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Beyond the Scrapyard

An Ethnography of Igbo Migrants in Germany

Thaddeus Ejiofor Eze

Fach: Ethnologie (Völkerkunde)

Looking behind the high walls:

Igbo migrants in Germany and the dynamics of social integration

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To my late parents, Francis and Agnes Eze,
who’re a proof of the audacity of hope.
And to the family they left behind,
who uphold their bold legacies,
united in a bond of love.

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FOREWORD

When Igbo men from Nigeria gathered in a scrap yard in an industrial estate in the Ruhr city of Essen to dissemble cars, refrigerators, and other technical waste, surrounded by the sounds of unfamiliar music and the wafts of exotic foods, they met with incomprehension and mistrust from their neighbouring German citizens and the municipal authorities. The present study offers the very insights into these immigrants' socio-cultural identity that enable one to overcome such ill-informed responses. Its author, Dr. Thaddeus Ejiofor Eze, shares this Igbo cultural provenance. He has meticulously studied the ideas and values that constitute their identity in the southeast Nigerian homeland and inform their interactions abroad. This has resulted in an 'ethnography of transnational transactions' – of managing the trade between the scrap yard and the markets in Lagos and Onitsha and interacting with their German co-citizens in various social and religious contexts.

Dr. Eze has examined the adaptive strategies enabling a participation in German social, economic and religious life. Drawing on Igbo cultural resources makes such strategies feasible in the first place. For the principles of ritualised kinship, affinity, ancestry and locality and the values of solidarity, cooperation and education not only structure Igbo society in the Nigerian homelands, but also steer their encounter with and participation in the German civil society. Conversely, that civil society in its various operative domains opens the door to intercultural interactions and exchanges that afford the Igbo their participation in that society without relinquishing their own cultural identity.

Dr. Eze aptly concludes that, instead of subscribing to the axiom that 'integration' require 'assimilation', German social conditions and Igbo social identity complement each other, leading to "a new valorisation of diversity and difference". In this respect the present study is of much wider relevance than that of a single case study only. For it is from such external cultural resources that any society may draw its benefits – as Germany, and other European societies, have done for centuries. Dr. Eze's study delivers a scientifically founded and eloquent plea for an assessment of the presence of 'strangers' in one's midst in these very terms.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there have been massive migratory movements, especially from the Global South to the Global North: a phenomenon that continues to elicit mixed reactions from various quarters ranging from a strong exasperation over the subhuman conditions of migrants *en route* the Mediterranean Sea (Gebrewold and Bloom (eds.) 2016), through a palpable panic and fear over an apparent African invasion of Fortress Europe (de Haas 2008), to a mix of laudation and critique of the landmark German *Willkommenskultur* in the event of the latest refugee crisis of 2015-2016 (Hann 2015). With a correspondingly extensive scholarly interest in this phenomenon across disciplines, there are volumes of research literature relating to migration that have been produced in recent years. In the field of social anthropology, in particular, the focus of research has been mainly on themes such as the trajectories of migrant journeys, the economic impact of migration on the recipient and sending societies as well as the economically marginal status of immigrants in the host society. Evidently, there have been scarce intellectual outputs on the process of social integration of African immigrants in Germany. Although there have been extensive studies of earlier migrant communities in Germany – for example, the Turkish community (Mandel 2008, Yükleyen 2012, Yurdakul 2009, Mehdi 2012); the Italian community (Janz and Sala 2011, Schmid 2014, Vaccaro-Notte 2014), etc. – sparse publications on African immigrants are readily obtainable; amongst which include Simon (2010), Schader (2017) and Parris' (2014) studies of the practices of African Pentecostal churches as well as Idemudia & Boehnke's (2010) interrogation of issues related to the mental health of African immigrants in Germany. Up until now, hardly any publication specifically dealing on the processes of social integration of African immigrants is available. Perhaps, this paucity of literature is consequent of the earlier disposition of German politics which considered immigrants as mere temporal members of German society; hence the term *Gastarbeiter* – 'guest workers' – an evidence of the valorisation of migrants solely on economic terms that had delayed proactive policies of social integration of immigrants to the mainstream society until recently.

Fortunately, in recent years, there have been progressive changes in the German immigration policy, the latest amendment being that which took effect on March 1,

2020 and was accompanied by further relaxation as regards the requirements for prospective immigrants who possessed professional or vocational qualifications. This paradigm shift ushers in a new era with corresponding new challenges – especially the concerns of developing a workable and sustainable strategy for the social integration of immigrants. As such, it offers a chance to consider alternative ways to valorise foreigners in our midst. In lieu of this, there emerges the need for a constructive critique of earlier policies that were overwhelmingly based on the valorisation of migrants only in economic terms. Subsequently, one discovers the contributions which migrants make in the social and cultural life of the host society which help to highlight that migrants are not merely "economically equivalent to the German labourers" (Platenkamp 2014: 6) but are rather socially and culturally equivalent to the indigenous population. To this end, a careful study of the provenance cultures of the different migrant populations in the German society is of immense importance, hence the need for the present study of the Igbo migrant community in Germany.

It has already been mentioned that of all migrant populations in Germany, Africans are the least studied. This is understandable considering the fact that the history of their contact with the German nation-state as a critical mass relative to the overall migrant population is a relatively recent one. It was only in the late 1990s that Africans began to constitute a sizeable population of German cities. Against this background, this dissertation seeks to fill this lacuna by engaging in an anthropological investigation of the integration processes of African immigrants in the German society. Using standard anthropological methods of field research and by appropriating a group of Igbo migrants in the city of Essen in Germany as its case study, this study describes the dynamics of social integration as "cultures influencing each other" (Tibère 2016). It further argues that although the importance of economic integration cannot be overemphasised, the subjective experiences of migrants with recourse to their sense of belonging to the host society are achieved not within purely economic domains but rather in the context of the informal domain of quotidian interpersonal interactions and social relationships. In this domain occurs the dialogic encounters on equal terms that make mutual disclosure and, consequently, cultural exchange between the interlocutors possible and inevitable. This dissertation therefore is arranged in two parts that progressively develop the central theme that the more the interlocutors have a fair knowledge of their respective cultural

backgrounds, the more effective their dialogue will be: a fact which reiterates Paul Ricoeur's assertion that, "No one speaks from nowhere" (cited in Odozor 2014: 166). To this end, the first part of the study describes the traditional Igbo society, its social structure and general worldview while the second part provides an analysis of the present-day social context of Igbo immigrants in Essen based on materials gathered from a long-term ethnographic study. The subjects of this ethnography – a group of Igbo immigrants in Germany – are thus situated in the cultural background in which they were originally socialised before undertaking their transnational journeys to Europe. It is upon this foundation that the subsequent analysis of their social context as immigrants in the German society would be based.

1.1 Research Methodology

A multi-sited ethnography which consists of "multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies" (Marcus 1995: 95, Coleman and von Hellermann (eds.) 2011), especially in a transnational context such as that of our research, requires a research method that comprises standard ethnographic methods of participant observation as well as the study of traditional features of the Igbo culture in Nigeria as to be compared to the current context of Igbo migrants in Germany. Thus, the first part of this method utilization presents the results of a literature research of Igbo history and culture which complement those of oral interviews and participant observation of major traditional feasts, market practices and rituals in Igbo land, Southeast Nigeria. In the second part, the selection of the research field where the standard long-term ethnography was carried out among a specific population of Igbo immigrants in a scrap yard in Essen-Dellwig, a tiny enclave located in the outskirts of the Ruhr metropole of Essen in Germany, will be justified. Mostly because this research was conducted by participating with and observing the subjects in their workshops and by piloting structured and unstructured interviews, both within and outside the scrapyard, the multi-sited ethnography will embody a comparative analysis of both the Nigerian and the German scrap markets which made it possible to track the movement of goods between the two countries as well as monitor the social implications of the exchanges between traders from both sides of the divide. For the Nigerian market, the research was limited to the Alaba International Market in Lagos and to the Mgbuka Market in Onitsha, Anambra State. Incidentally, about

three informants had offices in all three markets – Dellwig, Lagos and Onitsha – and their contacts greatly facilitated the study.

Furthermore, the choice of the field site was informed by a number of factors amongst which includes the dominant type of business conducted in this site which provided a good material for ethnographic research since it entailed a transformation of German "waste materials" into economically viable commodities for export. Additionally, another factor that informed this choice was as regards the fact that these business ventures which took off some two decades ago have, in the course of some time, remained dominated by Igbo merchants who now constitute over ninety percent of regular workers, and whose daily tasks revolve around the transformation of used vehicles, electronic wastes and disposed household appliances into export wares for the African market. With recourse to these outlined factors, the overall aim of this ethnography is to elucidate the fundamental social processes and their implications for those involved in these seemingly purely economic transactions. Core research questions in this respect which would be explored include: What makes a particular line of business so attractive for Igbo immigrants and what are the processes involved for recruitment? How do Igbo immigrants experience and engage in social contexts in which they live both in their Igbo homeland and in the German society? How do they navigate life between their native systems of family and kinship, with its particular traditional values, and their present-day life in the context of the German system of values? Is there a correlation between the actors' purely economic tasks on site and their social position in the larger German society? These questions when explored will foreground several highlights in this study and will help to establish its relevance.

Going by ethnographic data, at the time of fieldwork there are over two hundred Igbo men and a few women who transact their businesses as regular workers in the study's selected enclave daily; however, there are many more who work on these sites either on an ad-hoc arrangement or seasonally. More so, there are clients and customers who visit on business trips from various African countries mainly Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Benin Republic, and Cameroon. In lieu of this, for the purpose of a more effective participant observation, I had to enrol for a period of apprenticeship with one of the pioneer traders on site, identified

here as 'Chairman'[1], who eventually recruited me as one of his staff for the duration of this research. A fellow Igbo priest and friend who was once a chaplain for the English-speaking African Catholic Community in Essen where most of the merchants worshipped had introduced me to one 'Chairman' in January 2017. This fellow priest's tenure in Essen (2001–2011) coincided with the early stages of the development of the African market at Dellwig, and as a Nigerian pastor, more or less, the above-mentioned played a critical mediatory role between the pioneer traders and the city council that helped eventually with some of the early challenges posed by the setting up of the business premises. This explains why he was trusted so much that his recommendation of my recruitment for the purposes of research was easily endorsed.

Furthermore, my recruitment as an apprentice had a double advantage. Firstly, due to constant clashes with local authorities and recurrent police raids in recent times, merchants became very wary of strangers on the site; therefore, identifying myself as an Igbo and as a member of staff of one of the established shops effectively removed me from the category of "strangers" and helped to shield me from mutual suspicions. Additionally, my status as a priest who worshipped with these merchants several times during the period of fieldwork at the St. Gertrud Church Essen also contributed to the two-folded advantage that I enjoyed. More so, my recruitment helped to break down the normal communication barrier that existed between the outsider and the insider; in this case my recruitment bridged this gap between myself and other colleagues on the site as I became eligible to share in their discussions and jokes unhindered. Nevertheless, the recruitment did not obscure my identity as a priest and as a researcher; as my boss emphasized so well to other regular colleagues, and his irregular customers, the justification behind my involvement. From the above stated dual advantages, it is evident that my identity as an apprentice secured me an easier access to the market society than my identity as an Igbo priest did. Although it is important in a qualitative study, such as the present one, that researchers acknowledge their own positionality (Conner 2019: 33); which of course helps to establish them as human assets especially in ethnography, some post-modernist scholars have however argued that no matter how hard researchers strive for objectivity, their personal perspectives

[1] Throughout this work I abstain from the use of the real names of my informants/interviewees. Thus, all the names of the people in this ethnography are pseudonyms. Also, certain information that could help identify these interviewees are purposely withheld.

on issues may still find a way, sometimes at the subconscious level, to influence their final positions (Ferber 2006: 178).

Nevertheless, in the context of this study, it is evident that my double identity was not in any way a limitation to the ethnography but on the contrary comprised a very important asset. As an Igbo man well socialised in the Igbo culture, I had unhindered access to the Igbo community and thus could interact with them in their own language, could identify with their worldviews and could also understand their jokes and other Igbo cultural representations more than any non-Igbo anthropologist could probably have. Again, as a Catholic priest who has lived and worked in Germany for close to a decade, I similarly enjoyed the advantages of a relative access to the Igbo community in Essen. As such, the two major hurdles which every ethnographer would encounter at the outset of any research, especially in the delicate context of migrant lives – language and confidence building – were taken care of at once by my double identity; as both identities played a crucial role in winning the trust of my subjects right from the beginning of the ethnography. Notwithstanding, I was also conscious of the necessity for an epistemological distance which was factored in during the ethnography and data analysis.

Besides, beyond the practice of participant observation, I also conducted structured and unstructured interviews and to achieve this, I had to scout for willing respondents among the regular workers on site. This was not so easy owing mostly to their recent experiences with the German police. However, from the regular workers on site, some forty persons agreed to become formal respondents for my research. Although I could not interview all of them individually, each became a significant part of my circle of friends all of whom I engaged with in discussions during breaks, over the telephone and on social media platforms especially on Facebook and WhatsApp. Eventually, I succeeded in conducting structured interviews with twenty-five persons and these interviews were held at various places for various periods of time – on site during a break or after work or outside the site during weekends in public places like restaurants or at home. The interviews lasted between twenty minutes and two hours, depending on the disposition of the respondent in question. For some respondents, there was the need for a follow-up interview, either for the clarification of some issues earlier raised or to seek alternative opinions on issues that had come up in interviews with others – for instance, to confirm the sequence of historical accounts.

One major challenge that was experienced had to do with the fact that some respondents lived outside of Essen city; hence they could not be easily reached. This made it difficult for me to find reasonable time during working hours for exclusive face-to-face interviews with these respondents, because of their busy schedules on site. In the face of this challenge, interviews by telephone became the preferable mode of communication; however, this happened only in a few cases which constituted the exception and not the rule. More so, the ethnographic data were also enriched by insights from the programmes of various Igbo diaspora organisations that remained active in the Federal State of Nordrhein-Westfalen, whose extension of invitations to their meetings, and seminars conducted in and around the city of Essen during the period of my research I gratefully honoured. In line with the principle of reflexivity, this ethnographic study benefitted handsomely from my own daily life practices, through encounters and conversations with my (African) friends and colleagues, touching on the themes and the rate of progress of my research. Such unplanned conversations, taking place while shopping, during casual visits, phone calls, or exercising helped to complement the insights gained from the formal ethnography.

In a broader perspective, the emergence of the African scrap market in Essen-Dellwig may be considered a demonstration of the dynamism of culture contact. As will be shown in the following pages, the results of this ethnographic research basically support the hypothesis that there ought not to be any contradiction between the integration of immigrants and the retention of their cultural identities; rather both could and should complement each other. As Ülker (2016: 21) argues, "confronting a pre-given understanding of culture, ethnicity and nation by promoting concepts like transcultural, multicultural or cosmopolitan forms of entrepreneurship allows for the creation of a counterpart and generates grounds upon which it can only exist in a binary opposition with its other, i.e., the pre-given understanding of culture". Such a binary of oppositions yields not really to something completely new but to a novel possibility of the two sides existing in a harmonious manner. In the present context, the encounter between the Igbo culture and the German culture through our ethnographic subjects gives rise to a situation where the two cultural complexes forge out certain contexts where they can interact harmoniously in a new valorisation of diversity and difference. Furthermore, the ethnography underscores how engagements in a particular type of economic activity signifies the social position of those involved

in it. Subsequently, a connection will be established between the particular type of economic activity undertaken by Igbo immigrants at the scrap market on the one hand, and the social position they occupy in the German society at large, on the other. This study is therefore an ethnography of transnational transactions.

1.2 The Field: An Ethnography of Transnational Exchange

This ethnographic field research was conducted from February 2017 till August 2018. The research site was situated at the Ripshorster Strasse in Essen-Dellwig – a location intimately connected with the history of the Igbo in the city of Essen, Germany; as the scrap business that went on for many decades in this place was dominated by Igbo immigrants[2], who turned it into a small hub of transnational trade, beginning from the late 1990s. My first contact with this mainly Igbo-populated business enclave in Essen-Dellwig came by mere happenstance. I had visited a friend in Essen during the Christmas festivities of December 2016 who, in the course of a light discussion over dinner, cracked a joke about his need to "go to *Mgbuka* to eke out a living" should his current job application fail. Much later, I discovered it was more a statement of fact than a joke as this was an actual place that had been so code-named by Igbo residents in the industrial city of Essen. Since I had been in search of a research population of African immigrants in Germany for my doctoral thesis, I became curious to visit this place and see things for myself.

Etymologically, the term *mgbuka* is a substantive in Igbo language that roughly translates as "fragmentation", "dissection", or "the cutting into pieces" of something; in this context referring to a place where automobiles are sold in its component parts. Although there is a wide array of meanings that could be derived from this substantive, its dominant meaning in today's Igbo business lexicon derives from the large automobile spare parts market in Onitsha, Southeast Nigeria that is popularly known as the Mgbuka Market: an expansive international market where all imaginable kinds of automobile spare parts are sold. Apart from the new spare parts that are imported directly from producers elsewhere, used automobile spare parts for sale in this large market are also imported from different

[2] After a long period of conflicts and negotiations with the immigrants the City Council of Essen eventually ordered a closedown of a large part of the scrapyard premises towards the end of 2019. For details see Chapter 6.

parts of Europe. In Nigeria, these used spare parts are popularly referred to as “Belgium Parts” probably because the early importers from Europe preferred the Belgian seaport of Antwerp for the shipment of goods to Nigeria. Nowadays, other European seaports like Rotterdam and Hamburg are also much patronised. There are also sections of the market where old cars are dismantled to extract durable parts for sale. Such parts feed a booming local market patronised by a large array of automobile mechanics and, by extension, a huge population of car owners. It is popularly argued in Nigeria that “Belgium parts” are not only cheaper but are also more durable than new automobile parts on sale, which are mostly produced in China. In effect, the scrap market at the Ripshorster Strasse supplies these durable parts directly together with similar automobile spare parts markets in Nigeria and Africa at large; the largest of these markets in Nigeria being located in Onitsha (Obosi) and Lagos (Alaba), hence the nicknames “Mgbuka” or “Little Lagos”.

On a cold winter afternoon in February 2017, upon my request, I was led by my friend to this market located at the Ripshorster Strasse in Essen-Dellwig, at the northern outskirts of the Ruhr city of Essen, along the borders with the city of Oberhausen. I remember joking with my friend about my first impression on arrival, that should someone be blindfolded in Onitsha, Nigeria, and flown directly into this place and had his eyes opened in one of the premises, his first impression would be that he was in a typical “Mechanic Village” in Nigeria or perhaps in some strange part of an Mgbuka market in Onitsha or Lagos – that is, if he could be prevented from taking note of the well-paved streets and the constant power supply. It was not long before I became aware of the close relationship between the Mgbuka Market in Onitsha and the one at the Ripshorster Strasse, Essen-Dellwig. Interestingly, a good percentage of customers who patronised the business in the latter market came from or were linked with the Mgbuka Market in Onitsha, most of whom also had branches in Lagos and elsewhere. Many others came from similar markets located in Lagos, Lome, Ghana and Ivory Coast. The use of the acronym “Little Lagos” was already widespread around Essen-Dellwig, as acclaimed in an article published by the local newspaper in Essen, the *WAZ Zeitung* (Grenz, 2013). As such, I could not miss the striking similarities in both soundscapes and landscapes of both locations, just like anyone else who had been to the automobile spare parts markets in Lagos and Onitsha.

Our entrance point was a shop that would become one of my base shops at the Ripshorster Strasse. It belonged to the person I introduced earlier as the Chairman. The premises were a beehive of activities producing a cacophony of clattering sounds from working tools that interfered with the stillness outside. Intermittently, the soundscape would be evened out by the whirling noise of a cargo train passing through the railway tracks running a few meters away on both sides of the street. As the noise of the train dissolved into the distance, the soundscape returned to the immediate environment of clattering working tools and machines such as forklifts and cutting devices. These somehow harmonised with the other tones of laughter, the howling of instructions across workplaces as well as the hilarious jokes among colleagues that somehow combined to produce a replica of the boisterousness typical of the African marketplace. These evoked in me some feelings of usual nostalgia; a feeling of an ancient newness.

From the outset, one could immediately notice that the lingua franca at the place was not solely German. From different corners, ongoing conversations filled the soundscape with a mixture of Pidgin English and Igbo which was occasionally spiced with some German expressions. Sometimes, conversations would continue in German and this usually indicated the presence of non-Nigerians within the premises. For non-Nigerian (African) clients, it was usual to engage them first in German language unless the client showed a preference for English. But this did not imply that all the workers lacked proficiency of the German language; indeed, it was one of the pleasant surprises that many of them had a good command of the German language. However, the environment as such elicited those feelings of familiarity, at-home-ness and camaraderie that usually call for the mother tongue as the appropriate speech register.

Another significant component of the soundscape was the type of music filtering through different gadgets from all corners of the vicinity – from smartphones to big stereo equipment. They played Nigerian music in its different forms – *Afro-Juju, highlife, hip-hop, ogene* and *gospel*. Thanks to the internet, they could also stream the latest music albums online through such software applications as YouTube and Spotify, or the ones shared through WhatsApp from their smartphones, tablets or laptops. These were usually connected via Bluetooth to wireless loudspeakers to generate a booming effect that provided a soothing accompaniment to the tedious work of dismantling cars, loading used refrigerators and other home appliances, or packing used tyres for export to African countries.

Apart from business discussions, most of the small talks and conversations revolved around current topics of Nigerian (African) politics which sometimes metamorphosed into loud debates and arguments, dividing the interlocutors into different parties – either for, against, or indifferent.

Incidentally, the period of my fieldwork coincided with a crucial phase in the agitation in Nigeria for a Sovereign State of Biafra[3]. This resurgent pan-Igbo agitation was championed by the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), an Igbo separatist organisation led by one Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, who was arrested and detained without trial by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2016. His arrest and illegal detention for some two years generated a considerable interest amongst watchers of the state of affairs in Nigeria, especially in the Igbo diaspora. In Germany, Essen has long been one of the acknowledged centres of the Biafran organisation in the Nordrhein-Westfalen region. Furthermore, Essen also doubles as the centre for different Igbo welfare organisations in the region – a platform where Igbo immigrants organise themselves in accordance with their specific natal-geographic origins in Nigeria; as the Igbos in the diaspora are known for organising themselves in welfare organisations usually along the lines

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[3] The Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-1970) was occasioned by the declaration of independence by the then Eastern Region following a pogrom of people of southern origin in the northern states of Nigeria in the aftermath of the January 1966 coup which was branded the "Igbo coup" by the Nigerian Government. The Federal Government of Nigeria objected to the secession of the Eastern Region and declared war on Biafra. Almost fifty years since the end of that war, the people of Eastern Nigeria (who are predominantly Igbo) still insist that the same factors that led them to the war of independence against the Nigerian state still persist as they still feel collectively marginalised and short-changed by the Nigerian state; hence the resurgence of the agitation for an independent State of Biafra. The neo-agitation began in 1999 as the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which declared itself as a non-violent movement under the leadership of an Indian-trained Igbo lawyer, Chief Ralph Uwazurike. MASSOB concentrated on organising rallies and peaceful protests in several south-eastern states.
However, in 2012 a separatist group emerged from MASSOB, basically in disagreement of the former's principles of non-violent resistance as capable of leading to the realisation of the independent state of Biafra. The new group assumed the name Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), led by another Igbo lawyer based in the United Kingdom, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. The IPOB adopted a more active agitation for the formation of an independent state of Biafra. According to her spokesperson, IPOB calls for a referendum "to settle the issue of Biafra in a civilised and democratic manner" (Adonu 2017). The activities of IPOB were proscribed by the Federal Government of Nigeria following an interim injunction by a Federal High Court in Abuja on 20 September 2017 after a series of clashes with the members of IPOB who were protesting the arrest and detention without trial of their leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Important to note is that both movements – MASSOB and IPOB are extensively sponsored by the Igbo in Diaspora.

of the socio-political divisions in Igboland, with each of the five Igbo states in Nigeria being organised as a unit or body. The polarisation of interlocutors during conversations sometimes also assumed an alignment according to these primordial divisions, with some people being defensive of their groups or some others taking a contrary position from the group while appealing to this as a testimony of their impartiality.

Similar to the soundscape was the olfactory familiarity of the environment: a flourishing aroma of familiar dishes which after a closer look, I discovered that there was a nearby kiosk that functions as a restaurant. Almost every type of Igbo delicacy was served there: fried plantain, *akara* (bean cake) and *pap* (made of liquid cornflour), rice and beans, *foo-foo* (pounded yam or garri) and various sorts of soup – *egusi* (melon soup), *onugbu* (bitter-leaf soup), *oha*, *ogbono*, *nsala*, and vegetable soup – as well as other Nigerian dishes which were regularly on the menu. Even the list of available drinks was dominated by popular Nigerian beer brands like *Hero*, *Star*, *Life, Gulder* and *Guinness*. Subsequently, during the course of my fieldwork, I would count two other such restaurants within the vicinity – those were apart from some food vendors that occasionally hawked in the facility, offering special traditional Igbo delicacies like *okpa, abacha* and *akara* for sale. The availability of quality and assorted African (Igbo) cuisines combined with other factors already mentioned helped to create a sense of home for Africans within this market.

Moreover, the food business thrived very well for a number of important reasons. Firstly, most of the people who did business in this place were men who might not have learnt how to cook in their childhood because this was traditionally considered a female task in Igbo society. Also, because most workers at the scrapyard spent the whole day in the market, they would have almost all their daily meals at their workplace in Essen-Dellwig. Additionally, most clients who came from Africa were not used to the European foods served in standard restaurants, and for this reason, they were also dependent on these African restaurants within the premises for their daily meals. Interestingly, all the restaurants that served the market were run by women; the only one run by a man had mainly women on staff. In other words, the Igbo traditional division of social and gender roles was similarly replicated here.

Furthermore, another striking familiarity was as regards the arrangement of the landscape. As with the case in similar markets in Nigeria, most of the working-

shops within this business enclave were separated by walls from one another – although not necessarily brick walls. In some cases, the boundary between shops were marked by piles of scraps like the carcasses of disassembled cars or refrigerators, etc. Most shops were similarly ordered in a binary division into an outside (workspace) section and an inside (office) section. The outside section usually comprised an open space with untarred floors where the cutting of cars, rolling of tyres and other physical works were done. The greasy floors, dirty working clothes, littered tools and automobile parts testified to the physically demanding tasks that were performed there. In contrast, the inside section was a more restricted area which functioned as the office where secretarial work was done. This section was usually well furnished to create a proper atmosphere for negotiation of business deals and a place of repose from the harsh weather. However, such a facility was not every man's privilege; only a few established persons could afford such a luxury at the Ripshorster Strasse. Many others could only make do with much simpler arrangements like the make-shift containers as offices.

1.3 Organisation and Data Management

The work is organised into two broad parts that are arranged in eight chapters. The first part consists of the first five chapters which present the core characteristics and defining features of Igbo cultural identity inclusive of their cultural values and practices, rituals, and beliefs as well as traditional systems of social organisation. This articulation of Igbo society underscores the fact that migrants are first and foremost carriers of particular cultures. The second part of the dissertation deals with the ethnography and data analysis of my long-term field research in the scrap yard described above, where a group of mainly Igbo traders ply their unusual trade. This part explores how these traders are able to transform what has become 'wastes' in Germany into useful and viable commodities for the African market. From a description of the social and economic practices at the scrap yard, this section proceeds to trace the social networks and relationships that are created outside the business premises, including their social engagements in the multicultural urbanised environment of the city of Essen. These activities take place in the three contexts of sociality of the neighbourhood, the school and the church. Against the backdrop that social integration is a complex process that is actualized at different levels of social interaction that entails a mutual exchange

of values, the work also describes with the aid of ethnographic data particular contexts in which social distinctions between Germans and the Igbo are transcended. This leads to the emergence of a new form of social reality that is founded on shared values.

The study shall also observe how this social integration only unfolds when there is a fundamental acknowledgement that people are carriers of cultural values and that no particular culture is self-sufficient. Social integration therefore requires an acknowledgment of the cultural dynamism that celebrates an openness to mutual exchange with the Other as a necessary implication of culture contact. For these reasons, the chapters in the second part of this dissertation seek to provide answers to some relevant questions arising from culture contact and cultural flow in the city amongst which include: Does the process of reciprocal enrichment apply also with the case of a minority population of migrants such as the Igbo in Essen? In the face of their asymmetrically disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the mainstream society and the enduring contact with a plethora of meanings and meaningful forms from other cultural groups, what remains of the Igbo cultural identity, their traditional practices, their rituals, their language and histories, among those who now live in the culturally alien context of municipal Essen? Will these cultural identifiers disappear or are they becoming redundant? Is there any impact or influence from the mainstream society on the cultural identity of these Igbo migrants and vice versa? To what extent does the Igbo social reality influence the emergence of the new social reality of the host city? Are there some idea-values of the Igbo that impact on the German system of values such that the emerging new social reality is not only assimilating to the mainstream German society but perhaps influenced from both sides? If a new social reality emerges from the confrontation between Igbo and German cultures, is this new social reality exclusively German defined or not? What types of exchanges are occasioned by culture contact in this case? In a nutshell, what is the position of the Igbo cultural identity in the present German mainstream society? The quest for answers to these questions were the reasons for my one-year ethnographic field research in the scrap yard in Essen-Dellwig.

CHAPTER II
THE IGBO WORLD AND HER SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Every cultural group is distinguished by specific cultural practices which allows for a distinction from all other groups, to which a lot of factors account for such differences. To this end, the highway to the understanding of a people would necessarily course through an analysis of the peculiarities of her natural environment, her traditional methods of social organisation, her thought patterns as well as her value systems. These areas and more would be studied with respect to the Igbo – a cultural (ethnic) group inhabiting the southeast "geopolitical"[4] region of Nigeria which constitutes the third largest of the over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. Therefore, this study is an attempt to understand the most outstanding elements of the Igbo culture and its way of life; especially its important elements which have continued to influence and shape the lives of the Igbo from times past even up to the contemporary times.

The Igbo ethnic group possesses an interestingly unique feature: of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, it is the only one that is not native to any other country in Africa or elsewhere; neither is her language spoken by any other cultural group globally, at least judging from the currently available facts. In contrast, the other two largest ethnic groups in Nigeria (largest in terms of both geography and demography) – the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba – are spread into other neighbouring countries in Africa.[5] Therefore, this study shall begin with a cursory exploration of the physical geography of Igboland and then proceed to describe other distinguishing cultural features like her traditional systems of social organisation, social structure and kinship, etc., which would help in the understanding of the traditional worldview of the Igbo society and the resulting core traditional values thereof.

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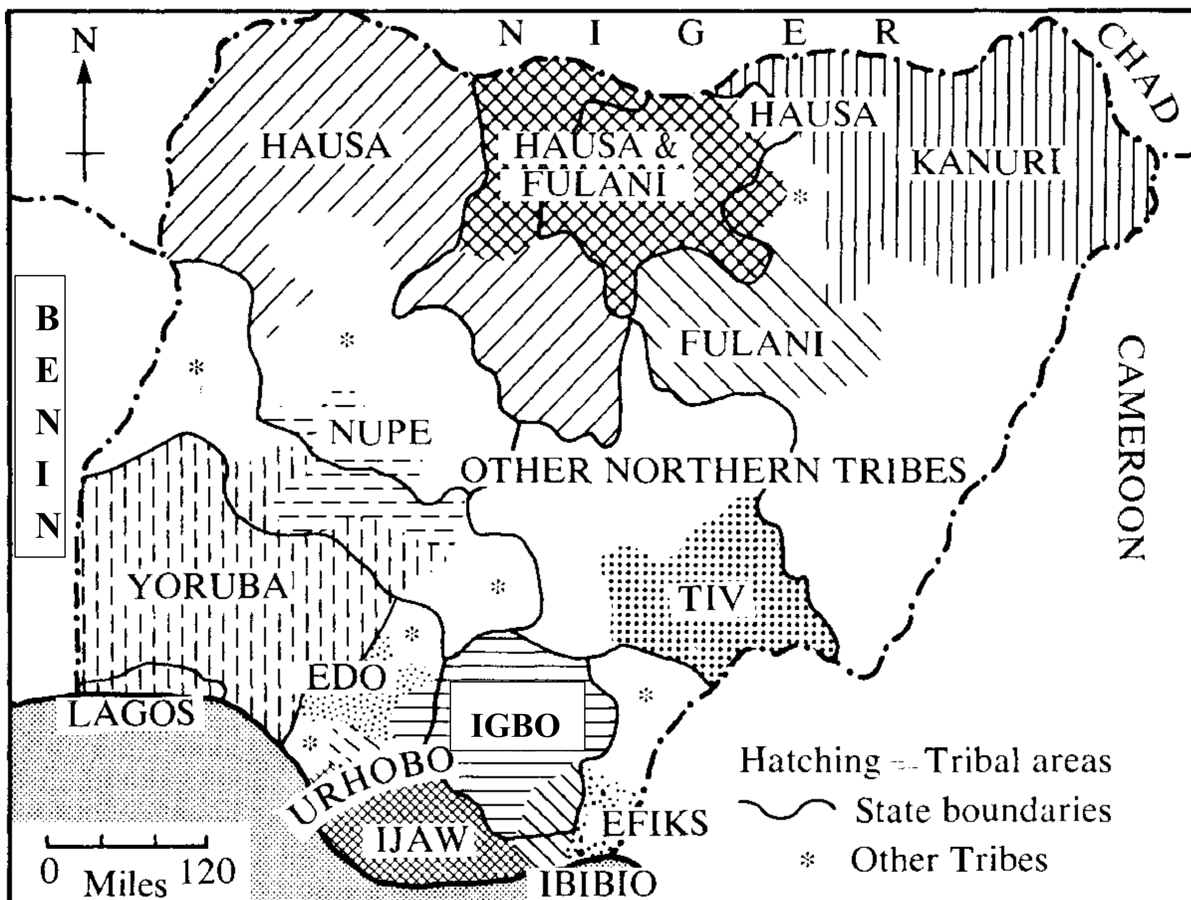
[4] The Nigerian state is divided into six "geopolitical zones" (Northeast, Northwest, North-central, Southeast, Southwest and Southsouth zones), fairly representing the major ethnic (tribal) constellations in the country.

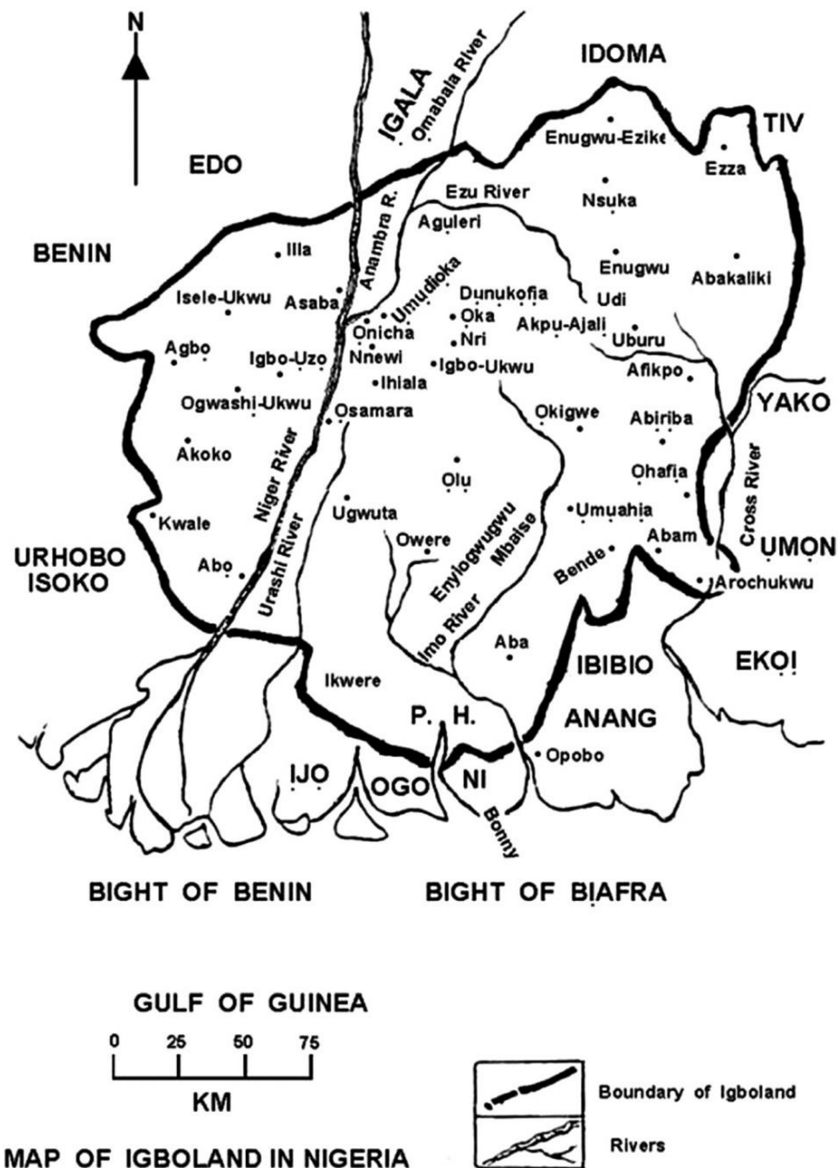
[5] The histories of the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups have been largely intertwined in Nigeria, hence the usual grouping as one, the Hausa-Fulani. However, elsewhere outside Nigeria each of them may be recognised as a distinct ethnic group. While the Hausa is acknowledged as the single ethnic group with the largest spread in the whole of Africa, the Fulani also, originally stemming from North Africa and the Middle East, are dispersed through the regions of the Sahel and West Africa. For the Yoruba, they are also found outside Nigeria, especially in such West African countries like Benin Republic and Togo.

2.1 The Igbo: People and Society

The word "Igbo" could be applied in three different senses. Firstly, it refers to a group of people who lay claim to a common culture and ancestry which reflects their collective socio-cultural identity, hence the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria. In the second sense, the term may refer to the common language spoken by this people, the Igbo language. As with most languages, there are dialectical variations of the Igbo language corresponding to the different regional vernaculars, but these different dialects are more or less understood across-the-board. In a third sense, the word 'Igbo' may refer to a specific, bounded geographical territory regarded as the ancestral home of the Igbo – that is, the Igboland. Identified as a cultural group, the Igbo exclusively inhabit the South-eastern geopolitical zone of the present-day Nigerian State although a sizeable number of Igbo communities are spread beyond this zone, especially to the neighbouring states of the Middle Belt and the so-called *South-South* geopolitical zones of Nigeria.



Map 1. Map of Nigeria showing major ethnic and language groups (Source: https://www.nairaland.com/2453728/map-ethnic-groups-nigeria-it. Accessed on 26.01.2019)



Map 2. Igbo region showing the major towns and neighbouring ethnic groups (culled from Ugochukwu 2010:183)

A major landmark of Igboland is the River Niger which divides the land into two disproportional parts, with the greater population living East of the River Niger (hence the usual reference to Igboland as “East of the Niger”) and the lesser population inhabiting the western flank of the river. In the context of the Nigerian geography, the location of Igboland is also significant. The landmass of the Nigerian state is divided into three unequal parts by her two great rivers – River Niger and River Benue – which join at a confluence in Lokoja from where they both flow into the Atlantic Ocean. These three parts roughly correspond to the three major languages and ethnic groupings: the Hausa/Fulani to the North, the Yoruba to the West and the Igbo to the East. Geographically, Igboland is located

roughly between latitudes 5 and 7 degrees north of Equator and longitudes 6 and 8 degrees east of the Greenwich Meridien, covering a total surface area of approximately 41,000 square kilometres (Nwaezeigwe 2007: 1; Ilogu 1974: 2; Ofomata 2002: 1) out of Nigeria's total landmass of 923.768 square kilometres. However, owing to the perennial political intrigues and arbitrariness that have characterised Nigeria's postcolonial policies of boundary adjustments, the Igbo as a people are not all contained within the region presently designated in Nigeria's official political parlance as the "Southeast Geographical Zone"[6]. There are pockets of Igbo population spread as minorities in neighbouring states like Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States respectively, which by way of geographical location officially belong to the "South-South Geopolitical Zone". Thus, by the current political arrangement of the Nigerian federation, the five states of the so-called 'Southeast Geopolitical Zone', comprising of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States are, as already indicated, exclusively inhabited by the Igbo.

More so, Igboland is bounded by some other cultural and language groups within the Nigerian state amongst which include the Bini, Esan, Urhobo and Isoko to the West, the Igala, Idoma, Igede and Tiv to the North; the Ekoi, Ibibio, Ogoni and the Ijaw speaking groups to the South. These neighbours constitute significant linguistic and cultural interfaces with the Igbo. Perhaps as a result of such interfaces, one observes the various dialects of the Igbo language as well as a diversity of cultural expressions as one moves across the many border-areas of Igboland. This factor, coupled with the characteristic distinctions in terms of the ecological diversity across Igboland (three vegetation zones have been identified namely, Mangrove Swamp Forest, Rain Forest and Derived Guinea Savannah), with the attendant variations in architectural and agricultural patterns, have led some scholars to propose a classification of the Igbo along what has been termed 'ethnographic' lines. Such efforts began with the colonial anthropologists, notable among them was Talbot (1926 [1969]) who classified the Igbo people into thirty 'sub-tribes'. Subsequently this pioneering effort was heavily criticised by Meek (1950), one of the later colonial administrative officers who carried out extensive field research among the Igbo. The latter argued that the sub-tribes

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[6] During the Gen. Sani Abacha military junta (1993-1998), Nigeria was partitioned into six "geopolitical" zones for the purpose of a more equitable distribution of national resources. The geopolitical zones are: Northeast, Northwest, Northcentral, Southeast, Southwest and Southsouth Geopolitical Zones.

proposed by Talbot were more of geographical classifications than ethnographic ones.

Of all the subsequent efforts in this regard, the theory that eventually gained wide acceptance originated from the work of Daryl Ford and G. I. Jones who, by introducing the anthropological concept of "cultural area", proposed a division of Igboland into five sub-cultural zones. This concept of cultural area "is based on the fact that particular cultures have specific traits and patterns which are geographically or spatially delimited. A cultural area is thus a geographical delimitation of areas that have or manifest the same dominant and significant cultural traits and patterns" (cited in Eze 2013:19). In the same vein, Ford and Jones based this proposed division on their assumption of various sources of migration of the different migrant groups which currently make up the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria. This, in their view, explains "the common cultural factors that bind the subcultural areas together" (Ilogu 1974: 3).

According to this classification, the five cultural areas of Igboland are as follows:

1. The Northern Igbo (also known as the Onitsha Igbo), comprising Awka, Udi, Enugu, Enugu-Ukwu, Nsukka, Aro Ndizuogu, Onitsha, Agukwu Nri, Igbo Ukwu and Ihiala environs.

2. The Southern Igbo (or Owerre Igbo), to which belong Isu Ama, Oratta-Ikwere, Ohuhu Ngwa and Isu-Item, Aba, Ụmụahia, Ibeku, Owerre, Ahoada, Okigwe and Orlu environs.

3. The Western Igbo (or Ika Igbo) is made up of Asaba, Agbor, Kwale, Illah and Aboh environs.

4. The Eastern Igbo (also known as Cross River Igbo) comprises of Abam, Ohafia, Afikpo, Arochukwu and Abriba environs. This area is surrounded by the Efik and the Ibibio tribes.

5. The North Eastern Igbo (or "Ogu Ukwu" group) is a comparatively small cultural area that originally had less interactions with other cultural groups, to which include Ezza, Uburu, Okposi and Abakiliki. But the situation has massively improved with the availability of good roads and communication networks.

However, it is important to underscore the caveat made by Forde and Jones to the effect that the above groupings are no watertight classifications but rather,

the divisions are made for ethnographic purposes as a means and guide to a more effective study of the various portions of the Igbo population. Such ethnography is perhaps inspired by studies in Igbo history which suggest that the pan-Igbo consciousness (or Igbo nationalism) as we have it today is a relatively recent development. In the pre-colonial period, the Igbo were not a completely homogenous nation rather, they were organised in small autonomous and independent subgroups or federations. Those subgroups were also their preferred reference points of identity in practice. Thus, at that time, a man born in Nsukka, for example, would identify himself as an Nsukka man rather than an Igbo man. The Onitsha people who lived around the eastern coast of the River Niger were known to refer to a "stranger" from across the coast as *"nwa onye Igbo"* (child of an Igbo person) – especially as such a person speaks a strange dialect different from the Onitsha variant of the same language – in contradistinction to a fellow *"nwa onye Onicha"* (child of an Onitsha person). In the course of history, however, and with readjustments and changes in alliances, the size of the federation grew larger, although the fundamental patterns of self-governance persisted. Similar to the events that led to the rise of nationalism in Europe in the nineteenth century, the pan-Igbo consciousness and identity developed in response to an urgent need for broader alliances among the different federations due to increasing contacts with non-Igbo societies. These alliances were mainly for the purposes of trade and wars. By most estimations, the most recent historical events that shaped the pan-Igbo consciousness and its resultant identity were the Transatlantic Slave Trade as well as colonialism through which the modern concept of the nation-state was introduced to statecraft with the consequent political independence of the Nigerian state in 1960. Within the broader context of the Nigerian state, Igbo nationalism acquired an importance of no mean political and ethnic magnitude.

Despite the differences in dialect, physical and ecological features, and other cultural peculiarities that may exist among the different Igbo subgroups, there are still many features that specifically distinguish the Igbo from other cultural groups in Nigeria. By comparing the Igbo with the Hausa/Fulani and the Yorubas, Nwaezeigwe (2007) illustrates the strikingly distinct socio-political outlook of the Igbo. The traditional Igbo society was relatively egalitarian, built on a highly competitive socio-political leadership system. It was a system characterised by a

natural flare for gerontocracy and a system of acquisition of social titles as a means of social mobility. In fact, according to van Allen (1972: 167),

> The main Igbo political institution seems to have been the village assembly, a gathering of all adults in the village who chose to attend. Any adult who had something to say on the matter under discussion was entitled to speak… [T]he leaders were people who had the ability to persuade. The mode of political discourse was that of proverb, parable and metaphor drawn from the body of Igbo tradition… The leaders of Igbo society were men and women who combined wealth and generosity with 'mouth' – the ability to speak well.

This contrasted with the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba systems where leadership was mainly based on a hereditary royalty, and so was only reserved for the classes of the royalty and the nobles (Nwaezeigwe 2007: 2). While affirming the foregoing, it is worth affirming further that only few institutions and practices, notably the worship of *ALA* (or *ANA* – the Earth Goddess), the belief in *ỌFỌ*[7], the indigenous language itself (which again has numerous dialectical variations) and their egalitarian propensities in social organisation could be regarded as typically Igbo.

Furthermore, the Igbo are reputed to be the most enterprising and widely 'travelled' cultural group in the whole of Black Africa. The word 'travel' is here advisedly used to indicate the temporality associated with the notion of migration among the Igbo; for the Igbo migration is a temporary event, a travel, which presupposes a clear prerogative of return. Thus, although dispersed to almost every nook and cranny of the globe, whatever the distance or duration of migration the Igbo would hardly lose contact with the homeland, neither would the close bond to kith and kin ever be severed. Rather, the Igbo would consciously seek to sustain and further strengthen such contacts through a complex system of mutual and reciprocal kinship obligations. It is interesting to note that this

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[7] *Ọfọ* is a kind of sacred stick from a specific type of tree, which symbolises (ancestral) authority, truth, and innocence. It is an emblematic staff that represents the twin principles of fairness and justice. There are several kinds (grades) of *ọfọ*: family *ọfọ*, sub-lineage *ọfọ*, and lineage *ọfọ*, town *ọfọ*, etc. The eldest male of each unit, who doubles as the ritual head is the traditional custodian of the sacred *ọfọ*. A more detailed discussion of the *ọfọ* system follows in the next chapter.

attribute is by no means a recent development. An early missionary to Igboland had, after a thirty-year work experience among the Igbo, written of them thus:

> Their [the Igbo] 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. Whatever the conditions, the Igbo immigrants adapt themselves to meet them, and it is not long before they make their presence felt in the localities where they settle (Basden 1966: xi).

Records of such qualities of high adaptability of the Igbo in foreign lands abound in classical and contemporary Diaspora Studies, especially in works that chronicle the settlement of African Slaves in the Americas. The source of this peculiar Igbo attitude could be traced to the fact that the traditional Igbo society is an ideologically open one where equal opportunity is provided for individuals to achieve their goals, and where personal achievements are highly valorised and celebrated. Largely, the Igbo traditional social structure, its kinship system as well as its worldview support, promote and sustain these peculiar Igbo traits and attitudes.

2.2 Igbo Traditional Social Structure

While many scholars of sociology and anthropology would agree that the terms "social structure" and "social organisation" have slightly different connotations, there is hardly any agreement with regard to the extent to which a distinction between the two terms could be made (Barnard 2002: 768). Thus, it could be argued that there is only but a thin line separating the two concepts. Put in a loose sense, "social organisation" refers to the totality of activities performed in a given society, whereas "social structure" refers to the real context, that is, the set of relations that link individuals in the society. As Barnard further highlights, "Writers who are mainly concerned with social action tend to concentrate on social organisation, which defines the roles individuals play in relation to one another. Those who are concerned more with the formal relations between people tend to concentrate on social structure, which defines the statuses of actors performing such roles" (ibid.). The latter group belongs to the primary domain of social anthropology, which is the field of this present investigation.

In *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 9-11) makes a distinction between social structure and social organisation, underscoring a conceptual difference that could be likened to the distinction between the 'real' and the 'ideal'. In a follow-up essay, "On Social Structure" he further distinguishes between social structure and structural form by using the famous hypothetical Tom, Dick and Harry example, in which case, social structure refers to the network of relations between these three persons in a real society; whereas structural form refers to the positions each of them occupy in relation to one another. For example, assuming that Tom is Dick's father, the structural form defines the relationship between father and son. These distinctions made by Radcliffe Brown did not seem, however, to have been well received by his contemporaries in the world of scholarship. It is actually difficult in real life to separate status from function as one determines the other, and vice versa. Barnard notes that Lévi-Strauss and many other anthropologists have consistently employed the term 'social structure' for what Radcliffe-Brown called 'structural form'. In particular, Lévi-Strauss used 'social structure' to refer to a still higher degree of abstraction. What he described as the structure of social relations in all societies, as well as within a particular society is essentially not different from Radcliffe-Brown's 'structural form' (Barnard 2002: 769).

Still on the same path of interrogation, the lack of clarity and the inconsistency in application of the term 'social structure' among scholars is quite evident in anthropological literature (cf. Nadel 2007 [1968]: 221). Whereas Egan locates the units or components of social structure in existing interpersonal relations in view of status positions occupied by the individual members of a given society, Evans-Pritchard on the other hand shares the opposite view. The latter limits social structure to interrelationships among groups, excluding interpersonal relations. Fortes (1963) re-echoes this position in his essay, "Time and Social Structure: The Ashanti Case Study", where he avows Radcliffe-Brown's distinction between the 'actual structure' and 'structural form' as being invalid. Contrarily, he prefers to distinguish between the 'constants' (essential elements) of social structure from the 'variables' (incidental elements); the former referring to the essential, permanent cultural elements while the latter espouses particular, concrete adaptations and manifestations of these elements in a given group (Fortes 1963: 54-58). For instance, bride wealth is a 'constant' element of African marriage, but there are local variations among different cultural

groups (and sometimes even among different sub-groups within the same cultural group) regarding what amounts to bride wealth. It therefore makes one to wonder what new idea Fortes brings to the argument except for a mere change in the terms used in expressing same old ideas.

Be that as it may, there have been sustained efforts by scholars to resolve this controversy of definitions. But like every other question or concept in the social sciences, it is hardly possible (it is not even desirable!) to achieve a unanimity of opinions. Therefore, any attempt at definition is fundamentally an attempt to establish a vantage point from which one could make valid statements about a subject of discussion. In view of the foregoing controversy of definitions, our approach to the analysis of the traditional Igbo social structure would, therefore, take into cognisance these broad perspectives and definitions. Uchendu (2007: 180-181) is credited with the important point that it is easier to make statements about social structure than to attempt its definition. He describes social structure as the body of rules or statement of principles embodied in objective reality that govern institutions and social relationships in a given society. Thus, instead of attempting a definition, he outlines three “random samples of behaviours”, which can be observed in any Igbo village, that serve as illustrations of cultural statements and give insight into the Igbo social structure. The three samples as pointed out by Uchendu relate to the rituals of hospitality, birth and death.

In relation to hospitality, Uchendu refers to the primary importance attached to “that ubiquitous symbol of Igbo hospitality”, the kolanut ritual[8]. According to him, hospitality is reputed to be one of the effective ways of keeping the social equilibrium in societies organised on the lineage principle, and for the Igbo, the kolanut is the traditional idiom thereof (Uchendu 1964: 47). Generally, the kolanut is known for its commercial, social and ritual roles in most cultures in West Africa. But among the Igbo, it occupies a revered and sacred position in their social and religious practices considering that both formal and private meetings usually begin with a kolanut ritual. As such, the kolanut ritual highlights “the traditional medium of welcoming a guest and establishes (if the guest is received for the first time) or reinforces (if he is already known) their interaction rate” (ibid.). The performance

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[8] The Kolanut rite is a very important and universal element of Igbo culture. Kolanut is the seed of the kolanut plant that grows mainly in West Africa. Of all existing variants, a particular species – *ọji Igbo* (*cola acuminata*) – is particularly valued among the Igbo and is traditionally grown to meet social and ritual obligations.

of the kolanut ritual provides an important window to the understanding of Igbo worldview and its core values. The value and importance of the kolanut among the Igbo has been beautifully summarised by an Igbo novelist (Nzekwu 1963: 47) as follows:

> Among us [the Igbo], kolanut is a highly valued and indispensable product. It commands our respect in a way no other produce has done… The kolanut is a symbol of friendship… Its presentation to a guest surpasses any other sign of hospitality which any host among us can show, even though in some places it costs only a penny… On more formal occasions, he [host] may entertain his guests lavishly… But because he has not presented him with kolanut, when the day of reckoning came the guest denounced in no uncertain terms his host's inability to present him with a kolanut – very cheap, very common, yet most significant and, therefore, most important.

Just like the presentation of the kolanut to a guest is of great value, an accurate observance of the complex kolanut ritual is of utmost importance. The ritual follows a definite path that helps to reinforce the model of the Igbo social structure. This is because the lineages recognise the primacy of residence and the seniority of kinship, both of which are traced when an Igbo presents a kolanut. The kolanut rite consists of four stages: the presentation (*iche oji*), the blessing/prayer (*igọ ọji*), the breaking (*iwa ọji*) and the distribution (*ike ọji*). Each stage involves an elaborate ritual drama.

More so, there are laid down principles for the presentation of kolanut and this depends on the composition of the commensal group. Primarily, the host presents the kolanut to the next ranking male in his own lineage segment, who in turn reaches out to the guests through relay messengers – a chain of representatives of differentiated lineage segments within the assembled group – who hand out the kola to the next segment of guests while paying attention to the genealogical order. When the "relays" are completed among the various segments, the kolanut is sent back to the host; as "what is actually traced is the hierarchy in the segmentation model of the two interacting parties – the hosts and the guest's lineages" (op. cit., 48-49). When the commensal group is comprised of guests from the same community, the proper principle may require a consideration of genealogical distance, social distance, social differentiation, or social structure as may be fitting to the particular occasion. If, however, the group is made up of guests

from different Igbo communities, an “expanded model” may be required to accommodate the situation, following the above principle. The presentation of kolanut is therefore an intricate ritual dramatization of exchange and reciprocity.

Furthermore, Uchendu’s second sample refers to the rituals of birth and child development. Basically, cultural practises associated with birth and death principally express the fundamental elements of the Igbo social structure. After the birth of a child, there is a traditional ritual of burying the umbilical cord and this ritual may require the presentation of an economic plant (usually a palm or banana tree) or a symbolic gift to the child, which would be planted on the spot to mark it out. The person responsible for this present is statutorily predetermined from the new baby’s agnatic unit in accordance with its gender and position in the family. By this token, a special relationship is created between the giver and the receiver which is maintained through lifetime. Another aspect of this practice that would be elaborated in a latter section is the ritual expression of the primary significance of the earth in Igbo cosmology. There exists yet another ritual which marks the different stages of growth of a child: for instance, when he brings home his or her first pot or calabash of water. On this occasion, the young child is directed to present the pot of water to the most senior woman who shares a close genealogical or affinal relationship to his father or mother. This act creates a new bond of reciprocity between the two; as the child calls this woman *nne* (mother), while she in turn begins to play the role of a foster mother to the child from then onwards. Where the child in question is female, this woman would have a special role to play later at the girl-child’s marriage. The foregoing indicates that the society creates an alternative support network for her members from early infancy, and that this network is gradually enlarged in scope as the child grows up to assume its place in the larger Igbo society. The social networks thus established add to the components of the social structure.

Finally, the third sample as highlighted by the scholar, Uchendu, evinces mortuary rituals. The decisive factor in Igbo mortuary rites is the age of the deceased; especially as the death of a child is treated differently from the death of a young adult or more so, an elder. The death of a child triggers off an uncontrolled and immediate outburst of emotions and wailing, in stark contrast to the solemn composure and rigid discipline observed in the event of the death of an elder. Uchendu (2007: 180) states pointedly that: “The dignity and the status of the dead elder and the prestige of his living relatives demand that the elder’s death

must not be formally announced until there is due consultation with all interested parties, and even then, there is a compelling necessity to assemble critical items for the "first burial rites" before any formal announcement is made. A premature wailing would be totally irresponsible in the circumstance". The process of announcing the death of an elder becomes even more complex if the deceased was a married woman. In this case, the leadership of both the affinal and agnatic kin groups must be adequately informed beforehand, according to customary provisions.

In the traditional Igbo society, the very nature of personhood is grounded in relationships with family, kin groups and the community of origin (Smith 2001). These relationships are further influenced by the pattern of social organisation which has largely endured till the present time. The Igbo society is organised into segments where at some level, these act as autonomous entities. For this reason, not a few scholars have described the Igbo social structure as having a segmentary and semi-hierarchical arrangement (Ekong 1986, Jones 1949, Uchendu 1965). In general, the prevalent practice among the Igbo is the patrilineal descent system, although there have been exceptions in a few regions. At least, one region has been identified as being matrilineal (Nsugbe 1974) while some others have been shown to practice a double descent system (Ottenberg 1968). Like in every society, the family is the nucleus of the Igbo society; the family here being understood in its extended sense.

Next to the family, the smallest unit of social organisation, is the patrilineage – *Ụmụnna*. "The Ụmụnna as a patrilineage unit is made up of the sum of all the agnatic units, each of which is called the *Ọnụama* or *Mkpukpu* (the extended family)" (Aligwekwe 2008: 61). A collection of different *Ụmụnna* units of different ancestral origins makes up the village unit – *Ogbe*. Then a further agglomeration or federation of different villages or village groups make up the town or community – *Obodo* – which is an independent socio-political state. To some extent, the appropriate English term for the Igbo social unit, *Obodo*, is still a point of contention in Igbo studies. While some anthropologists prefer the term "communes" (Meek 1930), or "communities", others would rather prefer "village groups" (Ford and Jones 1950). In his study of North-Eastern Igboland, Ardener (1954) uses the term "clan" to refer to this unit which he describes as "loosely-federated entities" that form the unit of social and political organisations. In his definition, one can already perceive the influence of colonial rule

on the traditional social structure which comes forth as being consequent of the British policy of indirect rule imposed on her colonies. Olisa (2002: 219) notes, with a reference to an earlier study by Jones, that, “In the 1950s, many villages and small towns in these areas chose to federate into clans in order to be assigned a second-class chief under the existing chieftaincy regulation of Eastern Nigeria Government”. So, the formation of clans, a historical child of necessity, was originally alien to the traditional Igbo system of social organisation. Many historians have noted how difficult it was for the early British colonialists to understand the political system of the Igbo which they derogatorily referred to as “acephalous” and an “ordered anarchy”, and to which they subsequently made efforts to put in place a more ‘convenient’ political system in the Eastern Nigeria colony, in accordance with their imperialist agenda. Hence, one may convincingly argue that the Igbo social unit *Obodo* is better represented by the term “community” as opposed to “clan”, and this arises from the fact that a community is usually a sort of agglomeration or federation of lineage groups occupying a definite geographical territory.

Originally at the village level, the unity of the constituent lineage groups (*Ụmụnna*) was predicated on their claim to a common descent from a remote ancestor. Secondly, the cult of the Earth Goddess (*Ala*) is another strong binding force of communal unity and identity, since every territorial unit is subject to a common cultic jurisdiction of *Ala* from where sanctions and ritual activities are coordinated and executed. In fact, Horton (1956) argues that the *Ala* cult is a more important factor of communal unity among the Igbo when compared to common ancestry; owing to the fact that it is possible to find lineage groups that live apart in different territories. Although these groups are still bonded by kinship ties, they may be subject to different cultic bonds of *Ala*. Therefore, irrespective of the ancestral differences of the lineage groups in a given territory, they are held together by the *Ala* cult which regulates their social and political activities through rituals and sanctions. Nevertheless, the primary basis of personal identification remains the patrilineage. In other words, the Igbo social organisation is based on two factors namely, the line of descent and the place of domicile. These account for the popular “theory of dual organisation” attributed to the Igbo traditional political system (Jones 1949): an obvious point which this study will revisit as it proceeds.

As already mentioned, the lineage group is called *ụmụnna* (literally, “children of the father”). The name already points to the close agnatic bond existing among members of the lineage group (kindred) who see themselves as descendants of a common ancestral father. Usually, this lineage group comprises a union of several extended families that are agnatically related through a common patrilineal descent. It is the most important social unit in the traditional Igbo social structure and constitutes the point where the socialisation and communal identity formation of the Igbo person begins (Meek 1937: 133). In other words, every Igbo citizen, irrespective of age or status, is traceable to a particular lineage group. Most lineage groups in Igboland practice exogamy; the lineages are not always of the same size because some are larger than the others. As such, the larger ones may in the course of history be divided into sub-lineage groups and move out to establish an outpost. As a result, there are levels and hierarchies of lineages that make up the village group – which may be a federation or a group of different lineages. Sometimes, lineages that are not agnatically related may federate into one kindred for political purposes. Here, the social bonds are not so strong in comparison with the lineage unit, and this may arise either as a result of the absence of a common ancestry or due to a recent amalgamation. In such cases, the unit may not necessarily be exogamous.

To further buttress a point earlier made by Jones, Olisa (2002: 219) notes that in Igboland,

> Everyone is a member of a lineage; if he is a stranger, he is regarded as a member of the lineage of the citizens in whose house he sojourns; if he is a slave (ORU), he is regarded as a member of his master’s lineage; if he is an OSU (ritual slave), he is regarded as belonging to the lineage to whom the shrine of his dedication belongs. Sometimes, strangers or slaves or even the OSU constitute their own lineages where their number is large, but such lineages always form part of the original village in which they are located. They act in the same way, within limits permitted them by custom, as other segments at the same level.

Lineages are of various levels and they indicate the depth and span of agnatic proximity. Usually, they are ranked in the order of seniority and importance according to genealogical depth, depending on the historicity and demography of a particular agnatic unit. So, there may be a maximal, major, minor, and/or minimal

lineage, in its hierarchical order of seniority relative to the original ancestor. Onwuejeogwu (1980: 42) identifies four types of lineage structures in Igbo society. A four-level type has minimal, minor, major and maximal lineages; a three-level type has minimal, major and maximal order or segmentation; a two-level type has a minimal and a maximal lineage; whereas a one-level type has a minimal level which operates also as a maximal lineage. So, the maximal level is the point of agnation, the original root from where the subsequent levels branch off. Conversely, the minimal lineage is the smallest segment of political significance and constitutes also the land holding unit where members generally live together in a distinct territory. In some cases, this minimal lineage unit is referred to as an extended family.

Sequel to this arrangement is also the practice of a "segmentary lineage structure" in Igbo society, akin to what anthropologists have also observed in other (African) societies like the Tallensi, Nuer, Tiv, Arab, etc. (Evans-Pritchard 1940, Sahlins 1961, Uchendu 1964). Like the phenomenon of "dual organisation" of the traditional Igbo social structure, earlier mentioned, segmentary lineage structures are expressions of the cosmological logic of the traditional Igbo society. Dual organisation is extremely pervasive in the sense that it divides the people into categories, segments, villages, moieties, etc., and divides the population into categories of persons as well. This comprises the cosmological foundation for what is physically explained by reasons of security, demographic change or ritual mandate. Some lineage groups were in the course of history split into two or more, with the splitting group(s) establishing outposts or territories outside the original village territory; and although they lived physically apart, their kinship bonds and obligations (reciprocity, exogamy, rituals, etc.) to the original group, which of course helped to assert their common identity as descendants of a common ancestor were maintained (Jones 1949). More importantly, these outposts were socially organised along the same structures as in the original territory. In his ethnographical report on the people of Nsukka division (northern part of Igboland), Meek (1930: 11 [12]) asserts that:

> Though the extended family is not wholly localised, all the members recognise the authority of Asogwa Oyeze (the family head), and any serious disputes (sic) between members of the family would be referred to him. All the members meet at feasts in his quarters, and he performs sacrifice to the common ancestor, Ori-Ada, on behalf of all.

In other words, the extended family is also a sacrificial community from which political authority is derived. Although members may live many kilometres apart, the kinship bond is kept intact together with consequent rights, duties, and obligations. In some communities, it is still the practice today that when the office of the eldest male (*Onyishi* or *Okpala*) of a patrilineage falls upon someone living in the outpost, he is required by tradition to relocate to the original communal homestead located in the ancestral territory. This compound serves as the rallying point of the entire lineage, where assemblies and other ritual celebrations are held. It also constitutes the abode of the group's sacred shrine which houses the *ọfọ*, the symbol of ancestral authority with the traditional custodian of the *ọfọ*-staff being the *Ọkpara* (*Onyishi*), the eldest male in the lineage.

The above feature of dual organisation which corresponds to the territorial divisions of the same village or kindred is found in many Igbo towns. It is usually expressed as a bipartite opposition affixed to their names, such as AGỤ (forest, bush) and ỤLỌ (home); ELU (high, up) and ALA (below, down); MGBAGO/UGWU (uphill, high) and MGBADA/NDIDA (downhill, plains); AMA (outside) and OWERE (inside); UKWU (big, great) and NTA (little, small), etc. These may appear as prefixes or suffixes to the name of a town or village. In some cases, only the outpost gets affixed while the original settlement retains its name – for example Obosi (original settlement) and *Ndida*-Obosi (outpost, meaning downhill Obosi). Usually the 'better' of the binary terms is affixed to the part considered to be the autochthonous settlement; whereas the outposts are identified by attaching the opposing binary term, instances of which include Ihakpu-*Ulo* and Ihakpu-*Agu*; Ovoko-*Ulo* and Ovoko-*Agu* (indicating home as opposed to forest); Akpa-*Mgbago* and Akpa-*Mgbada*, (uphill as opposed to downhill); etc. This common feature of the traditional Igbo social structure has been a subject of ethnographic research and anthropological analyses especially by Meek (1930), Jones (1949), Jeffreys (1937) and Green (1947). However, an important caveat to be sounded here is that this feature of Igbo social organisation is not quite similar to the principle of segmentary opposition that has been proposed by anthropologists and political theorists which describes lineage formation and social actions that basically serve to maintain a "balance of power" among the component units. In the Igbo system, the two components retain a single identity and in matters of ritual and leadership, they follow the original pattern of their kinship structure.

So far, the crux of this study's discussion has been anchored to the fact that the traditional Igbo social structure is inexorably based on the bond of kinship that transcends spatial boundaries; one which is wide and extensive. Against this laid down background, the next section would attempt to demonstrate the relationship that exists between the Igbo social structure, its kinship system and the complex web of social relationships that define its society.

2.3 Igbo Kinship System and Social Organisation

The quotidian life of the Igbo is enmeshed in an intricate network of relationships. Directly related to the social structure is the kinship system, both of which are related to each other like the two sides of the same coin. Since kinship structure is expressed in kinship terms, it is usual for ethnographers to begin the study of the kinship system of any particular group by analysing the kinship terminologies employed by that group. Typically, there is a broad application of these terms because the Igbo kinship system is uniquely classificatory. Therefore, in order to properly situate our discussion, this study will combine the analysis of kinship terms together with the investigation of traditional social organisations since both are intrinsically connected. Usually, a typical Igbo community is socially organised into three or four hierarchical units namely, the family (*ezi n'ulo*), the patrilineage (*Ụmụnna*), the ward (*Ogbe*) and the community (*Obodo*). By and large, the various levels of interpersonal and group communication as well as symbolic control are based on the principles of reciprocal, moral and legal rights together with duties among kin groups, the effectiveness of which is determined by the proximity of relationships along the lines of matrilineal, patrilineal and sex differences.

2.3.1 The Family

The family is the nucleus of any society. The traditional Igbo society approves of different forms of families; thus, a typical family could be monogynous or polygynous. As was typical of traditional agrarian societies, the size of an Igbo family was traditionally indicative of her level of wealth. A wealthy man was expected to marry more wives and beget more children. As such, polygyny was very rampant in traditional Igbo society because more children (especially male children) meant more hands in the farm and therefore more productivity and greater wealth. Apart from this, the Igbo practice of extended family system

results in a situation where most families or homesteads are made up of a collection of several nuclear families who share the same compound. These peculiarities are crucial to the understanding of the Igbo kinship terminology. This (extended) family is referred to as *ezi n'ulo*, which literally means a compound and home. Onwuejeogwu (1980: 41) articulates this point precisely when he asserts that:

> The families occupying a compound pass through a cyclic development of several stages. At the early stage, the compound is occupied by a simple or compound family with few relations and strangers. The owner and head of the compound is agnatically related to the owner and head of other adjacent compound. Such a compound has a small population of about 5-15 persons. Compounds in their latter developmental stages are occupied by one to six extended families whose males, except for a few strangers, sisters' sons' or daughters' sons, are agnatically related to a common ancestor to whom a collective temple is dedicated. The head of each family has his own temple. The collective temple is inherited following the rule of primogeniture.

The ancestral temple used to be a regular feature of every Igbo compound, under the custody of the family head, the eldest male. Usually located within the central hut is the *obi* which serves as the meeting place or living room, where the family head receives visitors and performs his ritual functions as head of the family. This locale serves also as the centre of communion for the agnatic unit where conflicts are resolved and other matters relating to the unit are discussed under the protective watch of a common ancestor. To this end, groups of compounds having a shared ancestor form patrilineages of various depths and span, sometimes according to genealogical depth relative to the primogenitor.

In his study of the Igbo kinship structure, Ardener (1954) begins by analysing the two most frequently used kinship terms among the Igbo: *nwannem* (literally, "child of my mother") and *nwannam* (literally, "child of my father"). In a strict application, these words refer to siblings of the same mother and siblings of the same father, respectively. But the loose application of the terms is more or less the norm than an exception in the everyday language use of the Igbo. Thus, Ardener (1954) avers that the loose application of kinship terms could sometimes go so far as connecting individuals who do not share more than a most shadowy putative ancestor, who may address each other as *nwanne*, especially

on such occasions when an emphasis on kinship is deemed beneficial to the interest of the parties involved. This is one of the commonest indications of the predominance of classificatory kinship terminology in Igbo kinship system. In fact, Igbo kinship, generationally defined, differentiates certain collaterals terminologically. Consider the following examples: *nna* – father, *nne* – mother, *nwunye* – wife, *ada* and *ọkpara* – eldest daughter and eldest son, in contradistinction to *nwa nwoke* and *nwa nwanyi* – son and daughter (with gender distinction), *nna-ochie* – mother's brother, *nwadiani* – sister's son, *ogo* – in-law. Other relations are expressed by a combination of these collateral terms and help to indicate differences in generational or patrilineal and matrilineal differences (Onwuejeogwu 1980: 53).

The foregoing could be concretised as follows: in his own family, Ego calls his father *nna*, he calls his mother *nne*, and his brothers and sisters collectively, *ụmụnnem* (that means, "children of my mother"). When he wants to distinguish between the sexes, he calls his brother *nwannem nwoke* (my mother's male child) and his sister *nwannem nwanyi* (my mother's female child). He calls his paternal grandfather *nnanna* (father's father) and his paternal grandmother *nnenna* (father's mother). His great grandfather he calls *nna ochie* (old father) just as he calls his great grandmother *nne ochie* (old mother). There are no specific kin terms for FB or FZ except to describe them as such. And because it is generally considered disrespectful of Ego to call his elders by their proper names, he calls them either *nne* (mother) or *nna* (father), if they are older – the same terms he would use for his parents, or by their proper names if they are contemporaries or younger. If Ego belongs to a polygynous family or in the case of a remarriage (stepmother), he calls each of his father's wives, apart from his mother, *nwunye nnam* (wife of my father), although as a mark of endearment it would be acceptable to call her *nne* (mother). He calls his half sibling *nwanna* (father's child), irrespective of age or sex. To distinguish the sexes, he calls his half-sister *nwannam nwanyi*, and his half-brother *nwannam nwoke*. However, in practice, especially where half-siblings live together, it is usual to address themselves simply as brothers and sisters (*nwanne*). It is only in formal identifications – especially to a stranger – that they make this clear distinction of being half-siblings.

When Ego marries and establishes his own family, he calls his wife *nwunye* (or *ndinyom*, for plural). Ego calls his own child *nwa* (in plural, *ụmụ*– "children"). To distinguish between his male child and female child, he calls them *nwa nwoke*

and *nwa nwanyi*, respectively. The first male child is referred to as *ọkpara*, while the first female child is *ada*; the last child being referred to as *ọdụdụ nwa* (literally, the "tail child"): a pet name which expresses the affection and tenderness extended to the last born by all members of the family irrespective of gender affiliations. Close to the family unit is the lineage which is studied in detail in the next sub-section.

2.3.2 The Lineage (*Ụmụnna*)

There is no universally accepted kinship terminology in the Igbo language despite an ongoing effort to develop a system of "central Igbo" language for formal speech and writing. One important reason for this is that although the basic principles of kinship organisation are similar, the kinship terminology reflects the extreme degree of dialectical variation on the one hand, and the local variation of details of kinship organisation among different cultural areas of Igboland, on the other (Ardener 1954). The central Igbo project has succeeded in outlining the general spoken and written forms of the language, but this is yet to be extended to the area of kinship terminology. In effect, what appears to be terminological inconsistencies in ethnographic works on Igbo kinship are occasioned by such variations in regional dialects. In this work, we would subsequently base our discussion, for the purpose of orientation, on the work of Aligwekwe (2008) who highlights kinship terminologies that are in accord with the current central Igbo language. Outside these, but also for purposes of convenience and consistency, we would adopt the prevalent terminology of the Nsukka dialect in the northern region of Igboland.

As already indicated, there are different types or segments of lineages. The minimal, major, and maximal lineages are headed by the elders and the titled men of the component agnatic units. They meet at the house of the oldest man, the *Onyishi* or *Ọkpara*, where the temple of the founding ancestor is located. The basic structure of kinship is the family which could be monogynous or polygynous, although the extended family system makes it more appropriate to speak traditionally of a homestead rather than a "nuclear" family as such. Because the Igbo are overwhelmingly patrilineal and patrilocal, the family is normally defined along the agnatic lines, but with some degree of maternal affiliation. Kin structure is therefore extended, although most related families live together within a

proximate boundary, with the eldest male being recognised as the *pater familias,* the *Ọkpara* or *Onyishi*.

A typical Igbo village is organised based on lineage segments. Based on the assumption that the village is the maximal lineage group tracing agnatic descent from a single ancestor that comprises major lineage group, each of these lineage groups is subdivided into minor lineage groups, and the subdivision continues up to the level of the extended family. With recourse to this, the minimal lineage is the smallest segment of political significance, generally four to five generations from the living elders. It is also a land holding unit as well as a place of primary identification where membership is defined by birth, adoption, or long-term residence. Mostly because marriage is virilocal, women strongly identify with their husbands, especially the elderly ones. Within a given community, the normal answer to the question, "Where do you hail from?" would be to mention the name of one's minimal lineage. Such names usually begin with *Ụmụ*… (children of), indicating the close bond that exists among its members. This minimal lineage is usually referred to as *Ụmụnna*.

Every Igbo person belongs to an *Ụmụnna* – that is, the agnatic lineage of the person's father in most cases[9] – and is at the same time affiliated to at least three other *Ụmụnna* namely: the mother's patrilineage, the father's mother's patrilineage, and the patrilineage of the mother's mother'. For a married person, there is a fourth affiliation – to the *Ụmụnna* of the spouse. These four agnatic units wield direct influences on the daily life of an Igbo according to their respective degrees of proximity to Ego. But in general, they constitute altogether the most important and basic network of social support and reciprocal kinship obligations for every Igbo person. In what follows, an attempt would be made to analyse each of these patrilineages in relation to its modality of affiliation to Ego.

2.3.2.1 Ego's Patrilineage

Ego calls his own patrilineage *Ụmụnna* (literally, "children of the Father"), which is the same as his father's in a patrilineal society. It is made up of families belonging to an agnatic line of descent.

[9] We shall limit our discussion to the patrilineal system. It has already been indicated that a few Igbo cultural areas are matrilineal.

2.3.2.2 The Patrilineage of Ego's Wife

In the patrilineage of the wife of Ego, he describes the father of his wife as *nna nwunye* (wife's father) and the mother of his wife as *nne nwunye* (wife's mother). But while addressing them directly, it would be more appropriate in most places to say *nna anyi* (our father) and *nne anyi* (our mother), respectively, as a mark of courtesy. This way, Ego places himself at par with his spouse in relation to his in-laws. To address his wife's siblings or any member of the entire patrilineage of the wife, he uses the reciprocal classificatory term ọ*gọ* – and would add the adjective -*nwoke* or -*nwanyi* to distinguish between the male and female sexes. He may call his wife's mother's father and his wife's mother's mother *oke* ọ*gọ* (the great or big in-law) as a mark of respect. However, it is more common to use the general classificatory term ọ*gọ* without any qualification to refer to one's affine.

2.3.2.3 The Patrilineage of Ego's Mother

Ego calls his mother's patrilineage *ala nne* (mother's land). He calls his mother's great grandfather *nna ochie*, just as his maternal great grandmother is called *nne ochie*. He calls his maternal grandfather *nnanne* (mother's father) and his maternal grandmother *nnenne* (mother's mother). Ego uses equivalent terms for his parents and his parent's direct siblings. Thus, MB = F and MZ = M. Ego is called *nwa-nwa* (child's child) by members of his mother's patrilineage and he enjoys great privileges of affection and tenderness from members of this patrilineage. *Alanne* is Ego's safest place of refuge at any point of his lifetime, should crisis or danger strike in his father's patrilineage. There is an Igbo saying to the effect that when one is in one's *alanne* (her mother's patrilineage), one may conduct oneself as one pleases. As Uchendu (1964: 48) remarks: "The Igbo maintain that the maternal bond is more solidary and the sanctions of kinship and kithship more binding in it than in the paternal segment".

2.3.2.4 The Patrilineage of Ego's Paternal Grandmother

As already mentioned, Ego calls his paternal great grandparents *nna ochie* (ancient father) and *nne ochie* (ancient mother) for great grandmother and great grandfather, respectively. Ego has no specific terms for the rest of the members of this patrilineage, perhaps because there is hardly any real closeness between them and Ego in a patrilineal society. Where the need arises, Ego may conveniently refer to them with the general term *ụmụnne* (plural) or *nwanne* (singular);

and this same pattern is replicated in the patrilineage of the paternal grandmother of Ego.

From the foregoing, one can already note that the description becomes increasingly vague and generalised as the distance between Ego and the patrilineage continually expands. One of the reasons for this may probably be because in practical life, it is a rare occurrence in the Igbo context for Ego to experience the living generation of his great-grandparents and beyond. More so, there was greater clarity and precision at the level of Ego's exogamic unit after which the distinctions disappear progressively. The clearest example would be the patrilineage of the wife of Ego especially in lieu of the fact that only Ego's wife, his father-in-law and his mother-in-law have specific terms. Apart from these, every other person within the patrilineage of Ego's wife is described by the classificatory reciprocal term *ọgọ*.

2.3.2.5 Further Explanations

One of the major reasons for this lack of clarity at distant levels of kinship could be the diminishing presence of the law of exogamy. Basically, Ego may marry any woman of his choice from his wife's patrilineage. Therefore, there is no pressure on him to particularly identify each member of the lineage. In fact, the Igbo tradition even allows Ego to marry two sisters when it becomes needful (though not without performing some rituals of purification). This scenario stands in sharp contrast to the situation within Ego's patrilineage. Because of the law of exogamy, the mode of relationship between Ego and all other levels of kinship within his patrilineage is adequately set out and clearly defined. The clarity here is to remind Ego that he is forbidden from entering into any conjugal relationship with the members of this lineage, irrespective of how distant their blood relationship may be. Be that as it may, another way of explaining the mutual generalisation of kinship terms between Ego and his affine would be to consider the Igbo concept of marriage. In Igboland, marriage is never an exclusive affair between the marrying partners. Therefore, Ego and his prospective wife are only but a major part of an intricate system of marriage process, along with their extended families. In Igboland, the traditional definition of marriage is that of a union of two lineages – Ego's patrilineage and that of his wife. The rituals and prestations of marriage attest eloquently to this fact as we shall observe later. As such, marriage places Ego and his patrilineage in a relationship of debt to his affines who assume a cosmological position equivalent to the ancestors in generational transcendence.

Hence the term *ọgọ* refers at the same time to the living, dead and unborn members of the affinal group.

It is interesting to observe, at this juncture, the reoccurrence of terms like *nne* and *nna*, either as an independent word or as affixes to another term. These variously remind Ego of his obligations to each personage in those categories – more especially, respect and financial support. Regarding his wife's parents, for example, Ego is expected to identify with their welfare especially by helping in farm work directly or indirectly. If he is not able to directly assist by working on the farm himself, he may pay a commission to labourers who would do it on his behalf. The parents-in-law therefore enjoy a special relationship of respect and loyalty from Ego. The term *ochie* (ancient), which appears in the designation of the spouse's great grandparents and beyond, indicates the reverence due to them because of their age in relation to Ego. They are also usually much aged in fact and so are quite close to the ancestors in status.

The patrilineage of the father of Ego which, in other words, is Ego's own patrilineage is the most important to him because of all the lineages, it plays the greatest role in his life. Ego is bound to its members by the traditional laws of descent, exogamy and patrilocality. His identity as a social person therefore derives from this lineage, for he is thereby grafted to the original ancestor as a result of which he becomes a brother or son to other members of the lineage depending on their age in relation to Ego.

Furthermore, it is important to note that this form of social organisation is similar at all levels, although there is a diminishing order of intensity or earnestness as the relationship extends outwards from the basic level of the family unit. As a result, each segment may, at any level, act as a corporate unit depending on the social situation. The main distinctive factor between the different segments is the reference to an original common ancestor, which on another hand may act as the linking factor between one segment and another, even if mythically. The standard pattern would be that lineage segments trace their descent from the sons of the (different) wives of a founding ancestor. Therefore, one could readily surmise that the internal structure of the lineage is modelled on that of the extended family, and that like all descent systems, lineage ties endure through lifetime and cannot elapse because it is permanent. To this end, one cannot also renounce his lineage under any condition whatsoever, although one may be banished as punishment for grievous offences like abominations. Another important feature of

the lineage system is its close association with the cult of the ancestor. The hierarchical organisation of the lineage structure is based on the hierarchy of ancestral shrines under the custody of the respective lineage heads which is based on the original genealogy of the lineage. Above all, each lineage is usually localised in a definite physical territory, although some of her members may eventually live outside its original territory. Nevertheless, the kinship bond is regularly maintained through an intricate system of social exchange and reciprocity.

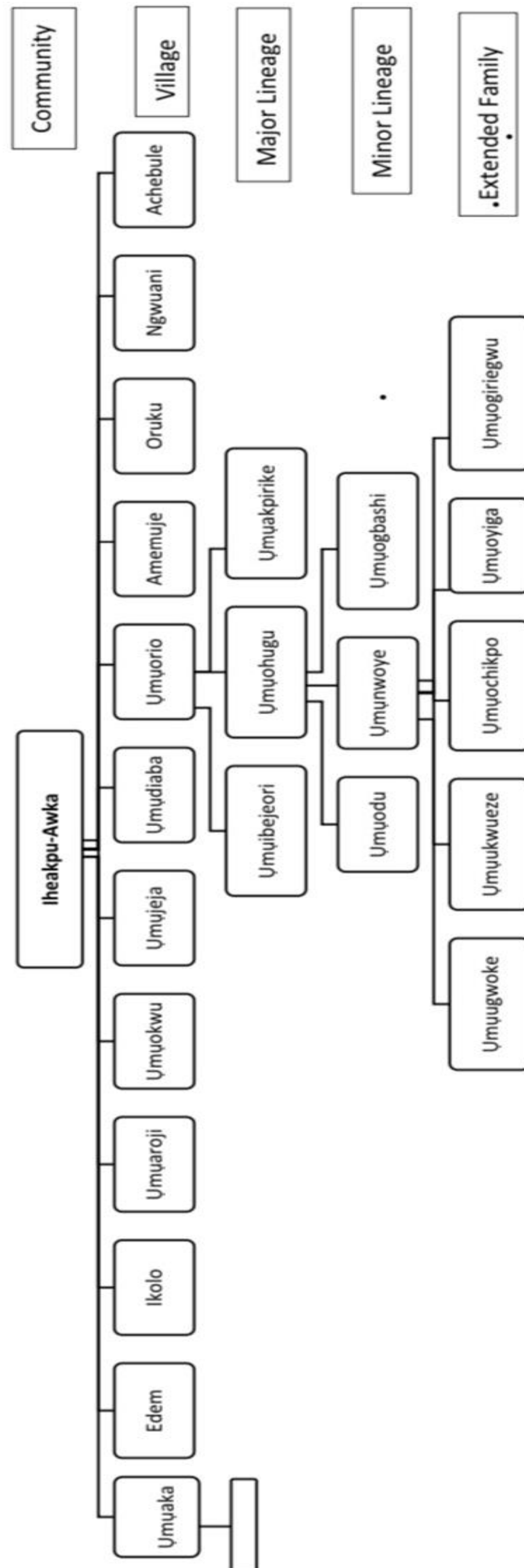

Fig. 2.1 A model Igbo community, Iheakpu-Awka, showing the lineage segmentations

2.3.3 The Community: Iheakpu-Awka Model as a Case Study

At this juncture, this study would like to expatiate upon the prior discussions made about traditional Igbo social organisations using Iheakpu-Awka town in the Nsukka area of Igboland, a community comprising of twelve villages, as a typical example. This town which has an interesting oral history explains the logic behind the social organisational patterns in Igboland. The founder of the town (the original ancestor), Okara Obara, who had two sons, is said to have migrated with his household from Awka town near the Igbo heartland, moving up north until he eventually settled in the present location at the northern outskirts of Nsukka region. His first son Ngwu had four sons who eventually founded four villages that made up the Ngwu clan namely: Ụmụorio, Oruku, Ụmụdiaba and Amemuje; while his second son, Mkpakode had six sons namely: Ikolo, Ụmụaroji, Edem, Ụmụaka, Ụmụokwu and Ụmụjeja that eventually comprised Ezzi, the second clan. On arrival, these clans met a pre-existing group, Ngwuani village (clan) and were later joined by yet another migrant group, Achebule, which is claimed to originate from a neighbouring town, Ibagwa-Aka. The latter is by this token considered the youngest of the villages and is therefore saddled with military and similarly youthful functions, although they may never perform any leadership or ritual functions at the community level.

The above oral history already encapsulates the social structure of Iheakpu-Awka town and the logic of the social relationship among the federating villages that is derived from their cosmological outlook. The autochthonous village, Ngwuani, is considered to represent the owner of the land and by this token also, the custodian of the earth goddess. Conversely, the village that is considered the youngest immigrant group, Achebule, is responsible for youthful functions as either provosts or errand officers of the town council. More so, Ụmụorio is considered the eldest of the original immigrant group of villages and as such is assigned the political leadership of the federation. The remaining villages know their respective positions in the town hierarchy which of course corresponds to the position of their founding ancestors in the original family. Resultantly, each village in this model is a sort of maximal lineage that is further subdivided into major and minor lineage groups (or extended families).

In the above example, Ụmụorio village is subdivided into three major lineages; the explanation being that the original ancestor Ụmụorio bore three sons –

Ibejeori, Ohugu and Akpirike – whose children now constitute each of the respective major lineage groups – hence the affix *Ụmụ…* meaning, "Children of…". Also, each of the three sons bore male descendants who established the minor lineage groups. Ohugu had three sons through whom three minor lineage groups came to be. One of them, Nwoye gave birth to five sons who in turn became ancestral father to five minimal lineage groups that constitute the Ụmụnwoye minor lineage group, respectively. Remarkably, out of the twelve villages that make up Iheakpu-Awka town, only one village is endogamous; and each of the eleven others have remained exogamous up until the present day. Fig. 1 above is a graphic illustration of this model of social organisation, which is typical of Igbo society.

2.4 Reciprocity and Kinship Obligations

Igbo kinship serves the purpose of building and sustaining various relationships through a complex system of reciprocity. Kin relationship creates and is sustained by reciprocity and mutual obligations through which the close bonds that characterise kinship relationships are maintained or improved. In traditional societies, it functions also as the foundation of social institutions, morality, socialisation, and value judgement. Kinship relationship is therefore the anvil on which the Igbo social personality and worldview are shaped and refined. Writing on the reciprocal obligation of kinship, Smith (2001: 350-351) posits specifically of the Igbo that these:

> People use ideas of lineal descent and kinship to create and maintain relationships of duty and obligation that structure morality and behaviour in powerful ways. In the village setting, children grow up with a wide range of classificatory mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. Throughout the life course, individuals benefit from the help of their lineage mates. Similarly, every person is expected to assist members of his/her patrilineage (*Ụmụnna*). At some points in the life course, such as at marriage ceremonies and at burials, these expectations and obligations are codified through specific customs… More often, expectations are more generalized, but individuals regularly feel pressured to help their people.

However, the reciprocal obligations of kinship are not limited to the patrilineage; but rather extends beyond it to include one's maternal kin (*ụmụnne*), the in-laws

(*ndi ọgọ*), in fact all the patrilineages previously mentioned that make up Ego's closest kinship network, in addition to a coterie of other alliances and supporters created by ties of residence and similar associations (Uchendu 1965). Reciprocal obligations may range from mutual assistances in the training of children to support in farming or trading and to general expectations of those who accumulate wealth who are usually obliged to redistribute some of it, as occasions may demand, in exchange for social recognition and prestige. The latter constitutes the foundation of the institution of title-taking that is a universal feature of Igbo societies. Usually, the process of acquiring a traditional title, which is a veritable index of individual success and achievement, is long and tedious leading through many elaborate stations of festivities and other forms of gift-exchange through which wealth is redistributed across board. Fundamentally, it starts from the extended family and spans through the *ụmụnna* or patrilineage, and eventually extends to the village and/or town level, depending on the nature and rank of the title to which one aspires towards.

Generally, the Igbo are obliged both affectively and morally to their extended families, lineage groups and their affines. The position of the affines in the Igbo kinship structure is one of privilege and respect. There is a popular Igbo proverb to the effect that every married man has three homes namely, *ụmụnna* (his patrilineage), *ụmụnne* (his mother's patrilineage) and *Ndi ọgọ* (affines). In this context, the concept of *Ndi ọgọ* extends beyond the extended family of the in-laws to their lineage as well. Of course, Igbo marriage rituals dramatize this point very clearly – that marriage is meant to forge an alliance between the lineage groups of the marrying couple and not just their immediate families. More so, there are elaborate affinal obligations, especially relating to birth and mortuary rituals; of all these however, the relationship to the maternal lineage is usually special as it is normally considered a place of refuge and tender care; especially when one faces some trying moments in one's patrilineage or elsewhere. In Achebe's (1959) *Things Fall Apart*, when the protagonist Okonkwo is banished as a result of homicide, he takes refuge together with his family in his mother's lineage in Mbaino where they settle down temporarily until the seven-year period of his banishment elapses. At Mbaino, he and his family enjoy the hospitality and goodwill of his mother's kinsmen and are able to thrive both socially and economically throughout this period.

Furthermore, the Igbo tradition informally prescribes certain mutual obligations and responsibilities among kin relationships, usually expressed in certain traditions that create expectations in social interactions. One of such obligations is hospitality in lieu of which Dike (1985: 166) asserts that "there is some isomorphic relationship between hospitality norm and primary or kinship relationships, and that this relationship generates some normative obligations and responsibilities which nurture hospitality". For the Igbo therefore, hospitality comprises one of the most complex, yet most basic of social values. It is expressed in words and actions and through material or immaterial provisions. As such, a hospitable person is regarded as having "a good heart": one which is a coveted social value among the Igbos. In line with the above assertion, Uchendu (1965: 71) buttresses that:

> The Igbo are nothing if not hospitable. To them, hospitality is a major social obligation. Inability to meet it is a humiliating experience for the Igbo. The general complaint of farmers after the planting season concerns the scarcity of yams with which to feed their guests. Their own need for yams, even when most pressing, is seldom discussed… But unwillingness to meet the demands of hospitality is another matter: it leads to loss of prestige. The inhospitable person is called many names (none complimentary) … In Igbo estimation, he is an unsocialized "person with a dirty heart".

To this effect, in the context of the Igbo tradition, hospitality is more of an attitude than it is an action. Not only does it mirror other virtues such as openness of heart, generosity, fairness, selflessness, and love but it could also be expressed in many ways. The kolanut is ultimately the paramount symbol of Igbo traditional hospitality and an unhospitable person is usually considered a mean person. Although it looks simple from the material perspective, among the Igbo, kolanut breaking and sharing is a highly priced, ritually charged process which epitomises communion and hospitality. Hence, in every gathering, whether formal or private, and irrespective of the number of participants, the kolanut ritual is performed before any of the proceedings commences. To this end, to not offer one's guest a kolanut would be tantamount to rejection or, to say the least, the denigration of that guest and whatever message he might have brought.

The ritual of breaking the kolanut comprises of prayers, speeches, and other protocols. The manner of breaking the kolanut depends on the number of kolanut

presented. When only one kolanut is offered, it is broken into two halves. One half is then further broken into lobes and into smaller pieces depending on the number of people present before it is shared among them, while the remaining half is given to the guest as a take-home gift. With more than one kolanut presented, one of them is broken into component lobes or pieces and shared to the assembly. From the rest, a full lobe or more may be given to each guest as a take-home gift. This gesture is usually expressed in a popular anecdote – *ọji ruo ụlọ, o kwuo onye wara ya* (On reaching home, the kolanut announces who has offered it). If the broken kolanut has five, seven or any odd number, the man who broke it is entitled to the smallest lobe which he takes before returning the rest to the host for prayer and sharing. The host picks the kola lobe bearing the plumule and prays, invoking the ancestors to partake of the kolanut and to provide good health, long life and prosperity. He also articulates the main purpose of the gathering in a nutshell.

After the prayers over the kolanut are made, the broken pieces or lobes are then shared to the assembled adults in the order of seniority of age while taking into cognisance the kinship configuration of the commensal group, which of course, depends on the number of people gathered. A piece is first thrown onto the ancestral shrine or simply to the earth outside the house (representing the Earth Goddess) with an invocation of the ancestors to come and eat. Thereafter, the person who led the prayers eats his own piece and others follow suit. By the way, children are not allowed to partake in the kolanut ritual. Whereas women may eat kolanut, they may not do so in the main house (*obi*) with the guests, rather they are to share theirs separately at the women's quarters unless they are part of the formal assembly. Usually, the host is expected to eat first as a demonstration that the kolanut has not been poisoned. In sum, the kolanut ritual is therefore a communion with the ancestors and a mutual declaration of goodwill among the assembled persons.

Furthermore, it follows that whoever fails in this act of hospitality is seen as lacking in goodwill. He is mean, and invariably possesses a "dirty heart" (*ajọ obi*). The direct contrast to a dirty heart is a good heart (*obi ọma)* which is not only a virtue to be acquired, but one that disposes one to strive for other traditional values that are held in high esteem by the Igbo. This spirit of hospitality derives from the principle of reciprocity which includes an unconditional readiness to share both material and non-material things such as foodstuff, ideas,

clothes, visits in times of joy and grief, and so on. These simple gestures are usually reciprocated in other ways. For instance, it indicates a high level of hospitality when the hosts' neighbours come around to greet or welcome his visitors. While coming to exchange greetings with a neighbour's guest(s), they usually bring along some gifts in the form of essentially symbolic elements which they hand over to the host as their contributions to hosting the guest(s). Hence, hospitality fosters a sense of community and mutual dependence.

Living true to the Igbo tradition also demands being at home with the institutions and the operative organigram of socio-political administration of the community. In his study on the history of Nigeria, Hatch (1971) was obviously fascinated by the structure of Igbo kinship, which he described as "interlocking allegiances". Although the Igbo could not boast of an extensive network of large recognisable towns or cities like the ancient empires in Yorubaland or the Sultanates of the Hausa in the past, their villages frequently provided cohesive links among various kin groups; links that extended beyond village boundaries. Writing on the Igbo kinship system, Ekong (1986: 201) notes that the extensive application of Igbo kinship terminology derives from the extensive conceptualisation of a "close" kin in Igbo traditional worldview. Thus, kinsmen, however distant, owe themselves a mutual affection and assistance; especially when they find themselves outside the home territory where they would be expected to behave like siblings from the same parents. Needless to say, this general pattern of extendedness is considered as a direct reflection of the extensive categorisation of members in the Igbo kinship system.

Subsequently, the intensity of kinship obligation may also vary in accordance with place and context. As a general observation, it seems that the extent of application of kinship widens in direct proportion to distance to the lineage group. Thus, when at home in the community, the closer kinship relationships tend to be more emphasised – family, lineage, village, and so on – with diminishing intensity to extended kin. But once outside one's hometown, the pattern of emphasis changes: every townsman becomes one's closest kin even if they had never met each other before they left their hometown. This feeling grows even stronger as one moves outside the Igbo cultural area: outside Igboland, the Igbo would normally refer to any Igbo person he happens to meet as *nwanne* – "brother" or "sister" – in this case, in a putative sense. And if per chance, they hail from the same cultural area, then they would likely relate to themselves as "real" brothers

and sisters. It is a fact that outside Igboland, the sense of kinship among the Igbo is very strong. As a result, migrant Igbos are known for their penchant to sticking together and relating very closely. It is this same cultural logic that led to the uniquely Igbo tradition of creating town (welfare) unions in any city where they make up a sizeable number. Apart from the immediate mutual assistance, like finding a living apartment or job and exchange of vital information, these "diaspora" unions provide them a common platform that helps them fulfil their collective kinship obligations to the native land by raising funds for community development projects in different parts of Igboland. Therefore, this embodies an ancestral demand where one is obliged to contribute to the overall welfare of one's lineage and community in order to merit the protection and benevolence of one's ancestors.

However, this uniquely Igbo attitude of bonding together in the "diaspora" can sometimes be problematic. It is oftentimes a reason for suspicion and misunderstanding of the Igbo by their non-Igbo neighbours. But the major problem is indeed a misunderstanding of the internal logic of the Igbo culture. While it demands the sustenance and maintenance of reciprocal kinship relationships, the Igbo culture also values other forms of friendships. There are many traditional sayings to buttress this point. Examples are: *ezi ọyi ka ajọ nwanne* – a good friend is better than bad sibling; or *nwanne di na mba* – siblingship exists even in a foreign land. These indicate that for the Igbo, a true friend could assume the position of a sibling. As such, the fundamental deduction to be made so far is that kinship is the cultural framework through which the Igbo evaluate social relationships. The stereotypic characterisation of the Igbo as "excessively clannish" or "tribalistic" as done in many urban cities across Nigeria, nay Africa (Ekong 1986: 201) should rather be a challenge to undertake more studies in Igbo thought and culture to avoid being unnecessarily judgemental of them. Interestingly, in recent times, some scholars have alluded to a connection between the overlapping nature of the reciprocal obligations of kinship and the dynamics of "patron-clientism", which is considered an acronym for corruption (Berry 1985, Bledsoe 1980, Smith 2001). Such stereotypes further expose the inherent danger in using Western lens to evaluate African culture, as the result would almost always be defective. In any case, whatever moral implications that could be drawn from the Igbo kinship system fall outside the scope of the present study. The point that

has been made is that the radius of kinship relationships among the Igbo is quite extensive and elastic.

2.5 Social Organisation of the *Ụmụnna*

It has been repeatedly mentioned above that the *Ụmụnna* comprises several agnatic units and is the smallest unit of the Igbo traditional social organisation next to the family unit. The heads of the component agnatic units under the leadership of the eldest male (*Ọkpara* or *Onyishi*) form the council of elders – the highest decision-making body of the patrilineage. The *Onyishi* represents his *Ụmụnna* in inter-lineage functions like community meetings. But since the *Onyishi* is often a very old person, coupled with some ritual restrictions accruing to his office, he appoints official delegates that represent him in major functions both within and outside his lineage territory. In the Nsukka region of northern Igboland, the representative of the *Onyishi* is often referred to as *Asogwa* and the qualities usually expected of him include honesty, cleverness, oratory prowess and physical agility, which somewhat are traditional qualities of the immigrant. This is further supported by the standing rule that the *Asogwa* must not be selected from the *Onyishi's* family. Details on this will further be expounded in the section on dual sovereignty.

Furthermore, the close attachment of the Igbo to the *Ụmụnna* group is caused and sustained by several factors; especially considering that the *Ụmụnna* holds a central place in the socialisation process of the Igbo person. After the birth of a child, the umbilical cord is buried somewhere within the family compound and an economic tree is usually planted on the spot to mark it out. This rite has a deep cosmological importance for the Igbo as it creates a bond between the newborn child and the *Ụmụnna* through the Earth Goddess who is greatly revered in Igboland. Moreover, the burial of the umbilical cord confers on the child the status of an autochthon. For the same reason, the traditionally correct place for the burial of deceased Igbo persons is in their homestead since every deceased member of an *Ụmụnna* is expected to be interred among his or her ancestors. Even women who are traditionally obliged to leave their patrilineage through marriage are still expected to be brought back after death to be interred in their original patrilineage, although by marriage they belong officially to the patrilineage of their husband with full rights and obligations. Where this is not possible, there are ritual provisions for organising a phantom burial in her paternal home.

This involves, in most places, the transportation of a log of banana tree, in procession, to the grave dug in her father's compound where some other rituals would also be performed.

By and large, the Igbo consider it a taboo to bury people outside their *ụmụnna* because this would mark their eternal separation from the ancestor. Worse still is the fact that one buried outside his *ụmụnna* would never become an ancestor which, of course, is the ultimate dream of every traditional Igbo person. With regard to this, only grave reasons may warrant otherwise; for instance, when one commits a taboo and dies before one could carry out the requisite ritual cleansing, or when one commits suicide, one is not buried within the *ụmụnna* for it would not be considered a good death. The corpse in such cases is taken to an evil forest to be buried, with the *Ụmụnna* having to be cleansed afterwards since this kind of death is usually considered a pollution of the entire *Ụmụnna*. However, if, for some justifiable reasons, a married woman who died in her husband's *Ụmụnna* was not returned to her patrilineage for interment, the *Ụmụnna* of the deceased's husband would be asked to pay some amount of money to her natal *Ụmụnna* for the performance of prescribed rituals that would reunite the spirit of the deceased to her ancestors. Such a gift exchange then acts as a proximate return gift to the bride's *Ụmụnna*. The foregoing underscores, therefore, that nothing can cut a living Igbo entirely off from the *Ụmụnna* – neither marriage nor migration.

More so, the women of the patrilineage constitute major stakeholders in the administration of their *Ụmụnna*. Although marriage takes a daughter out of her original *Ụmụnna*, she remains an important and active member of the patrilineage. Thus, daughters who are married out of the family play active roles in the running of their natal homes, and usually there are annual feasts to celebrate their yearly return with their children. In the Nsukka region, this is referred to as the *Ọnwa Asaa* (feast of the seventh month) and is usually celebrated at the peak of the rainy season sometime between July and August. Apart from this annual feast and other private visits, there is an official traditional status provided for these women at the lineage level. Through a women's forum known as *Ụmụada* (daughters' council), women who are married out to other lineages constitute an important pressure group in their original *Ụmụnna*. They may intervene to broker peace among warring parties within the *Ụmụnna*, demand for justice where it seems to have been trampled upon, or check the excesses of *Ndinyom* – that is,

women married into their *Ụmụnna* – and so on. In the event of a recurrent misfortune like so many deaths within a short period of time, they may demand an immediate ritual cleansing of the land from the menfolk. Therefore, although these married daughters live and belong to their husband's *Ụmụnna*, they are usually active participants in the life of their natal patrilineage through an attendance to important feasts, meetings and so on. More importantly, they contribute immensely to the peace and stability of their original *Ụmụnna*. On the other hand, they also aid in strengthening the kinship bond and reciprocity between their agnates and cognates; especially considering that they invite their agnates to such ceremonies like a child's naming ceremony (*Igụ-aha*) as well as other important feasts. This way, their children who are born into different lineages become friends and thereby begin as well to regard themselves as kin.

Still on the same path of investigation, the importance of the *Ụmụnna* to the menfolk in a patrilineal descent system of the Igbo cannot be overemphasised; as the *Ụmụnna* is said to be the basis of their social identity and existence, and by birth a male child becomes grafted into this agnatic chain. As he grows up, he is socialised into this group by the help of the entire *Ụmụnna*. For the Igbos, the upbringing of a child is not an exclusive duty of parents only rather it is a duty of all adult members of society, especially the child's patrilineage. In the same way, they share in the child's successes and failures throughout his lifetime. When he achieves success, the lineage takes credit for his success; and when he fails, they also share in the shame. This could be a great consolation and strength in times of adversity. But sometimes it could also place a big responsibility on one's shoulder with enormous pressure to succeed at all costs because of the high expectations from the kin group. As such, the Igbo place a great value on group identity and collective achievement.

The explanations of the kinship terms above are meant to provide some clues to the enormous network of relationships which Ego, as previously mentioned, is born and socialised into in Igboland. In lieu of this, each of the personages mentioned contribute in one way or the other to the upbringing of Ego and to the processes of his socialisation and growth into adulthood. As an adult, he takes up the same responsibility towards the younger members of society, and in the nuclear family, such assumption of responsibility begins relatively earlier especially if Ego is the first male child (*ọkpara*): one who is expected to lead the way for his younger ones in all respects. Additionally, he serves as a model to them –

especially in the acquisition of socially approved values and habits. And as he grows into adulthood, the scope of his responsibility widens in direct proportion to the radius of his kinship obligations. Thus, the more he becomes financially successful, the more the social expectations of him among his kin group. Even when he relocates beyond the limits of the physical boundary of his patrilineage, he is obliged to sustain the bond within the kinship network and thus fulfil his obligations. As regards this, he cannot do otherwise because his social personality is either improved or vitiated to the extent that his performance is validated by his fulfilment of kinship obligations. In other words, his life is inexorably tied to the bond of kinship – for better and for worse. Consequently, to sever this bond would amount to his social death. For this reason, the Igbo term for a good person – *ezigbo mmadu* – is descriptive of one who possesses a good character, one who pays attention to the demands of tradition (*omenala*). Necessarily, this involves a fulfilment of one's kinship obligations as well as a close and regular identification with one's *Ụmụnna* regardless of wherever one might be. Largely, this implies a regular attendance of the meetings of the *Ụmụnna* if he is a male adult residing within or close to the village, or by payment of regular dues and other financial commitments to the *Ụmụnna* if he lives "abroad". This way, he keeps in touch with and secures the benediction of his ancestors through whom his life-force is maintained.

In summary, this chapter has attempted to lay the foundation for our enquiry by presenting the Igbo society as a cultural group within a comity of nations in the broader Nigerian state. As a distinct cultural group, she has her unique indices of identification like language, culture, and definite physical territory. But more important to the present context is the social structure of the Igbo society and her patterns of social organisation which are primarily based on kinship and relationships of mutual reciprocity. In the next session, this study will discuss the Igbo traditional worldview and its value orientations which are at the basis of the cultural logic behind social relationships. More so, the section will demonstrate the intrinsic connection between the Igbo cosmology and her social structure.

CHAPTER III
IGBO TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW AND VALUE ORIENTATION

The term, worldview, more technically expressed in scholarly works as *Weltanschauung,* its German original, is a philosophical concept that was first employed by Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) and later popularised by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831). It basically refers to the fundamental cognitive orientation of a people, their general outlook and attitudes to life and the world that is peculiar to them. Hence, the Igbo traditional worldview refers to the traditional framework of ideas and beliefs through which the Igbo society interacts with and interprets cosmic events and the world. Such a general outlook is born out of long years of interaction with a specific physical and social environment, and is reflected in language, customs, religion, rituals, etc. Taking a cue from Nwala's (2010: 41) definition, worldview can be described as "the practical philosophies of life" of a people. It includes the overall picture they have in common about reality: the universe, life and existence; their attitude to life and death and the answers they provide attitudinally to the basic questions of human existence as such. What is life? What things are worth striving for? What is the place of man in the overall scheme of things? These are some of the questions whose default answers constitute a people's *Weltanschauung*. In other words, worldview refers to the fundamental principles and values that underlie a people's perception of the world, as well as the way and manner they express it in their reasoning and the quotidian existential choices they make. Defining worldview in the context of African philosophy, Mbiti (1999: 2) summarises it as "the understanding, attitude of mind, logic, perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life". It is therefore in this context that one would speak of an Igbo worldview.

Closely associated with worldview is value orientation which is shaped by or is rather a practical expression of worldview in daily living. However, Dumont (1977, 1986) would argue that values as such are rarely expressed explicitly, since for those who apply them, they seem to be so fundamental and obvious that they constitute 'unstated views'. Values thus belong to a category of knowledge usually called 'common sense'. Dumont further insists that values make up what he has called the basic categories or the distinctive operative principles of society – a sort

of grid of consciousness in the human community. To this end, values constitute the implicit coordinates of common thought in any society. Societal values belong to the metaphysical domain of human cognition that is formed from the earliest period of socialisation. Therefore, values constitute implicit knowledge or common-sense structures. Fundamentally, they are like core religious beliefs which are often deeply rooted, and in this regard are only rarely reflected by individuals, which would usually surface in moments of crises of faith. Values escape us at the very moment of their application, even if they form the bedrock of our moral judgements and are at the basis of the conceptual distinctions we make.

In the present context, however, there is the need to make a distinction between values and moral judgement; in that moral judgement is predominantly concerned with individual actions and/or inactions. But anthropology considers values essentially from the social perspective rather than from a purely individual perspective. And here lies the major contribution of anthropology to the study of values namely, the shift from the individual to the social. Dumont (2013: 290) notes that in anthropology, the concept of values "allows us to consider all sorts of cultures and the most diverse estimations of the good without imposing on them our own: we can speak of our values and their values while we could not speak of our good and their good". This points to the social and therefore cultural context of values. Values connote things that are preferred either of a specific or general nature. They may be moral, spiritual, political and economic or a social means to achieve an end.

Ultimately, there is a community dimension to this: in theory and in practice, every society has its cluster of values for which it is known (core values) and which defines it or marks it out as distinct from others. Therefore, the community dimension is decisive in this regard. According to Gyekye (1997: 39), the community "is not only a basis both for defining and articulating the values and goals shared by several individuals but alone constitutes the context, the social or cultural space, in which the actualisation of the potentials of the individual can take place, providing her the opportunity to express her individuality". It is in this sense that one may talk of Igbo traditional values. An understanding of the traditional Igbo sociocultural life tells us about the individual's peculiar environment and societal values, expectations, and conventions. Uchendu (2007: 214) specifically outlines what he calls the central values of Igbo culture that are rooted in the social structure, particularly in the extended family: "Among such

values are the importance attached to mutual dependence; to lineage continuity; to a man as a value; to life affirmation; and to a strong occupational orientation"

While in agreement with the above list of Igbo values, Njoku (2006: 28) had expressed Uchendu's "strong occupational orientation" as an inherent attitude, "the drive for individual achievement". These core values would be analysed in greater detail in a subsequent section. In the meantime, however, it would be noted that scholars seem unanimous that there exists an intrinsic connection between the worldview, social structure, and value orientation of any given society; all of them being derived from the metaphysical foundations of the human thought. Additionally, the worldview of a society shapes its social structure while its value orientations are also rooted in the social structure. Therefore, to make all these complexities a little more intelligible, it would be proper to first review the cosmological foundations of the Igbo society.

3.1 Traditional Igbo Cosmology

To zero in specifically on traditional Igbo cosmology is to focus on its default metaphysical dispositions regarding the origin, structure, and space-time relations of the universe, especially the place of man in the traditional understanding of the cosmos. The point has been made that for the traditional Igbo person, the universe is an integrated organic whole. Their perception of the cosmos is therefore a hierarchical structure of interrelated and inhabited worlds. Nwachukwu-Agbada (2008: 158) rightly observes that the Igbo reality consists of a mishmash of the physical, the spiritual and the abstract planes, all of which influence their perception of the environment. Whereas the physical plane is generally taken for granted, the Igbo pay an even greater attention to the invisible, intangible plane which comprises the spiritual and the abstract. In sum, cosmology is an effort to make the universe more intelligible, to explain how things in the universe came into being, to explicate the functions which the heavenly and earthly bodies have and how human counterparts should behave with reference to the gods, spirits and ancestors. Thus, according to Ejizu (1986: 119), the traditional Igbo cosmology is both religious and anthropocentric. It is,

> …essentially a religious cosmology which places man right at the centre. The achievement of such a coherent and functional model has been possible because of the innate ability of symbolic thought which the traditional Igbo share with the rest of the human kind. The ability to

> assign symbolic meanings is uniquely human. Animals can deal only with their immediate environment, but man can transcend his physical surroundings through the principle of symbolization. Through this innate process, the traditional Igbo is able to 'read' and gain some knowledge about the cosmos. He is equally capable of integrating the three spheres of his awareness; the preconcious (sic), the personal and the transcendental.

In every culture, a knowledge of the cosmos through the accumulated experiences of the people are communicated and expressed in myths, symbols, objects, and behaviours. These provide a network of symbolic forms uniting the social, ecological, and conceptual elements into a locally bounded cultural system that make up their cosmology. The same is equally true of the Igbo. Nwagbara (2007: 103) notes two aspects of Igbo cosmology namely: cosmology as a system of prescriptive ethics (what man ought to do and what to avoid); and cosmology as a system of action (the actual overt and covert behaviour of the Igbo). Without ignoring the former, this study's major interest would be on the latter aspect of Igbo cosmology whose central tenets will be outlined.

3.1.1 Dualism in Igbo Cosmology

Central to Igbo cosmology is the understanding of the universe as the totality of existence, which is expressed in a dualism and is usually expressed as a contrary of opposites. This cosmological mind-set is reflected in the dual social organisation as well as the dual authority (diarchy) operative in traditional Igbo society as already indicated in the previous section. Furthermore, the Igbo universe comprises two interrelated worlds or spheres – *Igwe* (heaven or sky) and *Ụwa* or *Ala* (the earth). According to Nwala (2010: 45), these two spheres are believed to be equal in extension. Apart from this, there are also two "realms" or "ontological orders of existence" – *Ala mmụọ* (the spirit world or supernatural order) and *Ala mmadụ* (the human world or natural order). More importantly he notes that:

> These expressions, 'visible', 'natural' or 'supernatural' are only approximate descriptions when used to describe the Igbo traditional cosmology. Something may appear to be unnatural to the man who does not have the intellectual and spiritual capacity to understand it; but to the diviner, it is not so. The art and wisdom of the diviner may appear

to be supernatural to the outsider, but to the diviner, his art and wisdom are natural and could be rationally and systematically explicable.

One sphere of existence*,* the *Igwe* (heaven or sky) refers to the celestial sphere or zone to which belongs celestial bodies like *anyanwụ* (the sun), *ọnwa* (the moon), *kpakpando* (stars), *urukpu* (cloud), etc. The sky is also the abode of some deities especially *Chukwu*, the Great Deity (also called *Chineke*, the deity that creates; or *Anyanwụ-Okike*, Sun-Creator). A host of other deities (e.g., *Amadiọha*, the thunder deity) and spirits and birds are believed to be domiciled there as well. These great deities are usually approached through lower deities. The opposite sphere, *Uwa* (earth) is the planet earth, regarded as the abode of created beings like man, plants and birds. This sphere is often represented in Igbo folktales and mythology as the scene of constant interaction between humans and spirits. The earth is also peopled by numerous deities and spirits even though they belong to the supernatural realm. There are deities associated with earthly phenomena such as *Ala* (earth goddess); river deities; mountain deities as well as those responsible for fertility and spirits that are associated with natural habitats like groves, valleys, forests, etc.

In addition, the earth is further subdivided into two complementary orders of existence – *ala mmadụ* (land of humans) and *ala mmụọ* (land of spirits) – the visible and invisible realms, respectively. Contrary to *ala mmadụ*, which describes the realm of the physical world, the realm of the empirical and the sensible; *ala mmụọ* refers to the invisible, supernatural realm peopled by the spirits of the ancestors, the unborn members of the community and other lower divinities like the wicked spirits (spirits of those who are not properly buried and so are not yet ritually dead). There is no clear demarcation between these two realms since they have many social commonalities which intertwine and are in a continuous interaction among themselves. More so, the deities and spirits, especially ancestral spirits, can assume human or animal forms or that of any visible agent to interact with human beings in the visible realm (e.g., to communicate a message or to punish a transgression). Conversely, there are human beings endowed with the capacity to commune with the spirit world – for example, to consult with the living-dead (ancestors) over particular issues through the masquerade cult or to ascertain the will of the gods through divination. In this sense, a*la mmụọ* is seen merely as a continuation of life in *ala mmadụ* with same conditions of existence, same regulations, and social organisation. Thus Nwala (2010: 46-47) warns that,

"It is not correct to talk of a strict dichotomy of the natural and the spiritual worlds. They are just different orders of being and existence, in constant interaction and communication. The main difference is that beings in the visible order are always there for ordinary eyes to see, while the spirits are symbolised in various natural and artificial objects". In the same vein, human beings and natural objects are believed to possess dynamic forces or some kind of pure disembodied spirits; each individual being endowed with a personal *Chi*: a personal guiding spirit-force responsible for one's destiny and guidance till death.

Furthermore, traditional mortuary practices offer a veritable prism through which the cosmology of a cultural group can be appreciated. This is also demonstrated by traditional Igbo mortuary practices which express Igbo beliefs about the universe, about life and death, about the natural and the supernatural orders of existence, about the world, ethical beliefs, hierarchy of beings, as well as the metaphysical foundations of dominant social values. For instance, the central position of children (especially male children) and kinship generally, the role of the *Ụmụnna* (patrilineage), *Ụmụada* (daughters of the lineage), the role of social organisations like age grades and the secret societies, etc., all come to the limelight during mortuary rites. As already mentioned, owing to the belief in the continuity of life in the spirit world and the role of ancestors in the society, the Igbo attach great importance to elaborate burial ceremonies. Burial and funeral rituals are primarily acts of purification and a rite of passage for the deceased. Therefore, elaborate burial ceremonies ensure that the dead person secures for himself a comfortable status in the world of the ancestors. For this reason, efforts are made to ensure that all outstanding moral, religious and social issues involving the dead person are straightened out before the dead is finally buried. Mortuary rites usually take off with the consultation of a diviner to determine first, the cause of death and then to ascertain which rituals should be performed in order to ensure that the deceased enjoys a good status among the ancestors. The criteria for a good death include a ripe old age, marriage with children, visible success in economic pursuits and other indices of personal achievement like title taking, an active social life, community service, etc.

For the Igbo, the entire cosmos is considered a delicately ordered and unified system where all beings exercise agency. Hence the society must regulate the agency of beings in order to constantly maintain cosmic equilibrium. This explains the origin of taboos (*nsọ ala* – literally, what the land forbids). *Nsọ ala* is

a code of forbidden practices that applies to every part of Igbo society, although there are local variations in application and interpretation. For instance, incest is a universal taboo but the definition of what amounts to incest vary from place to place. Any infringement on *nsọ ala* therefore results in a disbalance of the cosmos. To restore harmony, the cause and source of disbalance must be discovered (sometimes through divination) and appropriately redressed. Thus, for every kind of infraction or transgression, there are ritual provisions that restore cosmic harmony. This phenomenon is akin to what Tempels (1969) in his *Bantu Philosophy* describes as the "principle of restitution"; and to what Nwala (2010) in his *Igbo Philosophy* refers to as the "principle of radical penetration" of all that exists in the entire cosmos. Whatever terminology one may be disposed to adopt is secondary to the fact that the Igbo comprehend the universe as a totality with a common dynamic principle operative in all categories of being in the universe. Against this background, there is a spiritual essence in everything – in both 'animate' and 'inanimate' beings.

Additionally, the interaction among the various categories of beings in the universe is also governed by the principle of reciprocity: the core of the Igbo idea of cosmic harmony. Therefore, the different realms and orders of existence are in a constant, mutual, and symbiotic interaction. Nwala (op. cit.: 76) puts it succinctly:

> Men feed the gods and the gods, in turn, provide health, fertility of the soil, good harvest and reproduction. Deities as well as the ancestors are said to experience and complain of hunger, cold or heat and so demand food, fire or shelter as the case may be... Human beings manipulate and influence these higher forces through prayer invocations, rituals, festivities, 'ogwu' or mystical force, etc. The priests, diviners, elders, medicine men are responsible for securing proper harmony among all the beings in nature.

To this end, a mutual interaction of beings and forces in the Igbo universe is regulated and sustained by the principle of justice and fairness represented by the *ọfọ* symbol, a wooden staff reposed in the communal shrine of the various social units. Nwala (op. cit.) calls this phenomenon "cultural pragmatism", a situation where "the two principles of justice and innocence place a limitation on the powers of the gods and even the ancestors and when a deity contravenes it, he is regarded as being wicked. The Igbo are also known to destroy an ineffective and

all-together malevolent deity or cult. When a deity proves very destructive or weak, it is sent back (in a ceremony) to the town or village known to be its traditional home, and its shrine in the former place is destroyed… The Igbo are known to threaten a dead ancestor with hunger if the dead ancestor no more fulfils his protective role for the family" (Nwala, op. cit.: 82). This principle of justice and fairness also allows that whenever any of the parties fails to fulfil its obligation, the other party reserves the liberty to pull out as well. A concrete example: if the living feels they do not receive the expected benediction and protection from a spirit to whom they offer regular sacrifices they may abandon the shrine and return it to its original domain and look for another, if need be.

Of particular interest is the fact that the earth or land, *ala*, is an important category in Igbo cosmology. *Ala* carries every living being on its shoulder, gives fertility for the sustenance of the human community and at death the human body returns to it. *Ala* is so ubiquitous and all-encompassing that no one can escape from it. It is also made up of two related domains that make up the society (the land of humans and the land of spirits). *Ala* is sacred, in fact, it is a goddess – the source of life and sustenance, fertility and prosperity, and the custodian of the moral laws. Contrary to its counterpart, *Amadioha*, the god of thunder that only destroys when not appeased, *Ala* is a most benevolent goddess. No one can escape her reach for she is indeed the final repository for all human beings after death. Thus, the earth goddess is also the custodian of the *omenala* (that which obtains in the land), a function she exercises through the ancestors represented by the elders. The entire content of the already outlined Igbo philosophy of nature and life; the general principles of social practices comprising the totality of lore, custom, tradition and values; the complex of beliefs and mores are all embodied in the concept of *Omenala.* As such, the elders interpret any violation of the provisions of *omenala* as a breach of cosmic harmony. According to Uzozie (2002: 450), "*Ala* keeps constant watch over all the activities of men and ensures that people behave in accordance with prescribed traditional norms. Wicked people could be recalled before they ran their full life cycle". In lieu of this, acts against the land (*nsọ ala*) otherwise known as abominations are regarded as grave public transgressions because they jeopardise the entire cosmic environment and not just the particular offenders.

The term *Omenala* therefore covers a comprehensive body of moral codes and mores which protects the cosmic order and shapes the collective identity of the

community. It is a complex body of traditional principles of life and existence which regulates the social and ritual interactions and conducts, establishes the standard of morality and thereby, albeit indirectly, outlines what values are worth striving for and what actions must be avoided. Thus, the etymology already betrays an inherent emphasis on the maintenance of communal and cosmic harmony as the central concerns of *Omenala* provisions. A community without *omenala* is unimaginable, for without it there is no principle of unity or collective identity. Consequently, a complete breakdown of *omenala* would imply the extinction of the society as a matter of fact because it would be impossible to recover from the chaos that would definitely ensue. In the sense of an ethical code, *Omenala* establishes the basis of distinction between *ezigbo mmadu* (the good person) and *ajo mmadu* (the bad person) in the Igbo society (Agulanna 2011). Thus, in a broad sense, *Omenala* refers to both the embodiment and expression of the Igbo worldview – the traditions, mores, ideological expressions and social practices. According to Nwala (2010: 42),

> *Omenala* encompasses the major beliefs about the origin of the universe and its nature, the place of the spirits, deities, man and other beings in the universe, the nature or character of taboos, regulations, prescriptions and prohibitions as to what is proper in such a universe, including concepts of justice, truth, honour, friendship, war and peace, rules of marriage, sexual intercourse, attitudes to strangers – and forms of social relationship, as well as the realm of simple decency and etiquette. Indeed, *Omenala* is a body of law and morals along with their metaphysical foundations (italics are mine).

Therefore, *Omenala* is the yardstick with which the Igbo measure the propriety or impropriety of human action, as well as the mechanism for maintaining or restoring cosmological balance within the human community. Although not codified in written form like the positive laws of Western societies, the regulatory force of *Omenala* is nevertheless very powerful and pervasive. Even in contemporary times, wherever the provisions of the constitution of Nigerian state clash with demands of *Omenala*, the normal Igbo would rather offend the constitution and suffer the consequences than contravene the *Omenala*. This is because transgressions against the *Omenala* has both cosmological, religious, and social consequences which the average Igbo would least venture to risk. Like most African peoples, the religious and the secular worlds of the Igbo coexist and mutually

intermingle. This unity manifests itself remarkably in the so-called "cult of the ancestor".

With regard to this, the maintenance of a cordial relationship with the ancestors is a central concern of the Igbo person throughout the course of life. Elders are considered to stand in immediate proximity to ancestors because they are vested with the responsibility of ritually attending to the latter's needs in order to ensure harmony within society. Through a complex set of rituals dotting the different stages of the human lifecycle from birth to death, elders, parents, kin groups, diviners, titled persons and age-grades play diverse but interrelated roles in fostering harmony with the ancestors and the unborn members of the community. Elaborating on this issue, Njoku (2012: 24) writes:

> While individuals reserved the initiative to pursue their independent goals, family rituals presided over by elders sustained the link with one's family and kin. Community rituals, taboos, and common belief in divinities and the various age-grade affiliations in turn held the individual, the family, and the patrimonial kinship together. In this context, the legitimacy of the authority, and the rights exercised by the elders drew from their position as interpreters of the cosmic realm…

What can be gleaned from the above is that not only do elders preside over rituals that sustain the cosmic order, but they also constitute the custodians of moral laws. Usually, these elders are determined by a chronological age which the Igbo regard as coterminous with wisdom in view of the presumed wealth of experience of the elder. With recourse to this, age comprises a very serious factor among the Igbo; as etiquettes of behaviour, attitudes, status, and indeed social relationships in general are influenced by the age factor. Sometimes it is extended to a point where seniority by just one day could determine rank in a gathering. This is because it could have adverse implications should one advertently usurp someone else's seniority rights and appurtenances. To forestall this, a complex system of symbols and practices are instituted to preserve and ensure justice, not only in determining seniority rights but in all matters of morals and ethics. Paramount among these symbols in Igbo metaphysics is the *ọfọ,* through which, among other things, chronological seniority is determined and preserved. The *ọfọ* symbol is laden with a complex of meanings and is central to understanding the Igbo cosmology since its major referents are immediately connected with the rest of the ideas and beliefs on which the traditional cosmology pivots. The next

section shall briefly discuss the salient points about the *ọfọ* symbol, its meaning and its function in Igbo cosmology.

3.1.2 The *Ọfọ* Symbol in Igbo Traditional Cosmology

Symbolism is the basis of human communication, and communication is the basis of human life and social relationship. It is rightly said that man is a *homo symbolicus* – a symbolizing, conceptualising, and meaning-seeking being. David Schneider is reputed to have defined cultural system as a system of symbols with symbol being simply “something which stands for something else” (Spencer 2002: 808). His major interest however revolves around the idea that symbols constitute an autonomous system within which certain symbols are central points of orientation on which all else depends. As such, the *ọfọ* symbol occupies such a central place in Igbo universe of thought. Ejizu (1986: 121) admits that the *ọfọ* is a vital object of Igbo consciousness and ritual life: “Its very notion as a ritual symbol connotes the conscious trapping of certain important ideas and meanings by the users. Its critical properties, particularly condensation and polarisation suggest its deep semantic web”. The recurrence of the *ọfọ* symbol in the traditional Igbo ritual complex, the rich cluster of meanings which have been worked into it at various levels of experience, as well as its association with certain crucial ideas, beliefs and values in the life of the traditional Igbo all clearly indicate its centrality and importance to the Igbo world’s thought process, and therefore marks it out as the ultimate symbol worthy of attention. *Ọfọ* possesses a multivalent property; it is primarily a ritual symbol, but it wields a wide range of influence in the social life of the Igbo. This is hardly strange since for the Igbo the sacred and the secular are intrinsically connected.

Etymologically, the Igbo word *ọfọ* refers to two related objects namely, a particular plant species on the one hand, and in a derived sense the twig or branchlet that fall off from the trunk of such a tree, on the other. The latter, when consecrated, is used as the sacred *ọfọ* staff, an essential component of the ritual ensemble of every social unit in Igboland. The botanical name used for the *ọfọ* plant in earlier writings on the subject, *Detarium Senegalense*, has been challenged by more recent writings as incorrect. Ejizu (op. cit.: 32) argues that the more appropriate botanical name is *Detarium Elastica*, referencing as his authority the Nigerian Forestry Department’s official list of indigenous plants. The *ọfọ* tree exudes a red juice when cut – another cosmological connection with the human

blood. Its sacred properties derive also from the fact that the *ọfọ* tree may not be cut down (the twigs or branchlets fall off on their own) nor may any part of it be put into any other service apart from the customary use of the fallen twigs as ritual sticks. Thus, the term *ọfọ* applies more to these branchlets than to the plant itself on account of the former's use as ritual symbol throughout Igboland. Since *ọfọ* trees are usually brittle at the many joints, when dead and dry on their parent stock, they drop off in pieces of varying sizes – another similitude with human beings; they are born, grow and ultimately die off. *Ọfọ* branches are usually between 4 and 12 inches in length and between a half and one inch in diameter. When the branchlets fall off the tree, they are picked up and turned into ritual objects.

The rich symbolism of the *Ọfọ* tree and its branchlets are not farfetched. Its red juice is as sacred as the human blood. It may not be cut or used for any other purpose except for rituals and only with the branchlets that fall off naturally. These branchlets are related to the main trees as the ancestors are related to the patrilineages. Only those who die natural deaths could be ancestors; whoever 'cuts' his life offends the earth and must be thrown away in the evil forest. Thus, the extraordinary natural features of the *ọfọ* seem to have particularly recommended it to the traditional Igbo social structure as a special symbol of transcendental value. The transcendental belongs to the realm of the supernatural which forms part of the traditional cosmology. *Ọfọ* is therefore bound up with the traditional Igbo cosmology. Together with a network of sacred figures, images, beliefs and ideas, which form the traditional vision of the cosmos, the sacred *Ọfọ* stick gives order to the Igbo experience of the environment and aids in the compelling quest to explain, predict and control the forces of nature. The full expression of this cosmological connection of the *ọfọ* symbol is perhaps best realised in the traditional system of rituals. From the ritual perspective, *ọfọ* performs both vertical and horizontal functions. Vertically, it mediates the communication between man and the supernatural by serving as a ritual medium of prayer, a cult object in the worship of all deities. Horizontally, it is deeply involved in the web of traditional Igbo socio-political processes, importing the extrinsic authority of the "Wholly Other" on the relationship of the human population with one another, especially in the cause of justice and equity.

Of course, there are variations in the type and structure of *ọfọ* symbol objects in different parts of Igbo land, but the single twig type retains its primacy as the

prevalent structural form of the *ọfọ* symbol among the Igbo. There are also different types of *ọfọ* for different categories of persons, functions or social roles. Every Igbo male could possess a **Personal *Ọfọ***. But there are various forms of *ọfọ* that are owned collectively. For instance, the **Lineage *Ọfọ*** is kept by the head of the lineage at every level of indigenous social organisation: the family, patrilineage, village, moiety, clan, etc. The lineage *ọfọ* represents the ancestors and serves at their respective levels as the symbol of unity of the particular unit. It is normally inherited and kept by the eldest living male of the individual social unit. At the clan level, it is kept by the lineage unit with the primacy of honour under the custody of its eldest male. This class of *ọfọ* is usually known as *ọfọ-ọkpara* or *ọfọ-ụmụnna*. **Titular *Ọfọ*** refers to the *ọfọ* staff given to those who acquire traditional titles as part of their initiation into the title societies. *Ọfọ* in this case stands for the symbol of authority and truth which the different titles are supposed to embody, and a reminder of the ritual restrictions due to title holders. The name of a titular *ọfọ* symbol usually derives from the particular title itself. The **Professional *Ọfọ*** refers to the *ọfọ* symbol possessed by practitioners of certain prominent trades and crafts as their title of legitimation and medium of communication with their spirit-patrons. To this group belong the medicine men, priests, rain makers, black smiths, wood carvers, teeth-filers, and scarification experts – all those professions that offer positive services. But there are dangerous and negative *ọfọ* types, like the ones used by sorcerers, magic-rituals, and charms. Here likewise, the names of the *ọfọ* staff usually go by the names of their respective professions. The ***Institutional Ọfọ*** refers to a wide range of *ọfọ* types possessed by different social institutions. Women generally do not possess *ọfọ*, but ritual experts who happen to be women, such as diviners, native doctors, priestesses, etc. and leaders of exclusively women groups such as the *Ụmụada* as well as married women from upwards of middle age are entitled to the *ọfọ* staff which they use in the discharge of their respective functions.

The foregoing clearly indicates that *ọfọ* is basically a ritual symbol, which Turner has rightly described as a "storage unit", the basic unit or molecule of ritual behaviour (Morris 1987: 241) into which are packed the maximum amount of information. Thus, ritual symbols could be considered as multi-faceted mnemonics, each facet corresponding to a cluster of values, norms, beliefs, sentiments, social roles, and relationships within the total cultural system of the community involved in the ritual performance. Therefore, the real significance of any ritual

symbol is context-dependent and so, could be obtained only from a consideration of how it is interpreted in each particular ritual occasion but not without consideration of its role in the total ritual system.

Without intending a more in-depth discussion on the totality of the ritual system in the Igbo culture, it may be useful to note that symbolic objects are essential vehicles that enshrine and communicate the shared beliefs and experiences of a people; however, the task of decoding a symbol is not an easy one. Moreover, it is a fact that social relationships develop through and are maintained by symbols. Values, norms, rules and abstract concepts like honour, prestige, rank, justice, good and evil are made tangible through symbols, and men in society are thus helped to be aware of their existence, to comprehend them and to relate them to their daily lives. Symbols have the capacity to objectify roles and give them a reality distinct from the individual personalities of the incumbents. Through the objectification of roles and relationships, some measure of stability and continuity is achieved, and these are necessary for the sustenance of social life.

As an aid to the task of interpreting ritual symbols, Turner advances a three-model analytic scheme. This, however, does not imply a graded approach to the analysis of symbols but rather the three levels are simply overlapping perspectives for looking at different phases of an individual symbol. The exegetical level of analysis deals with the meaning of the symbol obtained from indigenous interpretation. This could be either esoteric (expert) or exoteric (lay) interpretations. Next is the operational level, which analyses the meaning derived from observation of the symbol in use. This level is concerned mainly with the types of personnel involved in the ritual and the effective quality of their reactions. Then there is the positional level, which is concerned with the meaning of the symbols in a patterned totality. Basing elaborately on Ejizu's (1986) masterpiece on the subject, titled *Ọfọ: Igbo Ritual Symbol*, we shall make use of the three-model analytic scheme advanced by Turner, but not in any particular order, as we analyse the *ọfọ* symbol in Igbo cosmology.

At the religious level, the meaning of the *ọfọ* symbolism is evident in the ritual performances. The traditional Morning Prayer and blessing rituals performed in every household are religious events where the dominance of the *ọfọ* is clearly evident as an object of mediation. Through *ọfọ,* the elders channel their prayers to the spirits. Similarly, the priests use *ọfọ* to perform ritual sacrifices and offer-

ings to the deities. At the social level, *ọfọ* is of very meaningful importance especially in decision-making. A typical traditional Igbo village is governed by the Council of Elders comprising lineage heads and other *ọfọ* holders, priests, and senior titled men. When an important decision is to be taken, these men would assemble in some public square, usually the local market square. During such gatherings, *ọfọ* is used to reach decisions by the elders, where it represents the authority of the ancestors who are considered the real owners of the land and the constituent groups. *Ofọ* also represents the supernatural sanction which it introduces. On the part of the elders, their individual *ọfọ* are symbols of legitimate authority: a declaration of commitment to tradition and especially to the twin principle of justice and fairness. The ritual act of striking the *ọfọ* on the ground (earth) to seal a decision could be interpreted as an invocation of the ancestors to witness the decision they make on their behalf as well as a recognition of the place of the earth goddess.

As already mentioned, there are different categories of persons who could possess different grades of *ọfọ*. The personal *ọfọ* establishes a link between its owner and the spirit world, especially to one's personal *Chi*. This category is the least of all *ọfọ* types. On the contrary, the lineage *ọfọ* at all levels of the ladder (family, patrilineage, village, clan, etc.) formalises the leadership role of the male elder who holds it. In these instances, the paramount meaning of the *ọfọ* lies in the ancestral authority it bequeaths on the elder. The titular *ọfọ* is more of a status symbol, representing the elevated individual status of its owner, a testimony to his individual enterprise and personal effort. The *ọfọ* serves as the candidate's staff of office and authority in the society at large. It also establishes a link between the possessor and the spirit-world directly. More so, the Titular *ọfọ* marks out the bearer as a man of honour and integrity. Usually during the rite of installation of such a title, the initiate is admonished, among others: *"Kwube ka nze ikwuzina ka okolo!"* (Speak henceforth like an *nze* (elder) and no longer like a youth!). Thus, it could be said that *ọfọ* primarily represents the relationship of man to the supernatural order of reality. But it also embodies the norms of behaviour that regulate social interaction among the living. It is in this context that the significance of *ọfọ* as the traditional symbol for truth, justice and moral probity comes into limelight.

At this juncture, it may be apposite to dwell more on the positional level of analysis for obvious reasons: in the area of Igbo social system, *ọfọ* is best appreciated

as a dynamic factor of the social structure, in the definition of interpersonal and group relationships. The various images and meanings already mentioned indicate that *ọfọ* symbolism is an important feature of Igbo cosmology; one which interconnects the three levels of human experience – the personal, the social and the transcendental. Through the process of symbolisation, vital ingredients of traditional group solidarity which comprise abstract notions like power, truth, justice, moral uprightness, etc. are telescoped by means of symbol into the cosmic vision of reality and experience in which the Supreme Being, divinities, ancestors, the unborn and myriads of spirit-forces are also active role performers. *Ọfọ* plays a similar role in the Igbo cosmos: "Within this type of mental framework, the very structures of society, including the stratifications of roles and statuses as well as the pattern of power configurations and the network of social laws and norms are taken as primordial revelations. And *ọfọ*'s involvement in the dynamics of traditional life as a potent factor of social, political and moral control is seen to be rooted in the same orientation of life in which events of Igbo man's daily experiences are conceptualised in terms of archetypal models" (Ejizu op. cit.: 131).

3.1.3 *Ọfọ* Symbol in Traditional Social Structure

As already stated, the *ọfọ* symbol offers us a glimpse into the cosmological foundations of the Igbo social structure because it is essentially caught up in the logic of the traditional Igbo worldview. Ejizu (op. cit., 132) argues that the *ọfọ* is "a powerhouse which evokes emotion and impels the people to action. Every ritual use of the object by the accredited holder is seen as a re-enactment of sacred proto-types and the repetition of the actions of mythical ancestors". Categories of kinship define the Igbo social life and relationships, relations of authority, economic practices and ritual exchange, and these categories which kinship affords provide the context and idiom for most kinds of social relationships that are available in the traditional social milieu.

It has already been mentioned that the traditional Igbo are dominantly patrilineal and virilocal. Unilineal descent through the male line is the main principle of local grouping and corporate activity. Similarly, patriliny is also the major referent of the *ọfọ* symbol. The *ọfọ* staff is held by the patrilineal head of the family, who is also the ritual head. The male elder therefore enjoys more than any other member of the family, thanks to the family *ọfọ* under his keeps, the power and

favour of the ancestors and myriads of spiritual beings that interact with the family unit. Apart from his ritual role, the *ọfọ* empowers him also to represent the family unit in other areas of social life. At every level of the Igbo social organisation, the *ọfọ* helps to distinguish the order of seniority of the various individuals and corporate groups that make up each individual unit. At the town level, the overall *ọfọ* (the **Town *Ọfọ***) belongs to the eldest clan or the earliest village to settle in the land. At the clan level, the clan *ọfọ* is kept by the eldest village, that is the village founded by the eldest son of the original ancestor, or the village accorded the primacy of office. The village *ọfọ* is kept by the eldest patrilineage, whereas patrilineage *ọfọ* (*Ọfọ Ụmụnna*) is kept by the eldest living male of the unit. At the family level, the eldest male keeps the family *ọfọ* whereas all grown-up male members of the family could possess their personal *ọfọ*. Thus, at each level of the social organisation, the *ọfọ* accomplishes two ambivalent functions. First, it marks out the specific groups as distinct social units and then unites each to the larger corporate unit: e.g., the individual to the family unit, the family unit to the patrilineage, the patrilineage to the village unit, and so on.

This double function applies to all grades of *ọfọ* as well – the titular, the professional, the institutional, etc. For instance, the titular *ọfọ* distinguishes men of achievement from the rest of society but integrates each holder into his titular unit. It is a status-symbol, a mark of wealth and personal enterprise reserved for those who have acquired enough wealth demonstrated by the ability to shoulder the cost of the elaborate and expensive ceremonies required for such a title. Similarly, for professionals, priests, craftsmen, diviners, ritual experts, etc., the *ọfọ* staff is an acknowledgement of their special knowledge and dexterity and therefore marks them out individually and collectively as distinct from the rest of society. Their respective *ọfọ* serves both as staff of office and as a certificate of membership of their respective interest groups.

More importantly, *ọfọ* marks out the relative position of all adult males in the social hierarchy, identifying the different role-actors and determining the pattern of flow of the ritual and political authorities among them. Hence, the power and authority which the male elders wield through the *ọfọ* are believed to flow directly from the ancestors. This view is aptly expressed by the colonial anthropologist C.K. Meek (1937: 159): "the real rulers of the town (village, kindred, family) are the ancestors or spirits, and the living persons who act as rulers are merely the agents of the ancestors". This underscores the vital place assigned to

the ancestors in the Igbo traditional cosmology which the *ọfọ* symbol makes present and effective. Primogeniture, achievement, talent and expertise are potential factors in the distribution of ancestral power and authority for the general wellbeing of social life. The foregoing evidently asserts the position of *ọfọ* as the proto-symbolic object of the Igbo cultural milieu which offers a unique perspective into the Igbo traditional cosmology. Ejizu (1986: 134) summarises it beautifully: "On account of its ability as a dominant ritual symbol to stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, *Ọfọ* dynamically conveys to the traditional Igbo the norms of behaviour inherent in kinship relation; it canalizes the different social categories and institutionalizes the leading social actors in their respective roles and finally formalises the pattern of power distribution for the effective ordering of social structure". It follows naturally therefore that there is an intrinsic link between the *ọfọ* symbol and the value system of the Igbo society.

3.2 Igbo Value System

The foregoing discussions on Igbo cosmology and the *ọfọ* ritual symbol already crystalize the major themes that form the traditional system of values in Igbo society. The Igbo traditional systems of social organisation and social structure are invariably grounded on the cosmological categories already discussed. There are important correlations between the cosmology and dominant traditional values of the Igbo as shall be indicated shortly. In one of the most illuminating indigenous anthropological studies of Igbo culture so far, Uchendu (1965: 11-21) outlines some propositions that seems to summarise the Igbo value system from the cosmological perspective, to which we now turn for a brief excursus.

3.2.1 Life as a continuum

Uchendu posits that the traditional Igbo society is a continuum and argues that the Igbo has a picture of the universe as an extension: "They [the traditional Igbo] have neither a heaven nor a hell; spirit and land being merely a continuance of this life on exactly the same conditions, each country or community having its allotted position and each individual resuming the exact position that was occupied in this existence" (quoted in Leonard 1906: 184). Thus, for the Igbo, life is a continuous and never-ending process. Death is only a transition to another mode of existence. The traditional belief in life as a continuum is expressed in

daily life by the struggle to achieve and maintain a high social status which could later be carried over to the ancestral world. Prior to the advent of Christianity, it used to be a traditionally approved custom to bury men of affluence along with their slaves in the belief that they would continue to serve their masters in the world beyond, since a king in the world of the living would also be a king in the world of the dead. This notion continues to manifest itself in different forms in Igbo society. That is why social mobility is an important value among the Igbo. Linked to this is also the relationship with the ancestors and the unborn members of the society. Death does not severe existing social relationships, rather it only transforms them. Hence the need to take care of relationships with all members of society.

3.2.2 An integrated world

Furthermore, there is the proposition that the Igbo perceives the world as an integrated whole. This accords essentially with the principle of holism. At the abstract level, it is the position that the meaning and value of an element is determined by its particular relationship to the whole and not by its intrinsic and autonomous identity and value. Recent studies in psychology also indicate that holism may explain the differences in thinking styles between cultures. In analytic thinking, style objects are largely perceived independently from the context; whereas in a holistic thinking style the object and context are perceived to be interrelated. At the social level, the principle of holism implies therefore that one's identity in a social system is not a property of one's individuality rather of one's relationship with society. Hence, the individual is a being-in-relationship. In lieu of this, a person's value and identity would depend on one's particular relationship to the whole (society). Similarly, the Igbo views the cosmos as a unity and interaction of all beings. In this light, social life is a constant communion and interaction of the living, the dead and the unborn. All the various categories of persons and beings are thus defined by the enduring mutual social relationships considering that the universe of humans and the spirits are in a constant, mutual interaction. There is no strict distinction between the world of man and the world of the spirits, the visible and the invisible, the unborn, the living and the ancestors; rather they are all in constant mutual communion. As such, the different spheres and realms are in reality considered as comingled. The ancestors and the unborn are regarded as invisible members of the family of the living to whom they are united by a reciprocal exchange: the ancestors impart

benedictions upon the living; in return, the sacrifices of the living guarantee them wellbeing in the supernatural world.

3.2.3 A dynamic world

The Igbo world is dynamic and delicate, and this dynamism requires a constant watchfulness of appropriate institutions in order to ensure a cosmological balance that will sustain its social structure. Custodians of this cosmological balance include specialists like priests and diviners who, in the event of any threat to this balance, would ascertain the cause through divination and ensure that appropriate ritual remedy is performed to restore the cosmic order. Usually there is an appropriate ritual remedy for every imbalance, and here lies the domain of taboos. Where cosmic imbalance is suspected, there are diviners and medicine men who take care of the diagnoses and prescriptions of ritual remedies to restore cosmic balance.

3.2.4 The world as a marketplace

In many ways, according to Uchendu (2007), the Igbo conceives the world in market terms. The four traditional Igbo market days which make up the Igbo week are central to their orientation of time and space. One of the most popular sayings among the Igbo is "*Uwa bu ahia*" – the world is a marketplace. "It is a 'market place' involving a bargaining strategy but guaranteeing only 'equality of opportunity' but not 'equality of outcome'. Against this background, the four market days of the traditional Igbo week play a crucial role in Igbo cosmology and traditional metaphysics. Individuals as a party and the spirits as another are subjected to this bargaining process" (Uchendu op. cit.: 178). It is important to note here that the author is not referring to market in economic terms but to the marketplace as a social environment. The Igbo world is an arena where the society does not completely swallow up the individual but rather offers each person the opportunity to exercise agency and aspire to a social position. Social mobility is open to everyone according to talents and abilities. Unlike many traditional societies, the Igbo society has very limited ascribed statuses but rather creates more room for achieved statuses. The Igbo believe that every human being can strive unto greatness.

3.2.5 Unstable social status

With recourse to the attainment of social status, the Igbo society requires a constant vigilance to maintain cosmic balance. Regarding this, the quest for social status is a cyclical, unending activity as there is a mutual interdependence among the component parts of the Igbo world. At one end, the ancestors have vested interests in the living, so they protect and avert dangers from afflicting the lineage thereby ensuring that they also reincarnate in a good environment. And on the other, the elder keeps religiously to the requirements of his office such as performing requisite sacrifices (feeding the ancestors, for e.g.) and living in an upright manner – that is, in accordance with the provisions of *Omenala* – in order to live long and thus secure a place of honour for himself among the ancestors. Moreover, the Igbo value longevity; to die young is to die unfulfilled. Such death is regarded as a corporate disaster to the extended family which would require some ritual remedies to restore the land.

3.3 Igbo Core Values

Three closely related social values stand out as the core traditional values of the Igbo society deriving from the foundations of Igbo traditional worldview, cosmology, and social structure. These three values are: mutual dependence, lineage continuity and the valorisation of personal achievement. These core values are manifestly critical to the social life of the Igbo even in contemporary times, irrespective of wherever they may live. In lieu of this, this sub-section aims to analyse these core values in greater detail to show how they crystallise into a mental complex that drive the social life of the modern Igbo. The three values are essentially related and support one another; considering that mutual dependence and support among kin groups ensure the continuity of the social units that make up the Igbo society. At the same time, reciprocal kinship obligations compel every member of the society to strive for success and wealth in order to fulfil one's obligations through which one's social status and relevance are safeguarded. However, the understanding of wealth in this case should not be limited to economic value; as anything that has social value that could be exchanged belongs to the category of wealth amongst which include wisdom, social network, oratory prowess, physical strength, musical knowhow, landed property, etc. Hence, the drive to 'stand out' in the community becomes paramount in the mind of every

adult Igbo. Consequently, one's social profile grows in relation to one's contributions to the society.

The inclusive kinship system inherent in the primary descent group whether patrilineal or double descent makes mutual dependence a central value in Igbo culture (Uchendu 2007: 215). For instance, there is a mutual obligation between parents and children, but these obligations are not equal throughout the stages of each generational cycle. On the part of children, obedience to parents is an important obligation. In the course of time, however, this obligation transforms into filial piety. Then after the death of the parents, when they join the ancestors, it further transforms into a ritual obligation and in this way, mutual dependence between the living and the dead is continually maintained. This view falls in line with the Igbo traditional cosmology which highlights family as a unit comprising three groups of members that are in constant mutual interaction – the living, the living-dead and the unborn. More so, the traditional institution of marriage constitutes a means of fostering lineal continuity and horizontal solidarity in the kinship system.

Additionally, and intrinsically related to the value of mutual dependence is another important value namely, the continuity of the lineage. In traditional societies like the Igbo, the lineage is considered the building block of the society because every other institution and relationship develop from there. Majorly, this is the reason why its continuity is always of critical importance. Of this, Uchendu (ibid.) asserts that: "To maintain the lineage is a preoccupation reflected in the demands made in prayer: more children and wives, wealth and general prosperity to support them are the usual refrains at prayer. Since women, as wives and daughters, are the vehicle of lineage continuity, plural marriages are sanctioned everywhere" in Igboland. The valorisation of women as custodians of fertility is however not peculiar to Igboland as has been copiously shown by ethnographers of other societies (Kuper 1982, Bloch 1992). The concern for lineage continuity is expressed in almost all sectors of traditional life. During morning offerings, the family head prays for it and during kolanut ritual, it is often the most emphasised point of prayer. The list is inexhaustible. The same concern is also expressed in various names given to the new-born. An example is *Ahamefula* (may my name not be lost), which is a popular name given to a male child by parents who have either lost a number of infants or have had difficulty begetting a male child who would take over the lineage from the father. Other similar names that

denote concerns for lineage continuity are: *Eziechina* or *Obodoechina* (may the homestead not close), *Ubakamma* (increase is better), *Igwebuike* (multitude is strength), just to mention but a few. Similarly, this same trend of thought is manifested in proverbs and wise sayings.

Furthermore, wealth, wisdom, manliness, and the drive for achievement are highly prized in the Igbo value system, and the individual is judged according to his aptitude to secure them. In prior times, wealth in traditional Igbo society was reckoned by such indices as the size of barn and farmland at a man's disposal and the number of wives and children he had. In the larger society, wealth and status were also measured by the size of one's kin, material accumulation as well as titles acquired. Mostly because mutual dependence plays out also in areas of wealth acquisition, several means to acquiring wealth such as land, access to palm groves, funds for trade and wives are acquired through support from descent groups and neighbourhood. Consequently, the individual and society are mutually linked to each other. Quoting Ottenberg, Njoku (2006: 31) notes that "if a man has wealth, there are considerable pressures placed on him by his descent groups and age sets to take titles and to marry. Across the world, the object of wealth is used to further achievement and to improve one's status. While this goes together with title-taking, in the African world including the Igbo, generosity in giving public feasts and in other matters is of importance… achievement occurs primarily with group support". In lieu of this, the success of the individual is equated with the success of the group to which he belongs; and the reverse is also true.

Personal effort is also key to success and this is highly valued because destiny is achieved not ascribed. The Igbo proverb, *Nwata kwọcha aka, o soro ọgaranya rie nri* – "when a child washes his hands clean, he'd dine with the elders" betrays a flexible and accommodating mindset that rewards achievement and industry. In *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1958), Okonkwo had a weakling for a father who died without acquiring any titles to himself and leaving no inheritance behind for his children except his huge debts. Deeply hurt by this shameful legacy, his son Okonkwo vowed to be different. By sheer hard work, he was able to break the jinx of poverty and was overwhelmingly successful and became the pride of his village. He married several wives and acquired many titles at a relatively young

age from which time he started enjoying the privileges of an elder. The writer eulogises this hero who rose from grass to grace in glowing terms:

> Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. *His fame rested on solid personal achievements.* (…) That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time *Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bushfire in the harmattan*. He has beaten the till now unbeaten Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino (Achebe 1989: 5, italics are mine).

This is to be contrasted with the description of his father who was the exact opposite, a symbol of failure: "Unoka… was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow… he … was, of course, a debtor, and he owed every neighbour some money…". Although this example is from a work of fiction, it represents the Igbo belief that nature presents everyone with a level playground to compete and win a place for oneself in the world. Hence, what one makes out of this opportunity is up to each person. Moreover, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is reputed to be more than an ordinary work of fiction. Though the characters are fictitious, the settings and themes are unapologetically Igbo. Nwachukwu-Agbada (2008: 157) clarifies the point as follows: "Not only do the events in his (Achebe's) *oeuvre* take place on Igbo soil, the thought pattern, cultural ethos as well as the communal and individual character stance are essentially Igbo in conception, meaning and significance."

In the Igbo repertoire of symbols, next to the *ọfọ* is the *Ikenga*, which is "the plastic synthesis on dynamic movement or the desire of man to survive through individual creativity and personal growth. Its aesthetic definition is the modulation of rectilinearity with curvilinearity in order to prove that growth is the nature of man endowed with vertical attitude" (op. cit. 164). *Ikenga* is a hand-held wooden carving with two up-thrusting horns that signify strength, defiance and self-reliance. It is possessed by adult Igbo men just like the *ọfọ,* but unlike the *ọfọ* which is a medium of communication with the ancestors, the *Ikenga* represents one's commitment to his personal *Chi* in order to realise his destiny. Although the physical representation of the Ikenga symbol is no longer in vogue, its mental construct is still prevalent among the Igbo. As regards this, every adult male feels a mental compunction to personal enterprise in order to acquire material wealth.

In the words of Nwagbara (2007: 105), helping a town "to get up" is a common concern of the Igbo society. It expresses the drive that sustains community spirit and the mutual dependence of the individual to his direct kinship groups and community at large cherished among the Igbo. For this reason: "While depending on the community, the individual acknowledges his or her obligation to contribute to the growth of the community even when he or she lives 'abroad'. For the Igbo, there is no place like home". However, there is also a utilitarian angle to it, especially in modern times. The wealthy maintain economic dependants who in turn help to bolster their societal influence. More or less, the wealthy is considered to have a moral obligation to share their wealth with the rest of society, especially the less privileged members. In turn, the society honours the wealthy by availing them of her respect and the free services of the less privileged. The saying that a tree does not constitute a forest is frequently used by the Igbo to emphasise the need for building a community of mutual support and solidarity wherever they may be. In the light of this, the migrant is today the new prototype of the Igbo drive for wealth and achievement.

In sum, it is pertinent to reiterate the main thrust of the foregoing discussion on the Igbo value system which is that there are several strategies enshrined in the Igbo social system that help to ensure the realisation of social relationships as well as promote reciprocal obligations and advance social values. One of such inbuilt social strategy is ritual performance. The rich repertoire of Igbo rituals has at least one characteristic in common: each provides a window of understanding the social dynamics of the Igbo society. For instance, whereas the kola-nut ritual is an illustration of the Igbo morality of hospitality, the value of continuity of life is illustrated by the rituals of birth and death. In the next chapter, this study shall attempt full descriptions of selected important rituals to further illustrate the complex social relationships and kinship obligations in the traditional Igbo society.

CHAPTER IV
RITUALS AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Rituals are social actions whose careful analysis reveals the social structure of societies that engage in them. This is because ritual performances make possible the realisation of social relationships, reciprocal obligations, and social values. The preceding chapter has tried to demonstrate the core values of the Igbo society, central among which is the continuity of life and death. Following from that, the present chapter aims at a full description and analysis of the life-crisis rituals in Igbo society as illustrations of the centrality of this core value and a further clarification of her social structure. In describing these rituals, we shall generally keep an eye on three questions: What are the social relations involved? That is, what are the kin positions that are required to perform specific roles in a ritual? What is the scenario and sequence of the ritual? Finally, what materials are transferred from whom to whom? It is our conviction that a good analysis of ritual obligations is an important way of differentiating between different types of kinship relations. In the meantime, however, we shall start off with exploring the concept of ritual.

4.1 The Concept of Ritual

Ritual is a very intricate and complex concept and part of this complexity stems from its ubiquity and from the fact that there have been, at least in recent decades, several approaches to the study of ritual, spanning a wide array of branches of knowledge – anthropology, sociology, history of religion, sociobiology, philosophy, to name but a few – that consider ritual a sort of "window" to understanding social dynamics. As Bell further observes, it was the analysis of culture, as opposed to society and religion per se, that gave a particularly critical place to ritual. Bell further argues that, "the prominence of ritual in the work of cultural anthropologists such as Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Edmund Leach, and Marshall Sahlins fuelled the emergence of a focus on ritual itself in the cross-disciplinary endeavour of ritual studies" (Bell 1992: 15). Nevertheless, this interdisciplinary approach does not necessarily amount to an unanimity in the understanding of ritual. On the contrary, it paves way for multiple perspectives in the approach to ritual studies, which invariably gives rise to various definitions since each department of knowledge has an aspect of ritual to emphasise over others.

This development is perhaps a vindication of Edmund Leach's earlier critique to the effect that it is hopelessly difficult for scholars to arrive at a unanimous concept of ritual. What is therefore important is an operationalisation of the concept because: "Ritual is clearly not a fact of nature but a concept, and definitions of concepts should be operational; the merits of any particular formula will depend upon how the concept is being used" (Leach 1968: 521). However, there is no doubt that the scientific study of ritual "has offered new insights into the dynamics of religion, culture and personhood" (Bell 1997: ix). Of the various permutations around the concept of ritual, one can identify a common thread running across them. More than a theory, ritual is praxis; the theoretical perspectives are, at best, efforts to explain concrete, observable ritual acts. In the *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, Mitchell (2002: 738) notes that: "According to most theories, ritual either involves different forms of action from everyday life, or at least different purposes… The difference relates to the meaning attached to the ritual act, which is suggested by the use of symbols… This assumes that ritual has a communicative role". Like all acts of communication, ritual creates solidarity and mutual cohesion. Hence, what differentiates a ritual act from the normal quotidian performance of the same act is the meaning attached to the former, which is lacking in the latter – its sacrality, the property of ontological otherness. Thus, every material used for ritual could be found and used on other occasions but without the same meaning attached to it as in the ritual context. In *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Bell (1997: xi) declares that: "Today we think of 'ritual' as a complex sociocultural medium variously constructed of tradition, exigency, and self-expression; it is understood to play a wide variety of roles and to communicate a rich density of over-determined messages and attitudes".

Following the Durkheimian tradition, early British anthropologists consider the chief goal of ritual to be that of social integration because by attaching the ritual participants to the Divinity, it attaches them to the society at large. In other words, ritual comprises both vertical and horizontal dimensions that work together like the two sides of a coin and creates a nexus in real time between the natural and the supernatural, between time and eternity, through which the ultimate aim of uniting the entire society is achieved. Nevertheless, this rather functionalist perspective emphasises the way rituals reinforce traditional social ties between individuals, thereby strengthening and perpetuating the social structure

"through the ritualistic or mythic symbolization of the underlying social values upon which it rests" (Geertz 1973: 142). In other words, ritual is also a means of reproducing and perpetuating social relations. But this quality also alludes to the ambivalence of ritual: it unites as much as it divides; it integrates and separates at the same time; it functions as an identity factor. Whereas a particular group of people or culture could be identified and bound by a particular ritual, they could by the same token be differentiated from the rest. Bell (1992: 130) summarises the points as follows:

> Ritual systems do not function to regulate or control the systems of social relations; they *are* the system, and an expedient rather than perfectly ordered one at that. In other words, the more or less practical organization of ritual activities neither acts upon nor reflects the social system; rather, these loosely coordinated activities are constantly differentiating and integrating, establishing and subverting the field of social relations. Hence, such expedient systems of ritualized relations are not primarily concerned with 'social relations' in the Durkheimian sense. Insofar as they establish hierarchical social relations, they are also concerned with distinguishing local identities, ordering social differences, and controlling the contention and negotiation involved in the appropriation of symbols.

Taking note of these different perspectives surrounding the understanding of ritual, Bell proposes a synopsis of the meaning of ritual by reiterating the position of Geertz (op. cit.) that ritual is a symbolic act that functions as a sort of melting pot between thought and action, between the real and the ideal worlds. In order to attain a proper understanding of this symbolic act, Bell (1992: 32) advances a three-levelled step: "Ritual is to the symbols it dramatizes as action is to thought; on a second level, ritual integrates thought and action; and on a third level, a focus on ritual performances integrates *our* thought and *their* action" (emphasis in original). The first level is cosmological, the second is sociological and the third, epistemological – all three levels or perspectives must be considered before a valid interpretation of any ritual action can be attained.

More so, Bell proposes these three-layered steps as a guide for theorists in their attempt to deconstruct ritual action in a meaningful manner. For her, this must involve a mediation of both the epic and emic perspectives in order to arrive at an objective interpretation. Therefore, the greatest challenge to the ethnographer

becomes the task of interpretation which of course requires poking through the ultra-thin veneers of ritual actions into the cosmological foundations from which they originate. Put in another way, one can validly make the claim that ritual is the dramatized socio-cosmology of a society. To that extent, ritual is a veritable tool for understanding how societies function.

4.2 Social Functions of Ritual

Several authors have indeed focused on the social functions and structure of ritual in their enquiries into the subject. Foremost among these functions are the enhancement of social solidarity and maintenance of kinship relations. To this end, we shall focus on those social functions of ritual that may further bring to light the social structure and system of values of the Igbo society as already discussed in previous sections. This shall be investigated in line with the postulations of Monica Wilson as quoted by Turner (1969 [2008]: 6), which is a good summary of our major task in this section:

> Rituals reveal values at their deepest level… men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies.

Applying this to the Igbo society, our effort here is focused on using the different indigenous life-crisis rituals as analytical tools for the study of the essential constitution of the Igbo society, hence our present focus on the social functions of rituals.

4.2.1 Ritual as a Principle of Social Cohesion

Ritual is a social action with a social function, and it transforms the individual into a social person and inserts him in a web of social relationships. Thus, ritual creates and sustains group identity. It also brings people together and makes of them a distinct community. In Durkheimian parlance, it is the maintenance of social solidarity that impels the individual to engage in ritual practice since individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members (Lehmann 1993: 209). What can be gleaned from the above is that Durkheim is convinced that rituals express the moral precepts which are the foundations upon which

society is built. In his classic, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* he articulates this conviction as follows: "Rituals are as necessary for the well working of our moral life as our food is for the maintenance of our physical life; for it is through them that the group affirms and maintains itself" (Durkheim 1915: 382). Largely, his position reinforces the claim of an intrinsic connection between ritual and social values, for both are means of preserving the society.

The point that ritual constructs and reproduces social relations can be seen clearly by considering rituals of initiation. These rituals create new social persons and impose on them new statuses and roles that were hitherto not theirs. These "life-crisis" rituals necessarily involve "a crossing of social frontiers" (cf. Leach 1995 [1976]: 34) – that is, moving from one social status to another. For the Igbo, it is a transition that is cosmologically indefinite because the life-course is circular. The life-crisis rituals enable the individual to transit from one stage to another through his life cycle. However, the Igbo life cycle is not limited to the period from birth to death as in western cosmology; both the unborn and the dead ancestors (the "living-dead") are much alive and active in their social world. These series of rituals create new social relationships and incorporate the participants into the social web determined by the indigenous kinship system. More importantly, through the common experience created by participation in ritual performance, social relationships are created and or reinforced; the different parts thereby become attached to the whole.

4.2.2 Ritual as a Vehicle of Social Continuity

The prospect of continuity is a fundamental concern of every social group and ritual performances take care of this concern in every society. In other words, part of the primary functions of ritual are the creation and sustenance of social relationships. In other words, the existence and continuity of any society depends on its rituals. Crossley argues that ritual is "embodied practical reason" (cf. Campbell 2011), which is necessary for the production and perpetuation of particular types of social relationships. The veracity of this claim is vindicated by the rituals of marriage, through which Radcliffe-Brown (1940: 43) observes that:

> New social relations are created, not only between the husband and the wife, and between the husband and the wife's relatives on the one side and between the wife and the husband's relatives on the other, but also, in a great many societies, between the relatives of the husband and

> those of the wife, who, on the two sides, are interested in the marriage and in the children that are expected to result from it.

More than any other ritual, the process of marriage alliance in Igbo society demonstrates the capacity of ritual to produce and reproduce social relations. Taking cognisance of the points already made in the sections on Igbo cosmology and value systems, it may not be far-fetched to understand why the Igbo society places such a high premium on marriage because marriage alliances create for the descent groups, the possibility of self-perpetuation. Basically, this is the reason why fertility is a central consideration in the process of establishing marriage alliances in Igboland. However, it is not only the fertility of the in-marrying wife that is of crucial importance but, more so, the benediction of the ancestors, the original owners of the land, through whom the potential fertility of the woman is eventually actualised in due course. These cosmological foundations are well dramatized in the various ritual performances associated with the process of marriage.

This function of ritual is perhaps more pronounced in Igbo society because it is founded on the principle of cosmological holism. The evident holism in Igbo ritual performance is further expressed by Nwaogaidu (2017: 38):

> It is the people's belief that the land and everything that is in it belongs (sic) to the ancestors and the invisible deities. In that case, the point of interaction occasioned by the ritual is not only seen as a form of solidarity but also placed the people in communion with the superior agents of nature. This interaction therefore ensures that harmony is maintained in the cosmological order of being.

To this end, the important roles accorded the ancestors in their hierarchical order of social relationships come into play in virtually every Igbo ritual, as it binds together the unborn, the living and the dead in an intricate unity of mutual reciprocity. Therefore, it can be evinced that rituals effectively accomplish a transcending of boundaries between the invisible and visible worlds, between the sacred and the profane; as both spheres now interact and perpetuate social relations between the ritual participants and the spiritual agents. However, the relationship between a particular group and its ancestors, as well as the identification between them effected by ritual interaction with the ancestral forces, are particular to each

group. Thus, their ritual experience unites them as a group as much as it distinguishes them from others. Rituals therefore act as a visible iconic means by which the differences between various groups are valorised.

4.2.3 Ritual creates “Systems of Circulation”

Appropriating the example of eastern Indonesian societies in his article, “Transforming Tobelo Ritual”, Platenkamp (1992) argues that the meaning and value of hierarchical order of relationships which constitute the social morphology as revealed by ritual, are articulated in the transfer of beings and things. Such transfers viewed in their totality constitute systems of circulation. This aligns with the opinion that ritual creates relations of transfer and a system of exchange. Such “transfer of beings and things” creates reciprocal social obligations which guarantee sustenance of social relationships.

Of course, studies on gift exchange date back to the early twentieth century, with the pioneering works of Malinowski whose work on the *kula* exchange in Melanesia is considered classic. Broadly speaking, there are two major approaches to the study of exchange – the structural perspective and the relational perspective – both of which are rather complementary perspectives on the subject. The works of Malinowski, Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss and recently Paul Bohannan on the subject, count as representative of the structural analysis school. The other side of the coin is the relational perspective, which is mainly concerned with “how exchanges reflect and shape the identity of the social actors involved, as well as the relationship those actors have with each other, with the thing exchanged and with the act of exchange itself. Two themes at focus on the relational aspects of exchange are the way that exchange can create groups within a society, and the way that exchange links people and objects” (Carrier 2002: 334). Here lies the link between ritual and exchange: ritual is a system of transfer of material and/or immaterial gifts through which social relations are reproduced.

Furthermore, exchange, in the classical Maussian interpretation (cf. Verhezen 2009: 100) is constituted by a triad of interrelated elements, namely, the giver (the person giving), the receiver (the person receiving) and the gift (the object exchanged, which could be gifts or commodities). In Melanesian societies, which constitute the original site of ethnographies on this topic, the relationship established between the persons engaged in the exchange process is the acclaimed foundational principle of reciprocity. Hence, Abraham and Millar (2011: 691)

note that: “In Melanesian societies, reciprocal exchange is an important and often dominant principle which articulates a range of social, economic, political and ritual institutions. It is the woof to the warp of the social fabric, the means to its cyclical regeneration in time”.

Every ritual involves a transfer of beings and or things by which new relationships and reciprocal obligations are created, or the existing ones strengthened. Ritual transfers, like every form of gift exchange, defines boundaries of social relationships. Normally, gifts and counter gifts are exchanged within a defined social boundary but whenever this boundary is crossed in the process of exchange a new boundary is created. This is what happens in rituals of initiation and is even more clearly expressed in those of marriage alliance. Marriage rituals involve a “transfer of beings and things” that create new boundaries (or widening the existing ones) of kinship relationships. It is against this backdrop that the transfer of bride wealth and other exchanges in the marriage ritual should be properly understood.

More so, gifts impose on the receiver an obligation of a counter-gift. In lieu of this, Mauss argues that “In the exchanged objects … there is a property which forces the gifts to circulate, to be given in return” (cf. Lévi-Strauss 2001 [1950]: 46). In other words, what creates the obligation to give is the “représentation collectif” of reciprocity. Considered from the point of view of reciprocity, there are several modalities that the transfer of gifts, given in return of the ones received, can assume. Platenkamp (2014) identifies two such modalities namely: equivalence models of exchange and non-equivalence models of exchange. According to him, when gifts that are returned embody an immaterial value equal to that embodied in the first gift, it is referred to as equivalence model of exchange, and can assume different forms depending on the timing of the return gift. The second modality, the non-equivalence model of exchange, describes cases where gifts and counter gifts embody different immaterial values, thereby generating two distinct types of relationships: “By accepting the gifts from the giver the receiver agrees to participate in the origin relationship of which that giver is the custodian. Conversely, by accepting the counter gift, which that receiver makes in return, the giver participates in a different origin relationship, of which the receiver making the counter gift is the custodian” (Platenkamp 2014: 5).

The non-equivalence models of exchange are manifested especially in rituals, for example in marriage rituals, where the gift from the family of the groom, the so-

called bride price, is considered to embody immaterial values owned by the groom's ancestors; and the return gift, the bride and the so-called dowry or 'bride wealth', are considered to embody a different immaterial value – that is, the fecundity 'owned' by the ancestors of the bride. The non-equivalence model is also manifested in the relations between people of autochthonous and foreign origins as already indicated in the section on Igbo cosmology. The same tradition has been shown to exist in many other societies in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Whereas the autochthons are valued for having gifts 'from the soil', the foreigners are valued for possessing gifts 'from abroad', and in this way a reciprocal relationship of mutual esteem is made possible. Platenkamp argues therefore that such actual exchanges of gifts derive their social significance from "the relative valuation of two different wholes" of which these gift objects are the respective parts.

Still on the same path of interrogation, Carrier (2002: 332) asserts that: "Exchange is the transfer of things between social actors. The things can be human or animal, material or immaterial, words or things. The actors can be individuals, groups, or beings such as gods or spirits. Cast this broadly, exchange pervades social life". Indeed, the principle of gift exchange is the *key* principle of social life. There is an inherent social meaning to the exchange of goods such that the material value of the items exchanged hold secondary or even tertiary importance to the symbolic social meaning behind the act. As already indicated, every object of exchange possesses material and immaterial value and thus relations of transfer contain in themselves a mixture of both these values. Be that as it may, what really matters in the process of ritual transfer is the immaterial or symbolic value of the object being transferred rather than its material value.

In this respect, Platenkamp points out that the process of transfer ultimately "blurs" the distinction between the person and the gift since every gift object contains something of its original owner, which makes him part of the relational process. To this, Nwaogaidu (2017: 35) buttresses the point that: "Through ritual actions, the material values are rendered immaterial or non-observable because of the higher values they tend to reproduce. On the other hand, the gift exchanges create the will on individuals and groups towards the establishment of social relationships". The will here referred to, is a sort of moral compulsion inherent in every gift transferred namely, the obligation of reciprocity. To this end, using examples from the life-crisis rituals, this study would consider the rituals of birth,

initiation, marriage and death in Igbo tradition; and will more so, demonstrate how rituals reveal the Igbo society and her core values.

4.3 Rituals of Birth

Childbirth among the Igbo is an occasion of great joy and festivity and evokes community concern since the Igbo believe that "the child belongs to everyone" (*nwa bụ nwa ọha*). It is therefore a double joy when the mother and child come out hale and hearty from the delivery room. This is because the period of pregnancy is considered rather precarious and filled with dangerous uncertainties. Hence, in the traditional setting when a man wants to announce that his wife has put to bed, he uses an expression that indicates with how much trepidation the Igbo hold the period of pregnancy: "My wife has climbed down!" (*nwunye m arịtugo!*). The expression "to climb down" indicates a mindset that likens a pregnant woman to someone situated in a precarious height without aid; and is an image that the average Igbo would understand quite well. Interestingly, the sight of men climbing trees is rather commonplace – to tap palm wine, to reap fruits or cut down branches for building purposes and so on. But it is also not uncommon that such climbing ventures result in a slew of fatalities: a branch may just break off or a foot may slip and many a climber come crashing down. Thus, attributing such an image to a pregnant woman indicates that she is perceived as sharing the same fate as a tapper precariously perched on top of a palm tree; one whose whole art of climbing cannot guarantee him absolute security; one who is completely left at the mercy of the gods. As regards this, the safe delivery of a pregnant woman, which represents a safe "climbing down" from such dangerous perch, naturally elicits joy of immense proportions which calls for celebrations and ritual sacrifices of thanksgiving; therefore, birth doubles as a very important social and religious event.

Furthermore, the number of birth rituals and the procedure of celebrating them vary from place to place in Igboland, but the basic fact is that the process of procreation as the beginning of a new social life is universally acknowledged and variously ritualised. It involves the performance of various rituals in the form of prayers, divinations, various sacrifices that are performed between the expectant mother's natal village and her marital home. These rituals prior to delivery aim at preserving and protecting the lives of mother and child, but the postnatal rituals

are socially determined processes of transforming the new-born child into a social person; thereby situating it progressively in an extensive web of social relationships. Ultimately, the underlying aim of these rituals is the perpetuation of society. With the delivery of the child begins the period of seclusion for the mother and the new-born, a period known known as *ọmụgọ*.

4.3.1 The *Ọmụgọ* Ritual

The period from the day of birth till the twenty-eighth day (that is, seven native weeks[10]) is regarded as a period of seclusion for mother and child, known as the *ọmụgọ*[11] period. The nursing mother is confined to her section of the home and restricted from doing any work. Her mother or eldest sister (if her mother is already dead or invalid) who had arrived shortly before or during the onset of labour stays with her during this period and takes over the house chores as well as the care of the nursing mother and her newborn. She mentors the new mother (especially if it is her first birth experience) in the ways of early childcare.

However, the term *ọmụgọ* also refers to the various rites of initiation and socialisation that follow childbirth until infancy, and which are aimed at transforming the new-born baby into a social person and reintegrating the mother into the society. The period of *ọmụgọ* is also characterised by a series of gift exchanges through the expression of solidarity and the reproduction of social relationships. For instance, every in-married woman within the new-born's patrilineage (*ndinyom*) offers the nursing mother at least a ball of local table salt while friends and neighbours shower the new-born and the nursing mother with various gift items. Social relationships are thereby reproduced, and existing ones are consolidated. There are also certain minor rituals that are performed within this period, but the major ones begin with the completion of the period of seclusion.

In all parts of Igboland, the naming of the new-born is recognised as the ritual that accords him a social personality. In a fundamental manner, one could say that the naming ceremony is the culmination of the reception accorded to a new-

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[10] The Igbo native week is made up of four market days (Eke, Nkwọ, Oye and Afọ). Seven weeks make one month (that is, twenty-eight days). The seventh week is a very significant period in Igbo cosmology, as could be seen from the various illustrations of Igbo ritual discussed in this chapter.

[11] The term *ọmụgọ* has no literal translation, but the root *ọmụ* may refer to childbirth; it is also a term used for the new shoot of the palm tree (or young palm leaf), which is also considered sacred.

born child into the social arena – the family, the clan and more importantly, into the cosmos of the living. That is why names are not just given at random because they have deep meanings and cosmological significance. This is however not peculiar to the Igbo society. It is a view shared by all African societies wherein name is considered a full-length philosophical statement: one which reflects critical elements of space, time, the social as well as the religious cosmos in general. Therefore, to properly understand the meaning and import of Igbo names would demand a proper appreciation of Igbo cosmology. It has already been observed that the Igbo have a holistic understanding of society in which the dead, the living and the unborn continually interact in a cycle of life, death, and rebirth. They profess a circular notion of the cosmos where the living are the previously unborn and the dead are the previously living members of society. Whereas it is still a matter of great debate whether reincarnation in the strict sense exists among the Igbo, a careful analysis of most birth rituals shows clearly that at least some form of it is consistently expressed. Even when the ancestor does not return fully in the new-born, at least some aspects of the living dead – say some attributes and qualities – are believed to return in a new-born child. Put in another way, the influence of the ancestors in the integration of new members of the society is strong as human life originates from and returns to the ancestors.

With recourse to this, naming rituals emphasise this aspect of Igbo cosmology quite eloquently. This begins with the manner of determining which name is to be given to a new-born child. Different accounts of naming ceremonies seem to underscore the fact that Igbo names are not simply given out of personal choices of the parents of the child because there are processes and rituals employed to determine which name the child eventually assumes, which can either be the name of an ancestor or a living member of society. Whatever be the case, the act of naming certainly establishes the first social relationship between the new baby and the society, and so it is understandable that the ancestors who are the original owners of the land should play a crucial role in it. Several accounts point to the role of diviners, dreams and strange occurrences that eventually influence the choice of names for a new-born.

Additionally, the birth of a child brings indescribable joy to the family and the society at large and is usually well celebrated. After delivery, the child's umbilical cord is never cut but left to drop off by itself. By the time it eventually drops, the umbilical cord is collected and buried under the foot of a palm or banana

tree[12], which, from that day forward, belongs to the child as his first property. In some regions, the child's hair is also cut for the first time on this day. But a larger feast is reserved for the twenty-eighth day – that is, exactly seven native weeks after the child's birth, which is the traditional day of naming ceremony for a neonate. It is usually a big feast which is variously celebrated according to the resources at the family's disposal. However, there are some accompanying rituals to naming ceremonies whose sequence and details vary from place to place. For the purpose of our analysis, we shall discuss a few of such birth rituals with a focus on what traditional values and social relationships are reproduced in them.

4.3.2 *Ịgụ-ogbo* Ritual[13]

The task of determining which of the ancestors has come to visit the family in the person of a new baby is the first step to defining the child as a social person – linking him in a relationship with his forebears – and a prelude to the eventual social identification of the child by name. As the surest access to the ancestors who are the custodians of the land, the services of a diviner or fortune-teller (*dibia-afa*) is usually required for this ritual. Thus, the parents of the child invite a diviner to the house to find out who should name the child. The diviner may ask certain questions concerning benevolences received by the mother from people or animals (sometimes considered sacred agents of the divinities) during her pregnancy. These could be little tokens of kindness like helping her fetch water or firewood or helping her lift a load or as much as giving her some presents. The diviner may also like to ascertain what dreams she had within the said period or use other tools he may deem helpful in interpreting the minds of the ancestors.

When, in the long run, the diviner confirms a name, the agnatic kin then take *odo* (phallic chalk) from the diviner and, after marking themselves in the face with it, they break into singing and dancing in procession to the house of the named person. On seeing the *odo* chalk he knows immediately that he has been chosen as

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12 This is an important relationship which suggests a case of primal duality that agrees with Igbo cosmology. In many traditional societies, the separation of the neonate and the umbilical cord is the first social relatedness that emerges. It is the same for the Igbo, such that when the child is ill and the healer comes, he addresses this relationship for its potential healing properties, especially in the case of *ogbanje* healing rituals.

13 This ritual is very popular in the so-called Igbo-Odo region of northern Igboland. The account being analysed here is based on ethnographic materials from the Diogbe Community of that region obtained by this writer during fieldwork.

"the replica" (*ogbo*[14]) of a new-born baby, so he receives the *odo* with joy and immediately joins the singing party without hesitation back to the home of the new-born. On arrival at the house, the person chosen as *ogbo* would carry the little baby for some time and give it back to its mother. The parents provide food and drinks for the assembly which may also include friends and neighbours and after the merrymaking, the people disperse to their homes.

After this ceremony, the *ogbo*-elect begins to prepare on how to officially name the baby. This may or may not coincide with the official naming ceremony, and there is no time limit to doing this. Usually, the *ogbo* determines when he would do this; sometimes waiting for over a year. When he eventually decides on a date, he sends a message across to the child's family ahead of time and invites some friends and neighbours who would accompany him to the ritual of "the dance of *ogbo*" (*egwu ogbo*). On this day, he is accompanied by his own invitees with many gifts which may include a goat, some tubers of yam, new clothes for the baby, toys and other household utensils according to his means. On arrival, the *ogbo* lays down two trays on the ground at a reasonable distance to each other – one for him, the other for the new-born baby. After presenting their gifts, the assembly begins to sing, to which tune the *ogbo* will have to dance in celebration of the new life. In appreciation of his dance steps, the assembled persons drop their cash gifts in the two trays on the ground. In the end, the monies are collected by the *ogbo* and handed over to the parents of the new-born.

However, this ritual has changed in form especially following the advent of Christianity in Igboland. Today, it has become anachronistic to approach a diviner to decipher who the *ogbo* of a child is. Instead, people make use of the conventional system of casting lots. On the day of *ịgụ-ogbo*, the parents of the new baby make a list of the baby's agnatic and affinal relatives (males only for a male child; females only for a female child). These names are cut and folded. They are put in a bag or in a bowel and shaken over several times. Then an infant is made to pick one from the folded pieces of paper. At each pick, the name

[14] *Ogbo* is like a replica of a person. The concept of *ogbo* underscores the Igbo cosmology of the circularity of life. It is the ancestors that come back in the form of neonates. To name a neonate demands finding out which of the ancestors has come back to life. But in practice, it seems the emphasis is on determining the factors of semblance between the neonate and the ancestors. Thus, naming primarily creates a cosmological relationship between the neonate and a particular ancestor who is often represented by a living elder.

would be read out loud and the bag or bowel shaken again. This process is repeated until an *ogbo* emerges. The first name to be picked thrice becomes the *ogbo* of the baby, and then the ritual goes ahead as described above. An alternative variant is to use the elimination method, in which case the names in the bowel will be reduced at intervals by a particular quantity until only one piece of paper remains in the bowel. The person whose name is written in this last piece of paper is then declared the *ogbo*.

More importantly, *ịgụ-ogbo* is a birth ritual that must be performed in the native soil. However, in modern times when many people no longer live in their native homes, the pre-selection ritual of the *ogbo* may be done in a foreign soil to enable the parents name the child but the actual ceremony (the visit of the *ogbo* and the dance rituals) must be done in the native home irrespective of how long it may take to actualise it. It becomes important to note that of all the changes that have crept into this ritual, what has remained consistent is the effort to keep the choice of the *ogbo* a prerogative of the Divinity and the ancestors; hence the transition from consulting the diviner to casting lots is meant to serve the same purpose. Even though both methods could be manipulated to realise a predetermined choice of the parents, the fact that such manipulations are hardly admitted openly shows that the transcendental role of the ancestors in the process of admitting new members of society is still much respected.

Furthermore, the *ịgụ-ogbo* ritual establishes a life-long relationship between the child and the person after whom he is named. They call each other "replica" (*ogbo*) and so are expected to have a close and cordial relationship. The child relates to him as a mentor, an older self; and he in turn assumes responsibilities for the growth and welfare of the child. Their relationship involves a constant exchange of gifts and counter-gifts. For example, the social obligations of *ogbo*-relationship come out mainly during life-crisis rituals. At the death of one's *ogbo*, one is expected to make an equivalent return gift for the one received at birth – precisely on the day of "the dance of *ogbo*" (*egwu ogbo*). For instance, if the *ogbo* gave him a goat during his naming, he is expected to give a goat during his *ogbo*'s funeral. This is a final return gift that is cosmologically equivalent to a sacrifice. Conversely, when the child grows to the age of marriage he is expected to extend a formal invitation to his *ogbo* (that is, with kolanut and some wine), and the *ogbo*, in turn, is expected to reciprocate by giving him financial support for the marriage ceremonies. Having ascertained the name of the child through

the *ịgụ-ogbo* ritual, the celebration of the naming ceremony, *ịgụ aha* becomes imminent.

4.3.3 *Ịgụ-aha* Ritual (Naming Ceremony)

One of the most elaborate birth rituals in the Igbo society is the naming ceremony. It involves a coming together of both the child's affinal and agnatic kin groups: the *ikwu nne* – relatives of the mother and the *ụmụnna* – the father's patrilineage, as well as many other friends and well-wishers. The event comprises of ritual celebration and feasting. The naming ritual is performed by the eldest male agnatic kin of the child's extended family (*ọkpala*) as one who represents ancestors of the agnatic line, in his living room (*obu*) before the family shrine containing the family *ọfọ*[15] – the ancestral symbol. It would be the first time that the child enters this room, located in the male part of the compound. The family head is seated with some elders of the patrilineage. Ritual materials that should be put in place are kola nut (*ọjị*), a bowl of clean water and the *ọfọ* (symbol of ancestral authority). The family head washes his hands and that of the child while saying some prayers. Thereafter, he breaks the kolanut and says a few prayers of thanksgiving to the Divinity, the giver of life. He praises the ancestors for their benevolence and wishes the child well. The assembly intermittently approves of the prayers with the acclamation of "so shall it be!" (*isee*[16]*!*). After prayer, the *ọkpala* carries the child in his bosom while facing the ancestral shrine, he takes up the *ọfọ* in the right hand and then proclaims the name of the child that has already been determined from the previous ritual. After him, it would be the turn of the nursing mother and her own mother (the child's grandmother) who would together give the child its second name. In some other areas of Igboland, the affinal relatives perform their own naming ritual on a separate date agreed with the parents of the neonate. In both cases, however, the naming rituals impart on the neonate a double unilineal identity.

[15] A short staff-like object made from a branch of the *ọfọ* tree considered by the Igbo as symbol of ancestral authority. See pages 65-80 for details.

[16] The Igbo acclamation *isee!* has no direct English translation but its use is equivalent to that of the word "amen" in Christian religion. That is why it is usually translated as "so shall it be". It is however etymologically derived from *ise*, the Igbo numerical term for five, which is considered complete and divine in Igbo cosmology. Achebe (2016: 35) writes: "The number five in Igbo cosmology represented completeness, the wholeness of something". Typically, a kolanut with five cotyledons is considered a perfect one, a sign of divine endorsement.

After the second name has been given, the eldest man of the patrilineage who is present pours out a libation of palm wine to the Divinity, the ancestors, and the spirits. He admonishes the parents and prays for blessings to be bestowed upon the child. In his own account, Mba (1993: 179) articulates the ritual action of the elder in a naming ceremony thus:

> The elderly person rubs his hand over the child's head, prays and spits in his ears to implant the name into the baby's head. After that the name is then pronounced loudly to the crowd, and prayers are offered for long life and prosperity.

Thus, the naming ceremony incorporates the child first into his family, and then into the society at large. Cosmologically, the child who has been given a name sanctioned by the ancestors is believed to have been completely and ritually integrated into the community of the living and the living-dead. After the naming ritual, a ritual feast is held which is usually lavish. Another highpoint is the presentation of *ọmụgọ* gifts to both the nursing mother and her mother by the father of the child and the feasting assembly. The necessary gift items that must make up the husband's gift to his nursing wife include at least a set of Wrapper – a traditional textile which women tie around their waist. This is called "cloth for the nursing period" (*akwa ọmụgọ*). Then other articles of clothing, a special type of dried fish (*azụ ọmụgọ*), yam and other gifts that he may afford will also be given. These constitute the basic, traditionally symbolic gifts to a nursing mother. Nevertheless, there is indeed no limit to what can be given as *ọmụgọ* gifts. In modern times, there are instances where expensive gifts such as cars and motorcycles are given as *ọmụgọ* gifts; wherein the nursing mother is seated on a special throne-like seat set-up for the ceremony from where she receives her *ọmụgọ* gifts from the assembly. While acknowledging the generosity of those who shower her with gifts, she takes special cognisance of younger and expectant women whose foreheads she touches and says a prayer of good wish. This is believed to transmit the same good luck and benevolence of the ancestors for their own imminent delivery.

4.3.4 "Putting the Child on Ground" (*ịtọ nwa n'ala*)

There is another fascinating birth ritual of great importance found in many regions of Igboland. The Diogbe community in northern Igboland calls it "to put the child on the ground/soil" (*ịtọ nwa n'ala*). It is a simple ritual in form but laden with

profound depths of meaning and cosmological symbolisations – a typical illustration of the truism in the adage that "less is more". Not only is it a ritual performance that transforms a child into an autochthon and one which differentiates it from the stranger/migrant, but it also bequeaths him with all the rights and privileges due to a "son of the soil", as the Igbo would say. *Ịto nwa n'ala* is a ritual that effects an eternal incorporation of the individual into the cosmological commonwealth of its patrilineage. As such, this ritual can only be performed by autochthons on the ancestral soil. Hence, only the eldest agnatic male (*onyishi*) who is also the custodian of the ancestral staff – the *ọfọ* (*arụa*)[17] – may officiate this ritual. Also remarkable are the symbolizations and cosmological richness of the principal items required for this ritual performance – bare soil, the *ọfọ* staff and *odo* (phallic chalk) – all of which point to the link with the ancestors and the supernatural. The phallic chalk is an important socio-religious symbol among the Igbo. According to Udoye (2011: 142),

> Phallic chalk depicts holiness, acceptance, and is an element that aids concentration (in prayer) and mystical entrance into the spiritual realm. It is used as well for decoration, as medicine, as a symbol of welcome and for religious and ritual purposes… When a priest or dibia rubs it, it depicts him as a half man and half spirit. That means he can mediate between the visible and the invisible world. Nevertheless, when it is robbed (sic) only on the eyes, palms, hands, feet or nails, it serves as an empowerment.

The simple ritual of *ịtọ nwa n'ala* entails the following: on an appointed day after the birth of a child, the parents invite the child's agnatic kin, most important of whom is the *onyishi* as the agnatic head, whose function it is to officiate the ritual performance. The ritual takes place outside in the frontal part of the compound facing the entrance. When everything is set, the *onyishi* carries the unclad neonate and lays it on the bare ground or soil surrounded by the consanguinal and agnatic kin. Then he takes the so-called phallic chalk (*odo* or *nzu*) and rubs it on the child (usually on the right cheek); after which he then paints himself in the eyes and right cheek with the same chalk, paints the parents of the child and the assembled agnates on their right cheeks as well.

[17] Both terms refer to the same object. For details, see p. 64ff.

The rubbing of the child with the phallic chalk, done by the representative of the owners of the agnatic lineage links the new-born cosmologically with the ancestors of his patrilineage and all living members of its ancestral group. The implication of this simple ritual is that a social relationship is established which binds the child to his agnatic kin group in perpetuity, to the law of incest and exogamy and other laws and privileges which define its patrilineal group. Therefore, it bequeaths on the neonate the full identity, rights, and protection of the patrilineage. In the course of this research, my informant repeatedly stressed that through this ritual the child "becomes a sacred person" (*ọ g'abụ onye dị nsọ*); "sacred" in the religious sense of being "other", signified by this cosmological union with the original owners of the land who are also sacred. The person is, therefore, obliged to avoid anything that could pollute the land like abominations and sacrileges (e.g., adultery, incest, homicide, etc.) Conversely, he is also protected by the same token such that any violation against his life and person becomes a violation of the land to whom he is now united. Thus, he may not be killed by a fellow "son of the soil" (fratricide). In addition, since the Igbo concept of land is local and exclusive, symbolised by a single shrine of the earth-goddess which is regarded as a physical representation of the original owners of the land, a visitor cannot perform this ritual since each earth goddess is particular to a locality. The land is therefore a primary factor of social identification; the land being defined as the home of the ancestors and their descendants.

So far, the clear outcome of the discourse on birth rituals is the strong attachment of the Igbo to the homeland which is a major distinguishing characteristic of the Igbo everywhere. This attachment seems to have its cosmological foundation in the various rituals of birth which establish right from the beginning of life a sort of covenant or social contract between every Igbo person and the Igbo home soil in very strong and emotive ways. From this perspective, the undying penchant to take the bodies of their dead who died in foreign lands back home for burial can be understood. The ultimate reunion of the dead with the community of ancestors which is considered a sacred obligation in Igbo society has its roots in the elaborate birth rituals.

4.3.5 *Ahịa nwa* – Mother's Outing Ceremony

The naming ceremony effectively ends the period of seclusion of the nursing mother. Thus, on the market day following the naming ceremony, she goes out to

the market. It is a celebration of double significance: it marks her official outing and reintegration into the society, and then the official presentation of the child to the wider community. Members of the public gather around the mother and child in the market square, congratulating them and wishing them well. Some may also present them with gifts, especially those who could not attend the naming ceremony. This supports the Igbo traditional principle that, *nwa na-enweghi aha, anaghi eku ya eku* – which means, a child without name is not to be carried in the arm. From this time onwards, both mother and child become fully (re-)integrated into the society. As the child grows into adulthood, he would be expected to aspire for initiation into one or more titled societies.

4.4 *Eze ji* (King of Yam): A Ritual of Initiation

The Igbo society is administered in clusters of exclusive groups not unlike the age-grade systems and secret societies in other (West) African societies. While the age grade system is more or less determined by each person's relative age (usually within a five-year span) which is permanently fixed, there are other groups and societies whose membership is determined by other criteria such as specific achievements. These are called titled societies. The latter societies are socially more prestigious than the age-grade unions but are also more demanding. Titled societies are specially privileged because they celebrate the strong Igbo value for personal achievement and visible success in life. It is a sign of the coming of age and is a mark of honour and prestige. Thus, it is one of the greatest aspirations of the average Igbo adult to belong to at least one of such titled societies during his lifetime. One such title is the "king of yam" (*Eze ji*), a traditional title that is widely spread in Igboland. This phenomenon has been extensively studied but we shall limit the present discussion to the account of Uchendu (2007: 209-211) who observed its practice among the peoples of the Old Bende Division of Igboland. He justifies his choice of this area by referring to it as the "nuclear" Igboland and the original site of the evolution of the yam title system from where it eventually "diffused" to other Igbo cultural areas in the course of time.

To qualify for initiation into the *Eze ji* society requires a very long period of preparation. The aspirant is expected to undergo some periods of indoctrination, resocialisation and motivation through his lineage elders. He would also have to be physically strong and be able to work hard on the farm. Like most social activities in Igboland, he would not depend on himself alone; he needs to win a

good circle of relatives who would be willing to support his ambition in word and deed because he would need as much assistance with farm labour in order to raise the required quantity of the approved species of yam he is mandated to present. According to tradition, the aspirant must exhibit in his barn at least one hundred stakes of the approved yam type called *ji efu*. When he indicates his readiness for the title, the yams must be inspected first by the elders of his extended family who had taken the first step in his initiation process to the yam title society. Although there are officially approved species of yams which the inspection team look out for, the quantity of other species also stored in the barn under inspection may influence the result of the inspection. The inspectors would be more impressed to see the barn filled with other species of yams aside from the official species. That would be a sign of exceptional diligence on the part of the aspirant. When they are satisfied with the quality and quantity of yams presented, the elders would summon their worthy "son" to take the first step into the *Eze ji* initiation.

Usually, the first step in the initiation ceremony concerns the cosmological dimension. It involves the sacrifice of a goat to the yam deity (*Ahajoku*), which is also the divine principle of fertility, through her priest. Through this sacrifice, the aspirant prays to the deity to bless his efforts at the farm and make it prosperous. It is a stage of liminality because no one can correctly predict the outcome of the farming season. Many people end their aspiration at this stage, should there be poor harvest at the end of the farming season. The successful aspirant whose farm yields a bountiful harvest would still depend on his large network of friends and members of his extended family or lineage for the tough work of harvesting the yams at the appropriate time. When he succeeds in gathering enough yams in his barn to the satisfaction of the inspectors, he could proceed to the next stage known as "doing the yam thing" (*ime ihe ji*) ceremonies. There could be a single title of "ten mounds" (*ihu iri*) or a double title of "thousand" (*nnụ*) depending on the number of qualified yams he could exhibit. An aspirant who exhibits two hundred stakes of *ji efu* and two hundred stakes of *apụ ji* (crested yam, harvested more than once) qualifies for the *ihu iri* title; a double such amount qualifies one for the *nnụ* title, a rarity in many Igbo communities. There are categories of *Ezeji* title, and this depends on the quantity of yams one could stake in one's barn that would scale through the process of inspection.

4.5 Rituals of Marriage

Marriage among the Igbo is a long and highly ritualised process. In spite of the ever-growing and pervasive western influence, the process has remained largely unchanged in the sense that the basic tenets of the traditional marriage system have been left intact – a fact that is evidenced by the different stages of the Igbo marriage process. Beyond the union of two consenting individuals, marriage is understood primarily as a union of two patrilineages – those of the bride and the groom. As would be shown shortly, the marrying couple are hardly at the forefront of the negotiations during the marriage process. They do not speak for themselves rather, the representatives of the respective patrilineages speak on their behalf. In fact, once the bride-to-be has given her consent to the proposed marriage before the assembly, the rest of the negotiations would be carried on behind her. Officially, the bride appears during the marriage negotiations only twice – firstly, when she comes to make a public declaration of her consent and secondly, during the ceremonial handover of her to the groom's family. Normally, it is the traditional responsibility of the man to initiate a marriage proposal, "to seek a woman's hand" in marriage, as the Igbo would express it.

Fundamental principles underlying the Igbo concept of marriage find expression in various ways during the ritual process. Marriage is a process of ritual transfers of gifts and counter gifts. The relations of transfer initiated by the process of marriage alliance between the two lineages continue even after the marriage has been consummated and do not cease as long as the marriage lasts. There is an established index of return gifts such that even the agreed bride wealth is not fully accepted, thus creating an unending chain of reciprocal obligations and mutual debt between the two families and by extension, lineages. *Anaghị alụcha nwanyị alụcha* – "the marriage process is never completed" – is a proverbial statement among the Igbo. All negotiations during the process of marriage are mediated through "the finder" (*Ahụta*), commissioned by the wife-takers but who must have the confidence of both parties. There is yet another important and interesting principle of Igbo marriage namely, that throughout the different stages of the marriage process, speeches are made sitting down, unlike the usual practice in other formal gatherings where one addresses the assembly only in standing position. This may be an indication of the cordial relationship marriage is expected to create between the uniting families/lineages. Although divorce is

possible, there are customary provisions that must be fulfilled before it can be effective.

4.6 Stages of the Ritual Process of Marriage

As already mentioned, the process of marriage is highly ritualised and consists of different stages. The terms for, and the ritual sequence of, the different stages may vary with local customs, but the fundamental logic is the same across the various regions of Igboland. The Iheakpu-Awka model[18] in northern Igboland comprises the following stages:

a. *Ijụ ese*: the identification of, and declaration of interest in, a prospective bride by the potential suitor.
b. *Ije di*: the maiden visit of the prospective bride to her suitor's family (a sort of familiarisation visit).
c. *Ihụ ashụa*: negotiation of the bride price.
d. *Mmanya nchọta*: handing-over of the bride (traditional wedding).

The above stages may also contain certain sub-stages as well as a few ritual ceremonies marking each one of them. We shall now describe the individual stages in greater detail.

4.6.1 The *Ijụ Ese* Stage (Mutual Inquiries)

When a young man intends to marry, he first shares the desire with his parents. Sometimes he may already have found a lady he loves to marry; sometimes he would commission his family to help him out. In the latter case, his immediate sisters would be of help if they are already of age; but if not, then the FZ and MZ would step in to help him find a suitable wife. Whatever be the case, the marriage process officially begins as soon as a potential bride is found and announced to the parents and they in turn are at peace with their son's choice. This first stage

[18] Because of the local variations in terminology and sequence of the rituals, I limit myself to the materials gathered from my fieldwork in Iheakpu-Awka, a small farming community in northern Igboland, situated close to the borders with the northern States of Benue and Kogi, between 2016 and 2018.

is known as *ijụ ese*, literally meaning "asking questions", which comprises different levels of inquiries about the suitability of both parties to enter a marriage alliance.

The wife-taker's family then commissions a person who is quite familiar to the wife-giver's family to inquire whether the lady in question is free for marriage or already engaged. The delegate is given two lobes of kolanut for this visit. If there is already a suitor in the waiting, or if there is an obvious hindrance to the marriage from the perspective of the wife-givers, the usual answer would be an outright "no" and the kolanut would not be accepted at all. Otherwise, the wife-givers would take about two native weeks (eight calendar days) to obtain their daughter's official consent to the proposal and send word to the wife-takers. When eventually the response is in the affirmative, the marriage process then formally begins.

The *ijụ ese* stage is a period of intensive investigation with both parties trying to ascertain the propriety and workability of the proposed marriage alliance. The inquiry begins with determining the genealogical history to ensure that the law of exogamy would not be infringed upon. In many Igbo villages, marriage is allowed between persons who trace their genealogy to the fourth generation but not under the headship of one *onyishi* (elder)[19]. In the very rare instance of a breach of the law of exogamy (e.g., when marriage occurs between persons whose genealogical distance is less than four generations or who come under the headship of the same *onyishi*), then a ritual of appeasement would be performed by the elders of both lineages to appease the ancestors and restore cosmic order. This sacrificial ritual is called "the navel goat" (*ewu otubo*) and involves the killing of a young goat at the lineage shrine to appease the ancestors. By this means, the elders take full responsibility for such a breach of marriage taboo because it means they failed to do a proper job of "asking questions" (*ijụ ese*). Important to note also, is the reference to the navel which is a major symbol of kinship.

When genealogical compatibility is finally established, both parties would then launch separately into a full-scale inquiry about each other. This would involve the cooperation of the extended families, friends, and neighbours. The wife-takers may like to find out how the prospective bride's mother and her other married

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[19] For details of the Iheakpu-Awka social structure see page 41ff.

sisters relate with their husbands. If she hails from another town, they may investigate how other women married from the same town relate with their husbands or how they cooperate in communal activities. They may also try to find out if there had been any established cases of abominations like murder, suicide, adultery, etc. in the family or lineage, as well as traces of perceived hereditary infirmities like madness, epilepsy, childlessness, etc. The existence of such issues might be considered grave enough to call off the marriage proceedings. In a word, the matrilineal qualities of the bride are highly valued in the pre-marriage investigations. In the cosmology of Igbo marriage, the bride is primarily valued for her fertility through which the groom's lineage would be perpetuated. So, establishing any factor that may put this quality in question automatically sounds the death knell to the prospect of marriage for the bride.

On the part of the wife-givers, apart from factoring in the same areas of investigation as the wife-takers shown above, they would be primarily interested in issues of the welfare of their daughter in her new home. This includes among others, finding out how much wealth the intending suitor possesses in terms of landed property in order to ensure that he has the capacity to play the role of breadwinner of a new family. However, this is not always a decisive factor. Other conditions could supply for the lack of immediate material wealth. For instance, if the suitor is known to be a diligent and hardworking young man despite coming from a poor background, he would be considered fit for marriage. A physically strong and hardworking young man is a great asset to the wife-givers. Part of the regular exchange in marriage alliance is that the husband makes regular visit to his in-laws and also supplies labour to their farming activities as well as other household services. The report of the Government of Eastern Nigeria on Marriage Regulation (1955: 4) outlines a wide-range of services the wife-givers would normally expect from their daughter's husband as part of his obligations in the marriage alliance as consisting of:

> … the original clearing of the bush and the making of yam heaps, of assistance in the building of their house and sometimes palm cutting and fence-making also. [During this period] he usually gave presents to the girl's parents of things like palm-wine, yam and firewood or, if he was a hunter, a share of any animal he killed. It was generally obligatory to give certain presents at festival times.

On the other hand, if the intending suitor is poor as an individual but hails from a rich extended family, it would be taken for granted that the solidarity of his kinsmen would be enough to supplement their possible lacks. After all, "only one person cannot marry a wife" (*otu onye anaghị alụ nwanyị*) especially considering the fact that marriage is not an individual venture but a community project. Moreover, the wife-givers would also like to ensure that there are no established criminal tendencies in the family of the wife-takers nor notorious cases of maltreatment of wives by their husbands at least within the radius of the prospective groom's extended family. Although there are various traditional mechanisms of checkmating excesses of husbands over their wives within the social structure, this point remains decisive at this stage. The reason is that issues of marital violence could place extensive social stigma on both parties which may adversely affect the marriage prospects of their respective younger population. To that extent, therefore, no amount of precaution would be considered too much.

Another requirement during the *ijụ ese* stage that both parties would separately consider may be the consultation of diviners and sorcerers to determine the probability of success of the proposed marriage. Mostly because the ancestors are considered the original owners of the land and the primary custodians of fertility, which is the key reason of marriage, it is fundamentally important to secure their benediction over any new affinal relationship or marriage alliance in their lineage and this must be done at the very beginning. In lieu of this, marriage is also a process of transfer between two ancestral communities at the cosmological level. In another sense, it can be said that when these human agents might have reached the limits of their own capacity in the premarital investigations, they hand over the baton to the ancestors through the agency of diviners and sorcerers in order to determine the final decision they would take. This is usually a relatively simple ritual process: the diviner demands a list of materials to be provided by the father of the intending spouse which would be used to ascertain the mind of the ancestors at the lineage shrine; the proclamations of the oracle are taken seriously and if they are in the affirmative on both sides, then the marriage proceedings could go on. But if not, they may either consult yet a higher specialist for reversal or confirmation of the earlier pronouncements or alternatively request for possible sacrifices that may placate the supernatural forces that stand against the prospect of marriage if the earlier oracle was in the negative. However, this aspect of the

divination process is fast disappearing from the *ijụ ese* stage of the modern marriage process in Igboland due to an increasing influence of Christianity in the Igbo cultural landscape.

Assuming the outcome of these inquiries is in the affirmative, the wife-givers would send emissaries to the family of the wife-takers to say that "the road is clear" (*ụzọ dị*). This is a codified manner of acceptance of the marriage proposal. The family of the prospective groom would then arrange a first formal visit to the bride's family. During the visit, the bride is called in to be officially informed that the groom asks her hand in marriage. She looks at the suitor shyly and leaves the room without saying a word. She is not expected to talk. Thereafter, a date for the next major stage which is the "bargaining the price" stage (*ihụ ashụa*) is fixed. Meanwhile, a mediator (*ahụta*) is selected and agreed upon by both parties of the marriage negotiation. The *ahụta* plays the crucial role of mediation during the entire marriage process because he takes responsibility for the nuptial alliance between the two families. Literally, *ahụta* means "one who finds". He stands as one who found the bride/groom and is proposing him/her as the best choice for marriage. Thus, technically he bears witness to the propriety and suitability of both the bride and the groom in making a successful marriage. As such, his task is to make the marriage negotiations as smooth and cordial as possible.

In principle, each party of the bride and the groom can elect an *ahụta*; a role that can be played by any qualified male or female from beyond the extended family. However, if a woman is selected for the role of *ahụta*, she must provide a male proxy who would be speaking on her behalf during the marriage ceremonies. Again, while each of the party may have its own *ahụta*, it is the *ahụta* from the wife-takers who plays the chief mediatory role throughout the process. In fact, he is the fulcrum around which the entire process revolves. That is why he must be a man of uncommon qualities, a good speaker, and a negotiator with a sound retentive memory as well as well-versed in matters of traditional marriage. More importantly, although the wife-takers have the prerogative of selecting the *ahụta*, whoever is selected must be equally acceptable to, and endorsed by, the wife-givers. As a mediator in all transactions during the long process of marriage, the *ahụta* must have the confidence of both parties because all the material and immaterial transfers during the process of alliance are conducted through him. In fact, his role extends beyond the formal ceremonies of marriage in the sense that at any stage during the marriage alliance, he could be called upon to mediate on

different issues of dispute that may arise; and should the marriage eventually break down, he superintends the process of returning gifts of bride price, dowries, etc.

Following the agreement of both families on the person to play the role of *ahụta*, the father of the suitor makes a formal request on the wife givers for the "husband-journey" (*ije di*) ritual – that is, the maiden visit of the bride to her would-be home. This visit serves several purposes. It affords the prospective couple an opportunity to get to know themselves better. The bride especially familiarises herself with her prospective affines – especially the members of the immediate family and neighbours of her suitor. She is also expected during the visit to demonstrate those good qualities expected of a new wife like hard work, tolerance, good culinary skills, etc. She is also under close watch by the neighbours and close relatives who normally come by to interact with her and make their first impressions of her personality. These visits are often a kind of subtle evaluations of the bride and the feedbacks can influence the progress of the marriage negotiations either positively or negatively. Since marriage is a communal affair, the opinions of close relatives especially those of the extended family and the wives already married into the lineage (*ndinyom*) count a lot.

Furthermore, *Ije di* normally lasts for some four native weeks (that is, sixteen days). During this time, preparations for the next ceremony, *ihụ ashụa*, would already be underway on both sides. Extensive invitations are made on both sides to the extended family, friends, and well-wishers but without the usual formalities[20]. However, the invitation of the suitor's extended family takes a more formal shape: the male members of his agnatic kin group are formally summoned to a meeting at the elder's house. The father of the suitor brings some lobes of kola nuts and two gallons of palm wine to announce to them that their "son" requests them to accompany him to "find" a wife. This invitation is also binding on those who did not attend the meeting. Thus, on the day of the *ihụ ashụa* ceremony, every adult male member of the agnatic unit is expected to take along with him two gallons of palm wine to the home of their "son" as token of support

[20] Formal invitations among the Igbo are usually accompanied with presents, especially kola-nut and palm wine. In return, the invitees come to the function with some presents. But at this stage of the marriage ceremony (*ihụ ashụa*), people are merely invited to "come and drink the child's wine". In the last major stage, the invitation would be more formal (accompanied with a present) because this would be the time to shower the bride with gifts to start her new home.

for the marriage ceremony. This action further demonstrates the community dimension of Igbo marriage ceremonies.

At the end of the four native weeks of *ije di*, the suitor accompanies his fiancée back to her father's house but before their departure, those neighbours and close relations who socialised with the prospective wife during her stay would come around to give her some cash gifts as a sign of their satisfaction with, and approval of her as their "wife". Along with these gifts, the suitor also takes some lobes of kola nuts and two gallons of palm wine and returns the prospective wife to her parents. This is purely a family affair devoid of official ceremonies. However, close friends and neighbours may be invited to come around and await the return of their daughter to her natal home.

4.6.2 *Ịhụ Ashụa*: Negotiating the "Bride Price"

The *ịhụ ashụa* ceremony usually begins in the evening, close to sunset, but the preparations in the home of the wife-givers which is the venue of the occasion begins much earlier. Friends and neighbours who would help in preparing the food for the expected guests as well as other arrangements and decoration arrive early in the morning. The arrival of the contingent from the wife-takers marks the beginning of the ceremony. The groom's delegation is seated in a reserved place different from the rest of the guests. This contingent must include the following:

a. the groom
b. the groom's father
c. the eldest male (or his representative) and at least three of his agnatic kin
d. at least one maternal uncle to the groom
e. the ahụta (mediator)
f. at least one friend

They are later joined by the bride's maternal grandparents with whom the *ịhụ ashụa* ritual would be performed.

The highpoint of the *ịhụ ashụa* ritual begins with the invitation of the bride before the assembly. On her arrival, the *onyishi ụmụnna* (head of her agnatic kin group) orders for the first cup of palm wine from the suitor's family. This would be

brought by the mediator (*ahuta*) who hands it over to the patrilineal male elder (*onyishi*), who in turn gives it to the "daughter", the bride. He asks her to sip the wine and offer the rest to the person she most prefers among the gathered assembly. Kneeling before the *onyishi*, she receives the cup of palm wine, and as instructed, goes around the assembly "in search" of her heartthrob. She takes her time for this exercise, which increases the tension within the assembly. When she finds him, she goes down on her knees before him, sips from the cup in her hand and gives him to drink, amidst cheers and jubilation from the onlookers. By this act, she assures the gathered assembly that the proposed marriage is on course. But the head of her kinship group would need a further reassurance and re-confirmation from her. So, he requests for a second cup of palm wine from the *ahụta* and asks the bride again to reassure him that never in the future will she cause him "to vomit"[21] this wine he is about to drink. If she still answers in the affirmative a second time, the *onyishi* would thank her and then drink the second cup of palm wine in his hand. With that he declares the wine fit for drinking by the public. After this public declaration of consent, the bride returns to the background and the assembly settles down to merriment.

Following this is the climax of the *ịhụ ashụa* ceremony: the negotiation of the bride price. It is important to note that this stage of marriage negotiation brings out the beauty of the Igbo speech act. It demands a high mastery of traditional oratory and involves an intricate use of codes, riddles, and proverbs. This stage brings to light the import of Achebe's (1959: 9) postulation that "[A]mong the Igbo the art of conversation is regarded highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" – *ilu bụ mmanụ e ji eri okwu*. The eldest man in the wife-taker's contingent takes the floor. He first greets the assembly in the correct order of protocols and then presents the purpose of their visit, usually in the form of a riddle such as:

> We have seen a little beautiful bird whose nest we have traced to this compound. If it pleases you, we would like to fetch and keep our firewood in this compound as well. Please, kindly tell us what it would

[21] In the context of Igbo marriage, wine is said to have been vomited when the bride price, along with the palm wine and other sundry items used for marriage are returned by the wife-givers to the wife-takers, in full equivalence, which signifies the final dissolution of the marriage alliance (divorce). Again, it is the work of the *ahụta* to ensure that this process is completed amicably.

cost us to achieve these stated objectives (Odoja Asogwa, oral interview in Nsukka, Nigeria. 18 October 2017).

There is another Igbo saying that every speech has a son. By this is meant that every formal speech must be seconded by someone else. Thus, following the main speaker another member of the agnatic unit would have to second the elder's speech by articulating and emphasising the former's main points in his own words. In response, the eldest of the wife-givers group thanks their guests again for taking interest in their daughter. It is usually an opportunity to boast and recount all the positive qualities with which the lineage is associated with and what their in-laws stand to gain by the marriage alliance with them – all in an effort to prove to the guests that they had made the right choice. He then proceeds to enumerate the different prestations the wife-takers are expected to fulfil. These are already fixed by local customs and so are not subject to negotiation. These may include the following[22]:

a. The quantity of wine to be brought for the *ịhụ ashụa* and *nchọta nwanyị* stages;
b. *Otụrụọshị* and *ndụnyị-ndụnyị* fees. The otụrụọshị fee is the negotiating fee (40 naira, about 10 Eurocents) that is paid to the head of the bride's agnatic group and to her maternal grandparents; while the *ndụnyị-ndụnyị* fee (100 naira, about 25 Eurocents) goes to the young men of the bride's extended family – that is to the bride's "brothers".
c. *Ikpo arịa* – the financial assistance due to the bride's mother for the purchase of bridal presents during the bride's hand-over ceremony.

Thereafter, he comes to the topic of the bride price which is the only negotiable component of the marriage package. There is no fixed price but a benchmark which forms the basis of negotiation. The haggling over the bride price may take quite some time; and may even extend until the next day. It is usually an intricate art of wits and proverbs. At the end, with the help of the mediator a consensus is reached. The other items listed apart from the bride price are paid for in full and the first instalment for the bride price is paid. This brings the *ịhụ ashụa* ceremony

[22] In modern times, the prestations and bride price are reviewed from time to time by different autonomous communities, so requirements often vary from one place to another. Nowadays, modern household articles are increasingly finding their way into the list in many places. The present list is taken from my fieldwork notes entry of 2016.

to an end. But before the wife-takers take their leave, the leader of the delegation (representing the patrilineal head) makes yet another request of the wife-givers – namely that their wife (the bride) should go with them "to return the palm wine calabashes" with which they brought the wine (this is called *ikpole obele* in the native dialect). The request is never refused. Thus, the marriage alliance is now fully on course.

4.6.3 *Mmanya Nchọta* – The Feast of Handing over the Bride

The *ịhụ ashụa* ceremony is the beginning of the legitimisation of the marriage alliance. The couple begins to be publicly recognised as such, while their families and descent groups also begin to relate as affines. Thus, from the time of the *ịhụ ashụa* ceremony the bride could, at the request of her fiancé, freely and openly make occasional visits to her prospective home without provoking untowardly discussions from the public. In the meantime, the fiancé would be busy gathering resources for the next large ceremony during which his bride would be handed over to him. When he is ready, he approaches his parents-in-law with two gallons of palm wine and some lobes of kola nuts to arrange for a suitable date for the *mmanya nchọta* ceremony, whose highlight is the official handing over of the bride from the wife-givers to the wife-takers.

The *mmanya nchọta* ceremony which is properly the traditional wedding is conducted in a much similar manner as the *ịhụ ashụa* preceding it, only on a larger scale. This is evident in at least two notable instances. The first concerns the quantity of palm wine demanded of the wife-takers. For the latter ceremony (*mmanya nchọta*), the quantity of palm wine doubles that of the earlier stage (*ịhụ ashụa*). At least a day before the ceremony, which usually takes place in the bride's father's compound, the wife-takers are expected to plant two *nrụrụ* – extra-large earthenware pots used for storage, each one capable of holding about twenty-eight gallons – in the compound, one at the men's premises (*obu*) and the other at the kitchen section/women's premises (*enyekwu*). The two reservoirs will be filled with palm wine for the occasion – that is, a total of about fifty-six gallons of palm wine. The positioning of the *nrụrụ* already reflects the binary cosmological opposition replicated in the architecture of the Igbo traditional household along gender lines: the male – outside, versus the female – inside. Usually, the guests are seated outside in the male section of the compound. More so, the reason for the larger quantities of palm wine required for this ceremony

is because at this stage of marriage ceremonies, the parents of the bride are obliged to make extensive invitations to the entire village and beyond "to come and drink the child's drink" (*bia ñụọ mmanya nwa*). It is from this invitation that the name of the celebration is derived. It is an occasion that always pulls a very large turnout of guests. It is, however, possible that the wife-takers could fail to bring the required quantity of palm wine; however, it would be on record that they are indebted to the wife-givers, a situation that elicits consequences beyond the scope of the present discussion.

The second notable difference is that the climax of the latter ceremony also marks the completion of the marriage ceremonies which is the final handover of the bride to the wife-takers. It is against this background that modern writers refer to it as a traditional wedding (cf. Ndiokwere 1994; Obi 2010; Onyekwere 2011; Izekwe 2015) because it is the last ceremony after which the prospective couple transforms into a legitimate, socially approved couple. This final ritual begins at the end of the wining and dining on the day of *mmanya nchọta*. The eldest male from the wife-takers formally requests that "their" wife be finally handed over to them. His counterpart from the wife-givers responds by calling on "their" son, the father of the bride, to send for his daughter. When she arrives, the eldest male of her agnatic unit reaches out for her hand and after praying for her and wishing her well, hands her over to the *ahụta* (mediator), who in turn hands her over to the eldest male of her husband's agnatic unit. At this moment, the young lady transforms into a wife and the groom becomes a husband. This development is greeted with loud cheers as the wife-takers break into a joyful chant:

Ihe di mma, ihe di mma
Ihe di mma erugo anyi aka!

Something good, something good
Something good has come our way!

After a few minutes of exchange of pleasantries between the two parties, the bridal train collects the remaining personal effects of the bride and the gifts she had received from the guests and hands them over to her companions. Thereafter, the joyful party of the wife-takers takes leave of their hosts with her priceless gift, their new wife.

Meanwhile, in the home of the wife-takers, an equally large assembly of relatives, friends and well-wishers gather in a festival mode anxiously awaiting the return of the party with their new wife. On their approach, singing joyful songs as above, the bridal train is greeted with more singing and dancing. The merriment continues without any other formality until morning. At daybreak, the new husband leads a delegation of his close relatives (including his parents or their substitutes) to his new parents-in-law to show appreciation for their goodwill in giving away their daughter in marriage to them, and for the successful ceremony the previous day. A traditional aspect of this visit is that the manner of appreciation symbolically makes a statement about the new wife. If on the wedding night, the husband finds his new wife to be a virgin, he would be required to come along with a goat on this visit for the sole purpose of acknowledging that, which would add to the pride of his in-laws. It is also remarkable that the new husband now leads the delegation in contrast to the background position he had played hitherto.

4.7 Mortuary Rituals

In chapter three while discussing the Igbo worldview, it was mentioned that the Igbo traditional cosmology is based on the principle of holism. This stipulated that there is a pervasive sense of cosmic oneness in which the worlds of the unborn, the living and the dead are cosmically inseparable. The ancestors, the spirits and the unborn inhabit the invisible universe which is only a territorial extension of the visible world. The ancestors, whom Mbiti (1999 [1969]: 81) refers to as the "living-dead", take active part in the daily affairs of the living. Ikenga-Metuh (1987: 63) notes that "the ancestors… are believed to be around their homes and hearth, and take part in all important family affairs. There is a continuous exchange and interaction between beings in the universe irrespective of the realm (visible or invisible) to which they belong". It is against this background that the following illustrations of the Igbo traditional mortuary ritual would be situated. However, the deciding factor for the type of mortuary ritual to be accorded a deceased is the relative chance of attainment of ancestorship which could be determined by the life accomplishments and circumstances of death of the deceased.

Becoming an ancestor at the end of an earthly existence is a goal every Igbo person would like to achieve; however, not every dead person attains the status of an ancestor. As such, there are criteria that must be met before a deceased person is

acclaimed as an ancestor. Echema (2010: 23) outlines these qualities in two inter-connected sets: the ones that must be personally accomplished by a person in his lifetime and other ones that would be determined by his kin and survivors after death. They are as follows:

a. Bodily health and physical integrity

b. Exemplary moral life

c. Success, wealth, and prosperity

   - maximal self-actualization and self-fulfilment
   - the acquisition of titles
   - a position of power, authority, and responsibility in the community

d. A happy married life with offspring to the third and fourth generation

   - the privilege of seeing one's great grand children grow up

e. A ripe old age

All the above requirements must have been accomplished by the deceased in his lifetime, thus indicating that one's fate after death depends on one's achievements while alive. This accords with the observation of Basden (1966: 117) that:

> The Ibo [sic] will endure everything demanded of him in this life; he will put up with hardships, the misbehaviour of his children, indeed, anything, in order to ensure that his burial will be properly performed. His whole future welfare depends upon this, and hence it takes, at all times, a most prominent place in a man's calculations.

The personal accomplishments notwithstanding, there is another set of qualities that can only be determined after death by the survivors, without which the deceased may not be admitted into the cult of the ancestors. They are:

f. A natural death (*ọnwụ chi*)

g. Befitting funeral rites

Usually, a diviner is contracted as soon as the obituary is formally announced to ascertain the cause of death. The Igbo identify three broad categories of death judging from the circumstances of death, the age of the deceased and the perceived cause of death. Consequently, these categories of death also determine the type and extent of the mortuary rituals to be celebrated.

The first category is "death from the gods" or natural death (*ọnwụ chi*). This is characterised by a peaceful passing away, preferably in one's home and at a ripe old age. When other accomplishments like wealth, multiple wives (if male) and children are added to it, then it becomes the ideal death, typically acclaimed as the "normal" type of death. It is more adequately expressed as "going home to the spirit" (*ila mmụọ*). The second category is referred to as "hard death" (*ọnwụ ike*), that is, a sudden, untimely death. This applies to whomever dies without falling sick for at least some days, irrespective of the age of the victim (may be an infant, youth, adult, etc.). However, the relative age of the deceased still plays a role here because the level of grief is reduced the elder the victim might be. Thus, it is regarded as a tragedy (*ọnwụ nwuchu* – premature death) when a youth dies without a child. As such, the deceased of this category cannot become ancestors because they are "ne'er-do-wells" (*akalaogoli/ofeke*), "with no children, no titles, no *obi* [homestead], no *mmụọ* [shrine], no *usekwu* [hearth] of their own, indeed nothing to remember them for, the *akalaogoli/ofeke* can never be admitted as *ndiichie* [ancestors]" (Echema 2010: 25). Such types of death include those caused by accidents like drowning in the river, falling from a palm tree, fire disaster, death during childbirth, etc. These are generally believed to be unnatural and caused by some angered spirits that must be appeased to forestall further occurrences. The third category known as "bad death" (*ajọ ọnwụ* or *ọnwụ ọjọọ*) is similar to the second one but graver. The victims include those whose death is caused by "abnormal" diseases like elephantiasis, leprosy, insanity, and suicide. Others include those condemned to death because they are guilty of sacrileges and abominations like a woman who gets pregnant while mourning her husband, etc.

The implications of these types of death are seen in the approved mortuary rituals for each of them. The first category, *ọnwụ chi*, is regarded as the ideal type of death, so it typifies the ideal Igbo funerary rituals. Those in the second category are buried but without much pomp since the victims are not eligible for ancestor status. The dead of the third category are not buried at all in some places because abomination is considered an offence against the Earth Goddess. Because of their offences the earth cannot receive them back, they are thrown into the "evil forest" (*ajọ ọfịa*) outside the town. Should they be buried at all, it would be in shallow graves and outside the town – in the "evil forest". Such a death is considered a pollution of the society, so when the corpse is disposed of, a ritual specialist is

invited to cleanse the land. Victims of such a death are considered to transmute into wandering ghosts who would never find rest. But their worst fate consists in the fact that they are eternally banished from the community and cut off from their ancestors. As mentioned elsewhere, banishment is the maximum penalty reserved for only the most grievous crimes in Igboland. Since they are ineligible for the status of ancestors, they are therefore not accorded funerary rituals.

Among the Igbo, the immediate aim of mortuary rituals is to transform the deceased person into an ancestor. What has been observed of the Senufo, another West African ethnolinguistic group, agrees with the traditional Igbo understanding of funeral. Glade (1981: 149) comments on the Senufo funeral:

> The funeral is the final rite of passage, one that transforms the dead into a state of being that is beneficial to the living community, thereby ensuring a sense of continuity between the living and the dead. Only in the "village of the dead" can the dead one function effectively and safely as an ancestor, a mediator between the human and the supernatural.

With the above prefatory remarks in view, we shall illustrate a typical Igbo traditional mortuary ritual for an elderly man of the first category using the local variant as practised in Iheakpu-Awka, a farming town in the northern part of Igboland as narrated by an indigene, Dr. B.O. Ugwu, and later witnessed by the researcher during his fieldwork in July 2016. Mortuary ritual is a long process that spans across several stages over a long period of time with different stages that fit into the three-step ritual format advanced by van Gennep (1960) in *The Rites of Passage*. In the "normal" case of an elderly male person, death does not usually come as a surprise. As soon as the elder becomes gravely ill, the wives or children send word to other family members (sometimes the sick man takes the initiative to summon close relatives himself). These close relatives including immediate siblings, wives, children, grandchildren, etc., take turns in looking after the sick elder at his bedside.

4.7.1 The processes of traditional Igbo funeral

When death has been confirmed, the first step is to arrange for the "death journey" (*ije ọnwụ*). The immediate relatives at the bedside take care of the corpse by closing the eyes and straightening the arms and legs before the *rigor mortis*

sets in. For the *ije ọnwụ*, several young men from the patrilineage are sent, usually in pairs, in different directions as emissaries to announce the death. The first set of emissaries are sent to the *Onyishi* (the village head) to officially inform him, first, that his 'son' [classificatory child] is gravely ill, and then after a while, that he has passed away. The *Onyishi* in turn summons "the council of elders" (*Ndi Ọha*) and informs them. They in turn mandate a delegation of young men for the "tying death" ritual (*irụa ọnwụ*). This involves taking out the corpse from the deathbed, washing and dressing it, and placing it in the coffin ready for burial. The ritual bath normally takes place at the back of the house. Some fresh plantain leaves are cut and spread on the ground on which the corpse is laid. Then it is carefully and thoroughly washed with local sponge and native soap after shaving off the pubic hairs, sideboards, and beards. Finally, the body is lavishly smeared with camwood dye (*uhie*) and then returned to the living room for lying in state.

At the end of the ritual bath, a symbolic monetary gift is handed to the team. In the case of a woman, the emissaries are sent to her natal family who in turn inform the *Onyishi* of their patrilineage. He commissions another set of emissaries for the *irụa ọnwụ* ritual. This is very delicate because they shall examine the corpse to ascertain whether their "sister" was physically manhandled or died a natural death. If they are satisfied, they then authorise the commencement of burial processes. After they have performed the *irụa ọnwụ* ritual, they demand from the affines a symbolic sum of money for the services. If one has the impression that the deceased was not properly taken care of or maltreated during her lifetime by the affines, they may make very high demands as a form of punitive or retaliatory measure. But if the relationship was very cordial between the two patrilines, the fees would be minimal or merely symbolic, such as a bottle of local gin. Meanwhile, the other emissaries will have spread the news to other close relatives, especially those living outside the village.

On receiving the news, every married daughter in the deceased's patrilineage is obliged to drop whatever engagements she might have and move to the compound of the deceased for mourning. As soon as the emissary sent to the *Onyishi* returns (at which time most of the close relatives living nearby must also have gathered), the eldest male of the family (or the husband, in the case of a woman's death) utters a loud cry of grief*, ata-o-o-ogwe!*, then a number of cannon shots are fired. These herald the public wailing by all the mourners gathered around the corpse. Silent sobs may be tolerated before this time, especially by the closest

relatives but not a loud cry. By this time also, a team of young men, usually from the immediate neighbourhood, would start digging the grave somewhere within the compound of the deceased during which they are served local gin. The atmosphere here is usually a stark contrast to the grief and tumult on the other side of the compound: the young men crack jokes among themselves and drink the local gin as they dig the grave. This brings out the ambivalence in the Igbo attitude to death, which Echema (2010: 29) articulates as follows: "Among the Igbo, death is deeply felt and mourned but highly honoured and celebrated".

When the grave has been dug, the corpse of a male deceased, now dressed in the best clothes, is finally laid in the coffin which in the olden days used to be the very raffia-bed he had used during his lifetime. Enclosed in the coffin also are some of the best clothes of the deceased, his sheathed sword (*ebejiri*) in his right hand, and his gun, if he had one. The essence of enclosing these prized possessions is to provide the deceased with the important supplies he may need in his journey. It is significant to observe in this respect that in normal conversations, the dead person is usually referred to as "one who is on a journey" (*onye gar'ije*). This conception of death is reaffirmed by the orations addressed to the deceased while lying in state, which often ends with the petition: *Ka ụkwụtaz' gị dịn' anyị ọyị!* – literally: "may your back (departure) bring us good!" As the coffin is lowered into the grave, another round of cannon shot is discharged amidst the wailing of the sympathisers. Either one of two types of shrubs, *Ejụrụ-oshishi* (*Newbouldia laevis*) or *Echịkara* (*Spondias mombin*) is planted at the grave head to mark out the position of the grave. As the wailing and lamentations die down, the people gradually take leave of the grave and sit in groups within the compound. Towards evening, the oldest male of the family or his delegate presents the gathered sympathisers with some kolanuts, local snuff, palm wine and other drinks in appreciation of their condoling presence. Thus begins the *inọ ọnwụ* (mourning) period. This is a period of stasis when all normal activities cease. *Inọ ọnwụ* literally means "staying dead"; it signifies that there will be no farming, no market, no external social events, etc.

The burial marks the beginning of the rite of transition when the deceased is "between and betwixt" the two worlds of living and the dead. As *onye gar'ije*, he is still on a journey – having left the world of the living but not yet arrived his ultimate destination, the world of the ancestors. Now, the extended family of the deceased holds a meeting with the delegates of their affinal relatives to choose a

date for the “mourning death” ritual (*ikwa ọnwụ*). The choice of date is completely at the discretion of those gathered for the meeting. It could be a few days after burial or it may wait for some years thereafter, depending on the socio-economic standing of the family. Whatever be the case, members of the patrilineage and their close affines remain in mourning at the deceased’s compound until the eighth day after burial. Usually, they are nourished with the contributions of the members of the patrilineage (*ụmụnna)* and the generous donations of friends and well-wishers who come to sympathise with them and pay their condolences. The women married into the patrilineage (*ndinyom*) take care of the cooking and serving while the daughters of the patrilineage (*ụmụada*) keep watch over the room of the deceased which has been barricaded with *ọmụ nkwụ* (young palm leaves).

Furthermore, the eighth day after burial marks the *nchikpo ọnwụ* (literally, dispersing death) ritual. It is a day in which non-resident members of the extended family disperse to their homes where they may continue their mourning in a lower key. The ritual is customarily a modest one and begins with the shaving off the hairs of the widows and children of the deceased, usually with a single razor blade for all. Other close relatives may also do the same as an external sign of grief. Towards midday, the in-married women *ndinyom* prepare a few dishes for the mourners and other visitors. Each son-in-law is expected to bring with him two gallons of palm-wine to “fetch” his wife - after the day’s celebration each son-in-law takes his wife home. After meals and drinks, the eldest son of the deceased reminds the assembly of the date chosen for the funeral ceremony, and all pending issues in that regard are clarified. After this clarification, the people go home to make necessary arrangements for the funeral ceremony, leaving the immediate household behind.

The period between the burial and funeral rites is a precarious one, both for the deceased and the survivors. For the dead, it is a period of torment which is called in some places, the period of *ịta ọkazi*, literally eating of raw *ọkazi* leaves, a subtle reference to the starvation the deceased is subjected to before funeral celebration. Nzekwu (1963: 161) expresses this core Igbo belief thus:

> There are the funeral rituals of our relatives to be performed. People are talking. These relatives of ours have not yet taken their rightful places in the spirit world. They are still sleeping and hiding under the *ọkazi* shrub. It is our duty to liberate and send them home.

For the living, it is also a time of danger that is marked by several taboos and prohibitions. In this period, the widow is expected to abstain from sexual intercourse during the traditional one-year mourning period. At this time, she would also clad herself in a funeral garment (usually an all-black costume). Within the first twenty-eight days (that is, seven Igbo weeks) from the burial of her husband she remains indoors, avoiding contact with people as much as possible. In some places, her bedside would be barricaded with a line of white cotton wool to restrict sympathisers from approaching her too closely. After this period, she may go out for important reasons but always clad in her black attire and with *mma ekwu* (kitchen knife) in the hand. Among other things, these serve to remind the people that she is still in mourning and therefore may not be freely talked to. So, it is always a great relief for all to come to the end of this period.

Contrary to the mournful and solemn mood that pervades the two stages discussed above, the next stage is called *ikwa ọnwụ* ("funeral"); it is characterised by hyperactivity and a lively atmosphere. The funeral ceremony is a typical rite of incorporation which transforms the dead into an ancestor. Preparatory to the proper ceremony, there are two simple rituals to be observed. The first is called "death journey" (*ije ọnwụ*). This serves to announce the date for the funeral and to invite the different groups concerned – e.g., the village council of elders, the neighbourhood societies, the *ụmụada*, the age-grade, the agnatic and affinal kin groups. Here, emissaries are sent out with kola nuts and palm wine for the errand. The second ritual is called "summoning the in-laws" (*oku egọ*), which involves inviting all the relevant stakeholders – that is, all the different parties that have financial obligations towards the funeral ceremony, especially the affines – to a final roundtable. This invitation is also extended to all heads of family groups of the lineage of the deceased, delegates from his mother's patrilineage, all his in-laws, representatives of his age-grade, etc. On arrival, they are presented with a live goat which would be slaughtered and used to prepare the meal for the meeting. After a good meal of pounded yam with soup and palm wine is served, they first confirm the date (there may arise the need to change the earlier date due to current circumstances) and share responsibilities for the funeral ceremony.

The most important consideration for the funeral ceremony is the provision of the local cow (*Eshu Igbo*[23]). For the Igbo, the killing of the cow is the consummation

[23] *Eshu Igbo* is regarded as a sacred animal in Igbo cosmology. It is acclaimed as an "indigenous" breed of cattle as distinguished from the commercial breed reared mainly in the

of the funeral ceremony that brings the dead finally home. Conversely, there can be no valid funeral without the killing of *Eshu Igbo*. In some cases, more than one cow may be needed for a funeral ceremony and this must be determined during the in-laws *oku-egọ*. For instance, if during his lifetime the deceased failed to kill a cow for any of his dead parents or grandparents, then this debt must first be settled before killing one for him. So, the number of cows needed is determined by the debts of funerals that are still pending in the family of the deceased. In other words, all exchange obligations still pending must be fulfilled before the funeral could be celebrated. When this has been settled, then the cost is shared among the stakeholders gathered. If the dead man has wealthy in-laws, each may decide to bring one cow for the funeral. However, irrespective of the number of cows eventually assembled, only one cow is officially used for the funeral ritual.

However, as regards funeral cows, there is a caveat that must be noted: if any of the invitees (e.g., in-laws, kith and kin) has not killed a cow for his/her late parent or grandparent, he/she would be exempt from contributing to the purchase of cow for the funeral. Making such a contribution is believed to provoke reprisals from the dead relatives who had been kept wandering all the while since their burial. In his *Arrow of God*, Achebe (1975: 217) mentions the case of Amulu who agrees to his family's request to delay his funeral ceremony because he died during the period of famine; but after a long wait, he loses his patience and begins to harass them because,

> He had already stood long in the rain and sun and could not bear it one day longer. A poor man might wander outside for years while his kinsmen scraped their meagre resources together; that was his penalty for lack of success in life.

Be that as it may, the eve of the funeral ceremony is marked by three distinct activities: the arrival of the funeral cow marked with gunshots, the arrival of the *Ụmụada* and the actual wake (*uru ọnwụ* – mourning death), which is marked by all-night singing, dancing, and fanfare by the *Ụmụada* and the different age-grade troupes present. The funeral day is ushered in by the booming of cannon shots which serves as a reminder to the townspeople that the important day has

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northern part of Nigeria, the *lama*. Whereas the *lama* breed is more economical because it gives more meat to serve large the population that usually gather for funeral ceremonies, it can never be used for the funeral ritual.

come. It is also believed that the cannon shots are a means of communicating with the ancestors and thereby alerting them of the approaching ritual.

Shortly after the gunshots, a masquerade group comprising of young men with *ọmụ* leaves tied around their heads arrive at the funeral compound with some *akatakpa* masquerades. Their arrival causes some fear and uproar among the assembled guests and especially the women and children scamper for safety. Some of the masquerades climb the main roof of the family house – thatched of old – and attempt to disorganise it. The disarray continues for a while until the elders begin to call for a restoration of calm. To appease the masquerades from unleashing further violence, the eldest son of the bereaved family comes out to sue for peace while offering some cash and material presents to plead with the masquerades to calm down. Next, he donates *okeọkụ ote* (a live cock) as a trophy for the best wrestler among the youths. Soon the masquerades disappear, and a wrestling context ensues at the corner of the funeral compound. At the end of the context, the winner is presented with the trophy and the youth group exits the compound.

It is important to note that this special masquerade performance during funeral is different from the regular annual outing of *akatakpa* and other masquerades during the feast of the annual visit of the ancestors, when they perform their regulatory roles in the society. This includes providing a "model of ideals" and "satirizing unacceptable behaviour" (cf. Njoku 2020: 133) as they patrol public places for two native weeks, entertaining the people. However, in modern times, with the waning practice of the rite of initiation into the masquerade cult in many communities, there are more cases of abuse of this tradition by many a youth who engage in masquerading without keeping to its traditional ethos and rules of engagement. For instance, the practice has been increasingly hijacked for politically purposes or to unleash violence on the public, thereby drawing the ire of the civil government and religious bodies[24]. On the contrary, the masquerade performance in the context of the second mortuary ritual is meant to set some life-providing processes that were blocked by death into motion again through

[24] In recent times, there have been calls for the scrapping of the annual masquerade festival especially in communities in and around the major cities in Igboland owing to rampant violations of the traditional rules of masquerading by the youths such as beating up old and pregnant women, illegally blocking public roads and the use of weapons by masquerades. This has resulted in official banning of masquerades in certain areas (see e.g., Why Nsukka community banned masquerades – Monarch – *The Sun* Newspaper (sunnewsonline.com); https://dailypost.ng/2019/06/24/akatakpa-masquerades-banned-enugu-community/).

such practices as controlled violence, offering opportunities for marriageable youth to flirt, engaging in sexual licence and subverting the rules of decency.

As the chaos and disruption occasioned by the masquerade performance and the wrestling contest die down, the guests return to their respective places on the arena and the funeral programme sets forth in a peaceful and organized manner. Meanwhile the *Ụmụada* is served a special breakfast called *nri mkposhi uzu n'onu* (literally "meal to remove dust from the mouth"), which is meant to reinvigorate them after an intensive all-night activity of singing and dancing. After meals, they are also presented with *ewu ngwu ogodo*, a live she-goat. What is remarkable about this gift is that it is not slaughtered; rather it is killed by punching. The women gather around the goat and keep punching it in turns until it dies. Thereafter, the *ụmụada* leave the funeral arena *en masse*, taking the unprocessed carcass of the goat in a basket. They also commission a *nwa-nwa* (daughter's daughter) – that is, a daughter or granddaughter to one of them – to process the meat. This task is considered a favour and is given only to someone who is known to identify regularly with the *ụmụada* group as a sign of recognition and reward. While bringing back the processed meat to the leaders of *ụmụada*, the girl is expected to bring along a gallon of palm wine and kola nuts.

In the meantime, when food and drinks for the entertainment of guests are ready, another round of cannon shots is discharged to declare open the funeral ceremony. Then all the entertainment groups that are invited have the floor. The chief mourners take their places at strategic places in the compound where they are easily accessible to their guests. There may be dance groups, musical maestros, local trumpeters, or singers, etc. to cheer up the guests. Usually, this heralds the time for merriment and celebration and continues until late evening when the married daughters and the in-laws begin to arrive. Each daughter dresses in her best attire, accompanied by her husband's family and a host of friends. Sometimes, they may be ushered in by their own dancing troupe. What is most significant is that the daughter leads the procession with a folded wrapper tied round her waist and horsetail in the hand or flung across the shoulder (which represents the cow she had bought for the funeral) as she shouts intermittently "My father goes home!" (*nna m ala-o-o!*). The procession is received by the eldest son who offers some money (a hundred *naira*) in exchange for the cow brought by the in-laws. These are the core affinal exchange relations.

Just like the daughters, the daughters-in-laws are also accompanied by their families in their own procession. But instead of cows, they bring other material gifts like yams, palm wine, a new metal pot containing soup condiment and other household utensils. On arrival, her husband will be present to welcome her and her followers. The carrier of the pot containing condiments also receives some monetary gift (usually a hundred *naira*) before she releases the pot with its content. At this juncture, the whole arena is electrified with dancing and merrymaking with sporadic shouts of *nna m ala-o-o!* rending the air. Towards late evening, more important masquerades and masked dancers begin to appear if the deceased was a man of high standing in the society or if he was a title holder or an initiate of secret societies like the *ekpe*.

However, such masquerades do not appear at the funeral of a woman. Instead, by this time, her mock corpse (usually the stump of a plantain tree wrapped in a mat) would be prepared. Along with a cow and an *oba* (a model of the woman's trade vessel) the mock coffin is "returned" in a procession led by a dance troupe to her maiden home for interment. Thus, the deceased woman finally returns home to rest among her ancestors and she becomes an ancestress in her patrilineage of birth. For the widow, however, the funeral ceremony ends the period of her seclusion. She becomes reintegrated in the society once again, just as the deceased is fully incorporated in the cult of the ancestors. No longer bound by any taboo, she is free to remarry elsewhere or to remain in her late husband's family. The same applies also for the widower.

4.7.2 Elements of symbolic inversion in Igbo mortuary ritual

Every ritual is a forest of symbols and symbolic acts, and hence a sort of drama. One may need to look beyond the veneer of the visible roles in ritual performances to their symbolic meanings and implications to the society. Therefore, Dening's observation about the dramaturgical property of sacrifice could be said to apply to rituals in general:

> [I]n sacrifice, human actions – in the destruction of a living thing – are transformed by being given a meaning. What is destroyed – a man, a pig, a plantain branch, a piece of unleavened bread – becomes something else: a victim, an offering, a gift, a scapegoat. The instruments of that transformation are always dramaturgical… There are always things that, in their colour or shape or in their association,

> make an environment of signs. The sequence of actions draws their elements together… But the significance of these plays is never automatically effective or static. The rituals are conditioned by all… all the endless creativity of meaning construction (Dening 1992: 228, quoted in Damon 2016: 61).

One of the most common characteristics of ritual practices is the use of symbolic inversion which may be defined as any ritual behaviour or act that inverts, contradicts or presents an alternative to commonly held cultural norms and values (Gell 1997: 448); or roles in a ritual context that contrast with the normative cognitive or social structure of society. Symbolic inversions are believed to acquire significance as sacred or elaborating symbols whose analysis sheds much light on the cosmological and social organizations of the particular cultural traditions (Geertz 1973; Ortner 1973; Pandian 2001). As Pandian further elaborates,

> Symbolic inversions in the ritual context represent certain individuals as having certain properties or qualities that are not normally, i.e., socially associated with them… As Victor Turner (1978: 287) notes, "One aspect of symbolic inversion may be to beak people out of their culturally defined, even biologically ascribed roles, by making them play precisely the opposite roles…" (Pandin 2001: 557).

Several elements of symbolic inversion could be identified in the Igbo mortuary rituals described so far that are worth our closer attention. One of the pronounced elements is the inversion of gender roles in which salience is accorded to female roles in several ways. These include killing a goat with bare hands – that is, without the use of (male) lethal weapons, the transfer of the meat to women married into other lineages (*ụmụada*) and its cooking by a daughter's daughter. Moreover, before the killing of the native cow (*Eshu Igbo*) for the funeral, the eldest daughter is requested to use the pestle to hit the cow three times at the waist before it is slaughtered by the men. And it is the deceased's daughter who leads the procession of the affines bringing a cow to the deceased's son in exchange for money. Such practices are symbolic of a switch from male potentially violent dominance to female fertility and nurturing as dominant values. Another element of inversion consists in the role of the masquerade, whose traditional role as representative of the ancestors is the maintenance of order and decorum – a symbol that is further strengthened by the use of tender palm leaves (*ọmụ nkwụ*) by the accompanying youths (symbol of peace and sacredness). But in the funeral arena,

the masquerade occasions an orgy of violence and destruction until the eldest son of the deceased (who, after the father's funeral assumes the office of the family elder, the *de facto* representative of the family ancestors) appears to sue for peace. These and other forms of symbolic inversion have been shown by anthropologists to be characteristic of mortuary rituals in other traditional societies (Pandian 2001, Middleton 1965, Gell 1997). In all, funeral rituals are meant to set the processes of fertility and life that were rendered static by the event of death back into motion again.

The above description of major traditional Igbo rituals concludes the first part of this investigation. The general purpose is to provide a panoramic view of the social milieu in which the subjects of the ethnography that would follow in the next part of the work were shaped and socialised. The raison d'être of this excursus is to underscore the point that, as carriers of culture, their present social context as immigrants in an industrial society like Germany is continuously, albeit innocuously influenced by the traditional worldviews they had carried over from home.

CHAPTER V
THE CITY, THE SCRAPYARD AND THE BLACK MARKET

In this chapter, this study presents an analysis of my ethnographic field research among a group of Igbo immigrants who work at a scrapyard at the Ripshorster Strasse in Dellwig – an outskirts district of the metropolitan city of Essen, Germany. It begins with a description of the 'unusual' business of transforming metal and household 'wastes' of the German society into economically viable commodities for African and world markets.

5.1 Transforming Scrap into Fortune

In the north-western outskirts of the metropolitan city of Essen lies a comparatively small district known as Essen-Dellwig or simply Dellwig, with one popular, long street, the Ripshorster Strasse (see Appendix for maps and pictures, p. 264f.). To a first-time visitor driving towards the Ripshorster Strasse, the street may appear, especially while approaching it from the Donnerstrasse, like a continuation of the greenery area of Dellwig with the lush green vegetation by that side of the road giving no inkling of what lies beneath. Similarly, on approaching the street, one finds an otherwise quiet, unobtrusive space as there is hardly a residential building in sight but for a few single buildings interspersing an array of gated industrial estates. The long street is lined with parked cars and lorries as well as busy men draped in work-aprons amidst a medley of passers-by who walk in every direction of the road and adjoining streets. According to the city plan, this street belongs to the industrial area *(Gewerbegebiet)* of Dellwig, specifically reserved for the recycling of metal wastes or scrap materials generally. However, in recent decades, the street has gained more popularity, which of course is connected to the economic activities of the growing number of African traders that have effectively turned it into a viable international market, than it has gained for the many recycling plants originally located there. It has also become more things than one: a hub of transnational businesses linking several nations and continents; a platform of social and intercultural encounter and a locus of social and political contestations – or rather a contested space.

Perhaps as an evidence of its subordinate position in relation to the city centre, Dellwig is commonly spoken of in compound terms, usually suffixed to the Ruhr City of Essen as if deriving its essence and relevance therefrom – hence, the usual reference to the area as "Essen-Dellwig". Officially identified as District IV by the City Council of Essen, Dellwig is home to about thirteen thousand inhabitants. The district is in several ways a marginal niche. Situated in a borderline location, the Ripshorster Strasse connects two metropolitan cities – Essen and Oberhausen. As such, it lends itself as a stage for the regular contest of sovereignty between both city councils as copiously reported in the local newspapers[25]. To this degree, even the residents of this borderline area of Dellwig can be said to live in some state of spatial liminality. In the last few decades, this otherwise unobtrusive street lying in-between two main railway tracks in Dellwig, the Ripshorster Strasse, has risen to become the cynosure of social and political discourse in the entire district, a classical example of an Appaduraian ethnoscape (Appadurai 1996).

Thus, the Ripshorster Strasse is in more ways than one, a global platform. Standing by the roadside at the entrance to the street from across the railway track one summer afternoon during my fieldwork, it was interesting to observe the flow of vehicular and human traffic in and out of the busy street. There was a crowd of people of varied origins and skin colours, vehicles with plate numbers from Germany, Poland, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, etcetera, driving in and out of the premises. Although there were mainly black men walking along the street, one could also identify Turks, Germans, eastern Europeans, and Indians in their numbers, all on task at their businesses. It is therefore hardly surprising that the volume of activities going on around this street would evoke suspicions from both the police, the city authorities, and the German population resident in the neighbourhood. Newspaper reports refer to the place in uncanny terms, describing it as "chaotic" and "intricate"; with curious and probing questions about the kind of business going on there. The WAZ newspaper once queried, "What do they do there, actually?" (WAZ, 22.10.2011). The quest for answers to this question had caused several police raids in the facility.

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[25] I read several accounts of disputes bordering on matters of sanitation and public utilities, especially in the *WAZ*, the major local newspaper of the region. Repeated meetings of representatives of both Essen and Oberhausen city councils were reported in the dailies.

Right from the outset of my fieldwork in Dellwig, I was curious to investigate the origins of the African business at the Ripshorster Strasse. What was commonly known is the fact that in the original city plan, the premises were a part of an industrial area reserved for the recycling of waste products. An overwhelming majority of those transacting business within the premises today are recent immigrants to Germany who had met the area in its present state. Fortunately, I was introduced to one of the foremost Africans that pioneered the transformation of Ripshorster Strasse from a dumpsite into a centre of African business, where European trash is being transformed into viable commodities for the African market.

5.2 The Uneventful Beginnings

In the course of this research, I had several long and intensive discussions with 'Chairman', my major contact person and mentor: an astute Igbo trader in his early fifties who fortunately is one of the four Igbo men that pioneered the establishment of the African business at the Ripshorster Strasse. He eventually became a critical figure among my research population owing to his connections and wealth of insight regarding the history of African presence at the Ripshorster Strasse and in the city of Essen general. According to him, the idea for this business evolved as a child of necessity and as a survival strategy that eventually turned out to be a bigtime opportunity.

As at the early 1990s, when he arrived in Essen after he had lost his job in a German company somewhere in another region, there were only a few firms dealing in different forms of recycling plants located within the vicinity of Dellwig. In the course of time, some 'Arab'[26] migrant workers who were perhaps employed in those recycling plants began to extract valuable spare parts from scrap vehicles for sale. Pioneer African traders who joined the business started by buying off those spare parts from the Arabs and shipping them first to Nigeria, and subsequently to other African countries for sale in the local market. At inception, they worked in partnership with both the 'Arabs' who were already in the business before them and with their German suppliers who made available

[26] He calls them Arabs but could not identify their individual countries of origin; the claim is only based on his assessment of their language and phenotypical features.

the scrap vehicles for sale. The volume and intensity of transactions in the trade continued to grow over time. As he puts it:

> This street (Ripshorster Strasse) was originally an industrial street and there were other foreigners doing business in this area even before we arrived here, especially the Arabs. They were originally cutting cars there (he points to a location beside his shop); then our people were buying some engine parts from them and shipping home. Overtime the business began to thrive. As the Arabs began to leave, we gradually took over. That way, it gradually transformed into a centre for African trade.

With time, more Igbo marketers began to join the scrap business. They began to buy cars themselves in order to cut them and extract their spare parts for shipment to the Nigerian market. By the end of the 1990s, the so-called Arabs had withdrawn, and the trade progressively assumed its present African character.

By most accounts, the Igbo-dominated market at Ripshorster Strasse formally started in 1998. It began with three persons – Charles Ugochukwu from Akpugo-Nkanu, Paul Abugu from Enugu-Ezike (a.k.a. Obidigbo) and Chris Ndibe from Nri (a.k.a. Zimba) – all of whom are Igbo traders from Nigeria. These are acclaimed as the pioneers and pacesetters of Igbo second-hand business in Essen-Dellwig. Out of the three, only one had remained in the business in Essen up until the period of my fieldwork. The day I met him, it was not difficult to decipher his long experience and success in the scrap business through the beehive of activities going on in his premises and by the quick succession of telephone calls from his customers and business partners. Hence, the only opportunity we had for a private conversation was when he took a break at midday to pick up his children from their schools. He took me along in his car and we had a robust and lively conversation along the way as he drove, and the discussion was later concluded in a restaurant over lunch. While the languages of our conversation were mainly Igbo and English, the interviewee still offered some expressions in German. However, during transcription I tried to reproduce the interview entirely in English while trying as much as possible to stay close to the opinion of the respondent.

Recounting the genesis of their business, Don acknowledged that it was a tough but collaborative start wherein he further recalled that:

> We actually started with cutting [disassembling of] cars. We did not have many tools for it then, like forklift, air compressor, etc; everything was simply manual – even to upturn cars or loosen anything we had to do it manually with simple tools like rods and things like that. We had manual carriers that we used to remove engines from the engine hub. Then there is one white guy Peter, a German, who comes to pick the remaining carcass of cars from us for further supply to the recycling plants. Other recycle-dealers (*Schrotthändler*) also used to come around, too.

These pioneers were soon to realise how large the demand for European second-hand goods were in the Nigerian (African) market. This encouraged them to trade more volumes of spare parts to meet the demands of the Nigerian (African) market, which was not limited to automobile spare parts alone. More so, they gradually began to try their hands on related businesses and bought not only used cars but also other electronic scraps like used household appliances. Against this background came the introduction of used electronic items like toasters, microwaves, fridges, televisions, videos, audio sets, etc., into the export market as well.

Of crucial importance to the development and progress of the African business in Dellwig was the obvious team spirit, the sense of fraternity and the mutual collaboration exhibited by these pioneering *troika*, who considered themselves brothers with a common task of breaking free from the shackles of poverty and marginalisation in Europe. The older respondents bemoan what they consider "a loss of the spirit" of fraternity which seem to have accompanied the numerical growth of Africans at the Ripshorster Strasse. With a tone of nostalgic remembrance, Don recalls after letting out a sigh of disappointment:

> The first person that we loaded container for, he was simply called Tallest, from Abia State. He's still in this business but no more here; you could have asked him to confirm this. We did a lot of things together – good ones and not bad ones. It wasn't an easy task because we had to do everything manually. That costed a lot of energy. Gradually people from other African tribes outside Igbo began to join us – Yoruba guys, Benin guys, etc… Yes, it was a gradual growth, so that by 1999 we had 3 to 4 registered shop owners.

What's more, with a growth in the number of traders came a corresponding growth in the further diversification of business interests and the variety of goods that were traded upon.

Meanwhile, I was curious to know how the traders learned their business since my informant, Don, had earlier mentioned that they (the pioneers) had no prior experience of "car-cutting" before coming to Germany. His response was simple and short: "We learn by doing!" As such, through constant practice and an accompanying trial and error method, they were able to gain expertise in the field. This practice would be subsequently upheld as more people joined the business and neophytes were inducted by already established and experienced merchants in a type of apprenticeship system patterned after the traditional Igbo system of training in trade and vocational skills.

5.3 "Learning by Doing": Systems of Apprenticeship

The Igbo traditional method of learning a trade or profession is by and large a system of apprenticeship known as "playing servant/boy" (*igba odibo/igba boyi*). This system has attracted several scholarly investigations even in recent years. It has been widely acknowledged as a peculiarly Igbo entrepreneurial strategy (Isichei 1976, Meagher 2010, Okoh 2012, Peterson 2014, Uzo and Meru 2018), a process whereby an intending entrepreneur (in trade, craft, or vocational enterprise) is inducted by a mentor into the process of learning a particular trade, business, or craft. As the local term for it implies the apprentice "plays servant" (*igba odibo*) to the mentor (*Oga*, male or *Madam*, female) in a very wide sense. This arrangement is however more than a mere business contract. In its traditional practice, the apprentice not only serves and learns from the master, but he also literally becomes the master's boy (hence the name *boyi*[27]), or more appropriately his fictitious son. In other words, the mentor adopts or incorporates the learner not only into his business circle but more so into his family circle. The mentor is seen as a social father/mother to the apprentice, who in turn becomes his social son/daughter. Accordingly, the *boyi* (apprentice) moves in with his *oga*

[27] The term *boyi* usually applies to a male apprentice only. Although females could become apprentices while learning a trade or profession (e.g., seamstress), they are usually referred to as *nwa-ahia* (market child) or *nwa-oru* (work child), respectively, but not as *boyi.* The traditional system of apprenticeship described here is exclusive to males although young women were recruited to serve as maid or nanny in wealthy households.

(mentor) who now takes care of him/her like a bona fide member of his household throughout the period of learning the trade or craft – that is, until the disengagement ceremony, otherwise known as "settlement" is performed. In most cases, the relationship so established would endure through lifetime because even after the period of apprenticeship, the bond is sustained by the traditional system of reciprocity.

The period of apprenticeship ends with a disengagement ceremony known as *Nkwado* ("support") usually according to the initial terms of agreement. On this occasion, the mentor "settles" (disengages) the apprentice by providing him/her with the supporting capital to start off his or her own business enterprise independent of the mentor. Usually, there is no officially stipulated amount for the "settlement" of an apprentice rather it is often left open – to the discretion of the *oga.* However, it is generally held that the amount of "nkwado" given by the *oga* is indicative of the level of cordiality between him and the *boyi*. That is the clearest way to demonstrate how impressed or disappointed the latter is with the former's services during his or her period of apprenticeship, owing to the usually long period of apprenticeship. Of course, most apprentices join their mentors at an early stage in life, usually in their teenage years or even much earlier. In the olden days, the practise was so well fancied by the Igbo society as it provided the poor (for example, wards of indigent parents) an opportunity to jumpstart into financial independence without subjecting the family to the risk of borrowing – that is, if ever they could afford the required collateral – to establish their wards in a meaningful trade.

Fundamentally, the culture of apprenticeship functions as a means of creating, sustaining, and expanding social networks in Igboland. It creates a semi-kin relationship between the apprentice and his mentor and by extension between the two families. Irrespective of the prior social relationship between the parties, once the agreement is signed the apprentice becomes like a son to the master, who assumes the social position of *nna ukwu,* "big father". This applies also to the not-too-rare situations where the apprentice may be older than or age-mate to the mentor. Generally, the apprentice is referred to as *boyi* (in false imitation of the English term "boy") or *nwa oru* "work-child" if the mentor is a skilled labourer – for example, blacksmith, bricklayer, carpenter or automobile mechanic; or *nwa-ahia,* "market-child" if the master is a trader or a businessman/woman who deals with the buying and selling of goods and services. Important

to note is that the mentor assumes the role of a social father over the apprentice. Thus established, this hierarchical relationship usually lasts beyond the period of apprenticeship; usually over a lifetime for, according to an Igbo adage, “an okra plant never grows taller than the person who planted it” (*okwuru anaghi etokari onye kuru ya*).

Against this background, I was naturally curious to know if and how this Igbo cultural practice finds resonance among the Igbo traders in Dellwig. Although there were significant signs of departure from the traditional practices, there were also notable indices of continuity with the usual practise in Igboland. Evidently, the practice here has been adapted to suit the peculiar European (business) environment, no doubt. My finding is that in Dellwig, the practice of apprenticeship is not fundamentally different, although clearly somewhat modified. There is no apprenticeship in the classical sense described above, but rather some kind of mentorship. But there is clearly some kind of continuity – for example, in the sort of kinship relationship established between the mentor and his apprentice. The new arrangement is probably a readjustment to the peculiarities of the European socio-political system where it would be difficult to replicate the traditional Igbo practice of apprenticeship. Nevertheless, the hierarchical relationship between the mentor and the mentee is still preserved. Although it is not directly expressed, one can decipher some subtle expressions of it in conversations and interactions with respondents. Those who have successfully mentored people consider it a social capital and would always refer to them with pride as part of their laudable achievements.

One day, as I discussed with Chairman about the exponential increase in the number of Africans doing business in Dellwig, he did not hesitate to explain, with a tone of pride, that it was as a result of the benevolence of the pioneers that a good tradition of cordial reception was set up:

> …when new arrivals come, we explain to them how things are done here. We encourage them and give them hope. Normally I first take them to the *Hausmeister* and introduce them as my brothers. In this way, we kept increasing in number until the whole street got filled up... Among others, we welcomed them because we didn’t want to be rich alone, we wanted others to be rich with us. Things were moving. It was so wonderful in those days – 1998/1999 – so wonderful. Then by

> 1999, a lot of people had already joined the business because of our influence.

What can be deduced from the above affirmation is a continuation of the tradition where a newcomer is introduced into the community by an older member who would vouch for the new as guarantor; after which the apprentice would observe the different sections and decide for himself, according to his interest and physical ability or acquired skills, which area he would like to specialise in. However, there is no hard and fast rules to this as one could always try one's hands on other things. To this end, newcomers "simply fix themselves somewhere" as is randomly stated.

Another trader, Balonwu, provides further explanation on the process of initiating a newly arrived apprentice in Dellwig:

> He [the new apprentice] spends some days to observe what we do here, thereafter he decides for himself which section he'd like to engage himself in. There's actually no period of apprenticeship in the classical sense that we know in Nigeria because here one gets paid from day one, according to what he's able to accomplish each day. Gradually he learns to work faster and become more professional, thereby increasing his earning. There are also sections that don't require much special skills other than physical strength and common sense, like in loading services or fixing tyres. Those are the usual first points of call for new arrivals.

In broad terms, newcomers can be grouped into two, namely, those who got to know about the business in Dellwig only after they had arrived Europe, and those who had prior knowledge of it before migrating into Germany. In both cases, the eventual admission could only be made possible through some relationship with someone who is already established, preferably a registered shop owner. This connection is usually traced in order to win the trust and confidence of both fellow workers and customers. More importantly, the owner of the shop where he would be working needs to know him well enough to introduce him to the *Hausmeister* as a new "brother" that has just joined them. This way, he becomes the *Oga* or the mentor to the newly arrived and therefore assumes responsibility for him in that capacity.

5.4 An Emerging Global Market

As each merchant began to build his own network of customers, there gradually developed some sort of specialisation or departmentalisation in the scrapyard, eventually turning it into an emerging global market. With the passage of time and the expansion of business experiences, individual traders began to limit themselves to specific items of trade. Thus, as more and more people started learning and joining the business, there was a gradual development of some sort of specialisation. Worthy of note is that this did not happen as a result of some legislation but rather developed on its own through personal preferences and competences of the merchants. The choice of goods to trade on is determined primarily by one's business network and target-area in the African market. Consequently, some merchants/dealers began to limit their trade to specific wares like used tyres, or fridges, or televisions and other home appliances, etcetera. However, it took a while before a few of them would engage in the direct shipment of goods to Africa. Chairman recalls that:

> It took quite some time before I dabbled into the shipping business because I combined a lot of things together. I got to be careful, you know. Before that we had someone, who did the shipping for us. His name is Omuvi from Delta State, Urhobo actually. We used to ship containers through him before I got my own contacts and opened the UZ Import-Exports Company. So, the first African-owned [shipping] company to be established in this Essen area is the UZ Import-Exports of which I happen to be the Director. We have some white men who used to bring goods to us, and some "fake oyibos" (acronym for non-European "whites") also. At a time, we were making about 2 to 3 containers per week.

In his own case, the shipping business was only a part of his business chain as he continued dealing in car cutting and sales. The shipping business afforded him the chance of partnering with other traders that need to ship their wares down to Africa. With the arrangement, they would organise containers to be personally arranged and loaded in Dellwig, complete the paper works and then transport the container to a shipping agency at a chosen seaport for cargo. Other members of staff in the same company would then undertake the logistics of clearing the container from the wharfs on arrival at the destination countries as well as delivery

to clients and customers. This was a safe response to incessant reports of vandalization of imported containers at African seaports during the late 1990s, especially at the Lagos ports.

With recourse to this, by the inception of my fieldwork in 2017, there was already a seemingly clearer structure of departmentalisation in place in Dellwig. Sellers who brought their wares for sale were easily directed to the shops of dealers who specialised in the wares in question. Alternatively, they only had to park somewhere along the street and announce their presence. In no time, interested dealers would have come to negotiate prices with them. When the price is settled, the wares are then driven to the corresponding "warehouse" for offloading.

However, there is also another group composed mainly of newcomers who simply work as middlemen. They are generally referred to as 'hustlers'[28]. They do not own shops and are not restricted to any specific kind of wares. They rather buy up all sorts of wares from the suppliers and resell them to the more established ones who deal in those wares at marginal profits. Alternatively, they may keep the goods until the corresponding dealers come from Africa to whom they would sell directly and make some gains. Gradually, they made their money and grew some more capital. As I pondered on why some of these hustlers would choose to play the middleman at their daily jobs, instead of joining the more established shops where they could work and earn money, Nduka, one of the hustlers, explained to me why he chose this path. According to him, there is

> … nothing strange about that. It's simply a matter of choice. But that's how most of these big men you see here began, too. You know these things do not have fixed prices and because many of them are already branded useless. Of course, they're declared wastes. Some of the suppliers do not really care how much you give them; they just want to get rid of the stuffs. They are already happy they could get some money for it. So, you negotiate the price with them and pay them off. But not all of them are like that. There are also those who just want to sell off their property for money. Those ones are more difficult to deal with in terms of price [negotiation]. If the wares are in good stand you could sell them at a higher price to the dealers and make some little

[28] In Nigerian parlance (and in other countries of West Africa, see Gaibazzi 2018: 99) a hustler refers to an unemployed young man who tries his hands on any available business in an effort to provide himself a means of livelihood.

> gains. But sometimes it's just a game of trial and error, because if you don't know what to expect, you may end up buying off a real waste that nobody would buy from you again. So you lose the money. Yea! But if you're clever and lucky you could hit some jackpot sometimes when you chance on wares that are still of high value at a cheaper price. When you have saved enough capital, you may then stand on your own.

What's more, further interaction revealed that Nduka's experience was representative of the many respondents on the tough and humble beginnings of their business enterprises in Dellwig. As regards this, chance, diligence, and luck are the recurrent indices of success mentioned by respondents in their narratives. Frugality constitutes another catchword among these respondents; some of them recounted how they used their monthly savings while working in the formal sector to buy used items from the neighbourhood or online over internet platforms like eBay and Autoscout. These were stored off in the cellar until the collection was large enough for shipment in a container. Alternatively, one may then buy a used car or van for the same purpose, depending on the quantity of goods one has for shipment, or one may join with some other person(s) and hire a larger container in which the goods are packed for onward shipment to Africa. In this case, the cost of shipment and clearance are borne by the parties involved in the transaction. Such an arrangement is considered to be more cost effective, especially for starters who trade on a smaller scale.

Udo and his colleagues agree that this is even a safer way to save money than putting it in the bank as liquid cash "because when you keep money in the bank you still have access to it and if some pressing needs arise you tamper with it". Also, there is always the tendency to tamper with liquid cash and this comprised a danger generally acknowledged by informants. Resultantly, they generally prefer to save their money in stocked goods rather than in liquid cash in order to forestall the danger of tampering with it, whatever the circumstance might be, until the goods are resold. In other words, they found this to be a more effective way of controlling unnecessary expenditure in a consumerist European society.

With the progressive diversification of trading possibilities in Dellwig, there arose the need to better structure the business environment. Although there were no clear-cut boundaries as some people continued to deal on any commodity that they could lay hands on, the current structure of business at Ripshorster Strasse

could be divided into four broad sections or "departments" – the first section deals in used vehicles and automobile spare parts; the second section comprises dealers on electronics and home appliances; the third group deals with used tyres whereas the fourth deals with refrigerating systems. In addition, there are still other ancillary services departments like shipping and logistics, transport, restaurants, and barber's shops. Important to note, however, is that there are no physical boundaries separating the above-mentioned sections. In fact, it was common to see different sections operating side-by-side within the same business premises, sometimes owned by the same person. Since many of the traders could not afford to rent their own shops, it was usual to find two or more traders sharing a single business premises that was registered under one person. In what follows, these sections would be described in detail.

5.4.1 Vehicles and Motor Spare Parts Section

This is the first and major section for which Dellwig is known and it comprises dealers in used vehicles and automobile parts who buy off vehicles that have fallen out of use either because they are too old, or because they are accident vehicles that can no longer be repaired or perhaps because they would be too costly to repair in Europe, etc. In lieu of this, the buyer inspects the vehicle to determine if it would be more gainful for him either to ship it the way it is, for sale to the destination country, or to have some minor repairs done by himself, or if the vehicle has no second-hand value, to disassemble the vehicle into its component parts and sort out the useful and valuable parts for sale to the African automobile spare parts market.

Furthermore, it takes a whole lot of diligence and expertise to be able to correctly inspect a scrap vehicle. The records in the vehicle's papers alone do not suffice for an inspection since some papers could be falsified and some vehicles may have been out of use for quite so many years. Primarily, the checks include inspecting the engine compartment to confirm the status of the engine and to find out if there is a major engine problem like an oil leak. Afterwards, the body parts would be checked to ascertain if there is a rust, leakage, or serious dent. Then, the underneath and the edges and bends are inspected since most of the rusts begin from the edges. Next to be inspected is the functionality of the mechanical and electrical sections – gear, brakes, air condition, lights, horn, wipers, etc. In the long run, the price of the vehicle would be determined by its general state as

ascertained by the inspector. Vehicles that are still operational are usually test-run after inspection to confirm what had already been observed during inspection.

By and large, two further subdivisions can be identified in this section: the vehicles sales division, referring to the sale and/or export of used vehicles and the spare parts division, referring to the section that deals with car-cutting services (disassembling of cars). In case of the former, used cars are bought and exported the way they are to the African market for sale, although some of them that are still roadworthy according to European standards may be resold to European users. In the latter case, cars are disassembled into component parts and exported as "genuine spare parts"[29] to the African market. The decision of which car should be exported whole and which should be disassembled is entirely that of the dealers. It is by such decision-making that individual expertise is brought to bear; expertise in turn results from long years of experience in "car-cutting" and in spare parts marketing. This highlight on expertise will be buttressed with the impressive story of Kingsley, the dexterous car-cutter.

It happened on a cold winter morning in March 2017, at the outset of my fieldwork. I spent several hours in the premises of one of the registered shop-owners in the scrapyard, simply called Ibezim, a man in his mid-forties. He told me that he had stayed up to fifteen years in Germany as at the time. Apart from the few years he spent in the asylum camp, he had spent all those years doing the scrap business in Ripshorster Strasse. The trajectory of his migratory experience had coursed through Greece from where he arrived Germany and applied for asylum in the early 2000. He was sent to an asylum camp in a little town called Schoeppingen in the western part of Muensterland, where he spent up to three years before his asylum application was eventually approved and he could find his own residence. It was while in Schoeppingen that he got to know of the scrap business in Dellwig through an Igbo friend. Thus, when he got his residence permit, he moved closer to Essen in order to work at the scrapyard.

By dint of personal effort and with the support of a network of friends, Ibezim was able to establish his own business cluster within the premises. He now owns a shop that is officially registered under his name with the government as a taxable business premises. He emphasises this last point with a great sense of pride, explaining that it is a feat that many of the people transacting business there could

[29] This is the usual inscription on automobile spare part shops in Nigeria.

not boast of much easily. He also believes that part of the negative perceptions of the city council against them originate from the fact that the majority of people that ply their trade on a daily basis in Dellwig are not captured in the tax database of the city because their businesses are not officially registered. He had also got an apprentice who was learning from and working with him.

Among Ibezim's staff was Kingsley, an ebullient, hardworking young man in his early twenties. Throughout my discussion with his boss, he was busy in his working apron clearing the little space outside of littered scraps and tools. Although Ibezim's business premises are large enough, they are stacked full of heaps of vehicles and sundry machines and tools. Having cleared a relatively large spot in the middle, Kingsley jumped into a waiting lifting fork by the side which he used to bring down a Volkswagen Golf limousine hanging on top of a pile of wracked cars into the cleared spot. Having brought it down, he dragged his toolbox towards the limo and was soon briskly at work, disassembling the Volkswagen Golf into component parts. His dexterity was simply amazing, as was revealed by his measured strokes of hammer on different parts of the limousine; after which he instantly got them dismembered from the corpus in a manner reminiscent of an experienced butcher working on a carcass at the abattoir. Then with the aid of an electric cutting machine, he severed the component parts from one another.

During my break, I had a long chat with Kingsley who explained to me the process of disassembling a vehicle. As complex as it was, it takes him only two and a half hours to disassemble one car. In other words, depending on the weather condition (the workplace is in the open), he got an average of three cars every working day. According to him, the most important thing was to get oneself acquainted with a systematic way of disassembling a car as the procedure varied according to personal preferences. His own style was to begin with the front parts, then move through the underneath of the bonnet area to remove the engine hub, the radiator, grill, shocks, back-axle, then the tyres, etcetera. These are packed in separate compartments in the store together with the nuts and washers. After removing the vital parts, Kingsley used the forklift to evacuate the now empty vehicle carcass to an earmarked position among the heap of wracks. When the pile of empty vehicle-carcasses increased to a large number, they were sold off to metal recycling plants. It is interesting to observe how in this business nothing is wasted: the disassembled parts are mainly exported to African markets

for sale, the tyres are sold to tyre dealers also for export and the empty carcasses end up in the recycling plants. It is through the breakdown and cumulative retailing of the component parts of the disassembled vehicle that the traders make their surplus.

5.4.2 Electronics and Home Appliances Section

Under the electronics and home appliances section are those who deal in such second-hand home appliances like toaster, electric iron, stereo sets, television, microwaves, etc. Just like vehicles, the home appliances are generally inspected before purchase. Older gadgets are generally valued for their durability, so their spare parts are in high demand for the repair of later models that are considered less durable. Interestingly, what is considered as an old model in Europe might still be quite current in the African market. Moreover, the German system does not encourage the repair of electrical gadgets because the cost of repair is often too high that the owner would rather replace damaged gadgets with new ones than repairing the older ones. In contrast, electronic spare parts are on high demand in Africa because the African market still encourages repair of damaged electronic gadgets.

Nduka, one of the respondents, explains that he buys up all sorts of electronic gadgets, including especially televisions of all sizes, home theatres and other audio equipment because they are in high demand back home in Nigeria. When I drew his attention to the fact that some of the gadgets in his collection were obviously dysfunctional, he responded that they would be repaired in Nigeria. He explained further that before shipment, he would group his collection into three. One group would contain the completely functional gadgets that were ready for use; another group would contain gadgets with minor faults that may or may not be repaired before sale while a third group might comprise of those gadgets that are either too old or too damaged for immediate use. Similarly, the prices of the gadgets were also arranged accordingly, with the first group being the costliest while the last group constitute the cheapest price. Wares of the third group are usually sold to repairers who may need vital spare parts for their business and since it is difficult to ascertain exactly what part may be needed from a damaged gadget, the dealer does not disassemble the gadgets as done by vehicle dealers. Rather, he exports the gadgets in a whole form; thereby leaving the extraction of vital spare parts for the repairers in destination countries.

5.4.3 Refrigerating Systems Section

The next big section comprises refrigerating systems and includes refrigerators and freezers of different shapes and sizes. In this section, dealers buy off different types and sizes of used refrigerating systems for export. These appliances are also meticulously examined by the dealers before a prize is settled for with the supplier. The cooling compartment, especially, is carefully crosschecked for possible leakages. The most decisive factor to be considered is the state of the compressor and then the date of manufacture of the appliance. Generally, the older the appliance the higher its energy consumption rate. Therefore, modern technologies are considered environment-friendlier than older products. However, non-functional refrigerators or freezers may still be purchased (usually at give-away prices) for valuable spare parts that could be extracted from them.

On many occasions, I spent long hours at the fridge depots in order to gain insight into their business mechanisms. My very first day at this section was quite eventful because I was struck by the huge number of refrigerators stacked up to several meters high upon one another in an effort to judiciously manage every available space. There were various kinds of refrigerators piled up in all four corners of the open shop, making the premises look like one huge, white-washed cubicle. The refrigerating systems were supplied from different parts of Germany and other neighbouring states like the Netherlands as electronic wastes. Some were already too old and therefore no longer considered energy efficient nor environmental-friendly by European standards, especially because they consumed high voltages of electricity; while some others were considered dysfunctional owing to some damaged vital parts; etc. Whatever the reasons for their disposal might be, the dealers spent quality time sorting out the fridges into different categories. The good and functional ones eventually found their way to the ports for onward shipment to African states, although some of them were resold to those who needed low-cost fridges in and around Essen (people living around the area come to buy second-hand goods there as well). More so, the damaged ones were disassembled into their component parts just as with the case of motor vehicles as already explained above.

Furthermore, there are important components of refrigerators that are normally in high demand in most countries of Africa. Notable among them is the compressor, which is the main engine of any refrigerating system. In a press report by

WAZ newspaper (April 8, 2013), environmental officers are quoted to have accused the marketers of buying up used refrigerators chiefly because of "copper: a coveted substance contained in most cooling systems". They however fear that in their effort to extract copper, other climate-damaging substances like the coolant, fluorocarbon (CFCs) may escape into the atmosphere. According to the report, with only 128 grams of coolant, the damage to the environment is equivalent to the emissions from 20,000 diesel miles driven. Thus, the CFCs are 10,900 times more harmful than carbon dioxide. For this reason, fluorocarbon is a contraband product in some countries, including Germany because of its capacity to pollute the environment. This factor has been severally adduced as part of the official reasons for the incessant police raids of the African business facilities at the Ripshorster Strasse since the early 2000s; with the local authority assuming this as a pointer to possible illegal activities going on within the premises.

In effect, the incessant police raid over the years have created a great sense of angst among those traders in Dellwig such that they took extra security measures to protect themselves from prying eyes. This was brought to my knowledge through a short melodrama that occurred on my first visit to this business section. In a bid to collect more data for this research, I had visited the business premises of Damba, one of the prominent refrigerator dealers at the Ripshorster Strasse. Mostly because I was putting on a huge winter jacket and I had a mobile Power Bank in the lower pocket of my jacket with a white connecting cable that stretched from my breast pocket to my cell phone, a small group of young men, a few metres away, who were also discussing amongst themselves became ill at ease. Repeatedly, they took turns to steal glances at me while making suspicious gestures. After some time during my discussion with Damba, one of them came closer to eavesdrop. He later threw some seemingly casual questions at me, asking about my identity and mission. After this brief interlude, it became obvious to me that the men were not comfortable with my presence; hence I approached the group and introduced myself properly. One of them, Ozoemena, who identified himself as a member of the Task Force (a kind of internal security outfit) told me that he was impressed that I had come unsolicited because they were just about to invite me for interrogations. Notwithstanding, they queried me over my identity and mission and insisted that I should be properly searched. Not impressed with my claims that I was their colleague, I had to give in to their summons to be roundly searched.

The ensuing search was, to say the least, a shocking experience for me. The fact that they refused to believe me even when I had spoken Igbo with them and had, moreover, referred to one of their top shots as my mentor was shocking and embarrassing at the same time. They were clearly suspicious of my mission in the vicinity. Eventually, it turned out that the object of their fear was the connecting cable to the Power Bank sticking out of the pocket of my jacket which they had presumed to be a recording device; implying that I was perhaps a journalist spying on them. Eventually, when they got convinced that I posed no threat to them, Ozoemena quipped that they had become a lot more circumspect in dealing with strange faces in the area because of their recent experiences of an unexplainable frequency of police raids. Hence, what they employed was, more or less, a defensive strategy to ensure they were better protected against possible spies; owing to the fact that they had remained puzzled as to why the police had turned its searchlight on their facilities with such frequent and dramatic raids as witnessed in recent times.

5.4.4 Other Ancillary Sections

Having reviewed the major sections of the scrapyard business, this study shall now turn to other sectors that provide ancillary services to sustain merchants and customers who operate at the Dellwig market in sundry ways. Amongst these include:

Barbing Services: Apart from the main trading activities at the Ripshorster Strasse, there are also provisions for sundry services for African traders and workers within and around the scrapyard. Just by the right corner at the main entrance into Damba’s premises stands a little shop made from a large metal container: a barber’s shop run by an Igbo guy called Collins. This shop provides for the barbing needs of the men, women and children who come around the scrapyard; thereby solving a usual problem encountered by Africans in Europe. European professional barbers hardly come to terms with the African hair-type and their barbing styles hardly fit the African hair. The relevance of this barber’s shop comes to light especially on weekends when there are large queues of people waiting to have their haircut. With regard to this, Collins employs the services of two apprentices who are learning the skill at his shop.

Culinary Services: Apart from the barber's shop, there are three main restaurants within the scrapyard as already mentioned, each serving a variety of African dishes and delicacies. Two of the shops are run by women while one is run by a man with some women on the staff. Apart from these, there are food vendors who prepare traditional Igbo delicacies at home such as *okpa* (made from ground pea), *abacha* (made from sliced cassava), *akara* (baked beans) and *pap* (made from ground maize corn) and bring them to the scrapyard for sale to interested customers; hawking their wares from shop to shop. These hawkers, however, do not ply their trade daily. What's more, the excitement with which this is received was evinced by a newly arrived Nigerian trader who gleefully exclaimed: "*Chai*, they have almost everything here!"

Logistics and Transport Services: There are also transport services – *Abschleppdienst* – comprising those who bring damaged cars from various points of purchase to Dellwig. They use buses or special trucks to pick purchased items from different points of sale (cars, TV, fridges, etc.) to the store or to deliver purchased goods from the Ripshorster Strasse to buyers outside Essen. These transporters make use of Lorries, vans or small cars fixed with carriages, depending on the type of cargo they may need to deliver. Although some of them are not always stationed within the scrapyard; they however leave their telephone numbers conspicuously written on walls or on other advert bills posted on walls around the premises so that those who may need their services may be able to contact them.

Logistics Services: More so, there are logistics services that work in collaboration with shipping agencies to arrange for the shipment of purchased items in containers or cargoes to Africa. These have their collection points within the Ripshorster Strasse from where they transport the goods to the seaports in Antwerp or Hamburg for shipment. Many of the shippers also offer clearing services at the ports. Their offers are so comprehensive that one could just stay within the premises in Dellwig and organise the entire business transactions from collection of goods in Germany to clearance at the ports and delivery to their clients' shops in Nigeria on one spot. In other words, the Dellwig market serves as a one-stop business hub. As such, an astute businessman, even if he is a first timer, could conveniently organise his entire business transactions apiece by engaging the different specialists – buying cars online; using the *Abschleppers* for transportation; disassembling them and sorting out the useful parts; arranging and loading

them in containers; transporting them to the ports for shipment and for clearance at the ports where his wares will be delivered promptly at his shop back home in Nigeria. Against this background, one might readily surmise that for each of the stages there are available "specialists" in Dellwig!

So far, we have described the events and activities of the Dellwig market from the perspective of the African migrants who ply their trade and who have found their means of livelihood in this emerging market. To complete the circuit, we shall now look at the German neighbourhood's perspective to the developments at the Ripshorster Strasse. To fully investigate this, one question which comprises the central thrust of the next sub-section will be asked, thus: how do the indigenous Germans, especially the host community and the neighbourhood dwellers, "see" the emerging market in Dellwig?

5.5 "Black" Market in a German Neighbourhood: Dealing with Stereotypes

This ethnography is more than a story of an African market at the Ripshorster Strasse; it also a story about the key participants in this market, their social practices within the market and their overall quotidian struggles for survival as well as an account of their social standing in the larger German society. More so, it is also an ethnography of the city and her inhabitants in their daily encounter with the *Stranger* in her midst. It is an attempt to understand the contestations of space and meaning associated with them, especially in reference to such concepts like public, order, beauty, and legality – and the mutual gaze between the city and the strangers. At the micro level, this study will focus on the lives and business practices, everyday circumstances, self-image construction, and coping strategies of the African merchants in Dellwig. At the macro level, attention will be paid to ethnographic details which will enable this research to determine what the everyday world of the African scrap dealer in Dellwig reveals about the contemporary German society, especially her general attitude towards (black) strangers.

With recourse to this, the site of the scrap market offers us a good platform for the social analysis of the African presence in Germany. To this end, the market in this context means more than just the physical space in which people trade; it is also a site for complex social interactions and communication that can be used to illustrate how different facets of reality overlap. Thus, beyond the notion of the

market as an economic phenomenon, there is the market as a social and cultural practise. In the Weberian parlance (Weber 1980), the market is a polysemous space; it can be both the site of business transactions and the site of politically or religiously "imposed order". For Harrison White (as quoted in Zierenberg 2015: 6), the market activity is a praxis that can be "as social as kinship". It is therefore hoped that the process of describing the activities of the scrap market will invariably bring to light the social reality in operation among the different groups of people that constantly interact there.

Furthermore, the ethnography also factors in the nexus between trading and trust. As Zierenberg (op. cit., 7) rightly notes, "The relationship between 'exchange' and 'trust' turns out to be circular". In this case, the level of trust or mistrust between and among the different constellations of personalities – the traders, their customers, the city authorities, the neighbourhood, and visitors – proves to be very decisive in determining a peaceful coexistence. Therefore, a successful market transaction between people, or the acceptance of (implicit) long-term trade relationships between individuals and institutions, both require trust. But trust is not built in a vacuum, it requires a platform of long mutual interaction, which is provided by the marketplace and marketing activities. They simultaneously function as a trust-building mechanism even beyond the immediate economic transactions. In contrast, mistrust can lead to the dissolution of trading relationships especially as, "This interplay fosters social cohesion that reaches beyond individuals acting on the basis of utility maximization." (ibid.)

Fundamentally, trading as an everyday practice is a form of exchange that occurs between two poles – at one end, there is the act of "giving"; at the other end is the act of "taking". From this perspective, one can describe the marketplace as an exchange forum for both commodities and non-commodities. Igbo trade partners coming from Nigeria bring "gifts" in form of local delicacies or foodstuffs to their counterparts in Dellwig as "kolanut from the journey" (*oji ije*). More than sheer courtesy, such gestures align with the practice of reciprocity which result in the building of mutual trust that is an essential part of economic transaction. Some traders who have built such relationship of trust prefer to pay in the naira[30] equivalent of whatever capital they intend to trade with into the bank account of their trusted partner in Dellwig in advance before travelling to Germany so as to

[30] Naira is the Nigerian currency.

collect the Euro-equivalent on arrival. Usually, multiplex trade relationships are built on the basis of social relationship networks, often deriving from (fictitious) kinship claims or as former school mates, neighbours or friends of friends, etc., which also have a reciprocal influence on the actors. In all, the ability to find customers and build a trusting relationship with them is the surest way to secure further business transactions. In this way, trading wields more than a passing impact on the social relationships of business partners.

Largely, the role of trust in the "performative construction of markets" has been a subject of interest in sociological studies in the recent times (Beckert 2002), which largely acknowledge trust as the foundation of all interpersonal communicative actions. "In marketplaces", writes Zierenberg (2015: 143), "trading partners had to be able to trust one another at least minimally… For the most part, it was a performative, self-promoting act on the part of one of the trading partners that signalled credibility to the other. In response, the other trading partner was then motivated to perform the same act." As the author further indicates, experts on socialisation and the psychology of relationships make a distinction between "role relationships" and "personal relationships", although it is also acknowledged that the distinction between the two is very marginal. In the traditional Igbo context, however, the distinction is completely blurred; although, experts argue that in a standard situation there exists "stable patterns of interaction" between the seller and the customer, a sort of mutual expectation with regard to each one's "role" – which could be described as "the expectations, culturally determined, in regard to interactional behaviour" (op. cit., 65).

Ordinarily, the Ripshorster Strasse is just a quiet link-road between two big metropolis of the Ruhr Region – Essen and Oberhausen – through which dwellers of both cities interact; but in the real sense, it is more than a centre of cross border activities and encounters. In a special way, it is an important meeting point between the Global South and the Global North, and therefore a locus of global social encounter and interaction. Thus, in philosophical parlance the street could be described as a platform of mutual gaze: on the one hand, between the black (Igbo) immigrants and the German state, represented by the City Council of Essen; and on the other hand, between them and the common dwellers of the Dellwig neighbourhood. Apart from differences in their utilitarian perceptions of place, there is also the question of the dissimilitude of the gaze of the city vis-à-vis the gaze of the marginal subjects in the scrapyard. Thus, one could describe

the place as a black market in at least two senses: firstly, it is dominated by black Africans and secondly, it is considered illegal by a section of the German population, especially the immediate neighbourhood and the state authorities. Both considerations wield impact on the relationships between the scrapyard operators and the German society.

For the black (Igbo) workers in the scrapyard, the Ripshorster Strasse represents not only a source of livelihood but is also for them an oasis of hope and freedom in their bid for self-actualisation. The city authorities, on the other hand, together with the German neighbourhood consider the same street as an aesthetic dent, an evidence of poor or ineffective political representation and a cryptic facility. This perception is carried over and promoted by the press whose operative metaphors in publications and reports concerning the scrapyard conjure up negative images of a place of chaos, lawlessness, and disorder, or a centre of clandestine activities, which are all descriptions of a typical black market. By their reportage and commentaries on issues, journalists not only represent public views in their publications but also shape, influence, and promote public opinion around such issues. Such collective public opinion represents the "gaze" of the city and the German public on the African market and their presence at the Ripshorster Strasse.

Although not expressly acknowledged, it appears that the attitude of the city authorities of Essen towards the presence of the African businesses at the Ripshorster Strasse is largely influenced by popular stereotypes of the black subject. The operative metaphors employed by both the city authorities and the press about events there lend credence to this permutation. However, the authorities through the representative of District IV to which Dellwig belongs, claim that they were only reacting to the complaints from the neighbourhood. It is quite understandable that the large number of ebullient young black men (representing the typical image of the "stranger" in Europe) who troop in and out of a particular location on a daily basis would raise suspicions in the mainstream German society. In fact, the *WAZ* newspaper (April 4, 2013) reported that the dominance of African presence in the market at Ripshorster Strasse was a cause for concern. With time, the neighbourhood began to complain of excessive noise and disorderly streets – both allegations fit perfectly into usual stereotypes of the black subject as loud and ghetto-like (Foley and Kranz 1981, Hunt and Ramón 2010). Moreover, it seemed that in the eyes of the city authorities in Essen, the Ripshorster Strasse

was more or less a black market – that is, in both senses of illegality and clandestine operations. As such, the style and frequency of police raids on the facility lend credence to this assumption, as would be elaborated shortly.

During my field research I sought audience with the City Council of Essen for an interview to elicit an official position concerning the foregoing, especially as regards what makes the authorities lose sleep over the activities going on there and how this influences their perception of the business activities going on at the Ripshorster Strasse. The administrative commissioner (*Verwaltungsbeauftragter*) of the Urban District IV (Borbeck Essen), Michael Quadt, responded to my enquiry per email. He acknowledged that the activities in the industrial area at Ripshorster Strasse had been a recurrent concern of the local politics of his district since he assumed office in 2011. The politicians who were representatives of the people laid complaints on many occasions expressing their worries while pressing on the management to undertake measures against these "grievances" (*Missstände*). According to him, as an administrative commissioner his duty involved relaying the articulated problems and suggesting solutions to the relevant administrative offices after the meetings. He however failed to enumerate the grievances himself, referring me instead to a compiled list of web links that document the grievances which might shed light on the causes of dispute. Eventually those were links to the websites of some local newspapers of the district and a radio station – *WAZ, DER WESTEN* and *Radio Essen* – specifically their online reports on the recurrent face-offs between the security agencies and African merchants operating the black market at Ripshorster Strasse, the earliest of which had occurred in 2011, about ten years since the beginning of the African scrap business in Dellwig

Additionally, each of the links led to an online reportage of these raids that were planned and executed by the police in collaboration with the relevant agencies of government, including the Foreign Office (*Ausländeramt*), the Customs and Tax office (*Zollamt*), the Environmental Protection Office (*Umweltamt*), the Public Order office (*Ordnungsamt*) and the Fire Brigade (*Feuerwehr*). The realisation that it took ten good years of observation and surveillance before the police began to clamp down on the scrap business awoke my curiosity to find out why it took so long to address the situation. Considering that African business in this street had started around 1998 by most accounts, which meant that the first ten years were largely peaceful, as the first recorded police raid of the facility was in

October 2011; I was keen to know why the authorities were now raising eyebrows on the activities of the African merchants in Dellwig? The only logical explanation I could arrive at, as could be deconstructed from the various newspaper and oral reports, was that at the early stage their presence and activities were overlooked as something temporal and harmless. But then, as the number of the black merchants continued to increase progressively, their large numbers began to attract public attention and with it grew a suspicion of possible illegal and clandestine business. This suspicion encouraged the spread of the common stereotypes of the black body in the media and popular culture. Hence, the neighbourhood dwellers became more agitated and began to raise complaints which, in turn, moved the authorities to respond by planning a "big raid" (*Großrazia*) that was carried out by the police and their collaborators.

More so, the newspaper reports allude that trouble started with a suspicion of an illegal drug business going on at the market; and by the early 2000s there was a police search of the shops and facilities for illegal drugs. However, the police did not find any incriminating material but unfortunately, the suspicion of clandestine and illegitimate dealings did not in any way abate thereafter. As Jörg Maibaum, a journalist with NRZ-Essen puts it, the authorities kept looking for an opportunity to "look behind the walls and answer the question, 'what are they actually doing there?'" (NRZ, 22.10.2011). Against this background, the allegations of both the neighbourhood and the reaction of the police tend to fit into popular stereotypes of blacks as criminals and drug pushers (Welch 2007). In his essay on "Blackness, Diaspora and the Afro-German Subject", Campt (2009: 66) identifies two primary visual referents that dominated the imaging of blackness in the twentieth-century Germany, one of which is "the stereotype of marauding Black masculinity: an image produced as a hyperbolic response to the historic presence of African colonial troops used by the French in the occupation of the Rhineland following World War I". It is also likely that the long period of loss of contact with African immigrants in post-World War Germany led to a perpetuation of these stereotypes in the psyche of the people. If so, it is then no wonder that the presence of so many male black Africans in a single space would elicit an image of "marauding Black masculinity" that would necessitate police action.

In retrospect, my informants could guess the possible origin of this attitude of suspicion displayed by the German public towards them. One of my respondents,

Barry, conjectured a reason for the change of attitude by the police and neighbourhood towards them:

> There was a point the “Stadt” Essen was actually seeing this Dellwig as a mere dumping site, but sometime later their perception changed. They could see that from the amount of money that was exchanged in the banks around here. Sometime ago, I think in early 2000s, the Nigerian government proscribed the practice of traveling abroad with raw cash, so businessmen were forced to transfer their money through banks ahead of international business trips. By that time, it became clear how huge the amount of money being transferred for business here is, which gave the “Stadt” some sense of the volume of economic activities going on within this Dellwig area. I think it was thereafter that our relationship with the city took a different turn.

It was perhaps difficult for the authorities to comprehend how such volumes of money could flow in such a make-shift market; hence the effort to find out what was really going on behind the walls of the Ripshorster Strasse. Again, the above picture fits into a typical narrative around the black-market controversy, which historically was a subject of heated contention in Germany of the post-war years. Black marketers were considered morally deranged pests and profiteers who unscrupulously promoted their own interests at the cost of the community’s. Describing the activities of the black marketeers of the post-war Berlin, Zierenberg (2015: 186) refers to the black market as “a realm of experience and the symbol for the absence of rules, an absence that was difficult to tolerate; and … also a social event”. He further notes that in the ensuing public debates on the subject in post-war Berlin, “The black market was treated with disgust because it promoted – and reflected – a social morality interested only in profit, where people did not refrain from deceit, where they took advantage of the existential needs of others. A careful appraisal of this attitude toward the black market pointed out the difficulties of complete economic liberalization” (op. cit., 203).

In line with the foregoing, it would seem by their attitude that the authorities in Essen saw some similarities between the post-war black-market phenomenon and the ongoing African scrap business in Dellwig. Just as the police used several measures of surveillance to clamp down on the syndicate in the big German cities like Berlin in the post-war years, there have been a series of coordinated and comprehensive police raids at the scrapyard premises at the Ripshorster Strasse

over the last decade. Interestingly, the official reasons advanced by the police for the raids in each case have been quite disproportionate to the scope of state might unleashed on African merchants in each case, which betrays once again a peculiar perception or "gaze" of the state towards the scrap market community.

5.6 Looking behind the High Walls: The Gaze of the State

The "theory of the gaze" is a philosophical concept that goes back to the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty both of which wielded a great influence on Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), who eventually redefined the concept of the gaze in his major works. Jean-Paul Sartre had in his *Being and Nothingness* (1956), among other things, concerned himself with a discourse on subjectivity – that is, the relationship between the self and the other. He considered what makes people (the Other) stand out as people and not as any other mundane object like a doll or robot. His enquiry was instigated by an observation that if a human person is alone in a given place, he is not bothered by the presence of other objects like furniture, doll or flowers around him. But the moment another human being enters the same environment he gets agitated by the presence of an Other as he feels intruded upon: a feeling he never had all the while he was alone (Cummins 2018). Cummins expatiates on this phenomenon, thus:

> In my solitude, I rule the space around me but when my environment is intruded upon by another person, I have to share it with this Other in an indeterminate manner. The freedom of the Other destabilizes my own freedom and disintegrates the preconceptions I had previously existed in. As a human being, I naturally tend to objectify the world around me but I must also presume that the Other also objectifies the world as well, including me in it. I have now become an object in the Other's vision and because I realise this innately, I have become an object even in my own opinion".

In the light of the above assertion, the gaze becomes more about the mutual encounter and appreciation of the Other. In such an encounter, both subjects are confronted with both their commonalities and differences, which in turn lead to a relationship of mutual respect and deference. Where this is not possible to achieve, there is likely to be antagonism and mutual suspicion. In the analysis of

this study, we shall apply the theory of the gaze from a particular perspective namely, that of an encounter between two cultures or cultural subjects, a meeting point between the autochthon and the stranger which naturally contains in itself the potency for mutual suspicion and fear. That being said, it is also pertinent to take into cognisance the insightful observation of Cox (1996: 87) who rightly cautions that "perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space. The world is seen from a standpoint definable in terms of nation, of social class, of dominance or subordination, of rising or declining power, of a sense of immobility or of present crisis, of past experience, and of hopes and expectations of the future". In lieu of this, the different social standpoints of both the state actors and the migrant merchants in Dellwig are necessary determinants of their particular perceptions of the status quo.

As already mentioned, since the early 2000s, there have been several raids by the police on the 60,000 square meter facility at the Ripshorster Strasse. The official reasons for these raids as advanced by the authorities include grave suspicions of drug trafficking, theft, illegal businesses or "black jobs" (*Schwarzarbeit*). Other minor allegations include unlawful parking of vehicles along the pedestrian walkways and infractions on environmental laws. The first recorded major police raid on the site was on October 20, 2011. The Essen police led a large team of forty officers, in collaboration with personnel from the foreign office, the city council, customs and environmental authorities to a big raid on the business premises of black Africans in the scrapyard in Dellwig. They had additional support of an aerial surveillance by the police helicopter "Hummel" which continuously reconnoitred the premises. By this time, the black population on site were just slightly above eighty. The official reason by the police for this big raid as given in a press statement was that a search warrant issued by the public prosecutor's office in Duisburg accused a company based in Essen of infractions against environmental laws. It was presumed (but not established) that the said company could be traced to the Ripshorster Strasse.

During the operation, four black African traders attempted to flee the security agencies by jumping the high walls but were eventually caught through the assistance of the aerial surveillance. In the end, statistics from the police report showed that they had searched the eighty black Africans who were within the premises, out of which thirteen were found wanting on matters of immigration laws. Out of these, eight were kept in custody awaiting decision of the court on

the cases levelled against them. The police statement was silent on whether they eventually discovered the firm against whom the search warrant was issued or not. Neither did the records show that any of the African merchants searched was found with any incriminating substance nor drug, and none was charged of any environmental infraction.

In any case, the grey areas left by the police report were subsequently filled up by newspaper reports. The NRZ-Essen surmised that the authorities wanted to find out whether the eighty black Africans found within the premises also resided there and whether they had building permissions for the existing structures within the premises. It also reported that environmental authorities discovered infractions on environmental laws owing to dismantled refrigerator-compressors that dripped poisonous liquids. In another twist, the newspaper provided a new dimension to the police action. One of the police detectives was quoted in an interview claiming that the search warrant issued by the District Court of Duisburg was “apparently a welcome occasion for all authorities, after a long period of time, to set foot once again on the premises and ascertain what actually they were doing there.” In other words, the authorities were not satisfied with the previous raids and had been eagerly looking for excuses to pry more intensely into the activities of the traders. Nonetheless, what this brings to the fore is that there were covert reasons for such deep suspicions.

Interestingly, in April 2013, only two years after the big raid, there was yet another police raid of one of the facilities of the market. Writing on the incident, WAZ newspaper reported a “spectacular find” following a raid on a facility where “four hundred refrigerators, dismantled refrigerator compressors and other electronic wastes illegally stored in a cleared area next to the railway tracks” were busted by the police. The police again expressed suspicion that the trail of the lawbreakers may likely lead to the Ripshorster Strasse and that the find or parts of it may likely be exported. Environmental officers also claimed that the marketers bought up used refrigerators as electronic garbage chiefly because of copper, a coveted substance contained in most cooling systems. Apart from that, both the dismantling and export of refrigerating systems were prohibited practices in Germany because of the often-inhumane disposal systems in recipient countries. Series of newspaper commentaries followed up on this incident for months.

Then on 17 October 2017, there was another "big raid" (*Großrazia*) staged by the police at the Ripshorster Strasse. It was a well-coordinated and comprehensive operation that lasted almost the whole day, beginning from about ten in the morning until about five in the evening. WAZ newspaper reports that there were almost three hundred personnel on ground led by the police, including officials from customs and immigration, tax authorities, environmental services, fire services, city council officials (from the foreign, public order and building planning departments). Once again, for additional support a police helicopter "Hummels" provided aerial surveillance from the sky. A volunteer group, Johanniter, even set up a tent where snacks and coffee were provided while the raid lasted. More so, the police set up a mobile security screening centre where about 130 black traders were profiled, one after the other, to determine the legality of their status in Germany, after which each was marked with a ribbon for easy identification. Those who came out with a green ribbon clipped on their hands were free to go about their normal businesses; while those who had questions to answer were promptly arrested. Against all expectations however, only twenty-six persons were arrested, and all for offences bordering on irregular residential status. Of the seven business premises that were thoroughly searched, one was shut down for not having a valid operation license and for "sundry environmental offences" that were not itemised.

The unsatisfactory outcome of this operation yet again begs the question of what exactly the authorities had expected to see, considering the enormous conflicting interpretations that followed the event. Incidentally, the statement of the police spokesperson, Christoph Wickhorst, betrayed what appeared to be the real motive of the state authorities: "We want to see who is here and who does what". A similar comment was made by an officer of the city council who was quoted by Radio Essen as saying, "We wanted to look behind the high walls". These statements point to the dynamics of asymmetrical power relations between the state and the immigrant population which was not open to dialogue. While the black merchants agreed with the charges of some violation of public order especially the parking of unregistered vehicles and the dumping of junk fridges by the roadside in Dellwig, they lamented the lack of readiness of the state authorities to listen to their own side of the story. They argued that those electronic wastes that were dumped by the roadside just like some of the unregistered vehicles were done by external clients. Often when they brought their wares for sale and could

not find buyers, they moved them away from the scrapyard only to return by night-fall (when the scrapyard had closed business) and dumped the wastes by the road-side. They had hoped that the state could have partnered with them to secure the place against such defaulters rather than accusing them of wrongdoing. Thus, the failure of dialogue in this case is also indicative of improper gaze in the Lacanian sense.

The theory of the gaze in our context is therefore closely related to the image of the wall as a strong metaphor for ambivalence. The wall represents all that stands between (in the sense of a barrier) the autochthons and immigrants – the prejudices, biases, and stereotypes – as well as the real cultural differences. Walls create binaries of difference like inside/outside, indigene/foreigner, us/them, etc.; hence the ancient walls of history were like fortresses that were heavily guarded against a possible siege. But "a siege is not only a discrete event; it is also a mindset" (Tóth 2018: 194). Hence, when the police describe the mission of their raid of the scrap yard as "looking behind the high walls", it represents the mind-set of the mainstream German society towards the black strangers in their midst: the fears and uncertainties including prejudices that seek clarification. It also evokes the feeling of an ominous threat, a logical extension of the fear earlier described by de Haas (2008) as the "myth of invasion" of Fortress Europe.

In its Latin etymological root, *lime*, the term "wall" also connotes *liminality*, which is akin to the social position of immigrants in the host society – a position of marginality. In other words, the economic activities of the African scrap merchants also signify their marginal social position within the scheme of things in the larger German society. This property of liminality could provide us with yet another way of looking at walls. Because walls have gates, they may also function as bridges between two barricaded sides, hence walls have a connecting function: acting as a link between two disparate environments. Such perspective makes intercultural dialogue possible and effective. In this manner, migrants bear a semblance to gates through which the host society encounter their original cultures just as they relate the cultural values of the host society to their original societies. This also places them in a good vantage position in their interpersonal social interactions with members of the mainstream society. Our research subjects naturally engage in a variety of such interactions outside the scrapyard in Dellwig as members of the city population in Essen.

CHAPTER VI
BEYOND THE SCRAPYARD: OTHER SPACES OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Our ethnographical analyses so far might perhaps give the impression that the research population in question (that is, Igbo traders at the scrap yard in Ripshorster Strasse, Essen-Dellwig) lives in some form of exclusive ghetto, secluded to itself and having little or no interaction with the native community. This is in line with a dominant characterisation of migrant communities in literature on migration research, wherein some authors have documented the problems arising from the ghettoization of ethnic enclaves. As regards this, a familiarization with the host country is inhibited because such enclaves offer fewer incentives and fewer opportunities for integration (Chiswick and Miller 1996, Borjas 1995). Studies on migrant communities in the USA, Canada, the UK, and Australia establish a negative correlation between ethnic concentration (segregation) and language proficiency (Chiswick and Miller 1996, Cutler et al. 2008, Dustmann and Fabbri 2003, Lazear 1999, Warman 2007). However, the social context of immigrants in Germany is radically different from that obtainable in America because of the different trajectories of their respective history and the corresponding immigration politics of the state. From the demographical perspective, the population of German cities had been, up until the recent times, largely homogenous in contrast to her American counterpart.

Against this backdrop, the need to follow the research population beyond the scrap yard arose from the quest to plot the trajectories of their social interaction with the mainstream German society. This consists in observing their multiple engagements and interpersonal relationships with a wide range of subjects within an expansive social space, intersecting both fellow migrants and the non-migrant population of the city. Some of the relationships might have been newly formed, while some might have been maintained for over a long period of time; some could be formal, while some could be informal. Of course, social relationships are basically complementary, at least from the perspective of the individual person. As a social being, the individual person is shaped or defined by his accumulation of social networks. Hence, juxtaposing the lives of the subjects at home with their lives at the workplace affords one a more holistic perspective that enables one to verify the common assumption that migrant communities tend to

live in ethnic enclaves. Interestingly, the home encounters have proved quite useful, as they revealed some otherwise obscure spaces of social interaction where integration literally "happened" to migrants in quite unobtrusive manners.

In what follows, this study is going to describe the ethnography by means of a series of concepts that help in describing the dynamics of quotidian encounters of our research subjects with the mainstream German society in the process of social integration. These are the concepts by means of which we shall describe the social processes observed during ethnography that would become key to our subsequent analyses of the ethnographic materials. These concepts include exchange, social integration, common discursive register, social field and shared contextual values. Furthermore, three types of contexts of social relationships (social fields) are addressed in this section: the religious community, the school community, and the neighbourhood. We observe in these social fields several shared values between the Igbo and the German cultures on which a common platform of mutual acceptance, social interaction and value transfer could flourish.

6.1 Brief Clarification of Basic Concepts

This section will clarify some basic concepts that are employed for the following analyses. These include:

6.1.1 Exchange

The theory of exchange has been previously elaborated to a large extent in chapter three in connection with the discussion on rituals and social relationship. We shall only attempt here a summary of the concept of exchange in relation to social integration of immigrants. An entry on 'exchange' in the *Encyclopedia of social and cultural Anthropology* (Carrier 2002: 332) states as follows: "Exchange is the transfer of things between social actors. The things can be human or animal, material or immaterial, words or things. The actors can be individuals, groups, or beings such as gods or spirits. Cast this broadly, exchange pervades social life". Following from this, therefore, it can be argued that exchange is *key* to social life. Largely, there is an inherent social meaning in the process of exchange such that the material value of items exchanged hold secondary or even tertiary importance to the social significance of the act itself. Studies on exchange date back to the early twentieth century, with pioneering works of Malinowski (1922) whose work on the *kula* exchange in Melanesia is considered a classic.

However, the interpretive framework of gift giving is attributed to Marcel Mauss (1990 [1924]), whose study of Melanesian and Polynesian societies underlined a structured system of gift exchange, where gifts are never free but instead give rise to reciprocal relationships. Taking as a point of departure the Maussian notion that gift exchange is a cultural phenomenon which is practiced in all societies, this section attempts to identify from the theory of gift exchange some principles and practices of human interaction that could be of help in understanding the workings of the process of social integration of Igbo immigrants in Essen. Since according to Strathern (1990: xi), the reciprocities and debts created by the exchange of gifts comprise a form of sociality and a mode of societal integration, this research would view the integration of migrants into a given society or culture as a dialectics in the form of gift exchange.

In any case, this effort is hardly novel as some authors have applied the theory of exchange to explain the dialectics of multiculturalism. For instance, in his study of the Turkish presence in Germany, White (1997) focuses on the dialectics of identity formation and maintenance. Drawing inspiration from Stuart Hall (1990), he posits that identities, like everything historical, undergo constant transformation and are subject to the continual play of history and power. He focuses on Victor Turner's idea of 'processual identity' to which he ascribes some positive, community-building and integration-enhancing effects deriving from the principle of reciprocity. Also, White understands identity as a dialectics between how people see themselves and how others see them, and further affirms that identity has a processual internal component "which builds social relations in a changing and unstable social environment. This processual component of German-Turkish identity is generalised reciprocity, an adaptable set of expectations that forges community across boundaries of social class, lifestyle, generation, and even ethnicity" (White 1997:754).

Furthermore, social exchange theories are used to explain reciprocal relationships between individuals and groups or organisations. Exchange, to refer once again to Mauss (op. cit.), basically involves three elements namely: the giver (the person giving), the receiver (the person receiving) and the gift (the object exchanged, which could be material or immaterial). Our postulation is therefore, that every human interaction evokes this dynamic of gift exchange and participating in it is an inexorable means of partaking in a social exchange. In the social contexts that involve an interaction between Igbo immigrants and the indigenous

German population (or any other human population for that matter), a process of social exchange is activated as the indigenous population transfers to the immigrants some aspects of their culture, but at the same time is obligated to receive in return a gift of some sorts from the immigrants as well, and vice versa. This kind of reciprocity eventually engenders mutual esteem and mutual respect which fosters social integration in the long run.

6.1.2 Social Integration

The term "social integration" is a contested concept that has been variously defined and applied by experts from different domains of the social sciences. In our present context, however, it is used to refer to processes of blending "strangers" into the mainstream society. Economists, sociologists, and anthropologists studying migration have been concerned with the same questions concerning the incorporation of immigrants in host societies, even though their theories and methods could differ, and sometimes even radically (Brettel & Hollifield 2015: 19). In the present case, the crux of the matter lies in the question of how Igbo immigrants and their descendants harmoniously become part of the mainstream German society. In general terms, such incorporation can only be engendered by mutual social interactions and healthy relationships between immigrants and the mainstream society.

Quoting Umberdson, Wallace (2013: 139) refers to social integration as indicated by "the existence, quantity or frequency of specific relationships. It may reflect structural or affective interconnectedness with others and with social institutions as a result of social interaction and participation in relationships". Social relationship or social interaction creates a platform of mutual esteem and exchange. Although it could initially trigger off a brief moment of distancing due to culture shock (especially where the interlocutors are of different cultural origins), a relatively prolonged period of continuous interaction neutralises fears and may lead to a discovery of commonalities in values and aspirations that could pave way for mutual acceptance and deeper friendship. That way, social interaction leads to the mutual transfer of values between the interacting subjects. Following from the same trend of thought, Bock and colleagues (1983) proposed a "reference group theory" to explain the value of social interaction in which they claim that the attitudes and behaviours of individuals are shaped by groups in

which they participate. Specifically, these groups have greater impacts on individuals where members of these groups have similar attributes or share common beliefs and values with the individuals in question.

In addition, the concept of social integration is also a politically charged notion that has become a central topic of electioneering campaigns and it continues to generate heated political debates in many countries, especially since the recent wave of refugee influx into Europe in 2015/2016. In *The Age of Migration,* Castles, de Haas and Miller (2014: 265) outline the varying responses of different nation-states to the question of integration of immigrants in host countries:

> In newer immigration countries, for instance the Golf States and North-East Asia, there is a widespread belief that immigrants are only temporary and should not be integrated at all. In older immigration countries the key issue is whether immigrants should be incorporated as *individuals* – that is, without taking account of cultural difference or group belonging – or as *communities* – that is, ethnic groups which tend to cluster together and maintain their own cultures, languages and religions (original emphasis).

By the same logic, it would seem that historical experiences derived from the process of nation-state formation play a significant role in the development of national models for dealing with internal cultural and ethnic differences within the nation-states and in designing a formal approach to the integration of migrants. For instance, Britain is a nation with a rich history of conquests through which populations of diverse ethnic and religious leanings were brought together (the territories of Scotland, Wales and Ireland were incorporated to the United Kingdom through conquest). The fact of these ethnic and religious diversities gave rise to a politically integrated state that tolerated difference. In other words, the United Kingdom required political loyalty but accepted cultural difference. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the 1789 French Revolution, the fundamental principles of equality and the rights of man became established in France. These principles rejected group cultural identity and aimed to include individuals as equal political subjects (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014: 265). Hence, Britain adopted a multicultural approach to dealing with ethnic and cultural differences within its territory whereas France adopted the principle of assimilation following the French revolution.

Interestingly, Britain and France share some similarities in their national history. In both countries, political belonging came before national identity, since in each case it was the expansion of the state that created the nation. But the case of Germany is different as her national history follows a different trajectory: German nations had preceded the formation of the state of Germany and in fact, Germany as presently constituted was formerly a conglomeration of autonomous nations or tribes that were only united as a state in 1871. This led to a form of ethnic or folk belongingness that was not consistent with incorporation of minorities as citizens. Added to this is the fact that Germany was hardly an active player in the business of colonialism, so she was largely autochthonous and closed-in to itself. This fact could be regarded as the historical foundation of the formal attitude to immigration by the German state prior to the constitutional amendment of 2010. Before then, the operative immigration policies especially during the *Gastarbeiter* period of the mid-20th Century when Germany recruited foreign nationals as 'guest workers' in her booming industrial sector, were designed only on economic terms.

As the acronym implies, the *Gastarbeiter* immigrants were merely 'guests' who had come to work and earn a living, and so were valued by the German society purely on such economic terms (Platenkamp 2014). This also explains the hesitation among native politicians to acknowledge Germany as an immigrant nation up until the recent refugee crisis. Hence, the official German attitude to strangers had been to see them as mere sojourners whose stay in Germany was temporal. Even today, the official German term for migrants – *Zuwanderer* – seems to retain this emphasis on temporality and mobility. By implication, therefore, the different approaches to definition of citizenship indicate different relationships between society and nation. Thus, comparing the concept of citizenship in the three countries of Britain, France and Germany, Castles, de Haas and Miller (op. cit.) state: "in Britain a person could be a full member of the society and political nation and yet belong to a distinct cultural and religious group. In France, civic identity required a unitary national identity but in Germany, national identity came first, and was the precondition for belonging as a citizen".

Just as the approach to the policies of integration differs among countries, the approach to its conceptualisation of meaning also differs among theorists. Adaptation suggests temporality and superficiality: to adapt to a culture implies that one merely learns to cope with the culture the way one adapts to the weather; it

suggests a lack of choice or agency on the part of the immigrant. Assimilation, on the other hand, means that the migrant must shed off his identity completely and be lost in the crowd of his host society – hence sacrificing cultural identity on the altar of national homogeneity. This is the thought behind the American concept of the "melting pot". But integration goes a step further, for it recognises and appreciates cultural differences and allows for tolerance and mutual acceptance between the migrant and the indigenous society. However, all three terms – integration, assimilation, and adaptation – have been criticised for connoting a sort of one-sidedness that run short of the reciprocity that is at the base of a functional social relationship. This has led to a recent shift, where experts are now showing an increased preference for what is considered a more neutral term, 'incorporation' as against the more common 'integration'. Nevertheless, irrespective of the term used to describe the process – be it integration or incorporation – the central concern remains that the process should not be unidirectional but should rather be a two-way process of reciprocal cultural exchange in the broadest sense, as would be shown in the following ethnography.

6.1.3 Common Discursive Register

The two-way process of reciprocal cultural exchange is to be necessarily driven by effective communication, which can take various forms, although largely conveyed by means of the spoken language. But there are also other notable means of communication and cultural expression like gestures, signs and symbols that are fundamental to social interaction among groups. The term common discursive register here refers to such commonalities of interests like ideas, values and interests that build a sense of community where language plays a decisive role in formulating and expressing such commonalities in symbolic forms. Social interaction can only be meaningful when such commonalities are meaningfully expressed or communicated. Hence, common discursive register would mean a common platform of communication between members of the host community and immigrants. By acquiring the basic communication skills in the indigenous language, they open themselves to the possibility of mutual interaction and cultural exchange with one another.

The European Union has long acknowledged the crucial importance of language competence for the social integration of immigrants, thus insisting that "language and cultural education are now required for non-Western immigrants to Europe

in order to assure their employment and respect for the political and cultural traditions of the host nation" (Doerschler and Jackson 2010: 147). In 2005, the German government passed the German Immigration Act into law which literally predicated the success or failure of professional and social integration of immigrants solely on the extent of the migrant's competence in the German language. Hence the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees declared that the language support they offer to migrants is "the beginning of the development of the nationwide integration programme". Much as the merits of competence in language skills in the social integration of migrants cannot be denied, overreliance on it as the exclusive panacea to the challenge of social integration is at best shortsighted, anthropologically speaking.

In a sociological study that examined language as an integration criterion, Doerschler and Jackson (op. cit., 150) warned about the "relative exclusivity of the emphasis on language skills in Germany's official integration policy". They enumerated two broad reasons why an integration strategy that focuses exclusively on language competence is questionable. Firstly, it promotes inattention to other factors affecting the integration process like family conditions, the integration of parents in the labour structure of the host country, financial situation, residency status and more importantly, the majority's acceptance of immigrants. Secondly, their goal of promoting language competence in immigrants through "effective language courses" in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands have not yielded the expected results as the courses have proved insufficient "to meet the needs of individuals seeking to improve their German" (op. cit., 151). Thus, acquiring language competence only lays the foundation for other factors necessary for the proper social incorporation of migrants in the host society to take their natural courses.

Some experts (Esser 2006) have identified three critical functions that the acquisition of the host country's language could play in the social integration of immigrants. These were summarised by Doerschler and Jackson (op. cit., 152) as follows:

> First, language is a critical aspect of human capital that can be used to obtain valuable resources. Secondly, language functions as a symbolic mechanism for describing objects and defining situations, sometimes activating stereotypes and discrimination toward the speaker. Thirdly,

> language is a medium of communication regarded as a critical component in many areas of social integration, including the initiation of social contact, the structuring of individual identities, and the advancement of education, job prospects, and income.

Regarding the education of immigrant children, researchers find that fluency in the language of the country of settlement is decisive in their social inclusion (Clauss and Nauck 2010, Esser 2001). Specifically, Clauss and Nauck (2010: 489-490) note that: "In preschool, in the school system and during leisure activities among peers, the importance of a common language for communication, social interaction and cooperation has begun to be emphasised". Thus, acquiring the basic language competence is key to social integration, not in its own right per se, but as a key that unlocks other important factors in the dynamic process of social interaction. With it the immigrant is empowered to engage and dialogue with the host society; he becomes open to mutual interaction, builds friendships across boards, wins self-confidence, and feels more accepted in the neighbourhood and community. In this manner, stereotypes and prejudices are reduced, if not completely overcome. Following the analysis of the three social fields or joint social contexts where social integration happens in a very significant way, this study will demonstrate, using the following ethnography, that even a mediated language competence where immigrant children play the role of language brokers to their parents, suffices in a situation where the other factors are guaranteed, like joint action in the school community or ritual participation in a religious community, etc.

6.1.4 The Social Field

It may be useful to state from the outset that our use of the notion of field in this discourse is descriptive rather than prescriptive. As Postill (2008) has pointed out, field is an inherently neutral term with an in-built resistance to the kind of normativity that has rendered emotive notions such as community or nation practically unusable as theoretical concepts. In other words, it is a concept that sheds light on the way things are, not the way things *ought to be* within a specific domain of human life. This allows us to investigate the empirical actualities of a given social process or phenomenon with an open mind. We also recognise that social interaction is generally regarded as elemental to the notion of community (Bessant 2012). In lieu of this, this study acknowledges that social exchange,

social relationships, and interaction do not happen in a vacuum rather they require a social space in which they can thrive. Such a space could also be referred to as a social field. However, the geo-spatial field as such must be subordinated to the act of social interaction among persons with shared interests irrespective of locality – for instance, the "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) such as the cyber- or visual communities.

The concept of social field has a very complicated history; it lays claim to multiple ancestors spanning through various disciplines. Originally from the physical sciences (based on the theory of the electromagnetic field), the use of the field theory in the social sciences literature is traceable to the pioneering works of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu but were subsequently developed by various other authors (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1008). According to Levitt and Glick Schiller (ibid.) "Bourdieu used the concept of social field to call attention to the ways in which social relationships are structured by power. The boundaries of a social field are fluid and the field itself is created by the participants who are joined in struggle for social position. Society for Bourdieu is the intersection of various fields within a structure of politics". Closely related to Bourdieu's notion is that of the Manchester school of anthropology which considers the social field as comprising an intersection of power and social positions. This position does not serve our interest here because we hold the view that power structure is not fundamental to social relationships, especially at the micro-level of everyday interactions.

In contrast, our interest in this ethnography is based on the conception of social field developed within the broader discourse on community, where the "field-interactional perspective" is employed to explain emergent social processes and community change dynamics (Bessant 2012). The rapid social transformations of the post-World War II society had engendered a rethinking of the transitional conceptions of place, space, and community in view of the blurring of spatial boundaries occasioned by the unprecedented advancement in information and transport technologies (McLuhan 1962, Kaufman 1959). Wilkinson (1991) responds to the debate by proposing a mediatory path: he affirms the territorial bases of localized collective agency but also notes a sort of co-constitutive dynamics operating between geo-spatial and socio-spatial aspects of community. Thus, he emphasises "the influence that place can have on social interaction,

while stating that interaction is responsible for first delineating and then reproducing local ecology over time" (Bessant 2012: 630).

Furthermore, Wilkinson's emphasis on social interaction as a basic constituent of community is very informative for an important reason. As much as the geographical boundary (ecological locale) is important in defining a community, it is the mutual interaction of the human population that constitutes a community, hence the definition of the social field as an interactional community. In the words of Mead (1932: 194), "if we can bring people together so that they enter into each other's lives, they will inevitably have a common object, which will control their common conduct". Thus, for Wilkinson, the study of an interactional community begins with the identification of a shared locale, after which analytical emphasis shifts to the lives of those who imbue territory with meaning. As Bessant (2012: 630) further clarifies,

> His thinking on this issue expresses some of the discursive and phenomenological aspects of community as "a collective phenomenon… which is co-constructed by individuals in their daily talk and action" … the boundaries of 'community-led' projects are dictated by all those who are involved in and affected by a joint action …

Viewed in the above manner, one can safely argue that community implies shared experiences. It is in this sense that we employ the concept of social field to describe the various domains of shared experiences and mutual interaction involving Igbo immigrants in Essen and the indigenous population. This ethnography reveals complex social dynamics of interaction and a mutual exchange of idea-values which result in those social fields that silently oil the engine of social integration of immigrants in the mainstream society. With the aid of ethnographical materials, this study shall discuss three of such social fields, namely, the neighbourhood, the school community and the religious (church) community.

6.2 The Neighbourhood Community

The renowned American sociologist of the Chicago School, Robert Park, and his colleagues had referred to neighbourhood life in the metropolis as "a kind of primordial re-creation of village life in rural areas" (Guest, Cover and Matsueda 2006: 365). Some other writers, in an attempt to account for the enduring culture

of solidarity and neighbourhood ties around individual homes even in urban centres, despite the rapid modernisation and influence of the digital age, trace it to a primordial attachment to "the little worlds" of the village (ibid.). In his classic, *The Urban Villagers*, Herbert Gans (1962) describes the familial and closed character of the Boston village environment prior to urbanisation as an old neighbourhood "where everyone knows each other's business, women were housewives and mothers, men hung out with men, and outsiders of any type… were not welcome" (Zukin 2007: 39). This can be explained by the fact that ancient village neighbourhoods were developed solely along the path of ancestry, which was supported by a lineage-type residence pattern. Due to these close kinship ties, neighbourhood ties in the village setting were understandably strong and exclusive.

However, with the rapid modernisation and urbanisation that resulted in the emergence of densely populated, multicultural cities and metropoles, the concept of neighbourhood began to assume entirely new meanings and significance and to pose new challenges. Nevertheless, it retained a significant importance in the social life of people. Even in large cities, a significant proportion of residents found personal comfort through developing ties with like-minded individuals around them and still interacted frequently with their neighbours. Some theorists like Wirth (1938) and his followers of the Chicago School have, however, pointed out that the great size, density, and heterogeneity of the city population have led to impersonality and a high degree of anomie across communities and neighbourhoods. This is true of modern cities which have become more mobile, more heterogeneous, and multicultural. To this end, the stability that characterised earlier neighbourhood systems became a scarce commodity, a fact that vindicates the school of thought which predicts that "as population mobility increased, the bonds of neighbours would be further reduced" (Guest, et al. 2006: 365).

Important to note is that stability of residence is one of the key elements that lead to strong neighbourhood ties. When people live together in the same neighbourhood for a relatively long period of time, there is every likelihood that they would know themselves better and develop a strong sense of fellow-feeling in the course of time – even if they do not become mutual friends in the strict sense. Moreover, the excessive mobility of today's world has taken a toll on neighbourhood configurations and significance as demography keeps changing rapidly. In many city neighbourhoods, people hardly get to know themselves for the same reasons.

However, the role of neighbourhood organisation in social dynamics has never been put to doubt. Building and sustaining neighbourhood ties would therefore continue to be relevant to both urban and rural populations. Hence, young families in their child-rearing stage would tend to develop strong neighbourhood ties not only because they reside longer but also because the neighbourhood serves as an important site for the socialisation of their children. Thus, migrant families with growing children tend to develop stronger and quicker ties with their neighbourhood than their single counterparts.

Through the process of socialisation of children, parents also tend to be incorporated in the social network of their children. By identifying with their children's playmates and friends, with their families and fellow parents, a stronger neighbourhood tie develops that usually snowballs into other networks of belongingness. These facts were confirmed by the ethnography through interactions with the families of some respondents in their neighbourhoods.

6.2.1 German Neighbourhoods

In Germany, the idea of neighbourhood still plays an important role in the organisation of society, especially at the micro level. However, as would be expected, there is a clear difference between the forms of neighbourhood organisation in the cities and those in the villages. The latter are more stable and well organised than the former because of the homogeneity of its population. Apart from issues of basic mutual concern like sanitation and security, neighbourhood residents in the city meet to deliberate on important issues or simply for social interaction. In a special manner, the neighbourhood community play important roles during life crisis events, especially marriage and funeral. For instance, during marriage ceremonies, some neighbourhoods in Germany organise the *Junggesellenabschied* (bachelors' farewell party), where bachelors and spinsters dress in funny costumes and hold party in honour of their friend(s) who are about to get married. In some places, custom also demands that the neighbours make flower bouquets to decorate the entrance to the house of the new couple some few days before the wedding date. They also gather to celebrate the birth of a new baby. In the villages especially, there are various other feasts on the occasion of which the neighbourhood have to cooperate very closely or celebrate together – including marriage anniversaries, opening of a new house and summer feasts. I observed these quite often while residing in Ahaus, in the western

part of Münsterland. While participation in such events is usually voluntary, it is highly regarded as a sign of social cohesion and togetherness. Also, there is the more informal daily practice of mutual help and tokens of courtesy like watching over a neighbour's property, or lending/borrowing stuff like sugar, salt, etc., or even simple courtesies like the exchange of pleasantries. This level of social interaction and network distinguishes a residential neighbourhood from a business one, where interpersonal relationships are more on a formal level. Against this background, one may appreciate how well regarded an immigrant would be if he or she regularly identifies with the neighbourhood of residence.

6.2.2 The Igbo in Essen

As already mentioned, not all the respondents working at the scrap yard in Dellwig lived within the city boundaries of Essen. Five out of the twenty-five persons interviewed lived outside the Essen area but resided within the larger Ruhr industrial area. This constituted one of the statistical bottlenecks I had to contend with in the analysis of the ethnography. Another statistical challenge faced was as regards the determination of how representative my research would be in respect of the overall Igbo population in Essen; especially as it was not possible to determine the total number of Igbo people living in Essen. Fig. 6.1 below shows a table from the Statistics Department of the Mayor's Office in Essen. Unfortunately, there are no entries of the ethnic nationalities of Nigerian immigrants who are resident in Essen. The staff of the department of statistics explained to me that entries are made of nation-states only, based on the possession of travel passports. Thus, this study was left with only a rough estimate that was based on personal observation and oral enquiries of respondents that put the percentage of Igbo population in Essen to an estimated 80 percent of the overall Nigerian population in the city. The last statistical update from the mayor's office in Essen available to me was dated 30 June 2019 (see Fig. 5.1) and shows a total of 1,149 Nigerians resident in Essen – that is, those that possess Nigerian passports whose current main residence are located within the Essen city area. These statistics show that the Nigerian community is made up of a very young population: about a half of the population – 555 persons – are still within the age bracket of 30-49 years, which also comprised the age bracket of our respondents. Out of the total number, only 174 persons were married, 58 were divorced and 4 widowed, yet a total of 151 persons were entered as having "unclear family status" (*ungeklärte Familienstand*). This could possibly refer to

those who were married but did not live together with their spouses (some men left their wives in Nigeria, and some couples are not yet recognised as married by the German law). The 762 Nigerians that were still single are distributed equally across gender: 381 males and females, respectively. Three hundred and nine (309) persons out of the total population are children under age ten. Also interesting is the length of these immigrants' residence in Essen, considering that the majority (203 persons) had lived in Essen for just between five and ten years whereas only 119 persons had lived between ten and twenty years in Essen. More so, only twelve persons had been resident in the city for more than twenty years.

At this juncture, it is perhaps pertinent to point out the shortcomings of the above statistics. Three of them are of major concern to our present analyses, namely the legal limitations, the comprehensiveness, and the representativeness of the data therein. First, there was a limit to the details of the statistics that can be made public (such as names and addresses of persons, etc.) owing to the new European data protection laws. The lack of access to such details was a major limitation as they could have further helped in the data analysis. For instance, it could have been possible to sift out the number of the Igbo from a list of the Nigerian population through their names. More so, data protection is even stricter where it concerns children (0-17 years) in the preschool and primary school ages both in the secular and religious institutions. During my interrogations, I was repeatedly reminded of my legal obligation to protect the identity of my respondents and to anonymise my records throughout the course of research. Therefore, taking pictures was absolutely forbidden in schools; and even in the case of private contacts, there were complex legal provisions guiding the use of personal data for publications.

Stadt Essen, Nigerianer am Ort der Hauptwohnung am 30.06.2019

Geschlecht	Familienstand					Insgesamt
	ledig	verheiratet	geschieden	verwitwet	ungeklärter Familienstand	
insgesamt	762	174	58	4	151	1.149
davon...						
männlich	381	91	38	.	75	587
weiblich	381	83	20	.	76	562

Geschlecht	Im Alter von ... Jahren					Insgesamt
	unter 10	10 bis 17	18 bis 29	30 bis 49	50 und mehr	
insgesamt	309	79	148	555	58	1.149
davon...						
männlich	162	32	60	287	46	587
weiblich	147	47	88	268	12	562

Geschlecht	Wohndauer[1] in Essen								Insgesamt
	unter 1 Jahr	1 bis unter 2 Jahren	2 bis unter 3 Jahren	3 bis unter 4 Jahren	4 bis unter 5 Jahren	5 bis unter 10 Jahren	10 bis unter 20 Jahren	20 oder mehr Jahren	
insgesamt	187	192	171	157	108	203	119	12	1.149
davon...									
männlich	93	94	86	76	56	108	67	7	587
weiblich	94	98	85	81	52	95	52	5	562

1) Bei Personen, für die kein Einzugs- bzw. Zuzugsdatum (mehr) in der Einwohnerdatei verzeichnet ist, wurde das Geburtsdatum als Einzugsdatum unterstellt.
. = aus Datenschutzgründen unkenntlich gemacht
Quelle: Einwohnerdatei

Fig. 6.1 Statistical table of Nigerians living in Essen as of 30 June 2019 (Source: Mayor's Office Essen, 20.08.2019)

The second critical observation concerning the data outlined in the table above borders on the question of its comprehensiveness. The data from the department of statistics of the Mayor's Office are limited to legal residents of the city area of Essen and so cannot factor in those who reside outside but ply their trade in Essen daily, neither can it capture undocumented residents. As already mentioned, the efficient transport system in the city makes it possible for many Igbo traders at the scrap yard in Essen-Dellwig not to reside in Essen but rather commute daily from nearby cities around the Ruhr industrial area. Equally, such traders are not captured in the database of the city council in Essen. This partly explains why we would be unable to compare the data from the city council and the one from the catholic community: the latter being not geographically bounded. Furthermore, the table does not factor in those Nigerians who are already naturalised in Germany, who are formally designated as German citizens but whose immigrant status are still informally acknowledged in their social fields. Most of these naturalised citizens of Nigerian origin continue to identify with their Nigerian compatriots in their self-definition and identification. They also play active roles among the Nigerian community in Essen. It is worthy of note that Nigerians who naturalize in Germany have a right to double citizenship and most of them opt to keep their Nigerian citizenship.

The third major difficulty to contend with, partly following from the foregoing, is the question of representativeness of the ethnography based on the above data. From the entries, it is difficult to determine how many Igbo family units (understood here as comprising of father, mother, and children) live in Essen. In this light, this study has noted some disparities between ethnographic records and official data entries. Consider, for example: of the total 174 married persons, 91 are men while 83 are female, meaning that 8 married men do not live with their wives, which is less than the number captured in our ethnographic records from personal interactions with respondents. More so, there is no indication of whether the divorced or unmarried persons live with their partners or have children (that is, whether they are socially living as families but not legally recognised as such). In any case, the twenty Igbo families covered in this ethnography represents about twenty-three percent of the total number of Nigerian couples living in Essen, going by the official statistics (but not the percentage of Igbo couples). However, going by the fieldwork entries and recollections of participant observation, one can argue convincingly that the number is representative

of the research population. Therefore, the following case studies represent a general trend among the Igbo in Essen.

6.2.3 Scattered Residency

It has been observed already that although there are residential quarters close by and within short treks from the scrapyard, all respondents for this study have their residences in locations closer to the Essen city-centre and other smaller neighbourhoods located outside the boundaries of the business premises at Ripshorster Strasse. The reasons for their residence choices range from personal convenience, such as preference for particular types of neighbourhood or proximity to friendship circles, to more utilitarian considerations like the proximity to public utilities such as supermarkets as well as the accessibility to public transport. Although some respondents put cost as a major determinant of their choice of residence quarters, they rarely mentioned the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood as a point of consideration. Furthermore, some respondents argued that it made sense to separate home from business environments and that the efficient public transport system in Germany makes it practicable to shuttle long distances without much difficulty. At least two of the respondents admitted that they shuttled daily to the scrapyard from outside Essen city: one from Oberhausen, the other from Mulheim – both nearby cities within the Ruhr industrial metropolis. Despite living outside the city boundary of Essen, they claimed that they made it faster to the scrapyard than some of their colleagues who lived in certain outskirts of the city of Essen.

Thus, one significant consequence of the scattered residence pattern of these Igbo traders is that they hardly held face-to-face interactions with one another outside the working hours of the scrapyard. Exceptions might be, perhaps, during some regular and occasional functions at worship places (for those who belong to the same religious community) and during diaspora community meetings (again, for those who belong to the same group). Against this background, the above residence pattern is a unique feature of the Igbo that distinguishes them from (African) immigrant communities as shown in earlier and more recent ethnographic studies of Igbo immigrant communities in the USA (Holli and Jones 1997; Bubinas 2003). Generally, however, the practice of ethnic segregation is less common in Europe than in the United States of America. But even in the

context of the United States, Reynolds (2004: 23) observes that "the Igbo settlement pattern provides a stark contrast to the establishment of ethnic enclaves among other immigrants in specific neighbourhoods, with their shared churches, mosques, and temples, community centres and commercial strips".

What could be established from the foregoing, therefore, is that the scrapyard serves our respondents only as a business centre where they go to work during the day and then retire to their homes elsewhere at the close of business. In other words, they remain open to other contexts of social encounter outside the business community at the scrapyard. Such contexts vary in scope relative to the individual personality of the subject, his living style and status. For instance, those who are married and have children or those who live in partnership with a German (who may also have own family close by) are more likely to have wider social networks than their single, introverted colleagues. To this end, these factors play a crucial role in their respective pattern and level of social interactions. In any case, the point made is that each person is capable of acting within his individual social limits and is susceptible to social influences from outside the scrapyard. This highlight shall be evinced fully in the next sub-section with the story of Mr. John who is a typical case in view.

Case I:

John, an Igbo immigrant in his early forties who has lived in Germany for almost twenty years, is the first child of his parents and the eldest of six children. He was not able to go beyond the secondary school level of formal education owing to financial challenges. As the eldest son, John had to work hard early in life in order to support his parents and younger siblings. Having left home after his Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE), at the age of eighteen, he went to Lagos where he learnt some trade in the sale of textiles for two years. By the end of his apprenticeship, he was "settled" by his mentor (*ọga*), after which he became an independent trader. With time his business began to grow rapidly, during which he started considering the possibility of engaging in the direct importation of textile materials. This highlights how his first contact with Europe was established: friends linked him to some businessmen in the Netherlands who

offered to partner with him in the importation of the popular "Hollandis[31]" textiles that are highly valued in the Nigerian fashion industry. Unfortunately, John was duped in the process and thus lost a huge chunk of his capital. In a desperate bid to recover his capital, he sold off whatever remained of his shop to enable him pay for a flight ticket to Holland in the hope of eventually tracing his dupes. That was in 1998. He ended up overstaying his visa and then moved across to Germany to seek asylum.

When he left the asylum home, John served a brief stint as casual worker in a production company within the Ruhr metropolis before he began to "hustle" at the scrapyard "to make ends meet". He had worked in shifts at the production company, with a morning or afternoon shift rotating on a fortnightly basis. During this time, he was also partly active in the scrapyard. Usually, during the week that he was on morning shift, he worked in the evening hours at the scrapyard to make some additional income. With time, it dawned on him that work at the scrapyard was far more profitable than his casual company work, then he decided to resign from the company and work full time at the scrapyard instead. According to John, what he enjoyed most about his fulltime job at the scrapyard was the amount of flexibility it afforded him that enabled him to combine it quite well with his present family responsibilities. For him, there was no strict work schedule as such, so the duration of his stay each day varied and could be determined by several of factors; amongst which include: his personal disposition, the volume of work available and the weather condition. For instance, during the summer season when the weather was more clement, he would put in more hours of work than usual. There are also more traders coming from Africa during the summer season, so there are usually more trading activities at the scrapyard at this time.

Furthermore, John is married to an Igbo woman, Chi, who is in her late thirties. Chi is a housewife who joined her husband in the early 2000s shortly after they had their traditional marriage in Nigeria, which was celebrated for John by proxy. The family had moved to a quiet neighbourhood in a fringe district of Essen shortly after the wife's arrival. By the time I visited them in 2018, they already had three beautiful children – the eldest was already in the *Grundschule* while

[31] *Hollandis* is local name for a particular brand of textile that is imported from Holland and is highly valued among Igbo women (or rather, Nigerian women generally) for its superior quality.

the other two were in a *Kindergarten*. A typical day in the family usually began at 5.30 in the morning when John wakes up to assist his wife with some domestic chores. Then he leaves for the scrapyard around eight o'clock and works till the close of business in the evening. His work is energy-sapping, one that involves the "rolling" (read packaging) of used tyres for export; hence he tries not to overlabour himself since he must wake up early the next day to attend to his official employment. Mostly because the children are at home during weekends, he puts in more working hours at the scrapyard on these days. When the need arises, he would take some days off his duty to relieve his wife of certain household chores, especially preparing and taking their children to school and/or kindergarten, as well as doing some gardening chores.

On the day I visited their home, I got fascinated by a few things that, out of curiosity, I had wanted to know especially about the scope of their social interaction with the host society. First, they were the only Africans living in their neighbourhood, although there were a few others living in a neighbouring district as well. As John recounts, his German friend and former colleague at the production company had helped them secure the apartment from the rental agency. When they moved into their home, it took some time before they could get along well with some of the neighbours, especially their immediate neighbour who was not so comfortable with the presence of children in the apartment. However, this had nothing to do with their persons, but was a question of personal preferences. The couple was also gracious to assure them it had nothing to do with their being strangers. In the light of this assurance, they reminisced on some good experiences; a case point being their friendship with a couple, Mr and Mrs Schmidt.

The Schmidt family lives in a block next to John's. Mr Schmidt is 74 years old while his wife is 68. Both are already pensioners and their children no longer live at home with them. Both had taken special interest in John's family shortly after they moved into the neighbourhood. With time, both families had become really close such that the Schmidt's began to keep their spare keys with the John's – a gesture which John's wife, uncomfortable with it at the beginning, had surmised to be a bait set for them to possibly accuse them of theft. Her husband, John, however, allayed her fears by appealing to his wealth of experience as a long-time resident in Germany. John assured her wife it was simply a genuine gesture of friendship.

With time, the two families got bonded so well that during their church wedding, John and his wife opted for Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt as their preferred marriage sponsors (*Trauzeugen*) against the expectations of their Nigerian friends. In a separate interview, the Schmidts acknowledged the friendship between both families and were full of positive remarks about John's family and their presence in the neighbourhood. Against this background, both families can be said to have profited enormously from this friendship, growing in mutual respect, and enriched by an appreciation of their respective cultural values. Today, John's family sees itself as an integral part of the neighbourhood, all thanks to the extensive social networks of the Schmidt family. More so, as the only black children in the neighbourhood, John's children are well-known by the neighbours, and they regularly play at the city park with other children while their parents chat with one another.

6.3 The Child's School as a Social Field

As already mentioned in the previous section, childrearing is a very intensive work for parents. The socialization of the child begins informally at home but continues in formal public institutions like schools and often churches. Parents are often expected to accompany the child all through this process. In the case of migrant children, the process could even be more tedious given the fact that both migrant parents and their children often undergo the process of socialization together, even though at different levels. The present section attempts to describe the social processes associated with the schooling of migrant children and how they relate to the widening of the social network of their parents and families. In the context of the rapid increase in migrant demographics in Germany, schools have become important sites of convergence of diverse cultures, for the acquisition of German language competence by immigrants and for the renegotiation and transformation of identities (Miller 2000: 70). By participating in the various programmes and activities relating to the school system, immigrant parents and their wards therefore get incorporated into the mainstream society.

Remarkably, the largest volume of literature on Igbo migration so far originates from the United States of America, covering a wide range of studies on various aspects of their migrant lives in the USA that has spanned many decades. One of the most recurrent features of these studies is the (re)affirmation of the high value the Igbo place on education. In the United States of America, Nigerian immigrants (the majority of which are Igbo) have a collective reputation as "the best

educated of any immigrant influx in the history of the USA" (Reynolds 2009: 211). Such remarks are in continuity with the distinctive general attitude of the Igbo people, even back home in Nigeria, which can also be corroborated anywhere in the Igbo Diaspora. In lieu of this, one of the chief concerns of average Igbo parents is how to provide their children with quality education. Also, in the course of informal interactions, it would be impossible to neglect the passion with which Igbo parents talk about the education of their children as well as their efforts in present and future plans. Apart from the intensive engagement in their children's education, many of the respondents are also pursuing their own education or more specifically, professional training. The aim of highlighting the above background information is to underscore the social significance of child education to Igbo immigrant parents; especially its capacity to widen their social networks.

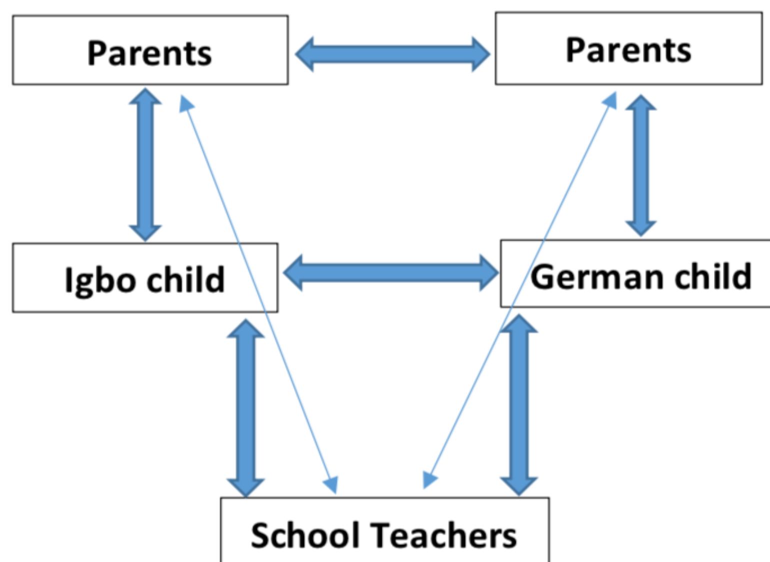

Fig. 6.2 Graphic representation of dynamics of social interaction mediated by the school community

It is interesting to observe how the German education system methodically 'compels' parents to actively participate in the education of their children and wards usually in close cooperation with the school authorities. That is an unintended outcome of putting a premium on the active involvement of parents and guardians in their children's education. For instance, in 2017 the Ministry of Education in the State of North Rhine-Westphalia published a brochure on "the ABC of Parents' Participation" (*Das ABC der Elternmitwirkung*) in schools which encour-

aged parents and guardians to take advantage of a constitutional mandate to engage themselves actively in the schooling of their children's school community. In her foreword, the Minister of Education, Ms Yvonne Gebauer encouraged parents "to have a say in the organization of education" of their children at school. She declared that such exercise of the right to active participation of parents in the school life of their children contributes to a good school climate and to the success of their children. Hence, the brochure was designed to show parents the concrete possibilities of co-operation with their children's school authorities. She further notes emphatically that, "Parents not only have the right to help shape their child's school. It can also be fun to get to know the place where your child learns and spends time with others ... Parents have different ways to get involved in their child's school" (cf. *Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen* 2017). Such areas of cooperation may include extra-mural lessons and projects like concerts, excursions, and fundraising for charity.

What's more, schools–parents' cooperation is even more intensive at the kindergarten and primary school stages. Usually, there is a regular meeting of parents and teachers/educators through the course of the academic year. As such, parents belong to the larger school (or Kindergarten) community, thereby participating actively in major events and projects. For instance, there is a regular forum of interaction between parents and teachers where parents are afforded the opportunity to brainstorm with the staff on the overall welfare of the school. There are also situations where parents cooperate with the pupils/students, and teachers in order to embark on voluntary projects like choir concerts and fundraising for charity purposes. By this token, the school community can be seen as an important space of sociality for parents as it affords migrant parents the additional opportunity to interact freely and better with other parents. Therefore, it is not uncommon that close friendships develop between some families through this process.

Fig. 6.2 provides a graphic illustration of the dynamics of social interaction in a typical German school system. The teachers have direct contact both to the pupils and their parents. The children interact with one another in classes and in other meeting points in the school; thereby enabling them to socialize together and form lasting friendships. By mutual participation in various programmes of the school, immigrant parents are afforded the opportunity of widening their social networks and by extension, their social integration. This observation accords

with the postulation of Dustmann (1996: 346) that “children in school age have been found to improve parents’ integration”. This happens mainly through cross-cultural friendships among children of school age. A typical example is the friendship between the Müllers and the Ibiams which originated from an incidental encounter between their children, Anthon and Obi, at the elementary school.

Case II:

Anthon is a young German lad while Obi is of Nigerian parentage. Both attended the same kindergarten class and subsequently got enrolled in the same elementary school. Although they were in the same group while in kindergarten, they never really identified themselves as friends. But when they met again in the new elementary school and landed in the same class again, a close friendship between the duo developed, and as both children kept telling their respective parents about each other, the parents in turn started talking to each other. This began with longer exchanges of pleasantries during school run which gradually developed into a mutual friendship between both families. During this time, their children would regularly visit each another to play during which their parents also engaged themselves in mutual correspondence.

Children can be efficient bridge builders, mainly because they are free from the usual biases and prejudices that often hinder interrelationships among adults. They easily contract friendships across boards without any consideration of tribe and tongue and colour or whatsoever. Such considerations are products of nurture that often percolates into their innocent minds through the adults around them during their upbringing. In the same vein, school-age children of immigrants in Germany help their parents to bridge the gap of ethnicity and foreignness through their active engagements with indigenous children – and by extension, their parents – during their years in school. As parents attend meetings, participate in school events and sundry programmes, they thereby get to learn more about the operative social mores and etiquettes and consequently get better integrated into the mainstream society.

Anthon’s father, Mr. Müller, a trained educationist by profession, proudly recounts how he volunteered to organise a reading mentorship programme for a few children of his son’s class in their first year in the elementary school. His son, Anthon, immediately suggested that his friend, Obi, should be a part of the

programme and Mr. Müller had to quickly oblige him, although with some reservations. However, as the programme went on, he came to realise how gifted Obi was. As a result, he promptly volunteered, beyond the programme, to help the young lad develop his many potentials better. This he achieved by helping both lads in their homework and with other extra-curricular activities by enrolling them in a music school within the neighbourhood where they learnt to play some musical instruments. As at the time of the interview, he was proud to be part of Obi's success story because the young lad had alongside his own son, Anthon been admitted to a reputable Gymnasium in the city. Perhaps it would have been impossible for the two families to relate at such level had both kids not become friends in the school, given that they do not even live in the same neighbourhood, not to mention their cultural differences.

Additionally, when at the end of my first interview with the Ibiam family, the wife insisted that I must honour their invitation to the celebration of their son's First Holy Communion holding in two weeks, I obliged but was not sure of what to expect. However, on my arrival that late afternoon at the modest restaurant, which was the venue of the celebration, I was pleasantly surprised to see a colourful mosaic of guests from diverse backgrounds – whites and blacks, Europeans and Africans, young and old persons. The attendance list shows clearly that the host family's social networks had extended far beyond their ethnic community networks. Mrs Ibiam explained that in addition to their neighbours, acquaintances, and a few work colleagues, they had invited all the kids in their son's class, all of whom had already celebrated their First Communion the previous year. Their class teacher was also in attendance as well as Obi's preschool teacher at the kindergarten.

Largely, while the children were having fun at the playground outside, the adults were treated to a host of Nigerian music and cuisine in the large hall. Some of the German guests also brought self-made cakes and other delicacies to support the host family. Obi's parents acknowledged that their relationship with most of their present circle of friends originated during their children's schooling. This confirms the postulation that social exposure is critical to migrant integration, and specifically that "children in school age have been found to improve parents' integration" (Danzer and Ulku 2011: 346, Dustmann 1996, Constant et al 2009). It is not uncommon therefore to find migrant children helping their parents to improve their competence in German language or explaining the history behind

some traditional German feasts and ceremonies like St. Martin and the annual Carnival which they have learnt in school.

Be that as it may, it still needs to be remarked that it is not always rosy for migrant children growing up in a foreign land, especially in the context of Africans in Europe where there is a pronounced phenotypical difference. Often, it happens that black children are first confronted with the colour question by their peers in school even before their parents would raise the issue for discussion with them at home. Even adult blacks have often acknowledged that they first realised their blackness by the time they arrived Europe or America (Adichie 2017), because back in their homelands it was simply normal and never an issue worth discussing. Some immigrant children have told stories of some ugly experiences which they had to work through before they could finally find their feet, gain self-confidence or feel accepted among their peers. Some experienced bullying and mobbing from peers, often verbally but sometimes physically also, for being “strange” due to their phenotypical difference. Interestingly too, there are more reported cases of such “intolerance” in the primary schools (*Grundschule*) than in the kindergartens. This seems to underscore the opinion that such behaviours belong more to a product of nurture than nature. Although the attention of little kids is also drawn to the phenotypical differences of their immigrant counterparts it occurs usually out of mere curiosity. The attachment of value to this difference is therefore a product of nurture, which manifests with the progress of socialization. In the light of this, we may safely conclude on the strength of this ethnography that the school community plays an important role (complementary to the family) in the socialization of children.

6.4 The Religious Community:

Revisiting the story of Obi’s First Holy Communion already recounted above, we note that the celebration was both a religious and social event. Thus, the church community played a fundamentally significant role in the story. The parish community (comprising of natives and migrants) had gathered to celebrate the Holy Mass as a single Family of God. This first part of the event that preceded the gleeful party with friends at the restaurant actually underscores the importance of the religious community as a very crucial social field especially for immigrants. Fundamentally, the First Holy Communion is a rite of passage in the Christian tradition and which marks the coming of age of a baptised member of

the Church, elevating him to a full-fledged member of the Christian community, with all rights and privileges accompanying such status.

Theologically, the First Holy Communion is regarded as the second part of the one sacrament of initiation which is a continuum comprising three stages – baptism, communion, and confirmation. Akin to van Gennep's ([1908] 1960) classical model of the rite of passage, every stage requires some period of rigorous preparation culminating in the main event. This period of preparation (liminality) is usually hidden from the public gaze and often goes unnoticed until the main celebration at the end of the preparatory period is held. In the case in view, which is being used as a reference point in this study, the preparation for the First Holy Communion occurred at Saint Getrud Church, Essen and lasted for six months (November till April). More so, it was laden with various programmes and events in which the candidates and their parents were active participants. Basically, the participation in these programmes had created an opportunity for social and spiritual interactions and helped in building of a sense of community for the candidates and their parents.

The parish in view had a group of volunteer catechists (instructors) that organised the program for the First Holy Communion as well as a total of thirty-five children as candidates, who were divided into working groups of seven children each. Each group was headed by a volunteer catechist who coordinated their meetings and learning, and each had to meet several times on a rotational basis in the homes of each candidate. With the assistance of their parents, volunteer catechists taught the children the basic rudiments of the Catholic Faith, especially in relation to the meaning and significance of the Holy Communion as the centre of the faith's community. They also employed various pedagogical approaches that helped make the programme quite interesting for these young candidates. With regard to this, each group was encouraged to form a primary circle within the larger group, and by the end of the six-month preparation, members of each small group had become very good friends. At the larger group level comprising all candidates, their parents and instructors, there were joint programmes such as Family Mass, excursion and pilgrimage as well as charity events for the less privileged that were organized during Christmas and on the feast of St. Martin, etc. during which the families got to interact closely with one another. As the children fostered a stronger bond through friendship, so also did their parents.

More so, out of the thirty-five candidates who took part in the preparation, there were only six migrant children, among which Obi was the only Nigerian. The constant meetings during the six-month period of preparation for First Holy Communion brought him and his parents into an intensive contact with other members of the parish whom, otherwise, they would have had no reason to interact with. It also afforded Mr and Mrs Ibiam the opportunity to identify with their new parish community and make valuable contributions to it. For instance, in Obi's primary group, they were able to share with the group some traditional Igbo children's songs and games which their children had learnt from their home country. They were also made to participate actively in the multilingual celebration of the First Holy Communion through hymns and prayers that were rendered in their mother-tongue (Igbo). What is more, the celebration of Mass was in itself a community activity where the entire congregation did everything in unison – singing and praying, rising and sitting – together as one "Family of God". Although Mrs Ibiam was not yet so fluent in the German language, she felt at home because the rite of the worship was the same as she had known it in her church community in Nigeria. After the ritual performances in the Church, the Ibiams proceeded to the restaurant with their guests to celebrate.

The above account buttresses the fact that through ritual performances, religion impacts the social life of members of society. In other words, religious performances have wide-ranging social impacts. As Conner (2019: 30, citing Ugba 2009: 216) rightly observes:

> For the adherents of a particular religious community, the significance of this "chosen" identity attachment is amplified when they join a collective – the congregation of the church in this case. Through this action, the adherent actively chooses to become a congregant, thereby linking his/her individual identity to the collective identity of others. Here, congregants typically acquire a deep sense of belonging to the other members of their congregation due to their shared beliefs, values and practices.

This being the case, it is also worthy of note, in line with the postulations of Derek Alderman and Joshua Inwood (2013: 219), that this sense of belonging is a socially mediated matter that is related to the discourses and practices of "socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion, a means of defining membership to a group and ownership of a place". The above example of the preparation and celebration

of Obi’s first Holy Communion shows that there is a deep sense of belonging that has been socially constructed amongst the congregation through their shared religiosity. It also offers us a typical example of the processes through which religious communities act as a social field for migrants which, of course, is the primary concern of this subsection.

The close nexus between migration and religion has been the subject of academic research for a very long time. As regards this, there is no doubt that religion plays a positive role in providing stability for migrants who must manoeuvre through the day-to-day challenges of life in their new residences (Conner 2019: 27). Usually, the pain of separation, which are sometimes violent and involuntary, from families and from one’s homeland, language and community could be so overwhelming that immigrants seek succour and stability in religion through her various agencies and programmes. Moreover, as Charles Hirschman (2004: 1228) points out, “religious participation and rituals can often fill the psychological void and create a sense of belonging and community for newcomers”. Every religion preaches the importance of respect and solidarity with the stranger, and consequently makes provisions through various programmes to provide care for immigrants in their bid to settle and integrate in the mainstream of their host societies. Therefore, religion poses as a critical vehicle of integration for immigrants as it provides the platform for building trust and kinship between migrants and non-migrants. It also serves as a gateway to social integration; for example, with Christian immigrants, the network of believers become their primary social field as regards network ties in a new homeland.

As already indicated, much have been published on the interconnection between religion and migration over the years especially in Europe and the United States. However, in the case of Europe, perhaps owing to the fact that over the centuries she has enjoyed reputation of being rooted in the Christian tradition, most of the academic research on religion and migration in Europe have been largely limited to studies on the growth of Islam and Muslim communities in European societies (cf. Kuppinger 2014, Naylor and Ryan 2002, El Hamel 2002, Joppke 2014, Sunier 2014). It is only in recent times that academic research began to focus on Christian migrants in Europe (cf. Conner 2019). To fill this gap, this ethnography sought to provide further insights concerning the intersection between religion and migration with respect to the formation of African Christian communities in Essen. Thus far, the presumption has been that the Christian immigrant in a

Christian country would encounter less problems of social integration when compared to the Muslim immigrant in a Christian country. Nonetheless, it is the position of this ethnography that the African Christian immigrant in Europe is faced with similar, if not even more critical, challenges as his Muslim counterpart although not on account of religion but rather on account of cultural and phenotypical differences. But on the other hand, they share another common experience: just as the mosque plays a critical role in facilitating the stability of the Muslim immigrant in the host society, so does the church play a critical role in stabilising the Christian immigrant by acting as his bridge to the mainstream society.

In the course of time, regular worshippers or core members of a religious congregation, including migrants and natives, are likely to establish personal relationships with one another. In this manner, they begin to develop mutual trust and thereby overcome various prejudices that tend to separate people. Through this mechanism religion creates the atmosphere necessary for the blossoming of friendships that are ritually reinforced and re-enacted through the liturgy of the church. For instance, the liturgy of the Catholic Church understands the congregation as a Family of God which consists of an assembly of putative brothers and sisters. Therefore, her liturgical books compel the celebrant during liturgical celebrations to address the worshippers in such informal and familial terms irrespective of their social status in real life. The Pentecostal Christians are even more radical in enforcing a very close fictitious kinship among the adherents as they profess a very radical belief in the primacy of baptismal rebirth over natural kinship. This is popularly expressed by the saying that the water of baptism is thicker than the blood of consanguinity. In other words, adherents of a Christian community tend to regard members of the same congregation as more closely related than their natural siblings regardless of race, colour, or culture.

In line with the above religious redefinition of kinship, the Christian communities embark on several projects aimed at promoting the brotherhood and sisterhood of all humanity. For instance, the St. Getrud Parish, Essen, is a parish located at the very heart of the City of Essen and is home to native and immigrant Catholics of various cultural backgrounds. Each of the language communities is allotted a regular time of worship including the service for the deaf. Thus, apart from the worship sessions of the native German community, there are also other native-speaking church communities within the parish including the Francophone African Community, the Anglophone African Community, the Korean

Community, the Spanish Community, the Italian Community, the Syrian Community, the Tamil Community, and the Hungarian Community – each holding regular services in her native language in the same church. These communities offer their immigrant members the opportunity of retaining their native style of worship and faith practises even as foreigners and their presence adds to the diversity of the overall parish community. While every service is open to the public and not just limited to the language community, the beauty of diversity comes to light on certain occasions like major feast days such as processions, the Holy Week liturgy and other parish festivities when all the different communities celebrate together with the native parish community as a single family. In the same vein, there are other joint programmes and projects that unite these subgroups as one family amongst which are volunteer works in the Caritas or in the youth ministry. Youth programmes especially are organised centrally since they do not have much of the language problems as the adults. All these initiatives help to promote social interactions and integration.

There is another interesting platform of social interaction introduced by mainline churches in Germany. Since 1975, the major Christian denominations in Germany cooperate with one another in the task of building bridges of tolerance between immigrants and natives through its annual programme called the Intercultural Week (*Interkulturelle Woche*). This is an initiative of the three major Christian denominations in Germany – Catholic, Evangelical and Greek-Orthodox churches – which is designed to serve as a social contribution towards building a tolerant and egalitarian society. Usually, a central office releases a general programme and theme for each year, while every city or parish plans and executes the programme at the local level, usually in cooperation with the political community and voluntary agencies with a get-together at the city centre for mutual interactions.

In 2018, when I participated in the September 22nd opening ceremonies at the City Centre, the different religious bodies in town (Catholic Community, Evangelical Community and Islamic Community) as well as the City Council, respectively, erected stands around the market square, offered information flyers, free biscuits and coffee/tee to interested passers-by with volunteers stationed to answer questions from interested passers-by. Each of the religious communities displayed its multicultural disposition and openness with the presence of their immigrant members who were encouraged to prepare some traditional delicacies

that were displayed for the public to try. The overall aim was to promote social interactive sessions and cultural exchanges among the inhabitants of the city, with a view to encouraging mutual respect and tolerance.

In a jointly signed foreword to the 2019 intercultural week with the theme "Living together, growing together" *(Zusammen leben, zusammen wachsen*), as published in its official website[32], the leaders of the three churches (Reinhard Kardinal Marx, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and Metropolitan Augoustinos – representing the Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox churches, respectively) renewed their appeal for mutual respect and tolerance as basic dispositions for a successful community living thus:

> First, we grow by allowing ourselves to open up to our "foreign" counterpart, to a world that was previously unknown to us. Learning another language opens up a different mentality for us and brings another culture to life. The dialogue with members of other cultures and religions expands our horizons. It is not about arbitrariness or the relativization of one's own point of view, but an appreciative, interested perception of the other, which enriches our thinking" (*my translation, Th. E.*).

Through these initiatives, religious communities provide the platform for social interactions and integration.

6.5 Mutual Interests and Transcendental Values

The social fields analysed above show a number of interesting mutuality between Germans and the Igbo with regard to social integration. First to be considered is the role children play as mediators of social integration of their parents in the three contexts considered – the neighbourhood, the school, and the religious communities. Worthy of note are the different levels of interaction that run through the three social contexts that bring together the two different populations – the German and the Igbo – to pursue some common enterprises. At the level of social interaction in the neighbourhood, it is the basic social concerns of friendship, good neighbourliness and the daily concerns of living that are of uppermost interest. When children come out to play in the neighbourhood, they

[32] Https://www.interkulturellewoche.de/gemeinsames_wort/2019 (accessed on 04.07.2019, 17:50).

make friends and through their interaction provide platforms for social interaction between their parents and these eventually lead to social integration.

In the context of the school community, there is a transcendental dimension at work. Apart from the mere social interaction while learning, one observes a deeper mutuality in their value for education. Igbo parents, like their German counterparts, have a strong value for the education of their children, a kind of progressive future-oriented attitude towards the improvement of life of one's children. More so, Igbo parents believe that offering their children quality education is a sure way of securing for them a status in life that would be better than that of the parents. In fact, this belongs to the primary reason of raising children. Traditionally, this attitude or idea-value is codified in Igbo proverbs, for example: "a father's prayer is that his child becomes greater than him" (*ekpere nna bụ ka nwa karịa ya*); "the purpose of procreation is for the offspring to be greater than the forebears" (*ihe e ji amụ nwa bụ ka nwa karịa nna*). Therefore, it is common of Igbo parents to go all out of their way (to give their utmost best) in order to provide their children with the opportunity to excel beyond their own records. Some researchers tend to explain this common tendency from a simplistic utilitarian economic perspective, namely, that because of the poor economic situation in Nigeria, Igbo parents do this as a sort of strategy to secure their welfare in old age (cf. Uchendu 1965, Ekpe 1983). However, I would argue that this tendency goes beyond the temporal welfare of Igbo parents; it is rather an expression of an idea-value, a predisposition that is rooted in the holistic vision of life characteristic of the Igbo *Weltanschauung* as already discussed in Chapter three, which regard children as potential ancestors or re-embodied spirits of the lineage ancestors. The same reasoning explains why even among contemporary Igbo in the diaspora (example, the Igbo in Essen), whose social welfare do not necessarily depend on their children, this value is still sustained and held as top priority among parents. This peculiar disposition and attitude towards the education of children have remained essentially unchanged from what Shelton (1968: 237) had observed decades ago in his essay on "Igbo Child-Raising, Eldership and Dependence" wherein he asserted that:

> … many (Igbo) parents show an excessive indulgence toward their children on the grounds that they will be dependent upon their children for their nourishment and their status both in this world during their old age and in the next world after death. Accordingly, the Igbo strive

> to convert their wealth into acts and titles which will increase personal and family prestige: by owning a house, providing completely for the elderly parents, educating relatives, and contributing generously to village development funds.

This moral obligation to children is therefore a value common to Igbo and German parents and offers them a common platform of mutual engagement and social integration.

Another interesting observation from the ethnography under study are the two dimensions in school education namely, educating the pupil and thereby extending the radius of social relationships of the parents. The latter is not a formal objective of school education but an unintended consequence thereof. Whereas the formal purpose of education may be simply to improve the knowledge of children, this ethnography outlines an unintended consequence that, sociologically speaking, is also an important dimension to schooling, namely, as a means of extending the radius of parent's social networks. Hence by emphasising the intensive cooperation of parents in child-education, the German education system provides the incentive for this dimension, whereby the school becomes a platform of social interaction between the parents of school children, especially through the parents-teacher-pupils' cooperation. The school, therefore, constitutes a community that transcends social distinctions at parental levels. It is a peculiar social context that consists of a mix of institutionalised and informal interactions going on side by side. Gradually, the social interaction begins to transcend the levels where distinctions between peoples are decisive: between Igbo and Germans, between whites and coloureds, between natives and immigrants. This leads to a higher level of social relationship that metamorphoses into a new sociality characterised by mutual respect and solidarity. This is a level of abstraction that is also found in the religious community.

In the same vein, our ethnography on the Catholic Church community could be analysed based on the same parameters. And although it presents a completely different set of values in a completely different context, the dynamics are essentially similar, namely, the transcendence of social distinctions and the creation of new forms of sociality. The description of Obi's First Holy Communion reads in essence like the description of any ritual process celebrated by a ritual community. From an anthropological perspective, it is a ritual clearly demarcated in time and space – following van Gennep (1960). It reminds one of a point of view

adopted by Hubert and Mauss in their classic, *Sacrifice: its Nature and Function* (Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1896]), in which they tried to come up with a model of sacrifice that is comparable to the model of ritual of van Gennep which places ritual participants for a moment within the context of shared equality. Thus, when Igbo Catholics attend the Holy Mass in the church in Essen, they become part of a ritual community that transcends all distinctions of race, colour, status, tribe, and tongue. The component kin groups and families comprising the worshipping community are levelled into one large Family of God, which accords also with the notion of catholicity. This is ritually expressed by employing the familial model of relationship among the ritual participants – they are all "brothers and sisters in Christ".

So far, we have tried to establish the same unexpected spin-offs in the relationship between parents engendered by the social actions of their children in the three social contexts that have been considered – namely, the neighbourhood, school, and religious communities. The fact that in all these cases there are unintended consequences of particular social actions goes to emphasise the unpredictability of social dynamics, which leads to the conclusion that rituals and idea-values are important drivers of social integration.

CHAPTER VII
WHAT REMAINS?
Cultural Identity and Adaptation

O my shoes are Japanese. ...
These trousers English, if you please.
On my head, red Russian hat;
my heart's Indian for all that
(Rushdie 1988 [1998]: 5).

The previous chapters have described the changing social and cultural landscapes of a group of Igbo immigrants by way of an exploration of their life worlds, starting from a review of the traditional Igbo society where they were initially socialised, through the trajectories of their transnational journeys from the native home in the Global South to their present socio-cultural context as immigrants in their society of domicile in the Global North. The discussion began with an exploration of the traditional Igbo worldview and social structure and continued with a description of their current life practices in the urbanised environment of the metropolitan city of Essen. Specifically, there was an ethnographic presentation of the social conditions of the scrapyard where most of them engaged in various types of business. Moving further, their network of social relationships outside the scrapyard was also described, specifically in reference to three dimensions of sociality, namely, the neighbourhood, the school, and the church. It is pertinent to point out that most of these Igbo migrants belong to first generation migrant families; only a few married ones among them have some second-generation members in their families. As is characteristic of this group of immigrants, their contact with the host society and culture brings upon them a conflict of sorts between the cultural values operative in their homeland and those in their new society of domicile (Eriksen 2003: 232). The process of resolving such conflicts of cultural values belongs to the collective experience of any diaspora community and is a necessary stage in their process of social integration.

Thus, Chapter six makes the point that social integration is a complex process that is actualized at different levels of social interaction and is driven by a mutual transfer of values. As example, it describes two contexts in which social distinctions between Germans and the Igbo are transcended leading to the emergence

of a new form of social reality founded on shared values. Social integration therefore begins to take place where there is a fundamental acknowledgement that people are carriers of culture and cultural values and that no single culture is self-sufficient. This point has been empirically established repeatedly by anthropologists in the course of field work in several non-European societies which differ radically from their experiences in homeland Europe (Platenkamp and Schneider 2019). In his introduction to the edited work, *Integrating Strangers*, Platenkamp refers to the European fascination with "the sublime Perfection of Antiquity, the Nobility of the Savage, the Superior Wisdom of the Oriental" which are all to be internalised by the individual European student in the course of his educational formation as accepted values but which would not translate into a valorisation of migrants from those parts of the globe for their foreign provenance in European society, which may qualify them to mediate the society's relationship with the outside world: "this sophisticated understanding of an outside world as a highly valued source of estimation of one's own society is ill at ease with a European perception of a 'Third' or 'Non-Western' world whose market economic 'deficiencies', technological backwardness and political 'malfunctioning' make it dependent upon the benevolence of superior European state" (Platenkamp 2019: 20). Be that as it may, the foregoing shows that social integration requires an acknowledgment of cultural dynamism that celebrates openness to the strange and to mutual exchanges or value transfer as a necessary implication of culture contact.

At this juncture, the famous comment made by Salman Rushdie in an essay in defence of his controversial work, *The Satanic Verses,* comes to mind – a statement that is widely cited by proponents of cultural creativity or creolization (cf. Hannerz 1996: 66-67, Eriksen 2003: 223, Stade and Dahl 2003: 203). In the essay, Rushdie (1991: 394) argues that his major concern in that novel (*The Satanic Verses*) was simply to make a strong statement against cultural purity and absolutism in the light of present global realities. Thus, *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling and the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*" (emphasis in the original). In order to demonstrate this point more effectively, the author cross-references an English translation of an old Hindi hit song, which

he puts on the lips of Gibreel, one of the principal characters, as he fell down from the sky towards the English Channel: "O my shoes are Japanese… These trousers English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart's Indian for all that". Reading in between the lines, it appears that the song captures the author's main task in the novel – an effort to expose the contradictions between globalisation (represented by foreign goods: Japanese shoes, English trousers and Russian hat) and the stability of cultural identity (an Indian heart). Thus, the opening quotation above tends to show that the bits that bring newness does not necessarily displace the given in the process, but rather enriches it and perhaps modifies it in subtle ways. So it is with cultural flows in global metropoles: it broadens and enriches, rather than eroding, the indigenous culture. This is the uniqueness of the process of creolisation of culture as shall be shown shortly.

In the light of the foregoing postulations, the present chapter seeks to provide answers to some relevant questions arising from culture contact and cultural flow in the city. The central questions in this regard include: does this process of reciprocal enrichment occasioned by culture contact apply in all cases especially with a minority population of migrants such as the Igbo in Essen? In the face of their asymmetrically disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the majority population in Essen and the enduring contact with a plethora of meanings and meaningful forms from other cultural groups, the following questions are also anthropologically relevant: what remains of the Igbo cultural identity, of the typically Igbo traditional practices, worldview and rituals, in the quotidian lifeworld of Igbo immigrants who now live in a culturally different context in the Ruhr city of Essen? Are these elements all disappearing or are they becoming redundant? Is there any impact on or influence from the mainstream society on the cultural identity of these Igbo migrants and vice versa? To what extent does the Igbo social reality in Nigeria influence the emergence of the new social reality of their diaspora in Essen? Apart from their high value for education already discussed, are there other idea-values of the Igbo that impact on the German system of values such that the new social reality that is emerging not only assimilates to German society but perhaps exerts a mutual, reciprocal influence? If, in other words, a new social reality emerges from the confrontation between Igbo and German cultures, is that new social reality exclusively German defined or not? What sort of exchange is occasioned by culture contact in this case? In a nutshell, what remains of an exclusively Igbo cultural identity in the present German mainstream society?

7.1 A Clownish Audacity?

> *Imagine a young Igbo man, his car is German, his shoes are Italian, he's wearing a fine English suit, he speaks English and German fluently and he is a roman catholic. When it was time to kneel to propose to his woman, he said: No I can't do it, it's not my culture. The clownish audacity* – @Mayoveli.

The statement above is a tweet from a middle aged, well-educated Nigerian, Mayowa, that had caused a heated argument among a group of Africans who were gathered for an evening hangout in an Afro-Shop[33] in Essen, Germany. The argument eventually narrowed down to an engaging debate over the perceived radical changes in marriage rituals and other cultural practices among the Igbo in the modern times, especially those living abroad. It was a clear case of serendipitous ethnography (Stade and Dahl 2003: 204) as, per chance, I literally walked into the argument on a cold Saturday evening. In any case, the surprise was not about the fact of the gathering of these men considering that such a weekend rendezvous is a regular practice among African migrants and business travellers in the city, especially on Saturdays and Sundays when they gather in the so-called Afro-shops – which usually serve equally as restaurants and bars in addition to the regular groceries – to unwind and share the latest news in town and from the homeland. The surprise was rather on the happy coincidence regarding the relevance of the topic of discussion at the point of my arrival to the ongoing research.

On that occasion, someone had shared the above tweet meant to criticize an Igbo man who did not get on one knee to propose to his fiancée (the new vogue for marriage proposal among young Nigerians), on the excuse that it was an unacceptable Igbo cultural practice, (see Chapter IV for details of the traditional processes of Igbo marriage). This position was heavily criticised by his friends as being "backward and archaic", as evident in the tweet. The tweet occasioned a heated debate on whether it was still fashionable in the present era for migrants

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[33] Afro-Shop is an acronym for a type of grocery store run mainly for Africans, where exotic products such as food and cosmetics are sold. Interestingly, most Afro shops are not run by Africans but mainly by Asians (hence, some call it "Asian Shop"), and the commodities on offer are not always of African origin but also from Asia and South America. They offer mostly exotic products as most of the goods on display are not found in the regular supermarkets.

to stick to the cultural practices of their native homes while living abroad or should they rather jettison them to adopt the cultural practices of their societies of domicile. In other words, to what extent should one preserve one's cultural identity in a global metropole? The discussion immediately called to mind one of the observations Ulf Hannerz had made in his *Transnational Connections* (1996, see also Hannerz 1987, Yelvington and Ramassote 2018) concerning his personal experience while doing fieldwork in Kafanchan, north-central Nigeria, in the early 1970s about the "Beento" (an acronym in the colonial years for a Nigerian who had been to Britain). The figure of the "Beento" had featured frequently in early postcolonial writings in Nigeria as an embodiment of confusion and social estrangement. Having gone to study abroad for many years, the "Beento" was usually presented in literature as a cultural disaster on his return (he was usually male) because he had become too distant from the cultural habitat that he had left some years before, for which he is now considered a bundle of contradictions. On the one hand, he is valued for functioning as a bridge between his townspeople and the foreign Other, but on the other hand, he is also seen as a disappointment and a lost son, who can no longer protect his ancestral heritage. The tweet under discussion could have come from a typical "Beento".

As the debate got underway, two opposing camps emerged: the supporters of @Mayowa were for the proposition that the present globalized world has brought with it a decontextualization of symbols and values such that it becomes superfluous to insist on specific cultural practises. The opposing group, on the other hand, insisted that it belongs also to the age of globalisation to respect specific cultural configurations which are the markers of social identity. It is the view of the latter camp that one should always maintain and preserve one's cultural identity and heritage through the observation of cultural practices even while away from the native society. Thus, in concrete terms, the debate mirrors the broader question of the place of cultural identity in a globalised world. It asks the question, what remains of the cultural identity of migrants in the global metropoles – of the Igbo in Germany (Essen), for instance? More so, does the fact of cultural flow, mixing and borrowing that happen in global cities and metropoles necessarily lead to a homogenisation of culture and cultural practices?

Therefore, what @Mayowa refers to as a "clownish audacity" is indeed a perennial question about the place of cultural identity in an era of globalisation, which

understandably has been one of the hottest themes of academic discourse in recent years. For those who view globalisation as a path to full unification and homogenisation of global culture, it means an erasure of specific cultural identities, a death-knell to cultural diversity and a levelling of all cultures into a common Global Culture that is determined by the global market economy and, by that token, the capitalistic hegemony of the Global North – the so-called "coca-colonization" (Wagenleitner 1994) or "westernization" of the world (Hannerz 1996: 18). Interestingly, this seems to explain the striking similarity between @Mayowa's statement and Rushdie's translation of the Hindi hit song "Mera joota hai Japani" that was referred to in the beginning of this chapter. For many a migrant, despite the continuous cultural mixing and borrowing, ethnographic evidence (Hannerz 1987, Duru 2017, Jackson 2013) show that the core cultural personality tends to remain stable over the years, especially for the first-generation immigrants. Thus, contrary to the fears expressed in the earlier days of cultural studies on the effect of globalisation, it is evident that increasing mobility and cultural intermingling occasioned by globalisation do not necessarily result in a flattening or homogenisation of cultural values as such.

On the contrary, there is a growing appreciation of cultural diversity in today's global metropoles, with states and communities taking concrete steps to celebrate and promote diversity. There is, however, also a strong tendency towards homogenisation through global capitalist market practises. This is marked by globally coordinated capital markets and forex regimes and by the fact that increasingly identical brands of commodities are produced, distributed, and consumed in all corners of the globe. These certainly tend to indicate a sort of homogenisation of tastes and consumption habits across the globe. Nevertheless, the perception and specific cultural practices associated with consumption, or the use of commodities purchased from the global market, remain in the domain of particular cultures since even tastes and aesthetics are culturally mediated (Tibère 2016). This confirms a general tendency that is observable in the areas of marketing and publicity. In general, publicity and marketing strategists are aware of the fact that brands are culturally specific, and not universal, categories. Hence the values that are communicated or transported by brand images cannot be assumed to be universal. With regard to this, marketing strategists ensure that in their adverts the values communicated by their products and brands are meaningful to customers in their target audience. Therefore, a particular brand could

be valued differently by customers from different cultural backgrounds. For example, it may be helpful to imagine this possibility: consider that one may well put on a pair of shoes made in Japan and a pair of trousers from London with an Italian belt to match and capped with a hat from Russia – like the opening quotation from Rushdie suggests – yet the heart of the individual (his tendencies, thinking pattern, choices and inclinations) remains for all that under the mediation of his specific cultural dispositions, irrespective of how elegant or repulsive he may seem to appear in the outfit (after all, beauty is in the eye of the beholder!).

On another note, items of fashion may not necessarily be appreciated the same way by all users or say, peoples from different cultural backgrounds even when they live within the same social space. Just like taste, beauty or aesthetics is a relative concept that belongs to the process of socialisation. For instance, during a cultural event, an Igbo man was visibly infuriated that his costly traditional chieftaincy attire was described by his German friend as “a nice colourful costume” that would be nice for the coming carnival outing. The disparity in their concept of aesthetics can only be explained by the different cultural standards for defining beauty and making aesthetical judgements. This strengthens the opinion that globalisation may influence, but not obliterate, cultural identity. Perhaps another ethnographic example may suffice to drive home this point further. For most indigenous Europeans and Americans, spirits (e.g., Schnapps, Whiskey, Rum, etc.) may be mere brands of alcoholic drinks but in traditional societies like in Igbo land and elsewhere in Africa, such items have strong ritual significance attached to it; a disposition that endures even today among the African diasporas. During ritual ceremonies like marriage and child-naming, for instance, such drinks are valued as gifts from abroad which are used to effect ritual exchange, irrespective of where they may have been produced. Even among the Igbo in diaspora, including those living in Europe and America, this practice is still common. Thus, it is pertinent indeed to consider the question of cultural identity in a world of globalisation.

7.2 Cultural Identity in a Globalized World

From its early days, social anthropology as a branch of knowledge has continuously engaged itself with the study of cultural boundaries, starting from the notion of Cultural Diffusionism all the way to the current one of globalisation. Although

the school of Diffusionism was subsequently eclipsed by the emergence of new schools like Franz Boas' Historical Particularism, Bronislaw Malinowski's Functionalism and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown's brand of Durkheimian Holism (Eriksen 2019: 4) in the Anglo-American anthropological scholarship just like the shift from Evolutionism to Structuralism in continental Europe, it has remained an acceptable fact "that cultural diffusion, or rather the spread and transformation of ideas, practices, crafts and world-views beyond their initial confines takes place continuously" (ibid.). Towards the eve of the second millennium, with the astonishing innovations in the travel industry and the information technology which radically destabilised the idea of geographical and spatial boundaries, the idea of cultural flow has once again taken the centre stage in current intellectual discourse. This is evident in the emergence of several neologisms and concepts that basically describe the same phenomenon of intercultural contact. As Eriksen (op. cit.: 5) observes: "the preoccupation with cultural flows and mixing was to a great extent a *fin de siècle* trend, peaking in the 1990s with Homi Bhabha and third cultures, Arjun Appadurai's ethno- and technoscapes, Ulf Hannerz' encompassing concept of cultural creolization, James Clifford's predicaments of culture, Stuart Hall and the voluminous cultural studies literature on hybridity". Of the above theorists, Hannerz stands out prominently in the development of theories of cultural flow and the organisation of diversity in modern cities (cf. Hannerz 1969 [2004], 1980, 1987, 1996) especially in the European context. He prefers the use of the term "creolisation" to describe the process of global cultural flow and organisation of diversity which he calls the "flow of meanings and meaningful forms". This study shall return to this interrogation in a later section.

Historically, the concept of cultural identity originated from the field of psychology, specifically from Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in his theory of psychoanalysis. It is from this that Eriksen eventually drew inspiration to develop his concept of "self-identity", which he described as a succession of individual psychological crises (Graumann 1999: 59). It is important to emphasise, however, that the term "crisis" as used by Eriksen differs substantially from the negative connotation that is currently associated with the word in everyday usage. For Eriksen, "crisis" rather describes a moment of decision whether a development will succeed or fail. Basing on the concept of self-identity and stretching it further to apply to the broader platform of interpersonal interaction in the social

environment, Henri Tajfel (1974) in turn developed the concept of "social identity". This later concept is built on the observation that people are socially categorised based on some stereotyping mechanisms through which a clear distinction is made between members and non-members, insiders and outsiders, of a particular category. Thus, through social identity, people not only classify others as members of specific social groups; they also categorise themselves by the same token.

The cultural angle was later introduced to the concept of identity by acknowledging a fundamental link between social groups and locations and thereby recognising the importance of stability. This corresponds to an earlier understanding of culture as localised within specific physical boundaries. Hence, when social identity is stretched beyond the interpersonal-interactive framework and taking into consideration how this framework always relates to the symbolic meaning and value of places and things, one arrives ultimately at the sphere of culture. Indeed, "what can be symbolised by locations and things and persons ultimately are values, all of which define a culture" (Graumann 1999: 64). Identity is always value-oriented, and every value relates to a community sharing such value. Hence, cultural identity involves identification with specific values through which one becomes identified with the group representing such values by at least a partial membership. Hannerz (1992: 39) argues that, "as collective systems of meaning, cultures belong principally to social relationships, and to networks of such relationships. Only indirectly, and without logical necessity, do they belong to places". All that is required for the sustenance of cultural practices is therefore a community of persons with a common system of values that are in regular contact, irrespective of the physical distance between them. Following from the group perspective, the three basic functions of identity become clearly manifest, namely: identifying others, being identified by others, and identifying with others (Hauser 1998: 7). In other words, cultural identity necessarily implies inclusion and exclusion at the same time. By this same token, persons may be included or excluded from a particular 'community of values'.

But this is not a haphazard process. In a social context, identity requires both internal and external indicators that enable members of a group to recognise themselves on the one hand and make themselves recognisable as such by those outside of the group, on the other. Linguists believe that language serves an important function in this respect. In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*,

Joseph (2013: 1) explains that identities are manifested in language in three ways: “First, as a category and label that people attach to themselves and to others to signal their belonging; secondly as the indexed ways of speaking and behaving through which they perform their belonging; and third, as the interpretations which others make of those indices”. These standard practices and values expressed through the medium of language refer to the particular culture of those involved. Language is therefore an important vehicle for the identification of particular cultures and thereby the expression of specific identities. The innate interconnection between culture and identity as well as the dynamism of culture is further expressed as follows:

> On the one hand, culture and identity are never entirely separable: It is a defining trait of the concept of culture that whatever beliefs, values, inclinations, tastes, practices, and texts constitute it must also serve an identity function for those who participate in the culture. On the other hand, no group can be expected to be culturally homogenous… (ibid.).

Thus, one may logically infer that the constituent elements of cultural identity could be broadly grouped into two fields of experiences: first, the bodily and emotional field which includes such experiences as shared tastes and inclinations; and the more cognitive and moral ones, which include shared beliefs and values. Here also, the insider-outsider demarcation comes into play. Much as these constituent experiences are known to and shared by group members constituting its *conscience collective* (Durkheim 1895 [2010]), they are usually not in themselves observable from the outside until they are enacted by the group members in the form of observable practices and texts. Such practices are, on the one hand, marks of collective intra-group self-identification and on the other hand function as indicators “ad extra” in relation to the outside through which non-members can identify the “performer” as a member of the particular group. This agrees with the phenomena of sociability and social binding which are intrinsically linked to the construction of collective identities. Beneath it also lies the logics of social distinction and the organisation of life in society (Becuț and i Puerto 2017: 1).

Of course, the fact that culture is performative is hardly in doubt. It is mainly from observation and discussion of the performance of cultural practices in their various forms that ethnographic research can take place; it is through such per-

formances that cultures can be lived, studied, and analysed. Interestingly, linguists further argue that such practices and texts are accessible to the ethnographer only when they are encoded in language – in terms of signs, symbols, and texts. Such cultural performances may include, for instance, "how food is obtained and prepared, how clothing is made and decorated, patterns of marriage and family arrangements, how trade is carried out and how worship is conducted. Often these practices are encoded in or bound up with texts, either in the narrow sense of written texts or oral tradition, or the broader one of visual texts, including paintings, statues, and other totemic figures, tattoos, jewellery, songs and chants, dances, and the like" (Joseph 2013: 2). Thus, narrowly defined, language may be seen as a systematic cultural practice of a particular group through which texts are made. In fact, Joseph further argues that what we know as language today (not the spoken art of communication) historically developed in conjunction with the practise of writing (ibid.). Like language, identities are not given; they must be constructed, performed, reproduced, and transmitted. Cultural identity therefore involves a dynamic process which accommodates some level of openness to growth, change or modification. Such growth and modification naturally happen through culture contact.

In the era of globalisation characterised by a continuous flow and mix of various cultures, some scholars hold the opinion that cultural identity cannot be compatible with globalisation since, according to them, globalisation seeks to enthrone global uniformity of meanings and meaningful forms. In an incisive work on cultural identity in a globalised world, *Tanz der Kulturen. Kulturelle Identität in einer globalisierten Welt*, Joana Breidenbach, and Ina Zukrigl (1998) express an observation that the two concepts "cultural identity" and "globalisation" are often diffuse and uncertain, especially when related to each other. It is often assumed that globalization leads to a blurring of cultural identity as a result of current "revolutions" in information and communication technologies, especially with the internet. Hauser therefore posits that:

> Social networks of persons, i.e., communities, no longer develop only in places where people meet in the flesh at a specific point in time, but as links between any location where it is possible to "log in", and where there are facilities for sending and receiving messages, independent of time and space… The new information and communication

> technologies thus build a bridge between local contexts, such as cultural identities, and global contexts, and the spread of uniform systems of symbols, lifestyles and stereotypes (Hauser 1998: 3).

The veracity of the above postulation is taken for granted in the light of the present global context. However, it still needs to be emphasised that unity does not imply uniformity (of symbols, lifestyles, and stereotypes). The world may be united by common platforms like the internet and the blurring of physical boundaries through political systems but that may not necessarily lead to a uniform interpretation of symbolic forms across boards. The so-called uniform symbols only make sense when they become part of a symbolic system, and (except for global scientific symbolic systems such as mathematics) the latter by necessity are locally communicated and therefore culture specific. They thus lose their universality. The @Mayowa tweet which caused the long debate in Essen had certainly originated from a migrant Nigerian living somewhere in the United Kingdom, yet it could be accessed anywhere in the world where there is an internet facility in its original formulation. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the symbols contained therein, represented by the various responses to the tweet, could be as diverse as the cultural distances separating the various responders as evident in the polarizations of the debate it caused in Essen. This ultimately begs the question: if globalisation does not necessarily result in a homogenisation of culture (Hannerz's 'meanings and meaningful forms'), what are the effects of the continuous cultural flows and mixing in global metropoles such as Essen in Germany?

7.3 Creolization or Adaptation: Contestation of Meanings

The rapid phenomenal breakthrough in innovative technology towards the end of the twentieth century, especially in areas of communication and mobility together with the invention of the internet, ushered in the era of globalisation that has continued to increase in sophistication up until today. Since then, scholars in the area of cultural studies have engaged themselves very intensively with the study of the dynamics of global cultural flow. It was in connection with this phenomenon that the term 'creolisation' was introduced into the lexicon of social anthropology. However, the term "creole" originated from linguistics where it was used to describe the new "languages" or modes of verbal communication

that were forged by slaves in the plantation fields of the Carribeans from their various native tongues. Having been forcefully uprooted from their homelands, these slaves were forced to forge a new life and society of their own in the New World where they lacked any pre-existing structure of social organisation on which to build. The mostly young slaves had, of necessity, to invent new forms of communication and social organisation in their new environment; drawing from the remnant vestiges of their original individual cultures in the process of living together which resulted in what is today referred to as "creole cultures". Since communication is a necessity of social life and organisation, the slaves and their descendants in the course of time gradually developed a common language of communication which was a mixture of the limited and rudimentary grammar of their different mother tongues. While some linguists argue that creole languages develop out of various pidgins, in which case the creole could be regarded as a more advanced form of pidgin, some others propose that there is a close relationship between pidgin and creole language even if they are never the same. The difference seems to lie in the degree of development. Breidenbach and Zukrigl (1998) are of the opinion that while creoles typically relate to plantation societies with ethnically and linguistically complex populations that are stable over several generations, pidgins, on the contrary, are rudimentary trading idioms in port cities, which generally do not develop into fully fledged, complex languages. Be that as it may, our major concern is on the application of the "creole" concept in social anthropology and not on the historicity of the acronym.

One of the areas of application of the "creole" concept is in the analysis of the dynamics of cultural change in a world of globalisation that is linked by movements of material resources, peoples, and their cultures. Although 'the pidginization of culture' has never caught on in anthropology, 'cultural creolization' has, but not without some conceptual difficulties. "Creole" cultures originally referred to the non-systematised cultures in the Plantations of the Caribbean islands as already indicated. In the course of time the term gained further applications in other areas of study. Hannerz (1996: 66) avers that, "it used to be that there were only some handful of historically recognized creole cultures, mostly in the plantation areas of the New World, but now we sense that "creole cultures" may be turning into more of a generic term, of wider applicability". For one, the concept is being used today "often in a loose and evocative way, to designate mixing resulting from the confluence of discrete strains [of cultures] leading to

qualitatively new cultural forms" (Eriksen 2019: 8). Such intermingling of cultures might occur through various mediums and platforms especially at unexpected places in a multicultural environment. For instance, in "The World in Creolization" Hannerz (1987: 546) mentions that he was drawn to this idea by "the cultures at display in market places, shanty towns, beer halls, night clubs, missionary book stores, railway waiting rooms, boarding schools, newspapers and television stations". Just like in linguistics, conceptual difficulties arise also in the use of the creolization analogy in anthropology, including even trickier issues regarding the possibility of describing cultural worlds as enduring entities (Eriksen 2019: 8). However, describing cultures as stable and enduring does not necessarily diminish its dynamic character in any fundamental way – just as could be inferred from the opening quotation of this chapter.

Other terms that are closely linked to creolisation are 'interculturation', which is preferred by global theorists to 'hybridisation' and 'cultural adaptation'. While some theorists consider interculturation as an essential feature of the concept of creolization, others vouch for hybridisation. For instance, Munasinghe (2006: 549) mentions three attributes that make any such concept attractive to be employed by cultural studies, namely, the "processes of interculturation, the simultaneous entertainment of multiplicity, and the creativity of cultural production". Furthermore, scholars like Eriksen (2019: 8) trace the use of creolisation in cultural discourse to a suggestion by Hannerz in his 1987 article on "The World in Creolization". However, Hannerz himself warns strongly in the said essay that the concepts relating to the phenomenon purportedly described as creolization could be notoriously slippery and fussy in their connotations. His fieldworks in the Caribbean had shown that the local emic applications of the concepts in the so-called creole societies partly overlap and even partly contradict the academic usage. It is important to emphasise this observation at this point in order to properly situate the application of the concept in the present work.

It is also important to stress that Creole languages are new languages. Even though they are composed of linguistic entities (lexemes, syntactic features, intonations etc.) deriving from existing other natural languages, their incorporation into the syntactic and paradigmatic structure of the Creole language deprives these entities of their 'original' significance and gives them a new one. Structural linguistics and structural anthropology teach that once an element is

taken from an existing language/culture to become part of a new linguistic/cultural system, that latter system assigns the element by definition a new meaning, for it is the relations of the system that define the significance of the elements related and not vice versa. In addition, it is difficult to imagine *any* culture that is *not* composed of elements that are partly originally indigenous and partly of external provenance. Since Creole languages are not merely a 'hybrid' or 'interlinguistic' phenomena, one should be careful to transpose the descriptive linguistic concept by speaking of 'creole culture'.

Out of the many concepts advanced to explain the phenomenon of a confluence of diverse peoples and cultures in the current era of globalization outlined above, it would be preferable for our present context to apply the term 'adaptation'. The term 'cultural adaptation' in this sense acknowledges that migrants (especially first-generation migrants, who are the subjects of our ethnography) encounter the culture of the host society through applying the values and enacting the practices that are part of the cultural repertoire of their own society of origin. While they adapt to the host society, they internalise aspects of the host society while at the same time retaining core aspects of their own culture. It is this process of exchange and adaptation that we investigate here. Hence, the term is applied here strictly in a narrow sense to describe the experience of cultural interaction and the transfer of values between the subjects of our ethnography and the majority society in which they live.

7.3.1 Emerging forms of Cultural Adaptation

As already mentioned, the process of globalisation is characterised by unique socio-anthropological patterns of intermingling in both tangible and intangible cultures and in ways of living together. Rapid global mobility occasions a continuous flow of peoples, goods, services, ideas and meanings in cross-cultural encounters especially in major cities and metropoles of the world. Globalisation brings people of diverse origins and cultural backgrounds into closer contact, creating out of them both real and imagined communities. Such communities – whether real or imagined – are shaped and sustained by common systems of meanings and meaningful forms. Hannerz (1996: 69) observes that cultures are not themselves living beings but are rather shaped and carried by people in pursuit of their different aims in varying social constellations. The ensuing personal

and group interactions consequently result in some kind of cultural exchange in the form of a give-and-take sort of process of mutual enrichment.

Even in a migrant context, where there exists an obvious hierarchical asymmetry between the migrant group and the mainstream society, there always emerges some innovative ways of regulating multicultural cohabitation and mutual enrichment through intercultural interactions. In a migrant context, however, it is instructive to note the dual constraints observed in the process of creolisation: on the one hand is the energy and ingenuity they deploy to prevent the erosion of their native cultures and, on the other hand, is the effort to identify with, and integrate into the mainstream by constant dialogue with other cultures, by living and working together peacefully for the common good. Thus, in the first instance, creolisation builds on the "imagined worlds" (Appadurai 1996 [2005]: 33) through which migrants perform their daily tasks and make efforts to keep to and preserve the memory of their original culture while adapting to new circumstances. Thus, the concept of creolisation seems useful today in order to reflect on cultural contacts and ways of managing the resulting diversity, together with the question of migration and its attendant recasting of identity (Tibère 2016: 87). In the following section, we shall describe the process of cultural encounters between Igbo migrants and the mainstream German society in the metropolitan city of Essen and the resulting forms of cultural adaptations. This will build upon foundations already laid in the previous chapters.

Like a typical global metropole, the city of Essen is home to a wide constellation of cultural groups of varying demographical sizes. Of the large migrant population domiciled in the city, representatives of different African cultures are generally seen as one block, partly because they are in the minority and partly because of their peculiar phenotypical features. In fact, recent statistics show that although the Igbo make up a significant percentage of the African population, they are an infinitesimal number in relation to the overall population of Essen – totalling less than one percent of the overall immigrant population of the city (see Table 6.1, page 171). In other words, Igbo immigrants in Essen belong to the marginal minority population of the city – that is, to "the periphery", to use the words of Hannerz (1996: 152). "Centre-periphery relationship" is one of the concepts normally employed to explain the asymmetrical process of cultural flow in global metropoles. The flow of culture, of its "meanings and meaningful forms" (op. cit.: 20) is asymmetrical in that the centre is privileged over the periphery in

a hierarchy of power that determines the direction of this cultural flow. This asymmetry is critical to the process of creolisation: “What is at the core of the concept of creole culture, I think, is a combination of diversity, interconnectedness, and innovation, in the context of global centre-periphery relationships” (op. cit.: 67). Cities as a rule contain a critical mass of people of various cultural backgrounds within its boundaries. These people are carriers of culture. In an age of globalisation and intense human and material mobility, especially as experienced in large metropoles like Essen, cities constitute a huge arena of cultural interface, interlinking the different peoples who encounter one another at various levels and in various circumstances in the city scape. Through these interactions there is a continuous and complex process of intermingling, cultural mixing, innovation, and intercultural exchange (Eriksen 2019: 5).

In his classic study, *Cultural Complexity*, Hannerz (1992) conceives of two complementary socio-cultural processes to explain this phenomenon. On the one hand, there is a less abstract view in which culture is seen to flow largely within and between the organisational frames of the form of life, the state, the market and the formal sector, and on the other hand, he points to a more abstract and formal view of culture as the social relationships marked by six dimensions of symmetry and asymmetry in relation to a power hierarchy of the centre-periphery scale. Going further, the author proposes the concept of “creolisation” as a useful ‘root metaphor’ (Hannerz op. cit.: 39) in capturing the quality of these processes in which meanings and meaningful forms are shaped and socially organised between centre and periphery. To answer the question of “cultural flow” – that is, cultural interaction – Hannerz (op. cit., 46) focuses on the organisational frames of form of life, market, state, and movement, as mentioned above. These frames are valid in a broader analysis of cross-cultural interaction in a multicultural environment. For the present study three of these shall be applied as parameters to highlight the experiences of cultural exchange between Igbo migrants and the mainstream society in the Essen metropole, specifically using the form of life framework.

7.3.2 Hannerz’s ‘Form of Life’ Framework

According to Ulf Hannerz, the most basic and common framework of cultural flow is the form of life. This term refers to the spaces of direct, face-to-face encounters between people where this flow occurs in the course of normal day-to-

day engagements. Our concern here is to identify the process of adaptation and creolisation of Igbo culture at this level. It involves an analysis of everyday practices of production and reproduction, face-to-face encounters and activities in the workplace, domestic settings, neighbourhoods, and other places. By merely doing things together or by observing others doing it, one learns or begins to engage in simple cultural practises. It may range from simple exchange of pleasantries or partaking in some kind of culinary action to other informal practices like dancing. According to Hannerz (1992: 47), "One characteristic of [the] cultural process here is that from doing the same things over and over again, and seeing and hearing others doing the same things and saying the same things over and over again, a measure of redundancy results which is at least reminiscent of the small-scale society." Such pattern, however, may well be proper to any process of socialisation not just that in "small-scale societies". The different contexts of face-to-face encounters in which Igbo migrants interact with the mainstream society such as schools, churches, neighbourhoods, working communities, sports- and other voluntary organisations, etc. belong to this framework. Other typical examples are personal friendships and peer groups. In the course of such close interactions, there is a deeper and subtler exchange in the form of a mutual appreciation of cultural values that takes place beyond the common concern that might have brought them together in the first place. Face-to-face encounters are very effective in loosening up tensions and overcoming engraved prejudices and stereotypes. Once trust is established following upon acquaintance and friendship in a multicultural environment, a mutual acknowledgement of each other's values may ensue.

The most basic cultural expression of the form of life frame is language. Igbo immigrants tend to speak their mother-tongue in their homes. However, whereas the parents may be fluent in that language, most of their children, especially those born in Germany, show much difficulty in the use of the Igbo language. They generally understand it and may show a rudimentary knowledge of basic greetings and the exchange of pleasantries but lack a deeper communicative skill. The ability to communicate fluently in a language is of course also a sign of socialisation in the particular culture. Igbo is a tonal language; hence it matters how each word is pronounced. A single lexeme with same spelling may have more than one meaning, the different meanings being communicated by the respective

tonality only.[34] For this reason, children of Igbo migrants who were born in Germany generally tend to show low competence in pronouncing Igbo words correctly. It is not difficult to identify an Igbo migrant child who was born in Germany from one who grew up in Igboland; simply by listening to their different dictions would indicate the difference. This is understandable since to the former, Igbo is not a mother-tongue, strictly speaking.

Other ethnographic examples mentioned in Chapter six above have dealt with the multifaceted nature of social interactions between immigrants and the indigenous German population. They demonstrated that there are various spaces of sociality open to immigrants in general beyond their primary places of work and residence. It also emphasised the form of life framework where integration is achieved in the quotidian mundane interactions between immigrants and the indigenous population rather than in the more official settings and formal encounters. It is at this level of everyday encounter that the transfer of cultural values occurs. Be it through social activities relating to their children's education, through common interactions within the neighbourhood or by participation in ritual celebrations as members of a religious community, such encounters bring the participants to a sort of transcendental level of relationship where commonly cherished values count for more than the social and economic statuses of those involved. As such, they open the way to a mutual acceptance and exchange between immigrants and indigenes.

When cultural values are exchanged between peoples, each side of the cultural divide must experience some readjustments of one's own cultural outlook, wittingly or unwittingly. Hence, the late anthropologist of Leiden University, Jarich G. Oosten, is credited with a statement to the effect that the processes of integration consist in understanding the "differences in value" and the "value of difference" (Oosten 1999, cited in Platenkamp and Schneider 2019: vii). Understanding the two aspects are the key to successful integration. On the one hand, an awareness of the "differences in value" recognises the uniqueness of every cultural perspective and promotes an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Mutual encounters lead to a mutual understanding and appreciation of the differences in

[34] An example is the Igbo word *akwa*: depending on the tonality (identified in Igbo calligraphy by tone-markings), it could mean any of the following – egg (*àkwá*), cloth (*ákwà*), cry (*ákwá*), or bed (*àkwà*). Such tonality extends as well to compound words formed from these roots. Similar examples abound in Igbo lexicon.

value systems of the respective cultures. On the other hand, appreciation of the "value of difference" celebrates the beauty of cultural diversity, thereby enabling the society to reap from multiple perspectives in a plethora of possible alternatives to tackling social problems. Such an attitude has become imperative in any multicultural society.

Of course, no society is a closed system, the more so in today's globalised world. The encounter of any society with the foreign – be it persons, objects or practices – is fundamentally an encounter of cultural values since every human being embodies his/her culture's values. Such encounters are inevitable in the contemporary globalised world, although it could be perceived as bringing about a destabilisation or even an "infection" with cultural "impurities". But when properly understood, every cultural encounter is an opportunity for enrichment and growth. The valorisation of the strange and foreign has long been recognised by traditional societies as a source of social capital. Hence, there is much wisdom in the admonition of Pieter ter Keurs (2019: 199):

> All societies must engage with the outside world whenever they encounter people and things that come from regions beyond their own familiar one. Such regions may be thought of as far-away and perhaps mysterious places, as a distant unknown past, or merely as the forest nearby. There is always a potential danger that the people or objects coming from abroad disrupt the order of the receiving society. But the danger emanating from the beyond may also be a source of new life. Instead of rejecting people may modify what comes from outside, so as to incorporate it into their own cultural settings and use it to their advantage.

With new insights, new forms of technology or other new ideas coming in from abroad, the encounter between two different social communities can produce a new social reality that is different but not necessarily less valuable. Ethnographic data show that the encounter between the Igbo in Essen and German mainstream society at the interpersonal level has been without much friction and has impacted on both sides of the divide. Thus, the Igbo have internalised some aspects of German social life, thereby partly transforming their own Igbo culture while at the same time impacting on their host society. The more obvious demonstration of this proposition could be seen in the areas of culinary practises and fashion.

7.4 Food and Culinary Practices

There is a long tradition of anthropological studies on food and eating that date back to the nineteenth century with Garrick M's article on "Manners and Meals" which was published in 1888. Since this time, there has been a torrent of research on food ways and culinary practices in the social sciences that has been accompanied by a corresponding flood of literature on the subject. In an interesting review, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating", W. Mintz and C. M. Du Bois note that their findings on the place of food in anthropology "suggest that food had become a much more concrete and important subject by the late 1950s" but the textbooks on the anthropology of food as such began to appear by the 1980s (Minz and Du Bois 2002: 110-111). Among known classics on the subject are works on categories of food and edibility, a famous example being, in the context of myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1965), *The Raw and the Cooked*. Other works that deal with food classification and ritual include: Mary Douglas (1966), *Purity and danger*; Jack Goody (1982), *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology*. In recent times, a growing literature on the socio-cultural dimensions of food, especially its significance in the structuring of everyday life has become available (Becuț and i Puerto 2017, Douglas 1999). There are studies on the cultural representations underlying culinary adoptions, adaptations and borrowings and the role of food in the relationships between cultural groups (Tibère 2016). The scope of anthropological interest in food is hardly surprising, considering the fact that food is one of the most culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships (Mintz and Du Bois 2002: 109).

The continuous extension of the scope of research on food is thus an indication of how food systems connect so intimately to human life which tends to support the proposition that "next to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all human activities, and one with which much of social life is entwined" (op. cit.: 102). In their recent review of current studies on food in the social sciences, Becuț and i Puerto suggest that there are broadly two strands of empirical research on the subject: one is based on the 'foodscape' framework, which is concerned mainly with the politics of food production, distribution and consumption, whereas the other deals with food as a social practice with a more pragmatic approach to the consumption of food. By drawing on the vast resources of social theory and anthropological methods, they declare that "food choices and eating habits are now

conceived as related to phenomena of sociability and social binding, the construction of collective identities beneath which lie logics of social distinction and the organisation of life in society (Becuț and i Puerto 2017: 1). It has also been commonly recognised among anthropologists that peoples on the move – including migrants, refugees, and colonisers – also function as agents of change of culinary practices (Lockwood and Lockwood 2000, Mintz and Du Bois 2002).

Be that as it may, the social aspects of food production and consumption have remained largely self-evident in all human societies despite growing trends in the context of globalisation to reduce food to mere commodity. Especially the practices of cooking and eating – who, when, where and how – are factors that have wide social implications. Taking a clue from Clifford Geertz, particularly the approach deriving from his study of cockfights in Bali (Geertz 1973 [2000]), Tibère justifies the approach to food as a social fact with particular symbolic status. This premise allows for an analysis of the culinary practices of a given society in an effort "to try to understand what it means, and from there to move on to a global level, to its deep structure, and its collective/social psyche… In all societies, eating and drinking are core activities that help to structure and shape human relations and cultural identities" (Tibère 2016: 86). Earlier works have noted how food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart; how food functions in social allocation in terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, class and gender (Caplan 1997); how food can be used to contrast local identity with globalisation (Robertson and White (eds.) 2003) or how the global may actually reestablish the local rather than supplant it (Tuchman and Levine 1993). The import of these diverse studies would be factored as we progress in our consideration of the place of food and culinary practices among Igbo migrants in Essen as a social fact that plays a decisive role in their construction of a collective cultural identity. This thereby provides an insight into their representations of self and Other as a migrant community vis-à-vis the host society. Indeed, the choice of food and the ingredients used in its preparation, the methods and process of cooking as well as table manners while eating all belong to culturally determined practices that become especially significant in a multicultural environment.

7.5 Continuity and Adaptation in Igbo Food Practices

Walking through the many large supermarkets in the city of Essen, one encounters uncountable food products on display originating from all corners of the

globe. It is fascinating to consider that the same market and the same assortment of food commodities are available to all city dwellers – indigenes and immigrants alike – yet the choices, preferences and significance attached to the selection of food items are quite diverse. It is taken for granted that the choice of what to buy depends on the purpose or use one intends to make of the food product. There are culturally established and accepted standards for the preparation of food in all societies, although there is still room for innovation and adaptation. Thus, every culture lays claim to specific culinary products as being indigenous to them and thereby a marker of their cultural identity. The fact that dishes have specific names as labels of identification is another indicator that culinary practices are subject to cultural standards and regulation. Those who are strangers to such culinary products sometimes take the liberty to improve on or even create something quite new with a combination of their cultural preferences together with the culinary practices of other cultures – so that in this case, one might speak of a creole cuisine.

Also, African migrants use culinary habits and practices as markers of identity, albeit with a certain measure of ambivalence. For instance, during an informal conversation, an Igbo woman boasted of her achievements in the proper upbringing of her children by citing the fact that "they all prefer African food to German food" as proof. Here she differed from a friend whose children hardly tasted typical African cuisines like *fufu* and okra soup. And yet, one's ability to enjoy German food is sometimes considered a social capital among Igbo migrants. Hence, when a young man claims that he enjoys having cheese on his breakfast menu, his friend tells him jokingly that he has become German and may never return to Nigeria. It appears that most Igbo migrants enjoy international dishes and fast foods for the sake of their availability and low cost in comparison to African cuisine, but their preference in terms of culinary satisfaction (especially during special occasions) concerns traditional African dishes. As a result, one would observe a clear evidence of creativity and adaptations regarding culinary practices among migrant Igbo in Germany. Table manners mark this difference as well: Igbo migrants might prefer to eat traditional dishes in the traditional way – namely, by using their bare fingers rather than cutlery. One young man recalls how he enjoyed trying to teach his European friends the art of eating *fufu* with the hand without staining one's clothes. Thus food, cooking and eating serve as markers of inclusion and difference and these practices may challenge the human

capacity for innovation, especially by women. For indeed, "[w]ith their high degree of ritualization and their strong affective investment, culinary activities are for many women of all ages a place of happiness, pleasure and discovery. Such life activities demand as much intelligence, imagination, and memory as those traditionally held as superior, such as music and weaving" (De Certeau et al. 1998: 151).

For Igbo immigrants in Essen, there are certain tropical food items and ingredients which are not found in the regular supermarkets. So, they choose closely resembling food items in order to prepare what looks like the traditional dishes they had known from their native culture using familiar cooking methods. A typical example is *fufu* – a common staple food in most West African countries prepared mainly from root crops like yam, cassava but also from plantain. These are ground into flour and prepared by stirring the desired quantity in boiling water into dough-like dish. It is served with soup (e.g. okra or bitter leaf soup) or with stew prepared from different tropical vegetables. But since neither the traditional root crops nor the tropical vegetables are available in German supermarkets, Igbo migrants innovate the way of preparing this type of dish by using similar food ingredients that are available in the regular supermarkets. For instance, kale leaves (*Grünkohl*) are used in place of *Ugu* leaves (a type of tropical vegetable) to prepare soup or farina flour (*Grieß*) in place of yam or cassava flour in making *fufu*. So, from the same food commodity available to everyone in the supermarkets, they prepare a traditional dish that hardly any German person would recognise when the food is served. This is a clear evidence of some culinary adaptations or dietary shifts that have been observed in migrant communities elsewhere (Lockwood and Lockwood 2000, Goody 1982). We more so observe a similar pattern with respect to traditional forms of aesthetics like fashion and haircare practices.

7.6 Fashion

Fashion is a broad theme that has caught a special interest of a wide range of researchers in various fields of study including Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Philosophy, Sociology, Media Studies, Marketing, Advertising and Psychology to mention but a few. What originated as one of the basic necessities of human life – clothing, alongside food and shelter – was eventually transformed in the course of history to what is today one of the most lucrative branches of human

endeavour, thereby providing employment to an unquantifiable number of people across the globe. Although ancient philosophers like Plato[35] made passing remarks about fashion, it was not until the eighteenth century with Christian Garve's essay "On Fashion" that serious academic interest on the subject began. Thus, despite the growing trend of globalisation and capitalist market economy – and perhaps also as a result of it – fashion remained a cultural phenomenon through which cultural values and other immaterial goods could be transmitted – or claims to particular traditions are made – especially when defined in the narrow sense of clothing. According to Meinhold (2013: 24), "[T]he narrower fashion concept as used by most philosophers until now, refer exclusively to clothing, since the concept of *fashion* only came into existence with the *fashion of clothes* and is primarily used in relation to clothing" (emphasis in the original). However, Meinhold notes that the current broad definition of fashion dates way back in the 17th century, with the industrial revolution, and brought about a culture of textile mass production using the steam engine as a source of power – as part of the development that has been described as "the democratisation of luxury" which has peaked with globalisation (op. cit.: 25). Today, the concept of fashion covers not only clothing and accessories but also all other appurtenances of beauty like hairdressing and tattooing. Therefore, fashion is a symbolic cultural behaviour that expresses such values as propriety, adornment, social affiliation, etc. What's more, all forms of fashion have an inter-personal dimension and are thereby considered a social fact in the Durkheimian sense. It is in this broad sense that we shall discuss fashion in this section, with a view to showing how Igbo migrants in Essen express their cultural identity through it and the adaptive processes therein. Our focus shall be specifically limited to clothing and hairdressing only.

7.6.1 Between Costume and Fashion: Continuity and Adaptation in Clothing Styles

A passing reference has already been made to a mild argument that ensued in a social function in Essen during the course of my fieldwork, where a 'well-dressed' Igbo man was angered by his German friend who tried to 'praise' his chieftaincy attire by describing it as a beautiful 'costume'. The Igbo man considered the comment as denigrating and was only assuaged when his German friend

[35] Plato writes in his *Phaedo*, 64 d-e: „The true philosopher will care about nothing and therefore despise costly raiment, or sandals, or other adornments of the body" (cited in Meinhold 2013: 10).

promptly apologised, and the discussion veered off to more neutral themes. Again, I have encountered a number of Germans who had visited African countries in the past and had purchased 'exotic' African clothing, which they find suitable to wear in public only during special 'African' functions. For them, those pieces of clothing did not belong to normal everyday attire but only meant for such special occasions. In fashion studies, there is a distinction between costume and fashion.

In *A Critical Inquiry into Fashion*, Meinhold (2013: 25) argues that costume is a "*vestimentary* precursor of fashion", which he explained by tracing its etymology in the Germanic languages as *Tracht* (German), *dracht* (Dutch), *dragt* (Danish), *dräkt* (Swedish), *drakt* (Norwegian) – all forms of which are verbal abstracts of the verb 'to carry, to wear' (German, *tragen*). He thus claims that the original meaning of costume is 'that which is worn at a special time' – e.g., at table – or more generally, 'that which is worn'. Costume therefore indicates a relation to tradition since every ancient society has its own definition of 'that which is worn' and also peculiar ways of making it for the different categories of its population based on such parameters as gender, age, status, etc. To this end, fashion as costume is a marker of cultural identity. In contemporary parlance, however, the term costume tends to describe typically traditional clothing while fashion is a more general term for 'modern' clothing: "[F]rom the present-day point of view, it [costume] refers to the past. Fashion – despite occasional borrowings from the past – refers to the present and the future: *"Fashion sees itself [...] as the natural law of the present"*" (ibid. italics in original). Thus, just as the Igbo associate costume with masquerades being representations of the past – that is, the ancestors – Germans associate the term with their traditional past such as fantasies represented by the carnival costumes on Shove Monday. In other words, what the past means in this context is culturally and historically defined; thus, the misunderstanding referred to above was only a matter of cultural distance. Radical changes have occurred in the area of fashion, especially clothing, occasioned by the so-called 'democratisation of luxury' that came with modernity and globalisation. This has left solid marks in fashion practices with the blurring of boundaries in terms of clothing materials, styles and preferences through the media and advertising industry. Nevertheless, there still remain observable culture-specific peculiarities in fashion and clothing lifestyles.

Fundamentally, the Igbo are known for their preference for colourful clothing although what is today popularly considered 'traditional' Igbo attire is neither in its material nor in its sewing style historically Igbo. They are, nevertheless, cultural adaptations that have entered the collective consciousness as a marker of Igbo identity. Early colonial and post-colonial literature describe the original Igbo pattern of clothing as consisting mainly of little pieces of cloth used to conceal private parts from the adolescent age, although elders are said to be "fully dressed" with their clothes passed under the right armpit and with goatskin bags, etc. (Achebe 1959: 70). Perhaps because of the tropical climate, the traditional Igbo was scantily dressed; from infancy up until the adolescent age, children usually went nude except for some occasional ornaments like beads worn for therapeutic reasons around the waist or the traditional *uli* body art (perhaps a local precursor to modern tattoos) applied by drawing lines and patterns on the body as a form of decoration which could be applied to both male and female irrespective of age. Age and status, however, played a role in the choice of patterns drawn. Men wore loin clothes around their waist while adult women wore *jigida*, a lengthy string of beads worn around the waist which not only covers the genitalia but is also a mark of femininity.

From late nineteenth century through slave trade and eventually western colonisation, the traditional Igbo society got more and more in contact with the wider world. This led to adaptations in clothing which gradually developed into what is known today as Igbo traditional clothing. In Nigeria, owing to its multi-ethnic population, there is a collective representation of traditional Igbo clothing: women dress in wrapper with headscarf while the men dress in trousers with *Ishiagu* top, sewed in the form of African Dashiki. There are different types of cap to match – with different colours as markers of individual status. Also, the various types of *Ishiagu* (lion's head) clothes are used traditionally for different types of chieftaincy titles. But today, anybody can sew and wear whatever type of traditional dress, especially those living in the cities and those abroad. Titled persons therefore invented new ways of distinguishing themselves, mainly through different types of beads around the neck, hands, and feet, etc. including around the waist for women. Women have been more creative in the Igbo traditional fashion industry. Most of their clothing apparel revolve around the wrapper and other ornaments like necklaces and beads. The traditionally hand-woven and dyed textile, *Akwete,* has almost gone into extinction with dwindling interest

among the younger generation in the business. Today, most of the fabrics and materials used to make 'traditional' clothes are imported from abroad; Igbo women generally value the Dutch wax fabrics, which they call *Hollandis*, and the Swiss lace. These could be sown in different styles, but tying a wrapper is considered a symbol of attainment of full womanhood. Once a married woman begins to give birth, she would be expected to attend public functions in wrapper.

For the Igbo living abroad, there is always a longing for occasions where they can adorn themselves with their traditional clothing. During special occasions like Sunday services and cultural festivities, and especially feasts and ceremonies that are organised by Africans, they take pleasure in wearing their traditional dresses. My informants point to another major inhibiting factor to the wearing of traditional attire in Germany – the cold weather. Most of the materials for Igbo traditional clothing are not suitable for the cold weather and this is why they wear them more in the summer season. Again, most of the festive occasions are usually scheduled for the summer season because of the holidays. Sometimes though, the weather could be cold even in the summer period but here, adaptations are made by having inner wears like sweaters before putting on the traditional clothing. Some may also choose to cover their traditional attire with a summer jacket until he/she arrives the venue while others use the normal western fabric to sew shirts and trousers in Igbo traditional styles.

7.6.2 Haircare and Fashion

There is a growing anthropological interest in the human hair because of its relevance in the dynamics of human relationships. Hair is both a biological and cultural signifier: it serves as a collective attribute of the human species, but by virtue of its distinctive features, it confers a characteristic cultural mark on the human person. Head hair is considered a social symbol and hair practices a symbolic behaviour the interpretation of which belongs to the domain of social anthropology (Leach 1958: 147). From social and cultural perspectives, Doy (2005: 62) makes the valid point that the term 'hair dressing' "immediately indicates the 'nakedness' of hair, before it is 'cultured' in various ways according to class, ethnicity, gender and even sexuality". More specifically, Miller (2001: 182) describes hair as "an unfixed and potentially destabilizing sign of group identity […] widely seen as a bodily indicator of cultural self-identification, political ideology, and social status. It is second perhaps only to skin colour as a socially

defined determinant of biologically based group affiliation; but unlike skin, hair readily adapts itself to human creativity in a multitude of expressive appearances”.

One of the classical anthropological texts on the cultural meaning of hair is the seminal essay written by the then Professor of Social Anthropology in Cambridge, Edmund Leach, which won the 1957 Curl Bequest Prize and was subsequently published in 1958. In the essay titled “Magical Hair”, Leach concentrates on human hair (head hair) in order to analyse the relationship between the interpretations of symbolic behaviour in psychoanalysis and anthropology, respectively. His thesis posits that although the premises and frames of reference of each science may differ, the ultimate findings or conclusions could be considered complementary and illuminating rather than contradictory and divergent. Building on Malinowski’s earlier proposition that symbols consist of both pragmatic or operational content and communication content, he argues that symbolic behaviour is likewise performative: it “not only ‘says’ something, but it also arouses emotion and consequently ‘does’ something” (Leach 1958: 147), and therein lies the bridge between the two sciences – the convergence of meaning between the public and private effects of symbolic behaviours. While the characteristic quality of private symbolism consists in its capacity to arouse emotion and alter the state of the individual, it belongs to the essential quality of public symbolism that it is a means of communication by which the actor and his audience share a common language, a symbolic language – that is a culture: “When people belong to the same language they share between themselves various mutually understood systems of communication. Every member of a Culture will attribute the same meaning to any particular item of culturally defined ‘ritual’ (*op. cit*. 148).

It is against this background that we shall consider hair practices among Igbo immigrants in Essen. Of course, hair adornments have always been an important element of culture. Especially with respect to the African Diaspora, the practice of haircare has been largely emphasised as an indication of a shared cultural identity (Dione-Rosado 2004: 61). In Igbo culture also, hairdo and hair-care practices belong to an acknowledged indigenous cultural technology. In a perceptive essay on “Black Hair/Style Politics”, Kobena Mercer (1990: 250) suggests that “[i]n the complexity of [the] social code, hair functions as a key ‘ethnic signifier’ because compared with bodily shape or facial features, it can be changed more

easily by cultural practices… the malleability of hair makes it a sensitive area of expression". Because of its peculiar texture in comparison to the European or Asian types, the Igbo hair requires a special kind of treatment and styling. The common experience of the Igbo and other sub-Saharan African immigrants in Europe is that the normal haircare provided by the regular (European) hair salons is largely incompatible with their hair type. Whenever their (sub-Saharan African immigrants) population grows to a reasonable extent in any place abroad the need, and hence the economic viability of, having 'African' hair salon arises with an increasing demand.

Leach's observation that in most societies head hair is frequently employed as a public symbol with an explicitly sexual significance with marked changes in hairdressing accompanying the changes in sexual status that occur at puberty and marriage (Leach 1958: 153) seems to apply especially to Igbo women. For them, hairdressing is an important way of expressing their status and femininity and they invest enormous energy and time in it. The malleability of human hair contributes to the possibility of cultural borrowing and to the adaptability of styles in haircare practices. By this token, haircare practices provide another area of cultural adaptation and exchange between the Igbo and European traditions with respect to cultural technology especially for migrants. Furthermore, there is a certain fascination by a growing number of Europeans with African hairstyles, especially the braids. Different styles of African braids are very much *en vogue* in Essen, especially among young women and girls. They have the advantage of naturally long, straight and silky hair, so that in contrast to their African counterparts with their short, curly and woolly hair, they do not need to apply some hair cream and chemical relaxers in order to get them straightened before braiding. It is therefore easier for European girls to wear African braids. Many of them find it fascinating to wear African coiffeurs like knots, twists, and locks without the purchase of hair extensions that their African counterparts would need. During fieldwork, my female informants drew my attention to the increasing popularity of African braids which was evident in the proliferation of African hair and beauty salons in Essen which are usually annexed to Afro-Shops. Some of these shops that I visited had reserved sections for hair/beauty salon for women and/or a barbers' shop, even though they are traditionally meant for sale of exotic African groceries and cosmetics. Much as they try to maintain the traditional patterns and styles of haircare technology, it is obvious that some creative adaptation of

cultural technology takes place here. Of particular interest in this regard is the fact that the boundaries between traditional gender roles are being transcended as a growing number of males now engage in the business of hair dressing of women – what would have been unthinkable in a traditional Igbo setting.

Largely, haircare provides African hairdressers an important platform for cultural creativity. While it offers them a great measure of creative freedom, there seems to be an unwritten law of propriety guiding the choice of style for particular occasions. Just like in fashion generally, the occasion determines the choice and propriety of hair style. Hairstyles are usually a central topic of small talk especially among Igbo women. At private and public meetings, it is not unusual for people to pass comments about each other's hairstyle – either as compliment or as criticism – and to inform about the one who made the hair. Haircare plays a significant role in expressing Igbo sociality also in Essen. For instance, accepting to braid or plait someone's hair privately rather than in the beauty shop is taken as an extension of the hand of friendship. It is a form of reciprocal gift exchange in which services are not commoditised. Leach's claim that anthropologists have observed a widespread association between hair and libidinous energy seems to agree with our anthropological evidence (Leach 1958: 150). In one family, the wife confirmed that she takes care of the hairs of every member of the family including the husband and their five children (three boys and two girls) and that the husband helps her out in fixing hers as well. The same also applies to the Igbo men in Essen. Accepting to have one's hair cut by someone else at home without pay is an expression of friendship and benevolence. Allowing someone who may not even be a professional hair stylist to take care of one's hair is an act of friendship and of trust, because haircare is such a delicate matter.

In this context, it is significant that according to the traditional Igbo worldview, mourning the deceased includes the ritual shaving of one's hair. This is in concord with the observations of Tarlo (2019) and Bryd & Tharps (2001) that in many African countries, hair that has not been carefully groomed, reshaped, or styled indicates either a state of mourning or insanity. A similar observation is repeated in classical ethnographies of mourning rituals such as Malinowski's about the Trobriand Islands, where he observed that the complete shaving of hair belonged to the essential feature of mourning (Leach 1958: 152). On the other hand, the widow does not shave her hair but rather allows it to grow dishevelled

until the end of the mourning period when she shaves her hair as a ritual of separation, after which she could remarry. These symbolic behaviours were interpreted by Malinowski as a social obligation through which the ritual participants make a public expression of certain basic facts about the social structure of the community. Thus, hair has a very wide ritual significance across societies.

So far, the point has been made that there are various cases of cultural adaptation of haircare practices and its ritual significance among Igbo immigrants. Perhaps another area of observation is on the collective judgement of decency. Traditional Igbo women are required to cover their hairs during sacred functions like religious worship, but at other occasions hair styles are displayed for public admiration. However, many Igbo women in Essen seem not to keep strictly to this traditional behaviour anymore. On several occasions during Sunday Services in the church, I observed most of the women with their bare hairs. Their explanation was that the rule does not apply in Germany and it is for them an opportunity to display their hairstyles for public admiration. Church services and other public functions have become for the Igbo women opportunities to display their improvisational genius in haircare practices. This is in line with our thesis that the religious community serves as additional platform for cross-cultural interaction and social integration.

7.7 The Value of the Strange: Appraising the *Interkulturelle Woche* 2019

It is a well-known fact that religion plays an important role in the stabilization of society not only through rites and ceremonies but also in maintaining what Radcliffe-Brown has called "a sense of dependence". Delivering a Henry Myers Lecture on the role of religion in the development of society, Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown theorised that:

> An orderly social life amongst human beings depends upon the presence in the minds of the members of a society of certain sentiments, which control the behaviour of the individual in his relation to others. Rites can be seen to be the regulated symbolic expressions of certain sentiments. Rites can therefore be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on

> which the constitution of the society depends. I ventured to suggest as a general formula that religion is everywhere an expression in one form or another of a sense of dependence on a power outside ourselves, a power which we may speak of as a spiritual or moral power (Radcliffe-Brown 1945: 35).

Radcliffe-Brown noted, however, that since societies differ from one another in their structure and constitution, so also do they differ in their cultural rules of behaviour. Nevertheless, the main point therein which remains valid even in contemporary societies is that religion influences social action. Even though German politics today is built on the constitutional tenets of a secular state, she has not let off her self-definition as part of a Christian Europe. Thus, religion still plays an important role in German society and politics, especially the central tenets of the Christian religion like mutual respect, love of neighbour and selflessness. As the trend of globalisation caught up with German society in the second half of the twentieth century, its three Christian confessions, viz., the Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox churches instituted in 1975 an annual programme of intercultural encounter. This helped to provide a platform of interaction between immigrants and autochthons. At its inception, the programme was named *Tag der ausländischen Mitbürger* (Day of the Foreign Co-citizens) but in 1999, it was changed into *Interkulturelle Woche* (Intercultural Week). This renaming was meant to accommodate the changing public perception of and growing sensibilities regarding issues such as gender sensitivity. In addition, many second-generation immigrants (who are now in the majority) no longer felt addressed by the old name. Furthermore, it is also a way of acknowledging the fact that the intercultural encounter is more than a one-way process of assimilation of the immigrant to the mainstream society: All parties involved – the autochthons as well as the immigrants – have much to give and to receive from the other.

This joint initiative of the three Christian Churches in Germany entails the selection of a leading theme for the next two years which would provide a programmatic impulse for a nation-wide socio-political discourse. Usually, the theme chosen addresses current socio-political issues in German society, especially as it concerns the peaceful coexistence, the integration of migrants and other related intercultural issues. The announcement of the theme is usually accompanied by a joint statement by the three churches (*gemeinsames Wort der Kirchen*) which is signed by the chairman of the *Deutsche Bischofskonferenz* for the Catholic

Church, the chairman of the *Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland* for the Evangelical Church and the metropolitan of the *Orthodoxe Bischofskonferenz in Deutschland* for the orthodox church, respectively. The joint statement articulates and expatiates on the specific societal issues and developments that informed the choice of theme for each year, which sets the tone for subsequent national discourse. Moreover, it is meant to provide orientation and guidance to the local organizers who would in turn adapt the programme to suit their specific local circumstances. Details of the programme at the local level range from podium discussions and art exhibitions to personal encounters and interaction at market squares and town centres (see Chapter 6).

What is more, the history of this annual week-long programme makes an interesting read and supports the above-mentioned premise on the role of religion as a stabilising factor in the society. It all began as a reaction to what German politics had regarded as a historical mistake [*Fehlentscheidung*] – namely, the massive recruitment of migrant labourers to strengthen the industrial labour force during the historic era of the *Wirtschaftswunder* that stretched from the mid-1950s through the 1970s. The unforeseen social consequence thereof is aptly captured in the famous statement attributed to the Swiss writer, Max Frisch: "We wanted a labour force, but human beings came". These human beings, the migrant workers that were recruited as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers), eventually settled down for good with no plans to go back to their native homes as was envisaged by the designers of the policy. Thus, in response, the German government enacted a Recruitment Ban on all foreign workers in 1973, with a view to forcing the guest workers to leave the country. But many of them were already raising families and so, were well settled in the German society, even though they were not officially recognised as citizens. It was at this time and in this context that the intercultural week as a joint initiative of the three churches was first launched in 1975. The name, *Tag der ausländischen Mitbürger*, was therefore in that political context a bold and provocative statement because it unofficially elevated the guest worker (*Gastarbeiter*) to the status of a co-citizen (*Mitbürger*) even though the state did not yet allow that, thereby setting the stage for more than a decade-long national discourse on the social status of the guest workers, or rather on whether or not Germany was a "country of immigration".

Ever since this enactment, the organisers have kept faith with such provocative themes based on an insightful prognosis of the nation's socio-political landscape.

In the aftermath of the European refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016, to which the German government under Chancellor Angel Merkel reacted with great social responsibility, the organisers of the *Interkulturelle Woche* again had the wisdom to draw attention to the historical lessons from the 1970s in addressing the crisis. Instead of treating the refugees as temporal sojourners with limited time of stay as "guests", it was necessary to initiate intensive programmes that would enable them to participate actively in, and acquire a sense of belonging to, the German society. This can only happen when the different peoples and cultures are appreciated for who and what they are, for their "Otherness" in relation to the mainstream. This was the consideration behind the choice of title for the *Interkulturelle Woche* 2019: "*Zusammen leben, zusammen wachsen: Begegnung, Teilhabe, Integration*" (Living together, growing together: encounter, participation, integration).

In their common statement for the Intercultural Week 2019, the leaders of the three Christian Churches – Reinhard Kardinal Marx, Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and Metropolit Dr. h.c. Augustinos – began by praising the German society for her progress in promoting intercultural consciousness and for finally acknowledging the German state as a country of immigration. While extolling the immense contributions that immigrants made to the economic progress and stability of the German state, both in the past and at present, they also acknowledged the impressive cooperation of German citizens who volunteered *en masse* in engaging themselves actively in the task of resettling the over one million immigrants that flocked the country during the 2015/16 refugee crisis. Casting a positive glance on the crisis, they inferred that it further strengthened the German openness to foreign cultures and peoples through which the country has also been variously enriched. After these preliminary observations, the joint statement marshalled out programmatic points on the value of 'the strange' in the German society.

Drawing copiously from the Christian Scripture, the statement acknowledges that it has always been a challenge from time immemorial, for people with different cultural values and historical backgrounds to live together in a society – both for the foreigners as well as the autochthons. Yet, it is a moral obligation for both parties to manage their differences effectively by encountering themselves with respect and tolerance. In view of that, the theme or motto of the 2019 Intercultural Week draws attention to the need for German citizens to go beyond

the moral requirement of hospitality to engage the “Other” in a more active and mutual encounter – with the right disposition, openness and readiness to learn from one another. It ends with a clarion call on the citizenry to encourage immigrants to participate actively in the local society; hence the motto: “living together, growing together”. The core message of the statement consists in the postulation that intercultural encounter is an opportunity for mutual growth for both indigenes and immigrants:

> First of all, we grow by allowing our “foreign” counterpart to open up a world that was previously unknown to us. Learning a different language opens up a different mentality and lets us experience a different culture. The dialogue with members of other cultures and religions broadens our horizons. It is not about arbitrariness or about relativising one's own point of view, but about an appreciative, interested perception of the other, which enriches our thinking (*Gemeinsames Wort der Kirchen zur Interkulturellen Woche* 2019: 1, my translation, T.E.).[36]

The mutual enrichment to which the text refers is predicated on an attitude of openness that encourages giving and receiving and leads, in the long run, to a widening of mental horizon, thereby enriching all parties involved. It further argues that appreciating the “Otherness” of the stranger is fully consistent with the Christian law of love. It stresses the fact that such an attitude has become inevitable for any society that wishes to remain compliant with the current trends of globalisation. A multicultural society has become the new standard all over the world today, which calls for a more accommodating spirit: “We constantly meet people who are somehow strange to us… Meeting everyone with courtesy and respect helps to overcome trenches of ignorance, walls of isolation and fronts of hatred in our society. The wave of globalisation is moving people worldwide closer and closer to one another, owing to increased mobility and almost unlimited possibilities in communication” (my translation, T. E). In other words, a sin-

[36] „Zunächst einmal wachsen wir, indem wir uns von unserem „fremden“ Gegenüber eine Welt eröffnen lassen, die uns bislang unbekannt war. Das Erlernen einer anderen Sprache erschließt uns eine andere Mentalität und lässt uns eine andere Kultur lebendig werden. Der Dialog mit Angehörigen anderer Kulturen und Religionen erweitert unseren Horizont. Dabei geht es keineswegs um Beliebigkeit oder um die Relativierung des eigenen Standpunkts, sondern um ein wertschätzendes, interessiertes Wahrnehmen des Anderen, das unser Denken bereichert“.

gularity of cultural identity, let alone a 'cultural purity', has become both unrealistic and anachronistic in the present global context. Thus, face-to-face encounters with the "Other" is necessary and helps to overcome fear and prejudice – both the fear of the Other and the fear of the future – as fearfully formulated in so-called 'myths of invasion', for example. This re-emphasises the usefulness of openness and creativity in response to cultural contacts and ways of managing the resulting diversity as well as the question of migration and the attendant recasting of identity. Mostly because the world would be more beautiful through its recognition of the "value of difference and the difference in value" in the context of cultural diversity, there is therefore a need to see the diverse cultures as worthy of preservation especially considering that they complement and enrich one another. To this end, in a globalised world, the secret of sustainable growth lies in an openness to mutual encounter and active participation of all members of society irrespective of particular origins or status, thus living together and growing together in peace and harmony.

CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

8.1 Encounter – Participation – Integration

Although some scholars would describe the phenomenon of massive cross-cultural encounters which have become a defining feature of the present globalised world in such polemical parlance as "the clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1996 [2011]), the ethnography that formed the empirical basis for this dissertation has shown that such encounters, at least at the micro-levels of interpersonal and small group relationships, rather engender constructive interactions that serve the process of social integration in a multicultural context. This is a fact that policy makers could build upon for the benefit of the larger society. For the state is, at least in the present ethnological sense, "man-writ-large", if one may use Plato's famous expression in *The Republic*. In other words, the social practices that transpire at the micro-level of interpersonal relationships provide a useful window through which the macro-arena of the public domain may be validly interpreted. Herein lies the *raison d'être* of ethnographic research of small groups and communities: it serves to provide useful materials for the interpretation of the social dynamics of the larger society (O'Connor 2015: 75).

While this ethnography has aimed to highlight both the challenges and benefits of intercultural encounter, it also emphasised the fact that such encounters should not be considered an event but rather a process that involves an appreciation of the "differences in value and the value of difference" (Oosten 1999) in a multicultural society. That is to say that social integration is a process that begins with a mutual and dialogic encounter of persons who are carriers of their respective cultures that is borne by an attitude of openness and mutual respect. Such an attitude is indispensable to the formation of the "multicultural citizenship" as advocated by Dietz (2009), a citizenship that "should be based on the one hand, on individual rights *qua* citizens, and on the other hand, on the mutual recognition of differential group rights" by all the components of the society (Dietz 2009: 31). The unstoppable trend of globalisation has made nation-states increasingly heterogeneous in their cultural composition. Their populations encompass different cultural communities that all are subject to processes of social integration into the mainstream social body. It is a slow and complex process that begins

with mutual encounters between persons of different cultural backgrounds who all wish to attain a certain mutual recognition and valorisation of their different identities as positive contributions to the common good. This encounter involves the task of overcoming initial difficulties such as mutual suspicion and mistrust. As Dietz (op. cit., 53) succinctly puts it, "the encounter between individuals from two different cultures generates a mutual recourse to reciprocal stereotypes as a reaction to both the frequent "identity shakiness" and the "linguistic and cultural barriers"".

Furthermore, the ethnographic evidence presented in this dissertation shows that in their early stages, cultural encounters are usually rife with tensions or "clashes" between the autochthonous and the immigrant cultures. These reflect what anthropologists often experience as the "culture shock" generated by the reciprocal stereotypes at play on both sides of the divide. But the repeated interactions of the interlocutors in different contexts of face-to-face encounter gradually translate into a mutual appreciation of the values inherent in the "otherness" of the Other. This stage marks the beginning of the process of cultural exchange and adaptation. While the immigrants still apply the values and enact practices that are part of the cultural repertoire of their own provenance society, they gradually adapt to the new cultural environment of their hosts. That they thereby internalise certain aspects of the host society's cultural practices in various ways has been ethnographically illustrated in the previous chapters. Hence, when cross cultural encounters happen on equal terms, the mutual readjustment of one's respective outlook opens the way for a more intensive participation of immigrants in the social practices of the host society, especially in the public domain. By the same token, they would feel encouraged to bring in their indigenous perspectives and foreign provenance to enrich the socio-cultural inventory of the host society.

Another important fact demonstrated by this ethnography is that the immigrants themselves do not necessarily desire to lose their cultural identity in a "melting pot" North American style. Neither do they wish to completely dissolve themselves into the cultural anonymity of German society in order to feel well integrated and capable of active social participation. Thus, they represent a culture in which the "foreigner" is accorded a privileged position as one who is "to enhance the host society's exchange relationship with the outside world and its sources of wealth and reputation" (Platenkamp 2019: 19). As "foreigner" themselves, they accordingly wish to be valorised as people capable of contributing

alternative perspectives and possibilities to the social and cosmological universe of the host German society. As such, one does not need to shed one's cultural "strangeness" in order to be well integrated in a society. After all, the socio-political conditions of citizenship are identified by the Constitution and the Laws of the German State, and the citizenship of a German citizen for instance is defined, not by the German culture but by the legal institutions of the German state. In other words, the German state allows her citizens to be carriers of a non-German culture unlike in other contexts where statehood is equivalent to nationhood.

It is crucial to note that the experiences of professional anthropologists who have spent substantial lengths of time working as "strangers" in various non-European societies resonate in the Igbo experience described in this dissertation. In many a non-European society, integration does not amount to unconditional assimilation. On the contrary, even while the "stranger" is given various labels depicting him/her as being different, such labels, according to Platenkamp,

> . . . instead of depriving him of this difference as a precondition of his integration, assigns a particular meaning and value to it. For these societies, each in their particular manner draw their benefits from relating to the strangers who come to live in their midst. As representatives of other societies, they are to make the host society known to the outside world, to document the wisdom and expertise of its elders so that it can be transferred to younger generations, or to witness and praise the society's achievements and enhance its collective renown. To achieve such ends the stranger actually may be indispensable (op. cit., 17).

While one would not expect the same type of valorisation of the immigrants by the German state [one should distinguish between the German *State* that tends to equate integration with assimilation, and German *society/culture*, that considers cultural achievements of 'foreign origin' as valuable factors to 'complement' the *Bildung* of German people as an enrichment (*Bereicherung*) of individual lives; see Platenkamp 2014] within her domain, it may provide an alternative view of what possible roles could be assigned them in broad terms. In fact, such roles are already being assigned to immigrants in different areas of European life. Consider, for instance, the area of marketing of major sports' events in Europe – be it football clubs or the national team of any sport event – where a display of the multicultural character of any team is in vogue or is considered of great value and a sign of receptiveness to cultural diversity. During the last FIFA World Cup

in 2018, Germany created a media sensation because of the composition of its national team featuring players like Jerome Boateng, Mesut Özil, and Sebastian Rudiger, all with a non-German background. Such messages also resonate positively in the countries of provenance of the players concerned, for even though they have become citizens in the host country, their ties with their countries of origin remains. Apart from their football skills, their foreign provenance is also beneficial to the German society as it promotes it as non-racist country. One could therefore argue for a parallel valorisation of foreign provenance in the German society, although based on a different frame of reference (largely economic or political) than in non-European societies that are usually based on cosmological arguments. For instance, as was several times indicated in this ethnography, Igbo migrants see themselves as enriching the host society (German culture) with their "gifts" of cuisine and vibrant cultural music during events – gestures that were equally appreciated by the German community. Such events show that a mutual transfer process fosters the enrichment of both cultures, without one assimilating the other.

More so, it has been argued that such dialogic cultural interaction is not possible from the point of view of an economic frame of reference. Economics does not value cultural difference, unless as a market of consumers especially as labour factor culture is irrelevant; see the phenomenon of *Gastarbeiter* (Platenkamp 2014). In Europe, the political valuation of culture is situated in the connection between state and nation. Hence, the ideal *political* subject is carrier of a 'national' identity and the ideal State is mono-ethnic (consider EU-member states like Poland, Hungary, but also increasingly Denmark and the United Kingdom). Therefore, one may have lived for twenty-seven years in Germany as a foreigner from a neighbouring country, may speak German fluently, may teach generations of German students, may pay taxes and even may be a *Beamter,* and still not be allowed to vote for the parliament. This ethnography therefore further underscores the argument that the valued contribution of foreign culture and its carriers takes place in very different – non-political and non-economic domains: small scale local communities taking in refugees, church, the arts; in short, in all domains where the individual develops an identity.

By and large, it belongs to the domain of social anthropology to provide a comparative view of the social practices of different cultures. By exploring the social practices and life worlds of the Igbo immigrants, both in their original homeland

in Nigeria and their present social context in Germany, this ethnography has sought to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the procedures of social integration of "strangers in our midst" in the German society. To this end, it was an informed decision to bracket the legal (political) status of the subjects of this ethnography in our analysis since it has no substantive contribution to make with regard to the goal of research. The central focus of research was to investigate the dynamics of interpersonal social relationships between the immigrants and the mainstream society. It is true that their legal status impacts upon the migrants' relationship with the German state, especially where their economic and business activities in Essen-Dellwig are concerned; however illegal immigrants are still unable to register their businesses nor can they make tax returns. Yet our focus has been on the social anthropological significance of these economic practices amongst which include the social organisation of the scrapyard as it was patterned after similar market places in Igbo land; the socio-economic process of transforming European "wastes" into viable commodities for export as a means to make a living and the social interactions with the mainstream society beyond the scrapyard. It is hoped that such detailed background information may be an important contribution to the German society's endeavour to forge intercultural hermeneutics of understanding and appreciation of the values inherent in the foreign cultures that are part of its population. This would be one of the ultimate achievements of this ethnography.

8.2 *Looking behind the High walls…* Towards an Intercultural Hermeneutics

Stagl (1993: 34) has aptly described ethnography as "intercultural hermeneutics" in the sense that it involves an interpretation beyond a single context. Such an understanding of ethnography belongs to a long philosophical tradition seen as "an extension and systematization of the classic transcendental hermeneutics that – with evident Kantian echoes – reflects on the conditions that make *Verstehen* ("comprehension", "understanding") and communication between human beings possible" (Dietz 2009: 56). To comprehend or understand the Other demands much effort and attention; and every dialogue is an exercise in hermeneutical self-disclosure between the interlocutors. In his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2004 [1960]) has presented dialogue as the connecting link between indigenous and

alien cultures. But for him, this dialogue is designed more in line with the Socratic method of self-enquiry and interrogation through mutual contestation than on the principles of Hegelian dialectics. It involves an attempt to comprehend and interpret what the phenomenologist would describe as the "life worlds" (Schütz 1967) – in this case, the German and the Igbo life worlds – which would require, as Braun (1994) suggests, a development of "reflexive dialogues" with the "other's" horizon of comprehension, and:

> If this dialogic reflexivity is to be established between subjects coming from different "horizons of meaning", comprehension of the other will lay the foundations for "modifying attitudes towards determining one's own meaning based on the other's meaning (Schmied-Kowarzik 1993:73). Thus it inaugurates a process of interculturalization between what is "mine" and what belongs to "others". This is the genuinely anthropological contribution, and its empirical procedure, ethnography, systematizes the challenge of translating between different life worlds (Dietz 2009: 57).

Anthropology applies the tools of ethnography in its project of trying to understand and interpret human relationships in the contexts of their social and cultural practices. Of course, as social beings, human communities cannot be studied in a vacuum. Thus, in the case of transnational ethnography, like the present one, several social and cultural contexts are brought into consideration in the analysis of ethnographic data. It is to make this crucial point that the encounter between the German State (represented by the police) in the ethnography section was described as "Looking behind the walls" – a metaphor that aptly represents the dynamics of intercultural hermeneutics. Walls are metaphors that represent boundary, barrier, distance, and radical otherness and characterise the immigrant, especially those from Sub-Saharan Africa – both physically and metaphorically. The act of looking (or *gazing*, to speak with Sartre or Merleau-Ponty) at the "high walls" therefore is a metaphor for a phenomenological deconstruction of the Other in a critical process of *Verstehen*. It is by such processes of hermeneutics that prejudices and stereotypes are critically analysed and set aside such that through dispassionate encounter and dialogue, some mutual understanding can blossom. The statement "Looking behind the high walls", therefore refers to hermeneutics of intercultural encounter.

Furthermore, the image of the wall connotes a deep ambivalence. Walls may create a sense of security and protection but can also be a sign of fear, division, isolation or exclusion. It creates unwholesome binary contrasts between inside and outside, public and private or us and them. In this sense, the wall can be a strong metaphor for the radical Otherness of the foreigner. One approaches a walled space with uncertainty and trepidation – guided only by one's instinct, prior knowledge based probably on hearsay – but hardly with a dispassionate disposition. Furthermore, the image of a wall may also represent a state of mind. If walls in this context are a metaphor for temporal and cultural distance, then the "high walls" mentioned earlier refer to the radical otherness of the Igbo culture vis-à-vis the German one. But like every wall, there is always a relatively shorter distance separating the divides than the height of the barrier tends to portray. The height of the wall in this case represents the legal and bureaucratic bottlenecks involved in the process of formal incorporation of the foreigner into the Nation-State, whereas the thickness of the wall itself – a mere fraction of its height – represents the interpersonal relationships and informal interactions between the immigrant and the autochthon. Thus, looking *behind* the walls also implies looking *beyond* the walls – that is, beyond the barriers and differences – to (re)discover the surprisingly "hidden" horizontal proximity, in terms of basic commonalities shared by the interlocutors. From its Latin root *limes* is also *liminality*, which "could also mean in-between-ness and therefore has the potential to straddle borders, to transcend them, struggle with them, go above, under and beyond them" (Tóth 2018: 198). This is the starting point of a hermeneutical dialogue in the process of social integration. It is in this regard that we discussed the ethnographic instances where some shared idea-values have become platforms of transcendental unity that bridge the cultural distance between Igbo immigrants and their German friends and colleagues. They are the contexts where social distinctions between Germans and the Igbo are being transcended, leading to the emergence of a new form of social reality founded on shared values, especially with regard to education, the fictive kinship effected through participation in religious rituals, the value for hard work and the good life. Thus, at the metaphysical level of idea-values, human beings of all cultures discover commonalities among themselves that may transcend their specific cultural differences.

The foregoing therefore leads to this conclusion: if the high walls of cultural prejudice and stereotyping could be broken down by intercultural dialogue, the

same process could also turn the debris of those walls into building blocks of a cultural bridge that would foster effective communication and mutual exchange between the component cultures for the enrichment of the common society. Thus, paying more attention to the horizontal distance between the occupants of both sides of the wall than to its vertical dimension has greater promise of a more effective result. Of course, in an alternative interpretation, high walls could be turned into gateways of communication:

> Once we start seeing walls as tools of connection (such as traffic on or along the wall as much as across it), then we can also understand some functions of border rivers. Thus, these constructions or contour features may serve to facilitate communication, commerce, and transfers of culture, goods, ideas, as well as bodies. Whether as a wall's original functions, its evolved functions over time, or the active subversion of its original functions, these are all there at least potentially, 'built into' the wall (op. cit., 199).

Hence, if the state elects the use of force in the form of police raids to prosecute intercultural dialogue, the project could be dead on arrival because the asymmetry of power would make dialogue on equal terms hardly realisable. However, this ethnography has shown some alternative ways of assigning great value to cultural difference. Through the lens of the social anthropological gaze, the world may look *beyond* the walls of prejudice and stereotypes to discover the beauty and richness in cultural diversity. As György Tóth aptly surmises regarding President Donald Trump's electoral promise of erecting walls at the US-Mexico borders: "Even when our politics and societies are 'turning to the wall', our walls may retain some openness to meaning and exchange. As such, unlocking these may help change both the understanding and the enactment of the walls of our world" (op. cit., 201).

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GLOSSARY

Ada – eldest daughter

Agụ – forest, bush, or lion

Ahajiọkụ – yam deity

Ahamefula – a name, lit. may my name not be lost

Ahịa – market

Ahụta – marriage mediator (lit. the finder)

Ajọ ọfịa – evil forest

Akalaogoli (ofeke) – ne'er-do-wells

Akara – bean cake

Akatakpa – a type of youth masquerade

Ala – land, the earth goddess

Ala mmadụ – the human world; the natural order

Ala mmụọ – the spirit world; the supernatural order

Ala-nne – maternal agnatic unit

Amadiọha – the thunder deity

Anyanwụ – the sun

Azụ – fish

Chukwu – the great deity (also called *chineke*, the deity that creates; or *anyanwụ-okike*, sun-creator)

Di – husband

Dibia-afa – diviner, fortune-teller

Ebejiri – sheathed sword

Egusi – melon soup

Egwu – dance

Enyekwu – kitchen

Eshu igbo – a local breed of cattle

Ewu otubo – scapegoat (for ritual of appeasement)

Ezi n'ụlọ – family, compound, home

Eziechina; *obodoechina* – a name (lit. may the homestead never close; may the lineage never become extinct)

Ezigbo mmadụ – a good person; one with a good character

Garri – processed cassava

Ị*gụ-aha* – naming ceremony

I*gwe* – heaven or sky; the celestial sphere

Igwebuike – a name, lit. multitude is strength

Ijụ ese – ritual of inquiry

Ikenga – hand-held wooden carving used as medium of communication with the ancestors

Ikwa ọnwụ – funeral ceremony

Ikwu nne – relatives of the mother

Inọ ọnwụ – mourning period (lit. staying dead)

Isee! – so shall it be! (acclamation at the end of a prayer, equivalent to the Christian "amen")

Ishiagụ (Isiagụ) – lion's head; also name for a traditional textile

Ji – yam tuber (a root crop)

Ji efu – a specie of yam

Kpakpando – the stars

Mgbada (ndida) – downhill

Mgbago – uphill

Mgbuka – dissection, cutting into component parts; a market where component parts of used automobiles (spare parts) are sold

Mma-ekwu – kitchen knife

Ndi ọha – council of elders

Ndiichie – ancestors; council of titled men

Ndinyom – co-wives, women married into an agnatic unit

Nna – father

Nna nwunye – wife's father

Nnanna – paternal grandfather (lit. father's father)

Nna-nne – maternal grandfather (lit. mother's father)

Nna-ochie – great grandfather (lit. ancient father)

Nne – mother

Nne nwunye – wife's mother

Nnenna – paternal grandmother (lit. father's mother)

Nnenne – maternal grandmother (lit. mother's mother)

Nne-ochie – great grandmother (lit. ancient mother)

Nsala – special soup, usually prepared for newly-delivered mothers

Nsọ – sacred

Nsọ-ala – taboo

Nta (obere) – small

Nwa – child

Nwadiani – sister's son

Nwanna – half sibling (father's child)

Nwanne – maternal kin

Nwanne nwanyi – sister, female relation

Nwanne nwoke – brother, male relation

Nwa-nwa – grandchild (lit. child's child)

Nwanyi – female

Nwoke – male

Nwunye – wife,

Nze – elder

Ọba – a woman's trade vessel

Obele – calabash

Obodo – town, community

Obu (obi) – the living room of the family head; homestead

Odo – phallic chalk

Ọdụdụ nwa – last child (lit. tail child)

Ọfọ (arụa) – a kind of sacred stick from a specific type of tree, which symbolises (ancestral) authority, truth, and innocence. It is an emblematic staff that represents the twin principles of fairness and justice.

Ọga – boss, mentor

Ogbe – village unit

Ogbo – replica to a neonate after whom he is named

Ọgbọnọ – a type of local soup, also called draw-soup

Ọgọ – in-law, affine

Ọha (ọra) – a type of vegetable (soup)

Ọji – kolanut

Ọkpara – eldest son, eldest male

Omenala – custom, tradition

Ọmụ nkwụ – tender palm leaves

Ọmụgọ – the period of seclusion after childbirth

Ọnụ ama (mkpukpu) – (extended) family compound

Onugbu – bitter-leaf (soup)

Ọnwa – the moon

Ọnwa asaa – feast of the seventh month

Ọnwụ – death

Onyishi (*Onyishi ụmụnna)* – eldest man, agnatic head

Oru (ohu) – slave

Osu – ritual slave

Pap – semi-liquid food made of ground cornflour

Ụbakamma – a name, lit. wealth is better

Uhie – camwood dye

Ụlọ – house, home

Ụmụada – daughters of the lineage; council of daughters

Ụmụnna – patrilineage unit

Urukpu – cloud

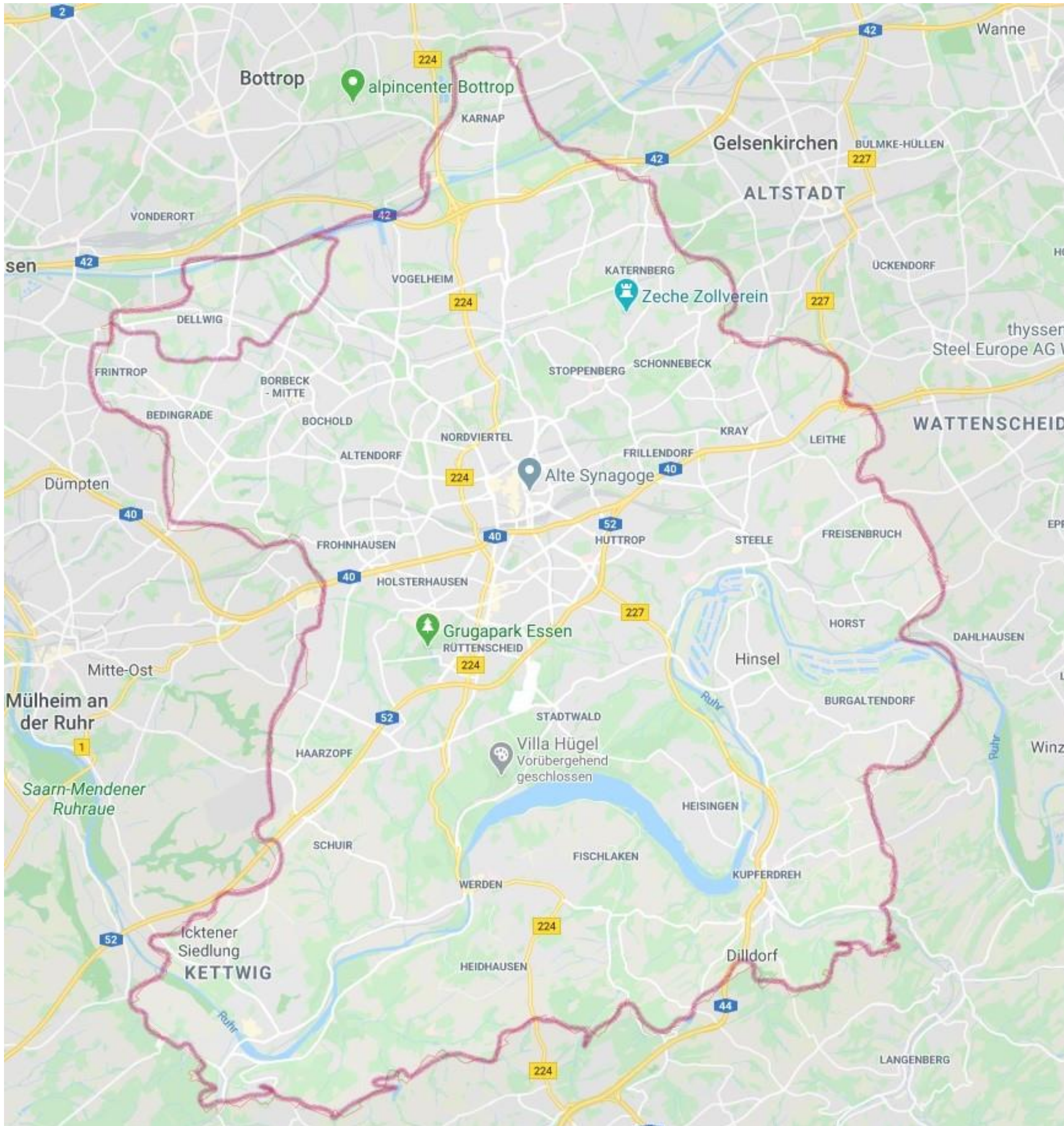
Usekwu – hearth

Ụwa – the planet earth

APPENDIX

A. Fieldwork site at the scrapyard in Ripshorster Straße, Essen-Dellwig. The marked part of the map shows the part of the street reserved for the scrap business in the industrial estate. Source: Google Map

B. Map shows the area boundary of Essen metropolis with the relative position of Dellwig at the northern edge. Source: Google Map



C. Pictures showing the scrapyard and its environs, and the scrap business in Dellwig. Source: Author

Beyond the Scrapyard

Thaddeus Ejiofor Eze

When Igbo men from Nigeria gathered in a scrap yard in an industrial estate in the Ruhr city of Essen to dissemble cars, refrigerators, and other technical waste, surrounded by the sounds of unfamiliar music and the wafts of exotic foods, they met with incomprehension and mistrust from their neighbouring German citizens and the municipal authorities. The present study offers the very insights into these immigrants' socio-cultural identity that enable one to overcome such ill-informed responses. It is an 'ethnography of transnational transactions' – of managing the trade between the scrap yard and the markets in Lagos and Onitsha and interacting with their German co-citizens in various social and religious contexts.

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