

Ikenga Cultic Symbol and Structural Representation of The Igbo Enterprise

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Abstract

The Igbo of Nigeria are one of the most dispersed and highly enterprising ethnic nations in Africa. They are located in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, and form one of the three largest ethnic groups in the country; the other two being the Hausa- Fulani and Yoruba. The Igbo propensity to always migrate from their homeland to other places in search of greener pastures, the associated enterprising spirit and the resulting successes have often led to envy from a number of their host communities. This has resulted to hostilities, leading in some extreme cases, to outright anti-Igbo riots, particularly in the northern states of Nigeria. This characteristic enterprising spirit coupled with bitter experiences in the hands of their host communities has led some people to describe them as the Jews of Africa.

However, many scholars and commentators have attributed the Igbo propensity to migrate from their homeland to environmental factor. Unfortunately, these writers could not link this environmental factor to the Igbo achievement-driven culture of enterprise, especially when it is gathered that quite a number of groups with similar or even more severe environmental disabilities do not possess similar culture of enterprise. This notion is further faulted by the fact that not every part of Igbo land is in lack of arable lands. On the other hand, available ethnographic evidence tends to link the Igbo culture of enterprise with the associated migratory tendency to a spirit-force called *Ikenga*, otherwise known as the cult of the right hand, which is structurally represented by a ram-headed man with a cutlass in the right hand, and a booty, cosmologically represented by a human head in the left hand.

The *Ikenga* is thus a cosmological concept of the Igbo belief in an open society, which recognizes that talent leads to enterprise and enterprise to achievement, and achievement to customary privileges. Hence, the Igbo society with its characteristic republicanism is engrossed in a highly competitive personal achievement-driven motivation, which is anchored in a generative life-force structurally represented by the *Ikenga*. This paper therefore intends to prove that the fundamental driving force behind the Igbo enterprising culture and migratory propensity is not environmental, but cosmological, which is structurally represented by the *Ikenga* cultic figure.

The *Ikenga* is therefore an Igbo cosmological concept which memory of translation and transmission is structurally preserved by the *Ikenga* object.

Introduction

The Igbo of Nigeria are markedly the dominant entrepreneurs in small and medium scale industrial and commercial activities in the Nigerian nation today. In fact over seventy percent of Nigeria's commercial activities are carried out by people of Igbo extraction. In other words, every major market in every major Nigerian city is under the economic grip of the members of the Igbo ethnic group.

Associated with Igbo commercial enterprise is their propensity to travel far beyond the confines of their ethnic boundaries. Hence it is not mistaken evidence that even beyond the confines of the Nigerian nation prominent Igbo communities have become common features in such African countries as Benin Republic, Cameroon, Cote D'Ivoire, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Basden (1966:x1) pictures the Igbo rightly in this respect when he wrote:

The readiness to travel and tenacity of purpose especially when seeking employment have armed many of them far beyond their native environment. When aboard, they maintain close contact, cemented and sustained by a strong tribal bond of union. Whatever the conditions, the Ibo immigrants adapt themselves to meet them, and it is not long before they make their presence felt in the localities where they settle.

But think of it, whenever an Igbo businessman, whether ordinary laborer, artisan, trader or big time transporter enters a community, in no distant time the social and economic landscapes of that community tend to wear new looks. It is therefore only a habitual anti-progress community that could discourage the presence of Igbo people in its midst.

The Igbo have characteristically been compared to the Jews and Irish, as well as such people as the Kikuyu of Kenya, the Chagga of Tanzania, the Ewe of Ghana and Togo, and the Bamileke of Cameroon. Robert LeVine described these groups as the "examples of groups noted for their opportunism and industry in response to the new situation created by Western institutions in this century." In comparing the Igbo with the Irish, Sir Rex Niven (1970: 18) wrote:

The Ibo have the same courage and intelligence as the Irish and they had not come under any greater authority than the village nor had they encountered an outsider in the war-path. Every man has always been for himself and has usually done well himself. Under the new administration they now had to look over their shoulder; they were no longer alone. They lapped up education when it came their way; they took up the learned professions and did very well in them. They filled important professional and technical posts all over the North. They traded and worked with commercial firms with success.

However, one political denominator common with these people is their bitter experience of persecution and outright physical attacks in the hands of some of their host communities. This habitual hatred, most people tend to believe, arose out of marked jealousy arising from their phenomenal successes in their business adventures amongst their host communities.

All the same, there is more to the characteristic enterprising spirit of the Igbo than the mere lack of central political authority. This is because most other ethnic groups with similar political structure do not possess similar enterprising spirit with the Igbo. Thus, if one may ask, what are the forces that propel the characteristic enterprising spirit of the Igbo, as well as their expansionist tenacity outside their traditional homeland?

Evereth Lee, (1966:48) working in concert with Ravenstein's theory of migration lists as factors which account for economic-related migrations, the introduction of bad or oppressive laws, heavy taxations, an unattractive climate, uncongenial social surroundings, as well as compulsion which may arise from either slave trade or transportation. He is however of the opinion that none of the above-mentioned factors "can compare in volume with that which arises from the desire inherent in most men to 'better' themselves in material respects"

There is no doubt, as Lee rightly puts it that it is the desire for better economic attainments more than other motives that pushes the Igbo out of their traditional home base. Yet, it has to be made known that neither the desire for better economic needs nor the propensity to migrate from one's home base is exclusive to the Igbo. Every group of people is imbued naturally with such desires. What then is the uniqueness of the Igbo experience which made them the most shrewd and remarkable in these matters of economic quest and expansion among their neighbors? The general trend however has been for many scholars to associate the Igbo economic adventurism with ecological disadvantages. Coleman, (1970:69) one of the major apologists of this theory writes:

Ibo land is one of the most densely populated rural areas in the world. In some places the density is more than 1000 persons to the square mile. Moreover, the soil is comparatively poor. As a result, in the past the Ibo expanded territorially and exported to other areas large numbers of seasonal labourers and even semi-permanent residents. In fact, the Ibo were expanding territorially in many directions at the time of the British intrusion. Since then this outward thrust has continued and has been the source of anti-Igbo feeling among the tribes bordering Iboland.

However, while migration arising from expansion could readily be linked with pressure of the population on the available resources, it is unlikely that such could bring about the culture of high enterprising spirit. To say the least, scarcity of land is not a uniform feature in Igbo land. Most peripheral Igbo sub-groups have relative expansive portions of arable land enough to sustain viable agricultural communities. Linking migration with

scarcity of farming lands seems therefore ridiculous in the case of these Igbo sub-groups. This is evident in the case of the North-East or *Ogu-ukwu* Igbo sub-group, which is made up of the present Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Apart from possessing enough farmlands relative to their population, and producing enough foodstuff particularly rice and yams on commercial quantities, they paradoxically constitute the bulk of seasonal migration farm laborers in Igbo land. How then can this be explained in terms of scarcity of land arising from population pressure? In their study of Venezuela, Brown and Goetz (1987:49) while stating that:

Migration in third world settings as elsewhere, results when opportunities provided by geographic places are not commensurate with the personal need(s) or capabilities of their resident.

They further see outward migration “as a function of both personal attributes and places of contextual characteristics related to development.” In a similar interpretation, Ottenberg (1959: 130) links the force behind the Igbo tendency to expand beyond their traditional borders to their receptivity to culture change. He went further to associate this attribute to four major factors. These include the influence of the European slave trade on them, the nature of direct European contact following the slave trade, the nature and organization of Igbo cultures, and the Igbo population density. Since the first and second points raised are not exclusive to the Igbo, and thus could not be strong determinant factors, and the fourth having been discussed earlier, it remains to look at the third, which most profoundly borders on characteristic culture traits.

Relating to the nature and organization of Igbo culture as impetus to their achievement-oriented drive, Ottenberg (1959:130) believed that its strength lies on first, the emphasis on individual achievement and initiative; second, alternative prestige goals and paths of action; third, a tendency toward equalitarian leadership, fourth, considerable incorporation of other peoples and cultures; fifth, a great deal of settlement and resettlement of individuals and small groups; and finally considerable cultural variations.

The foregoing observations, although seemingly evident, yet they cannot be said to be exclusive to the Igbo. Take for instance, the emphasis on individual achievement and initiative. How could it be explained that no other ethnic group except the Igbo, has a sense of individual achievement motivation and initiative? Again, looking at the issue of equalitarian leadership and bringing it alongside the Tiv of Benue State, and even the Ekoi groups of Cross River State, it becomes difficult to define it exclusively in the context of Igbo achievement drive. The same goes with the other observations. However, that is not to say that these factors do not on their own varying degrees play important roles in shaping the Igbo personality. In actual fact, they represent the outward symbols of an inner ideological drive which the Igbo do not appear to share with any other group.

Thus, as Basden earlier recalled, one unique character which the Igbo appear not to share with the other groups, except of course the Jews, is their sentimental attachment to their traditional homeland. Major socio-political, economic and even religious indicators show that the Igbo enterprising spirit seems to be propelled by a momentum spirit which induces a pattern of massive but regulated fortune-hunt and periodic massive and equally regulated stock-taking home-coming. In other words, the pattern and nature of Igbo enterprising spirit built around their habitual proclivity to home-coming could be likened to an army of fortune which comes back at the end of every campaign to announce and celebrate its success, or if it goes the other way, to atone for its failures. In like manner, in looking for an exclusive motivating force behind Igbo migration, one should not be oblivious of a similar force which cosmologically accounts for their massive home-coming tendency, particularly during the end of year period. What then is this force that seems to have defied all external linkages to exclusively associate with the Igbo receptivity to western cultural values?

Given the interplay of existing centrifugal and centripetal cultural forces, it becomes necessary to explain the entire nexus of Igbo enterprising drive in terms of a primordial, yet extant socio-political ideology which is rooted in Igbo pattern of inheritance, vis-à-vis succession to and exercise of political power. This is clearly expressed symbolically in the roles of the *Ofo* and *Ikenga* in the socio-political, economic and religious lives of the Igbo. Given the paramount nature of these two symbols in any study that tries to explain the nature and dynamics of Igbo leadership culture, it becomes necessary to explain their roles and characters in the context of the present study quite in more detail.

The *Ofo* and *Ikenga* when viewed in the context of Igbo cosmology embody the ideological fulcrum on which the Igbo society rests. In other words, a better understanding of the basic character of Igbo way of life explained through their pattern of political behavior and economic enterprise can only be properly understood from the position of the two cosmological concepts of *Ofo* and *Ikenga* in the body of Igbo belief system. Furthermore, since these two conceptual cultic symbols are intrinsically wrapped in traditional Igbo religious belief system, understanding the basic character of Igbo traditional religion becomes equally paramount. Unfortunately, the purview of the present study can only permit a contextual explanation of the Igbo traditional religious belief system.

But one fact that must be noted here is that the *Ofo* and *Ikenga* are not idols, or their iconoclastic symbols as most dogmatic Christians often believe. In the strictest sense of the word they are simply symbolic representations of the Igbo political ideology, which unfortunately could not be reduced to writings because of the people's non-literate culture. Otherwise were the Igbo to be as literate as Europe and Asia, they could have succeeded in reducing the whole concepts of *Ofo* and *ikenga* to literary details. This could have led those foreign cultural and religious chauvinists who described them

as pagan idols to have quickly accorded the *Ofo* the status of a full scepter of political and religious authority, and *Ikenga* the symbol of the people's martial cum enterprising spirit. It is ironical therefore that most of the so called educated Igbo elite who hide under the cloak of Christianity are still encaged by this whirlwind of foreign indoctrination.

The *Ofo* as a conceptual symbol is the twig of a tree known among the Igbo by the name, but botanically known as *Detarium senegalense*. Its branches fall off naturally on drying. It is this branch that thus represents this concept after formal customary consecration. Viewed in Igbo cosmology, since the *Ofo* cannot be cut or broken off by the agency of human activities, but falls off as nature wills, so it is believed that its inherent authority cannot be acquired by the act of human effort. When therefore defined in political and religious terms, it is the symbol of authority founded on ancestral heirloom by divine commission, which represents the continuity between the people living and their dead deified ancestors. It also embodies the dual concepts of truth and justice.

Since the holder of a collective *Ofo* for a given community performs the dual roles of a political and religious leader and thus is by ancestral sanction expected to be just in his dispensation of justice among those he is ancestrally elected to lead, it becomes fashionable to speak of the *Ofo* as a symbol of truth, justice and authority. Furthermore, since *Ofo* stands for an ascribed rather than achieved status of political authority, its falling off from the branches without the agency of human activities evidently symbolizes ancestral sanction of authority. Its acquisition is therefore by the right of inheritance as willed by God, and not by the agency of human efforts. Accordingly therefore, as Ilogu (1974:18) puts it:

The characteristic falling off of the *Ofo* twigs symbolizes the process of establishing new family and lineage branches among the Igbo. No cutting of the *Ofo* branch is done. It is believed that Chukwu (the Great God) purposely created this tree to be sacred, and by manner its branches fell unbroken, he (Chukwu) symbolizes the way families and lineages grow up and established new extended families and lineages. Therefore the *Ofo* made out of these branches is the abode of the spirit of dead ancestors, hence the authority and the sacredness of the *Ofo* as well as the special place given to it as the emblem of unity, truth and indestructibility for the individual or group possessing the *Ofo*.

But one impression which needs to be corrected from the above description is the one credited to the *Ofo* as the abode of the spirit of the dead ancestors. It is important to point out that the *Ofo*, much as it embodies the symbolic link between the living and their ancestors, does not in itself constitute a deity, or what Christians erroneously refer to as idol. Thus, whereas one can swear by the names of his ancestors and such deities as *Ogwugwu*, *Iyioji*, *Amadioha* and *Agbala*, among others, one cannot swear by the *Ofo*. This in effect puts *Ofo* clearly on the pedestal of an instrument of authority, whether political or religious. As a staff of office inherited from

one's ancestors, it portends the force of ancestral authority. This does not in effect suggest that the ancestors live in the stick itself.

For an *Ofo* to be traditionally functional, it must first be consecrated. This consecration often takes place on the day a man leaves his father's homestead to establish his own branch of the family by taking a wife. Although having become independent of his father's house by establishing his household, he and his other equally independent brothers continue to maintain a collective allegiance to the authority of their father, which is symbolized by their father's *Ofo*. On the death of their father however, the eldest among the male children inherits both their fathers homestead and his *Ofo*, which then becomes the symbol of their father's authority. By having custody of the *Ofo*, the eldest son holds every aspect of their father's assets principally his living house, and such others as land and economic trees which he holds in trust for the others or shares among them afterwards as the case may be. Where the situation concerns a father with many wives, he is equally obliged to take over the responsibility of the widows' maintenance and welfare. In return, the other sons are expected to transfer the allegiance due to their late father to the first son, who then assumes the role of the political, religious and juridical head of what becomes the minimal lineage or *Umunna*.

Taking after their colonial and religious mentors, most Igbo writers on the *Ofo*, particularly those of the Christain School, have had the erroneous tendency to see the *Ofo* in cultic terms with multiple functions. To Edmund Ilogu, beyond being the instrument of establishing new branches of families, the *Ofo* is used for prayer, swearing, certification of truth by an *Ozo* title man, and as an outward symbol of the presence of the ancestor, among others.

Ejizu (1986:61-64) on his own account stated more than one dozen uses of the *Ofo*. These include prayer, ritual, sacrifices, contact with spirit patrons, magico-religious uses, naming ceremony, determination of calendar of events, affirming moral uprightness, sealing covenants, legitimating of status/office, decision-making, settling of disputes, oath-taking and promulgation and enforcement of laws. Arinze (1970:15), however appears to have deviated from the holier than the Pope approach. To him, the *Ofo* symbolizes ancestral authority when handed over to the first born son, the *Okpala*, from one generation to the other.

Moving in the same direction with Cardinal Arinze, it is the opinion of the present writer that the paramount character of the *Ofo* in Igbo culture lies in its role as a symbol of authority wearing the garb of an ancestral heirloom which maintains the link between the ancestors dead and their living descendants. Religiously however, the *Ofo* in one aspect symbolizes the Igbo belief in continuity of life after death and interaction between the living and the dead as well as with generations yet unborn. Yet, this could only be explained in terms of divine-right authority which cannot be acquired by the force of arms or personal initiatives.

The *Ikenga* on the other hand, is symbolic of Igbo adventurism. It is the go-getter spirit of the Igbo associated with good fortune, personal ability,

war, and general success in life. It is ideologically associated with a man's right-hand. Since a man's right hand in Igbo cosmology symbolizes positivism, his ability to utilize it most effectively for a considered goal puts him on the saddle of success and recognition. A man's basic strength among the Igbo is therefore to be found in his right hand. Afigbo, (1986:2) describes the *Ikenga* as cult of the right hand with which a man hacks his way through the jungles of sweat and bitter experiences known as life.

The *Ikenga* is symbolized structurally by a carved wooden ram-headed human figure with two horns, a machet on the right hand, and a human head representing the booty on the left. It conceptualizes a man's strength in his head through his ideas and thoughts in the same way the strength of the ram is found in its head, but who unlike the ram, uses his right hand to execute the plans of his brain.

Beyond the authority provided by the *Ofo*, which is only restricted to an individual within a selected kindred group, the *Ikenga* provides a level-playing ground for all the male members of the group, based on their individual abilities to achieve the material goals of their lives. Both the *Ofo* and *Ikenga* are therefore based on two mutually opposed, yet complementary patterns of acquisition and exercise of socio-political and economic influences.

How then does this situation act as a lever for the extraordinary enterprising spirit of the Igbo? The answer appears to lie, as earlier pointed out, on the pattern of inheritance among the Igbo, which leaves nearly everything at the disposal of the first son, including his father's liabilities. This in most cases also involves those of his grandfather and great-grand father. Often, in a typical Igbo family, the eldest male child inherits, in the strictest traditional sense, his father's homestead, the *Ofo* and the ancestral shrine which houses the *Ofo*. These three objects of inheritance represent the most potent evidence of a family's unbroken link with the ancestors. By this unquestionable right of inheritance, the other male children become extended branches of the family when the eldest son dies, while the homestead often remains within the custody of his first son, the *Ofo* and the ancestral shrine go into the custody of the next eldest surviving son.

Thus, within each lineage level, the position of the eldest surviving male child, commonly referred to as *Okpala* or *Diokpa*, remains constant over time. However, as one moves up to the maximal stage and eventually to the village-group level, his authority gradually diminishes, although not actually in importance but in effectiveness. At these upper levels, what counts most is the evidence of one's achievements in life, which in traditional Igbo society was measured not only in material acquisitions, but the number of scalps brought home. However, it was in the acquisition of social titles that in most instances one's socio-political influence is measured in his community. If a man has all the things that constitute the status of a wealthy man, but fails to acquire the necessary titles which his level of wealth demands, such a person remains an *Ofeke*, a commoner of no social significant worth in the society.

Thus as LeVine (1966:21) puts it, "among the Igbo the social title system is the one potent means by which a man's wealth could be translated into social and political statuses".

Furthermore, since these titles are graduated into levels of importance in ascending order, it means that as one acquires more titles so his influence in both social and political matters increases. This ascending order also means a corresponding high cost of initiation. This further means that for a man to move from one grade to the other, he must work towards accumulating enough money to cover the cost of initiation rites. Most significant is the fact that a man dies with his title, living his sons to work towards getting theirs. One striking thing about this however is the fact that, the higher levels of these titles are ones which one cannot take in his father's life-time. Thus putting limits as to the degree of one's dependence on his father's wealth.

Among the Igbo therefore, while age is highly respected, a man's achievements based on his personal enterprises are revered. To the Igbo therefore, a man's worth is not measured by his inheritance but by his personal enterprising efforts. The Igbo- born literary icon, Achebe pictures (1965:6) this vividly thus:

When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders.

It is in this realm of personal achievement that *Ikenga* takes precedence. Thus, for the greater majority who are not privileged to exercise the authority offered by the possession of the *Ofo* or inherit the bulk of their father's wealth which could enable them to begin a new life with considerable ease, the *Ikenga* becomes the motivating ideological force. Boston (1977:14) again wrote:

Ikenga symbolizes the person as a particular individual contrasting his personal achievements with those which can be ascribed to hereditary qualities or to some other external source.

Unlike the *Ofo*, the *Ikenga* is not inherited. Each man is expected to have his *own Ikenga* which ceases to exist on his death. The *Ikenga* is expected to direct his life ambitions and adventures. Whenever he meets with success, he is expected to celebrate victory, which he attributes to his *Ikenga*. On the other hand, if a man meets with repeated failures in the quest for his life objectives,

he may re-consecrate his *Ikenga* on account of its ineffectiveness, or attribute the situation to his *Chi* (his personal guardian spirit). A man's *Chi* is expected to save him from misfortunes. Thus an Igbo who escapes dramatically from accident or an enemy attributes such feats to his *Chi*. Since someone's *Chi* determines his *akalaka* (destiny), repeated efforts to make a breakthrough in life without commensurate results could then be attributed to one's *akalaka*.

Among the Igbo therefore, while a man's achievement, based on his personal ability is recognized and accorded due respect, there is still a strong belief in the unseen hands of the supreme God (*Chukwu*) offering every bit of protection through the man's *Chi*. It is therefore clear that religion strongly pervades every aspect of the Igbo determination to live. This may account for the high degree of Igbo receptivity to Christianity, yet with strong attachment to their traditional values and belief system.

The Igbo spirit of enterprise is strongly anchored on the premise that man is created by *Chukwu* (Almighty God) who dumps him with hands and feet in a world-like jungle, giving him the option of either being unable to conquer and thus die off, or struggle to conquer and thus live. The *Ikenga* in this case provides the impetus for a strong bargaining power. Hence, while intelligence and strength are recognized as natural gifts from *Chukwu*, the ability to harness them into tangible substance is attributed to the *Ikenga*.

Jeffreys (1954:34) explains this in these terms:

Even if a man is naturally strong and vigorous, this virility is attributed to the power of his *Ikenga*; furthermore, if a weak man by accident throws a stronger one or makes money more easily than others, people give the credit to his *Ikenga*

This prominent role accorded *Ikenga* in Igbo philosophy of life was clearly manifested by its widespread presence in Igbo households in the early periods before European influence. Commenting on this with respect to Igbo spirit of enterprise, Basden (1966:219) wrote:

Each household contains many sacred objects, but they have not all equal significance, for among the 'god' many and lords many there are higher and lower degrees of importance. The most universal of these household gods, and that which is given first rank, is the *Ikenga*, and no house may be without one. It is the first god sought by a young man at the beginning of his career and it is the one to which he looks for good luck in all his enterprises.

Allied to the individual *Ikenga* is the *Ikenga* associated with a group, usually a village or village group community. It is usually associated with the collective interest and advancement of the given community. Unlike personal *Ikenga*, which ceases to exist on the owner's death, the group *Ikenga*, which is normally called *Ikenga-oha* or the associated suffix, as the case may be, exists as long as the community concerned exists.

One inherent character of both the *Ikenga* and *Ofo* is their tendency to always draw the Igbo towards their ancestral homeland. The *Ofo* is fundamentally a centripetal force which quite often draws the individual

Igbo closer to his ancestral home. For instance, in most Igbo communities, any man who attains the status of *Okpala* but is sojourning somewhere outside his ancestral territory is traditionally required to return home and assume the headship of his lineage. The reason being that no other person can occupy the position while such a man lives.

In like manner, a man who sets out for a business adventure needs to return home occasionally to give account of his successes and failures whichever is applicable before his people. Thus, for a man who goes out in search of fame and wealth, it is traditionally imperative for him to engage on periodic home-coming, in what appears to be occasional stock-taking vis-à-vis the virility of his *Ikenga*.

For the Igbo man who goes out in search of fortune therefore, his occasional home-coming is driven by the following reasons. The first is to assure the people as well as his *Ikenga* at home of his survival in the course of his adventure. Secondly, he is expected to reappraise his successes and failures in a ceremony that leads him to occasionally propitiate his *Ikenga*. Furthermore, he is expected to pay periodic homage to his *okpala* (*Ofo* holder) who acts as both the guardian of the home-front and the link with the ancestors for his welfare and that of his immediate family.

By the same token, this resultant ancestral tie makes it imperative that a man should be buried in the land of his ancestors, the land of his *Ikenga*, *Ofo* and *Chi*. Since proper burial among the Igbo is mainly defined in terms of burial of the dead in his ancestral land with all the wishing necessary traditional accompaniments, the most honorable act a relative does to his kinsman who dies in a foreign land is to bring his remains to his home town for proper traditional burial through the necessary traditional rites. In fact, it is often stated that, in one way this belief of an Igbo wishing to die or be buried in his ancestral home acts invariably against the expansionist tendencies of the Igbo in pre-colonial times, the demographic disabilities notwithstanding.

Those who in the pre-colonial times actually engaged in migrations that subsequently resulted in permanent settlements were to soon import all the appurtenances of their cultural existence as a group from their original home. Although such factors as environment and contact with other people might quite often lead to their evolving not exactly the parent culture but a variant. But the fact however is that once such a settlement is planted; the people need not be buried in their original ancestral home when they die. The openness and ease of communication that followed European intrusion appear to have cleared the mist of insecurity and thence the outpourings beyond the frontiers of Igbo land. Basden (1966:116) stated his observation quite clearly:

The desire of every Ibo man and woman is to die in their own town or at least, to be buried within its precincts. For a long period it was very difficult to persuade a man to travel any distance from his native place and if he were in need of medical assistance an Ibo would seldom agree to go from home in spite of assurances that he

would be able to have better treatment elsewhere. In the case of death occurring at a distance, if it can be done at all, the brethren will bring the body home for burial

It is therefore this desire to always keep in touch with one's ancestral home that explains why, in spite of their widely traveled character, the Igbo remain the most active yearly home returnees during occasions of either traditional festivals or the modern Christian associates like Easter, Christmas and New Year.

From all indications therefore, while the *Ofo* emphasizes ancestral linkage, the *Ikenga*, although diametrically opposed to it, especially in matters of mode of status acquisition, complements it by creating alternative means of status acquisition, which lays more emphasis on personal ability. This readily accounts for the seemingly habitual Igbo tendency towards individualism, which in effect produces their characteristic culture of competitiveness, industry and expansionism.

The socio-political organization of the Igbo society does not recognize classes based on right of birth. Instead it maintains that every free-born has equal opportunities to attain the highest position in the community like any other person. From the point of adolescence the individual begins to bear his share of the responsibilities concerning the welfare of his community. These responsibilities which are allotted on the basis of age were determined through the organ of age-grade associations which are built into the age-set framework.

Thus, from the onset, a young man has to compete with his peers. This spirit of competition which starts at peer group level through the organ of age-grade associations soon permeates the family, kindred, village and the town levels. Furthermore, since wealth brings prestige and political power, an individual who acquires it not only brings honor to himself but to his family, village and subsequently town. Hence Uchendu (1956:34) was to note:

In the days before contact with the Europeans the prestige and influence of a town was measured by the strength of its able-bodied warriors, its diplomacy in dealing with its neighbors, its access to long-distance trade routes, the power of its oracles the importance of its market place, and the degree of its craft specialization.

The new situation created by European intervention soon brought new dimensions to the notion of status acquisition. The old structure still remains, although in different garbs. The Igbo had to seize the new opportunities offered by the unrivalled communication links created by European intervention. Once they take the initiative and it pays, they soon proceed to incorporate their kinsmen in the available opportunities. Achebe (1969:50) tries to picture this attitude in one of his novels:

It was five years since Ezeulu promised the white man that he will send his sons to Church... at first Oduche did not want to go to church. But Ezeulu called him to his obi and spoke to him as a man

would speak to his best friend and the boy went forth with pride in his heart... He had never heard his father speak to anyone as an equal "the world is changing, he told him. 'I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: "men of today have learnt to shoot without missing, so I have learnt to fly without perching." I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow.

Such has been the ideology which over the centuries molded the Igbo personality; a personality founded on individualism, go-getter spirit, and a close kinship that radiates from traditional home-base. It therefore follows that if the Igbo are seen to be distinct in their struggles to achieve status in such areas as education, politics, business and the modern professional fields against the pace of their neighbors, it has little to do with population explosion or dearth of farmlands. Neither could it again be linked with the coming of Europeans. It is equally obvious that even the socio-political frameworks of the society cannot in themselves alone provide the impetus. The instinct to achieve has therefore lived with the Igbo as an ideological force; the questions of population explosion and European imperialism being added impetus. In other words, the European intervention only served to widen the Igbo horizon and frontiers of adventure.

The force of Igbo spirit of enterprise is therefore deep and powerful, operating from within, and not merely a response to external factors. The lives of the 18th century liberated Igbo slave turned abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano (Curtin: 1967) and the 19th century Sierra Leone-born of Igbo parentage, Col. (Dr) Africanus Beale Horton, (Fyfe:1972) present historical instances of the fact that the hunger for achieved status, fame and wealth had lived with the Igbo far back into the remote past. This further explains the instinctive republican character of the Igbo, their individualistic orientation, and subsequent tendency to easily adapt to any given situation without changing their basic primordial character. Thus, as Ottenberg (1959:142) further explains:

Yet, paradoxically, of all Nigerian peoples, the Ibo have probably changed the least while changing the most. While many of the formal elements of the social, religious, economic, and political structures, such as lineages, family groups age grades, and secret societies, have been modified through culture contact, many of the basic patterns of social behaviour, such as the emphasis on alternative choices and goals, achievement and competition, and the lack of strong authority, have survived and are a part of the newly developing culture.

In general, the traditional Igbo pattern of status acquisition, which invariably provides the impetus to economic adventurism, tends to maintain a balance between the right of primogeniture explained by the possession of the *Ofo* and the drive for achieved status which is guided by *Ikenga*. Thus, while *Ofo* as a patrimonial instrument of authority represents continuity, the *Ikenga* on the other hand depicts change as a fundamental element of man's process of achieving his destiny on earth, through the dint of his personal efforts.

This spiritual force was to further account for the inherent Igbo protestant spirit, their disdain for monarchical and authoritarian tendencies, and subsequent tendency towards democratic principles. Achebe (1969:105) again presents a graphic picture of an Igbo society living with these ideals:

The missionaries spent their first four nights or five nights in the market place, and went into the village in the morning to preach the gospel. They asked who the king of the village was, but the villagers told them that there was no king. 'We have men of high title and the chief priests and the elders', they said.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the ideological catalyst to Igbo entrepreneurial spirit is rooted in their ethno-history and not the consequence of demographic deficiency. The Igbo attitude to business which is shrouded in their propensity to achievement-driven enterprises is in one way cosmologically rooted as expressed by the ethno-historical roles of cultic symbols of *Ofo* and *Ikenga*.

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