures. For the Igbo, night time represents suppression of the sense of sight. With the only form of illumination coming from the stars and the moon

(when it is full), night time is one of the fearful personal experiences whose mastering starts with the initiation into the masquerade cult, and probably lasts the duration of an individual's life. So when the Igbo breaks the first kolanut after more than ten hours of eerie darkness, he celebrates the rising sun (a visible attribute of *Chukwu*), he re-affirms himself as being important because *Chukwu* found him and his family important enough to be kept from harm during those long hours of total darkness. A new day, therefore, is a new experience which he starts with a new performance - during which he recites his ancestry and retells his family history. Where a man's father is deceased, he (the living) re-iterates the lessons of life taught him by his father, and thus re-assures himself and those present that they are never alone. At the same time, he transfers what he had been taught to his own children and listeners. Libation is a form of continuous education.

Ritual and Social Action

It is important at this stage to differentiate between ritual and social action. Social action is the sum total of human action. Haralambos (1992) in discussing the Functionalist theory of social action as propounded by Emile Durkheim argues that human action does not happen in the void because humans possess consciousness, thoughts, feelings, meanings, intentions and awareness of being. And that all these human attributes determine, to a great extent, how people accord meaning and perception to external stimuli. He, therefore, concluded that since action and reaction stem from these unseen human attributes, it follows that for human action (and reaction) to be correctly interpreted and understood, one must first of all, look for and correctly interpret the subjective and hidden logic that drives such action (and reaction). In other words, the ability to interpret social action depends on one's ability to understand the role(s) played by some unseen variables.

On the contrary, rituals "operate on a reflective meta-level" (Werbner:4), and they differ from social action in that rituals have set and agreed rhythmic ordering, timing and the belief on the part of the participants that outcomes or expected results are known from the onset. These results are empirical in the sense that the same results will be achieved each time, provided that the prescribed rhythm, order, timing of words and action are adhered to. In discussing divination rituals, Werbner stresses the importance of adhering to already agreed format during ritual as it enables people to give "interpretations of their symbols, icons and indices...they do not merely respond to their signifying practices unreflectively..." (4)

So during most rituals, the pre-liminal stage is a time for intensive induction during which participants are empowered to reflect on issues by learning set guiding principles. When ritual participants are re-incorporated into the society after their performances, they are able to use the period between rituals to test out and personalise those lessons learnt during rituals. Social action periods are those relatively quiet periods between one ritual and another. They are like active holiday periods during which individuals who had been involved in ritual become re-absorbed as members of their community, and where in their everyday life, they are able to test and implement the lessons learnt during rituals.

The language of ritual

The term "language" in this context refers to the verbal rendition of ritual. If it is accepted that ritual affords people the space and time to reflect on the true meaning of their existence, it then will follow that its language will be such that can describe this heightened experience in which people become aware of their true nature as both human and spirit. Nkala (1983) notes that:

ritual ceremonies are often occasions for instant rendition of folk poetry. The song, dance and recitations that feature at rituals constitute a veritable corpus of imaginative literature.(p.11)

The language of rituals is as culture specific and as varied as rituals themselves, and varies from one performance to another, and depending on what purposes the rituals they are employed in serve. The language may range from simple prayers and supplications to the very complex and coded recitations and chants found in some cult initiation. An example of the prayerful is that which the Igbo use in the consecration of the morning kolanut. Through this ritual, the Igbo thank Chukwu-Okike for their lives, and invite their ancestors to partake in their affairs and to protect them. By doing so, they affirm themselves as part of a bigger universe. The more complex forms of ritual language are those evident in secret initiation rites of which examples include those used in initiations into the masquerade cult and the *Egbenuoba* or hunters' guild. In these cases, the words used are participant-oriented and are intentionally coded to exclude the *ogbodu* (or the uninitiated). So an individual's ability to understand the language of the masquerade cult (language of the spirit world) depends on the level of initiation he may have attained. Verbalised communication in this category may have a graduated structure which explains why people who belong to the same guild or cult may have a differentiated understanding of various icons and symbols depending on their varying levels of exposure.

The language employed in separation rites is usually in the form of dirges, and they are solemn reminders of the transitory nature of human life and the inevitability of death. A common Igbo dirge goes:

Igbo

Asim gi ficha anya mmili ebezina
Ficha anya mmili ebizina
Igwe nine je ko n'uzu
Mmadu nine nako be Chukwu
Nwannem ficha anya mmili ebezina

English

I say wipe off your tears and cry no more
 Wipe off your tears and cry no more
 All iron must go to the smith
 Just like every person must return to God
 My beloved, wipe off your tears and cry no more.

Okpara (1995) in an interview, agrees that the use of language may differ from one ritual to another when she described the language of ritual in Igboland as "a classified mode of expression which has great potentials for excluding uninitiated individuals or groups at different times and places". According to her, the complex nature of rituals makes it difficult for anyone who had not undergone a particular ritual to understand and make sense of the more complex ritual events. According to her, this may be because different forms of coded communication befitting the initiands' new status may have been learnt while the group was in seclusion, away from the rest of the society. This is true during initiation rites such as initiations into man/womanhood, the masquerade cult and *ozo title*. Furthermore, Okpara notes that the verbal component of ritual can be as local and as reflective of images, symbols, expressions and connotations unique to their locality. Okpara argues that these may differ depending on whether the society is patrilineal (or matrilineal), riverine (like Aguleri and Oguta) or upland (like the majority of landlocked Igbo towns). She continues by saying that, most times, the language of rituals in male-oriented societies tend to unbelievably marginalise women, and vice versa.

The researcher's experience during her fieldwork lends support to the fact that generally, language in patrilineal societies can really be patronising and sexist. For example, when she inquired as to why women do not consecrate the kolanut at gatherings, an informant responded that it is because, "*na ana ali nwanyi enu*" (women are subordinates who are mounted during sexual intercourse). Beyond this apologist explanation, the fact is, that women are not allowed to consecrate or break the kolanut for two reasons. First, the Igbo are patrilineal and as such, it is an age old practice that men alone can offer libations and prayers to the ancestors. Second, the Igbo society portrays the female as a paradox - an embodiment of the sacred and the unclean. Women are sacred in their role as mothers, carriers and nurturers of

life, and by the same token unclean because they have menstrual periods. The Igbo believe that during their monthly period women possess awesome powers which when shed as impurities can diminishes the spiritual powers of those who have contact with them. Therefore, they were confined and forbidden from carrying out any activities which may expose the public to them. These activities include attendance at the market place, village streams, sex and preparation of meals. Hence the Igbo name for monthly period is *iso ezi* (avoidance of public areas). In fact, in pre-Christian Igbo society, menstruating women were confined to rooms at the back of the house, and were re-incorporated at the end of the period, having undergone cleansing herbal baths.

Over the years, some women have developed sarcasm when describing their period of isolation during menstruation. They would say *anom n' ezi* (I am in the public place). It seems that this response began as mockery to the overt emphasis given to their unclean state, and possibly, a psychological reassurance that they are not as 'lethal' as they are made out to be when menstruating.

Unfortunately, this ambivalent attitude of the Igbo to their women has not changed much. Many times during the fieldwork, the researcher was reminded of her status in the society, primarily because some men found it difficult to share information regarding Igbo rituals with a woman. Their amusement and sometimes indignation at her quest into Igbo rituals (especially for academic purposes) could not be masked. As exposed to western type of education as some of the men are, they still felt that she had loss sight of her appointed role place as a woman - in the home. The researcher always made known her objections to being treated this way, and she sometimes got apologies for her hurt feelings, but not the needed information. Of course, being so vocal did not help issues, but she nevertheless made her point.

Having said that, it is interesting to note that Igbo women had from time devised their own ways of making a mockery of practices that they found demeaning, but felt helpless to change. However, the Igbo woman is still in the process of carving out a respectable niche for herself - in trying to combine her powerful traditional role as mother with the more modern role of a professional. It will take time before her male counterparts begin to recognise and accord her this well-deserved respect, but this will hopefully happen, with time on her side.

So in trying to determine and understand the language of ritual (using the Igbo as an example), it is very important to consider two points; first, that rituals exist to negotiate both biological and occupational crises. This means that people who belong to the same occupational group, may have different biological crises to resolve. It is, therefore, no wonder that at any point in time, rituals are being performed by different people to resolve different life challenges. Second, the language of Igbo rituals addresses the Igbo belief in dualism -that the human being is a material as well as a spiritual being. So the ritual language is crafted to aid in affirming and negotiating this duality, and to enable people's expression of their yearning for the meaning of life. Fromm (1956) describes ritual and the language it employs as:

a statement about man's identity as a structured spirit. In the rite man stands forth in all his limited and conditional freedom, as the embodied soul, separate and defined, given individuality, by his own body, living in relation to others who are at once like and unlike himself whom he knows as his fellows but meets as strangers (xi)

The language of ritual is specialised and encourages performers to express their experience in a way which may seem nonsensical to the ritual outsider. The implication being that before the outsider can understand the goings-on in most rituals, he/she needs to be open to the cultural milieu of the rituals. Grainger

articulates this point further when he writes, "that the culture itself was shaped and moulded by its religious beliefs; and this is why those beliefs cannot be reduced to anything which is itself non-religious".(18)

It can, therefore, be argued that since culture is the sum total of a people's way of life, that ritual being culture-specific means that it has to be understood through the interpretation of cultural symbols and elements manifest in the spoken language. Furthermore, it can be argued that an understanding of the process of ritual depends very much on the understanding of the language of the performance. This is because a subtle juxtaposition and fusion of the secular and sacred on a personal as well as the communal levels, which may be harder to detect unless one understands the language and pays particular attention to the entire process.

This intrinsic ability of rituals to juxtapose and fuse elements of different densities is clearly demonstrated in Igbo masking tradition, where by wearing a mask an individual ceases to be a human being, and becomes an ancestral spirit. But at what point the human becomes overtaken by the spirit is a matter of the momentary fusion of the sacred and secular. However, there are a lot of existing materials on all aspects of Igbo masking tradition by Ukaegbu (1996) and Okagbue (1993, 1997) that have delved into the co-habitation of different cosmic zones in Igbo theatre and ritual.

However, from the on-going, the spoken component of ritual can be better understood once a flexible attitude is adopted to the definition of ritual itself. This is because the ritual experience is a very personal one and allowance needs to be made in defining the language of rendition employed in rituals from different individual perspectives. Therefore, this study advocates that there should be allowed, as many authentic definitions of what constitutes a ritual as there are ritual participants. Only through these personalised insights will scholars be able to extract the real attributes of rituals

and the language it employs. Until this is done, the term - ritual - will continue to defy attempts at definition, as Schechner (1995) notes:

even to say it in one word, ritual, is asking for trouble. Ritual has been so variously defined - as concept, praxis, process, ideology, yearning, experience, function - that it means very little because it means too much (328)

Ritual essence

One wonders if the essence of ritual is truly indescribable, or if it is simply misunderstood by those whom Werbner (1989) refers to as "meaning seeking anthropologists"(4) as they attempt to transport what is a cultural and personal experience of the greatest sublimality onto either the pages of text books and/or stage. Some works of scholars and researchers such as Schechner and Turner, sometimes, belong to this group, and it seems that the challenge posed in understanding rituals is created by these people as they attempt to universalise rituals. Ironically, Schechner (1995) warns against the premature "globalization" of rituals which he describes as the "unavoidable expression of Western hegemony" and its "attempts to cull and harvest the worlds cultures"? (257).

The researcher finds this comment coming from Schechner quite interesting especially in the light of the fact that Schechner himself underwent an initiation into Hinduism just to enable him to gain access to the Temple (and possibly rituals). It can be argued that Schechner may not have been the first person to join a group simply for altruistic reasons but the question this raises is: what validates a ritual performance? Is it the environment, participation in the rites, the content or belief? Did participating in the initiation and the certificate given post-initiation make a Hindu out of Schechner? In the researcher opinion, a ritual becomes authentic only when the action and performance sequence are observed while guarded by the belief. This is a position which Enekwe (1981) seemed to be in agreement with when he wrote:

ritual can easily be transformed into theatre and vice versa - in a number of ways. A ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency. (155)

So, in spite of the controversy that may surround the definition of rituals, any attempts made to transport and transpose rituals from one cultural milieu to another will inevitably result in the reason for and meaning of the ritual being lost. The real essence of any ritual has to be interpreted within the context of the culture in which it operates. All forms of transposition will only result in the kind of confusion and semantic waste of time that a lot of people (including this researcher) get into when we attempt to grapple with some literary works on rituals.

The Ritual Process and Structure

The process and structure of any ritual are determined by the purpose that ritual is designed to achieve. It is important in discussing a ritual process to differentiate clearly between process and structure. Structure refers to the shape or outline of any ritual performance, while process is the arrangement of action in time and space. The ritual process uses symbols and quality transference. For example, *iwa anya* is a rite of separation during which an animal is slaughtered and, it is believed that by dropping some of the blood from the animal into the eyes of the dead, that the attributes of the animal are transferred to the corpse.

The ritual process enables detachment from other participants and this allows individual participants the leeway to interpret the symbols and icons used in such a manner that they are enabled to find personal answers to the challenges they face. This is probably why Grainger (1974) describes ritual as that which "reconciles man and his world". It is through detachment that individuals are allowed the space to

create lasting personalised images based on their different but individualised perspectives. In this state, ritual participants are not afraid to explore the secret places of their individual worlds. They do so in the knowledge that built into the ritual framework, is a high level of support network which offers them safety in the knowledge that they may come face to face with the fears within themselves, but that they are nonetheless protected from harm. This is true of the initiation of young girls into womanhood. What happens during most of this ritual, like in most initiation rituals, is a closely guarded secret, but the general outline is that these young girls are taught all about sex and sexual decorum, pregnancy, child birth, delivery etc.

Hence, the ritual process makes it possible for people at the pre-liminal stages to hold a homologous and collective image of what their experience may be. This collective understanding gets transformed during the liminal stages when individuals are allowed the space to come to terms with the ritual truth. By the time the initiands are re-incorporated into their society in the post-liminal stages, what originally was their collective image in the pre-liminal stages would now have become coloured by individual perceptions about themselves and things. In this manner, people who have gone through the same initiation will emerge affected in different ways by a common experience. No wonder Grainger (1974) describes rituals as "man's religious truth", during which process individuals attain a level of solitude in which they see and know things as they really are. Further on, Grainger writes that through the ritual process:

the structure of the rite allows interaction of persons who are both interdependent and independent, and neither isolated nor confused (Grainger:xi)

However, we must be careful in laying too much emphasis on the process, because overt concern with process has the capability of undermining the meaning. Rituals are not accidental happenings - their order, time and place are according to an

agreed action plan. In discussing rituals, it is important to assume a holistic approach to enable a clearer understanding of the underlying aim and purpose of any particular ritual. Werbner (1989) highlights this point when he writes that:

the processual form of ritual is not as important as the key idea and its combination of terms - the terms being coordinates for sequencing of phase. (14)

The researcher wonders if this warning will not be more relevant to those studying rituals from an anthropological point of view. For the purpose of this work which approaches ritual from a performance perspective, it is very important to go into in-depth processual analysis because the correct interpretation of symbols, icons and indices are contained within the process. This is because in the process we see the relationship between various performers, how they use dialogue, their use of space, costumes, arts, music and dance. Furthermore, if this suggestion is correct, does it make van Gennep's (separation, transition and incorporation) and Turner's (pre liminal, liminal and post-liminal) phases obsolete in the study of rituals? Not necessarily. What Werbner seems to be warning against is the urge to evaluate the ritual process in isolation, to a point where the part becomes greater than the sum of other aspects of the ritual. When this happens, meaning as well as the subtle transformation inherent in the liminal phase is lost, especially as this is an important stage during which:

... people are metaphysically and sociologically remade into "new beings with new" social roles. Newborn infants are made into human persons, children are made into adults, men and women are made into husbands and wives, deceased people are made into revered ancestors, princes are made into kings (Benjamin, 1976:91)

This suggests that the ritual process can bring about irreversible changes, and one only gets a balanced sense of this transformation when attention is paid to the ritual in its entirety. This is best exemplified in how initiands use and position their bodies in relation to other bodies within any given ritual space (actor placement), how rituals

are ordered and clustered (determining stages of experience), what ritual language is rendered (former ritual exposure determines language intensity) and finally, how and what symbols are used (the higher rituals use more complex symbols).

On the subject of structure, Schechner (1995) important classification of rituals under the "Ritual Tree" identified three categories of rituals namely: "social", "religious" and "aesthetic" (229). This classification is helpful because it serves as a useful tool that enables the creation of ritual boundaries, thereby helping in its understanding. However, it must be pointed out that such a rigid classificatory mode does not exist for the Igbo, as every ritual, to a certain extent, encompasses aspects of all three categories. For instance, in the *ozo* title the social, religious and aesthetic are all aspects of that one ritual. The social is evident in the announcement of the intention to take the title, the religious during the period of isolation in the *akwu ozo* (*ozo* nest), while the aesthetic is evident in the various dances that accompany the re-incorporation of the performer into the family and society.

However, it is during the religious aspect of rituals that the human instinct for sacrifice to God is fulfilled, because the Igbo perception of God is as a being removed from their world, and there is a human need to bring him nearer by offering him their world. So, although the Igbo realise that they are offering aspects of God's own creation back to him, they are satisfied that they are able to offer something - no matter how little, and albeit offering God's world back to him. In sharing what they have with him, they overcome their feeling of inadequacy and thus share in God's sacredness. As Grainger (1974) puts it "man's religious truth is to be located in his hunger for the Divine"(25).

Furthermore, he notes that:

the purpose of religious ritual, then, is to proclaim the authenticity of human reality - the finite world of men and women. Thus, ritual externalised those ideas and theories about the meaning of reality which are given doctrinal form in the dogmas of creation and preservation of men and their responsibility (25).

How then do human beings in their seeming ineptitude transcend their physical and material limitation to achieve such complex insight as described above? The researcher is of the opinion that built into all rites of passage are those qualities that enable the creation of a bond between the context, content and form of the ritual. The consequence of this bonding is the liberation of people's sublime nature. Once liberated, it affords them a transcendental insight into their real nature and place in the universe. According to Benjamin (1989), this bonding is created during the rites of passage:

between man and divinity ...between temporal process and archetypal patterns in order to give meaning to human events (93)

Achieving this bonding can be quite arduous as it demands that "the physical exteriorization of the emotions must be canalized, and this becomes a wave of explicit signs (Barba, 1974:34) However, he like Schechner (1995) warns against placing processes over and above all other aspects of the ritual. The implications of allowing debates about one part to overshadow the sum total of all parts, has already been discussed. The power of ritual as a whole is felt and seen more when we are able, as Grainger (1974) suggests, to see how man (or woman) is able through ritual to weave his/her speech, gestures and rhythm within a structured ceremonial, using his/her body as a vehicle to achieve a form of worship. Through this process, he/she moves beyond the "impossible truths and incredible understanding" (32), to an intelligence which defies logic, but one in which they can face their own human-ness. This is *satori* (instant awakening) which he describes as:

the response which is forced from man by his awareness of divine transcendence [and which] does not allow man to avoid the issue of its own ineptitude (32)

In summing up, it is easy to understand why what happens during rituals can never be fully understood by the ritual outsider. This is because ritual is culture and context specific, exclusive, sublime and above all, a personal experience. Ritual has the power to lift both the performer and participant and afford them the courage to talk and think of things that would normally be beyond his/her daily expression.

Without ritual, human existence may likely be a mass of chaotic and unanswered experience, instead in ritual, human beings get an insight into their divine nature. It is the only process that has the ability to transport men and women to a time and space of unimaginable essence, where in guarded silence, they are able to glimpse and further their exulted otherness. Ritual creates and solves its own challenges - it is at one and the same time, the turbulent sea, the compass, the steadying keel and the lighthouse. Through ritual, men and women become one with the Divine, and the secular becomes the sacred.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRIANGLE OF LIFE: TRANSITION AND PROGRESSION IN IGBO WORLD

Introduction

So far, a differentiation has been attempted between structure and process in ritual. Structure refers to the general outline or the overall form which is static in nature. Structure does not offer much information on the content because it does not attempt to explain the "symbols, icons and indices" that are employed within the ritual. It also does not offer any insight into the potential or latent capabilities and scope of the ritual in question. In a sense, the structure looks at ritual in its synchronic state. If, however, an understanding of ritual as a diachronic event which details a sequence in time and space is to be attempted, we then need to undertake a processual analysis, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Since rituals are culture specific, it is important in discussing the structure of Igbo rituals to briefly revisit aspects of culture from which these rituals spring. Igbo culture operates on two interconnected levels - the human and the spiritual. The Igbo diligently seek to maintain links with their ancestors, *chi* (personal gods) and other deities as a means of reaffirming their interconnectedness with Chukwu (God the creator). So, through rituals such as daily libation (*iwa oji ututu*), seasonal festivals (such as *Ifjioku/Ahajioku*) and initiations (such as *iba afa and ima muo*), the Igbo seek insight into their spiritual nature and invite their ancestors and all other forces around them to partake in their activities. These forces are the different deities that are created by Chukwu and they include *Igwe* (heaven), *Anyanwu* (Sun) and *Ala/Ana* (Earth), *Orimili/Oshimili* (sea) and *Amadiora/Amadioha* (thunder). These, together

with the ancestors and personal gods, are messengers of the supreme God, who is the central intelligence that permeates and orders all aspects of Igbo existence.

For the Igbo, therefore, the real nature of Chukwu is incomprehensible and can only be glimpsed through the attributes of his complex creation. Nkala (1980) writes regarding the Igbo God thus:

... the supreme God concept is at the core of the Igbo world view. This concept is discernible from:-

- (a) names and invocative attributes of God;
- (b) stories and folklore, especially of origin;
- (c) proverbs and prayers, e.g. morning prayer with kolanuts, and
- (d) religious rites (1)

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the Igbo perceive *Chukwu* as an active force whose voice is thunder, his smile is lightning and the rains are his tears of joy. Onwejeogwu (1987:62) informs us that the essence of the *Chukwu* of the Igbo can be felt in the way it orders, permeates and empowers all the forces of creation and these include, *agbala* (fertility), *ife* (sunlight), *amamife* (knowledge) and *chi* (destiny). *Chukwu* also created - *alusi* (deities), including *Ifejioku* - the deity responsible for yam yields and *agwu*, the deity of *afa* (divination). He also created *obodo* (towns) to be the abode of *mmadu* (humans), *anumanu* (animals) and decreed that at death, humans become *mmuo* (spirit) and shall return to live in *ani mmuo* (the land of the spirits). There are also two categories of spirits - good and bad, and the type people become at death depends on their spiritual, social, economic and political status while alive; and upon their ability to abstain from *nso ana* (abomination). For instance, marriage and procreation also play an important part in this progression. Therefore, great achievers who die leaving wives and children become revered ancestors, while

women who depart leaving husbands and children become revered daughters. Both *ndichie* and *umuada* are privileged to reincarnate.

On the contrary, those people who lived unproductive or bad lives are believed to have lost the vital life force used for reincarnation and either become *ajomuo/akaliogholi* (evil spirits) or *ekwensu* (devils). They inhabit the evil forest (*ajofia*), and would sometimes visit their anger for their inability to reincarnate on the living by afflicting them with ill luck, diseases, confusion and poor farm yields. Some are benign and can be placated, while the malevolent ones must be exorcised with specific rituals. The *ogbanje* are a mischievous group of spirits who possess the ability to re-enter their mothers' womb to be re-born. (see Appendix D.)

Furthermore, the Igbo believe that while alive, men and women have the ability to make conscious choices about the type of posthumous spirits they will become. This is founded on the Igbo belief that at birth, God endows each individual child with some personal attributes that enable the type of fruitful existence that is conducive to reincarnation. Some of these attributes are: *ikenga* (the strength of a man's right hand and unfailing enterprise), *uho* (negotiation, persuasive argument), *iru* (imposing personality), *ukwu na ije* (the force that directs adventure especially in foreign places), *umu oku* (conservation of wealth), *ako na uche* (mindfulness, wisdom, memory, common sense), *nso-na-egwu* (respect and fear of God). How well these develop depends first, on the parents and society and second, on how much an individual is willing to do, to tap into latent abilities.

So the Igbo are aware that there must be some good reasons for all these God-given attributes at their disposal, one is that as human beings they have an important role to play (as the custodians of the past and present from which the future takes form)

in the relationship between them, their ancestors and their gods. This is because the Igbo hold important information about their gods, myths and symbols, and they pass these down from one generation to another as coded information during rituals.

Turner (1977) notes the importance of symbols and myths:

These symbols, visual and auditory, operate culturally as mnemonics, or as communications engineers would no doubt have it, as "storage bins" of information, not about pragmatic techniques, but about cosmologies, values and cultural axioms whereby a society's deep knowledge is transmitted from one generation to another. (239)

The Igbo have the ability to create their gods to fit into the symbols and icons that they can relate intensively and extensively to. It is the intensity of this relationship with the unseen that make them a spiritual people who believe that being in harmony with the gods should ensure positive responses on the part of the gods in the form of abundant resources. This Igbo expectation of the ancestors and deities sometimes leads them to become disenchanted with these unseen forces. This is because there are occasions when despite the hard work an individual puts in, the gods would remain unresponsive - hence human expectations are not met. At other times, the gods may become unnecessarily demanding even after numerous sacrifices, and when this happens, people may become defiant and would refuse to placate and sanctify the gods. This show of dissatisfaction may sometimes lead to prolonged stand-offs between individuals or an entire community and a deity. In extreme cases, this may lead to the abandonment of that deity. Sometimes, an abandoned god may go quietly without any major consequences, but at other times, it may fight back in retaliation, inflicting ill-luck, sickness and death. To either find the cause of their misfortune or resolve a long standing feud between them and their gods, the Igbo would always resort to divination (*igba afa*) as a means of gaining insight into the 'thoughts' of the gods. This enables them to find remedial actions needed to resolve the ominous silence of their gods and ancestors. *Igba afa* is, therefore, born out of the Igbo need

to gain an insight into the ways of the gods, and as Werbner (1989) notes:

Divination is the ritual with which to begin reflecting about ritual. Its seances start the reconstruction of social reality that other rituals complete. In divination, people seek to obtain their bearings, and to prepare for the symbolic relocation of the person in other, later, ritual. As a preliminary approach to the occult, divination is, in many parts of the world, preeminently a ritual of orientation and disclosure. It creates and is created by the sense of discovery, for that reason it is typically exploratory or variable, and remade for each occasion, whereas other rituals, tied to foreknowledge of the desired outcome, unfold in fixed coordinated sequences that rely on constant terms. What comes to be known during divination, often through dramatic modes of searching and finding, is the hidden significance of events in extraordinary powers of communication; it thus has to be seen and felt to be extraordinary. In many of the moments of divination, little or nothing need actually be said. Instead, a silent language of objects is used for the presentation from the occult of felt realities, for interpretation, and for reflection. (19)

This delicate power politics between an individual and his/her personal deities may sometimes spill over to affect an entire community, and once again, different forms of divination will be employed with a view to offering a balanced solution to the problem. A powerful and unique performance evolves as people use rituals to negotiate a harmonious existence with the forces around them.

The place of ritual in a contiguous universe

The Igbo universe consists of the past, present and future. This statement is predicated on an appreciation of the intricate and contiguous nature of the Igbo universe where there is a constant coming and going between the human world (the present), that of the dead ancestors (the past), and of the unborn (the future). Yet in the Igbo mind, these three separate spheres or orbs of existence are one - they are not differentiated because these spheres co-exist in the same place, time and space. From Figure 3.1 below, these three spheres touch each other at different points but there is only a small commonly shared space in between the three. It is this commonly shared boundary that rituals help to define and negotiate.

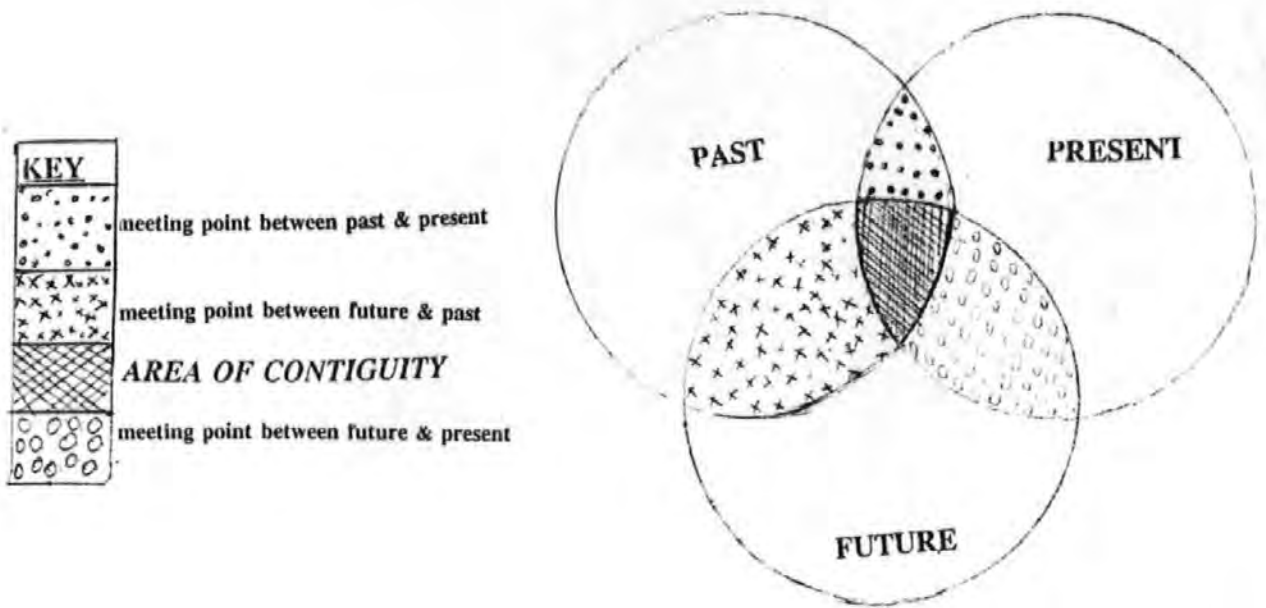


Figure 3.1: The contiguous world of Igbo existence

It is also worth noting that this interrelation between the orbs is not as straightforward or as simple as it sounds because at any given time, there are multiple levels of interrelationship in operation. For instance, the diagram shows a relationship between the present, past and future; the present and the past and vice versa; the present and the future, the future and the past and vice versa etc. So the Igbo are acutely aware of the influence exerted on their own world by this shared existence - an awareness acknowledged in the names they give their children including, *Tabugo* (Today is timely enough), *Azuka* (The past is supreme), *Nkiruka* (The future is supreme), *Echidimma* (Tomorrow is good), *Onyemaechi* (Who can forecast the future/who knows tomorrow?) and *Azumdialo* (My past is loaded) etc.

So, the Igbo use their rituals as a means of negotiating the shared commonality between them, the past and future. Rituals are a unique performance which enables a fusion of the three levels of Igbo existence because in-built in the ritual structure is that which best allows for the co-existence of the three planes in one moment and space. It is, therefore with the ritual context (present time) that the Igbo are able to recapture within a single space and time, the original time (past time, or time out of time) and the future time. For example, during marriage rites in Igboland, the format of the rite being enacted is repetitive and possibly as old as the Igbo themselves. In the process of a man taking a wife or a woman taking a husband, this age-old action is being replayed in the present (here and now) represented by performers and participatory observers from both the bride and the groom's side. What is repeated in the marriage rite is action performed in original time by the original Igbo ancestor and so each marriage recalls and re-enacts this primordial action as a means of validating/sanctifying the marriage act in the present. And it is the same in most other rituals. It is, therefore, through the re-enactment of this rite, that the past and present are brought together to co-exist in the same time and space. By the end of the rite, this fusion of the past and present would have enabled a negotiation of the future now embodied in the man and his new wife. This synthesis of the three levels of existence (past, present and future) is only possible within the rite which has the innate ability to engender a shared sense of belonging - a sense born out of the sheer intensity generated during a performance that manages to successfully balance three unlikely levels of existence.

During rituals, performer(s) become a conduit through whom the past is brought to life to the participatory observer-audience, and depending on the intensity of the performance, a deep sense of shared commonality helps this participatory observer-audience to identify with the crisis being negotiated. For example, during burial

rituals is that the participatory observer-audience come face to face with the fear of the unknown which is safely contained within the ritual. On the contrary, a ritual with the right intensity enables the initiated to look back on all his/her on life so far and to re-affirm readiness to make take on more challenges. For both the uninitiated and the initiated, the result of this encounter with the recreated past can be quite powerful and revitalising as Grainger (1974) writes:

... the rite prepares and enables us for the future by disarming the past. Not all past time, but our own past in its negative aspect, the past which drains the present of its meaning and significance, of its life. The rites allows us to understand in the present and live in the present. At the same time it recalls and makes present that part of the past which allows the present to be itself... (113)

This is true of the initiation into the masquerade cult, part of which happens in the middle of dark nights. For those who have not passed through the ritual, the predominant fear is that of dark nights and evil spirits that prowl in it. However, this ritual is designed in such a way that an integral part of it challenges and confronts these fears from early childhood. For the already-initiated who are either officiating or observing the ritual, the initiation becomes a travel through time in which they remember with pride and wonder at their resilience in challenging the power of the unknown.

What Grainger, also, describes above can be seen when one observes people arriving at the onset of a ritual - they come as separate individuals or in small groups. However, at the end, they leave as a group bound together by a shared intensity which Nkala (1982) describes when he writes that "ritual observances constitute the pulse. the very heart beat of a village life all the year round"(1). This is because rituals possess the inherent characteristic of creating fresh uncertainties in their bid to resolve existing ones. The fresh uncertainties must also be negotiated. So the successive pattern of Igbo rituals results from the ever-present positive tension

generated by the three levels of existence as they attempt to balance and co-exist with one another. For instance, the nature of this positive tension can be better appreciated if one understands why the Igbo seem to celebrate all their major rituals between mid-October and mid-March. There are two main seasons in Igboland - the rainy season and the dry season. The rainy season is also referred to as the farming season and lasts from March through to October. The first rain fall in the year (about mid February to March) marks the beginning of the farming season (which includes the whole process of preparing the farmland by burning, tilling, sowing and weeding). During the farming season, there are no major rituals as most of the people are busy in their farms. In some areas where arable land is scarce, people would travel great distances to access their farmlands. In cases like this, they build camp settlements in their farms for the duration of the season, and return to their villages once the intensive periods of sowing and tending new crops are over.

On the contrary, the dry or harvesting season usually lasts from about mid-October to mid-February which is a leisure time during which people rest and await the coming of the rains. During the months of December to January, the *harmattan*, a dry dusty wind from the Sahara desert crosses Igboland. At this time of the year, grasses are tinder-dry as most vegetation would have been exposed to the intense heat that comes at the end of the rains. This is also the time that people would burn their dry land to get them ready for farming with the next first rains; however, before burning the bushes, they would have set snares to trap animals that escape from the bush fires. So this is a also for hunting and most major communal and personal rituals happen during the dry season for three reasons. First, it is the period when people are relaxed and when they do not have the pressures of farming to contend with. Second, it is a time when farm yields would have been harvested so there is ample food for celebration. Third, the bush-fire season is the hunting season during

which people trap enough game and animals which they sometimes prepare for the celebrations. It is no wonder that some of the early European visitors to Igboland who understood little about the natural cycle the Igbo follow argued that the Igbo did nothing but celebrate.

These numerous celebrations are a mark of the never-ending need the Igbo have for rituals which enable them to negotiate progression, transition and the fear of the changes they involve. Grainger writes about the fear of the unknown and change thus:

Ritual is about change, and the terrors and uncertainties which surround change, but which must somehow be 'accepted into the system'... It is about mankind's fear of novelty, of unstructured situations and states of flux, in which the old way is over and done away with and the new has not yet really begun; it is about life without existential guide-lines, when man must launch himself out into the unknown; it is about the fear of the threshold, the need to plot new areas of experience... (115)

However, the Igbo believe that human nature limits the type of extra-sensory perception needed to "plot these new areas of experience", hence their need for divination to help their understanding. Divination is a process of communication between the Igbo and the unseen. It is a tried and tested means of prising information and knowledge from the unknown, from the spirit world. On the one hand, it belies the Igbo fear of the unknown while on the other, it shows a people who are aware of their connection with the unseen. Therefore, from the time a child is conceived, through life and until after death, this dramatic form of communication is present.

Igba afa: Communication in the Igbo Universe

The Igbo believe that the human being is a spirit undergoing a human experience, so they have a tireless yearning to understand the higher meaning of life. Being agrarian

also keeps them in very close contact with the forces of nature who they believe are manifestations of Chukwu. By interpreting the manifestations of these forces (the spirits of thunder, lightning, rain and/flood etc), Igbo people are able to know when they are in or out of Chukwu's favour. Furthermore, because of this belief that God is manifest through these elements, the Igbo have an overwhelming desire to ensure a correct interpretation of the 'language' spoken by these forces of creation. Hence, the regularity of their consultation with the oracles through the *dibia* (medicine man).

Divination is a primary ritual - a first among equal and without it the Igbo will not be able to find answers to the numerous questions they ask of the gods. According to Werbner (1989)

Divination is the ritual of rituals. It opens our understanding of the people's *own* interpretive process, for in a sense divination is ritual that, to a great extent, operates on a reflective meta-level. It is a ritual in which the people themselves give interpretations of their symbols, icons, and indices (4)

Furthermore, and in case there were doubts about the classification of divination as a ritual,

he continues:

I want to stress that it is ritual not merely because divination is symbolic action, but also because it is action in which people are moved by what they feel to be their experience of the occult. And divination, no less than other ritual, has its disparate moments as well as its capacity to play on different levels at once...(4)

Rituals operate on many levels. Igbo masking tradition is a typical example where people know that behind the mask is an individual, but for them that individual's persona is changed once he puts on the mask. He is from that moment an ancestral spirit and from then, the dynamics of the relationship between them and this spirit changes to the point where it is almost reverential. Some may regard the masked person as a total spirit while others may see him as a human conduit through whom

attributes of an ancestor manifest. This point can be further elaborated when we take the scenario where a supplicant is asked to provide a chick for use in divination. The Igbo mind would automatically think of it symbolically and would see, not just a chick but, its symbolic attributes which include innocence, swiftness and its lease of a new life after being used as a ritual agent. So the chick is not just a chick, but a symbol of survival for the supplicant. It has been used in negotiating with the unseen and as such it is a carrier.

Divination and subsequently sacrifices, are two very important aspects of Igbo life, and are usually the first step towards the resolution of complex situations that may arise between people or between people and the gods. This probably explains the sheer number of divination rites which occur on a daily basis as the Igbo seek harmony with the forces they have to co-exist with. Beyond the need for a harmonious co-existence is the fact that in divination people acknowledge and pay due attention to the existence of their ancestors and gods. By making out time to divine the mind of these ancestors and gods, the Igbo are able to tap into their own higher spiritual essence obscured by the pressures of their daily lives. Eliade (1957) notes that:

Since for religious man of primitive society, myths constitute his sacred history, he must not forget them, by actualising the myths, he approaches his gods and participates in sanctity (106)

Divination is, therefore, an effective form of communication transversing the three levels of Igbo existence. The need the Igbo have for divination has led to a sophisticated form of skills specialisation among the practitioners of traditional medicine aimed at catering to people's physical and spiritual needs.

The term "*dibia*" (medicine man/woman) among the Igbo refers to a healer, seer or priest(ess) of the gods. The people in this vocation are usually chosen by the spirit that owns and inhabits the shrine. Once a prospective *dibia* has been identified, the individual will be informed of the wish of the spirit of that particular shrine for their service. Some people may refuse initially, but this unfulfilled vocation will continue to disrupt their lives in such significant ways, until they are forced to resort to divination to enable them to find out what the problem is. If *dibia afa* finds out that the difficulties the individual is experiencing is connected to an unanswered call to priesthood, a series of initiation rites are performed after which the individual is ready to engage in a long apprenticeship during which his/her eyes are symbolically opened to the secrets of the gods. Initiation rituals into the *dibia* cult are ascetic and mystic experience which includes a period of purification and sanctification, usually a period of denial of earthly pleasures. For instance during this ritual, initiands are made to avoid contact with water. The idea is to allow herbal incisions on their skin a chance to settle-in without being washed off. So at some points in this particular ritual, water which is usually used for cleansing and purification in most rituals becomes unacceptable. The initiation of a priest[ess] into, and subsequent apprenticeship to, the *dibia* cult, is a training in the secrets of herbs and divination. Usually, a priest[ess] can specialise in one or more areas, and the length of training may differ from two to thirty years depending on the areas of specialisation and the trainee's natural gift (*nkaa*) for healing.

There are four main categories of *dibia* - *Dibia Afa* (Diviner), *Dibia Aja* (Priest[ess]), *Dibia Ogwu* (Herbalist) and *Dibia Mmili or Ora Mmili* (Rain maker). *Dibia afa* specialises in divination. *dibia aja* in preparing and carrying out various sacrifices recommended by the diviner and offered at different shrines and to different gods; *dibia ogwu* specialises in diagnostics and treatment of different diseases with herbs

while *dibia mmili* or *ora mmili* specialises in the art of rain making and prevention. There are also other categories of *dibia* that specialise in circumcision, delivery of difficult births, incision of abscesses and/or tumours and in setting fractures. Among the Igbo all categories of *dibia* are equally important, but the diviner is primary because without his intervention, neither the *dibia aja* nor the herbalist would be able to start their sacrificial or healing processes.

This also explains the esteem in which the divination priest[ess] is held as a go-between for the Igbo and their ancestors and gods. Their role is unique because the process of divination offers them an insight into the thinking of the gods and this enables them to offer suggestions about what people need to do to promote harmony with the unseen forces around them. Arazu (1981) discusses the role of the fortune-teller and medicine man thus:

The fortune-teller and the medicine man [and I add, woman] have powers to get in touch with the dead and other spirits, in order to find out their plans for man, and in order to secure their good pleasure or ward off their wrath. Those who see visions or apparitions make haste to consult these experts for an authentic interpretation of the phenomena. The fortune-teller and the medicine man are the experts or adept of Igbo traditional religion. (57)

The process of "*Igba afa*" (divination) begins when an inquirer/supplicant approaches the *dibia afa* (diviner) with either a physical or spiritual problem. The diviner in turn consults the spirits of the ancestors (see a detailed account of divination below) to intercede in determining and interpreting the wishes of the gods. Where appropriate, sacrifices stipulated by the diviner are performed by the priest[ess] in the knowledge that all will be well. Divination is a sophisticated, highly symbolic and essentially theatrical process and experience of information exchange, negotiation and dialogue which operates on two levels between four parties (supplicant, diviner, his *afa* or divination seeds and the unseen). The first level of relationship is that between

humans (the supplicant and the diviner), while the second is between the human (the diviner), a non-vocal but visible party (divination seeds) and the unseen (spirit[s]). The dynamics of these two levels of relationships is that each level employs its own language - possibly to the exclusion of the silent party. For instance, language between the supplicant and the diviner is verbal, while that between the diviner and the unseen is non-verbal and symbolic. On the first level (between supplicant and diviner), the unseen seems to be excluded, while on the second level (diviner and unseen), the supplicant is excluded.

Below is an account of a divination session which I witnessed at Mkpologu, a town to the south of Nsukka. This account is rendered here and not together with other rituals because of the primary position the divination ritual enjoys. Divination employs a high level of symbolism which will be discussed within the context of the narrative.

This process of divination began with an inquirer's visit to the home of the "*dibia*" or diviner. On arrival (there was no prior appointment booked), the visitor was made welcome by the diviner and in the process of their conversation he informed the diviner that he would like a consultation done for him. The diviner took him aside for a more private preliminary interview. After the interview, the diviner returned with the supplicant and asked him to sit at another location in his front room.

The location where he asked the man to sit was the place where the divination would occur. When asked why he sat him in that particular place, the diviner explained that there was no particular significance, but that he wanted to remove the inquirer from the place where we sat to afford him some quiet before the divination proper. In the meantime, the diviner reached to the rafter (roof) of his thatched hut, took a cup and proceeded to the back of his house. He returned with a cup of water, moved to the front of his house and began to wash his face and his hands. He would take a mouthful of water and swished it around his mouth with a "woshe, woshe" sounding noise; and then he spat it out. All the while he was intoning to himself in a low voice.

This was his pre-divination cleansing ritual and he explained that while he performed this ritual, he faced the East - source of the rising sun - symbolising the power of light, sight and inspiration. During the cleansing, he also washed all the parts that would be used to touch, see and talk to the ancestors. In washing his face, he cleansed his eyes, and so with his hands which he would use to later bring out and throw his divination seeds. He washed his mouth because through it he would beckon the ancestors and deities when the rite began.

On re-entering his front room, he repeatedly greeted (he was a new man after the cleansing and was seeing us for the first time in his new capacity) everyone saying "*deji-nu*" (you are very welcome) as he reached above the rafter one more time and brought down a dried and rolled-up animal hide, skinned off a black and white coloured goat and a raffia bag which was

his bag of afa paraphernalia -with some stuff rattling inside (he later informed me that it is the hide of a he-goat, and the he-goat is believed to be psychic). He spread it out on the floor, sits down with his feet wide apart and his afa bag in between both legs. He invited the supplicant to move and sat down on the floor opposite him, and made his presentation to his (the diviner's) "agwu" (the spirits inhabiting his divination paraphernalia).

The supplicant dipped his hand into his own bag and promptly came up with four kolanuts and five naira (Nigerian currency) note - these were token gifts before the diviner could let his afa out. The token was to clean the path of the afa. He held the kolanut and money in the cup of both palms held together in a gesture of someone begging for alms and said: "Please beg your agwu to receive these gifts from me." The diviner cleared his throat, collected the gifts from the supplicant and started to mutter to himself. When he had muttered enough, he informed the supplicant that the afa thanked him for his gift. He then put the four kolanuts and five naira note aside and invited the supplicant to explain his mission - this time to the afa. Still seated on the floor, the supplicant pushed his whole body frame forward as if to enable the diviner to hear him clearly, and he began "I have come to your oracle because for a long time, I have not heard from my son who is trading in a distant place, and I am worried".

The distant place was Bauchi (about 400 miles away from them, and his son was home about 17 months ago). Meanwhile the diviner listened intently with his head bowed (as if hearing this for the first time). He did not speak while the supplicant stated the reason for his visit. When he eventually spoke, it was to ask some questions as if to clarify the information the supplicant had given. Then he went dead quiet for a couple of minutes.

After this, he dipped into his *akpa aja* (divination bag) and took out a moulded piece of "nzu" (white chalk) and used the "nzu" to draw a circular pattern on the floor. Nzu is the symbol of the gods inhabiting the seas. The circle drawn was to be his ritual space for the consultation with the oracle. It was now sacred and when he started throwing the 'okwe' seeds, only those that fell into this defined space would be interpreted. (The *okwe* tree belongs to the iroko family, its roots grows deep into the earth [symbolic of deep contact with Mother Earth and immovability] and because the branches spread out wide, it is home for birds of the air and shelter for human beings. Its great and robust trunk which grows quite high represents the physical link between the sky and the earth).

He dipped again and this time emerged with a small tortoise shell (which he placed in an inverted position). In Igbo fables, the tortoise is known for being old, wily, savvy and notoriously slow. However, the tortoise's lack of speed has never been known to limit its operations because where he cannot reach, he would use others to do so. So the shell of the tortoise symbolised the manipulative will that is needed in the negotiations with the unseen.

Another dip into his divination bag and the diviner produced his charm or divination beads which was a set of four half *okwe* seeds and some cowrie shells on a string (cowrie shells are a symbol of wisdom that comes from the depth of the sea), his *ofo ebenebe* which is a piece of sculptured stick carved out of the ebenebe wood, with copper strings around one end. The *ofo* is a symbol of male authority and the ebenebe tree symbolises greatness and grace because it is one of the biggest trees in the forest, and above all by perching on it, the eagles grace it with their presence. The rest of his charms were a small bone and a small ram's horn. The ram's horn is a representation of the ram which symbolises strength and courage (refer to "Ritual Agents").

In performance terms, everything that has so far emerged from his bag became individual characters in this play and had been placed in a corner of his defined performance space/stage where they would remain until he cues them to speak.

Next, he brought out a pod of alligator pepper or "*ose oji*", and he took a few seeds from the pod which he threw into the circle (for the unseen forces already contained in his azu circle to eat), then he threw some into his mouth. The alligator pepper pod contains tiny peppery seeds and these sterilise the diviner's mouth against whatever defilement is left over from swishing the water in his mouth earlier on.

Taking one of the kolanuts from those presented by the supplicant, the diviner consecrated it and as he did so, he invoked all the deities and ancestors to come and take their share of kolanut, and get ready to speak. When he broke the kolanut, there were four lobes and the diviner beamed a contented smile. Four lobes in Igbo kolanut numerology signifies the four market days meaning that the deities were happy. Taking a lobe, he split it into many tiny fractions using the nail of his thumb. He threw one little fraction outside towards the door and the rest he more carefully brought to rest in the defined circle. The dramatic movement in the nonchalant manner in which he threw the small piece towards the door was very apparent - as opposed to the care with which he placed the rest of the pieces to rest within the circle. That piece thrown outside was for the uninvited and mostly mischievous forces who unless they got a share of whatever was being shared, no matter how small, had the ability to negatively interfere with the process of divination.

He also threw a lobe of the kolanut into his mouth and started crunching and as he did so, he continued with his invocation, offered one lobe to the supplicant and beckoned on my companion and myself to take half a lobe each.

Chewing the kolanut and still muttering his invocations, he reached one more time into his bag, and took out his afa cap - a high red cap (the kind worn by Igbo *ozo* men). It is adorned with one large feather "*abubo ugo na ichieoku*" (eagle's and red parrot's feathers respectively) on each side. The eagle feather is symbolic of insight and attainment of great heights, while the red parrot's feather represented the power of eloquence. Putting the cap on his head, he adjusted and cradled it with both palms on each side of his head just above the ears for a few moments in a clasping motion that was intended to stop both the cap and his head from expanding. All the while he was muttering incantations (he later explained to me that he was re-activating the dormant psychic qualities in the cap).

Taking hold of the white chalk with which he had earlier on defined his ritual space, he ground it on the bare floor in a front/backward movement until he extracted enough powder. With the index finger on his right hand, he took some of the powder, marked a white circle around his eyes. This would give him the ability to see clearly. His incantation was now more audible and more frenzied. He picked up his afa beads, threw them repeatedly within the circle and as he did so, called on *Arejiogba* (their ancestral god) to attend. He looked as if he was expecting the beads to speak or move. (I am informed that the gods he invoked at any time would normally depend on the purpose of the supplicant's visit. He could call on *Ite-ogene* (god of procreation) or *Nwakuute* (the gift bearing god that appears at *Ifjioku* or the new yam festival).

Still studying the pattern created by the thrown beads, the diviner used the *ofo ebenebe* to touch each divination bead as if willing them to speak and then did his permutation as he invoked the ancestors some more. He tapped the tortoise shell with the *ofo* and it produced a hollow sound "kpoom" "kpoom" "kpoom" and he invoked *Arejiogba* to speak his mind, talking to the afa seeds independently at each time.

He pronounced "the fire never lacks what it eats" and there was an interval as he looked at the okwe seed turned upside down, "fire never ceases to find its food". (Interval). "He [referring to God] who has given the skunk to a child will give the child water with which to wash his hands" (Interval). "your son tills the land" (interval). "he awaits the harvest" (interval). "go home" (interval), all will be well".

The tension in between each spoken word was palpable as he waited for the next set of messages. Each time he got a message, he threw the beads again for another set of messages to come through and clarify the received message. He continued receiving messages and depending on what message he got, he would stop to interrogate the supplicant for further clarification.

At a point the supplicant said to the diviner "ask them if he shall return?". The diviner took a string of cowrie shells and one string of the okwe seed and vigorously threw it as if to force an answer out of the unseen presence. He waited, then smiled "he shall return when he returns, all will be well."

After that, he relayed all the messages he had received as if to re-confirm what the afa had said, and instructed the supplicant to visit the *dibia aja* who would recommend the appropriate sacrifice to enlist the protection of the ancestors and deities over his son.

Still intoning, he removed his cap, started to gather his afa paraphernalia in the order in which he had brought them out, and carefully placed them inside his raffia bag. The supplicant sat patiently until he finished before he thanked the diviner and then left.

The dramatic significance of divination

The account given above shows that the action moves from outside (the supplicant arrives from outside the diviner's house) and moves inside (as the supplicant describes his mission). The action sequence is once again taken outside the diviner's house during cleansing and on his re-entering his house, the action is taken to a corner of the room where it becomes contained in a smaller but well defined circle. Structurally, the divination encounter has a fixed format. First are the preliminary meeting and inquiries, both by the supplicant and by the diviner to establish the nature of the problem. This is followed by the preparation and the ritual which include cleansing with water, marking the eyes with nzu, defining the space, costuming and assembling the props (*afa* paraphernalia) etc. This is then followed by the actual divination which can be seen as a series of dialogues, meta-dialogues and interrogations of both the supplicant and the spirit forces by the diviner who is the conductor/director of the entire encounter. The order is reversed at the end of the divination.

The process reveals a high level of symbolism and representation that does not happen in everyday life. Werbner (1984) describes the process of divination thus:

Divination is meant to reveal occult realities through extraordinary powers of communication; it thus has to be seen and felt to be extraordinary. In many of the moments of divination, little or nothing need actually be said. Instead, a silent language of objects is used for the presentation from the occult of felt realities, for interpretation, and for reflection. Or, if words are at all spoken, they are cryptic, highly elusive, and perhaps in a special language or in archaic verse. Almost never are they unambiguous. The imagery used is paradoxical and puzzling; it is evocative on different levels of meaning at once. At other moments, however, interpretation becomes more explicit verging on direct statement. Divination takes form as discourse through disparate moments. (20)

The divination process functions on very dissonant levels and the dramatic tension is unique because it is generated by the interaction of the most unlikely fields. In this case, communication happens across three different categories of characters who are involved in the process, namely, the human, the inanimate and the unseen ones. The human characters directly involved in the process were the supplicant and the diviner. The researcher and her companion were observers. The inanimate characters were the powerful divination symbols, for example, the tortoise shell, the eagle feather, the *ofo ebenebe* and the cowrie shells. The unseen characters were the ancestors and deities whom he acknowledged during cleansing by facing the East, and others with whom he consulted through the oracle.

The oracle was the most active in the sense that it was the medium used by the diviner to ask for and get the required information from the ancestors and deities.

The action unfolds gradually with the diviner making all the necessary preparation to ensure that all goes well. Water and later on, alligator pepper, are the different form of cleansers with which he symbolically cleanses all parts of his body that will be in direct contact with the oracle. The stage varies from the entire front room to a corner in the living room where the diviner uses the *nzu* to further mark out his performance space. The diviner directs all movements and actions within the wider and more circumscribed space. Also, he decides in which order the props from his *afa bag* appear and how they are placed within his performance circle. The tortoise

shell comes first because apart from its symbolism, it serves as a container in which the diviner puts all other divination bits and pieces.

When he is done with his role as a director, he returns to play the actor by putting on his cap - which is the same as those won by the ozo title holders. Among Igbo people, ozo title taking is one of the rituals of distinction taken by elders and distinguished men in readiness for a more sublime form of living prior to the journey (after death) to the land of their revered ancestors. Hence when used in the divination context, the cap confers all the attributes of an ozo (moral astuteness and respect) on the diviner. Furthermore, preparation for the performance occurs at different stages. First, the cleansing in the forecourt is his own rehearsal. The divination bag which he retrieves from the rafter of his house contains all his costume (red cap with feathers), prop (*ofo*, white chalk, tortoise shell, cowrie shells etc) and make up (the powder from the chalk).

By defining the space, he determines once again where the performance will take place. Once this is done, the on stage performance really starts. The interpretation given to the half *okwe* seed and cowrie depends on a couple of variables. First, it depends on the deity or oracle that is in attendance, and second on the circumstance warranting the divination. Different deities make different demands, hence they would understand and interpret the inquiry by the diviner and the micro-dramatics of the divination seeds differently. It is because of these variables that the Igbo would, sometimes, invite more than two *afa* when they wish to ensure that any divination reading is correct. It is also interesting to note that an object that falls outside the defined circle is not interpreted. According to the diviner, there are no set indices for interpreting the fall of the half *okwe* seeds and cowrie shells, but there are broad outlines that are learnt with the trade which every diviner must personalise through

repeated practice to be able to work with and interpret them successfully.

What the researcher found most interesting were the messages that the diviner relayed from the *afa*. They were re-assuring enough in this circumstance, but could have answered many other needs. "The fire never lacks what it eats" can be interpreted to mean that the supplicant's son (like the fire) once lit, must have something cooked in it - meaning that he is well taken care of by the cosmic, and (like the fire which has to keep flaming so as not to turn into embers), the supplicant's son struggles to keep alive. This is a fact of life and normal to most people. However, a more pessimistic interpretation of the same statement could also mean that just as misfortune never fails to strike normal people, his son was in trouble. Furthermore, his use of the phrase "all is well" could be a philosophical resignation to the will of God - who gives and takes life.

So the diviner is an all-round performer - director, actor, make-up and props manager, script interpreter and continuity artist. Like a good director, he leaves the supplicant a lot of creative freedom in which to interpret the messages (text) that he, the diviner, had transmitted. The continuation of the performance and its context largely depend on his recommendation to the supplicant.

Types of sacrifices

Sacrifices are usually the next stage after divination in the process of psychic and physical redress or resolution of personal crises among the Igbo. And depending on the outcome of the divination, the *dibia afa* can recommend three categories of sacrifices - *prophylactic*, *propitiatory* and/or *osadaka*

Prophylactic as the name suggests, are those sacrifices offered as prophylaxis, to ward off any evils and misfortune. Propitiatory are those sacrifices performed to placate the ancestors and gods for the sustenance of existing or the restoration of favours where there had been improprieties. These ensure the return of harmony between people and these forces. Osadaka are performed in thanksgiving for blessings anticipated or already received. They are usually in the form of open-door feasts in which all are welcome to partake and offer prayers for their host's intention.

The *afa* may specify particular groups of invitees or participants to the sacrifice/feast. For example, in cases where a female supplicant seeks children, she may be asked to prepare a feast to which only children are invited. As always, the sacrifice or feast is performed in the belief that the spirits of those innocent invitees would attract children to that homestead.

Basic concepts in ritual

The discussion of divination has now opened the way for other rituals. But because the subject area of ritual is a vast one, it has become necessary to introduce concepts that will enable a clearer understanding of the subject area. There are different categories of rituals, and each category has a collection of rituals that belong to the

same time and space. Igbo rituals reveal that while some are mandatory, others are not. Furthermore, while different rituals demand different agents, the structure and components of most rituals belonging to the same category (space and time) appear the same. This observation is revealing because it means that a model can be developed for the study of rituals by breaking any given ritual down into various components and using these components to determine the ritual characteristics and purpose(s). More important is that these concepts also offer insight into ritual sequencing which is part of the Triangle of Life model.

Passive, controlled active and active rituals

Most rituals of passage can be classified as either passive, controlled active or active and these adjectives connote the level of the initiand's physical and emotional involvement in the rituals being performed.

Passive rituals are those performed for the individual. So although other people may be closely involved in the ritual, the emphasis is not on them. Examples include the parents in relation to a new born baby during its naming ceremony or the immediate family of a deceased person in relation to the transition rites being performed for the ascendency of the deceased individual.

The naming ceremony is a passive ritual performed for every child born to the Igbo. In traditional Igbo society men and their wives did not live in the same house. The man's house was called the *iba or obi/obu* and it was usually the main structure on entering the compound. His wife or wives lived in their own smaller huts (*mkpuke*) at the back of the *iba*. There were no hospitals or maternity homes - women were delivered in their huts. The birth of the child is announced to his father in his *iba*.

After the birth, the mother and baby would remain in the hut for seven market weeks (twenty eight days) before the naming ceremony which usually happens inside the father's *iba* (if there are many people, the space before the *iba* would be also be used). The naming ceremony is a passive ritual during which the child is incorporated into the society and given a personal identity (its name). Before this time the child would be referred to as *nne* (if it is a girl) or *nna* meaning 'boy'. After the naming ceremony, the mother is re-incorporated into the society and could after this time attend public places and events.

During the naming ceremony, the child is for the first time taken beyond its mother's *mkpuke* into the father's *iba*. Figuratively, that would be the child's and its mother's first time inside his father's house since birth. This explains the varied names given to this ceremony in different parts of Igboland some of which include *I kubata n'uno* (to be brought into the house), *I kuputa nwa* (to bring out a child), *I puta ife* (to see the light) and *I ba nwa afa* (to name a child). The first three suggest crossing a threshold, while the last one suggests the conferment of an individual identity. All four are suggestive of what happens within the naming ceremony which takes place in the *iba*. On the contrary, funeral rites are also passive - totally passive during which the person is once again carried across a threshold.

The importance of the structure and purpose of these two rituals is a strong factor which suggests that one major characteristic of rituals in this category is crossing of thresholds.

The Passive-active or controlled active rituals is performed by the individual under the tutelage of an elderly or more mature and initiated individual. Most of the rituals in this category belong to what can be termed rituals of adolescence, and they include initiations like that into the masquerade cult (*ima mmuo*) and initiations into womanhood (*iso ebe*). These rituals are passive-active because they are usually initiated by the parents or adult guardians of the initiand, who later becomes more involved and active as the process progresses.

Iso ebe is performed by young girls under the guidance of elderly women, during which both the young girls and their mentors remain in seclusion for three months. Each young girl is assigned her own chaperon/mentor who would see to her welfare throughout seclusion. When the time for this initiation comes, the mentor would arrive to escort the girl to the venue (usually the shrine of the goddess of fertility) where they will meet with other initiands. It is there that these novices are taught all the secrets of womanhood. When they are through with their period of seclusion, the women will return them to their respective families. This ritual and the initiation of young boys into the masquerade cult are grouped under the Controlled Active group because all the actions are performed by the initiand but under the direction of a more mature person, and because the initiands do not initiate it. It is often the parents or guardian who know when the time is ripe for each girl or boy to go through the process of initiation. They make most of the preparation, but the rite proper requires active participation by the initiands themselves.

Active rituals are those rituals initiated and performed by the individual. In these rituals, the individual is the principal and makes most major decisions regarding how, when and where the ritual takes place. Most adulthood rituals (*inu mwanyi* or marriage rites) and rituals of distinction (*ozo/iyom*) belong to this group. One

interesting finding of this study is the fact that all rituals in the personal sub category start as passive, graduate to active and return full cycle to passive in a sense replicating the Igbo cyclic view of existence and the universe.

Using the marriage ceremony as an example, it is the man who decides when he is ready for a wife. Where he is having difficulties with finding one, his family may get involved and introduce someone to him. After this, the elders carry out all the necessary negotiations for him, but with his approval. Igbo marriages involve six distinct stages which are *Iche ego* (declaration of intention by the man), *iju ajuju* (inquiry into family genealogy) *Iru onu aku* (negotiation of bride price), *ibu ego/iwena ite* (payment of bride price), *igba nkwu nwanyi/i na be di ndulu nwanyi* (marriage proper) and *ogo malu ogo* (formal introduction of relevant in-laws). All the activities take place in the girl's home except part of the marriage proper and *ogo malu ogo*, and the groom is the person who makes all the decisions in conjunction with his direct family.

Ritual categories

Information about the origin and sheer numbers of Igbo ritual can be as speculative as the origin of the people. What, however, we cannot speculate on is the fact that the Igbo, like most Nigerian societies possess a rich tradition of performance which Ogunbiyi (1981) describes thus:

...in many Nigerian societies, [there exists] a robust theatrical tradition. The primitive root of that tradition must be sought in the numerous religious rituals and festivals that exist in many Nigerian communities. For, as an expression of the relationship between man, society and nature, drama arose out of fundamental human needs in the dawn of human civilization and has continued to express those needs ever since... embodying his first preoccupations, his first struggles, set-backs and all.(3)

So it can be safely inferred that in Igbo performance is a veritable corpus of information from which we can learn a lot about the people, their gods, their environment and entire belief system.

So far in this study, we have succeeded in establishing the following: (a) that rituals are those actions that accompany a community's or an individual's attempts to negotiate their way through life's crises and (b) that rituals are either passive or active. The grouping of rituals into categories will enable a further understanding of the nature of these rituals. This is because once these categories have been successfully determined, it would be possible to assign the rituals to families and as such, it will be easier to establish the reason for each ritual and its order in relation to other categories. With this in mind, every ritual can be categorised into three namely: *communal, peer and personal*

Communal rituals deal with the sanctification of communal deities, seasons, and shrines - usually they involve everyone in the community. Most of these are annual rituals that follow a pre-determined calendar. They are all active in the sense that the communities involved perform them for their own well-being and continuity with the priest/ess of the deity deciding (in agreement with the elders) exactly when the ritual should happen. Like most active rituals, they have a secret and public component. The secret component is performed on behalf of the community by the Chief Priest/ess and the elders away from public glare and, most probably at the shrine of the deity, while the public components are in the form of celebrations open to all members of the community. The venue is usually the village square.

Most communal rituals are used by different communities to affirm their oneness on both the physical and spiritual level. An example is the *Uzo-Iyi* festival in Umuoji

which marks the beginning of the planting season while consecrating the river goddess, *Idemili*. On the physical level, it is a time for the annual clearing of the pathways to the village stream in readiness for another rainy season. In many other communities, these communal festivals are times when the different age grades undertake the maintenance of commonly shared places and things like shrines. The culmination point is the celebration which people from surrounding communities are invited to partake in. These outside invitees can be referred to as the ritual outsiders, because to them, *Uzo-Iyi* is about a carnival of masquerades when in fact the core of the ritual had been completed and what the invitee witness is the incorporation stages. The incorporation stages are times when the whole community come together to demonstrate their collectiveness evident in their arts, crafts and dances.

Peer rituals They are performed because it is beholding on the peer or age grade to do so. They are mostly initiation rites, active, and they as well possess both the secret and public components. The secret part usually involves a period of seclusion when peer members are initiated into the ethics of their peerage, while the public component takes the form of dancing and merriment aimed at the re-integration of the initiands into the society after seclusion. Such public outing is usually marked by performances to demonstrate usually the skills and team spirit that the group may have learnt while in seclusion. An example is the production and display of the *Okotoko* masquerade in Nkpologu by young men, on the twelfth day after their initiation into the masquerade cult.

Due to the fact that different peer groups are arranged according to the age grade system (three yearly interval), it is possible to find that within one age grade, several peer rituals happen but with different emphasis. As a result, there may be celebrations from different groups happening within the community at regular

intervals - but they do not interfere with the communal cycle. Examples of peer rituals are different initiations for males and females into adulthood - initiation into the masquerade cult for boys and initiation into womanhood in Agulu and Nkpologu respectively - an initiation into womanhood performed for girls. In traditional Igbo society, individual families have the responsibility for ensuring that their members perform these rituals at the appropriate time. Where the family fails to do this, a certain level of communal coercion is used to ensure compliance. Invitees are usually members of other peer groups and friends and families of the peer group members.

Personal rituals mark people's progression through life and their attempts to negotiate their way through life's crises. They usually start with passive rituals and as these individuals progress, the rituals become active and then finish off as passive. All rites of passage belong to either this or the peer group. The organisation of community and peer rituals take precedence over these, and to a great extent determine when, how and where personal rituals occur. Examples include the naming ceremony, traditional marriages and the *ozo* title. In traditional Igbo society there were no mortuaries and anyone who died during the *Uzo-Iyi* week was buried without any ritual and the funeral deferred until a more appropriate time.

The importance of ordering the communal and peer rituals over the personal is the society's way of reinforcing in its members that they are never more important than the group or community they belong to. The family unit is an important agent of social control through which this message is reinforced and maintained. This system of control ensures that any major clashes of interest between the personal and communal needs are minimised. For instance, in Umuoji - one of the communities in Idemili Local Government Area, it is unacceptable to fit in personal rites during the *Uzo-Iyi* week. *Uzo-Iyi* is the festival in honour of the goddess, Idemili. Invitees

friends, families and in-laws. An example is *alom chi* (veneration of personal *chi*) performed by women in honour of their personal gods.

Unfortunately because of the vast scope of the rituals that exist under these three categories mentioned above, it is impossible to delve into all three at this stage. Therefore, the researcher intends to limit this work to personal ritual category. However, it must be noted that she intends to continue work on the remaining two categories as part of her post-doctoral work in rituals. The "communal" and the "peer" ritual categories contain some of the richest forms of performance that exist among the Igbo.

So having briefly looked at the three categories, rituals can also be further classified depending on whether they are *mandatory* or *non-mandatory*.

Mandatory rituals are those whose omission is believed to have negative implications by stifling progression and/or excluding individuals from performing subsequent rituals. Most rituals in this class are those used for head counting, registration and identification within the family and society at large. Examples are *iba afa* (naming ceremony), *ibe ugwu* (circumcision) and *ifijioku/ahajioku* (new yam festival in honour of *Ana* (Earth)). Without the *Ifijioku* being celebrated, new yam seedlings cannot be harvested and for the Igbo for whom the yam seedling is their major cash crop, the consequences can be dire. The rituals mentioned above are mandatory throughout the whole of Igboland.

Non-mandatory rituals are desirable but not essential. For example, *ichi ozo* (except in Onitsha where initiation into the ozo rank is compulsory for every grown man).

It is also only in Onitsha that the ozo title still maintains its traditional format in the sense that it has not been interfered with by Christianity. As a consequence, every Onitsha male who is ready to take this title must perform all traditional rites, and thereafter does not return to Christianity) and *inu nwanyi* (taking a wife, for men). In the researcher's opinion, these are also *enhancing* or *embellishing* rituals because they help enhance or embellish an individual's credibility and social standing. It is worth noting that with the advent of western education and subsequently, Christianity, some rituals have changed from mandatory to non-mandatory, while others have become almost extinct (for instance *Igbu ichi* - a test of courage and pain threshold). Examples of a movement from mandatory to non-mandatory are *igba agu* (inquiry regarding reincarnated soul) and *ima muo* (initiation into the masquerade cult).

The use of the mandatory and non-mandatory modes of classification may seem to suggest that some rituals are more important than others, but the purpose is to highlight the flexibility inherent in the Igbo social system - which offers people ample opportunities for upward mobility. Upward mobility in this context means that hard work is a passport that permits people to move into social statuses other than those they were born into. This is perfectly acceptable to the Igbo. So, this classification, reflects the dynamic nature of the Igbo society which considers its members' need for inter-class movement, and uses the ordering of its rituals to achieve this purpose. Therefore, while mandatory rituals are a *sine qua non*, non-mandatory ones are there for people who may wish to avail themselves of their performance to move into a different socio-religious and political strata. An example is the *Ichie* or the chieftaincy title taken after the *ozo* title. It must be noted that only in Onitsha is the *ozo* title mandatory; in other parts of Igboland, it is desirable, but done only by those who can afford the expense.

Ritual agents

Ritual agents are either animal or plants (animate) and objects (inanimate) which are used because they are either innately psychic or they are psychic inducers. Every ritual makes use of at least one of these agents, and they are facilitators that possess inherent properties that enable the invocation, access to and negotiation with the spiritual world. In the hands of the different categories of *dibia*, these normally domestic animals, objects and things act as bridges between the contiguous worlds of Igbo existence. They serve different roles depending on the type of ritual they are employed in. For instance, in propitiatory or cleansing rituals they are carriers (carrying people's misdeed and evils away hence facilitating absolution), while in the prophylactic and *osadaka* rituals, they are psychic conductors and hence conduits of unseen energies that facilitate rituals.

Categories of ritual agents

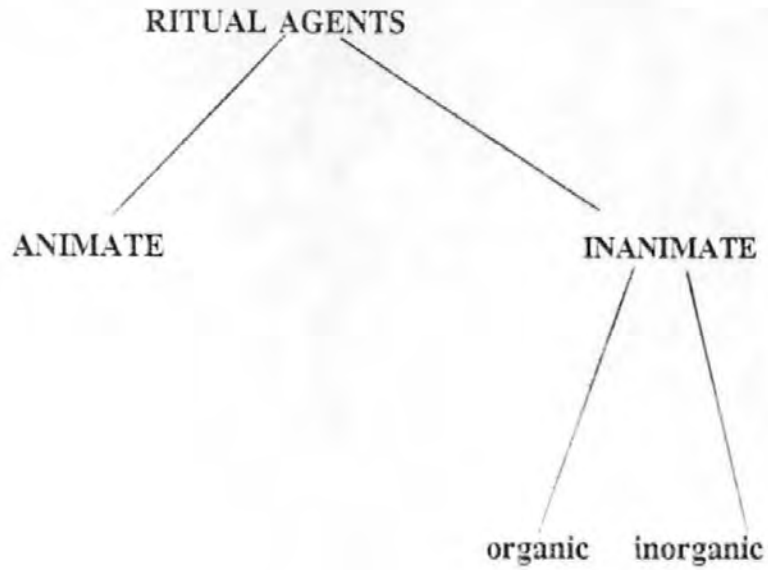


Figure 3.2: Categories of ritual agents

The three tables below give examples of the different ritual agents and their symbolism.

Table 3.3 contains a list of animate ritual agents, while Table 3.4 lists some inanimate-inorganic agents and Table 3.5 is a list of inanimate organic agents.

Table 3.3: Animate ritual agents

Igbo name	English approximation	classification	Purposes	Symbolism
akwa okuku	chicken egg	animate	carrier	embodiment of the future - the unknown universe - nobody knows what an egg would hatch into. Sign of fertility
nwa uyom/nwa uliom	chick	animate	used for sacrifices and rituals	innocence, speed
nkita/nkuta	dog	animate	sacrifices and rituals	psychic, friendly, speedy, vigilance, alert
mkpi/mpi	he-goat	animate	rituals	psychic, self-confident, good runner, diplomatic, fighter and especially procreative
ebunu/ebune	ram	animate		psychic, stoicism, strength, fortitude, stubborn, good fighter and procreative

Table 3.4: Inanimate-inorganic ritual agents

Igbo name	English approximation	Classification	Purposes	Symbolism
ofo	none	I-inorganic	all rituals	symbol of male authority, usually given by fathers to sons
nzu	white chalk	I-inorganic	all rituals	purity, sacredness, sincerity
o-odo	yellow chalk	I-inorganic	all rituals and sacrifices	symbol of the universe - the earth
ego ayolo	cowrie shell	I-inorganic	igba afa (oracle consultation)	The link between the living and the dead
aba	U-shaped cast iron with sharp ends	I-inorganic	to fasten sacrifices at particular spot (common amongst Nkpologu Igbo)	Seal acceptance
abubo or ugbene	eagle or red parrot feather	I-inorganic	in divination sign of great heights reached by an ozo	Eagle's - power, strength, vision Red parrots: power of elocution, persuasion, oratory and negotiation.
nsi/ntu egbe or mkpo n' ani	gun powder	I-organic	announces great events, arouses the power of divination from the sun god, while in separation rites used to alert deceased about time to proceed on the journey to ancestral land.	symbol of the sun god responsible for light. The sun one of the principal forces of Chukwu, the creator. Sun god is giver or power of vision especially in initiations and funeral rites

Table 3.5: Inanimate-organic ritual agents

Igbo name	English approximation	Classification	Purposes	Symbolism
oji	kolanut	I-organic	all social occasions, sacrifices and rituals. Principally, used during libation	Hospitality, used in covenants.
ose oji	alligator pepper	I-organic	sacrifices and rituals	cleanser, warmth energises the spirit
ji	yam	I-organic	major cash crop cultivated by men. From the myth of origin was given to Chukwu to Eri in reward for his obedience to his will.	wealth earned through months of toiling under harsh weathers. During sacrifice stands for self-denial in giving back to the gods that which they had so freely given.
isikara/ogirisi/ echikara	ogirisi leaf	I-organic	Especially significant during childbirth - serves as the first contact the new born has with the material world. Used in rituals of exorcism. Used by <i>Egbenuoba</i> - hunters' guild for its psychic and medicinal purposes.	anti-biotic, protection from contamination from material, human and spiritual elements.
omu	young palm frond	I-organic	the most tender part of the palm frond reaching out to the sky, signifying aspiration to more arcane values. Marks sacred places eg shrine, to seclude ritual sites, cordon off contested pieces of land, used as a form of social control on promiscuous men and women, when held between the lips signifies need for non-communication with humans. Sign of seriousness, silence and confidentiality	purity, direct link with the sky (Chukwu's abode), virginity and sacredness. In some cases used as a seal.

Igbo ritual agents and the notion of transference

Most ritual agents have four characteristics in common. First, their significance is understood all over Igboland. Second, the animate ones possess innate psychic attributes, while the inanimate are psychic inducers. Third, in the ritual context transference occurs and the attributes of the ritual agent(s) are transferred to the ritual subject. Finally, when animate agents are slaughtered for the preparation of ritual feasts, only a select few qualify to participate in the feast.

The notion of transference is unique to Igbo rites of separation, and can be better understood when viewed in the light of the fact that of all domestic animals the Igbo use only four for the intrinsic qualities that they possess. These are the chick, the dog, the he-goat and the ram. During the ritual, the animal is either killed or incised and the blood is extracted and in some areas, dropped into the eyes of the ritual subject. It is believed that in so doing the ritual animal is transferred onto the ritual subject. The transferrable qualities of these ritual agents are illustrated in Igbo proverbs which are a culture-specific method of communication whose assumptions are coded in such a manner that only those who are part of the culture can recognise, understand and interpret the relevance of the symbols, icons, images and metaphors used. The successful interpretation of any proverb depends on an individual's ability to decode the content, and match decoded message to the context which necessitated the use of the proverb. The evidence of the transferrable qualities of these animals are substantiated in the proverbs used in the following discussion:

Igbo proverb for the chick: *Ochu nwa okuku we ada, nwa okuko nwelu nwenwe oso.*" (He who pursues a chick has the fall, while the chick has swift tiny steps for escape).

The chick is innocent and swift in its escape from danger, it never ventures too far from mother-hen, hence it is, most times, protected from danger. When pursued, it does not run a straight course and the tendency is that the person in pursuit ends up falling over and getting hurt instead. More importantly, its longevity is most assured of all the ritual agents because its meat is too tender for human consumption, so it is usually left to escape. It continues its life as a carrier.

It is believed that through transference (during rituals) the performer becomes as innocent, swift and free from harm as the chick. Its innocence assures survival.

Igbo proverb for the dog: *Nkita sili na ife ya ji eso onye afo tolu bu o diro anyu anyu, o na agbo agbo*

(The dog said that the reason why he follows someone with indigestion is that the individual is either defecating or being sick (hence the dog's feeding is assured). This particular proverb espouses the dog as a strategic planner.

The dog is friendly, loyal and playful, but it can also turn quite ferocious when it feels threatened. It is a swift runner, observant and patient. The dog is psychic - capable of seeing spirits and ever alert because it is a light sleeper. It has a high pain threshold and as such does not die easily when tortured. It is dogged and has a good sense of smell.

Igbo proverb for the he-goat: *Nwa mkpi sili na mkpogha amaka, maka n'obu na ikwu nne ya ka nya jelu wee muta ikpokeni imi enu* (mkpi, the billy-goat said that travelling is nice because it was on its visit to its mother's kindred that it learnt how to be proud and cocky).

The he-goat, although smaller in size than most goat species and a lot less attractive, is quite aggressive - its stature does not affect its self confidence. During the mating season it would fight for supremacy using its short powerful horns on opponents until it mates with as many she-goats as it can. It is known for very short recovery rate between intercourse - hence the Igbo name for virility-engendering herbs is "*ike agwu nwa mkpi*"; meaning the he-goat never tires. The he-goat is swift and territorial during mating and it would jealously guard the females on its ground from violation, even after mating. It possesses a very strong musky smell and when on heat, this scent becomes quite pungent. This also alerts the less mature she-goat that are not ready for mating to flee. Also less likely to be slaughtered for food as its pungence continues even as meat.

The he-goat is believed to possess psychic powers hence its hide and skin are used by traditional medicine men as sitting mats during invocation. It is quite smart and would easily negotiate its way out of confrontational situations, especially when faced by bigger and more powerful species. It also outlives these other goat species because the he-goat is valued for its procreational prowess which increases people's herds and thus their wealth. For the he-goat, procreation is its mission and he affirms this fact in the cockiest manner as it single-mindedly fulfils this mission. Hence, the legendary visit (referred to in the proverb), which was made by the archetypal *mkpi* to its mother's kindred is a pointer to *mkpi*'s procreational worth - it is sometimes rented by people without a he-goat in their herd to mate the female members of the herd. This is why the *mkpi* travels a lot in the course of duty.

When used as a ritual agent, transference enables the subject to become swift, territorial, virile and to attract the protection and love of female spirits who can get quite vicious during confrontation.

Igbo proverb for the ram : "*Ebune sili na onye ga aku mpi, ekwo kaa kwa ya aka*
(The ram said that one who is willingly to lock horns must ensure that he has well-developed neck muscles)

Meaning: the ram is a renowned brave fighter with strong, well-built powerful horns. It is a great strategist - it would engage an opponent briefly to size it up and assess potential danger. It then withdraws and charges into a fight - a stoic and relentless fighter who when once engaged in a fight with another ram stops only when one party drops dead. Like the mkpi, the ram is a procreator.

Symbolism and inanimate ritual agents

The following are inanimate ritual agents, which unlike the preceding animate ones act at a symbolic level and act as conductors of psychic energies:

Ofo is a symbol of a man's authority, the centre of Igbo culture and religious life - symbolising *nti ndi muo* (the ear of the gods). It is also a symbol and medium representing divinity - the gods and ancestors and it represents truth, character, moral rectitude and paternal lineage. *Ofo* characterises and represents the owner and it is used during divination, naming ceremonies, oath taking, settling disputes and as a seal in making covenants. Among the Igbo, there are at least twelve structural variations of the *ofo*, signifying variety in personal perception of the gods.

Nzu and odo (white and yellow clay) are both clay but from different sources. While the *nzu* is clay from an active river bed, the yellow is taken from a dried up river bed. Together, they are representations of the gods inhabiting the seas and farmlands - universal unity. They are both symbols of peace and good intention for visitors, and they are used in almost all rituals to represent Igbo duality (the wet and the dry). During divination, one or both are rubbed around the eyes as an aid to enable human eyes to see the secret of the gods.

Ego ayolo (cowrie shells) represent the power of the visible universe - the sea. It symbolises vision, foresight and widespread fame which is re-echoed in the resonance of the waves of the sea. It was a legal tender in Igboland during the late part of the 19th and early part of this century.

Abubo/Ugbene (feather): Its significance depends on the bird it is taken from. There are the following types of abubo in Igbo ritual:

Abubo ugo (the eagle's feather) is a symbol of power, majesty, vision, eloquence, soaring heights/presence and beauty.

Abubo udene (the vulture's feather) symbolises the presence of spirits during sacrifices hence the proverb: "*Achu o aja ma si afuro udene, ife mmelu be muo*" (if during a sacrifice the vulture is not seen, then there is something wrong in the land of the spirits). In real life, the vulture represents all that is repulsive in nature - a scavenger that promptly arrives at the scene of all accidents. It possesses a powerful vision and intuition for scenes of human disaster and sacrifices, and it is a representative of the spirit world. Its weird sense of humour is borne out in the saying credited to it "*udene sili, na nwa ya aru na adiro nwuru anwuru, ulu! odiri adiri, ulu!*" (if my sick child survives, it is my gain; if it dies it is still my gain.) The *udene* would eat anything.

Mkpo n'ani or nsi/ntu egbe (gun powder) is a symbol of the spirit of the sun - one of the principal forces of the supreme God. It also symbolises light, power of vision and divination and it is used to announce great events such as title taking ceremonies and the death of an accomplished elder. It is used during final burial rites to facilitate the final ascent of the deceased's spirit into the ancestral realm.

Oji Igbo (kolanut) its use symbolises the sacred ritual of welcome both to spirits and humans. It enables mediation and negotiation between the human and spirit worlds and it has a tremendous functional role (both spiritual and economic). It is a sure key to unlock the hearts of men and gods and as such is employed in all rituals. When broken and shared by all, consumption signifies unity.

Ose oji (alligator pepper) is an antidote for poisons, and it is used as a mouth cleanser/steriliser prior to divination. It cures all throat infections and tonsillitis

Akwukwo ogirisi/ichikara/echikara is a coolant with an antiseptic/antibiotic effect. It is an evergreen and if used during childbirth to place the new born, transference of its evergreen qualities means health and long life. When used to place a newly born child, it protect the child from physical and spiritual harm. It dispels evil spirits and witches.

Omu (virgin palm frond) is a symbol of divine order, and one of the most sacred objects in Igbo society - it announces death, war or peace. It neutralises evil forces when used to adorn an individual. When woven into a garland, it is a means of beautifying sacrifices to make them attractive to the gods. It is also a symbol of purity and it has a sanctifying effect.

Ritual Clusters

One of the interesting findings of this study is that rituals are clustered, and that these clusters follow clearly defined patterns. For instance, communal rituals follow seasonal patterns - there are rituals that mark the beginning of the farming season and those that occur during the harvesting season. The pattern in peer rituals is such that

they take place mostly during the harvest season when it is possible to remove the initiands to a place of seclusion without placing too much pressure on their families where the initiands are valuable farm hands. Personal rituals follow basic human biological development from birth through to death.

So the nature of these clusters is such that each main cluster comprises various sub-rituals and this is very apparent in personal rituals. Personal rituals will be focused on for two reasons: (a) rituals in this category are so varied and occur more frequently, because they chart the course of an individual's progression from birth to death, (b) the frequency of their occurrence offer a rich variety of texts on which to base the study of rituals, their purpose and sequence.

The hypothesis of ritual cluster concept that is proposed here is in many parts. First, all personal rituals can be grouped into clusters, and rituals in any particular cluster tend to have the same attributes, hence making their study easier. Second, that if these clusters were to be represented as either horizontal or vertical strands, they would be of equal length and intensity, because they would represent the different phases of human biological development (from birth to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood and from adulthood to death). Third, that because all three strands are supposed to be equal in length and intensity, they could be used to form a triangle. Fourth, that because the strands are supposed to be equal, it means that no rituals on any of the three strands are more important or more significant than the rituals on other strands. Fifth, that because the strands are equal in length, they complement one another. Sixth, and finally, that if depicted graphically, this triangular axis show continuity in Igbo existence, because the tail end of one is the beginning of another.

Furthermore, the idea of ritual clusters and consequently the ability to arrange personal rituals on a triangular axis enables the introduction of the concept of the triangle of life (ToL, Figure 3.6.) The term is chosen because it clearly depicts rituals as following a basic pattern of human biological development. The ToL is a distinctive model which enables the placement of rituals as sub-sets within each cluster. Put together, each sub-set forms a single cluster. Using the ToL model will enable a thorough examination of sub-sets within each cluster. Hopefully, this will determine if rituals in the same cluster really possess identical characteristics. The benefit of this will be that if clustered sub-sets are identical, then it would be easy to carry out a performance analysis of selected sub-sets within each cluster; and hopefully, from this performance analysis will emerge the characteristics of a performance style that can be regarded as authentically Igbo. This can be better understood through this structured approach to the study of Igbo ritual.

Three clusters are easily identifiable in Igbo rituals and they are:

infancy/childhood rituals
adolescence-adulthood and status enhancement rituals
distinction/mortuary-ascendency rituals

Infancy/childhood rituals: Rituals in this cluster are those performed from conception through to when the child is about twelve years of age. This axis begins with inactive and ends with controlled active rituals. They are either earth, spiritual or socially oriented, and they exist to ensure that after birth when the child is severed from its natural mother, it is grounded with Mother Earth because any biological link to the mother is buried into the earth. For example the placenta, the umbilical cord and the

foreskin removed during the circumcision of male children are all buried inside the earth - these are earth rituals. Earth rituals also foster bonding because one thing most members of the community (male and female) have in common is that the placenta in which they lived as foetuses and their umbilical ends are all buried within the same locality. The males in the community share the additional bonding that comes from their foreskin being within the same earth radius.

Almost all the rituals in this category are started and concluded within the child's father's compound. The music and dance during these rituals are usually produced by the women either by clapping or using the *ichaka* (a gourd encased in beaded net) and sometimes the *ogene* (a small gong).

Adolescence-adulthood and status enhancement rituals: The rituals in this category are in two sub-clusters. The first is the adolescence-adulthood rituals and they span the teenage years through to adulthood. They start with controlled active and gradually move into the active category. They also exist to fulfil the Igbo need for earth, spiritual and cultural affiliations. These include *igba oghom* (initiation into manhood in Ngwa area), *iso ebe or ikpa iyi* (rituals of initiation into womanhood in Agulu and Nkpologu respectively), *inu nwanyi* (taking a wife) and *idobe chi* (the installation of personal chi). It is important at this point to note that marriages happen not only between men and women, but also between the gods and women (exclusive marriages). All the music and dance performed in this sub-cluster are energetic and acrobatic (for the males), while female dances are less aggressive and aimed more towards highlighting suppleness and beauty. The men would use *igba* (drums of

varying sizes), *ogene* (metal gong), *aloo* (giant metal gong) and *oja* (wooden whistle), but never *ichaka*. The young women would use *ichaka*, *udu* (earthen pots with openings at the side and top) and *ogene*.

In the second sub-cluster are the status enhancement rituals and these are performed when individuals invite the community to bear witness to their affluence and gradual preparation for their journey after life. The ability of an individual to move through the social strata, to a large extent, depends on how that individual uses the attributes he/she was endowed with at birth. Examples include the *ozo* and *di-ji* (master farmer) titles for men and *Iyom* (for women). In Imilike and Nkpologu, men do not take the *ozo* title but instead, they have the *Ozioko* and *Ophiere Agho* title respectively. Only women who have reached menopause belong to this prestigious group, and after the rite they are accorded almost the same respect as their male counterparts.

The music and dance for both the male and female initiations and ceremonies are now slow and prestigious. For the men, the period during their *ozo* title taking ceremony when they enter the *ozo* nest is the first time that the *ufie* (a wooden musical instrument with high religious significance) is used to produce music for them. At the end of the *ozo* title, they will join other *ozo* men in dancing to the *abia* which is the music produced on the *ufie*. On the contrary, women who are *Iyom* are not called out on the *ufie* neither do they dance to the *abia*.

Mortuary-ascendency rituals: All mortuary-ascendency rituals are passive and are performed at and after death and are meant to transform the deceased from an ordinary person to the ancestral cadre. In some pre-Christian Igbo societies (Nkpor, Umuoji, Uke and Nnobi to mention a few towns), men were buried within or immediately outside their own *iba/obi* while the corpses of women were returned to and buried with their pre-marital families in an elaborate performance referred to as *iwena ngiga* (or *iwena aga* in Nsukka area). *Ngiga* is a wire mesh basket given to all women by their family on the final day of their traditional marriage. It is used for storing her dried fish, meat and spices for cooking. The size of a woman's *ngiga* increases with the size of her family or she may even decide to have different ones for different food items. No matter the number of *ngiga* a woman has, they are usually hung on the *uko* (kitchen rafter) which is directly above *osi ite* or the cooking tripod. In this position, the smoke and heat from the firewood used in cooking reaches the *ngiga* and gradually dries up whatever its contents are without necessarily destroying the nutrients.

In Nsukka area (Nkpologu, to be specific), the woman's *aga* is returned with her corpse. The *aga* is like a fishing net that is woven with thicker ropes and women in this area use it to cover their market wares after packing them. In traditional Igboland, people travelled either on foot or in their canoes or rafts. Market women would walk miles on foot to sell their varied and oversized market wares in neighbouring markets and used the *aga* to cover and hold these overloaded wares in place so that they can carry all of them as one load on their head. The *aga* symbolises a woman's spirit of enterprise it is returned to her family at her death.

Therefore, when the woman's corpse is returned to her maiden family, her *ngiga* or *aga* which are both symbols of her office (family cook or trade) go with her, and it is usually buried with her. However, if her family felt that she had not been properly catered for by either her husband and/or children, they may refuse to take her corpse and *ngiga* from her married family. When this happens, a lengthy negotiation process ensues during which gifts and money are offered to placate her birth family for the abuse their child suffered in her marriage.

Four things readily emerge from clustering. First, the infancy/childhood cluster is passive, while the adolescence-adulthood and status enhancement cluster is active. However, by the time of the mortuary-ascendency cluster, the cycle is completed and rituals once again become passive. Second, the controlled active period begins from about twelve years of age until the individual is past the teenage years.

Third, all the clusters have in common a mix of components which the researcher terms the *earth, spiritual and social* rituals. The earth rituals are clearly marked actions geared towards severing links with the natural mother and aligning or bonding with Mother Earth (eg *ini nhe* or burial of the placenta, *ini otubo* or disposal of the navel dropping, *ibe ugwu* or circumcision and *ini ozu* or burial of a corpse). The spiritual rituals affirm the individual as both human and spirit and examples include *ino uwa* inquiry into reincarnation, *ima mmuo*, *iso ebe* or initiation into manhood and womanhood respectively and *ichi ozo/ichi iyom* or initiation into the *ozo* and *iyom* cult); while the cultural rituals have elements that mark the individual as belonging to a particular culture, such as *iba afa* or naming ceremony and *inu nwanyi* or

traditional marriage rite. Some rituals like *ibe ugwu* (circumcision) are both spiritual and cultural. In the first cluster, these rituals have clearly identified boundaries and as the individual matures biologically, these boundaries begin to merge to a point where they become one.

Fourth, in-between each cluster are rest periods filled with social action during which, individuals are given a chance to own and personalise the lessons learnt during each cluster. The tables below show aspects of the different clusters. An analysis of their performative aspects will be fully dealt with in Chapter 4.

Table 3.6: Maternity/Infancy Cluster

NAME	ENGLISH APPROXIMATION	PERFORMED BY	PERFORMED FOR	TYPE	MUSIC	DANCE	SYMBOLISM
Ichi Oga/Iti mkpu nwa	Shout of joy	Father, paternal(PGF) grandfather	child	passive/spiritual/cultural	nil	nil	A coded shout of joy announcing birth to entire village. News of birth is relayed from compound to compound until all get to know.
Ini nhe	"Burial" of placenta	Paternal grandmother (PGM) or midwife	child	passive/earth	nil	nil	Child accepted into human world, first contact Mother Earth as its pre-natal home is buried with her bowels
Igba agu	Re-incarnation inquiry	<i>Dibia afa</i> (diviner) for child's father or paternal grandparents	child	passive/spiritual	nil	nil	Inquiry to find out which ancestor returned as child.
Iwa agada	Mentoring/name-saking	Any respectable adult	On child	passive/spiritual/cultural	nil	nil	A respectable family formally becomes physical and spiritual mentor.
Ibu oma ite	Formal announcement of birth to maternal grand parents	Paternal grandfather for maternal grandparents	child	passive/cultural	nil	nil	Formal announcement of birth to child's maternal kindred and invitation to grandmother to <i>omugwo</i> .
Ine omugwo/ngwo	Extended visitation	Maternal grandmother	Mother and child	Part passive/part active/cultural	nil	nil	Laden with choicest gifts and food stuff, grandmother visits to offer respite to daughter by taking over the domestic functioning of her home and baby care for minimum 3 months.
Ibe ugwu	Circumcision	Traditional circumcision expert aided by a family member who can stand the sight of blood	On child	Part passive part active/earth/cultural	nil	nil	Cleansing rite for boys for making sexual contact with mother as they passed via the birth passage. The removal of the foreskin atones for this unavoidable incest, tribal identification for all Igbo male (female is later in life)

Ini otubo (Obosi) Ini ntu (Imilike)	"Burial" of dropped navel	Father/grandfather	child	passive/earth/cultural	nil	nil	Child linked with ancestors, form of head count as a cash tree in planted on the spot of burial. The yields are harvested by child throughout life. For female children, tree is their only claim in the family once married
Iba afa/i puta ife/i kuba n'uno	Naming ceremony	Open invitation to entire community	on child	passive/cultural	by women	by women	Personal identity bestowed. Registration with kindred and acknowledgement of child's existence
Iticha ebube ntu	Vote of thanks to visiting grandmother	Child's father, family and close friends	child	passive/cultural	nil	nil	As maternal grandmother prepares to return home, people are invited to a farewell/thank-you feast and presents are giving to departing grandma as show of gratitude for long visit and help
Igba nkwa nwa	Wine sharing for birth of child	Child's maternal grandmother	child	passive/cultural	by women	by women	Grandmother registers child by inviting all women married to the same kindred as herself to partake in the presents she was given. Displays gift and white talcum powder passed round - as women apply and thus become witnesses to the birth. "Egwu nwa" (birth songs) are sung
Izu afia nwa	Announcement of birth on a market day	Maternal grandmother	child	passive/cultural	nil	nil	Unlimited announcement of grandchild's birth while market is in full session to both humans and spirits gathered in the market place. Grandmother offer remnants of her white talcum to women selling their wares as to enlist their goodwill for grandchild. In return, everyone who accepts her talc gives her money or presents in reciprocation of goodwill. Unwise for anyone to refuse as it shows ill will towards the new child.

NAME	ENGLISH APPROXIMATION	PERFORM'D BY	PERFORM'D FOR	TYPE	MUSIC	DANCE	SYMBOLISM
Iso ebe (Agulu) Ikpa iyi (Nkpologu)	Initiation into womanhood	Elderly women	Girls	Controlled active/earth/spiritual/cultural		sexually suggestive, vigorous but dignified extolling female attributes	Irreversible maturity rites during which girls are taught all about, sex and sexual satisfaction esp. of partners, pregnancy, birth etc.
Ima muo (Umuoji) Iba mmanwu (Mkpologu)	Initiation into manhood, ie, masquerade cult	Elderly men	Boys	Controlled active/spiritual/cultural	possibly learnt in seclusion, produced from different drums, gong (ogene) giant gong (aloo) and oja	energetic, acrobatic and rigorous extolling strength	Irreversible: boys are made men and taught the secrets of manhood and sworn into secrecy, their responsibility to community, sex, marriage, and setting up own home etc.
Inu nwanyi	Taking a wife	Man	Himself	Active/spiritual/cultural	No music before final rite of ina be di. Music accompanied by rattle and clapping provided as the girl is escorted to her husband's home by other young girls. At some other times, the bridegrooms mates make music from drums and gongs.		Extensive use of negotiation skills employed as man attempts to convince the girl's family to let go of their daughter (see analysis of marriage rite under Chapter 4)
Iwu ulo/ilu uno	Building first home	Man	His family	Active/earth/cultural	nil		Man is now the head of his own homestead
Idobe chi (Awka) Ikpu ifu chi (Nsukka south)	Installation of chi	Man	Himself	Active/spiritual/cultural	nil		man owns his own <i>ikenga</i> - a symbol of the spirit of endeavour and achievement

NAME	ENGLISH APPROXIMATION	PERFORMED BY & FOR	TYPE	MUSIC/ DANCE	RITUAL AGENT	SYMBOLISM
Ozo (Onitsha) Ichi Ozioko (Imilike) Ophiere Agho (Mkpologu)	No equivalent but they could be collectively referred to as status enhancement titles	Man	Active/ spiritual/ cultural	Ufie music	Mkpi (he goat), nwa uyom (chick)	Mark of distinction and wealth. A commitment to a more spiritual existence in readiness for moving on to the next plane of existence
Ichi Iyom/Lolo	Iyom/Lolo title	Woman	Active/ spiritual/ cultural			Title taken post menopause, signifying that woman has surpassed the taboo of menstruation. She is now taken into highest confidence by the men and regarded as one of them.

NAME	ENGLISH APPROXIMATION	PERFORMED BY THE LIVING FOR DECEASED	TYPE	MUSIC	DANCE	RITUAL AGENT	SYMBOLISM
Iwu ozu aru	Bathing of corpse		Passive/earth/spiritual/cultural	None	None	-	Last earthly bath, once again as at birth, the dead body is placed on ogirisi leaves and (see symbolism of ogirisi leaves under ritual agents) cleansed in readiness for journey to spiritland
Iwa anya		Person chosen by deceased	"	None	None	Ram/chick/he goat or dog	Transference from ritual agent fortifies man for journey ahead. (See Chapter 4)
Ini ozu	Burial	Family	"	None	None		Deceased sets off on arduous journey
Ikwa/Igbasuzo	Funeral ceremony	Family	"	Ikoru or Abia	Ikoru or Abia	Ram or chick or he goat or dog	Deceased reaches ancestral land after.
Itu nni/Ina nni	Last supper. Final rite of separation	Elders son and daughter	"	None	None	Favourite dish of deceased	Final separation rite, performed at midnight. Food taken to a cross road and for deceased. Ensures that the spirit does not travel hungry. In Agulu on this night, the deceased receives the final instruction to re-incarnate
Igba mkpi	Period of mourning - 1 calendar year	Nuclear family	passive/spiritual/cultural	None	None	Spouse's hair shaven clean and black clothing to be worn for the duration	A show of grief. Among the Igbo, hair is synonymous with a woman's physical beauty. Shaving off the hair signifies the loss of beauty and a show of mourning.
Iyipu akwa ozu	End of mourning	Nuclear family	passive/earth/spiritual/cultural	None	None	Mourning cloth worn by nuclear family gathered and burnt by Umuada (daughters of the family)	The deceased is comfortably with the ancestors. The living are now free to continue in life as part of community. Younger female spouses free to remarry
Ipu afia	Attending the market	Spouses	passive/spiritual/cultural	None	None	None	Spouses attend the community market day - re-integration. Greeting and gifts offered.

From the tables above, it is easy to see that all passive rituals are contained within the infancy/childhood and mortuary-ascendency clusters. All adolescence ones are passive-active or (controlled active), while the adulthood and status enhancement ones are active. So biologically, the first set of passive and passive-active (or controlled active) rituals are over by the time an individual is ready for marriage - this for men in traditional Igbo society is any age from twenty years on, while for girls it is usually from the time of their first menstrual period which is between twelve and fifteen years of age. The second set of passive rituals are at death. Divination precedes both active and passive rituals, and animate agents are predominant in the adolescence-adulthood cluster and in the status enhancement, mortuary and ascendency sub-clusters. All passive rituals are performed on behalf of the individual by family members. There are fewer rituals on the second cluster than on the first and third. All personal mandatory rituals are performed in the first and third clusters - suggesting that they are either passive or passive-active (or controlled active) in nature. It is, therefore, safe to conclude from the foregoing that all personal mandatory rituals are passive in nature. There is also a marked absence of choice and these individuals concerned need not do anything for these rituals to take place, and neither do they have any choice in determining when, where and how these rituals are to be performed. They are, therefore, not performed by choice.

The Triangle of Life (ToL)

Right at the centre of all rituals is the human person whose journey through life is plotted on the triangle below (Figure 3.9). The concept of the triangle of life was evolved to enable a breakdown of, and better understanding of the vast subject of ritual. Among the Igbo,

different stages of biological and social development are marked by different rituals aimed at negotiating different crisis points or zones. The triangle of life is an equilateral triangle - meaning that all three sides and angles are equal and complementary. This presupposes that life remains incomplete should any of the clusters be left unperformed. In most cases, every individual goes through all the passive and passive-active (or controlled active) rituals that their community subscribes to before they get to a point of biological maturation. It is only when people get to this point that they are allowed to make relative choices about which rituals they would perform and when. The term "relative choices" is used because in as much as the individual may seem on the exterior to be self-determining, the community exerts a lot of pressure through families and friends; and in most cases, the individual would act according to the society's timing although such individuals may think that they are totally at the helm regarding what happens and when. The marriage ceremony is a good example - individuals can choose not to marry but there is a stigma attached to that choice, or some may delay the time, but have to live with the taunts and constant reminders of relatives and friends. It is usually expected once an individual attains a certain age - twenty years upwards for men and fifteen years upwards for women.

There are four interesting and revealing points about the flexibility of the triangle and how it demonstrates the Igbo belief in dualism. First, the performance can commence either from the A-B axis (for human beings) or it can start from the C-A axis for the ancestor who is about to reincarnate to be born on the A-B axis. It could, therefore be argued that because of the Igbo belief in reincarnation, the performance begins on the C-A axis. Second, in terms of the Igbo belief in dualism, the axis C-A can be argued to be as important as axes A-B to B-C put together. This is because these two axes represent the human material

existence in its entirety, and according to Igbo belief, the will to reincarnate depends on how effectively individuals use the attributes endowed to them by God at birth. The third point is that because life is a continuous process, the triangle can be unwound to form a circle or one can draw a circle which can touch the three points. This captures the cyclic/continuous nature of the Igbo universe and view of life. The circumference of this cycle of existence depends on how long an individual lives.

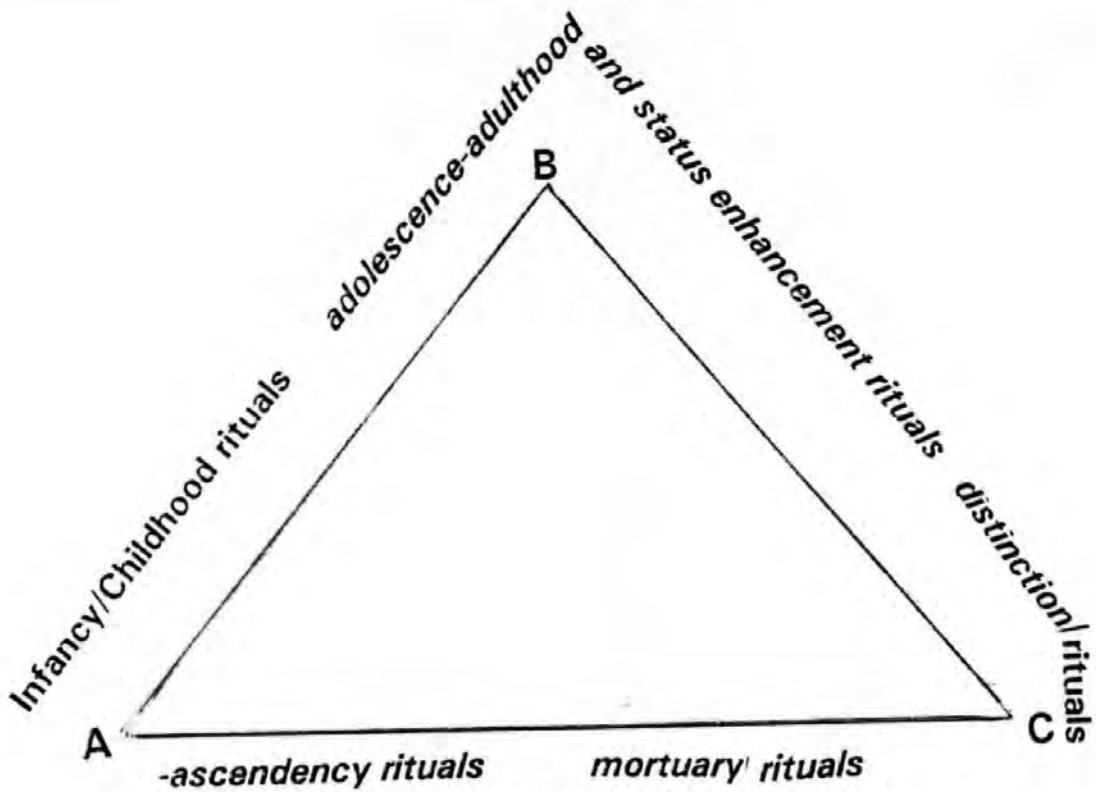


Figure 3.9: The Triangle of Life

The ToL is a useful tool in this study because of the following reasons:

- it enables the placement of rituals in such a manner that permits a detailed look at the **components** of each side of the triangle or cluster.
- its structure demonstrates continuity in Igbo life, because the end of one plane of existence is the beginning of another. For instance, the beginning of the B-C axis (adulthood rituals) is the end of A-B axis (infancy and childhood rituals).
- it highlights the structure of rituals as a movement from the known into the unknown and back to the known
- the triangular axes enable the test of four hypotheses:
 - that Igbo people generate these rituals at regular intervals because they help them find meaning and anchor enabling them to organise and sustain themselves as beings with spiritual needs.
 - that their regularity shows the huge need the Igbo have for contact with their ancestors, deities and God
 - that all rituals are ordered according to their role, content and form;
 - that symbols are an integral part of all rituals, and as such rituals have to be interpreted on a symbolic level.

The Structure of Ritual

As this study has already indicated, one of the things it aims to achieve is to be able to contribute to the understanding of Igbo rituals as performance by contributing to existing modules in the study of ritual structure and process. Although Schechner (1995) and Turner (1982) have carried out researches on and propounded theories of ritual, some of their work can sometimes be difficult to understand. This is more perplexing especially in the light of the fact that their contributions have been vital drawing attention to performance as a genre encompassing the drama-theatre debate. Without the immense contributions from these scholars, this work will probably not exist in its present form - as the researcher will have been caught up in trying to justify rituals as either theatre or drama. The researcher is, however, of the opinion that the difficulty sometimes encountered in understanding Schechner and Turner is that their anthropological background sometimes interfere with in-depth processual analysis. This is because they may be more interested in the belief on which the ritual is founded rather than the process, however, the understanding of process is very vital in understanding the performative aspects of rituals. Having said that, Werbner (1989) succeeded in carrying out an in depth analysis of the ritual process and it is hoped that this study will offer a succeed in contributing more into the performative aspects of rituals. So this work investigates ritual as nothing other than performance.

Structure in this context should be read as arrangement in space, or the form or outline of the ritual in question. For instance, the structure of the Stations of the Cross (a Roman Catholic ritual that commemorates the passion of Jesus Christ) is that it has fourteen stations that starts from when Jesus is condemned, to the point where Joseph of Arimathea removes

his body for burial. This brief description does not give details of any dialogue between Jesus and the people he met from the Garden of Gethsamane until he died at Golgotha, neither does it include the size or make of the cross he carried, the description of the route he took, details of the people left at the foot of his cross after crucifixion, what he said to them etc. So structure is not involved with the dynamics of the theatrical relationships between performers, dialogues/monologues/incantations, costumes and lighting design, props and make up etc. Rather, it is interested in the frame within which the drama happens. Structure is the repeatable and inflexible component of any ritual - as it was done at the beginning, so it will be done now, and so will it be done in the future - in effect, it is the skeleton around which rituals are built. It is the order of the events and it lays the groundwork for a proper understanding of process or the content of all ritual performances.

Maternity/childhood rituals

This can be understood better if we remember that polygamy is an accepted practice among the Igbo. A man's compound in traditional Igbo society is made up of a major hut which is built at the centre of the compound which belongs to the man. Behind his are those of his wives - each wife and her children shared a hut. The first son born to the man from these wives inherited the *obi* at his father's death, while other sons would leave the compound to settle on other pieces of family land, usually given by their father. The last son of each woman owns the hut at the mother's death, and would live there until he was ready to build his own house. He had the freedom to build where his mother's hut stood or to find another piece of land. The latter is the case most times.

Ikpa iyi

The equivalent of *iso ebe* in Nkpologu town is performed over two weeks during which the girls are taken every evening to the shrine of the goddess of fertility (*Ite-ogene*), and they return to their respective families each morning. At the end of the two weeks, each initiand is led by her chaperon singing and dancing in the village square. After this she returns home where the *ikpa n'enu* (initiation into sex) happens under her mother's supervision. One thing clear from these initiation rituals - *ima mmuo*, *iso ebe* and *ikpa iyi* is that structurally, they all involve physical removal of the initiands from their homes to a secluded spot and they also end with a symbolic cleansing either in the village stream or just a cold water bath at the cult house as is the case with *ima mmuo* in Nkpor. Also, they all appear structured as journeys with deliberate obstacles which the initiands have to surmount or negotiate their way through. And it is these that provide the performative/theatrical dimension to the ritual process.

Inu nwanyi

These rituals already mentioned were mandatory in pre-Christian Igbo society. In Umuoji, for example, a man was not allowed to marry unless he had been initiated into the masquerade cult. However, it must be said that this is not the case in present day Igbo society where initiation into manhood and womanhood are no longer a pre-betrothal requirement. There are six major steps involved in taking a wife all through Igboland. As always in Igboland, there may be differences in the name by which each step is known, and this is due to the difference in regional dialects, but each marriage ritual goes through these stages namely: *Iche ego* (or the declaration of intention to the girl), *iju ajuju* (inquiry into

the family history of prospective groom). Usually, the man would have inquired into the history of the girl's family before the declaration of his intention. The next step is *Ikpa/iru onu aku nwanyi* (negotiation of bride price), *Ibu ego/iwena ite* (payment of the bride price/first official visit to her new family), *ndulu nwanyi/ina be di* (taking the bride home) and finally *ogo malu ogo* (getting to know your in-laws.)

The composition and number of people involved in initiation rituals such as *ima muo* and *iso ebe* differ from those involved in the marriage rituals. In the case of initiations, only a select few are involved and these are mostly the parents or guardians, observers who have already been initiated and the initiation officials. As the ritual progresses the circle of people involved grows smaller until once again it is the time for the presentation of the initiands to the public, when it is open for all who may so wish to attend. On the contrary, during *inu nwanyi*, there is an ever-widening circle of people who get involved as the action progresses from one stage to another. The main difference between any initiation ritual and a marriage one can be graphically represented as shown below:

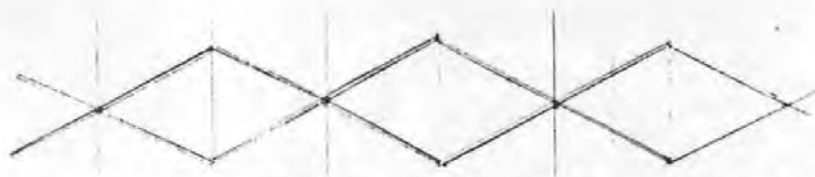


Diagram 1: Nature of relationships formed in initiation rituals

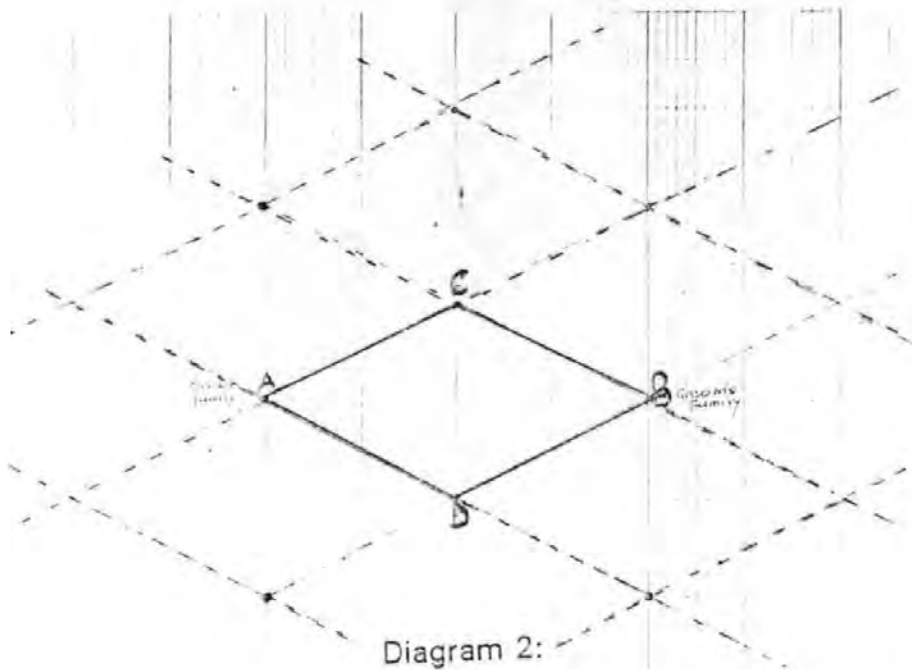


Diagram 2: Complex relationships formed through the marriage ritual

Figure 3.10: Representation of the initiation and marriage rituals

Diagram 1 shows that in terms of activity and composition of participant in initiation rituals, two distant points converge until they meet. The separate points A & B mark different individuals at the onset of their initiation. The point where these two lines meet represent the period in seclusion for the participants. After this point, the lines begin to diverge as the participants gradually get re-integrated into the society. The children from these diverging lines will again meet to diverge again. Therefore an initiation, in time, has the possibilities of continuation, but only in a uni-directional pattern.

On the contrary, the marriage ritual represented by Diagram 2 begins with the two points opposite each other, representing the bride's and groom's families (A & B). Both points begin an unrestricted divergent movement once motion (marriage contract) starts, and stop when they converge at points C & D. At this point, a diamond shaped figure ACDB is formed. The dots show the endless meeting points that can arise from this original diamond shape. The broken lines signify other relationships that can arise from the original ACDB figure, while the dotted lines show the meeting points between subsequent unions that may arise out of the original union. This diagram is complex because it shows how an axis of one union can become a complement to another - a demonstration of how intricate and endless the marriage ritual among the Igbo can get. It is no wonder that the Igbo would say "*na uzo eji nwa ada echi echi*" (a union that begets a child is forever.)

Status enhancement sub-cluster

Ichi ozo

From the time a man decides to take this title, he visits the head of the *ozo* to inform him of his intention. Following that, he would inform the nuclear and extended family respectively and the *ozo* title holders in his compound. Next is his time in isolation in the *ozo* nest in the forest, and to the shrine of Mother Earth. From there he goes to the river for cleansing and then the public presentation at the village market. The structure is interesting as it is a combination of both the initiation and marriage - widening, seclusion period, cleansing and public presentation.

It is interesting to note that not only is the circle of people involved widening, but there are also more levels to cover as the ritual gets more active. During *inu nwanyi* for instance, there are six steps to cover while *ichi ozo* (in Onitsha) has fifteen steps (see Chapter 4).

Ichi Iyom/Ichi Lolo or Igbu odu

Ichi Iyom is a ritual of distinction in which post-menopausal women are adorned with *odu* or the elephant tusk. The first stage is the announcement of the intention to join the *Iyom* society by the woman to her husband's family after which she does the same with the *odu* group of women. This is followed by a period of extensive interviews. After this, she is presented to the *ozo* title holders and after an agreement is reached, she is free to present her *odu* to the public. After that she performs the *izu afia odu* which is an attendance at the market place to display her *odu*. This is also her re-incorporation into the community. The circle of participants also increases as the ceremony progresses.

Funeral-ascendency cluster

In traditional Igbo society, the nature of these rites depends on the circumstances surrounding the death of the deceased person. For instance, death due to old age is called *onwu chi* (death approved by the person's *chi*) while other categories of death include *onwu ike/uke* (death by accident) and *onwu ifele* (shameful death due to the violation of taboos or by suicide). Thus in traditional Igbo society, the way a corpse is treated depends on the cause of death. In cases of death due to suicide and breaking of taboos, no rites are performed and the corpse is quickly bundled and in the middle of the night, taken and dumped in the evil

forest (*ajo ofia*) where it is left to rot. It is never buried in the ground as it is against the natural order of things, and so is unacceptable to Mother Earth. In some places, the corpse is tied to or balanced on tree branches, not allowed to touch the ground to avoid defiling the Earth. This serves as a social, psychological and legal deterrent to people who in the future may either decide to take their own lives or break a taboo.

However, in the cases of death due to age or natural causes, the corpse is cleansed and buried after lying in state briefly. The rest of the funerary rites commence immediately depending on the family's resources. However, if a family feels that they cannot cope with an immediate funeral, interment rites are performed, and preparations then begin for the actual ceremony which will then be arranged a year from the time of death when all the relevant circle of family and friends would have been duly notified.

In a case where the deceased is an accomplished person advanced in age, the public would be told that he/she is either asleep, travelled or in a hospital. This is in keeping with the Igbo belief that some evil people may employ diabolical means to inhibit the deceased's spirit as it travels to ancestral land. Men were buried within their compounds while the women were returned to their birth families. The family of the deceased would fix the date for the funeral rites to start and all the family, in-laws, friends and group networks would be informed and from then on they would become involved in the extensive planning that would reflect the deceased's social standing and affluence. After the funeral, the widows are confined within the compound until after one year when the final rites are performed at the market square.

From the study and analysis of rituals carried out so far, it is possible to make the following conclusions about the nature of Igbo rituals:

- all the passive rituals are in the A-B and C-A axes.
- that all passive rituals are performed on behalf of the individual by its nuclear family members and well-meaning friends.
- all mandatory rituals are also performed in the A-B and C-A axes - suggesting that they are either passive or controlled-active in nature. It is, therefore, safe to say that the attributes of mandatory rituals may be identical to those of the passive rituals.
- all adolescence rituals belong to the controlled-active category while the adulthood ones are active rituals.
- that most key rituals are designed to coincide with human biological development, and as such all passive and controlled active rituals are over by the time an individual is ready for marriage. This, for men in traditional Igbo society, is any age from twenty years on, while for the girls it is usually from the time of their first menstrual period which is between the ages of twelve and fifteen years.
- divination precedes both active and passive rituals
- that animate agents are predominant in rituals on the B-C and C-A axes.

- that there are fewer rituals on the B-C axis than on other axes because a sizeable percentage of this axis is devoted to having, bringing up and initiating children.

- that from clustering rituals on the ToL, that most rituals can be said to possess the following components:
 - the negotiation and containment of life's challenges
 - they fulfil the desire for personal, social and spiritual development
 - they answer man's duality - divination and invocation (consultation between the human and spiritual worlds)
 - cleansing (at the end) is a feature of most initiation rituals
 - incorporation is common to all rituals involving a period of seclusion
 - hospitality for participatory audience

From the information in this chapter, it is possible to define Igbo theatre and performance. It is a holistic theatre in which the training of performers rigorously starts from very early in life. However, because this training is a life-long experience built into the daily living experience (with high-lights during rituals), the trainee is almost oblivious of the level of relentless training, inculcation and character formation that are in tandem with the acquisition of other life skills. In its entirety, it is a training that takes into consideration the fact that all human beings are endowed with the physical, the mental and the spiritual attributes, and that particular attention needs to be paid to the development of all these aspects for life to be meaningful and thus, fulfilling. Igbo performance is active and representative of a total theatre where all performers are trained in all aspects of total theatre - costuming, prop and

stage management, instrumentation, dance, mime, solo and orchestra performance. Igbo performance is spontaneous and representative of the total universe where all the creatures and all the elements of the earth, air, fire and water are brought together in one united and harmonious existence. Igbo performance is life in action.

The next chapter will be a detailed analysis of selected rituals within the three clusters. From the study so far, some rituals have different names depending on which area of Igboland they originate from. Thus, one of the aims of the comparative analysis will be to ascertain whether there are semantic as well as processual differences. The rituals that will be discussed for processual analysis are also those that have been used in this chapter for the discussion on structure.

CHAPTER 4

RITUAL PROCESS: PERFORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF IGBO RITUALS

Rituals in Igboland are as varied as the dialects that are spoken from one locality to another. This is why it is necessary to carry out comparative analyses of rituals from the different areas of Igboland. These analyses will help us formulate a view of Igbo rituals and performance. Process, in ritual, refers to the vibrant, pulsating and dynamic aspects that make rituals come alive. When this happens, we gain a unique insight into the true nature of rituals as events which unfold in a given time and space with its complex network of interplay - between the participants, space(s), symbols/ritual agents/icons, rhythm(s) etc. In a sense, the theatrical and performative imperatives of rituals are securely contained, and blossom through processual analyses. Werbner (1989) seems to be in agreement when he describes the "ritual passage" as:

... a process of symbolic action focused upon the body. By means of the body, performers of the ritual passage find and resituate themselves in cosmological space. By means of the body, also, performers personify who they are, and what they intend to become in relation to the forces around them. Sometimes the body is simply their own; sometimes, it is that of some other as well, such as a domestic or wild animal, whose parts may be broken down and recombined. There is a variation in the presentation of the person, from direct disclosure, presenting the true selves of the performer and others around them....(1)

Through process it is easy to notice three things, for instance, about rituals in the maternity/infancy cluster. First, that they exist to serve the same purpose - to ensure that the earthly, spiritual and cultural needs of the baby (and the mother) are met. From the onset of pregnancy most rituals are purificatory and they set out social, economic, dietary and sexual abstinences for the expectant mother. This in turn aims to facilitate safe delivery. The imposition of these restrictions is meant to protect the mother and the unborn child against evil forces, and is founded on the Igbo belief that

pregnancy and labour constitute a journey during which the woman is suspended between the land of the living and that of the spirits. Hence when people enquire after an expectant mother they will say "*O lida go?*" (meaning: has she descended?). This need to protect the mother and child explains why some people put new born babies on a pile of *ogirisi* leaves while it is being cleaned of the after-birth. This is because these leaves are believed to have a sanitizing effect that protects the child against evil forces.

Second, that rituals on the said cluster may be called different names, but this is usually due to variation in regional dialects. An example is the announcement of the birth of a child. However, in all cases studied, the celebration is begun by either the baby's father or aunt, who are joined later by other members of the community.

And finally, that the Igbo are very economical in their organisation and management of rituals. For examples, *ine omugwo* (the three months post-birth visitation from the woman's mother) is time-tabled to fit in at a time when the new mother needs all the physical and psychological support her mother can offer. It is also during this visitation that male children get circumcised, and for most mothers, this can be a very trying time. Her re-integration into the community is also performed before her mother leaves.

In this section, the sample of localities used covers about eighty percent of Igboland and most of these areas are strong cultural centres. These are areas whose regional cultures are more representative so that they are representative of Igbo South (Nkpor, Obosi, Umuoji, Nnobi, Eziowele etc), North (Imilike, Ukpabi Nimbo and Nkpologu) and East (Avu, Ngor Okpuala and Umuahia).

Ritual Clusters

In the sections below, rituals are discussed in more details under their respective clusters and sub-clusters, starting with *iwa oji*.

Iwa oji (consecration of the kolanut)

Iwa oji (consecration and breaking of the kolanut), like divination, is a ritual that precedes all rituals and ceremonies (except burial and separation). The consecration of the kolanut is an act of affirmation and thanksgiving. It is also used as morning prayers by the head of each household, and for the rest of the day, performed in welcome to visitors. It is in recognition of the primary place of importance filled by this ritual that it is discussed first before other rituals.

Oji (botanically known as *carpel* or *kola atrophora*) plays a primary role in the life of the Igbo because it is used as a channel of communication between *Chukwu-Okike*, the gods, the spirit world and humans. Not all species are used in Igbo rituals - the only ones that are acceptable are those with three or more cotyledons - usually referred to as *oji Igbo* (Igbo kolanut). By way of ritual semiotics, each of these cotyledon is referred to as a lobe.

The origin of *oji Igbo*, as told in a legend, is that the Igbo founding fathers visited the home of the gods (in those days when humans and gods interacted more closely), and they were asked by the gods to choose a fruit from all the fruits in their orchard. The founding fathers chose *oji* - hence it is regarded as the king of all fruits and it has its own unique language used during its consecration and it is a language which is also understood by the gods, spirits and ancestors.

The kolanut symbolises goodwill, and when presented to a visitor, it marks a clear mind and pure intention(s). Its heart shape is symbolic because during its consecration, all the words uttered are deemed to come from the heart. If it is not presented to a visitor, it means that the visitor is not welcome, and when it is offered to a visitor it is more than just a form of delicacy. Apart from being the first thing presented to a visitor, it is also used at the beginning of any important function like marriage ceremonies, settlement of disputes or when drawing up contracts or associations between people or between people and the deities.

There are variations to the method of presentation of the kolanut. In most parts, it is presented along with a bowl of water for the visitor to wash his/her hands - a show of welcome from the host, and implied purification and cleansing of any ills the visitor may have unknowingly contacted on his way to the host. It is also a symbolic washing away of tiredness and physical filth from the journey. In Aguleri and Eziwele towns, for example, kolanut is presented with money (the amount depends on what the host can afford), which the visitor collects to show his/her acceptance of welcome. In some places, *nzu* (native chalk) is presented with the kolanut, especially if the visitor is elderly. *Nzu* is a symbol of purity and a clean and welcoming heart. When presented, the host removes it from the plate of kolanut and draws peculiar marks on the floor to signify non-evil intentions and individual achievements. He then rolls it on the ground to the next man on his left to make his own marks on the floor. The marks of the floor detail and affirm each individual's achievement and any strokes, dashes or drawings made represent aspects of the marker's accomplishment. Usually, the very successful people deploy the most strokes on the floor signifying their many accomplishments. The chalk continues its anti-clockwise rolling until each individual has made their mark. Then, each person would take a bit of the powder from the marks made to mark parts of their body - still as a show of total purity of

thoughts. When people share the kolanut they enter a covenant neither to think nor do any evil to each other. One informant, Michael Akukwe (1995) describes the kolanut in an interview:

Oji is the beginning and end of the human person. Because the kolanut features all through the human journey - at birth, at initiations, in short from birth through to death. It is an ever-occurring ritual that must be done, except at funeral when the kolanut is broken without it being consecrated.

The consecration of the kolanut (*iwa oji*) is peculiar to the Igbo and is a great occasion, full of tension and sometimes drama. For example, an man is not allowed to take or consecrate the kolanut in the presence of his in-laws. So while the kolanut is being passed round, people would have silently marked out all the others who do not qualify to either consecrate or to take kolanuts before them when sharing begins. So different people anxiously await each other to flout this rule so that they can either give them a lighthearted chastisement or fine. Sometimes also, defaulting in-laws are humorously ordered to return their wives because they do not know their wives' people. The drama could also be around men visiting their maternal families or villages where they are accorded special treatment, and are allowed to cause as much playful disruption as they may wish. So as the kolanut is shown around, one of these "sacrosanct" *nwadiana* may playfully collect all of them from the plate, in a move to pocket them. Everyone would plead, calling him pet names to coax him to change his mind. He returns the kolanuts to the plates amidst laughter and thanks from those present.

The oldest person in a gathering - usually the head of the household is responsible for consecrating the kolanut. Women never consecrate the kolanut in a mixed gathering, but they may, if it is a women-only gathering (and there is no man nearby).

In Umuoji, Nkpor, Obosi and Ogidi in the Idemili Local Government Area, the kolanut is shared in order of seniority, but in Owerri in South Central Igboland, and Imilike in the North, the youngest member of a gathering shares the kolanut under the direction of the oldest member. In unusually large gatherings involving villages in a town, the kolanut is shared along clan or kindred lines with the oldest representative of the oldest clan receiving and consecrating the kolanut on behalf of his clan or kindred. In places like Onitsha, the sharing of the kolanut also takes into consideration the titles of those present. For instance, an elderly man without any titles may not take a piece of kolanut before a much younger titled person. Again if the older man is married to the younger person's sister, he may also not take kolanut before the younger person, unless the younger person asks him to do so out of respect for his age. Women also, never take kolanut before a man - except in cases where age confers privileges on a woman. This is more applicable in among the riverine Igbo or (*Igbo Olu*) where elderly /post-menopausal women are regarded as their male peers. For instance, an *Iyom* (a woman who wears the *odu* or the elephant tusk) will take a share before untitled men or *akaliogholi* - an inconsequential or an irresponsible person.

During an interview, one informant, Chukwunwike Arah (1995), summarises the spiritual importance of the kolanut to the Igbo thus:

Just like when the Christians pray they invoke the God of Abraham and so on, so the person venerating the kola calls on the ancestors to come and partake in human endeavour. However, the Europeans made us believe that this was wrong and we have abandoned calling on the God of our ancestors - God of the Arah family, of Onitshaland, of Usuma - to call names we know nothing about.

Numerology and the kolanut:

The ritual significance of the kolanut depends on the number that is presented, and/or the natural arrangement of the lobes within the kolanut. However, different parts of Igboland present kolanut in different numbers depending on the occasion - in

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multiples of two and three. In community gatherings in Umuoji, four kolanuts are formally presented - these are different from the twenty-five that each representative of twenty-five villages are given to take back to the people they represent. As the Igbo would say: "*oji lue uno, okwuo ebe osi*" (meaning that when a kolanut gets home, it will say where it came from). In Agulu, kolanuts are presented in twos, its multiple of four, eight - even numbers. This is representative of the four market days of *Eke, Oye, Afo and Nkwo* - where *Eke* represents the eldest of the days, *Oye* is *Ada* (or eldest daughter), *Afo* is *Ulu* or the child after the *Ada* and *Nkwo* is the baby of the family. The three-lobed variety is regarded as *oji Eze* (king's kola), and all of its lobes are given over to the visitor as a mark of respect.

One uniform aspect of *oji Igbo* is that once it is presented, it is announced and passed round for everybody in the gathering to view, and it is then returned to the most appropriate person in the gathering for consecration. In some cases, this appropriate person may be someone who may be shy because he is not eloquent in using Igbo proverbs, he will be allowed to designate the job to those who are better able to do it. However, in most of the cases, these individuals are encouraged to do it themselves, as it is only through practice that people begin to feel comfortable in performing such rituals.

The consecration is usually couched in proverbs, prayers, praise, exultation and respect during which the deities are implored to attend in all Agulu gatherings, and their shrines are also respected and consecrated because Agulu people believe that they are the messengers through whom they gain access to God.

In Agulu, a kolanut with three lobes is referred to as *ikenga* (symbolising wealth), four lobes is *afia ino* (four market days, symbolic of the deities who established the four market days), and five is *omumu* (procreation). Beyond five (provided it is not

six) lobes, the kolanut will have another feast to in its honour because rarely does the kolanut have more than five lobes. When this happens, another play develops within the play of kolanut consecration. A chicken is slaughtered and shared by all who witnessed the five-lobed kolanut which symbolises abundant goodness. After the meal, another kola is used in libation. Only then can the original kolanut be shared by all present. The development of plays within plays is common to most Igbo rituals. These plays are not guarded by any rules of time and place, and some witnessed by the researcher, were very elaborate. However, the interesting thing in all cases, was that no matter how long these went on, the participants would always return (as if on prompt), to continue at exactly the same point they left off. Below is the significance of the lobes in Umuoji, Nkpor, Obosi, Uke, Nnobi and environs:

Number Presented

2 kolanuts	to a titled man
4 kolanuts	at big ceremonies eg fixing of bride price or ozo title taking
7 kolanuts	at important ceremonies like igbu ewu ndi ichie
8 kolanuts	at marriages when the bride is about to leave for her matrimonial home
<i>oji ugo*</i>	to important personality. Symbolises royalty and purity

Significance of cotyledons

Number of cotyledons Symbolism

2 cotyledons	malformed and not eaten by any titled man or woman
3 cotyledons (ikenga oji)	good omen eaten by men distinguished in noble deeds
4 cotyledons (afia ino)	general acceptance and approval of the gods
5 cotyledons (aku n'uba)	productivity and wealth
6 cotyledons	bad omen, one is thrown away and the rest eaten
7 or 8 cotyledons	very rare and highly valued. Reserved for great men

* *Ugo is Igbo for the eagle. The eagle symbolises beauty, great heights and power. Used in this context as an adjective describing the oji, it signifies how beautiful and fair the kola is.*

From the foregoing, we can see that each kolanut has a story to tell - a story that is told by the cotyledons as silent characters, on one level. On another level, it involves human characters who not only interact with , but interplay with themselves depending on a number of variables. These include the number of cotyledons presented, the mix of those participating, the occasion for the presentation and sometimes, even the time of day when the presentation takes place. Therefore, when the kolanut is presented, consecrated and broken the number of cotyledons it presents naturally lead to a powerful drama of numbers with the consecrator as the commentator, and sometimes conductor.

Table 4.1: Variations in meaning

Town	Name of ritual	Aim	Mode of presentation	No. presented	Performed by	Time scale	Performed during	Consecrated by	Shared by
Agulu	iwa oji	prayer, invocation & affirmation	kolanut is presented with nzu (if available)	2 and its multiples	oldest male unless his in-laws are present	First thing in the morning and during visits. Not presented after dusk - possibly because it is a stimulant	Proceeds all rituals, negotiations and covenants	As morning prayer must be by the head of the household. In gatherings, by oldest male unless his in-laws are present	Any male appointed by the eldest - usually the youngest male. Shared in order of male seniority. Women are given last unless they are titled.
Eziowele	"	"	with money and nzu	"	"	"	"	"	"
Nkpor	"	"	usually presented with nzu	5 and its multiples presented - acknowledging 5 Nkpor villages	"	"	"	"	"
Imilike	"	"	"	Depends on the occasion	eldest males consecrates and youngest male child nominated to break.	"	"	"	"
Nkpologu	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"

Aguleri	"	"	presented with money in the same plate. Visitor takes the money before veneration	"	the oldest person in gathering	Presented with money which is taken by visitor	"	oldest male	"
Ngor-Okpala	"	"	with nzu	"	"	presented alone or with nzu	"	"	"
Onitsha	"	"	"	odd numbers eg 1,3,5 etc	"	"	"	"	"

From the table above, it is easy to see that the kolanut is commonly called by the same name throughout the whole of Igboland (this is a rarity as names differ from one locality to another), although the mode of presentation and consecrator may differ depending on locality. However, in most places the meaning and the significance of the lobes are the same, and they are shared out in order of seniority. The consecration follows a broad outline of invocation and invitation to their ancestors, deities and God to partake in their affairs. However, the consecrator is at freedom about where to pitch his performance (and these include the manner of rendition, the use of proverbs, and the length of time it takes). The composition of audience-observers varies from one occasion to another.

The account presented below is the *iwa oji ceremony* performed by Chief Jonathan Chukwuemeka Obi of Agulu, 52 years old and Assistant Chief Ethnographer at the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Enugu, on 25 November 1995. On arrival at the Museum, the researcher was directed to Chief Obi. After the preliminary greetings, she announced the purpose of her visit with four kolanuts. On seeing the kolanuts, Chief Obi sent for three other members of his team (Chukwunwike Arah, Michael Akukwe and Comfort Nwankwo) to "witness the gift (kolanut) with him". Although the interview would take place in two days time, the kolanut was still consecrated in keeping with Igbo tradition that once presented, it must be eaten. The account below was audio-taped two days before the interview proper.

Ndi be anyi unu afu go oji.
(Our people you have seen the kolanuts)

Asi na onye wetalu oji wetalu ndu
(It is said that he who brings kola brings life)

Anyi nwa ga ata oji a ga atata ndu
(We that will eat the kolanut will partake of long life)

Obu Chineke ka anyi n'ayo ogonogo ndu, aru isi ike, na oganiru
(It is God, the Creator, that we implore for long life, good health and progress) -

Ife anyi n'acho n' ndua anyi ga enwetacha ha ncha
(The things we seek in this life may be ours)

Ebe ada anyi bu Chinyelu Okafor sili weta oji nkea, nyechigha kwa ya mmaji kwulu mmaji
(Where our daughter, Chinyelu Okafor brought this kola from may it be replenished)

Ife ochobalu welu chota anyi ebea, nya ga kwalu ya n'iru
(Whatever she is seeking that brought her to find us, will work well for her)

Ina acho mmuta, I ga enweta ya kaliasia ndi ogbo gi
(You are in quest of knowledge, and you will acquire it more than any of your mates)

Anyi na ayo Chineke ka obia nnoyelu anyi ka anyi welu taa oji a
(We beg God to stay with us as we eat this kola)

Ani Enugu ga ata oji
(Enuguland will eat this kola)

Ani Agulu ga ata
(Agululand will eat)

*Ani Eziowe, ani Ujali, ani Onitsha, Imo na Umuoji**
(The land of Eziowe will eat, Ujaliland, Onitshaland, Imo, and Umuoji) -

Ka ndu anyi disia nu mma
(May life be good for all)

Onye bia ka owelu ife anyi, anyi anwuru ebe anyi na anu ogu ya, anyi ama ekwe
(If they come to take what belongs to you, die fighting for it, do not agree)

Ndu ogonogo nu o
(Life will be abundant for us)

Ifeoma ka any n'acho, ajo ife choba anyi nya ekwudo kwana anyi
(Good things are all we seek, when ill thinks of us, let it decide where to go)

Onye si na ife oma adiro ya nma, nwunye mualu ya udene ka okulu
(He who does not like good things, may his wife give birth to a vulture for him to cuddle as his baby)

Ka owelu fu ka ife ojoo n'adi
(So that he will see how bad things look)

Ife oma ka anyi n'acho
(Good thing and events are all we seek)

* calling on the individual towns of each person present and of course, the town where the meeting is taking place

Anyi bu ndi olu oyibo n'Enugu
(We are in Enugu as civil servants)

Ka anyi nwetasia nu ulu di na olu oyibo
(May we gain from working within the civil service)

Anyi ga aluka ya nka
(Into our old age at the same age that our fellow civil servants retire)

Anyi anaghachi kwa n'be anyi
(And thence shall we return to develop our own villages)

Anyi ga enwe nni anyi ga eji zuu umu anyi
(May we have enough to feed our children)

Oga abu emesikwa fa nwa azuo anyi ma anyi kaa nka
(So that they will in turn feed us, and look after us in our old age)

Anyi ama bu ibu alu nyelu ndi anyi bi be fa
(May we not be a burden to the people we live in their land)

Ka mkpumpku daa apuna anyi n'azu
(So that when we depart, our backs may not be hunched)

Ndu ogonogo ka anyi n'ayo nu o
(It is longlife we pray for)

O ga adili nu anyi nma o
(May it be well for all of us)

Apata ohu n'abo nkututa nkututa
(May the two lobes of the bottom always touch each other)

O bu etua ka ndi be anyi si ekwu ya
(That is how our people say it)

Ije anyi n'ebe bu ije mmili
(Our journey here is a journey to the stream)

Ada nyi bialu mmuta na Museum, o ga adili gi nma
(Our daughter who came to gather knowledge at the museum, it will go well for you)

Mmuta ka i ga enweta
(May you learn well)

Obu ebea ka ana edebe omenani ndi Nigeria nine
(This is where all Nigerian culture and traditions are kept)

Omenani ndia ka obialu ka anyi mugosi ya
(The culture and tradition which she has come to us for)

I ga amutacha fa ncha
(May she learn it well)

O ga adili ya nma, dikwalu anyi nwa bu ndi nkuzi ya nma
(May it be good for her and us that are her teachers)

Aru isi ike na nchekwaba Olisa
(Good health and God's protection)

Ukwu a I jili si ebe telu aka bia, ka iga eji na
(The legs that brought you on this journey from such a distance will take you back as well)

Onwero ife ga eme ya
(Nothing will happen to her)

O ma ezu ajo mmo ma obu ajo mmadu
(She will not meet bad people neither will she meet bad spirits)

O ga adiliya nma n'ije ono na ya
(May it be good for her throughout her stay here)

Anyi nwa bu ndi obikwutelu, ajo mmadu na ajo mmuo ama afu anyi
(We who she is visiting, may we avoid all evil people and spirits)

O ga adisilu nu anyi nma o
(May it be well for us)

O nocha o ga abia kwa ozo maka na uzo a bu uzo mmili, oga abia kwa ozo
(After her stay she will come again because her path this is the path to the stream, she will come again)

Oma abu uzo nku
(It will not be the trip to gather firewood)

Maka na uzo nku na echi echi
(Because the road to gather firewood is not frequented)

Odiro ka uzo mmili n'agagide
(Unlike the way to the stream, which flows from its destined source on its destined journey)

Dika mmili, iga anatakwa fu anyi
(Like the river you shall return and see us)

Chineke anyi na ayo gi ka itaa oji a n'ogbe
(We implore God the Creator, to eat this kola whole)

Ka anyi bu umu gi taa n'ibe
(So that we your children shall eat the lobes)

O ga adilu nu anyi nma o
(May it be well for us)

Chineke nke'bi n'enu igwe ogodo ya n'akpu n'ani
(So Chineke who resides in the sky and whose robes sweep the firmament of the earth)

Ngi nwa malu obi onye obuna
(You who know the unknown, you who know the secrets of our hearts)

Nye anyi ife ndi anyi n'ayo gi dili anyi nma
(Grant us all our hearts desires that are kindly)

Napu kwa anyi ajo ife
(And remove the evil things)

Ka I gozie oji nkea ka anyi taa ya
(May you bless this kola that we may eat it)

All: *Akunnia*. (saluting him by his traditional *ozo* title)

Akunnia: It has three lobes. It is an *ikenga* kola. It shows that whatever you have embarked on will go well. You shall not falter. So all is well. The kolanut has told our fortune. If it had been four, it would be the four market days.

Akunnia: *Ka m welu kwa nu aka oji*. (let me take my share as the consecrator)

Akunnia: (Handing whole kolanuts to the men present) Arah, you hold this so that when you get to Onitsha the kola will tell the story of where you have been. Same for you, Akukwe.

Chief Obi's invitation to his colleagues to witness the kolanut presented shows the esteem in which the Igbo hold the kolanut. Although they were not ready for the interview, they nonetheless had to consecrate and share the kolanuts, because once kolanut(s) are presented, they must be accepted. In this case, having announced the kolanut, there was no debate as to whom should consecrate it because first, it was presented to Chief Obi, and hierarchically, he was the most senior. However, if he was in anyway related to those present by marriage, he may still have consecrated but with their permission.

His rendition was prayerful and full of proverbs and imagery as he implored the ancestors of those present to come and partake in the kolanut. He prayed for good life, health, wealth and children; and he paid homage to the land of Enugu where

their employment is based. At several points, he used the imagery of the stream which represents continuity. All through, he supplicated to God (*Chukwu/Chineke*), and at the end he implored him to bless the kolanut. For the Igbo, eating consecrated kolanut nourishes both body and soul as people also imbibed the prayers and blessings. Acknowledging him at the end was like saying "Amen", and a vote of thanks for his priestly role in a period communication with the ancestors.

A variation in the consecration of the kolanut noted by the researcher is that Chief Obi consecrated all four kolanuts before he invited Arah and Akukwe to remove one each. He, then, took one himself and broke the only kolanut left for all to eat. This is in contrast to some areas of Igboland, where before the kolanut is consecrated, representatives of different families, villages or towns would be invited to remove their 'take-home' share before the consecration starts.

MATERNITY/INFANCY CLUSTER

The maternity/infancy cluster is one extended ritual with many sub-sets which are independent of one another, but add up to a whole. For example, re-incarnation divination, *ini otubo* (disposal of the navel ending), *ibe ugwu* (circumcision) etc, are all independent performances that follow closely, one after another and have one overall aim - they are performances done in preparation for the main rite during the naming ceremony, in which the child is given his own identity by the collective (family, kindred and friends) who attend as participant-witnesses.

The birth of a child is treasured in Igboland as a special blessing from God. In return for this unique blessing, the Igbo express their thankfulness and appreciation in the collective manner in which they nurture and care for all children entrusted unto their

care by God. Hence, the whole community is responsible for the children's physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Before the introduction of a western-type baby formula, when a woman died in childbirth and the child survived, the child was taken to any nursing mother within the community who would willingly breast feed both her biological and fostered children. In most cases, the fostered child ended up not only in her care, but as her own child. Hence, the Igbo would give names such as *Nwora* (everyone's child), *Ifeora* (that which belongs to the community) *Obiora* (the will of the community), *Adaora* (the people's daughter), etc.

Many Igbo areas are intolerant of pre-marital sex and pregnancy. However, in cases where there had been *ime mkpuke/ime nkita* or pregnancies before marriage, which literally means pregnancy in the *mkpuke* because unmarried girls live in their mother's *mkpuke* or huts. *Ime nkita* (dog pregnancy) is also used in some parts of Imo State to signify promiscuity as the dog does not have only one mate. The pregnant person is usually seriously reprimanded for bringing shame to her family. But, once the child is born, it is fully welcomed with all appropriate rituals, accepted and absorbed into its mother's family. She/he is never treated differently from other children in the family. It is interesting to note that the words "bastard" or "illegitimate" do not exist in the Igbo language. This is because every child has a father and mother who are known by the community, albeit those children are conceived outside of marriages. The birth of any child, therefore, is a blessing and that child increases the every-growing circle of family, friends, future in-laws and other relations. Hence *ichi oga* (in Nkpologu), *iti mkpu nwa* (in Umuoji), *owoo owolo anyi* (in Umuahia) and *ibi oro onu* (in Avu) all mean the same thing - a joyous announcement welcoming the extra-ordinary gift of life from God, and an invitation to the entire community to join in the commencement of numerous and unique celebrations that will mark the journey of a unique individual through life.

Ichi oga (in Nkpologu)

In Nkpologu, the *ichi oga* announces the birth of all children, but when it is a male child, another variation called *ikpoo oroo* is added to inform the community that it is a male child. This extra ritual performed for the boys is probably because male children to the patrilineal Igbo symbolise continuity, motivation and development within families. So, the birth of a boy is celebrated more than that of a baby girl, who will eventually marry and join another family. *Ichi oga* is performed once the birth of the child is announced to its father in his *iba/obu/obi*. He will then authorise either his sister or a well-meaning female member of the nuclear family to announce the birth to the community. The authorised individual ululates "*anyi erite oke n'aka Eze Chutu Oke Obiama* (we are in receipt of blessing from God of creation). This signal is relayed by neighbours who are around. Before long, this ululation is re-echoed across the entire community. Usually, the person who performs the ululation also carries the news to the in-laws (the new mother's kindred). On getting there, she commences ululating, and this is also picked up and relayed from one household to another. She will then proceed to the home of the baby's maternal grandmother to inform her with a gift - the nature of this gift depends on how affluent the new father is. It may include some tubers of yam, hen(s), money, etc and these are given irrespective of the child's sex. The maternal grandmother, who would have been preparing for this moment, confirms when she will attend her daughter's *omugwo*. This is because, while her daughter was still pregnant, she would have prepared for this visit to her daughter and new baby and would have packed all the special herbs (*utazi and uziza*) and choicest condiments with which to cook for her daughter on her arrival to her son-in-law's home.

Owoo owolo anyi (in Umuahia)

In Umuahia in Abia State, this same ritual is more elaborate and it is known as *owoo owolo anyi*. It starts when people hear the ululating announcing a birth, and women living and passing nearby recognise this for what it is and would congregate from all parts of the immediate vicinity. A song and dance sequence begins which can include re-enactment of the sexual act of making a baby, the pregnancy, the birth and the cuddling of the baby from one participant's hand to another in a rocking/dancing movement. Meanwhile, the new father provides talcum powder to which every one present, including the men and children, help themselves to. They would rub the powder around their necks, this is an indication to anyone who meets the participants that there has been a birth.

This impromptu performance is what Werbner (1989) describes as anti-rite in his description of Kalanga healing rituals:

... the anti-rite which, in image and experience, regenerates what the rite cannot regenerate. The essentials that it provides are sociability without regard for the authority of elders; and informality and unofficial values (136)

Furthermore he continues:

... satire, joking, and fun, though essential for the healing reconstruction, have no proper part. They are not recognized as obligatory rites or strictly ritual events. Instead, they belong to the anti-rites of play. Occurring as interludes between obligatory rites, these anti-rites, seemingly spontaneous yet always performed in the same style, suspend realities otherwise upheld in the ritual (109-110)

From the foregoing description, *owoo owolo anyi* qualifies as an anti-rite because its imagery of the sexual act involved in the making of a baby, the pregnancy and the rocking of the baby are the things that the earlier announcement made with shouts of joy had not been able to reconstruct. In most parts of Igboland, children, women and men rarely dance together, and above all, children and women are not given to

lewdness in public. So, to be involved in this song and dance sequence with explicit sexual details marks the suspension of communal moral code. This happens irrespective of the presence of the village elders, who may not join in, but will usually watch with amusement/amused tolerance. Furthermore, hardly is anyone ever censured for a breach in societal morality during this performance.

Normally, such vulgarity which would be looked on as disrespectful does not happen before the village elders. Furthermore, Igbo men tend not to put on any form of make-up because it is looked on as effeminate, but on this occasion in Umuahia, men would set aside their reserves to do that which would have normally brought derision, or at worst a jocular comment. This dance celebrating a baby's arrival goes ahead irrespective of who is present. This ritual is also in agreement with Werbner's view of the spontaneity of anti-rites. Some may argue that the performance of *owoo owolo anyi* is deceptively spontaneous, because the new father was promptly on cue with talcum powder. Why would the father keep this if he did not know what was coming, and what role he was expected to play once his child was born? The same argument could be extended to the performers who it seems waited until they had enough willing performers before commencing their show. And with no one directing the action, how come the performers know the exact action and song sequence? The researcher's stand is that the performance is spontaneous by all standards of spontaneity because first, the new father merely provides the context and some of the props and make up. Also, although the women may have been expecting the birth, the actual time of the baby's arrival usually catches many unawares. Furthermore, the performers' ability to follow an action and song sequence stem from the fact that these have been done before and were merely being repeated with modifications depending on the state of mind and physical health of those dancing.

This performance also buttresses a point made earlier that rituals are culture-specific because an outsider to this community would never have interpreted the ululation as a call to celebration. And, let us suppose that this outsider was able to interpret the shouts of joy correctly, would he/she have been able to join in the song and dance sequence correctly? That is hardly probable.

Town	Name of ritual	Aim	Performed for	Time scale	Performed by	Setting	Others
Nkpologu	Ichi oga	A public announcement of the birth of a child - blessing from <i>Chukwu Okike</i>	all children with variation for males called "Ikpo oroo"	Immediately a live child is delivered	Either father, baby's aunty or family member and joined by entire community	Emanates from the father's compound and spreads to the whole village.	The action finally ends at the in-law's place with "izi ozi omugwo"
Avu	Ibi oro onu	"	every child	"	"	"	Two shouts announces the birth of a female child while three or more is for boys
Imilike	Gurube okodo	"	"	"	"	"	The same for both sexes
Umuahia	Owoo owolo anyi	"	every child	"	anyone who cares to join the sharing of talcum powder, and in the song and dance sequence	usually in front of the father's compound	the same for both boys and girls
Umuoji	Iti nkpu nwa	same	all children	same	Any member of immediate family	Same	"

Table 4.2 shows how some areas in Igboland announce births. In some localities, the manner of this announcement differs for boys and girls.

Inwa uwa in Nkpologu: (Re-incarnation divination)

The concept of re-incarnation among the Igbo is not an easy one to describe because in practice, it does not happen in the same sense as re-incarnation in the Christian sense where it is explained in terms of one body and one soul. Igbo duality expresses the human and spirit elements, but it does not specify if a single human translates into a single spirit after death. This is because the Igbo believe that people can re-incarnate many times in different places and generations. Sometimes also, a person who is still alive may re-incarnate and the Igbo would take all precautions to ensure that the 'new' and the 'old' persons do not come in contact with one another. This is because the Igbo believe that their meeting would lead to the death of the 'old' person. In discussing the challenge involved in attempting an understanding of the Igbo notion of re-incarnation, Arazu (Appendix D) argued that the term "re-incarnation is a misnomer", which stems from a wrong and faulty type of education that stresses the one body and one spirit element. According to him, the fact that it has been scientifically proven that all the cells of the human body are shed off and replaced at a seven yearly interval makes the term re-incarnation all the more difficult to accept as one grapples with and attempts to give a name to what the Igbo believe to happen to the soul after death. For example, he argued that if an individual died at the age of forty-nine, he/she would have shed his cells seven times over, and Arazu rhetorically wonders which of the seven bodies re-incarnates with the soul. He is of the opinion that the Igbo re-incarnation is better explained through the far-Eastern philosophy where every human being has a total of four bodies (*the physical, the subtle, the causal* and the *super causal* bodies) plus the spirit-soul. Part of what Arazu also highlights is the problems encountered when attempts are made to explain an ethnic and culturally-specific belief using a foreign language which does not share the ideology which the belief is based on. Hence, the term re-incarnation is used here for want of a better word.

Inwa uwa, ino uwa, ibia uwa are the different names by which the Igbo describe the positive spirit-souls that return after death. The word "positive" is used because there are different groups of not so pleasant spirit-souls who keep being born and dying, thereby causing a lot of pain to their respective families. *Ogbanje* is a phenomenon used to describe a group of mischievous spirit-souls that come, die early and return as many times as they wish just to be a source of anguish to their parents. They are believed to only stop when a specialist ritual (*ibo iyi uwaliji ogbanje*) is performed to sever them from their kindred spirit. However, the divination process through which the identity of the re-incarnated spirit becomes known is called *igba agu*. In Nkpologu, this rite is normally performed after the birth of the child, either by the child's father or a well-meaning family member, and where it is not performed, the child invariably falls ill. Most times, the time lapse between the birth and *igba agu* is due to the fact that there are no strict time limits regarding its performance. Hence, some families would procrastinate until such a time that the child falls ill. The origin of the re-incarnated soul can be traced either to the child's paternal or maternal ancestry. Time is, also, immaterial in re-incarnation in the sense that the re-incarnated spirit-soul need not have been dead for a stipulated number of years before coming again. Most times also, the child would present with the physical and behavioral traits of the re-incarnated person.

Among the Igbo, any form of illness would necessitate a visit to the diviner who would consult with the ancestors and gods through divination to find out the cause(s) of illness. Thus, when a child falls ill, the parents would consult the medicine man/woman who would inform them that the spirit-soul which has re-incarnated as a child is angry because it has not been recognised and welcomed. In Nkpologu, the deity that is consulted during this particular type of divination is *Itogene*, the deity of procreation. The consultation would also provide information on the person who has

returned and what type of sacrifice that he/she demands to enable him/her to live a fruitful life on this particular journey. The gift(s) given to the diviner's oracle is usually as stipulated by the diviner, and it is usually a token. The inquirer, as is usual during divination, would state his mission saying: "we have a child and we would want to know who has returned". In cases where the re-incarnated spirit-soul was mistreated in his/her former life by a particular family, a type of propitiatory sacrifice called *igbo ota* is recommended to placate him/her from wreaking havoc (sickness and even death on the family). However, it is worthy of note that *igba agu* was the norm in traditional Igbo communities where people believed that every child is a re-incarnated soul, but with the adoption of Christianity, a lot of families no longer believe that and as such do not perform this ritual for their children because of its "fetish" implications.

The parent would return home after the divination with the information and on arrival, would invite his family, friends and neighbours to announce the identity of the child. Elaborate welcome and stories regarding the re-incarnated's former existence would be recalled to praise and adulation. Plans would be made as soon as possible for any stipulated sacrifices to be performed. Usually, it is a cooked feast that will be taken to the village shrine and shared between selected male members of the child's paternal family and the spirits. This meal which is cooked with the choicest fish (*azu akpakpa or azu eshu*), is a covenant between the family and the guardian spirits to ensure that the child is looked after. If the re-incarnated was a male, a cock is additionally used in preparing the food and if it is a woman, a hen is used.

At the shrine, the food is consecrated by the priest, and the people in attendance will eat together. Other forms of sacrifices that may be stipulated by the initial divination

may be the presentation of the cooked food at any major road junction either near the family home or farther away in a farm, but as advised by the diviner. Road junctions are popular meeting places of spirits, and by placing the feast there, it is ensured that all the spirits get their share. This form of sacrifice is usually covered by *awu icheoku/ugo* (the parrot's or eagle's feather), and *nzu/odo* (white or yellow chalk) and human beings do not partake in this, because it is left strictly to the spirits. At other times also, *osadaka* (a feast for children) may be stipulated. The type of sacrifice, who partakes and where it is performed depend on the attributes the family wishes for the re-incarnated. Once the process is completed, the sick child is expected to recover instantaneously.

The importance of divining and recognising the re-incarnated ancestor is that it gives the necessary information for insuring that a cohesive care plan is drawn up for the individual, taking into consideration, factors that he/she may have re-incarnated to achieve.

The location for the performance is not fixed - moving from the family home, to the diviner's home and back to the family. From there, it moves to the village shrine where it ends. The circle of performers increases as the action moves from one location to another. First, are the sick child and its parents. The second stage involves the diviner, the deity *Ite-ogene* and other ancestors, and at the third stage, when the parent returns home with the information about the child's identity, a small crowd of family and friends who gather to welcome the re-incarnated spirit-soul are included. Finally, the male members of the family plus an unknown number of additional spirits with whom they share the meal at the shrine. The ritual agents are eagle and parrot feathers and a cock or hen, depending on the sex of the child. The only costumes and props are those that are used by the diviner during divination, and

, they and their significance have been discussed. There is no music or dance throughout the performance, only invocation and incantations by the diviner (*dibia afa*) and the priest (*dibia aja*).

Table 4.3: Variations in Igba agu

Town	Name of ritual	Aim	Performed for	Time scale	Performed by	ritual agents	Others	If not performed
Agulu	Igba agu	Reincarnation inquiry	new born	anytime preferably immediately after birth	dibia afa (divination priest), the parents and the dibia aja who may be approached to offer the sacrifices	nzu, hen, money (token fee) plus other items as specified by the dibia afa	the instruction to reincarnate to members of the family who need children is given to the dead on the night before the burial	child falls very ill
Eziowele	Igba agu	"	"	"	"	"		"
Nkpor	Igba agu	"	"	"	"	"		"
Umuoji	Igba agu	"	"	"	"	"		"
Imilike	Igba agu	"	"	"	"	"		"
Nkpologu	Inwa uwa	"	"	"	"	"		"
Avu	Igba afaa	"	"	"	"	"		"

Table 4.3 shows what this ritual is called in various areas of Igboland, and it demonstrates the reason for being and characteristics of the same throughout.

Iba nwa afa/iputa ife/ikubata n'uno (naming ceremony)

In traditional Igbo society, women had their children behind their *mkpuke* (hut) situated behind their husband's *iba/obu*. From the time the baby is delivered, both mother and child remain in confinement for at least seven market weeks before they are allowed near and inside their husband's hut on the day of the naming ceremony. They are put into confinement for two reasons. First, a woman was regarded as unclean after birth until she performs the ritual cleansing, and secondly, because she needed to recuperate after the ordeals of pregnancy and labour. In confinement, she is not allowed to attend public places, like, the village market, stream, woodland, etc. With her mother visiting and staying with her for at least three months post delivery, she has enough help around her home to enable her to finish her period of confinement without a break.

The subsequent ritual is the *iputa ife* (to come out into the light of day) or *ikubata n'uno* (to be brought into the home), appropriately named to signify the purpose of the ritual. Before this time, both mother and child remain un-incorporated into their family and community circle. As such they are assumed to be "outside", not only of the family home represented by the man's hut, but also "outside" the village life. It is during *iba afa* that the child is incorporated by his folks, while its mother is re-incorporated. In between *igba agu* and *iba afa*, males would have been circumcised on the eighth day.

While in confinement, she will be busy preparing for the naming of the child who up until now is still referred to as *nwa* (baby). The naming ceremony is an occasion during which the society takes over the ownership of the child, and as the child grows every member of the community is on hand to ensure both his physical and spiritual

well being. The naming ceremony is also a head-counting opportunity during which the community come together to bear witness and take responsibility for the upbringing of the child. Hence, as the child grows up, the mother may not be around, but someone else in their neighbourhood will feed, bathe and shelter him/her if there is the need to do so.

So, on the morning of the naming ceremony, the child's father will be busy buying palmwine for visitors. Prior to this time, he would have sent word around to invite everyone who would wish to come. His mother in-law would also have invited anyone she wishes to invite. Depending on how financially resourceful he is, he may cook some food to entertain people who would come. If not, it would be just drinks and light refreshment.

The ceremony takes place in the man's compound - usually in the evening so that people who had gone to either their farms or market would have returned. When enough people have gathered, the oldest male in the family will welcome the visitors and break the kolanut. After that the child and the mother are brought out and she moves around to greet their invitees. She will give the child to the eldest male of the family who holds the child in both hands and raises the child skywards as if showing him to the gods, facing the East. On bringing him down, he begins a special prayer of thanksgiving to *Chukwu* for the gift of another child and prays for the well-being of the baby and its parents. After that, he announces the name given by the baby's parents, and he either supports them or he gives the baby another name. Either way, he puts money in a container that would be placed in front of him, as he invites others to name the baby as he did. They also will offer money and/or other gifts. In Nkpologu and Ukpabi Nimbo, a child is named after a dead or living relative. If the namesake is alive, he/she presents a cockerel (if the child is a boy) and a hen (if

it is a girl) as the naming token. In cases where the namesake is alive, a special kind of relationship develops between the adult and the baby in which the older of the two is more proactive in caring and supporting the child and his family. Namesakes are usually role models. While this is happening, people drink their palmwine and make merry. All the money collected is for the mother and the baby. The father takes no share.

The naming ceremony is significant because during it, the child is given his own independent identity and the community marks the child as its own. Before then, he is regarded as a person with no identity. By participating in naming the child, everyone present partakes in a social ritual of joint responsibility and thus, a stake in ensuring that the child grows up with adequate supervision. It is also the occasion for the mother's re-incorporation into the community after which she is free to attend public gatherings and places.

The naming ceremony as theatre

The naming ceremony is a passive ritual because the child for whom it is performed does not in any way contribute to the dialogue and/or action. It is one of those performances in which the participative audience/observers know exactly what is expected of them because they have participated before. For this reason, no rehearsal is needed (not for lack of time) since the event would have been planned since the birth of the child. The sitting arrangement is usually circular and the space used is in front of the man's hut (unless it is raining, then the scene would be moved into the hut).

When the people have gathered, the woman emerges from her hut followed by other women (including her mother who would have been on *omugwo* and other wives of the family). This would be the first time since the birth of the child that she and her baby would venture beyond the threshold of her husband's hut, into the open space where the visitors are seated. The woman would tour the circular seating arrangement to greet people, starting with the oldest members of her family. Following immediately behind her is a woman carrying the baby which, in both the theatrical and the ritual sense, signifies that though one woman bore the child, its nurturing and integration is also the duty of others. In most cases, this role is performed by a woman who has had children of her own. With the tour of the circle completed, the baby would be given to the eldest member of its father's family. Meanwhile, the mother and these other women would either move from the crowd into her husband's *iba* from where they would watch the proceeding or return to her own living quarters. From being centre-stage performers, they now assume the role of spectator-participants. This is one unique trait of Igbo performance - the ease with which centre-stage character/individuals and active participants can, having finished their specified roles, intermingle with and become part of the spectator-audience (most times still wearing their costume).

Once the women leave the arena, the man holding the baby stands up (and as if on cue), most if not all side conversations would stop. However, should a pocket of people continue talking, the man with the baby (by now the main actor) will loudly clear his throat and all else will be silent. He would reiterate (in a loud monologue) their reason for gathering, and still holding the baby towards the sky, he would thank God, the Creator for bestowing the great gift of life on them. He prays for a good and long life for the child, his parents and siblings; where there are no siblings, he would mandate the child to ensure that only the best come after him/her. He would

pray for their health, food to feed the child with and other children within the community. He would also pray that the child may grow to be a child his entire community will be proud of in future. The beauty and length of his oratory would depend on his dexterity with words, and on how he is able to use Igbo proverbs. Although the child is passive, it is the focus and contact that draws the larger collective into re-affirming their unity. It is the reason why the family and its community have come together to enhance their survival and prosperity through the single act of naming a child, but through which they thank, supplicate and invoke the blessings of their ancestors and deities.

At the end of the elder's prayers, he would call on the mother to kneel before him and with the child on one hand and a cup of palmwine in the other, he would offer special prayers at the end of which he drops some of the palmwine on the ground in libation. He then passes the cup to the mother to drink from. She is obliged to taste the wine before handing it back to the man. Only then would she stand up and leave.

Sometimes, an interesting interplay involving the sip of the palmwine has been a way of extending the playfulness of the performance. While social modesty requires that the mother takes only a little sip of the wine offered, a woman's position in her husband's house could embolden her to break with this tradition. Women are supposed to kneel when offered drinks by their husbands, but older women would usually pretend to suffer from waist pain and thus, allow themselves to only bow forward instead of kneeling down. Sometimes, a younger woman may pretend that she does not drink at all, so she may take just a sip and make faces as if the wine tastes sour. When this happens, the spectators will call out in mock encouragement, asking her to try some more in spite of this "sour" taste. After a few sips and further cheers from those present, she will gulp everything down in one go, to

rapturous applause and laughter, and such appellations as "*oli nkwu*" (palm-wine bibber). At other times women have used this occasion to register resentment and/or defiance towards their marital families or community by totally refusing the drink in spite of all encouragements.

Most times these displays elicit laughter and healthy bantering between the women and the men. The main significance of such performance is that they stop rituals from becoming too serious, heavy thus emphasising more of their social aspect. Rituals have the capacity to quickly become sombre even when this is not their intention. This is because rituals exist to achieve set objectives, and sometimes, the participants may in their bid to achieve these objectives, without consciously doing so, become too serious. And in the ritual interaction between performers, space etc. such seriousness may become apparent unless there are conscious attempts (as the ones described above) to infuse and sustain some humour.

The theatrical implication of such humorous interplay is that they possess the ability to prolong rituals by bringing in spontaneous aspects of a play within a play - music, dance, song and recitation. For example, the researcher witnessed a naming ceremony in Ukpabi Nimbo (a town in Igboda Local Government Area of Nsukka) during which a very popular and well liked woman in the community contributed to a humorous interplay. She was the grandmother of the baby being named, and she was called to have a drink. She accepted the cup of wine from the man (who was her real-life husband), went on to hand it over to a very old man who sat unnoticed in the crowd. She knelt down before him and offering her cup to him, told him to drink first before she does - to the spectator's cheers and fond appellation. Before the old man could take her cup of palmwine, another much younger man got up and came

imploringly to the old man asking him not to be deceived by her ageing sweetness. He playfully chastised her to leave the men of the family to the younger wives who are not as wily as herself. The old man admonished the intruder to go about his business and leave him alone with his "one and only". Both men involved in this interplay were members of her married family, and the woman was the favourite wife because of her peaceful and loving disposition. While some of her admirers cheered her on, another gentleman who was sitting in the crowd made a bellowing sound for her on his *ozara* (elephant tusk). On hearing her praise being produced from the *ozara*, she collected her wine from the older man, drank up quickly (all the time to applause), thrusts the cup to the unwilling younger man and starts to dance, as the spectators cheered. She was now dancing in the centre of a circular sitting arrangement. At this point, the old man whom she had taken the wine to stood up and crouching over his walking stick, started to walk over to her. The applause from the spectators when they saw this was deafening. The *ozara* player now got up and followed directly behind the old man - the musician's face contorted by the spirit of the music he played. On seeing her ageing sweetheart approach her, the woman stopped her more vigorous dance steps, made some suggestive and coy moves while moving towards the old man. She stopped right in front of him, knelt on both knees with her head bent forward as if waiting for his blessing. Meanwhile the whole crowd went quiet, except for the music from the *ozara*. Gingerly, he stretched his withered shaking hands, placed it on her shoulder and said "*bunyi fu, Oyoo*", meaning "Get up my beloved". This drew ecstatic laughter and comments as some people mockingly called out to the old man to dance. She got up, put her arm gently around the old man's bent frame and started to return him to his seat saying to the crowd "this is my main husband". In real-life, the old man is her husband's uncle who was at the head of the delegation that performed her marriage rites, and to whom her family handed her over to so many years ago.

The role the old man played by getting up and moving towards the dancing woman was that he used his graceful presence to bring this side performance under control. By so doing, he was able to shorten the time the side play could have taken and thus enabled the continuation of the ritual proper.

The ceremony progressed from where it left off with those present being invited to name the child. They would either support the name the parents or someone else had given, or they would give whatever name they wish. As they did this, they would use money and other gifts to support the name given. The act of taking the child into their hands, giving it a name or supporting one previously given name signified their acceptance of responsibility for this child. By allowing anyone who wished to perform this seemingly simple act of naming the child, they became custodians of and providers for the child.

The flexibility demonstrated throughout this ritual, and the fact that its duration depends solely on the oratory, the dramatic moments and willingness of the spectators to participate in all side shows is a reflection on the Igbo propensity for using every available occasion to celebrate life. This is especially so as the performer-namers do not only celebrate the gift of a new life, they also celebrate and re-enact aspects of their own life and being.

After being named, the child is returned to its mother. The visitors are entertained with food and drinks, and there are no limits to how long people can stay. The women would gather in their own crowd in the space between the *mkpuke* and the man's *iba* to entertain themselves with songs and dances - some of which are quite lewd and obscene. This occasion is one of the rare times that women can make fun of their men's sexual organs and sexual prowess. Naming ceremonies are also times

when women are at freedom to consume considerable quantities of alcohol without being socially censured, and they return home late without upsetting accepted norms. Occasions like this mark the relaxation of social expectations on both men and women. There are no special costumes except that the baby's mother wears a new attire - a present from her husband at the birth of their child.

ADOLESCENT/ADULTHOOD RITUALS

Background to initiation into womanhood

Young women were initiated during the moonlit nights of the harvesting period. This was because in traditional Igboland, the moon was the only source of light at night, and rituals were scheduled to take place on those nights of full moon so that people could avail themselves of the natural lighting. *Ikpa iyi* (in Nkpologu) *iso ebe* (in Agulu) and *izu aña Itutara* (in Abakiliki), mean the same thing and they are rituals during which young virgins are taught the secrets of womanhood in readiness for marriage. It is only after this rite that they are qualified for marriage. The harvest season is a period of relaxation from intensive farming which usually happens during the rainy season. These rituals are also specifically designed to take place during this period so that the initiands' families would not be deprived of these much needed farm hands.

In traditional Igbo society, this was the only form of formal sex education which these young virgins would get that was approved by their communities. Community approval was important because, even today in most parts of Igboland, adults find the open discussion of sex with younger people very embarrassing. It must be remembered that during the time in question, sex was for the sole purpose of

procreation and it only happened in privacy and at night. In Umuoji, it is actually believed that albinism results from pregnancies conceived through sexual intercourse in daylight. Most traditional Igbo societies frowned on sex before marriage, and some families have been said to re-enter into negotiations with the bride's family to have part of the bride price returned if the bride was not a virgin. In extreme cases, the girl was returned to her family and the entire marriage agreement was nullified. This was a source of shame to the bride's family, especially for her mother as her daughter(s) was a reflection of her own morality and child-rearing practices. So not only was the non-virgin bride stigmatised, but her mother's own chastity as a married woman was also brought into question. In some traditional Igbo communities, the revelation of this type of incident would be widely felt and the unfortunate bride have been known to remain unmarried or made to take an oath to prove her chastity.

Female circumcision, in Abikiliki and environs, was a highlight of this initiation into womanhood. During circumcision, incisions are made and part of the clitoris removed. Some communities did this to ensure that promiscuity due to high libido is controlled. This aspect of Igbo culture is now being discouraged in many areas because it is considered brutal, and sometimes, excessive bleeding and poor hygiene have led to death.

Ikpa iyi (in Nkpologu) and *iso ebe* (in Agulu)

In traditional Nkpologu and Agulu communities, *Ikpa iyi* and *iso ebe* respectively, marked the initiation of young girls into womanhood. This rite, like *ima muo* (initiation of young boys into the masquerade cult), was shrouded in secrecy. It was during this time that young women are given a code of adult conduct, taught about the different guardian deities and the role they play in enabling women to build up

successful marriages and homes. It was also a time for sex education during which these young women were taught by experienced mothers all about pregnancy, midwifery, childbirth, motherhood and general family practices. The importance of this type of training cannot be over-emphasised especially when there were no hospitals.

As in most rituals of initiation, there was a marked period in seclusion during which the initiand received instructions in isolation. At the end of this period of seclusion, they returned to their families having taken their cleansing bath. In Nkpologu, this ritual lasts for three native weeks (twelve days), and takes place at the shrine of the goddess, *Ite-ogene*. Each initiand was assigned an elderly matron who was. The duty of a mentor was to collect her ward from her home, escorted her to the initiation venue and ensured that she fully understood and made use of the lessons of the initiation. Thus every night, for those twelve days, the girls were summoned with a song by their mentors and together, they went and remained in the seclusion of the shrine until dawn. Part of the lesson in staying awake all night, is to introduce the girls into the sleepless nights that come with motherhood. The songs with which the girls were summoned seems to be designed to motivate them to go through the pains of initiation (and perhaps, in particular, the pain of circumcision) by reminding them that no one in their family has ever failed to withstand the experience. The song goes like this:

<i>Awa nne gi obe</i>	(Your mother survived the incision)
<i>Awa nna gi obe</i>	(Your father survived the incision)
<i>Kawara Azidigbo</i>	(As Agidigbo was incised)
<i>Agidigbo ukwunne</i>	(Agidigbo your mother's brother)
<i>Oyoo Ogerewu</i>	(the beloved one who is very wealthy and healthy)

Once in the privacy of the shrine, the girls and their mentors remained naked, while the girls learnt about comportment in marriage, sex, pregnancy, child birth, delivery and acceptable child-rearing practices. Both the elderly women and the young girls going naked together helped to expose the girls to the transformation that their bodies would go through in due course. In this manner, the girls were also encouraged to be at ease in the presence of their fellow women who would eventually be their midwives and confidants. These lessons were very important in traditional Igbo society where women acted as midwives to each other.

The end of the ceremony was marked by a public outing either to the market or to the village square. Virgins from the northern part of Nkpologu performed this outing, naked. This was a means of showing off their physical attributes and signifying availability for marriage. Their bodies were adorned with *uli* (indigo) and *ufie* (camwood). In other parts of Nkpologu, girls performed their outing dressed only in *jigida* (a multiple line of native waist beads which fails to cover pubic area). They would dance to the accompaniment of songs rendered by their mentors, and the music was referred to as *Nene oye oma oyoko* (nene = mother, while oye oma oyoko = kind and beautiful) - referring to the goddess at whose shrine they underwent their initiation.

The outing marked the re-integration of the initiands into their society and their dance marked their exaltation into the status of women who now understood the basis of marriage and motherhood; and who enjoy the privileged protection of *Ite-ogene* - the goddess of procreation.

Meanwhile, the efficacy of the ritual would be tested in the ability of the girls to marry and make use of the lessons they had learnt during their initiation. It seems

that through these initiations, traditional Igbo societies ensured the quality, transference and continuity of societal norms; as the initiands carried the lessons of their initiation which would be felt from one generation to another.

The period after the initiation was unique in Nkpologu and some other areas around Nsukka because the girls were then allowed to have a lover chosen by their mother - usually a well-behaved man who would disvirgin and lead her in exploring the adult world of sex. This type of sexual mentoring was referred to as *ikpa n'enu* and, it served two purposes. First, all sex acts were carried out in modesty, under the close scrutiny of the girl's mother, who ensured that her daughter understood sexual etiquettes, especially the noiseless decorum that went with it. The Igbo would scorn a woman who is usually heard during intercourse. Secondly, the mother's involvement in her daughter's practical sex education helped to control the frequency of sexual contact and over-excitement as the mentor's visits depended on her mother's judgement. That control was important as it helped instill a sense of restraint in the girls, especially at a time when female contraception was down to the ability of the woman to avoid copulation during ovulation, and in her ability to ward off advances from her partner. The aim of *ikpa n'enu* was to monitor, limit and contain sexual contact to a socially acceptable level, thereby reducing the degree of sexual promiscuity for both sexes. Table 4.4 below shows the names by which this initiation were called in different localities, and what variations there were. In some areas of Igboland, this ritual has been overtaken by Christianity and westernisation.

Table 4.4: Variations in initiation into womanhood

Town	Name of ritual	Aim	Performed by	Setting	Performed for	Music/Dance	Duration & additional comments
Agulu	Iso ebe	Initiation into womanhood	Elderly women	Shrine of community goddess of fertility	Young women in readiness for marriage. In some places time for female circumcision	Songs sung by elderly mentor and dance learnt while in seclusion. This incorporation takes place in the market square.	12 market weeks (48 days) Secret initiation during which young women bond with the goddess of fertility and are taught the secrets of childbirth, etc.
Abakiliki	Izu afia itutara	"	"	Shrine by the village river. The young women go there at night and return to their families by day	"	"	12 market weeks Circumcision is carried out and the lessons learnt are the same as in Agulu.
Nkpologu	Ikpa iyi	"	"	Shrine by the village river. Young women leave home at dusk and return at dawn over an agreed period	"	"	3 market weeks or twelve days. Lessons learnt is the same.

Ima muo (initiation into the masquerade cult)

Ima muo is the initiation of young boys into the masquerade cult. Among the Igbo, the masquerade is the representative of the ancestors, and in this patrilineal society, it is predominantly a male cult. All initiated men are sworn to secrecy during this ritual, and from a very early age, young boys learn the secrets and mysteries that transform them into mature and fully integrated Igbo men. In an interview with J.C. Obi (1995), he described the precepts on which this initiation is founded thus:

Omenani Igbo [Igbo tradition] is not a play thing. Any true Igbo child must always return to learn the omenani of his people - his genealogy. Only after this does the individual fit into the society irrespective of how far he had travelled

In most parts of Igboland, boys are initiated from as early as when they are eight years of age. In Nkpologu, the initiation lasts approximately two full days, and it is usually sponsored by the *Idi n' Ikolobia* (Idi and Ikolobia) or the militant age grade made up of people whose ages range between twenty-five and forty-five years, and who are at the beginning of their career as ambassadors used as representatives and negotiators by their communities. Qualification into this broad-based age grade is not just by age but by achievement. People in it possess good leadership skills, and are seen as role models worthy of emulation by the younger initiands. Hence the reason why they are chosen as initiators and sponsors.

In most of Igboland (except in Imo and Abia States where people get initiated into the masquerade cult as full grown men), the *ima muo* ritual involves a series of overnight activities starting with the congregation of the young men at the cult house in the village square. From there, they are taken to the forest, and it is there that the initiand's survival skills and ability to persevere under strain and stress are put to the

test. The performance, usually in most cases, has a graded structure based on confrontations and dangerous encounters between the initiands and the initiating masquerades. In Nkpor, these initiating masquerades are individually or collectively called the *nwakpuluke*, and they are characters designed to arouse terror in the uninitiated. The size, physical strength and number of initiating masquerades usually depend on the size and number of the young boys being initiated. The purpose is to make sure that each boy receives maximum attention and harassment during the vigorous but playful contests which make up the structure of the initiation. These contests include wrestling with the *nwakpuluke*, climbing the 'hill of thorns' and broken bottles, a lie detector test, a shouting contest, a series of dilemma situations that require very unattractive choices such as the choice of which family members to offer to the masquerade in exchange for the resurrection of any *nwakpuluke* that may have been 'killed' during the contests, etc. All these tests are geared towards testing the young initiand's endurance, intellectual acumen and moral probity.

The *nwakpuluke's* job is to terrorise the boys into wanting to run away from the arena, thus disqualifying themselves from continuing with the process. As a result of the psychological conditioning and support from their families and friends present, the boys usually manage to last the initiation, especially with the mixture of taunts and encouragement which they receive from the spectators/participants made up of other young boys and the adult males of the village. The initiation is structured in such a way that the initiand moves from one stage to the other only after he has proved himself worthy of standing his grounds against the menacing initiating masquerades. Thus, throughout the course of the night, they are exposed to different masquerades - the good and the bad, the grotesque and the beautiful, the kindly and capricious etc.

For a lot of them, this is the first time that they would be coming in contact with the greatest of all masquerades - *ayaka/muo abani* or the night masquerade. *Ayaka* is different from the day-time masquerades because the *ayaka* appears only at night when human beings have retired, and it is legendary for its intolerance of any signs of human presence and light. When the *ayaka* is out and about, its eerie music and inhuman sounds are the only things that can be heard from miles away. The *ayaka* season is the harvesting season when the community has enough time for relaxation. The *ayaka* is the final arbiter in any disagreement between people, and they are the most effective force for social control. For example, the role of a mother in achieving and sustaining a stable and loving home is highly regarded among the Igbo, and part of that stability results from the woman's ability to cater for her family. No matter where she is, the expectation is that she must return home to prepare the family's supper and to feed her family before it becomes too dark. However, there are some women who do not uphold or share this sense of time and would still be preparing the family meals when everyone else in the neighbourhood would have retired for the night. Most times, their children who would have waited too long for the meal would fall asleep without eating. A woman like this is a social deviant and the Igbo would classify or call her, *ajo nwayi n'esi ite abani* (the bad woman that cooks late at night). If, however, she proves incapable of changing her late night cooking habit, the *ayaka onyekulufa* [Umuoji], *onyekuri/abare* [Imilike] which is the *ayaka* that satirizes people with unacceptable social tendencies would be drafted in to sort her out. A group of these night masquerade will sing with her name, run satirical comments about her bad habit as they travel throughout the entire community. It is a shameful thing to be talked about in this way, especially with all the evil spirits out and about at night. During an interview with Mazi Chime Emeoha, the role of *onyekuri* in Imilike was described thus:

In Imilike, there are different sorts of masquerades. The night variety is the one that women are not allowed to see. The daylight ones eg egwugwu, are the ones that women may see but not stand and stare at. As these come, they will be saying "*umunwanyị gba, o no n'uzo gba*" (women run, anyone on the way, run). However, the night variety in Imilike is called "*Abare*". This is an *alusi* and is not seen. It is an agent of social control. It satirizes women who are into prostitution. In Orba [an adjoining town], they call this same night masquerade "*onyekuri*". They satirise and advice. Also when they are out at night, they act as night watchmen.

They also satirize women who specialise in late cooking. Such women like you know in Igboland are bad women. They have no sense of time - so at about this time of the night (it was 8.30 pm), she is still planning on how to get her cooking fire started. Sometimes before the cooking is done the children would have been so hungry and gone to sleep on empty stomach. These are the women *abare* will sing about. They will also satirize mean men and the women who get pregnant while their most recent child is still suckling (November 1995).

In Umuoji, the *onyekulufa* is famous for satirising social miscreants and sexual impropriety, thereby forcing the people in question to change. It is a unique type of auditory theatre in which the performers are unseen and unconstrained by time of day and/or space, yet these factors do not interfere with people's involvement and response. The song below satirizes two men, the first is Willie Ji who gets a regular beating from his wife and the second, is Okolafo the loafer, who prefers baby-sitting to farming so that he can eat the food left for the baby because according to him, the baby would not eat. In Umuoji, both cases are laughable because, a man who is beaten up by his wife is not worthy of being called a man, neither are men who baby sit - real men work hard all day in their farms:

Okwu obu be okwu na nne (twice)
This talk is beyond all talks (twice)

Na onu n'ekwulu ira abia ahe eh eh
The mouthpiece of the people has arrived ahe eh eh

Willie Ji amutakwa ube ku be (twice)
Willie, the master yam farmer has learnt the unmentionable (twice)

Na mgbe chijili Ojiesili egbu muo
Once it is dark he would start to cry that Ojiesili* has killed him

Otie ya obee nna eh
When he is beaten and he cries, Father!

* *Ojiesili is Willie's wife*

Obe nna eh, nna eh ahe he he
He cries, Father! Father! eh ahe he he

Ina malugo muo na agu?
Do you now know the masquerade singing?

Muo Mmuloji n'agu eh, ahe eh eh
The masquerade from Umuoji is singing eh, ahe eh eh

Okoloafo nyem nni kam nye nwa
Okoloafo give me the food for the child

Nyem nni kam nye nwa Okoloafo
Give me the food for the child, Okoloafo

Na nwa elili kam lie muo
So that if the child does not eat, I eat.

Ima nwa dike na ere nwa
Do you know that the child of an illustrious man is a child-minder

Imalugo mmuo n'agu egwu
Do you know the masquerade singing?

Mmo Mmuloji n'agu egwu
The Umuoji masquerade is singing this song

Muo Mmuloji n'agu eh eh eh eh
The Umuoji masquerade sings this song, eh eh eh eh

The effect of this performance that the masquerades set off in the course of the night becomes more palpable the next day with people bantering and making fun, not only of the two men but, of their relations. This is an example of the Igbo using every opportunity to celebrate life - even in the darkest of nights. This masquerade's rendition is also typical of oral tradition in Igboland, where story-telling commences only after the story-teller informs his or her listeners that there is a great story to be told. This is a way of readying people and getting those who otherwise would not have listened to become interested. In this way, no details are missed by the listeners. There is also the repetitive style used by the masquerade when he gets to the point where he thinks that the gossip is juicy. For example, when it sings about how Willie cries when he is beaten, he repeats it so that anyone who had missed out on the first one will hear the subsequent information.

In essence, during the initiation into the masquerade cult, these young initiands are brought face to face with the real essence of Igbo dualism and manhood symbolised in the different forms of masquerades that appear at different times. Above all, they are exposed for the first time to the powerful role of the masquerade in maintaining law and order within the community. An Igbo saying sums up the lessons learned about Igbo manhood on the initiation night thus: *obu otu eze nwoke ji achi ka ona eji ataa* (it is the same teeth that a man smiles with that he bites with). In effect, the exposure of these young men to the varying strengths of the initiating masquerades (the kind and the callous, the beautiful and the grotesque, the riotous and the serene, the dancer and the fighter, etc) is an exposure to the level of complicated restraint and balance needed to be a mature Igbo man. This is the core lesson of *ima muo*, an education into manhood - gentle and flexible, but firm and persevering.

Furthermore, the initiation night is one of dread for the young initiands during which time they come face to face with pure darkness, its terrors and all its fearful ambience. The part of the initiation that takes part in the forest can be really scary, because the Igbo believe that the forest is the home for all homeless spirits, and that while the spirits who have a place to return to do so, the homeless ones return to the forest at dusk. These homeless spirits are usually the most vicious, and no sane Igbo person allows him/herself to be in the forest at dusk. So in bringing the initiands to the forest, and especially at night, they are made to face some of their unfounded fears learnt from childhood fables. What the trip to the forest does is that it forces two levels of bonding to happen on the night of the initiation. The first bonding is between the initiands and their mentors - on this night of reality, a great bond of trust and respect is formed as the initiands just have to believe that their mentors would not let them come to any harm in the dark. The second is the bond between the initiands themselves. The initiation night marks the start of a comradeship born out

of surviving the same ordeal, and a lasting knowledge that as a team, nothing will ever be too big to be dealt with. On this night also, the young men take the oath of secrecy which forbids disclosing their experience to the uninitiated. These young men learn from such early stages that the real mark of an Igbo man is that he does not speak unless he must - this fact has not changed in spite of the Igbo exposure to western influence.

The initiands remain in the forest until the very early hours of the morning when they will be the first to visit the village stream for their initiation bath which in Nkpor is called *iwucha aru ogbodu* (or washing away the uninitiated skin). In Nkpologu, as the initiands arrive at the village stream, an interesting performance called *iku ene/iku iyi* or *iku mmili* (control calling of the river goddess) in most of Igboland takes place. *Iku mmili* is another manifestation of Igbo duality - the belief that all public spaces are shared by human beings and spirits, and that each group has use of these places at specified times. These public places include the market square, the village stream or river, village shrines and woodlands etc. As a result, human beings have use of these shared facilities from dawn to dusk (except at noon when it is believed that some capricious spirits with no sense of time and boundaries appear), while the spirits appear for their own shift from dusk to dawn. However, if before the first cock crows (which is around 5 am) people want to use the village stream, they must stop at a distance to alert the children of the night that the children of the day are approaching. They will then give them about fifteen to twenty minutes before they announce final approach. Michael Akukwe's recollection (1995) of calling the goddess Idemili in Ezioweles goes like this:

Idemili kpolukwa umu gi anyasi na ndi nke efifie abiaba go
(Idemili please take your children of the night, your children of daylight are approaching).

Iku iyi is an art and those people who perform it are respected because they are believed to have daily contacts with the spirits. If for any reason this individual is indisposed to lead the way to the stream and perform this daily ritual, villagers will be warned to stay away from the stream until the sun has fully risen. Even then, the villagers also talk loudly on their approach as a further warning to any malingering spirit(s) that may be left behind in spite of the light of day simply because they have not heard the daily call to the goddess. In the past, this ritualised call was an important daily occurrence as the village streams and rivers were the only source of water supply, and some people would want to fetch the water they would need for the day before going to their farms or to the market.

The morning of the bath at the stream is an exciting morning for the young initiands as this would be for most of them, the first they would witness *iku iyi*. Before now, they would have been too young to attend the stream during the early hours. In addition, following directly after their experience of successfully confronting the initiating masquerade the previous night, the moment of *iku iyi* is a magical one which opens up a world previously unknown to the young men - a world in which within boundaries, the human being can command even the spirits.

Once in the stream, they would have their first post-initiation bath which is symbolic of a new and more mature beginning, and their leaving is timed in such a way that they do not meet even the first set of people from the village as they arrive to fetch water for their daily use. From there, the initiands are taken to the cult house, which in Nkpologu. is located in the village square where for the rest of the day, they are taught about corporate identity and team spirit, and about other cult secrets that were not covered during the night spent in the forest. After that, they return to their various homes on their own because they are now regarded as men who can take care

of themselves. Furthermore in Nkpologu, those of them who before the initiation slept on the same beds with their mother, sisters and other female relatives, are forbidden to do so from now on. It is from this early stage that these young men are made aware of the onset of biological changes, and their curiosity to experiment with bodies different from their own. Thus this community begins to instill in these newly initiated 'little men' that sense of moral propriety and decorum which forbids incestuous relationships.

The practice also, in Nkpologu, is that before they leave the cult house to rejoin their various families, the initiands are given their first mandate as men - to "call up" an *okotoko* masquerade from the land of the spirits within twelve days. The *okotoko* masquerade is a one-off design and its production and performance exercise is carried out by each group of initiands, and it is usually their first team work. So the *okotoko* is as unique and as distinct as the group that "called" it up. On their return to their respective homes, the initiands will continue to meet at an agreed time and place (without restrictions from their families) to practice the various techniques which James Eneje (1997) describes as "calling up their *otokoto* from the land of the dead". The Igbo believe that masquerades are usually summoned via appropriate rites which include libation, invocation and verbal undertakings for appropriate respectful behaviour and treatment of the visiting masquerades. On the twelfth day, post-initiation night, the initiands take their display to the village square. The highlight for them is that for the first time, they would have a chance to scare the girls with the whips they carry - those girls who are too big will be pelted with stones from a distance until they run. The picture painted here is hilarious, and it marks the beginning of Igbo male domination, and the supremacy of the masquerade cult.

The foregoing accounts are two different examples of *ima muo*, and both accounts are in agreement about the age of the initiands and the aims of the initiation. However, the names of the rituals differ. In Nkpor, the post-initiation bath is either at the cult house or at the home of the initiating elder, while in Nkpologu it takes place at the village stream. The Nkpor account is more specific about the nature of the initiating masquerade, the activities they engage in during initiation, but the Nkpologu example takes us beyond the initiation of the young men to their first design and performance exercise.

Town	Name of ritual	Aim	Performed for	Setting	Performed by	Music & Dance	Comments
Nkpologu	Iba mmanwu	initiation into the secrets of Igbo masking traditions - confrontation of childhood fears embodied in initiating masquerade, venues and time. Foundation training in Igbo manhood - diplomacy, leadership and team skills, family and community values through healthy peer competitions etc	Controlled - active initiation performed for and by boys aged between 8-12 years of age	Varied - from forest, to cult house, to village stream and back to village square for incorporation rites.	young men under close supervision of elderly men	guideline for presentation given during initiation. Music and dance steps are energetic and formulated by young initiands with the initiators in consultative roles	from experience, this is a dead end for any woman researching into Igbo rituals as only sketchy information is offered if one is lucky. In most cases, information dries up. This cult is still in present day Igboland as it was in traditional times. The uninitiated are still regarded as <i>ogbodu</i> (an uninitiated that is worse than an infidel)
Nkpor	Ikpu ani*	does not involve going to the village stream, begins and ends in the cult leader's compound	"	"	"	there is music and dance all through including a contest in singing and dancing	

* *ikpu ani* means entering the ground because it is believed that the masquerades live underground, and that they emerge from ant holes after appropriate libation and invocation have been carried out/performed.

Inu nwanyi (traditional marriage rite)

Inu nwanyi is an example of an adulthood ritual. In Umuoji, a man was not allowed to get married unless he was initiated into the masquerade cult. This makes *ima muo* a mandatory and passive-active ritual because it must be performed for advancement and for other stages in life to take place. It is after *ima muo* that young men were given their first yam seedlings (by their fathers) to enable them to start the process of establishing themselves, and accumulating some of the extensive wealth needed in the marriage negotiations. Among the Igbo, a marriage contract is a drawn-out process in which the circle of participants increases at every new negotiation point. There are two types of marriages - one between people and deities and the other between people.

The former type of marriage involves a process whereby young men and women were made spouses of deities and was quite prevalent in Ala Uno and Ukehe until recently, and was termed *adoro* and *ehuru* respectively. These marriages were contracted for three reasons. First, the young people were chosen because they were either very beautiful or handsome. Second, some prosperous families would dedicate their daughters (rarely sons) to a particular god in a covenant in which the deity's role is to enable continued prosperity and posterity. Third, some young men and women are used as ransom for covenants made with particular deities where the terms of that contract may have been broken by the people involved. These spouses were consecrated to and lived a secluded life at the shrines of their different deity-husbands. The brides' children were fathered either by their male counterparts or the chief priests of the deities, if they fancied the brides. Their offsprings automatically belonged to the deities, and like their parents, would spend the rest of their lives at the shrines.

With respect to marriage between humans, negotiations start with *iche ego* (presentation of money). This is a token amount - a declaration of intention by the man and the money is either given to the girl directly or is given to the girl by someone acting as a go-between. If the money was given to her outside her home, she must return immediately to show it to her parents. There is a period of one to two market weeks or eight days, depending on the locality, during which if the money is not returned to the man, it would signal acceptance of his declared intention to marry the girl. Up until this time, the drama is mute.

The duration of marriage negotiations can vary depending on how immediate the man's need to settle down is, and the level of his affluence. It may be up to a year before the girl finally goes to live with her husband after the *ndulu nwanvi* ceremony during which the girl is escorted to her marital home. The interesting aspect of Igbo marriage rites from a performative point of view is that the action changes from one scene to another, involving an-ever widening circle of performers. The process involved in traditional marriages differ from place to place, and as such, the examples from Imilike (in the North) and Onitsha (in the South) would suffice.

Inu nwanvi in Imilike

In Imilike marriages can be contracted either between a child-bride and a grown man, or between two consenting adults. In the case of a child-bride, agreements are entered into as soon as the baby is born in a ceremony known as "*itanyelu ha mnanya n'uju*" (which means to pour some wine into an earthen ware). This ritual is performed signifying that this child now belongs to someone else by marriage. This is a simple ceremony which happens after the birth of a baby girl, and the parents of the future husband would visit the parents of the new baby with some money and gifts to inform

them that their son would want to marry their daughter when they are both of age. If the parents of the girl accept, the welfare and good upbringing of the child becomes the joint responsibility of both families. The girl is allowed to visit her prospective husband's family from time to time. When both young people are old enough to marry, the rest of the marriage rites would begin, but before then, her family is bound by the terms of the contract between them and the boy's parents. As such, they will not accept any other offers of marriage from anyone else. Most times, families contract this type of marriage as a testament to a long standing friendship, and the rest of the marriage rites are completed when the children are old enough to get married. At other times, families enter into this form of agreement with men who are old enough to be the child-bride's parent because they (her parents) may be too poor to ensure that she is fed and clothed as she grows up. By giving out their daughter in marriage once she is born, they enlist the help of a grown and sometimes, prosperous man in bringing up their daughter. The down side of this kind of contract between the baby's parents and a full grown man is that probably, by the time the baby grows into a marriageable adult, the man would have become so old that the age difference becomes alarming. There have been cases where the girls grew up and refused to oblige such marriage contracts, and they were forcefully taken while screaming to a husband who may sometimes be older than their father.

However, in the case of a marriage being contracted between a grown man and woman, usually it is not the man that finds his bride (but his mother as in some other parts of Igboland), or where not successful, he will inform his family to start searching for any candidate that would make a good wife. Sometimes the man does not have the privilege of deciding that he is ripe for marriage before his family and friends begin to search for a suitable wife.

The first stage after the *iche ego* (presentation of money to declare intention) is "*iju ajuju*" - genealogical enquiry. Marriage negotiations do not commence without both families, first, finding out each other's dispositions or tendencies towards any form of illness. It is generally acceptable for families who had found any negative traits to call off the negotiations. If, however, the findings are agreeable, a date is set for the man and his family to formally request the girl's hands in marriage, and they would present her family with kolanuts and drinks. The next stage is the visit to the oracle aimed at ascertaining if the ancestors and gods are happy with the contract both families are about to set up. If divination shows that all is well, the negotiations will continue with the appointment of *onye uku* [Umuoji, Obosi, Nkpor and environs] or *ama ona* [Imilike and some areas in Nsukka] - a negotiator/intermediary appointed and accepted by both sides. This person has certain qualifications which make him acceptable to both families. Usually, he is directly or indirectly related to both parties - as *nwadiana* [a person with maternal links to a particular village], a friend or relative. These qualities help ensure his neutrality during the protracted negotiation process ahead. These negotiators are responsible for liaising and agreeing all dates, ironing out all differences and informing the other party through their own negotiators of any changes in agreement. In Imilike, the *ama ona* is also responsible for bringing the girl and the already agreed bride price back to her parents after her first official visit to her future husband. If, however, after divination no form of sacrifice could placate the ancestors and the gods, all negotiations would also be called off.

This next visit to the bride's family is *iku aka* (which means to knock on the door), and it is a formal introduction of the future groom to the girl's parents, grand parents, aunts and uncles from both the paternal and maternal sides. The drama at this stage develops out of playfulness. During this visit, the suitor - although a grown man -

does not speak much, the eldest member of his entourage introduces the reason for their visit. They do not mention the girl by name, instead she is described as some delicious fruit that has become ripe and which they have come to pluck. The family, who would have had fore-knowledge about this visit would have invited some other young girls from their extended family, and at the mention of this ripe fruit, they would ask all the girls to come out and greet the visitors to enable them point out which of the girls they had come for. When the girls have gone away, the visitors will now say which one it is and for the first time, her father will call her by her name and ask that she should be brought back to greet his visitors again.

When she re-appears, she will be acting all shy although in most cases she would have known the suitor and given her consent for him to approach her parents. In Imilike, it is during this visit that the bride price "*afia nwanyi*", is negotiated. It is a lengthy negotiation process and it takes place inside the *obi* of the girl's father. The negotiation of the bride price is usually a non-verbal performance. This is because the Igbo believe that negotiating a bride price is different from buying a commodity. So although there is extensive haggling, it is non-verbal. Pieces of stick with different lengths are collected and both families would agree the exact value of each piece of stick, and each side would add to or subtract from their pile during this non-verbal haggling. This continues until both parties are equally happy with an agreed number of sticks. At this point, the negotiators would start to refer to themselves as *ogo* (in-law). The in-laws are entertained with food and drink, and before they leave, the bride's family will request for "*nne-ewu nwa okpara* (a she goat presented to the eldest brother of the girl in question by the suitor's family).

This will be brought during the next agreed visit and involves a lot of miming. This is because most families find it easier to pay money instead of bringing a goat on what may sometimes be a distant journey. The action of bringing a goat can be mimed, and money given in exchange. This miming brings a lot of laughter as someone from the suitor's side begins to imitate the bleating of a goat. All the negotiations at this stage are rigorous, but once concluded, the girl then performs the "*ipanata ego*" rite - meaning that she returns the palm wine container that was used to bring the wine for "*afia nwanyi*" ceremony back to her future husband's family.

On this first official visit to her future husband's place, people who come to visit her will pass open comments about their new wife's beauty and other physical attributes and this usually leads to an open banter and light-hearted side plays. This visit usually lasts two market weeks, and it is during this time that she scrutinises her new family and they in turn do the same. She is free on her return to her family to decide and give reasons why she does not want to marry into that family. The suitor's on the other hand study her behaviour, comportment, her ability to keep a home, etc. She is also invited to feasts during which she gets to know the family and vice versa. Her new family also reserves the right to call off any agreement so far made.

When she completes her stay, her prospective husband will invite the negotiator and hand him over both the girl and the bride-price that had been agreed earlier on the day of *izu afia*. This means that the girl goes home with the approximate amount agreed for her bride price, because in Imilike, like other parts of Igboland, marriage ceremonies are a continuous affair and most families will demonstrate this by not paying the full amount agreed as bride price. The girl is made ready for the return journey to her father's compound as she is decked out in presents "*ukoro, akwa and ncha* (trinket, cloth and soap). She is also presented with monies for her good

behaviour and hard work during the duration of her visit. All the money she is given during this ceremony belongs to her mother. This is a form of thanks to her for bringing up such an adorable and hard-working girl - her father does not share in this money.

On her return to her father's compound after two market weeks, a jubilant crowd awaits her, and the amount given for the bride price is also announced. It is an open ceremony to which everyone in the village is invited, and they bring presents for the "*idu uno*" (assisting the bride to set up home) ceremony. After the merriment, the bride's family will now consecrate kolanuts to mark the covenant between the two families. Merriment continues until about midnight when the girl is finally handed over to the "*ama ona*" for the last time to be taken to her husband's family. Sometimes, the girl will disappear and a search party will be organised to find her. She can disappear as many times as she wants if the people are not vigilant. This disappearing act is aided by her siblings and relations and what initially is playful turns into a serious and tearful affair as she is repeatedly hidden and found. This is a show of her reluctance to leave her birth family, and most times by the time she is found she has to be virtually dragged to be finally handed to the negotiator. At this point, the bride, her mother, her siblings and some other members of her family will be weeping in earnest. Her mother-in-law will be coaxing her to go, and she in turn will be clinging to her mother who would also be crying and half-heartedly asking her to go on. Amidst tears from loved ones, she is reluctantly led away by her husband's people. From the researcher's experience, this is a moment of reality that wipes away the excitement of the fanfare that had been happening all along, as it finally dawns on the bride that, that is really it. At this stage, the husband's family would jubilantly sing and dance about the trophy they had won in "call and response" songs one of which goes:

Call: *Ka anyi je zigara ha ozi, ka anyi je gwa ha na ugbo anyi anata*
(Let us go and send them a message, let us go and tell them that our ship laden with goods has returned)

Response: *Ka anyi je zigara ha ozi, ka anyi je gwa ha na ugbo anyi anata*
(Let us go and send them a message, let us go and tell them that our ship laden with goods has returned)

And if their new bride is still weeping, the singers would add variations such as:

Call: *Ka anyi je zigara ha ozi, ka anyi je gwa ha n'obe akwa anata*
(Let us go and send them a message, let us go and tell them that the cry-baby has returned)

Response: *Ka anyi je zigara ha ozi, ka anyi je gwa ha n'obe akwa anata*
(Let us go and send them a message, let us go and tell them that the cry-baby has returned)

While still dancing, the bridegroom's party would leave her father's compound, taking with them the wife and all the home-making goods donated by the participants.

The "*itu akwa*" rite is performed the first thing the following morning as she performs her early morning chore of sweeping the compound. The most agile young man in the family is chosen to ensure that he is not caught when the girl gives chase. If he is ever caught, the rite is nullified. On reaching her, the performer will hide and call out the girl's name and say the following words: "*if you should ever relate to any other man while you are still married to this particular person, may this rag exterminate you*". Having said that, he throws the rag to land at the girl's back and he runs off. The girl will begin to chase him and when she does not catch up will begin to cry and lament the loss of her birth family. After that, she is ready to settle into married life.

The next ceremony is called "*ogo malu ogo*". This is the first formal visit of the bride's family to her husband's compound. A later date is agreed during which the man's family will also make their first formalised post-marriage visit to the girl's family to meet all their in-laws.

Inu nwanyi in Onitsha

Marriage negotiations in Onitsha are more elaborate and highlight the playful and dramatic elements that happen during this ritual. They also contains good examples of plays within plays and how these can extend the duration of a single performance.

It is also unique because Onitsha is one place in the whole of Igboland where the amount paid as bride price is not negotiated and has been pegged irrespective of the economics at any time. Marriage negotiations go through the following stages:

Iju ajuju is the first step and it starts when the man is ready to marry. The man's father and uncle take a bottle of alcoholic beverage to the bride-to-be's father to announce that they have cited a "ripe fruit" growing in his compound and they would like to pluck it. An extended conversation takes place before the "fruit" is called by name. At this stage, other girls who are not the "fruit" will be brought out and each time the visitors will refuse saying that this is not the fruit they had seen. This will continue until the girl is brought out and after greeting her parents' visitors, she will disappear and will not be seen again. She will be acting shy of this "unknown" individual who is visiting her parents for "undisclosed" reasons. Her acceptance to greet the visitors is a sign to her parents that she may be in agreement at this point, her father will accept the drink the visitors will present.

When the visitors leave, the girl will formally be informed of the suitor's intention. If she formally agrees, then the second stage is set in motion by her father and uncles who would invite the man's family back for the "*inu nwanyi*" or *ikwa nkwu* which is the engagement ceremony. It is during this visit that the bride prices will be negotiated and paid. The man's family will bring:

forty naira (N40.00 the local currency)
seven bottles of alcoholic beverage
sixteen gallons of palm-wine.

The items are shared as follows: the girl's father takes fourteen naira, one bottle of alcoholic drink and four gallons or one jar of palm wine. Her mother receives ten naira and one bottle of alcoholic drink. The collective of uncles called the *umunna* get five naira, while the bride-to-be gets three naira - and her share is called *ife aru*. Once the girl accepts the money, she now belongs wholly to the man, from her toe nails to the last strand of hair on her head. All the wives in her family get eight naira shared out amongst them. They will in turn give presents to her when she is about to leave finally for her married home.

The highlight of this occasion is the *ina nkwu* during which the bride's father or senior uncle says the final prayers for the new couple. The couple are invited to kneel before her father and after the prayer, a cup of palm-wine is handed over to the girl to sip from and then to pass on to her husband. Kneeling on both knees, she will drink, and in the same position she will give her husband. The act of kneeling is a show of submission to her husband's will. In some places, the bride will be summoned alone for this prayer and after that she has to search for her husband who may be hidden by his peers in the crowd. While she is searching, some young men will be coaxing her to offer them the wine, but she will continue, and on finding him, she will kneel and offer him the cup of palm-wine. The spectators will respond with rapturous applause and singing. After this, the bride and groom will dance together for the first time in public, while those present will offer them money. All money collected belongs to the bride's mother.

Furthermore, all the people who have a share in the money are witnesses to the fact that the girl has agreed to marry into her husband's family. The next step is *ije n'ani* which is a visit to the shrine of the Earth Goddess who is also the goddess of procreation. The visit is a mark of respect and a plea to the Earth Goddess and their ancestors to bless the union with children. The new couple will take gifts of kolanut and palmwine to the shrine. After this, a date is set for her to finally depart to her new home, and this is called *ina be di*. On the day of her departure, family members and friends will visit the bride for the last time at her father's home bringing with them different kinds of home-making gifts. This is called *idu uno* (to help the bride build a home as the items given help the new couple to set up their own home), and the gifts received are publicly displayed for all to see. What gifts she is given depends on how affluent and how well-networked her parents are.

On the same day, she is accompanied by the young girls from her village who would carry all the gifts she had been given to her husband's home. Her companions would be singing to announce their presence and these songs are called bridal songs, and they are mostly call-and-response style. One song goes like this:

Call: *Gwakwa ndi nwe uno na anyi na abia*
 (tell the owners of the household that we are coming)

Response: *Gwakwa ndi nwe uno na anyi na abia*
 (tell the owners of the household that we are coming)

They will continue singing and on reaching the groom's compound, the groom's family will respond to their call singing:

Groom's family response: *Ndi ogo anyi nno nuo*
 (our in-laws we welcome you)

Call: *Oche*
 (seats please!)

Seats are offered and after they have all been seated, exchanged pleasantries and the kolanut is consecrated and shared, the groom's father will invite his nuclear and extended family to witness the girl's acceptance of his son. He does this by giving a lobe of kolanut to his son, who takes a bite and offers to the bride. If she accepts this, then either the groom's paternal grandfather or the oldest surviving male in his family will order the girl to kneel. She is offered a glass of palm-wine and if she accepts, takes a sip and offers it to her husband, it means that she accepts him as her husband. This process is repeated two more times and if the action is in the affirmative, the girl is now the bridegroom's family's wife.

She is now led into the family home for the first time on that day and her family will re-commence singing:

Call: *Gwakva ndi nwe uno na anyi ga ana*
(tell the owners of the household that we are about to leave)

Before leaving, they will start a song in praise of their beautiful daughter now married to the "ugliest" man around town. This is a playful yet serious way of telling the groom's family that their daughter is a priceless trophy, whom they are blessed and honoured to have.

Call: *Ada anyi i puta go?*
(our daughter have you emerged?)

Response: *Ewenje*
(Ewenje)

Call: *Kilibe ada anyi*
(behold our beautiful daughter)

Response: *Kilibe*
(behold)

Call: *Kilibe oyoyo*
(behold the most beautiful)

Response: *Kilibe*
(behold)

Call: *Kilibe ada anyi*
(behold our beautiful daughter)

Response: *Kilibe*
(behold)

Call: *Kilibe akpa njo di ya*
(behold her husband, the very ugly one)

Response: *Kilibe*
(behold)

They will continue singing this song as they depart from the man's compound.

Marriage in Igboland exemplifies intensive play and performance. From the time the negotiations start, the girl is not called by her name, until she accepts that she is willing to marry. With the constant comings and goings, the circle of participants increases. There are also a lot of similarities in Igbo marriage rites starting with the negotiator known in different places as either *onye uku* or *ama ona*. In some areas, both the bride's and the groom's families appoint one each, while in other places they may agree to have a common one. Whether there is one or are two negotiators, his/their role is to ensure that details are fully negotiated and that negotiations are not stalled by minor disagreements. For instance, if the groom's side wants to arrange a mutual date and time for any ceremony, they will send the *onye uku* from their side to contact the bride's side through their own negotiator. Usually, through regular consultation, they will arrive at a mutually agreeable date and time. After the marriage, these negotiators are fondly respected by the couple and their children and this is usually another network of relationships established.

There is also a lot of play, miming and flexibility in Igbo traditional marriages. For instance in Imilike, the gift of a she-goat to the first brother of the bride is mimed, after which the money is presented to enable the girl's family to either buy a goat, if it is needed, or use for other purposes that facilitate the marriage ceremony. In Umuoji, money is never mentioned throughout the bride price negotiations. Instead, at the beginning of the process, both sides would collect sticks of varying sizes and would agree what amount they each represent. For instance, the longest stick which may be about six inches may stand for a thousand naira, while the medium sized one may be five hundred naira etc. When this silent haggling starts, the bride's side would sometimes collect all the pieces available which added together may come out to thousands of naira. They would place these in front of the groom's representatives and they in turn would remove almost all of them leaving just a few. Through this speechless negotiation, they would eventually arrive at a mutually agreed price.

The characters involved in the negotiations shift from the nuclear to the more extended family as it progresses. For instance, when the man declares his intention, it is most times between him and the girl. By the time he visits the girl's family for the negotiation of the bride price, his father, uncles and close friends go with him. The circle of participants continues to grow on both sides until the final rite, when almost both villages are invited.

There are no ritual agents except in those towns (Imilike and Onitsha) where divination and veneration of the Earth Goddess happen and the bride and the groom would take kolanuts and palm-wine. *Itu akwa* - the throwing a ball of rags is unique to Imilike and it symbolises the worn and tired. It is a reminder to the girl that her period of honeymoon is over and that marriages are more often than not a tiresome affair. She knows this fact, but the rags are meant to bring the truth home to her.

What is apparent in marriages in Onitsha is the playfulness, especially towards the end. The aim is to create a light atmosphere so that the girl will not feel abandoned and alone in her new home. This final trip to her husband's home is the most difficult for most new brides and they would break down in tears when she is about to be taken to their husband's home, or when their people begin to depart. These light-hearted songs are designed to neutralise some of the tension for the new bride.

From the table below, there are some variations to the marriage rites in Igboland, but they all have the following stages in common:

- money is presented to declare intention in both childhood betrothal and grown up marriages
- inquiry into both the prospective bride's and groom's family (*iju ajuju*)
- bride price negotiations (*izu afia nwanyi/iru onu aku/ikpa onu aku*)
- payment of the bride price
- first formal visit of the bride to the prospective husband's house
- the marriage proper (*igba* or *ikwa nkwu*)
- taking the bride home (*ina be di/ndulu nwanyi*)

Table 4.6: Variation in Inu nwanyi

Town	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9	Step 10	Step 11
Imilike	Itanyelu mmanya n' eju/iche ego	Iju ajuju	Afa	Afia nwanyi	Ipanata ego	Idu uno	Ogo malu ogo	Ilu akwa	-	-	-
Onitsha	Iche ego	Iju ajuju	-	Iru onu aku	Ikwa nkwu	Ije n'ani	Ina be di	Ogo malu ogo	-	-	-
Nkpor and Umuoji	"	"	"	Ikpa onu aku nwanyi	Igba nkwu	Iwena ite	Ndulu nwanyi	Ogo malu ogo	-	-	-
Obosi	Iju ese	Ika aka	-	Imalu uno	Ibuna ego	Ushi	Nkwu umu nne	Nkwu umu mma	Echem oji	Ogo malu ogo	

Table 4.6 shows that *iche ego* (declaration of intention to marry) is the first stage, except in Obosi where *iju ese* (enquiry into the family history) takes place before the *iku aka* which is Obosi's declaration of intention. *Iju ajuju* in Imilike and Onitsha is the same as *iju ese* in Obosi. *Izu afia nwanyi/ikpa onu nwanyi* (bride price negotiations) is also common to all Igboland. However, *ipanata ego* or *ibunata ego* is a term used in Obosi and Imilike respectively to denote *igba nkwu* or the final marriage rite. *Ogo malu ogo* (formal introduction of all in-laws) is common to all. *Afa* and *ije n'ani* (divination) is common only to Imilike and Onitsha, but at different points in the process. *Ushi* (physical scrutiny of intended bride) and *Echem oji* (occasion during which gifts are given to all bride's aunts and uncles) are particular to Obosi.

STATUS ENHANCEMENT RITUALS

Ichi ozo

Ozo is the ultimate title for men in Igboland, and it operates at both the physical and spiritual level. On the physical level, it is a mark of affluence, while on the spiritual level it is a mark of an individual's commitment to prepare for the journey after death into the land of the ancestors. He does this by avoiding certain things, places and people that may defile his exalted state. A description of the *ozo* title in Umuawulu, Agulu and Onitsha will provide a fuller illustration of this very important socio-spiritual ritual.

Ozo in Umuawulu and Agulu

In Umuawulu there are various stages of the *ozo* ceremony and these are *ozo efifie*, *ozo alo*, and *ozo owulu*. *Ozo owulu* is the final stage, and after it there is no other title a man can take before death. It involves a period in confinement for seven market weeks. This period and the processes involved differ from one locality to another, and it is one of the highlights of the *ozo* title when the aspirant is confined to the *akwu ozo* or the *ozo nest*. His wife is the only human contact that he has while in the *ozo nest*, and it is also her responsibility to cover his body with *ncu*.

On the night preceding this period in confinement, the aspirant would visit the shrine of *Ana* (Earth) belonging to his kindred - each extended family has their own shrine dedicated to the Earth Goddess. This visit is made in the middle of the night, and the aspirant is accompanied by *nwa Nshi* (someone from Nri - the spiritual centre of the Igbo). If the aspirant is from Umuawulu, the initiator has to come from Oraeri which

is the particular spiritual centre for Umuawulu people. The significance of midnight is that it is a time when only spirits are about, and this part of his initiation marks his pact with the spirits. On getting to the shrine, the *nwa Nshi* will remind the aspirant of all the *nso* (taboos) to observe. As he goes through the list, the aspirant is allowed to negotiate with the spirits through the *nwa Nshi*, if his source of livelihood is included in the list of prohibited activities. So when an activity which the aspirant cannot observe is mentioned, he will invoke his negotiation rites by saying "*ogu mafu*" (may it not bind). If after due consideration that particular activity can be waived, the aspirant is free, but he is not allowed to negotiate the more critical rules. For example, an *ozo* is prohibited from climbing. However, if the individual earns his living as a palm wine-tapper which entails climbing the palm tree, he would say "*ogu mafu, for if I do not tap, I would not have a source of livelihood*". He will repeat this phrase whenever the initiator gives him an unworkable option. Each time the prospective aspirant asks for an exemption, the initiator would go into a series of incantations after which he would inform the aspirant if his request has been accepted. This is a unique covenant between the individual and Mother Earth, and it must take into consideration the individual's limitations. This is because the implications of breaking any term of the pact with Mother Earth can be quite disastrous. The breaking of a pact with Mother Earth is what the Igbo refer to as *imelu ana or alu* (defilement of Mother Earth). The aspirant cannot ask for a waiver from murder because it will be contrary to the aim of *ozo* which is the upholding of absolute truth and purity of life. In effect, each *ozo* title holder has a different and personalised contractual obligation with Mother Earth - that is apart from the general rules binding all the members of the group.

After this ceremony, the initiator will lead the aspirant to the village stream to have a bath, and from there, he will return to his home and enter the *ozo* nest. Staying in seclusion in the *ozo* nest is an incubation period during which he has time to contemplate the rest of his journey through life, and how to uphold his pact with Mother Earth who is a goddess well-known for her swift retributive justice, when offended. It is a soul-searching time during which he is fed and prepared for the lengthy *ozo* process ahead.

The process whereby his wife covers him with *nzu* is called *itekwa nzu* (re-rubbing the *nzu*). The use of *nzu* for body painting has two meanings. First, it keeps the body dry and cool throughout the period in the nest and this is very important considering that he is not allowed a bath throughout this nesting period. Secondly, it symbolises his yearning for spiritual purity (*nzu* symbolises the pure/cleansing attributes from the depth of the sea). While in the nest, he is fed with delicacies, and an *Ufie* musician is in attendance from dawn to dusk. *Ufie* is an elongated wooden musical instrument which produces a unique kind of sound that can only be interpreted by those who understand its language. The hollow sound which it makes can only be danced to by titled men. It is also used during the funeral rites of an *ozo* to re-tell his life and greatness. The *Ufie* will continually 'call out' the aspirant's new name (seven repetitions each time). This is the name that he will be known by after his installation, and by repeating it severally, the aspirant becomes accustomed to hearing his name on the *Ufie*. On completing his seclusion in the nest, he then has a bath and prepares for the celebrations ahead when his fellow *ozo* men will formally welcome him into their fold.

In Agulu (a neighbouring town to Umuawulu), the declaration of intention to take the *ozo* title starts when the prospective aspirant presents a token amount, a carton of

lager, a bottle of brandy, whisky or gin to the head of *ozo*. The leader of the *ozo* society will then inform "*ndi otu ozo*" (members of the *ozo* society) about the individual's intentions. There is a long process of screening, in which members of *ozo* society digest and discuss all information available on the individual. If it turns out that the individual has a questionable character (rogue, liar, adulterer or an alcoholic, etc.) his application is declined without reasons. The Igbo are very sceptical about alcoholics because they believe that under the influence of alcohol, the individual may unknowingly reveal secrets. Having said that, a lot of this has changed, and there are some people who would negotiate such obstacles with huge sums of money. Thus, some of the screening practices have become corrupt.

If the candidate is accepted after screening, a life goat, one jar of palmwine, eight tubers of yam, eight jars of "*ngwo*" (raffia palmwine) and 1 bottle of schnapps are presented to the group. The leader of the *ozo* now invites the initiand's family to partake in the feast which is also an acknowledgement of his acceptance, and the leader would present the individual at the village shrine.

The circle of participants during an *ozo* ceremony follows the same pattern as in Igbo traditional marriage ceremony, where the circle grows wider as the performance progresses. For example, the first stage during the *ozo* title in Agulu is *Olulu ani*. Here, the aspirant declares his intention to the nuclear family. This is followed by *Uke* which is the announcement of the intention to the *umunna* (extended family), who he entertains lavishly. Once performed, this rite establishes seniority of the aspirant over subsequent aspirants. The third stage is *ifejioku*, and this establishes the aspirant as a full fledged *ozo*, who now has the capability to develop his spirituality in readiness for life after death. At this point the initiand re-affirms his willingness to uphold the *ozo* precepts before the other members of the *ozo* society. The initiand

swears to tell the truth, especially in cases of land disputes, to protect any plant, animal or person that is in the process of reproduction, never to get involved in sexual promiscuity, adultery or the defilement of virgins. If, however, the *ozo* craves a particular woman, he is allowed to marry as many women as he wishes, provided he can cater for their material and spiritual needs. He is not allowed to eat any food prepared by a woman who is menstruating and he can only eat outside his house if he is far away from home. The members present signify the ever-widening circle of witnesses. At this stage the individual is a full-fledged *nze* and can now wear the special red cap which only the *nze* and *ozo* are entitled to.

Otutu ofo is the fourth stage in the *ozo* initiation, and marks the endowment of the *ofo* (staff of office) on the new *nze*. This bestows some powers to perform certain rites on the *nze*. At this level, the *ozo* privileges become hereditary, and at death his eldest son may inherit his father's title. He does this by performing some transfer rites for his father's colleagues.

Ozo or *ibu n'isi* is the final presentation of the new *ozo* to the *ozo* society. The new *ozo* presents two tubers of yam and a live hen to his peers. The commandments of the *ozo* society are read to him again, and he recites them to the hearing of all present. He swears to uphold the rules and failing which he readily accepts retribution from Mother Earth. In traditional Igbo society "*ika mma n'ile* or *isa ile*" (carving the tongue with a razor blade or washing of the tongue, respectively) was not only a show of bravery because the tongue was physically incised and some herbs rubbed into the incision, the herbs perform the task of pulling out the tongue of any *ozo* that told a lie. According to Udenkwo-Ngo Okeke of Ogidi (1995), the effect can be quite swift and dramatic. However, these incisions are no longer performed in present day Igboland, instead the action is mimed while the rules are recited. In an

interview with J.C. Obi of Agulu (November 1995) he stated that the commandments of the *ozo* society are quite stringent and that people may be denied membership to the *ozo* society if members of their family feel that these individuals may be unable to uphold the rules which are read out thus:

Thou shall not profane the earth, thou shall not commit murder or be party to any discussion in which a decision to harm anyone is taken, thou must not incite hatred, always, thou shalt say the truth in all matters, especially in land disputes, even if in telling the truth you exposed people whom you love.

The end of this stage is marked by a twenty-one gun salute, and the *ozo* now performs the *igba ufi* (dancing to the *ufi* music). Having attained this level of membership, the *ozo* now has a sacred status and he must consider all his thoughts, words and action to ensure that he does not violate his pact with Mother Earth. For example, if he is invited to a public function, the host must first of all perform a ritual honouring the oath taken by the *ozo*, and to placate the gods for the food he is about to offer the *ozo*. He would take the *ozo* into a private place and perform the "*Ina nni*", to enable him to eat outside his home. This involves either giving him a raw tuber of yam, or in some cases money is placed in a bowl of water into which he washes his hands, before removing the money. In the event of death, all these routines are revoked in a reverse order, with a cow and some money presented to the living members of the *ozo* society. This is the final separation rite from the living.

Ichi ozo in Onitsha

Onitsha is the only town in Igboland where the *ozo* title has not been affected by Christianity. In many parts of Igboland, the influence of Christianity had led to the abandoning of those aspects of this ritual that they regard as "fetish". The implication is that most binding parts of the ritual, like the contract with Mother

Earth have been removed, and as a result some *ozo* members sometimes do those things unexpected of men with this title. Such things include subverting the course of justice in land cases, meddling with virgins and married women etc. In Onitsha, this title is mandatory for all men, but it is optional in the other towns. The implication of sustaining those so called fetish aspects is that by the time an Onitsha man takes the title, he has effectively departed from Christianity.

The duration of *ozo* taking in Onitsha varies, depending on how affluent the individual is. The ceremony is in two parts - the private and the public. The private phase begins with the declaration of intention by the aspirant to his nuclear family. This is called *igba oko nri* (itching the tympanic membrane), during which he presents his immediate family with kolanuts and palm-wine. After this, the announcement of the intention is in turn made to the extended family in a ceremony called *igwa umunna* (informing the extended family). Both his nuclear and extended families know him best and would decide if he has the moral astuteness to take the title. If they are in agreement, the next step is *inyedo muo* during which an image of his personal god is carved and consecrated. This is born out of the Igbo belief that every individual has a personal *chi*, who is a mediator between the individual and *Chukwu-Okike* (God the Creator). The aspirant's *chi* also acts as the person's guardian spirit. During the *inyedo muo* ritual, members of the *ozo* society from his extended family will gather to perform specific incantations and sacrifices aimed at activating a more dynamic relationship between the aspirant and his *chi*. After this, the aspirant is now in possession of his own *okputukpu* or *chi* or *ikenga* - a symbol of his spirit of endeavour and symbol of his manhood.

Ibu ego ozo is the payment of the enrolment fee which is shared in a pre-determined ratio among the existing members of the *ozo* society, the uninitiated men called the *agbala n'iru egwu* and the *umuada* (daughters of the family). The ratio is such that the titled men get the higher share. The aim of giving the untitled men a token, is a way of spurring them into taking the *ozo* title which will qualify them to have equal share as other titled men. As in marriage ritual, anyone who shares of this money becomes a witness to the fact that the aspirant went through this particular vetting stage.

The next step is *mmacha ozo*, and the ceremony starts at night and lasts until day break. The night time part of the ceremony is called *ina obibi* during which the initiand is taken into the forest to agree his personal contract with Mother Earth and to perform those rites that ensure the protection of his ancestors. This is necessary because the Igbo believe that there are diabolical people and spirits who do not wish to see human progress and as such, would do all in their power to harm the aspirant. This is followed by the presentation of the aspirant at the shrine of *ani* (Mother Earth), at which stage he makes a pact with Mother Earth and pledges to keep the *ozo* code of practice. Three goats are slaughtered in the presence of *ndi ichie* - the custodians of shrines and forests. The meat is cooked immediately, but not eaten until day break after the aspirant has performed the *ima nzu* (decoration with white chalk). After this, he is presented with *osisi* (staff of office) in a ceremony called *ikpo ifejioku iru*. (one-to-one meeting with the god responsible for the yam yields) during which the staff is consecrated. Another goat is slaughtered and the blood collected is used to polish and preserve the staff (blood is a wood preservative). In the event of the death of an *ozo*, all the living *ozo* will re-present their staff to be polished with the blood used for the final separation rite. Every *ozo* has two different

types of staff. The one which he is given at this stage of his title taking is bare and is referred to as *osisi afulu* (bare-bodied staff of office) and when he eventually dies, this particular one will be cut up and placed inside the coffin with the corpse. The motion of cutting the bare staff of office symbolises the severance of all links that the deceased shared with all the other members. The other staff is referred to as *osisi gba ona* (the staff of office with copper band) and can be inherited by the aspirant's son when his father passes on and he too becomes an *ozo*. The presentation of the *osisi afulu* to the aspirant marks the end of the private ceremonies. Once the private stage of the initiation is completed successfully, the individual is painted with *nzu*. This process is called *ima nzu* (slapping on the white chalk, and it symbolises that the individual is in a sacred and pure state). The *ozo* is now led through a responsorial ceremony where he renounces lies, plotting to harm others, adultery, incest, etc. This rite is performed in the middle of the night, and in the morning the person takes a new name - his *ozo* title name, symbolising re-birth or new life. The three goats cooked the previous night are now served. This is the first meal that the initiand eats with the other members of the society, and it signifies acceptance by the rest of the group.

Later on in the afternoon, the ceremony continues and the initiand, who up until now has been in isolation, is presented to the public. This is his re-integration into the community, and as he dances, people will offer him money in recognition of his achievement.

Having been successfully accepted into this privileged rank, the next stage is *isekpulu ani* (veneration of Earth Goddess). This symbolises the return of the initiand to thank the Earth Goddess for her protection throughout the numerous contacts he had with both men and spirits. If for any reason an individual decides not to do this, he is not

recognized as an *ozo*. This is followed by *afia ozo* which takes place the next day still at the shrine of *ani*. While the individual is dancing, people will also offer him money. An important landmark at this stage is *iti obi* (the embrace) performed by the first wife. This is a strict means of social control, especially in polygamous families, where sometimes, the first wife is not as favoured as subsequent wives. The embrace is a unique form of recognition for the initiand's first wife, and is aimed at putting both the man and his more favoured wife in their place. This is because no other woman is allowed to embrace the new initiand as he dances in full view of everyone except his first wife. If, however, the first wife is separated and the *ngo* or bride-price has not been paid back by the woman's family, he goes without an embrace as none of his other wives is permitted to perform this role for him. In Igboland, a divorce is not complete unless the bride-price has been returned to him. After the dancing, he shares whatever money he has been given while dancing with the other members of the *ozo* society. This sharing is called *igha ukwa* (circulation of wealth). The initiation ends with *izonye ukwu n'orimili* (stepping into the river, which is a visit to the River Niger [*orimili* Onitsha]). This visit to the River Niger serves two purposes. First, the new *ozo* steps into the embankment of the river and venerates the river goddess whom the people of Onitsha regard as their mother and protector. Second, he offers gifts in thanksgiving to the goddess for protecting him throughout the duration of the ceremony and not letting him fall prey to evil forces.

A performance analysis of the *ozo* ritual

Ichi ozo, like other rituals that belong to the status enhancement sub-cluster, is full Igbo theatre in action making use of a high level of symbolic action to achieve its goal. Throughout this ritual, there are many visits made to the forest in the middle of the night. This symbolises a recognition of the dual nature of the aspirant/initiand

as possessing both the physical and the spiritual dimension, and these visits are made to negotiate and harmonise both components. So from the moment the individual decides to take this title and announces his intention to his family, these negotiations become relentless. In Umuawulu, he is secluded from the rest of the public for twenty eight days, while in Onitsha, it is overnight. In both cases, the aspirant has his first contact with the goddess Earth as he takes the oath to keep the *ozo* precepts. His body being painted with *nzu* signifies a yearning for higher spiritual ideals and purity of thoughts, words and action. *Ichi ozo* is a drama in which there are other micro-dramatic happening. An example is the personalised negotiations between the aspirant and the *nwa .Nshi* on one side, and the aspirant and the goddess *ani* on the other. Where the initiator cannot uphold a precept, he indicates his inability by saying *ogu mafu*, and gives reasons why that particular precept should not bind. The *nwa .Nshi* then starts a series of incantations persuading Mother Earth for a waiver - thus marking the start of another play within the negotiating play. The negotiation is already a play within the entire *ozo* process. So the *ozo* process is a series of plays within one main performance. This exemplifies the dramatic flexibility for side performances, and care involved in negotiating the intricate structure of an *ozo* covenant. In performance terms, each covenant drawn up to suit specific aspirant involves a different language (incantation), set of action, props, characters (depending on which waiver is being negotiated and with which god) etc. From a theatrical perspective, there are three known characters at the shrine of the Mother Earth - the goddess, the initiator and the aspirant. However, at every stage where a waiver is sought, numerous other unseen deities are involved whom the initiator relates to through the Earth Goddess. So the possibility for characterisation is endless, and the dramatic representation of their presence and effect poses a challenge should anyone wish to recreate this interaction on stage.

Ichi ozo is also rich in symbols. The first is *nzu*, which is a representation of the deities of the rivers and seas. Its cooling characteristic is also representative of its source. The second is the symbol of the forest at midnight. The forest is the home of spirits and the action of entering it at midnight is a sign of bravery, determination to take up challenges and the beginning of another level of interaction with the spirit world. It is interesting to note that this is the second time in a man's life that he enters the forest at this time of the night, the first being at *ima muo*. Third, the slaughtering of three goats in the forest, and the use of the blood which is used as a preservative for the initiand's *chi* and *osisi* symbolises blood as the life force. With each new aspirant, every eligible staff is painted over again. This action perpetuates the bond between the holder and other members, thereby protecting through a collective will. Even when the holder dies, the *chi* that represented his personal god would remain, and its physical attributes will continue to tell, in silent terms, of the attributes of its former owner. The goats slaughtered at the shrine in the forest at midnight in the presence of the custodians of the forest, demonstrates man's awareness that through sacrifices he comes into contact with the spirits ordering his seen and unseen universe. Subsequently, the meal is a communion between the existing *ozo*, the new initiand and the gods. No wonder it is shared only after the initiand becomes a full-fledged member. Interestingly, the dramatic implication of the unseen actor(s) is once more highlighted, and with it, the implications should one decide to stage such an inter-action.

In Onitsha, the re-incorporation of the *ozo* into the community brings about a mini carnival atmosphere and clearly demonstrates the artistry involved in the carving of the different headgear and the colourful and intricate costumes. The gifts and money which he shares with the other members symbolise the communal nature of the wider society which the *ozo* is a part of, but also demonstrate the beginning of a shared

intensity not yet seen in other rituals. The powerful but silent role is demonstrated in Umuawulu where the man in the *ozo* nest is offered the moral and emotional support he needs to enable him to complete his soul search. In Umuawulu and Onitsha, the role of the wives demonstrates the importance of sustaining and reinstating his human attributes during and after an extended contact with the spirits. Symbolism and numerology in Igbo life is also demonstrated in the number of market weeks that the aspirant spends in the *ozo* nest - seven market weeks. This is exactly the length of time it takes an egg to incubate before the chick emerges. This symbolises the transformation that happens to the aspirant while in the nest, where he is protected against distractions and general mishap, and consequently, he emerges a new being and takes on a new name and an exalted role. In Onitsha, the post-initiation visit to the River Niger represents the initiand's final cleansing, and a visit to the domain of the unseen forces inhabiting the river. This demonstrates an attribute common to the Igbo - acknowledgement of duality, appreciation and gratitude to the unseen forces with whom they share aspects of their universe.

The *ozo* title marks the attainment of higher spiritual ideals and the peak in self-fulfilment. It sets aside resourceful men of very high integrity who are the custodians of the culture of their people. It demonstrates the investment of time and resource by the Igbo (the present) in ensuring a gradual integration with their ancestors (the past) in preparation for the journey ahead (the future).

In performance terms, this is a total performance in which there is a unification of all the elements of drama and theatre - seen and unseen characters at play, speech, dance and music, make up, props and multiple staging along with a high level of symbolism, representation etc.

Mortuary-Ascension Rituals

In traditional Igbo communities, the type of funeral accorded an individual depended on first, the cause of death and second, the individual's contributions to the community. Chapter 3 discussed one of the various types of death - *onwu chi* - which is death due to natural causes. Others which are abnormal include death by accidents and suicide, death by violation of taboo and/or committing an abomination and violent deaths. In abnormal deaths, the emphasis is on the performance of cleansing rituals to protect the living and also to ensure that natural rhythms are not upset. Such funerals are not elaborate as all attempts are geared towards achieving the burial of the corpse. Should the deities not be appeased, the corpse is disposed of in the evil forest. However, the funeral of an established person who died a natural death is an extended affair that could last up to two years. Funeral rites for women differ from those given to men, because women are returned to their birth families for burial. Two type of burial rites are: the immediate and the second burial rites.

The immediate burial rites: The usual rite for an immediate funeral involves first informing all the relevant family members of the person's death, and *iwu ozu aru* or the final cleansing in preparation for burial. If the established person is a woman, she is buried immediately her birth family members arrive and agree that the corpse should be sent to them. In some cases where the woman had not been looked after while alive, her family may reject the corpse and protracted negotiations will follow during which her family is compensated for any ill treatment she may have suffered. After that, she is buried. However, where a man dies, the third phase of his immediate burial rite is *iwa anya/iwanye ebunu n'anya* (eye incision/dropping the blood of the ram into the eye, respectively). This is a separation rite which empowers the dead to 'see' and ward off obstacles on his way to the ancestral land.

The Igbo believe that the way to the ancestral land is hazardous, because there are disgruntled and evil spirits that would attempt to deter the dead from ascending into the ancestral ranks. This ritual is performed by slaughtering an appropriate animal (ram, chick, he-goat, dog, etc depending on locality), and dropping the blood into the eyes of the deceased, who through transference, gains the attributes of the animal.

In Agulu, this rite is performed early in the morning by a *nwa Nshi* (somebody from Nri), using an *mkpi* (he-goat) aged between six and twelve months, and presented by the deceased's eldest son. After a lengthy incantation, the *nwa Nshi* immobilises the he-goat and makes an incision on its jaw. The blood is collected in an *ogirisi* leaf (see Chapter 3 for ritual agents) and dropped into the eyes of the dead person. This is a rite of guidance, encouragement, revitalisation to ensure he reaches his destination. Immediately after this performance, the *nwa Nshi* would place an *omu* (young palm-leaf) between his lips, and leave with the incised he-goat. The *omu* is believed to protect him against evil spirits that may be in pursuit and signifies to those who meet him on his way home that he must not be spoken to. He does not look back until he is safely home. The significance of not looking back is not to witness any spirits that may be in pursuit. At this point the corpse is buried, but it must be noted that there are variations to this from one locality to another.

Iwa anya in most cases is a performance with little or no verbalisation and it involves and is witnessed by only the deceased's peers and sons behind closed doors. Once the final goodbye have been said by the deceased's wife/wives and children, the ceremony begins with the dead in a sitting position inside a special form of coffin called *akpati nsukwu* [Nnewi and environs], while the rest of the witnesses stand around his corpse. His eldest son or a peer that the dead may have appointed while alive (in Agulu, the *nwa Nshi* performs) takes a machete and with one clean blow,

severs the head of the ram. While the blood is collected, the machete is now handed to the dead man. This will be his weapon of protection as he travels to the land of the ancestors. Meanwhile, his eyes are pried open and a few drops of blood are dropped into his eyes, and with very few incantations, he is mandated to fight all obstacles on the way, and to return and avenge his death, if it was brought about by any living person. The corpse is then tidied and buried in a sitting position. The corpse can be buried either in the deceased's sleeping room, immediately outside his *obi* or in communal burial places. Where a corpse is buried depends on what the deceased requested while still alive. Meanwhile, the ram is cleaned and cooked but the feast will not be shared by his peers until midnight.

In Mkpologu, the immediate burial rites include first, divination to establish the type and causes of death, and to find out the type of cleansing sacrifices (if any) that need to be performed. Second is the bathing of the corpse followed by the *iwa anya*. After the *iwa anya*, the animal used in the process is handed over to the *umuada* (daughters of the family) to prepare *ihe uchu* or the final breakfast. The feasting is called *ikpa uchu* during which his family members and associates (age grade or members of different societies) share the meal with the dead. Thereafter, his female relatives will pay homage to him by performing *ikpu akwa* (to cover with cloth) ceremony by donating a six-yard piece of cloth. His closest male associates will also donate special pieces of black home-woven cloth called *okpe*. This *okpe* is a mark of royalty and will be put into his coffin for him to use when he gets to the ancestral land. If the person died a death that should be avenged (which would have been revealed through divination) an appropriate weapon would be placed in his right hand by his son with an injunction to avenge his death.

After these home-based rituals, the coffin is decorated with some of the cloth donated and carried by two men with pads on their head. These pads would have been made by folding some of the donated cloth and the men bearing the coffin would move in a synchronised and dignified manner to the village square where the corpse accompanied by a masquerade which is greeted with gun shots. The grade of the masquerade in attendance depends on the status of the deceased and it represents the spirit of the ancestors. The gun powder is symbolic of the fiery attribute of the sun god and sound of the shots serves to propel the deceased's spirit into a higher realm and to warn the ancestors of his arrival. On getting to the village square where people would be gathered by now, a donation of money starts, and the monies collected would be shared later using a seniority ratio by the *umunna* (male members of the extended family). From there, the body is moved to the *ukpogwu* or communal burial site. However, sometimes very affluent and powerful men are buried in the *ime oma* (inner room) of their *nkoro* (house). Before the corpse is finally laid to rest, the son will perform the *iti o'ku ekwentshu* (Nkpologu dialect for *ekwensu* or the devil). As the name of this rite suggests, it is a sacrifice of a cock to the devil to ensure that no further temptation from all diabolical forces is encountered by the deceased on his way to the ancestral land. It is performed only for married men who at death were still living with their wife/wives, and it involves a prayer and praise oration extolling the deceased's virtues. After that, holding up a cock on his right hand and stretching out his left hand before him, his son would snap off the cock's head by hitting its neck forcefully against the outstretched hand. Once this action is successfully completed, the people around will perform the *ichi oga* (shouts of joy). This is the final *oga*, the first having been for the deceased at birth. When the coffin is placed in the earth, the next ceremony is called *ichi eja n'inyi* (collecting a handful of earth and throwing into the grave). This is performed by only very close relations to wish him well, or his rivals who may wish to prove to the public that they were

fair and even-handed with him in spite of their differences.

In the evening of the same day of the burial, the *itu uzu akwa* (the weeping ceremony) is performed, announced by gun shots which are followed by the wailing of all the women gathered, especially the *umuada*. After that the *umuada* will move into the man's *obi* for a seven-day period of grieving. Within the duration of this mourning period, the children will announce the date for the second burial of their father. With this ends the immediate burial ceremony in Nkpologu.

The second burial ceremony

In Umuoji, the second burial ceremony is performed usually about one year or more from the time of the death. It is performed for those well-advanced in age and the accomplished whose funerals need elaborate planning because of their extensive network, or for those people whose families need some more time to acquire the material resources needed for a fitting burial. In Umuoji, the initial burial is not as elaborate as that in Mkpologu. However, from the time the corpse is buried, the planning of *ikwa ozu* (funeral) commences, with all the relevant members of the family, relations and friends notified of this forthcoming occasion - in the appropriate manner with kolanuts and palm-wine. This formal announcement also serves to enlist the material, emotional and spiritual support of all concerned.

In pre-Christian Umuoji society, the agreed funeral day is a flurry of activities with the deceased's sleeping bamboo bed brought out into the reception area of his *iba* (hut) and decorated with all the traditional cloth or wrappers belonging to his wife or wives. Most times, by the end of the funeral, there would be many different types of cloth donated by his friends and in-laws when they arrive to pay their last homage

during *ikpu ozu akwa*. The quality and quantity of cloth donated depends on how networked and affluent the man was in his life time. This will eventually be shared by the eldest daughters by the various wives. When the bed has been decorated, the funeral proper begins with *iti mkpu ozu* (the funeral alert) or *itikpo ozu* (unveiling the corpse) which is performed by the oldest man around. This, unlike the shout of joy that announces the birth of a child, is not re-echoed from one household to another. Once the *mkpu ozu* is performed, the widows, children and relations begin to weep as if the deceased had just died. Meanwhile, the *mkpo n'ani* (which are short hollow barrels filled with gun powder and buried beneath the surface of the earth where they are ignited from a distance in a synchronised manner) announces the beginning of the funeral. It is supposed to awaken the deceased to make his final approach to the ancestors, as well as announce to the world the passing of someone.

Throughout the night, the man's compound is a beehive of activities with the cooking that will be used for entertainment the next day, and if the man is an *ozo*, the *ufie* (which 'called' out to him while he was in the *ozo* nest) will continue to summon and to tell of his achievement. At dawn, the widows will begin to cry again and this declares the funeral open for that day. While the visitors are awaited, the *ozo* members would arrive first thing in the morning to dance to the *ufie* music as it salutes their departed colleague. In most places, this is the time that the guild, cult and society members arrive to pay their peculiar homage to their member. For instance, if the deceased was a great hunter, the members of the *egbenuoba* guild would arrive to re-create his exploits as a great hunter in mime performed to the accompaniment of their own specialist hunters' guild music. If he was an *ozo*, music will be provided from the *ufie* and *abia ike* will be danced. The *abia* is an energetic music produced on the *abia* drum, which like the *ufie* 'talks' of the exploits of a *dike* (hero). Only a select few can dance and interpret the music of the *ufie* and/or *abia*.

The entertainment area is usually in front of the man's house and the women will remain in their *mkpuke* with other mourners. The funeral arrangements would have decided on which day the masquerades would appear and these are usually the fiercest, ugliest and the most destructive and they must be stopped with gifts in a ceremony called *igbo ota*. If this does not happen these masquerades will demonstrate their anger at the death of such a person by destroying the structures set up for sheltering the visitors. Most times, these masquerades are offered live animals (hen, cock, rams or goats) depending on how affluent the family is, and if the gift to the masquerade is a fowl, it is tied, hanging head downward on either its waist or head. If it is a bigger animal like a goat or a ram, it is carried on the shoulder of one of the masquerade's attendants.

At midnight on the last day of the funeral, the man's first son and first daughter would take his favourite food prepared by his eldest daughter, to a road junction nearest to their family home to perform the *itu nni* ritual. There the food is left for him to come and eat after they have bid him farewell, and this would be his last earthly meal. It is a separation rite which ensures that he does not embark on the journey hungry because the Igbo believe that a hungry man or spirit is an angry man or spirit. The food is also supposed to provide him with the physical energy that he needs to finish the journey successfully. Usually, by morning the food would have been eaten, leaving just the plate in which it was brought.

By the eighth day, the wife's hair is shaved clean by the most senior member of the *umuada*. If the widows had not cared for the man while he was alive, the *umuada* will refuse to shave her hair. This symbolises their refusal of the woman, and a series of negotiations would start headed by the rejected widow's family, to seek ways of redressing the grievances. The widows are not allowed out until after seven

market weeks, and they are said to be in mourning and for the next one year, they must dress in pure black cloth called *akwa mkpi/mkpe* (mourning cloth) and are not allowed to re-marry until their period of mourning is over. Life in the family is generally very low-key throughout this period of mourning.

After one year in mourning, the *umuada* would arrive to thank the wives for their decorum and respect with which they treated their dead brother, and they would ask them to remove their mourning cloth and to have a cleansing bath. All the mourning clothes are collected by the head of the *umuada* and burnt. This is the first time in Igbo rituals that we have seen the use of fire to mark a new beginning. This is a low-keyed family ritual. However, on the first market day following the end of mourning, the wives would attend the market in a ceremony called *ipu afia* (coming out into the market), which is their re-incorporation into the society after their period of mourning. Usually a lot of people in the market would notice that a woman has removed the black mourning cloth, and she is usually showered with greeting, money and gifts.

However, in Nkpologu the second burial ceremony is not as elaborate as the first. On this occasion, every adult male and female member of the *umunna* (extended family) is expected to kill a live animal depending on what they can afford. These animals are slaughtered on the eve of the second burial in the man's compound as this ritual is called *anyasi igbu anu* (the night when animals are slaughtered). The next day is for entertaining the friends invited from other towns and villages. Later on the same day, the male leader of each family unit that slaughtered animals will parade the village square carrying the head of the slaughtered animals. This carnival is led by an entertaining masquerade (*Ikorodo*) or the *atiliogwu* dancers. This is a collective and final send off to the departed.

The performance elements in the Igbo first and second funeral rites are quite elaborate. From the time of death, the performance moves from the man's house to the village square (only in Nkpologu) before he is buried in the communal burial space. In Umuoji, where the man is buried without any fanfare, the second burial starts and is mostly contained within his and other neighbouring compounds. One year later, during the outing ceremony, the venue is the village market square.

The performers involved are both human and spirits - where the spirits are represented by the masquerades. On the human level, the core organisers are the family, in-laws and members of any societies he may belong to, and their costumes comprise a strip of three yards wrapper tied over their normal clothes across their waists and knotted behind. There is also the *ijele* which is worn by women around their ankles and it comprises tiny and hollow spherical metal balls which are clumped to produce a jangling sound.

On the spirit level, the masquerades that appear are either those brought along by the man's peers, various in-laws and children. Their costumes and images depend mainly on the kind of spirit depicted. They range from the very beautifully carved to the grotesque, the benign to the violent, the dancing to the fighting etc. The more violent ones have mean and grotesque-looking dark faces, thick over-protruding and garishly painted red lips, out-sized yellowish teeth hanging menacingly over the lower lip, bulging eyes and menacingly twisted horns on their heads. The fiercest ones have bells attached to their waists to announce their whereabouts so that unsuspecting people are offered a chance for escape. Usually, they are summoned and directed by an *okwa oja* (a traditional flutist). Most times they do not enter the funeral venue through the regular route, but will scale very high walls and land amidst people unannounced, displaying fierce acrobatic feats, wielding axes which they do not

Performance overview of burial rites

The circle of performers, scenery, props (including ritual agents), costumes and length of play in burial/ascendency rituals depends on locality, and on whether it is the first or second burial. Burials are either performed immediately or deferred depending on how resourceful the family is to accord the deceased the total burial rites. However, once a person dies, the most important thing is how to contain the crisis at hand. If the family decides on immediate burial, the performers involved at this stage would be the deceased's peers and grown up children. In all areas of Igboland, the final cleansing of the corpse in preparation for the burial is performed with his sons and peers present. In Agulu, the *nwa nshi* is invited to perform the final separation rite using the he-goat, while in Umuoji, the machete with which the head of the ram is severed is also the prop that goes into the coffin with the corpse. However, in Nkpologu, the first burial is more elaborate and the performance starts from the man's house and moves on to the village square involving a wider range of performers. Once the corpse is buried, parallel staging becomes more apparent as different relatives entertain both the masquerades and human beings that have come to pay condolence. The intensity of the action depends on how well networked each parallel performer is, and his/her ability to cater for his/her visitors. There is no time limit and once darkness falls, the human activity and involvement is overtaken by the night masquerade.

Second burials demonstrate a higher propensity for planning. Usually, there is a time-table for all performing human and masquerade groups. Sometimes, the more intransigent masquerades would exceed their performance time and will refuse to clear the main arena for other waiting groups. This action is meant to irk the next group of performing masquerades and a fight may ensue. When this happens, a

pandemonium is 'caused by the disturbance of the natural balance as these masquerades use their diabolical powers in an attempt to subdue each other. This performance within a performance usually takes some time to quell before the main funeral resumes. Parallel staging also happens with various groups entertaining and being entertained in neighbouring compounds.

Costumes are as varied as the entertainers, but they distinguish the chief mourners from the visitors. This is because of the length of wrapper the family members tie around their mid-section and the *ijele* around their ankles. The vogue in most cases is that families will purchase bales of cloth which are then distributed to every member of both the nuclear and extended family and very close friends. This distinguishes those wearing the cloth as what the Igbo have come to describe these days as "chief mourners" and/or "circle of friends".

The music is also differentiated depending on whether the deceased is male or female. In the case of a man, the *ufie/ikoro* musicians play incessantly, re-telling the prowess of the deceased. This is a specialised form of music which only his titled peers dance to. In the case of women, masquerades never perform although in Idemili Local Government Area, the masquerade's music and musicians collectively called *igba mmanwu* (the masquerade's drummers) can attend and perform. Other dance groups are mainly women's groups.

Once the funeral rites have been completed, the action once again returns to the deceased's nuclear family. The shaving of the hair which signifies the loss of beauty is only carried out on the wives/husband and children. The person responsible for shaving the hair is the *isi ada* who is the oldest of all the daughters in the extended family. She either uses a pair of scissors or a razor blade to take off a turf of hair

at hair line right on top of the forehead. How low she goes demonstrates how she wants the hair cut - usually the person who would cut the hair after this would try as much as possible to keep to this guideline.

After the shaving of the hair, the *umuada* remain for the next seven market weeks, keeping vigil in the room where the deceased had been laid in state. Their departure leaves the spouses and children of the deceased to get on with the task of mourning for the next one year.

Structurally, there are many rituals within each other and these are brought about by the single act of dying. At different stages, there is an active interplay of characters, ritual agents, music and song within a flexible staging arrangement. Igbo rituals demonstrate that there can exist a performance style that is all-involving, which constitutes a theatre not restricted by space and time, one which takes into account the make-up of humans as both matter and spirit in natural characterisation, speech, staging, costuming, art and music etc.

CONCLUSION

The Igbo propensity to perform life is clearly demonstrated in their rituals. It is also clear that these rituals do not happen by accident; Igbo people have found it meaningful to have them in the forms and positions at which they occur.

This work is an attempt to understand how the Igbo accomplish their ritual performances and what forms they take. To do this, our approach has been a direct analysis of the functions and structure of Igbo rituals which are rich and varied. The textural richness of these rituals can be attributed to the fact that the Igbo live in a complex and contiguous world of the past, present and future in which they always strive to maintain a harmonious balance through rituals. So they have evolved their rituals to celebrate their relationship with the seen and unseen forces they co-exist with, and also to mark their biological and occupational progression in time and space. Furthermore, the Igbo believe that life is a gift from God; hence they use their rituals to thank God for the unique gift of life, to enlist the support of the visible and invisible forces for a fruitful life, to consecrate and venerate their deities and ancestors, and to celebrate their own biological and occupational changes.

Progress into this complex world of Igbo rituals was difficult at the beginning and so it became necessary in the course of this work to group them into three categories, namely, communal, peer and personal rituals. Communal rituals are the rituals of rhythm which the Igbo use as a calendar to mark one season from another and to venerate and celebrate their deities and ancestors. Peer rituals, as the name suggests, are those rituals used by people who belong to either the same age grade and other social groups to mark or celebrate their shared commonalities. Personal rituals mark individual, biological and occupational progression.

Once this area of study was sufficiently defined it becomes imperative to fully explain the function, structure and process of these rituals and this requires a taxonomy for clarification to aid the readers' comprehension. In the course of the study it also becomes necessary to limit the scope of the work so that a thorough analysis can be achieved, hence the decision to study rituals in the personal category. There is a rich field of untouched Igbo ritual performance that is yet to be mined, such as the peer, communal and numerous other Igbo rituals that do not fit into our three categories. This taxonomical approach has two major limitations (a) the rituals that belong, especially, to the communal group are completely left out and (b) the work's inability to contribute to a nearly thirty year-old debate (see Chapter 2) among some Igbo scholars (Echeruo, Amankulor, Enekwe, Obiechina and Nzewi to mention a few) in response to particularly Horton and Finnegan concerning their euro-centric views about "certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena to be found" in African traditional festivals; and again between these Igbo scholars and Echeruo for suggesting that Igbo theatre needs to free itself from its submergence in Igbo rituals. These scholarly debates are not directly relevant to this work, although it must be pointed out that they help to inform the researcher's opinion about Igbo rituals as performance. And this is where the work of such scholars as Schechner, Turner and Werbner become relevant as they provide the study with the appropriate concept and terminology for a discourse of performance theory and practice.

Having pointed out the disadvantages in studying only personal rituals, it must also be said that defining the limits of the work creates room for an exhaustive study using the classificatory methods and terminologies that immediately offer more insight into Igbo rituals. Under this model of classification, rituals in the personal category are divided into clusters and sub-clusters and consequently, their hidden characteristics start to yield themselves to further investigation and understanding.

Furthermore, all personal rituals can be classified into the passive, controlled active and active category, depending on the level of the main performer's involvement in any on-going ritual. It also becomes apparent that all rituals of childhood are mandatory and passive until the child reaches about twelve years of age and then, they change into controlled active - referring to the performer's increased participation in the ritual. However, after puberty young men and women initiate their own rituals in agreement with their families. This adulthood rituals belong to the active ritual cluster. Here is in control of what rituals, where and when they are performed. At death the cycle returns in full to passive and mandatory rituals. This form of clustering is a reflection of the Igbo belief in the cyclic nature of their existence.

Furthermore, the introduction of the "triangle of life" facilitates the placement of the rituals on a triangular continuum which also reflects continuity in Igbo existence. The equilateral nature of this triangle helps demonstrate that although different rituals form the different sides of the triangle, all sides are equal and therefore, all rituals are equally important. The effect is that rituals can be placed along the three axes depending on why Igbo rituals exist, and where they feature in the lives of the individuals that are involved in them. This placement also demonstrate that rituals exist because they fulfil the Earth, Religious and/or Cultural (Chapter 3) needs of the people.

As a result of these clustering and categorisation, ritual agents are shown to be as varied and as symbolic as the rituals in which they are used. Thus, ritual agents can be classified into the animate and the inanimate while the latter can be further be further broken down into the organic and the inorganic categories. For example, divination rituals make use of mostly inanimate inorganic ritual agents while burial

and ascendency rites use mostly animate agents. However, these agents are used because they are either psychic inducers or conductors, and because they enhance communication between the human and the spirit worlds.

The completion of this work makes possible the comparative and performance analyses of rituals from different parts of Igboland. A couple of things become clear (a) that rituals may sometimes have different names (depending on the region or locality), and (b) that the structure of any two given rituals from different areas of Igboland will be the same, but the process invariably differs.

The implications of this study are that it may encourage many others who, until now, may have been ambivalent about the worth of works such as this to come forward with their own contributions. It is hoped that this study (or the ideas it present) will rouse an interest in further researches relating to particular regions/localities. Most important is the possibility that performance artists and playwrights may find the modes of classification employed in this work useful in their translations of the symbols, icons and indices that they may come across their own work.

This work is useful because it enables graphic representations to be made at various points to help illustrate some complex ideas that may otherwise prove too elusive. It also enables us to draw up a list of some of the parameters common to most Igbo rituals, and they are as follows:

First, the diviners are most times instrumental to the nature of the rituals that ensue and the role and intensity of performers depend on whether the rituals are passive, controlled active or passive.

Second, the audience/spectators are participative and would often get actively involved in the on-going action and their level of involvement depend on their disposition and on the ability of the main performer to get them involved in his/her

experience. Their involvement has the effect of prolonging the entire performance and giving a flavour mostly derive from the spontaneity of play within plays. The study has raises the question about whether Igbo performance will be the same, or even be in existence without its participative audience/observer.

Third, the performance space or arena can be as diverse as the rituals - moving from the home to the village squares, shrines, forests, streams, etc. Hence, Igbo performance is a proof that space was made for performance, and not performance for space. Igbo performance is flexible and as such they can be experienced anywhere with maximum results - even if it is in the middle of the night.

Fourth, text in Igbo performance is learnt over the years as the individuals go through the various rites of passage. It is an active text and how effectively it is understood depends on the physical and mental disposition of the performer at the time, level of exposition and experience, participative audience-spectator response, time of day, space, occasion being celebrated etc. Ritual scripts are varied and are in the form of incantations, songs, libations, proverbs, chants and invocations etc.

The following are areas of further work stemming from the completion of this study:

More investigation needs to be carried out into the nature of peer and community rituals as well as the marriage ritual between deities and humans, as in the cases of Ukehe and Ala Uno communities.

There is also a need for further investigation into Igbo healing rituals, and exactly where they fit on the "triangle of life" - if at all they do. If not, can another model be used for the study of other yet unclassified Igbo rituals?

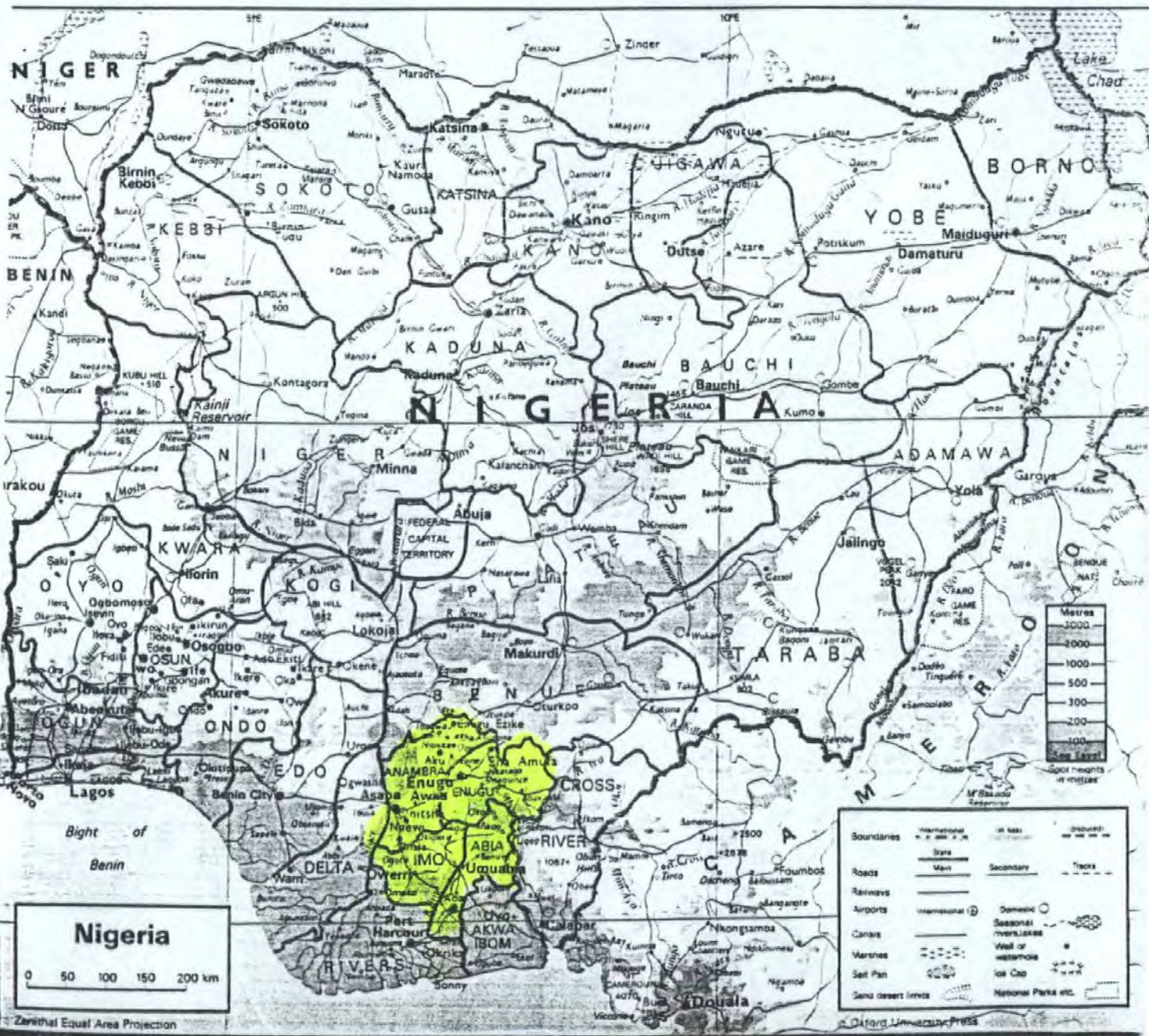
Further research work can be carried out into cult, craft and guild rituals, for example, initiation into the *egbenuoba* (hunters' guild) and *dibia* (traditional medicine cult), and the possibility of adopting another classificatory method

Finally, it is hoped that this work on Igbo rituals inspires an understanding and thus fulfils the yearning for rituals that may lie latent in every human being, especially, all those who may chance across this work.

APPENDIX A: MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING IGBOLAND

MAP OF NIGERIA

30 States and the
Federal Capital Territory.

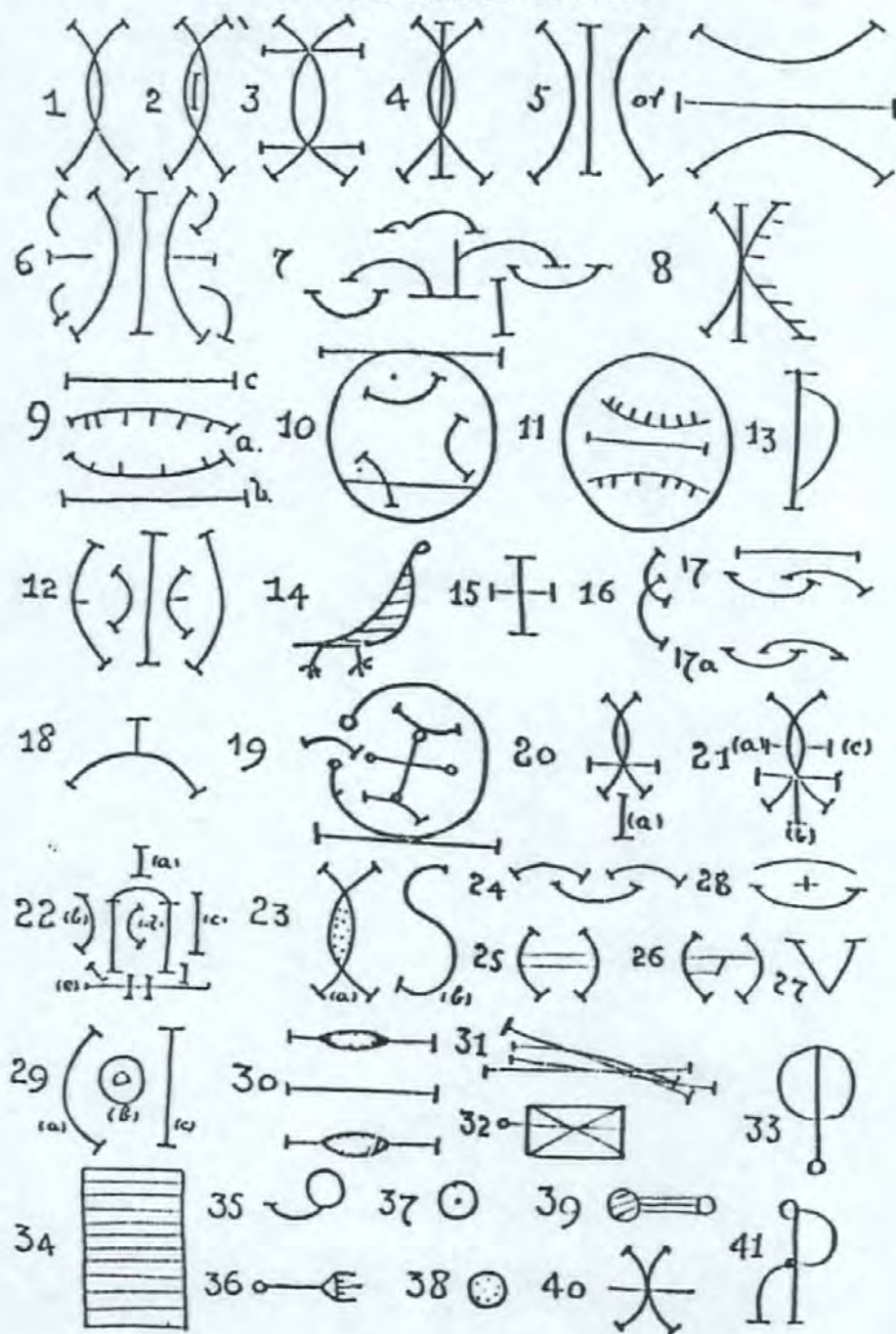


APPENDIX B: MYTH OF ORIGIN

(Translated by M. Angulu Onwuejuegw))

Chukwu, the creator,
Sent *Eri* down.
Eri came down from the sky.
He sailed down the river *Anambra*,
And established at *Aguleri*.
Mystical powers, he had,
Which won the people over to him.
They had no king and
There was no food.
Chukwu fed them on firmament.
Chukwu said: "Sacrifice "your first son"
Eri sacrificed his first son,
And *Chukwu* gave *Eri* yam.
Chukwu said: "Sacrifice your first daughter"
Eri sacrificed his first daughter,
And *Chukwu* gave *Eri* cocoyam
Eri became king;
Great king he was.
He bore *Agulu*, *Nri*, *Igbariam*, *Nando* and *Iguedo* by a woman,
And bore *Onoja* by another woman called *Oboli*.
Iguedo was a woman:
A famous daughter she was.
Onoja migrated to *Igala* country...
Agulu stayed at *Aguleri*...
Nri migrated to the forest south.
Through *Amanuke* he sojourned,
To found *Enugu-Ukwu* and settled at *Agukwu*.
He took the *Nri* title and became *Nri Ifikuanim*.
He established the *Ozo* title,
And *Chukwu* was delighted.
He sent four *Alusi* to *Eze Nri*.
They came four strangers with fish baskets.
They refused to disclose their names.
In the night *Eze Nri* discovered their names thus:
He sent rats into *Eke's* basket,
The rat went into *Eke's* basket.
Oye called out *Eke! Eke!*
Rats are in your basket.
The *Eze Nri* heard it...
He discovered their secret names: *Eke, Oye, Afo, Nkwo*.
Eke is *Nne*
Oye is *Diokpala*
Afo is *Osuzu Okpala*
Nkwo is *Odudu Nwa*
In the morning, *Eze* called them
Eke! Oye! Afo! Nkwo!
Eze's wisdom was extolled.
The four *Alusi* established the four market days
And the new occupation of trading and sojourning.
The supernatural said to *Eze Nri*:
Go and establish the markets,
Call them *Eke, Oye, Afo, Nkwo*.
Nri began to sojourn, establishing markets, *Ozo* and *Nso ana*.
This they did all over *Igbo* land
The four market days are from *Chukwu*

APPENDIX C: SAMPLES AND INTERPRETATION OF NSIBIDI



- 1, 2 Married love (2, with pillow)
- 3 Married love with pillows for head and feet – a sign of wealth
- 4 Married love with pillow
- 5 Quarrel between husband and wife, indicated by the pillow being between them
- 6 Violent quarrel between husband and wife
- 7 One who causes a disturbance between husband and wife
- 8 A woman with six children and her husband; a pillow is between them
- 9 Two wives with their children (a), of one man (b), with the roof-tree of the house in which they live (c)
- 10 A house (a) in which are three women and a man. The dots have no meaning
- 11 Two women with many children in the house with their husband
- 12 Two women on each side of a house. One on each side has a child
- 13 A woman with child (general sign)
- 14 The same; if a man writes this sign on the ground, it means that his own wife is with child
- 15 Palaver, the general term, by no means confined to marriage palavers
- 16 A woman who does not want her husband any more
- 17 A woman who wishes to put away her husband
- 17a Embracing? (unconfirmed interpretation)
- 18 A harlot
- 19 Two women who live in the same house have palaver every time they meet. A third woman is entering by the door
- 20 A man (a) who comes to a woman who has a husband and asks her to live with him
- 21 (a), (b), and (c) are three men who sought the same married woman, and quarrelled because of her
- 22 (a) is a man who committed adultery with a woman (b), who now lives apart from her husband (c). The guilty man has to pay compensation to the woman's family and her husband. (d) is the money paid. (e) are the parties to whom the money was paid
- 23 A man and a woman were 'friends'. The man wished to leave her, but she would not agree. One day he wrote this sign all over her house, and took his departure. (a) means that he curses her, saying that she has 'craw-craw'. (b) means that he has gone to another town
- 24 Love without agreement
- 25 Heart with true love
- 26 Heart without true love
- 27 Inconstant heart
- 28 Two persons agree in love
- 29 (a) is a woman who goes to bathe in the river at a ford (b), while her husband (c) watches to see that no one shoots her
- 30 Juju hung over a door or on the road to a house to keep danger – especially evil spirits – from the house. Sacrifices of fowls and goats are offered to it
- 31 Firewood
- 32, 33 Looking glasses (Also used for a man with a looking glass)
- 34 A native mat, used as a bed
- 35 A gourd for a drinking cup
- 36 Native comb
- 37 Toilet soap
- 38 Basin and water
- 39 Calabash with 400 *chittims* inside it. A *chittim* is a copper wire worth one-twentieth of a rod. Such calabashes have hinges of three strings
- 40 Slaves
- 41

**APPENDIX D: EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW WITH ARAZU
(RE-INCARNATION)**

APPENDIX D

(Excerpts from interview with Rev. Dr. Raymond Arazu (FRA) in November 1995. Interviewed by M-B Chinyelum Okafor (MB). This is a verbatim transcription of an audio interview, and the only inclusions are indicated with [] mark, added by the researcher to make some sections of the interview clearer.

FRA: ...the old man/woman will usually say "*uwam ga ano, agam abu onye di otua* (when I come to the world again, I will be that kind of person). He or she is very conscious of rebirth and is doing what is called *obibi uwa* - in other words declaring what he or she would want to be when he/she comes again. Because in these kind of assertions/affirmations about "when I come I will be..." he is trying to influence his nature by these assertions. We also hear that the old woman that commits crimes will have to suffer for those crimes when she comes again "*Nwa agadi nwanyi mesia alu, onokwa uwa o kpuchaa yaI*" (when an old woman commits an abomination, when she re-incarnates, she will undo it). So that embedded in the tradition itself is this idea that people are born, people come back to the world again. Usually you come back in your own ancestral home. The ancestors are always coming back, but those who earn the title of ancestor when they come back, they are still over here.

This is the only mystery we have in the Igbo type of re-incarnation. That the person who has re-incarnated, can reincarnate in more than one person and at the same time. When you are breaking the kolanut, or when you are drinking the wine - doing the libation, you are still referring to him as "*Nna ha taa oji*" (my fathers eat the kolanut). Even though you may be calling your son your father, believing that your father has reincarnated in your son, you are still praying to your [dead] father when you are pouring out the wine or when you are breaking the kolanut. So that we want to be faithful to the tradition itself - the tradition is not as simple as some people want us to believe. Not just a question of a person coming and being incarnated in the son, No! We believe that the person can incarnate in the son of this daughter, in the son of that son, in the son of that daughter. The same person can reincarnate more than once at the same time. The same person is still

over there in the spiritland, even after reincarnation.

It is only in the ogbanje issue - Dr (Mrs) Achebe has written a fantastic book on ogbanje - where she went through all the nuances, all the ceremonies, all the fortune-telling that go into the ogbanje issue. It is a fantastic book she has written.

The ogbanje is a group soul. They are souls that come in groups, they are born, they die young, they go back and they are born again. These are the only group that come completely. The same individual is reborn and stays, does not get to adulthood, goes back and comes back again - play this prank, breaking the hearts of the parents as a kind of enjoyment for their group. That is why they are regarded as evil and that is why you have to get *ogbanje dibia* to see whether you can stop them from playing this kind of pranks that is very disturbing for the family. These are the only group ... you find this... the Yorubas call it *Abiku*. You have this phenomenon all through West Africa - this ogbanje issue. Now these are the two types - if you call it reincarnation then that's what we have. But I don't think it does correspond to...

In fact if you read my article in the magazine of the Claratian Fathers - I'll look for it - where I spoke about reincarnation although they muddled up my... because I gave an oral interview and they taped it and they muddled it up. It was there that I wanted to point out ... you see they are trying to catch me out, to catch you out - you believe in reincarnation since you are Roman Catholic Priest, but I was trying to point out to them that the word re-incarnation when correctly interpreted, is a misnomer. Carnis. Carnis is a Latin for flesh, re is again and by implication it means taking the flesh again. That is re-incarnation. The problem is: you endorse Aristotelian philosophy which defines man as body, soul, entity - matter and form. The body is a matter, the soul is a form and strangely, the whole western system, western thoughts has endorsed this idea of body and soul.

Now, Oriental philosophy laughs at this because it is too simplistic, it's too elementary, it's childish. In Oriental thinking, they have made use of the sages who under clairvoyance have been able to discover that man has four different bodies - each within the other. You have

the physical body
the subtle body
the causal body
super-causal body before you come to the spirit-soul.

So when you talk about reincarnation, which body are you talking about? So that is the problem. Which body? Because when you slug off the physical body, you still have three bodies. Somebody who has shoved off the physical body has still three bodies. That is why atimes you can see somebody who has died.

I know a case that happened last year. One of my neighbours, he went to Lagos, his brother died when while he was in Lagos. He took the brother to a mortuary in Lagos - on Friday evening. He stayed Saturday in Lagos, came back on Sunday. [On his return] The son, 18 year old son, [who did not know about his uncle's death] told him "Daddy, your brother came here yesterday". Yesterday was Saturday - the day after he was taken to the mortuary. He said: "which brother?", called the name, it was the same brother who died on Friday, whose body he took to the mortuary that Friday. The son continued: "He came here at Abakpa [meaning the area where they reside] on Saturday, he said "he asked me where you are and I told him you went to Lagos, and he asked me to tell you that he is gone to Owerri". Now he [the man] was confused. But unfortunately for him again, around midnight, the phone rang and it was his nephew in America. He [the man whose brother died] had sent fax message to the nephew in America that his uncle had died in Lagos. And the nephew rang and said "what nonsense are you people talking there in Nigeria. But I got a message that my uncle is dead, behold my uncle arrived here today, Sunday. And he is sleeping in the room there now".

OK, at that stage I stopped him - this happened, I can call the witnesses. In this case, the son - independent witness saw the man - the son saw him here. The nephew in America saw him in America - within a space of twelve hours. The problem is that after the phone call when he goes to the room, he won't find him. (Laughs)

I have had some... I have investigated some cases like this and it is very common. Why I used this is that this one I know about. Because the man took the son to me and sat him down and said "tell Father what happened", and when we finished, he was completely confused.

I told him not to worry that the problem is that we got the wrong kind of training as we were told just body and soul, That was all. There are other bodies. When you lose the physical body, you still have three other bodies. So you can still move around with them.

MB: On this earth plane?

FRA: Sure! You can move around with all your bodies, it takes sometime. In fact, because there are some desires the person has, that is why he continues visiting - because of their relations and so on, because of attachment. That is why we are usually warned about attachments.

But these are ... I am glad parapsychology is now moving into these areas even at the University level - the area of clairvoyance, the area of being able to get information from the dead - but the Orientals, they knew these things for so long.

Now when you talk about re-incarnation, now which body are you talking about that the person is taking on because the Orientals have again told us which science is now realising that you have a brand new body every seven years. They have known that for over five thousand years ago. We are only recognising it now - the cells in the body are multiplying and

they are being replaced by new cells, so that over a period of seven years, most of the cells in the body are brand new. Now that means, re-incarnation is already taking place in one life time. Every seven years you have reincarnated, you have a new body. This is not the body with which you came out of your mother's womb. And in the next seven years, you won't have this body.

MB: Regeneration and reincarnation...

FRA: You don't generate a new body except through regeneration. To generate is by birth. You don't regenerate yourself. It is in-built in the system - that the system shrugs the old when the new is always coming, so that the body with which I came into this earth is no longer there.

So I was asking them when they talk about reincarnation, the final resurrection isn't that reincarnation? To say there is not reincarnation why should we take on the body again at your final resurrection - that is reincarnation. And moreover, the reincarnation, if you live up to 70 years, you have used 7 brand new bodies or 10 brand new bodies - every seven years you change. Now when you are going to rise again, which of them are you going to rise in? If you lived to 70, you have 10 brand new bodies you've made use of and which one are you going you use when you rise up?

What is actually happening is that the theological questions were put there where the philosophical thinking was crude. Now that you have refined the philosophical thinking a bit, you may have to get rid of some of those theological questions. They are no longer valid - like reincarnation, I don't know what it means any more. What people have in their minds is their physical body, I don't know which physical body you are talking about, I've had so many of them. So that what you are saying doesn't make sense to me

MB: Father, let me say it in Igbo, 'probably you will shed more light. What does this mean: *na mmadu nolu mmadu uwa*? (that someone has re-incarnated [that is speaking re-incarnation the Igbo way])?

FRA: *Na mmadu nolu mmadu uwa* (pause), your father may say to you that "*agam anolu gi uwa*"[I will come back to you] and then one of your children is born and may have his characteristics. If you disbelieve, and go to *afa* usually to perform the *igba agu* ceremony. Every child born must have this done. When *afa* starts *igba agu*, he will ask questions until he declare the person who the child is. This is done before the naming of the child. Sometimes after *igba agu*, problems may develop due to misunderstanding. To avoid this situation, three different *afa* would perform *igba agu* simultaneously. If they all agree who it is that is revisiting, then it becomes final. So that to say *na mmadu nolu mmadu uwa* in the Igbo system, the person is still over there.

But in the Hindu system, the person can always take on a new body, in fact, it is the law of karma that dictates reincarnation. You failed a class, you come and repeat it - you did not arrive at God realisation, so you have to continue coming, and if you live like an animal you will come back as an animal. Because all the animal kingdom are on their way to becoming man, anyway. Because there is only one *ATMAN* - the spirit-soul, it is in the plant, in the tree, in fish, in man and so on. It's a question of the kind of awareness it develops, it becomes this or that, but it is one.

MB: Father let me take you back to the *ogbanje*, so instead of looking at them as evil spirits, they should be pitied.

FRA: They are shame selfishness, absolute selfishness. That is what they are. They are enjoying themselves at the expense of other people, and that is sin.

MB: But do they understand what they are doing, because that soul does not understand it is in static motion.

FRA: They are very near the animal kingdom.

MB: Can a living person reincarnate (for want of a better English word)

FRA: We have some cases, very old people. I know one of my landlords who had a son: the ring on the man's father's head is on the child's. Immediately he was born, the child's grandfather sent a message that no one should bring this child to him. So the grandfather never saw the baby.

MB: Why?

FRA: I don't know

MB: He didn't want to see himself

FRA: No!

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Okafor, Oyegbo James, 29 November 1995

Okafor, Anna, 29 November 1995

Okafor, Pius, 29 November 1995

Udeagbala, Okibie Peter, 30 November 1995

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Akukwe, Michael

Arah, Emmnuel Chukwunwike

Ejiofor, Munachimso

Nwankwo, Comfort

Obi, Jonathan Chukwuemeka

Okpara, Maudline

Panel interview moderated by Enyikwunazu Agbasi, interviewed by M-B Okafor on 24 November 1995

Arazu, Raymond

Agbasi, Goddy

Umeh, 'Nwadibia' John

GLOSSARY OF SOME IGBO WORDS

<i>Ajali]</i>	
<i>Alor]</i>	
<i>Ala Uno]</i>	
<i>Enugu]</i>	
<i>Eziowe]</i>	
<i>Nkpor]</i>	
<i>Nkpologu]</i>	All Igbo towns
<i>Ukehe]</i>	
<i>Umuawulu]</i>	
<i>Umuoji]</i>	
<i>Afor</i>	third Igbo market day
<i>Ahajioku/Ifeojioku</i>	The god of farming
<i>Ala/Ani:</i>	The Earth Goddess
<i>Amadioha:</i>	Igbo God of Thunder, one of the attributes of Chukwu
<i>Anyawu:</i>	Sun/sun god
<i>Ayaka/Abare:</i>	choral night masquerade and social controller
<i>chi:</i>	personal god responsible for an individual's fate and character
<i>Chukwu-Okike:</i>	God, the Creator
<i>Eke:</i>	the first out of four Igbo market days
<i>Ezechitoke:</i>	name used in Nsukka and environs for Chukwu
<i>Igba:</i>	skin drum
<i>Ichaka:</i>	musical instruments - a gourd covered with netted
beads	
<i>Mmanwu:</i>	masquerades
<i>Muo:</i>	name for spirit also used for masquerade
<i>Nkwo:</i>	the last of the four Igbo market days
<i>Nzu:</i>	white chalk also has the yellow variety called <i>edo</i>
<i>Odu:</i>	elephant tusk worn by titled women
<i>Ogene</i>	metal gong
<i>Ogo:</i>	in-law
<i>Oji:</i>	kolanut
<i>Omu:</i>	virgin palm frond
<i>Oye:</i>	second of the four Igbo market days
<i>Uli:</i>	henna