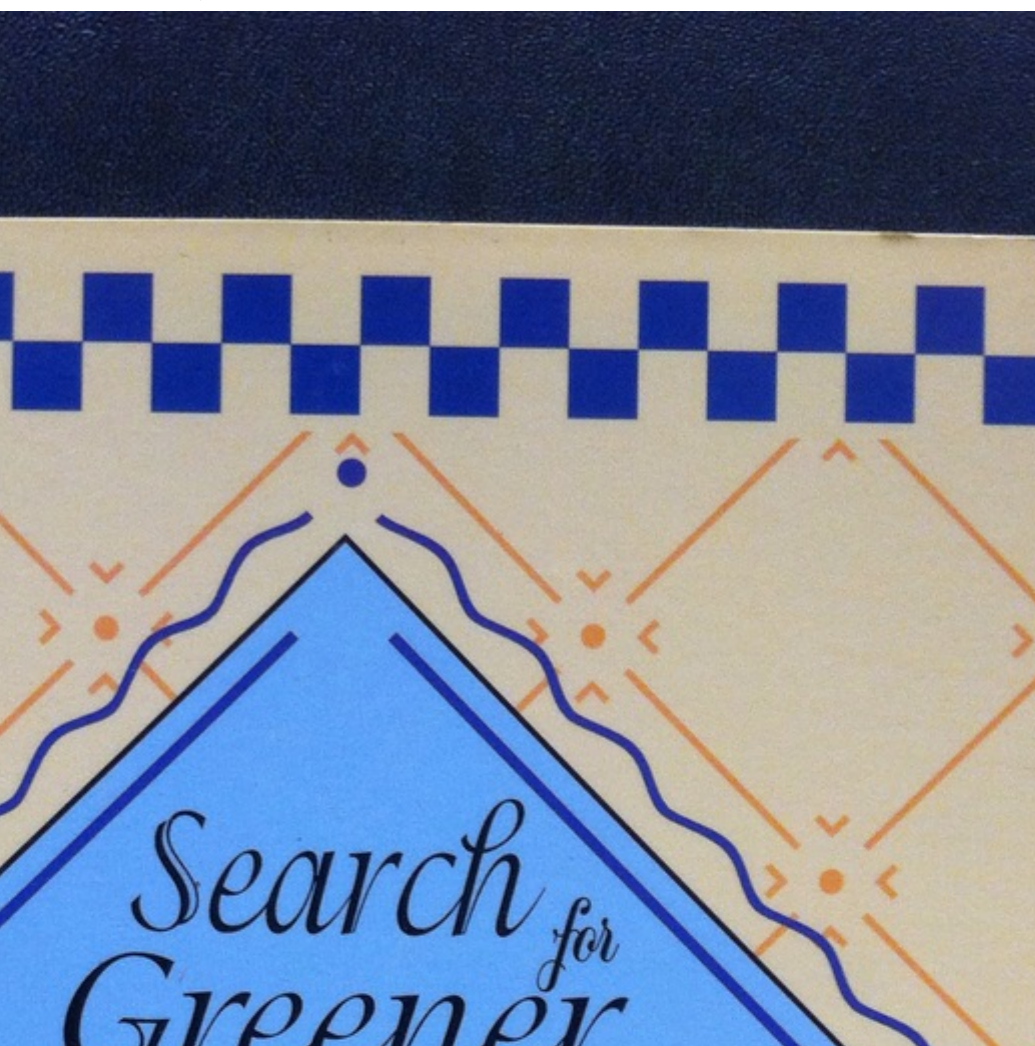


SEARCH FOR GREENER PASTURES



*Search for
Greener*

SEARCH FOR GREENER PASTURES

Igbo and African Experience

Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere

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The American libraries offer the most spectacular services in the world today. Just make a phone call to a library attendant, and, with your name, address, and phone number noted, the books (ancient and modern) and any other materials requested can be there for you in a couple of days, if not hours! I would like to thank the authorities of the public libraries of Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Butte, Montana for their wonderful help.

Online, one can retrieve most invaluable materials from the Internet. It is no longer necessary to buy and stock books. Bookshelves are becoming obsolete. Some CD-ROMS hold more materials than a public library! The 1998 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* CD, for example, contains the text of the 32 volumes of the encyclopaedia plus thousands of additional articles and images not available in the print set; natural-language searching, and browsable A-Z lists. *Britannica* CD, *ENCARTA Multimedia* editions and most other encyclopaedias in today's electronic version offer more than users ever expect.

It is a tragedy not to be well informed in the modern information age. I am grateful to many Nigerian friends who introduced me to Internet web sites like *Africa Online*, *Nigeria News Organization*, and *Igbo-.net*. It was indeed late when I

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realized the abundant resources these sites offer on Africa and the black world. The Igbo Magazine, *KWENU* also offered rich materials on Igbo cultural values. At least I was able to revise my work, cross the T's and dot the I's

Who says that necessity is *not* the mother of invention? I have tried to produce my work, from scratch to finish, using the latest software word processing programs. This is a hard task for an amateur! Even for computer wizards, obviously some of the applications cannot replace human sweat. One may still have to do some part of the work, for example, the grammar and spell-checks in the traditional way! The latest Microsoft grammar and spell-check application could not recognize whether the word "Igbo" is used in the singular or in the plural. To resolve this problem I have in some places adopted the current expression "Ndi Igbo" (Igbo people or 'Igbos') for the plural form. The singular form is "Onye Igbo." Elsewhere, "Igbo," (*not* "Igbos," "Ndiigbo," or "Ndigbo") expresses, too, both the plural and the singular form. The singular form can easily be recognized from the context. The older form - **Ibo** - usually preferred by non-Igbo speaking people can still be found in this work.

To save money I had to prepare the **Camera-Ready-Copy** of this document for the printers. An expert in book publishing gave an estimate of the amount of money I have saved by typesetting the document myself. But there were some areas I could not do it alone. Here I must thank my friends particularly Rev. Finnian Nwaozor, who meticulously proofread the entire document and made some valuable suggestions.

I shared the experiences of most Igbo and Nigerian friends in the U.S. I would not have been in the position to arrive at certain conclusions about the life of Africans in the Diaspora without listening to their stories. I am very grateful for their contributions to this work. I must not fail to mention the following: Dominick Ogazi, Franza Nwannewuihe, Athan Uche and Judith Ogoh, George and Stella Njoku, Francis Fada Ibezim, Herbert Akwaja, Don Ibezim, Bedford Umez, and MO Ene. It has been interesting, too, associating with some American friends who know much about Nigeria and Ndi Igbo in particular. I name a few here and thank them for their contributions: Jack and Kathy Ward, George Waring and Mary

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Other American friends who read some parts of the manuscripts said they were amazed to learn so much about Ndi Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans from me. Whatever impressions the bad sides of Africa make on whites everywhere, most of those who read the manuscripts said that Africa has rich cultural values that we Africans should never abandon in preference to any foreign culture. I hope my fellow Africans, in Mother Africa and in Diaspora will heed our friends' advice.

I take sole responsibility for the weaknesses of this work. One of my intentions for undertaking this work was to provoke reactions from readers and particularly from my fellow Africans. I don't expect everyone to accept all my views. But I will be very pleased to receive feedback from all concerned readers. Reactions will surely help toward resolving some of the problems facing all sons and daughters of Africa and the black race.

Nathaniel Ikechukwu Ndiokwere

Columbia Falls, Montana, USA

This work is dedicated to Ndi Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans who have not abandoned the fatherland; and to the black people in Diaspora returning to Mother Africa to ensure her survival and development. It is also dedicated to non-returning 'exiles' who nevertheless are committed to the development of the black continent.

INTRODUCTION

The world is indeed a global village. The ease with which people, today move around the globe in search of entertainment and other necessities of life is astonishing. And the urge to explore and conquer even the remotest parts of our known world and those yet unknown has continued unabated. Man has made trips to the moon several times. And similar missions to the other planets, including the Mars are already underway. It is a fascinating experience. Man surely owes much to the rapid advances in modern science and technology, and specially improvements in modern means of communication, to achieve his goals

Tourism also has contributed to the massive movement of peoples from one corner of the world to the other. There is no nook or cranny of the known world, including its waters, deserts and jungles that man has not discovered in the search for entertainment, self-fulfilment or increase in the material resources badly needed in sustaining the increasing world population. Around many dilapidated structures of remote and modern civilizations, enormous groups of people cluster all year round to explore and update high school and college notes on some historical and geographical data.

Historic Churches, great state buildings, jungles and shores of big and small oceans, seas and rivers are among the busiest tourist centers that attract hundreds and millions of people, young and old, from every part of the world. Thanks to the booming tourist industry, some of the poorer nations of the world have come to share in the resources of some of the more privileged peoples and nations. There is no gainsaying it that some nations that gain from such massive movement of peoples would suffer irreparable losses if for one reason or the other such avenues for revenue were closed. Sometimes, of course disasters strike and tourists disappear. Disasters come in the form of bad weather conditions or insecurity. But governments and people who realize the importance of tourism on their development and survival do not fail to live up to expectations by providing

security and sources of maximum satisfaction for their benefactors and visitors. These countries and peoples need the patronage of the ubiquitous Japanese, Germans, Americans and many others who flock their countries' borders and hinterland every year in search of entertainment and excitement.

There is joy in discovery and adventure. Variety, too they say is the spice of life. There is need to see new things. The busy and often monotonous life of big European and American cities can be boring. Why not visit a remote and quiet African or Amazonian jungle to experience wildlife? Some countries of Africa and Latin America that have anything in form of wildlife to offer to the curious tourists have greatly benefited from the mass movement of people all year round.

The advantages of modern tourism and movement of peoples cannot be calculated. There is increase in knowledge about other parts of the world, their peoples and cultures. There is better human and international relationship. People who enjoy visiting other countries also try to make room for those who visit them. Often visits are for a short while. In some other cases people immigrate to other countries in search of jobs for life sustenance. In such a case the sojourn may be prolonged. Some people after all decide settling for the rest of their lives in their host countries.

For various motives people have left their countries and fatherland for a specific purpose, namely in search of greener pastures. There are records of such movements of people in history at one time or another. Some who emigrate have been forced out of their countries as a result of political and religious persecutions. A greater majority had often abandoned their own countries in despair, in extreme stress and danger, on account of economic crunch. There are millions of people who find themselves in this last category. They live and work in the United States and some parts of Europe. The Africans, the Nigerians, and the Igbo of Nigeria are among millions of people who have found new homes in America, Europe and other parts of the world.

Naturally the advantages of migration cannot be underestimated. People who find better opportunities for work enjoy better life. Their earnings surely help in the development

of their home countries and families. But the losses in human, material and spiritual resources may not also be underestimated. It is this last consideration that has inspired this work, in which we shall examine, the impact of the massive migration of Africans to other parts of the world in search of greener pastures on the economy and development of the black continent.

Although the general **dispersion** of Africans has consequences for the entire continent taken together, we know however that our study has many sides to it. There is need to examine the effects of such dispersion from many perspectives, namely cultural, social, economic, religious, and political. In order not to fall into groundless generalizations, we have decided to limit our area of study to the **Igbo of Nigeria**. Surely our findings will apply to **Nigerians** and to most peoples and countries of the black continent including the **African-Americans**.

In our previous works, we have done extensive studies on **Africa**, its peoples and some of its institutions. We have tried to expose and evaluate some of the problems and challenges facing Africa of **Today and Tomorrow**. From an exclusively religious perspective we have exposed some of the problems facing the African Church of Today and Tomorrow. We have so far examined many related issues on the African Church in these works:

- Prophecy and Revolution [First published in London, 1981; Re-printed in Nigeria, 1995.]
- Search for Security [First published in Nigeria, 1990; Re-printed in 1995.]
- The African Church Today and Tomorrow - Prospects and Challenges - Vol. 1; [First published in Nigeria 1994.]
- The African Church Today and Tomorrow, Vol. II - Inculturation in practice; [First published in Nigeria 1994]]

The above publications offer a lot of interesting research materials and information to missionaries, scholars and students of Black Studies and culture. In a special way they are for theologians, teachers, students of theology and religion, social

sciences, psychology and anthropology and any researcher on African Church, politics and worship.

In these our publications we have also tried to present to Church leaders, students of Religious Studies and Christians and non-Christians everywhere the situation of the Church in Africa today. We looked into the future too to *forecast* the possible results of the impact political and social changes might have on the African Church of the present and future. It is widely believed and correctly of course by many Africans that most of the outside world knows little about Africa, and much less about the African Church.

The African Church of **Today and Tomorrow** faces many challenges. Justice and Peace Movement must have special place in the Church's evangelizing mission if the Church is to remain relevant to the black people. Often religious conflicts spurred up by Muslim and Christian rivalry are responsible for most of the African misery, political, economic and social instability. What are the leaders of the African Churches doing to rescue Africans from the perpetual bondage of poverty and isolation? What is the Universal Church doing to assure the Africans that they too belong to the World Christian Community and that black issues are being taken care of?

Africa has also a beautiful face. Its people are deeply religious. There is no gainsaying it; **African Traditional Religion [ATR]** has some enduring spiritual, moral, social and cultural values which peoples of other faiths admire. As peoples of other cultures founded and organized religious worship, Africans too could found their own Churches, ordain their own ministers and organize worship which suits African mentality and takes into consideration the African cultural values. **Inculturation** is the process. It is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people. The successful adaptation or implantation, in other words inculturation of the Christian faith within the African culture will largely determine the survival of Christianity in Africa. Such an adaptation should also be made to work in the areas of economic and political development.

Like most Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans, the white man and his land - **Onye Ocha** and **Ala Bekee** - have from childhood

fascinated me. The Irish missionary was the first who came closest to us when we were kids and attended Catholic liturgical services he conducted for the natives he had converted to Christianity. Some of us became altar servers as well as his interpreter when we got to high school. My father was among the first privileged Igbo in our community to serve under the colonial administration. He was the foreman at the Public Works Department (PWD) which served the District Officer (D.O.) and District Clerk (D.C.). About 30 to 40 men worked under my father who kept a roll-call or attendance sheet of the workers and paid their salaries at the end of the month. Those who missed work or came late were often marked "absent". As kids we learned that workers who were marked "absent" about 6 times in the month could be dismissed and would forfeit their retirement benefits. My father exercised great influence over those workers who were often threatened with termination when they were absent from work or did not carry out the orders of the white man efficiently.

My father, the D.O.'s foreman, was loved and trusted by the white man. When Africans took over the local administration from the white colonial officers he did not lose his job. He had wonderful *testimonials* from each outgoing or retiring District Office. These testimonials often printed in indelible India ink, were carefully framed and hung up in our parlor or sitting room. When we went to see our father at work, we were never allowed to approach the family of the white district officer, but it was easy to see from afar how orderly their premises looked, the quiet environment, the beautiful gardens and painted houses. There were also bigger and well-decorated storied buildings owned by rich Igbo traders and businessmen. But those buildings were located in the busy streets with no good access roads. The white man's residence or palace in the black township was meticulously kept clean and had everything that supplied the colonialists all the comforts of life. These included a swimming pool, electric giant generators for light and abundant supply of clean water. The workers watered the grassplots and flowers during the dry season and we thought it was really *sinful* to waste such amounts of clean water when we had none to drink! White kids played within the D.O.'s premises. We did not know how

white kids received their education because we did not see them in the local elementary or secondary schools. The D.O.'s residence was no different from the missionaries' rectory.

Because we imbibed the white man's ways of life, we learnt to make our own village compound and house look like that of the D.O. They did indeed look beautiful. Our father was fond of flowers, some of which he brought home from work. Flowers decorated our compounds like hedges leading to some of the footpaths to the other adjacent neighborhoods. Our father did not like too much noise because he told us that white man's house was always quiet and their children were well disciplined. We did not disobey his orders. English was no problem. Although our father had only four years of primary school (Standard Four) those days, he spoke like the white man and his handwriting was superb. Our mother had no formal education, but she shared our father's views on education and discipline. She is a very clever and industrious woman and at her age she was still cooking for herself and taking care of some of her household chores. What our parents learnt from the white man, they necessarily passed over to their seven children, all boys.

Without that first contact with the white man, it would have been impossible for our father to send all his seven sons to college and university overseas and in Nigeria. I have no intention here of showing-off the achievements of my family and brothers in Nigeria. But the difference is clear. The impact of the white man's civilization and particularly his emphasis on education can never be denied. We also gained and our father was the brain behind the achievements of his children. In fact this is another small way of paying tribute to our parents' wisdom, sacrifices and foresight. The first son (educated in Germany) is presently a professor of nuclear chemistry and head of department in one of the Nigerian universities. The second is a high school teacher. The third (educated in Germany and Leeds, England) who studied textile engineering, is a manager with a German company in Nigeria. The fourth, myself (educated in Nigeria, Rome and London and presently on sabbatical leave in the U.S.A.) is a Catholic priest. The fifth (educated in Germany) is an engineer in textile chemistry. The sixth (educated in Nigeria) became a practicing lawyer after he

dropped out of seminary, Catholic high school for young men training for the Catholic priesthood. The seventh, (educated in Nigeria) is a laboratory technologist with one of the university teaching hospitals in Nigeria. All are Nigerian citizens and are working to improve the lives of Africans in Mother Africa. None believes in the *search for greener pastures*. Abundant opportunities exist for them to work and earn perhaps a better living abroad, but none has succumbed to the temptation of abandoning the fatherland!

Who says that the white man is not great? Surely his influence will continue to revolutionize the lives of millions of black people everywhere. It is therefore not accidental that I have chosen the present topic addressing the *white man, his land and ways of life*. Without knowing it or systematically planning for it, it is obvious I had been preparing for this publication for a long time as I took courses in various European and American institutions of higher learning. I have always loved Theology, Black Studies, and Political Science although my best subjects in high school were Mathematics and Latin. Through various study trips, particularly to the Soviet Union, Greece, Israel, Canada and other European countries my knowledge of white man's culture has deepened. Innumerable opportunities I have had in the past 23 years to serve in various parishes and religious institutions in Europe and America have become invaluable assets in the irresistible crave to discover the *mysteries* surrounding the white man's successes in various areas of human endeavor.

What does the white man think about Africans and black people in general? I can write volumes on this topic. The title could be "**White Man: His Fantasies About Africa.**" I have a lot of stuff to keep my reader in a lighter mood for hours because I have experienced much in my closest association with white people – Italians, Germans, the British, Jews, Russians, and, of course, Americans. I have had close contacts with them, particularly in the simple white families. At no time did I ever take any offense when they asked me some disturbing (surely offensive) questions concerning *what Africans eat for meat, - for example - rats and rodents! Don't all Africans go naked like wild animals in the jungles? Haven't Africans tails? Don't they sleep*

on top of trees? I don't feel that such questions are foolish, because I believe that those asking such questions have not been well informed. Perhaps some are just prejudiced and would not like to hear something contrary to what had been circulating about the black world for centuries! But I am quite sure that no amount of argument could change some of their ideas. Often I try to avoid some controversial issues and discuss concepts with those who have already visited Africa for at least two to five years. It does not pay to discuss with those who visited Africa for one week and saw all Africa from the ship or the aircraft that brought them to East Africa for a week of wildlife jamboree!

I had often consoled some fellow Africans who complained about humiliating questions and distorted ideas the white people *still hold* about Africa and her people: Don't take any offense. They don't mean any evil. The problem lies in ignorance and misinformation, and in most part the news media are to blame. But we need to inform them better. It is our duty to provide enough valid information even when it seems most of our white friends have made up their minds about what they think about us. Charity requires all of us accordingly to correct those misleading ideas about Africa. While not succumbing to the cult of *inferiority complex* or to the temptation of accepting a *second-class status* among all peoples of the world, *white, red, brown and black*, we need to prove in the most practical way that we do not resemble that painting that had been made of us. In accomplishing this task, however, we have to be honest and present both sides of the picture – the good and the bad, the best and the worst. The rest of the world is the same. Africa is not so different from other parts of the world.

Search for Greener Pastures is part of my own reaction to some of the ideas of fellow Igbo, Nigerians, Africans, and blacks everywhere who argue that whites are always responsible for black peoples' woes and misfortunes today. True in part that may be, that we also share some of the blames. We are contributing to the deteriorating social, spiritual, cultural and political situations in Africa and in the black world today because many Africans are running away from their own responsibilities and are seeking refuge in the white man's land, which most of us think is the "**Promised Land.**" It is not late to

accept the inescapable truth that our destiny lies in our own hands. The younger generation of blacks will definitely hold us responsible for fleeing our fatherland, deserting our villages and communities and leaving only the aged, the children and perhaps a handful of corrupt leaders to carry on the work of developing our fatherland.

The primary aim of "**Search for Greener Pastures**" has been to alert Nigerians, Africans, Ndi Igbo, and black people in Diaspora about the devastating consequences of the mass exodus of Africans from Mother Africa to other parts of the world, particularly Europe and America. Using the Igbo example I have tried to highlight the factors I thought should be closely examined by all concerned Africans, non-Africans and the many white friends of black people everywhere.

In the **Introduction** I gave my reasons for using the **Igbo Experience** and pointed out why the **Igbo Dispersion** and the **Plight of the People**, including other African ethnic groups, should be a source of concern to African families, communities, and governments. The Igbo of Nigeria share a lot of values and qualities with other Nigerians and most Sub-Sahara Africans. The Igbo experiences may be somewhat similar to those of other Africans.

Chapter One is devoted to the **Igbo – Ancient and Modern**. What was their role in the black civil rights movements in the Diaspora? Igbo today as in the past are found in many parts of the world. It is not difficult to discover the Igbo among "peoples of color" in any part of the world, including North and South America and the Caribbean. Even though most Igbo of Diaspora have taken to foreign lifestyles, "by their fruits you shall know them."

Chapter Two takes up a detailed analysis of the negative consequences of the **Plight of the People and the Mass Exodus**. A crisis of identity and the loss of important African cultural values within multi-cultural societies, such the United States have put the survival of black people as a race in jeopardy. It is not only material wealth that makes a people great. When certain spiritual, social, and cultural values are neglected, material possessions may not mean much. In most cases the

inordinate pursuit of material wealth has brought more woes to society than poverty.

Chapter Three continues the discussion on the Igbo predicament. **Igbo Traditional Values are in Jeopardy.** *Things have fallen apart* in African society. Borrowing from Chinua Achebe, one easily discovers *why the center cannot hold*. Igbo in Diaspora as well as many in Mother Africa have partially or completely abandoned most of the old rich African heritage that gave life meaning to our ancestors. There is nothing wrong in changing to new lifestyles, but why abandon a custom or tradition that enriches a new or modern lifestyle? Many Igbo sons and daughters in Diaspora are considered *lost* because in their new lifestyles, they have lost the Igbo identity. They are neither *white* nor *black*. Neither the sky nor the land is within reach, and hence the theory of a lost people!

Chapter four takes up the problems of blacks in Diaspora in "**Welcome to America!**" All that glitters is not gold! The *greener pastures* are also pastures of frustration, surprise and disillusionment. Experience is the best teacher! This chapter has not much for Africans in Diaspora. But for those who still dream about the land of promise, it would be wise to take a look at some of the issues that could make their lives outside their fatherland miserable. Racism and harsh immigration laws may lead to years of frustration and lack of self-fulfilment in the white man's land. Not only a few have decided to return to their fatherland in Africa and suffer and die in poverty rather than suffering humiliation and a life of degradation. History continues to repeat itself. The "Back to Africa Movement" is not over. The movement goes on daily, if only in small ways. There are mixed feelings as well as confusion. There is a complex dilemma: to settle in a foreign land for the rest of one's life and "enjoy its greener pastures" or to return to the fatherland and contribute most positively, and in a concrete way to its development?

Chapter Five continues the discussion on some of the most disturbing problems of black people in Diaspora. These problems are deep-rooted and daily emerge in **Racial Slurs, and Hate Crimes** against black people. **Images of Scorn** painted by the white press about Africa and Africans affect black people

psychologically. Unconsciously blacks everywhere seem to accept the inferior status allotted to them by white people. The impact of colonialism, slavery, and racial prejudice is overwhelming. The status of second-class citizenship or inferiority complex is no doubt an aftermath of decades of racial discrimination against black people and has led to low self-esteem among blacks everywhere.

Chapter Six makes it clear that Diaspora Africans have always had **Crises of Identity**. Over the years the search for salvation of black people by African-American leaders has continued unabated. Their role and contributions to "Back to Africa Movement" cannot be forgotten. "Back to Africa" today should be seen in both the *physical* and *figurative* senses. Africans who have recently immigrated to Europe and America should consider what their fatherland is losing by their absence from Mother Africa. When these people wish to remain overseas let them not abandon or forget their fatherland. There are many ways they could contribute to the development of Africa.

Chapter Seven recognizes that the **Future of the Black Race** is still bleak. It is also **hard to predict**. Both white and black people themselves are held responsible for the poor situation in the black world, in Mother Africa and in Diaspora. All is not well with African-Americans. There is turbulence in the African-American communities and most families are torn asunder in black city neighborhoods. But the other side of the story is that the whites, too, share much of the blame for the black people's misfortunes and bleak future. Most whites have not abandoned their old misconceptions and prejudices about Africa and Africans. It is for the most part a lost battle to make them change and that is not good news for black people anywhere.

Chapter Eight takes up the issue of **Political Leadership** in the African nations and in other black nations in Diaspora. The main problem is lack of a system of government suitable for Africa and black people. Modern black governments do not need to copy from the whites. There is an urgent need to go back to the roots and rediscover the most suitable system of government to address African problems, especially those of ethnicity and quality of leadership.

The **Lingering Influence of Slavery in Africa and the New World** is evident in modern times. In **Chapter Nine**, I have tried to persuade my readers to share with me some of the thoughts, that most other authors - black and white - who have written on slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, neo-nazism and other similar issues concerning the misfortunes of the black race may not have considered seriously. If the "**Search for Greener Pastures**" has contributed anything of reflective value about the problems of black people globally, I think it lies especially in this chapter on **Slavery – Ancient and Modern**. It touches on a concept that should be of concern to blacks everywhere. It raises no false alarms. We have examined the hidden implications of search for greener pastures and the mass exodus of black people from Africa and immigration to the other parts of the world as their own world suffers from many pains of deprivation and oppression. **Neo-Slavery or Slave Trade in a New Garb**, is a reality today! As the Scriptures put it, it is "**Old wine in new wineskin!**"

Chapter Ten re-examines the values of the "**Back to the Roots**" movement, which many concerned blacks in history have considered vital to the survival of blacks as a people. African Americans, despite the ugly history of slavery have never forgotten their roots. A re-discovery of the rich perennial traditional African values can help salvage the deteriorating situation of black people in Diaspora.

In **Chapter Eleven**, the question - "Whither Ndi Igbo?" "Ndi Igbo, kedu ebe unu na eje?" - sums up the **Igbo and black people's Predicament**. This question has been posited in one form or another throughout this book. It is not only the "Concerned Ndi Igbo" who are worried about the future of the black race. Most foreign friends of black people express much concern as well.

I have not expected my Igbo, Nigerian, or African readers to agree with all I have written in **Search for Greener Pastures**. I have not claimed to have presented solutions to all African problems. I know that some of my countrymen would grumble and ask whether I was suggesting that they pack their belongings and head for the hellish situations in Africa. Every person is free to react as he or she feels.

CHAPTER ONE

The Igbo of Nigeria

I[g]bo culture can thus be characterized by its emphasis on individual achievement and initiative, alternative prestige goals and paths of action, a tendency toward egalitarian leadership, considerable incorporation of other peoples and cultures, a great deal of settlement and resettlement of individuals and small groups, and considerable cultural variation. Yet paradoxically, of all Nigerian peoples, the I[g]bo have changed the least while changing the most. While many of the former 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 behavior, emphasis on alternative choices, and goals, achievement and competition, and lack of strong authority have survived and are a part of the newly developing culture. But basic patterns of social behavior, of interpersonal relationships, have changed little, though symbols of success replace old ones and new goals appear. [Simon Ottenberg, renowned American Anthropologist.]

Since the early sixties researchers of Igbo history and culture have started to rely more on the accounts of the Igbo people – ancient and modern – provided by Igbo people themselves than on the accounts provided by European and other foreign writers. As a result of misinformation, distorted facts and figures provided by some foreign authors, it became necessary for Ndi Igbo themselves to investigate and furnish the outside world with more reliable information about Igbo people. Some foreign "experts" on African affairs spend little time in one or two African countries. Some have not even been to Africa. One white American writer, A Wellesley College classicist Mary Lefkowitz, in her book **"Not Out of Africa"** has written to contradict all that black writers have written about the contributions of ancient Egypt, an African "kingdom" to the modern civilization. She claimed she had visited Greece and

most countries of the Near East to collect materials for her famous book on Africa. The only place she never visited is Africa! She thinks that Black American writers and the "inspirators" of Black Studies are distorting historical facts. Together with some other critics of Afrocentrism Lefkowitz charges the mainstream Afrocentric scholars with intellectual inaccuracy, scholarly ineptitude, and blatant racism. She alone has all the facts about African History! But who should blame the whites if Africans do not provide the most reliable facts and figures about their fatherland and Africans?

Today there are abundant materials mostly provided by Ndi Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans about their people. The following facts provided by an Igbo writer may serve as a little introduction about "The Igbo and where they live."¹ Available archeological evidence has shown that Igbo civilization dates back to well over 4500 years ago when it separated from a common body of languages known as Niger-Congo. Many historical records suggest that the people known as Igbo may have migrated into modern-day Igboland from areas further North and this thesis is apparently corroborated by ancient *Nri Stories* which claim affinity with such Northern groups as the Igala located in the Benue State of Nigeria. At the same time, other traditions also exist within Igboland that point to other sources of origin or ancestry, such as the tradition held in Western Igboland whose people trace their ancestry to the famous ancient kingdom of Benin, located in the Mid-western region of the country. Further more, other historical accounts exist within the Arochukwu and Ngwa peoples of Southern Igboland that raise alternative theories of origin.² These other "alternative theories" may refer to those presented by another Igbo writer, Uzoma Onyemaechi.

The Igbo of Nigeria have often been likened to the Jews of *Erez Israel*. Do both peoples share common ancestors or destinies? Perhaps such details of ancestry are superfluous. Nevertheless there are some common qualities and idiosyncrasies, that link the two peoples in various ways - in social, economic, religious, and political spheres of life. As Uzoma Onyemaechi observed, despite the efforts made by Forde, Jones, and other anthropologists, few scholars could

produce facts adequate to support with absolute certainty an accurate analysis of Igbo origin. According to him there is a certain school of thought, however, from colonial times that runs contrary to popular Igbo belief that Igbo civilization might have evolved from Nok, Ife, and Benin civilizations. The accepted doctrine is that the classic transition from Stone to Iron Age came to Nok culture from Meroe or Phoenician settlements in the Maghreb (Okigbo, 1986)³ But on the inquiry, "Who are Ndi Igbo?" Onyemaechi still observes that historians of Igbo culture have not agreed on their exact origins:

They have located the Igbo originally around the Niger-Benue confluence; thence, due to population pressure, they migrated through the Niger. During the migration, the Igbo moved from Egypt, through the Sudan and Southwards to their present location. Archeologists have based certain of their conclusions on Igbo child-naming and meaning of names assigned at birth. Naming/Circumcision ceremonies, for instance, are as important to Igbos as they were to the Hebrews of old. One has only to read the Old Testament to note the similarities between Hebrew customs and those of the Igbo in this as in many aspects of life.⁴

On the important issue (at least for foreigners and younger Igbo of the Diaspora) of "Who the Igbo are," Nwabu provides some information. According to his account, Igbo people are among the three main linguistic groups living in Nigeria today. Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba groups are the other two. The Igbo live in the southeastern portion of extremely diverse Nigeria that is home to about 470 separately spoken languages. As in much of Africa, however a few groups are dominant with the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba groups accounting for over 60% of the population and 80% with the addition of other prominent groups such as Edo, Ibibio, Ijaw, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv.

The southeastern area of the country is itself home as well to numerous other groups located or near the Cameroon border that have yet to be fully classified. Within each group there is a rich history of language, customs and culture. The

"region" that once used to be referred to as "the Cameroons" was in fact part of Nigeria. One of the dominant political parties before the Nigerian independence of the 1960 was in fact named N.C.N.C (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons.) It was after the plebiscite or referendum of the early sixties that the Southern Cameroon opted for autonomy while the Northern Cameroon decided to remain Nigerian and the region was re-named "Sardwana Province", the present Gongola State of Nigeria.

But as Nwabu pointed out in his write-up about *The Igbo and Where They Live*, what is certain today is that the people referred to as Igbo number an estimated 13 million (according to the figures of the 1991 census) in their traditional states of Abia (2.7 million), Anambra (3.3 million), Imo (2.9 million) and Enugu (3.8 million). But since these figures were taken more states have been created in Nigeria. In addition to the four traditional Igbo States a fifth one - Ebony has been added recently. However, there are probably around an extra 3-4 million living all across the country, particularly in neighboring states such as Benue, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers, as well as in the major cities such as Abuja, Benin, Ibadan, Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos and Port Harcourt. In addition, a similar number is estimated to live in other countries throughout Africa and other parts of the world. All this suggests an Igbo-Speaking population totaling approximately 19-20 million – a number larger than many modern nations.⁵ Some other scattered accounts indicate that Igbo people number more than 23 million.

Diaspora - a Greek word, meaning *dispersion* or *scattering* and always employed in religious and political circles to refer to the scattering of the Jews all over the countries outside of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity, is often used by Igbo writers and Historians to refer to hundreds of thousands of Igbo people scattered all over the known world. What have the Igbo of dispersion, namely, those living outside Igboland got to do with Jews living outside the Land of Israel? *The return of the Jews from Diaspora* is strongly associated with the survival of the people and the rebuilding of the nation of Israel, and correspondingly, the Igbo return to Igboland.

Although the invitation is mostly limited to Jews alone, Israel is known to be the only nation in the modern world that strongly encourages immigration. Israeli authorities openly invite Jews living and earning their living in other parts of the world to abandon their host countries and return to the land of Israel. In fact thousands of Jews, mostly from the East European countries have responded to the invitation. More than 800,000 Jews have returned since the end of the Cold War. They have settled in *Erez Israel*, helping to establish very strong and dominant Jewish presence in the troubled region hitherto referred to as Palestine. Those who do not think it necessary to return to Israel are nonetheless true sons and daughters of Abraham, the Patriarch, and grand ancestor and father of the *Chosen People*. He was the man Yahweh promised "to multiply his offspring like the stars of heaven, or the sand on the shore of the sea" (Genesis: 12. ff). Jews living in Israel, as well as those still in Diaspora, contribute their quota and massively too, toward development and security of the land of Israel.

This is an interesting phenomenon when compared to the situation of the Igbo people, who claim to have much in common with the Jews. But, ironically, while the Jews everywhere see *unity* and *number* as crucial to their survival in a hostile environment, the Igbo of Nigeria are *scattering* more and more all over the world. Some have lost links with brothers, sisters, families, and friends in Igboland. In fact very few Igbo in Diaspora think that they would one day return and settle in their fatherland. And for their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, such a possibility is very remote in their minds. This is a sad phenomenon in the history of the Igbo people.

Other significant features lend support to the alleged similarities between Ndi Igbo and the Jews. The religion of the ancestors (*Judaism* and *Igbo Traditional Religion*) influences the customs and traditions of both people wherever they settle. The synagogue is both the religious and cultural center of the Jews. For the Igbo, although there is no such physical structure, as a *synagogue* or *temple*, the *Igbo Union* is the unifying force, moral center of religious, social, cultural and political activities of Igbo people.

The "Union" and the Igbo Diaspora

The Diaspora Igbo do not fail to establish *the Union* wherever significant numbers of the people settle and earn their living. The descriptive adjectives often attached to the word *Union* points to the objectives or goals of such associations – *Igbo Improvement Union, Igbo Development Union, and Igbo Progressive Union*. But whichever name they give to their *Union*, it is obvious that the *Union* forms the basic foundation for Igbo *Unity and Survival*. Meetings are held at various family quarters, apartments, rented halls, and Churches. The *Igbo Union* operates in almost every capital city of the United States where Ndi Igbo live in significant numbers. There is Igbo Union in Russia, in Rome, and even in a smaller city of Padua, where many younger Igbo people have settled to work. In England, Japan and in various German cities, and even in the tundra regions of Iceland and Norway such gatherings of Diaspora Igbo take place regularly.

When it comes to *the Union*, an organization, in one form or another, Ndi Igbo are successfully united and try to live together as a people. Where two or three Igbo families are gathered, the entire community resides. Igbo families do not fail to form cultural, political, social and religious groups or communities to promote the interests of Ndi Igbo. Such interests include fund raising activities to help members who may be in need. Among development projects usually undertaken, are hospitals, schools, roads, rural electrification, and road projects. Diaspora Igbo often collect money and send home for similar projects. Any Igbo who fails to register in such unions is at a disadvantage.

There are various such groups and organizations formed and many are working in full capacity in many cities of the United States. Some are the well-known **World Igbo Congress, Obigbo, Ohanaeze and Nwannedinamba**. They are all **Igbo Unions for the Advancement of Igbo legacy**. No Igbo should be surprised at such welcome developments. But as far as the author of the present work is concerned, the most important thing is that these Unions and Associations should start seriously addressing all the serious issues touching the survival and development of

Igbo people and Igboland. Definitely such a project will take care of Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The most populous African nation that has fallen from grace must be helped to regain its lost power and position as the leader of Africa and all black people. One of the best ways of effecting any meaningful project that would put back Nigeria to her former position of honor and respect is not far-fetched. The Igbo scientists, scholars, business men and women, medical doctors and engineers scattered over Europe, Asia and the United States of America should consider returning home to the fatherland to help in the rebuilding of the economic, social, spiritual, and political structures of Igboland and Nigeria that have fallen apart. Such a program is at the heart of this publication.

There is no doubt that Ndi Igbo living and doing business in Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan or Korea are brought together in the *Union*. Gatherings begin with a *roll call* and the enrolment of new members in the city and may end in eating and drinking. There is usually a review of events and projects undertaken to assist relatives in Africa. Prayers are usually said by the elder (preferably one of the titled men or chiefs). And in his prayers the leader does not fail to remind the younger generation of Igbo in Diaspora where their true home or family is. In life or death, their true home is Igboland.

Because of the political, social, religious, and cultural importance of these unions, Igbo families in Diaspora belong to these groups. In good times they engage in development projects. In times of adversity, they seek means to protect their people's interests when such interests are in jeopardy. In death the union often takes full responsibility, including the expenses involved in interring the deceased in the home village. The Igbo people recognize only one citizenship, namely, Igbo. Igbo sons and daughters who become citizens of other countries are not recognized as such. The community at home regards them as temporary sojourners in faraway lands, in search of wealth. They are expected to register their children as soon as they are born, and parents are urged to ensure that the names of their children born abroad are entered in the community register in Igboland. They are expected to update their contributions for development projects at home. While some negligent parents in Diaspora fail

in these obligations, families at home usually undertake such responsibilities on their behalf.

It is usually in times of adversity, and of course, at death that the true home is remembered or discovered. True satisfaction is had at home, among the brethren and community. There is nothing more consoling than the warmth and security offered by brothers and sisters, extended families, and entire community of the Igbo race. For the Igbo in general this represents the true picture and aspirations of a people. As numbers continue to grow, some Igbo communities in Europe and America have started building cultural centers in the large cities where Igbo concentrations are high. The Igbo community in Minneapolis, Minnesota has embarked on a five-year development project, which will include the building of a multi-million dollar cultural center. This will house a museum for the exhibition of Igbo art and paintings. A School for the study and development of Igbo culture and art is expected to be established immediately after the building is completed. A school for Igbo children will take care of Igbo language, customs and traditions. This is expected to benefit children born in the United States and whose parents have lost touch with Igbo customs and tradition. Foreigners interested in the history and culture of Igbo people are also expected to benefit from the project.

A socio-religious celebration of *Thanksgiving and Harvest Festival* is a remarkable event celebrated by most Igbo in the United States, Italy, Great Britain, and some other European countries. This is the annual *New Yam Festival*. In some parts of the United States this festival goes by the name *Igbo Fest*. Like the African-American *Kwanzaa*, for Ndi Igbo everywhere - at home or in Diaspora, these are moments of joy and thanksgiving. Thanks are rendered to the God of the forefathers for the countless favors bestowed on His children most especially for the gift of land and support for rich harvest. *New yam festival* naturally begins with Thanksgiving services in various Churches and ends with sumptuous feasting and cultural displays. *Kwanzaa*, African American festival, is celebrated by millions of blacks in the United States. The weeklong holiday of *Kwanzaa* was developed by the American scholar and activist Maulana Karenga in 1966. *Kwanzaa*, like the *New Yam Festival*

in Igboland celebrates African family, community and culture and is of course based on African harvest celebrations. The name Kwanzaa comes from Swahili for "first fruits of harvest."

Unlike the Jews of the Diaspora, the Igbo Diaspora has nothing to do with punishment from an angry God whose *chosen* people disappointed, as they neglected His laws and followed the ways of the impious. From earliest times, records - oral and written - had showed that Ndi Igbo have been an *outgoing* and adventurous people. At one time or another the Igbo have left their families at home in search of economic opportunities in near and far distant lands. It may be rare to find an Igbo family that has no sons, daughters, or kinsmen and women living and earning a living outside Igboland.

Nearer home, even before the colonialists came to the land known today as Nigeria, Ndi Igbo were known to have settled in Edo (Idu), then part of the Benin Kingdom. They worked in the rubber plantations for which the present Edo and Delta States of Nigerian were then known. Many Igbo farmers and traders have also settled in various parts of the West Coast of Africa, including the Cameroon, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Dakar, Middle Belt regions of Nigeria and in the Islands of Equatorial Guinea (Fernando PO) and Principe. Later they moved into the farthest parts of Northern Nigeria where they settled as farmers and businessmen. Eze Patrick Acholonu confirmed these findings in an address to his people during the anniversary celebrations of his 60 years as the traditional ruler of Orlu, Imo State, Nigeria.

Such reminiscences were part of his boyhood accounts of the Igbo of Nigeria. "As a child," he remarked, "I remember that the generations of my father and grandfather traveled on foot to far distant places like **Ahia Eke, Isiokpo, Diobu, Uboafor, Ahia Makara, Umumasi, Onumiri, Okirika, Ogoni, Obigbo, Azumiri, Itu, Ikot Ekpene and Calabar**. They also traveled to Mid-western Nigeria, crossing the River Niger at Onitsha, to **Asaba, Benin, Agbinikata, Ore, Owo, Akure, and Ifo**". The purpose of such journeys did not escape the memories of the Eze: "They traveled to these places on trade missions, while some others remained at home carrying on their farming, harvesting palm fruits, cocoyams, and cocoa." Such distant

travels opened further routes for more enduring relationships, like intermarriage, which the Eze remarked "brought joy and stronger bonds among the various ethnic groups that came to know one another."

As far as *attachment to land of the forefathers* is concerned, Ndi Igbo have much in common with the Jews. As a true Jew would not forget the *Erez Israel*, so would a true Igbo not forget Igboland. While the Igbo labors for daily bread in a foreign land, often half of his earnings go to the support of families and projects at home. No matter what possessions he may amass in a foreign land he does not fail to appreciate the value of the most important possession he may have, namely a befitting house in Igboland. In this personal and family house his remains will lie when they are brought home from the land where he has been only a sojourner. His burial place is that portion of land near this family house. It is usually assumed to be a tragedy if an Igbo is buried abroad. Not to be buried at home is a deprivation of the warmth and joy that only the community - dead or living - can offer!

In times of plenty or adversity the Igbo does not forget the *land*, the true home of the people. For big development projects - cultural, social, religious, and political the Igbo residing at home lean heavily for support on their sons and daughters in Diaspora. It was mainly the Diaspora Igbo community who helped sustain the Biafran secession of the mid-sixties and thus the subsequent three-year civil war. The Igbo in Diaspora set up propaganda machinery in most European cities - Zurich, Bonn, Paris, Israel, Moscow etc - to help fight the war. They did not fail in shipping relief materials and arms for the war efforts. At one stage during the war Igbo students in those cities abandoned the classroom for the street to tell the world the truly story of the Biafran tragedy.

The Igbo of Diaspora did not stop with offering money, relief materials, and arms in support of Biafra. Civil engineers, medical doctors, and business entrepreneurs flew into the Biafran enclave to assist in the most practical ways in the *win-the-war-efforts*. Most of them were the famous Igbo engineers and scientists who stunned the world with their new inventions in weapons of mass destruction. Some of these included the

Biafran fighter jets, Biafran shore-batteries (or Ogbunigwe - killing en masse), Biafran rockets and rocket launchers. These Igbo engineers and scientists were the brain behind the successes of RAP (*Research and Production Unit*) that manufactured and supplied the much needed local software and hardware in an enclave completely blockaded from land, sea, and air. Their ingenuity in the use of available local materials to manufacture high quality products and hardware marked an unforgettable stage in the black man's struggle for self-reliance.

Ndi Igbo and Self-Reliance

There are legends of men who have started from extreme humble beginnings and made it to the top without losing touch with humanity and charity. One of these is the story of the Igbo genius slave born Jugbo. Jugboha from Amaigbo, Imo State, Nigeria, later known as King Jaja, began life as slave in Bonny, graduated to a canoe paddler, successful trader, and ultimately, head of the House of Pepple and finally became King of Opobo, a king not to be surpassed. The Saga of Jaja so charmingly written by de Cardi (1899); Dike (1956); Jones (1961) etc, illustrate the Igbo at his best: courageous, adventurous, hardworking, charitable, obstinate, proud, and faithful to his friends and benefactors.⁶

Even though the end of the war also saw the end of the Biafran revolution that precipitated the dispersion of the Igbo scientists, the efforts to advance technologically have not been abandoned by the younger scientists and engineers of the post-war era. Only recently the world received the news of the first *made-in-Nigeria* saloon car known as the Z-600. This was launched in Owerri, Nigeria. The Igbo engineer and chief executive of Izuogu Motors, Ezekiel Izuogu told his admirers at the launch that took place mid August 1997 that he conceived, designed, and manufactured the car, which has been tested by the country's vehicle inspectors and found to be roadworthy. "The entire body work and chassis frame is our design from first principles. We also made the mould from which the body can be stamped out to produce hundreds of thousands of cars."

The Z-600, built on a 4-stroke 1800 cc engine, Izuogu said, can average 30 kilometers per gallon of gasoline. The engine can also be mass-produced and put to other uses such as agricultural mechanization, standby electricity generators and tricycles. The unit price of the new car is between 150,000 and 180,000 naira (between 1,800 and 2,000 U.S. dollars). Nigeria has several vehicle assembly plants but new cars are priced beyond the reach of the average salary earner. This has forced many car owners to patronize the booming market in used European vehicles. Izuogu said he needed 2.4 million dollars to set up a factory that would be able to roll out about 30 Z-600 saloon cars a year. "It is as low as this because we have the expertise," he added. Indeed, Izuogu has challenged Nigerians to invest in similar technological ventures. By manufacturing the car, he has demonstrated a spirit of self-reliance and that the theory of technology transfers was a myth. The breakthrough showed that Nigeria, which is endowed with human and material resources, could as well play a great role in world economy like the Asian Tigers.

Speaking at the launching ceremony, the retired Nigeria's former foreign affairs minister, Ike Nwachukwu, said: "It is gladdening to see a black man, a Nigerian, design and manufacture a car that is indigenous to Nigeria." Nwachukwu said no country could be free economically without having its own industrial base. "Education must be addressed squarely as democracy prevails," he said. The then Nigeria's minister of science and technology, Sam Momah, described technology as the "bedrock for development." He added: "Technology is prosperity and progress." Momah said the ministry would assist Izuogu Motors to produce the new car brand for the market.⁷

More than a few Nigerian and Igbo engineers were unhappy with the government's post-war destruction of most of the remnants of the Biafran scientists' inventions and establishments. The Biafran war establishments which included the airports at Uli, Uga, and Uturu, were all constructed under the cover of darkness to forestall massive air raids from Nigerian warplanes. Those airports of course matched most European standards. Other such establishments are the miles of underground secret labyrinths in which Biafran engineers and

warlords hid their most precious war materials. Biafran fighter jets, warships, armored cars, and rocket launchers were among the weapons of modern warfare, which if preserved could have helped inspire younger African scientists in the struggle to match their counterparts elsewhere in scientific and technological development.

There is yet another side to the story. "If those Igbo scientists had been encouraged," some argue, "perhaps Africa, in fact the black race would not be lagging behind in development in science and technology." It is often recalled that at the end of the Second World War, even though the Germans and the Japanese were woefully defeated, the victorious allies, particularly the Americans certainly made good use of the German and Japanese scientists who helped their countries fight at war. Most of those scientists were *exorcised* from punishment for war crimes and were welcomed to the United States, where they were lavishly offered accommodation and facilities to continue their scientific inventiveness.

Ndi Igbo believe that the Nigerian government's failure to *welcome* the Biafran scientists at the end of the war and encourage their enterprise hastened the Igbo *dispersion*. Concluding that their talents were no more needed on the home front encouraged most of the scientists to immigrate to Europe, America, Asia, and the Middle East. Here these Igbo scientists are serving their host countries in various capacities as researchers and producers of the much needed hardware and software of modern science and technology. What Africa has lost, other nations have gained! There is strong evidence that the failure of the Biafran secession contributed in a grand measure to the *dispersion* of many Igbo people. The first in this group are those Biafran engineers and scientists, who felt that corruption among high-ranking army officials was behind the Biafran tragedy. The engineers and scientists offered their services, made many sacrifices toward the war efforts. But alas! Confirmed rumors of sabotage ruined the Biafran cause. And everyone paid heavily with a humiliating defeat, massive losses and destruction in human and material resources. It was as if the gods had avenged their anger on a stubborn and stiff-necked people.

It was a tragedy of a scattered, humiliated, despised, and rejected people. The younger generation of Igbo who were a few months or years old or were not yet born during the civil war will not stop asking why no friends of big European and American powers came to the rescue of the Igbo other than France and General de Gaul who supported the Biafran cause. All the big political powers, including the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union sided with Nigeria. It was impossible for any other nation no matter how powerful to withstand the massive onslaught of the allied forces of America and the West. Adolph Hitler and Germany could not withstand it. Not even Saddam Hussein of Iraq with millions of soldiers and modern weapons of mass destruction could withstand a few days of Western firepower from land, air, and sea during the Gulf War!

Explanations have been offered for the lack of support from the Western and even African nations. Many areas - Europe - Africa- Asia - Latin America and even the United States face minority and secessionist problems. By supporting secessionist Biafra, they would be inviting trouble. "Unity, and not disintegration or balkanization should *always* be cherished and supported." Another speculation among Igbo elite was that the West was panicking as a result of Igbo advances in technology. *The thesis ran thus: If we leave this people to advance, they may become a threat to their neighbors and even the entire world. Some of the modern arms they are manufacturing are really dangerous. They should be stopped. These chicks should not be allowed to hatch.* It was in other words jealousy that inspired the Western hatred of the Igbo and thus their rejection as an independent state among the community of nations. Like the Jews, Ndi Igbo are thought to be *very clever* and *unpredictable* people who should always be closely watched. For the same reason the Arabs, the closest neighbors of the *chosen people of Yahweh* have never been comfortable sharing borders with Israel.

There are other reasons for the *Igbo rejection*. Among their Nigerian neighbors, Ndi Igbo are not very much liked. Because of their outgoing and flamboyant lifestyle, Ndi Igbo are thought to be arrogant, overbearing, and disrespectful. Other Nigerians mockingly interpret the three words - **IBO** - (wrongly

written) to mean - **I, Before Others**. They mean that the Igbo people want always to be on top. The Igbo may rebel when he fails to have his way! Igbo neighbors, in communities, workplaces, and clubs are always wary of the *movements* of their Igbo counterparts. Perhaps out of jealousy and prejudice their friends and neighbors think that the Igbo will deceive them, displace them, or even take over their land and property with force, intimidation, or tact. The Igbo are thought to be too clever for their age. Although most of these fears and prejudices are definitely baseless, more than a few of their acquaintances believe that Igbo are *dangerous* and should be closely watched.

The Igbo people's insatiable search for wealth points to their sophistication in fraudulent practices. Ndi Igbo do not usually take to *petty* business. They can be greedy and aggressive. They do not believe in half-measures. They strongly believe in the saying: "Onye choro iri awo, ya rie nke gbara abuba." Igbo people do not eat toad and it is not a delicacy. But where one chooses to eat a toad, one should eat the fattest! Igbo are often opportunists and utilize any chance offered them as leaders or even followers to grab what ever is within their reach to enrich themselves and their families! The Igbo, who wants to defraud, employs a rare expertise and sophistication in modern technology. Only an expert in the field can differentiate a fake currency minted by an Igbo expert from the genuine. Igbo experts could be said to be the authors of the discredited *419 scam* in Nigeria! Most of the evils that Chinua Achebe exposed in his book: *The Trouble with Nigeria* may apply mostly to the Igbo. Achebe's book can equally be given the title, *The Trouble with Ndi Igbo!*

Susceptibility to bribery the Igbo can go to any length in corrupt practices. Such practices eventually contributed to the downfall of Biafra. Some of the songs composed during the civil war to expose the corrupt practices of the army officials are preserved for posterity. One song translated into English goes like this: *See! I went to war with my brother. Strong and talented he is, but he would not fight. He accepted money from his enemies and betrayed his people. His insatiable lust for dirty money led my brother to betray his fatherland. See how crazy*

love for money and illicit accumulation of wealth made my brother loathsome to his people!

Much of the Igbo post-war dispersion was surely as a function of corruption in both pre-war and post-war Nigeria. One of the most renowned Biafran scientists, now living in the United States vowed to have nothing more to do with the fatherland - Igbo or Nigeria. He was so disillusioned by the poor situation of government and economy, caused by corruption, that he thought the damage done so far was irreparable. He has lost love, initiative, and motivation toward any measure to salvage the fatherland. He strongly believes this story about his fatherland. Among the depressed Nigerian community in Johannesburg, South Africa, a joke was said to be doing the rounds. As part of the conclusion of a world economic summit during the 1980s, each head of state paid homage to God and asked Him when their respective countries would be self-sufficient. The Almighty boomed to each of them in turn that it would happen, but not in their lifetime. Crestfallen and much in tears the delegates returned home. When it came the turn of the Nigerian head of state to ask when his country would be self-sufficient, it was God who wept, replying: "It won't happen in My lifetime!" As far as this illustrious son of Igboland and Nigeria is concerned, there is no reason to return to Africa. He has since become a naturalized citizen of the United States.

The younger generation of Ndi Igbo in Diaspora also think they have little or nothing to do with the land of their birth. Stories of corruption, political and economic instability and insecurity back home scare them. Although such anomalies and vices are found everywhere, these younger people believe that Ndi Igbo and Nigerians in general are so blessed with human and material resources that it is absurd to find sons and daughters of Nigeria lingering around in Europe, Asia, United States or other parts of Africa in search of work or food. There are an estimated 10,000 Nigerians residing in South Africa. These include doctors, university lecturers, teachers, managing consultants, university graduates and small businessmen and women. The poorer ones languish in the depths of Hillbrow, northern suburb of Johannesburg. One of these desperate young Nigerians in South Africa spoke the minds of his stranded comrades in

Diaspora: "We are stranded here. If someone gave us a ticket to leave South Africa today we would gladly take it - but only if the destination is anywhere other than Nigeria."⁸ It is a tragedy and such is the desperation of Nigeria's youth that they are willing to gamble their future in any country but their own, which they feel, has failed effectively to use its own natural resources, namely, its citizens, as a result of rampant corruption and economic mismanagement.

The Igbo of Nigeria: Ancient and Modern

*Though colonial rule [by the British] transformed Igbo society in many respects, it did not destroy the Igbo identity or cultural soul. The Igbo have remained "Igbo" in their attitude to and style of life; that is, while changing they were able to preserve their "ethnic essence" because they were astute enough to use in their own way, the new institutions and values introduced by colonialism.*⁹

Most of the accounts of the Igbo people were written by European missionaries and anthropologists who came in contact with this group of people in pre-colonial and colonial days. Such writers would include G.I. Jones, John C. McCall, and Simon Ottenberg among many others. Most prominent among all should be G.I. Jones who was born in South Africa. After his studies in Oxford he joined the Colonial Service and served as an administrative officer in Nigeria from 1926 to 1946. Most of his service was in the Eastern Region where he became District Officer for Bende and adjacent divisions of what was then Owerri Province. Later Jones became a lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge but was to return to Nigeria in 1957 on a commission to inquire into the indigenous political systems and role of chiefs. He returned again in 1963-64 and 1964-65 for ethnographic and historical research. This project included the collection of village histories written by local chiefs.¹⁰

Jones's researches were extensive and most Igbo students of Anthropology are not always happy with this author

because of some of his inaccurate accounts about the culture of Igbo people. Some students who have read Jones well are particularly critical of his accounts of the Aba women riot of 1929. In pre-colonial Igbo tribe women took part in ethnic warfare but never as combatants. They were never shot at. They functioned like *Red Cross* workers and could cross lines of battle to remove the dead and the injured. During the 1929 Aba Women riot, in Eastern Nigeria against the British colonial government and their native warrant chiefs in Igboland, many of the women who took part in the demonstration against the colonial tax laws were massacred or injured during the violent demonstrations. Jones in his account of this incident thought that those Igbo women were mad in confronting the well-armed colonial guards with nothing to protect themselves or launch their own attack. He ridiculed what he called the women's foolishness in thinking that African amulets or charms could protect them. The white anthropologist had no good knowledge of African culture that among the Igbo, women were never shot at the battlefield! This is most unlikely when they also carry green leaves or palm fronds during demonstrations. Carrying of palm fronds is a mark of peaceful protest.

Whatever his "misinformation" about the culture of the people he was writing about, G.I. Jones remains still an authority on "Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria". His most important publications from this time period included the ethnography *The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of S.E. Nigeria*, [with Daryll Forde] (1950) and his important historical work *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, (1963) which examined the great coastal states of Kalabari and Bonny. His other works included *The Art of Southeastern Nigeria*, (1984); *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912*, (1986); *Ibo Art*, (1989); and *From Slaves to Palm Oil*, (1989). Another author of great repute on the Igbo of Nigeria is John C. McCall, Professor of Anthropology, South Illinois University-Carbondale. His regional interests are Africa, Nigeria, and Igbo speaking peoples. McCall is a specialist on Ohafia, the Igboland of Mighty Warriors, Erudite Scholars, and Successful Entrepreneurs.

But Chinua Achebe - the real expert on the Igbo, in his renowned novel *Things Fall Apart*, was the first Igbo writer to

provide a comprehensive account of this people in *fiction*. For the first time people in the outside world were able to read a book, that shed light on Igbo people. Most of what Achebe wrote about his people revealed their way of life, customs and traditions before and during their first encounter with the white man - the colonialists and the missionaries. The Igbo people of *Things Fall Apart* were the primitive and the crude. Even though their system of government was even more advanced in *democratic principles* than one would find elsewhere in those days, Igbo religious and social lives were still guided by a world of spirits who demanded obedience. It was a spirit who ordered the killing of the lad Ikemefula. In the colonial era, the spirits warned the Igbo about the dangerous advances of the whites into Igbo territories and their ambition to establish their presence among the tribes of the Lower Niger River.

But some of the Igbo of *Things Fall Apart* had taken to the white man's way of life, had embraced some of his institutions and establishments. They had closed their ears to the warnings of the oracles. The emancipated Igbo allowed the white man to settle among them. The result of that fatal error was tragic! The white man was clever. He put a knife on the rope that held the Igbo together and they *fell apart!* As the title that the colonial master chose for his book - *The Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* indicates, the pre-colonial Igbo ethnic group was uncivilized. But Ndi Igbo were ready to accept changes, abandon old and primitive ways of life and embrace anything they found useful in the white man's religion and government.

Igbo Dispersion: Great Cause for Alarm!

This publication is meant to alert the Igbo of Nigeria, including families in Igboland, in our fatherland Nigeria, and Igbo families in Diaspora to the sad consequences of the massive dispersion of Igbo over the world. It also looks into ways and means of confronting what may still constitute a danger to the survival of the entire Igbo race and particularly Igbo in Diaspora. Igbo in Diaspora include those who are permanently or temporarily living abroad in various parts of the world. It is an undisputable fact that there is no part of the world where one may not find an

Igbo. Ndi Igbo live, work, study and practice their businesses in even remotest parts of the world's tundra and desert regions.

There is need to alert families at home and abroad because the massive migration of Igbo people has proved a great *loss* to the Igbo race and Nigeria. Despite the *advantages* of such a spread there are distinct *disadvantages*. As the advantages are obvious - increase in revenue for families at home, vast opportunities abroad for self-fulfilment as well as social, political, religious, and cultural upliftment, there is no need to dwell on arguments supporting migration. We need to dwell more on the *disadvantages* to emphasize the need for caution on the part of immigrants and *dispersed* Igbo. The Igbo are well known everywhere even though they share many features with other ethnic groups in Nigeria - particularly the *Yoruba*, the *Efik*, and *Rivers People*. But irrespective of these physical features, it is *not* always easy to distinguish the Igbo from the rest of black race. A Nigerian's accent reveals the Efik, the Yoruba, the Edo, or the Hausa/Fulani of Nigeria. But unless an Igbo speaks his native language, it may be difficult to point out an Igbo man or woman in a crowd.

The Igbo is so versatile in languages that (except for the color of skin) one can mistake him for a *German* when he speaks German, *French* when he speaks the French language. He speaks perfect *Italian* after short sojourn in Italy and can mimic Italians in body gestures and manner of speech. One may find it difficult to distinguish an Igbo from *African-American*. Igbo kids born in the United States are more *American* than African-Americans. Young Igbo man who went to Russia to further his education learned to speak perfect Russian in a space of two years. In a short time he brought his Russian girlfriend home on vacation in Nigeria. The friend knew no word of English and had to depend on the young man to serve as her interpreter! As long as it serves his immediate purpose, an Igbo student is ready to learn languages like Chinese and Japanese that may not serve any useful purpose when he returns to his fatherland.

Igbo people see the business world as an endless horizon where opportunities exist for everyone who can make it. Hence they have little or no sympathy for the weakling. Procrastination has no place in their work ethic. It is now or never! As for work,

the Igbo are not lazy people and do not refuse any type of job. Because of the "tragedy of birth"- commitment to the traditions of the ancestors, communities and families - the Igbo would undertake varied difficult jobs to meet commitments at home; otherwise they would be thought to have failed. The family tradition, for example, requires the Igbo to take over the leadership of the family (if he is the first son) after the death of the father. He must look after the rest of his brothers and sisters, including the distant relations and extended families. As he plans for his own family, he must remember the needs of the extended families.

To meet these needs the Igbo should necessarily work hard and plan well. In spite of high educational qualifications and special talents, the Igbo is always ready to accept jobs that are not befitting to his academic standards - a university professor in the morning, then car-washing or dish-washing in the afternoon, in order to get few more pennies to meet various family commitments. It is not rare to see him in the night, keeping watch at a grocery store or gasoline station, still for a few more pennies! He easily adapts to every situation and does not think that any job that would fetch him some more money could be despised as low or degrading. While he is not always free of corrupt practices - including *fast business* and illegal accumulation of wealth, in most part the Igbo man's successes - fame, power and wealth must be attributed to the sweat of his brow. The Igbo is a generous donor. Having worked hard and successfully amassed wealth for his family, he does not forget his community, friends, and even his host country. He donates lavishly and can even embarrass his superiors with unsolicited gifts! Because he recognizes everywhere he lives and works as his second home, he is involved in most of the development projects of the community. This open lifestyle facilitates his acceptance among even a hostile community. He learns the local languages easily and adapts to the culture.

The Igbo gets involved in many things to keep life going. He doesn't think he is too old to "upgrade" his qualifications in order to secure a better job. For example while he is a technician or teacher, he may enroll in a business administration class. His wife, already with three, four, or more

children and even expecting one may enroll in a university or college as a part-time student trying to earn a second or third degree. Stories abound of Igbo housewives who gave birth during part-time courses in Nigerian universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. After nursing their babies for a couple of days, they continued with their programs. Some even invite the grandmas for baby-sitting while moms attend regular lectures! There are few fields of human endeavor in which one may not find an Igbo in a remote city or village; in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, or South Africa. In Western and Eastern European countries, in the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and surrounding little islands you will find the Igbo. In the United States the population of the Igbo with full citizenship and permanent resident status may be enough to constitute the 51st State!

In various fields all over the world the Igbo hold very important positions as heads of departments in colleges and universities. In the fields of medicine and science they occupy top positions. Someone has hinted that Igbo scientists occupy top research positions in NASA. Many Igbo and Nigerians may not have heard of **Philip Emeagwali**, a United States based Igbo scientist. The following headlines on Philip Emeagwali man provide enough insight into the caliber and achievements of this illustrious son of Igboland.¹¹

- **Famous Scientist hails from Igboland:** "In this day and age when Japanese, Chinese or anyone remotely resembling Asian descent is automatically presumed to hold superior Mathematical and technological aptitude...."
- **A Nigerian, A Computer Wizard?** "A Nigerian has joined the ranks of Steve Job of Apple Computer and Bill Gates of Microsoft in the world of communication and computing."
- **Nigerian scientist leads computer field with discoveries, inventions:** "When a spectacular, year-long 50th year celebration heralds the 1946 invention of the first computer, a young man from Nigeria will be one of the principal honorees."
- **50th Anniversary of computer:** "1996 marks the Computer's 50th birthday and Philip Emeagwali was saluted

during the yearlong celebration as one of the brilliant pioneers behind this modern miracle."

- **Real Genius:** "Microsoft CEO Bill Gates may be the world's best known software and marketing genius, but as far as computer wizards go, Emeagwali is in a class by himself."
- **Nigerian "Calculus" takes America by storm;** "[Emeagwali] is continuing in his endeavor to show the world that the field of sciences, computers, and Internet is not the exclusive reserve of the likes of Albert Einstein and Bill Gates."
- **Genius of Our Age:** "Distinction could well be Philip Emeagwali's middle name. A high school drop out - and a former war refugee, this US based Nigerian is today the wonder boy of supercomputing." (Guardian interviews).
- **One of the World's fastest humans:** "Emeagwali attracted the attention of many industries and investigators when he won the Gordon Bell Prize by showing how he used a \$6 million massively parallel computation to perform the trillions of oil field-modeling computations at three times the speed of the mightiest \$30 million supercomputer. He hit a computational speed of 3.1 billion calculations per second."

As Philip Emeagwali exemplifies a courageous, intelligent Igbo man, younger ambitious Igbo students should not think that the ride to greatness is always easy. They may listen to these remarks by the Igbo scientist: "I want my son to be inspired by the fact that I was a high school drop-out and ex-refugee who overcame racism and made scientific contributions that benefited mankind."

Although not naturally inclined to politics, Igbo people are known to be good politicians. There are many Igbo scholars who believe that the best politicians (past and present) the blacks of America have produced are Igbo. Some point to the Igbo roots of black American politicians and statesmen like **Martin Luther King Jr., Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois.** Some very successful African- Americans in the *show business* are said to have Igbo roots too. Someone has speculated that the talk-show wizard and millionaire **Oprah Winfrey** is Igbo. Her family name (un-mutilated - **Oparah**) identifies her as

an Igbo daughter of Africa. In the Igbo language, *Oparah* is a household name and meaning the *first son*. The feminine equivalent is *Ada* (first daughter). But as Igbo family is patriarchal, *Oparah* is the proper family name.

Naturally inclined to education and business, the Igbo often can take up politics. But he has not been as successful in this field as elsewhere. Because of the Nigerian political experience, especially after Independence from Great Britain in 1960, the Igbo has come to hate politics. Many *Igbo experts* attribute this attitude to the result of the Igbo rebellion of mid-sixties, which ushered in the Biafran secession and consequently the Nigerian civil war. According to this theory, many Nigerians, particularly the so-called minority groups of then Eastern Nigeria, the British, and American diplomats had fears that if Biafran secession succeeded Igbo people would dominate the rest of the minority groups in the Biafran nation and perhaps enslave them as well! But Igbo politicians and scholars, as well as those who believed strongly in the Biafran cause point out that what really led to Biafran secession was the lack of unity and effective leadership in the Nigerian federation. Oppression by the Hausa/Fulani oligarchs was also unbearable. Before and after independence, the Igbo people were known to have had strong support for Nigerian unity.

But his successes and progress in various fields of endeavor have often prevented the Igbo from tolerating the weaknesses and failures of others. There is no doubt that the Igbo could be arrogant. He often has a very high opinion of himself and can be overbearing. He seems always to be in a hurry and this leads him to look for shortcuts to achieving his goals. This last attitude has often put him into conflict with his neighbors and authorities. Despite Igbo weaknesses, however, many people all over the world continue to admire the rare qualities found in the people. The German word "tuchtigkeit" describes these qualities in the following English rendering: *skill, efficiency, cleverness, sagacity, competency, shrewdness, astuteness, ingenuity, proficiency, productiveness, and intelligence*. Some Igbo leaders believe that it is on account of these qualities that they are loved by friends and criticized or hated by their detractors.

The Igbo: Civil Rights Activists and Successful Entrepreneurs

Records show that many "Heebo" (Igbo, Ibo) slaves perished on their way to the New World. Some fled from their masters and refused to serve under inhuman conditions. Most were shot as they tried to escape or as they organized rebellions to free themselves and their fellow blacks from white man's bondage. There is also strong evidence that the surviving Igbo slaves were among the frontline black political activists in the United States and elsewhere in the slave colonies where human rights activism was strong.

The **Biafra Revolution**, like the **Haitian Revolution** during the hot days of slavery and emancipation, was conceived as a turning point in the history of blacks whom colonialism and slavery had made a laughing stock of the rest of humankind. Biafra was conceived as an ideal state where blacks would be solely in-charge. The nation was to compete with other nations of the world - white and black - in all areas of development, science and technology and in all the other areas of human endeavor. But that was not to be, for Biafra was crushed precisely by the same foreign forces that had kept the black race in perpetual servitude. Today few African nations can boast of any political or economic success because of the same reasons, which have continued to impair the black man's progress. Independence has not brought the desired peace, development, prosperity, and progress.

The Igbo of the post-colonial era is a different personality altogether. Borrowing easily from different cultures of the world, in political outlook he is basically an *aristocrat*. Democratic ideals were deeply embedded in the pre-colonial system of tribal and communitarian governance fashioned by the elders and traditional rulers. For him democracy should operate from the local to state and federal levels. The Igbo believe in free enterprise and the *law of the survival of the fittest*. They believe in freedom of speech based on democratic principles, hence the saying in Igbo language "Igbo Enwe Eze". (Igbo People have no kings). Decisions affecting the Igbo community are made by

"Ohanaeze". (Oha and Eze - The People and the Chiefs) Equality of opportunity, as well as freedom of speech therefore rules out any form of dictatorship. Democratic principles were so embedded in Igbo traditional society even before the white colonists set foot in Black Africa.

The Igbo life-style is basically *capitalistic* and *pragmatic*. Any economic system that does not encourage competition and free enterprise does not win the Igbo's approval. Because the Igbo believes that as far as economic development is concerned the state has little or nothing to offer, he massively engages in private and self-development projects. As far as the Igbo is concerned the state or government is moribund and therefore waiting for government to solve the people's problems is a waste of time. Much of his family income is spent on development projects, such as the provision of good roads, water and electricity. Ndi Igbo spend a sizeable portion of their hard-earned money in building and maintenance of schools and other educational establishments.

The Igbo is generally a successful businessman. He finds it easy to set up a small-scale industry in a short time, employ workers and correspondingly help in the development of a rural community. He is very resourceful and his ingenuity has often brought him numerous problems from jealous competitors. It not rare to find natives, who criticize and mock their very sons and daughters, politicians and businesses men who have failed to help them over the years of adversity, lack of basic amenities and jobs. "But look at this Igbo, a 'foreigner' who settled in our community and has in a short time transformed our lives and rural community", they say. Soon they may proclaim him 'chief' of their community in the face of their own big sons and daughters. As a result of petty jealousies that may arise from such confrontations, their neighbors and other host communities do not always acknowledge such wonderful qualities of the Igbo. The Igbo believes that he must succeed. Therefore what the Igbo looks for is one who will hire him. In the field of sports, the Igbo is sure to come on top if a team, club or association would hire and train him. Male and female Igbo athletes can favorably compete with most of their foreign counterparts like **Michael Jordan, Tiger Wood, Evander Holly Field, Mike Tyson** and a

host of other international figures in amateur and professional sports and games. There are many young Igbo folks languishing in the villages looking for someone to hire them. If they were given the chance they would prove their worth.

The Igbo *religious outlook* is governed by deep faith in the Supreme Being. Such outlook is once again embedded in the Igbo Traditional religion. It is unusual to find an Igbo who professes atheism, regardless of his level of education. The names Igbo people bear or give their children point to their belief in God. The Traditional Religion of the Ancestors, which shares much with Christianity influenced Igbo acceptance of the Christian religion brought by the European missionaries. The Igbo are predominantly Christians and constitute the largest block of Christians found anywhere on the African continent. Very few Igbo are Moslems. Islam is the predominant religion of their neighbors in Nigeria. Most Igbo have never accepted Islam because of that religion's use of brute force or coercion in conversion. If any Igbo adopts religious faith that does not take its root in Traditional Religion or Christianity, it is most likely it is for utilitarian motives.

On the whole modern Igbo people have much in common with white people, whom they have always imitated. The average post-colonial Igbo is a spiritually well developed, emancipated, educated, forward-looking, aristocratic, and often professionally successful businessman. He believes that as far as achievement is concerned, the sky is the limit and he does not hesitate to engage in high-risk ventures. Because he does not usually trust the government or the ruling class, he organizes his own private business enterprises. Government or publicly sponsored social services are no match to his privately organized ventures. Even governments and other public bodies rely on his privately established bus services, water provisions, market development, and environmental services. The Igbo is indeed an entrepreneur! In their search for wealth and education, Igbo people have continued to disperse among other ethnic groups within and outside Nigeria. Wherever they go they bring along them the unique qualities for which Ndi Igbo are admired or hated. Their immigration to other parts of the world brings plenty of good things to the Igbo race as a whole. But at the

same time such massive immigration to the other lands should be a source of concern to the black world.

There is an urgent need to reverse the trend in which Africans, particularly the Igbo and Nigerians are abandoning their fatherland en masse for other countries. The causes of their plight are well known. The frustrations of a young Nigerian languishing in self-imposed exile in the United States were vividly expressed in his reactions to the recent developments in the Nigerian political scene in which two prominent key players died in "mysterious" circumstances. He thought their death marked a turning point in the struggle "to make our home a better place" for the country's staggering number that has fled the fatherland:

Many Nigerians had to leave their country because of hardship to seek greener pastures, leaving a potential one behind. Who wants to be in a foreign land, where one has no self-esteem, where one is laughed at by riff-raffs who by virtue of their color are assumed to be superior. Having stayed here for some years, I do not see the advantage I have over a progressive colleague back home. We must keep on fighting to make our home a better place.¹²

CHAPTER TWO

The Plight of the People and Mass Exodus

Crisis of Cultural Identity

This chapter examines the tragedy of the *Igbo Dispersion*. It discusses the *mass exodus* of Igbo people from Igboland and their consequent immigration to other parts of the world. The exodus constitutes a great danger to the survival of the people as well as a great loss to *Igboland*, the *Nigerian nation*, and the *black race* in general. As an Igbo aphorism concedes, it is most reasonable to begin searching for the lost black goat while it is still day light. When darkness sets in, it may be difficult if not impossible to find it. Perhaps it is not yet late to appreciate the need to stop the exodus.

Culture, embracing tradition, customs, way of life, identifies a particular people, ethnic group, or race. Culture as way of life of any named people may become irrelevant at some stage in their history in an entirely new environment or in a multicultural society such as the United States of America. Small and large groups of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Africa have been swallowed up in the multi-cultural American society. Except for their names, skin colors, and faces, there isn't much left to help identify these immigrants and their original cultures. Except for yearly ethnic cultural festivals in the larger cities, not much is left of the original cultures of the immigrants. The Igbo people of Nigeria are no doubt affected. Our contention is that most of the Igbo sons and daughters in Diaspora are fast losing their identity. And this loss will cost the Igbo race much in the not too distant future. By ignoring the importance of Igbo language, for example, the Igbo in the United States in particular are losing their most important cultural identity. Thousands of Igbo families live permanently in the United States. At least 98% of their children, some more than 30 years old were born in the United States. And many more join this number daily. They

speak little or no Igbo and almost all speak perfect American English. Nothing distinguishes them from the African-Americans.

Do their families or parents teach them their native language? Studies show that very few Igbo parents worry about this anomaly or care about the future of their children. When asked, some parents simply respond: *My children can understand a little Igbo; but they can't speak the language!* What a disaster! Then the inevitable question: *If they don't know the language, what is their identity? Who are they then?* For many of the parents and almost all their kids born in the United States, their home is America. Parents believe that their children born and raised in the United States are truly *Americans* and hence may have little or nothing to do with Africa any more!

Igbo Language and Cultural Identity

Igbo names are not mere appellations; they are "capsules" of concepts, history, lineage, religion, expectations, philosophy and the entire gamut of human existence. In Igboland, your name is you. [Ahamefule: Trends in Igbo names in KWENU: Igbo Diaspora Magazine (December 1998),

Igbo people maintain strongly that "**there is something in name.**" Unlike some other peoples the Igbo do not arbitrarily impose names on their children. Every Igbo name has deep-rooted meaning and most of the names portray or expose the exigencies and circumstances of birth. A name is not an empty expression chosen at random and imposed on an individual. A naming ceremony is therefore a big celebration among Ndi Igbo. At such ceremonies the entire community gathers to *claim* the newborn for the community by giving it a name. The obligations of the community toward the moral, religious, and social upbringing of the new member of the community are strongly emphasized. Without an Igbo name the child has no identity. There is always *history* behind each name and some of the names speak for themselves: **Ozoemena** - *Let it not happen*

again (probably after many tragic deaths in the family); **Onwubiko** - *Death, please!* (Pleading, after many deaths in the family - It is now enough!) **Onwuchuruba** - *It was death that destroyed and put an end to prosperity;* (in circumstances where the family, hitherto prosperous, is now in abject poverty). Misfortune of death is the root-cause! **Onwuanaku** - *Death does not accept gifts in exchange for life.* Offering of gifts or bribe cannot prevent it! **Ka-ona-adi** - *As usual* (in either positive or negative reminiscences).¹³

As they point to the circumstances of birth, most Igbo names likewise reveal the Igbo *religiosity* and belief in God. They also imply various forms of supplication, wishes, and affirmations as in the following - **Chukwudi** - *God exists;* **Chinedu** - *God leads;* **Chibuike** - *God is strength, all powerful;* **Chika-dibea** - *God is greater, more powerful than any medicine man or medical doctor;* **Chidiebere** - *God is merciful.* Others are **Ngozi** - *Blessing;* **Udo** - *Peace;* **Ihunanya** - *Love;* **Obinna** - *Father's wish;* **Mma** - *Beauty.* The beauty of Igbo and African names and the re-discovery of their cultural values have provoked a *revolution in authentic tradition* among Africans in Mother Africa and in Diaspora. In Europe and America, very few Africans these days go by foreign names like **Peter, Smith,** or **Brown.** The rejection of African names at baptism by the early missionaries really baffled most Africans. It was a fatal error, perhaps born out of ignorance that the early missionaries identified some African names with what they referred to as *paganism, occultism, or fetishism.*

KWENU magazine¹⁴ in a tribute to Late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik of Africa) - "Our Heroes: An Igbo giant of Africa." lends support to the Igbo affirmation "**that there is something in name,**" illustrating with Zik's names. As most school children in Nigeria know from Nigerian History books, Zungeru is in a predominantly Muslim Northern Nigeria. In this town, Zik was born on November 16, 1904 to Maazi Obed Chukwuemeka **Azikiwe** and his wife Chinwe. Of Igbo ethnic extraction, Maazi Emeka Azikiwe had settled in Zungeru as a clerk in the colonial office of Sir Fredrick Lugard.

The Azikiwes called their beloved son **Nnamdi** (Igbo for "my father lives.") This was in line with ancient Igbo custom: the first child in an *obi*, a new patrilineage, is usually a reincarnation of the paternal grandfather. Ndi Igbo are sociable, hardworking and peaceful people who believe that where one lives, there he thrives. (*Ebe onye bi ka ona awachi.*) And so a local seer came visiting. The man of Allah called the child **Ibrahim** (Muslim for **Abraham**); and predicted that the child would be the father of a nation. The parents would later christen him **Benjamin**. Benjamin Ibrahim Nnamdi Azikiwe grew up like children of his era, but he was born for greater heights.¹⁵

Today Africans everywhere strive to restore the lost dignity of the African culture by giving their children authentic African names, full of beauty and meaning. Africans and particularly those in Diaspora realize the implications of such cultural identity. But alas! Most of the Igbo kids born in foreign countries do not value their Igbo names. Parents of course know the implications of the failure to give their children Igbo names after birth. Some of the kids however do not *know* what their names mean. Believe it or not, some of these young people do not know their names or how to pronounce them!

One Igbo man, married to an African-American woman has given their first son a beautiful and most memorable name - **Njiko**- (tied together, coming together, and uniting -two races or groups). What a pity! Neither the mother nor the boy - now 12 - can pronounce the beautiful name - Njiko! The boy goes by his other name - *Mike* - imposed by the mother. When the children and possibly their parents, too, do not understand or speak Igbo language, what becomes their identity? Who are they? Americans or Igbo? The father says they are *African-Americans*. Who will doubt him? At least the Igbo concept of unity (Njiko) still points to his or their roots! But this is not a comfortable solution to this dilemma. There are thousands of Igbo kids in America who are like *Njiko* or *Mike*. We identify these among the numerous *lost children of the Igbo race*. They are *lost* because in not too-distant future they are likely to *shade*

completely their remaining cultural roots and there will be virtually nothing remaining to identify them. No one will address them by such names, as they (the kids) would not respond, certainly when they do not realize that they are the ones being addressed!

Most Diaspora Igbo for one reason or another *mutilate* their Igbo names. One of the reasons, they insist, is to make it easy for the white people to pronounce such names with little or no difficulty. But this reason looks absurd. The mutilation of Igbo names has rendered most of the names meaningless and consequently these names have little or nothing in common with the Igbo cultural heritage. Some Igbo people go by strange names like O'Mirry - originally, *Omeire* [One who goes beyond bounds to achieve]; Chijez- originally *Chijioke* [God is the sharer - He gives to whom he wants - Man can't intrude in the destiny of others; God is in-charge]; O'bekeh - originally *Onyebueke* [Who is the Creator?] The contributor to the article **Ahamefule: Trends in Igbo names**¹⁶ was not happy with this mutilation or "shortening" of Igbo names. He points out that the shortening of (Igbo) destroys their meanings. Nkechi becomes Kechi or Kikki; Nnenna, Nina; Chukwuemeka goes from Emeka to Emmy; Ngozichukwuka moves from Ngozi to Ngo or Goozi; Ekwutosi becomes Ekwii if not Equy; Okechukwu, Okey; Chinyere or Chinwe to Chi Chi and on to Chi baby; Onuora to Onii, etc.

Some of the reasons offered by these Igbo who mutilate their names are equally ridiculous. Some insist that as a result of racism in America it has always been difficult for them to secure a good job in spite of their qualifications. The story is that these Igbo job applicants are often rejected as soon as their applications are received by employers. Because the employers or interviewers are unable (or rather unwilling) to pronounce such names, it is alleged that most Igbo applicants have always failed to secure reasonable jobs in America. The allegation or observation nevertheless may be true. It may also be that the interviewers are unable to identify the applicants' racial group *in a society where race rules!* One Igbo man who badly mutilated his family name, surely to escape racial identification, boasted that his interviewer mistook him to be Hispanic! He got a nice

job! If such great numbers of Igbo people who mutilate their names, by omission or commission become *Hispanics, Asians, Afro-Americans, or even Indians and Europeans*, is that not a loss to the Igbo race? What one race has lost another has gained!

Interracial Marriage and Culture

Another means through which the Igbo *lose* great numbers of sons and daughters is interracial-marriage. As outgoing as they are, the Igbo easily adapt to other cultural traditions. Many Igbo men are known to have married successfully from other races. Many Igbo men have European, American, and Asian wives. These women confirm that Igbo men make good husbands. The Igbo men in general take good care of their wives and children. And as a result of this cherished virtue often lacking in many other men in modern times European and American women are known to prefer the Igbo in marriage more than men of other races or nationalities.

Foreign wives who have lived in Igboland or have visited the land of their life-partners have confirmed that the Igbo are good husbands. While they marry outside their cultural group and often feel happy and fulfilled, very few Igbo families in Africa give approval to such marriages. In the early sixties and seventies, Igbo people in America who married American women - white or black - were regarded as *lost sons of Igbo race*. The families of such men usually received condolence visits from their neighbors, who sympathized with them over the misfortune that had struck such families. Like *dead fellows*, they could be forgotten, as no rescue operation was possible. Worse still for the families if those involved were their oldest sons! It sounds strange that the Igbo - individuals or groups - have such attitude toward cross-cultural and inter-racial marriages. But the reasons for this opposition are well founded. The traditional Igbo family knows that under no circumstances would their son forget his roots. Their primary concern is with the foreign wife. Since women play a very respected and important role in the Igbo family and community, the first source of anxiety is that the woman might not adapt to Igbo culture. It is even possible that she might reject and ridicule the Igbo way of life.

There is of course the language problem, which is the ultimate barrier to communication and eventually to cultural adaptation. Will she learn the language of her new family? Without language something already is not in order. The Igbo marriage tradition is often a complex phenomenon. No Igbo marriage contract succeeds without an offspring, and at least a male issue for that matter. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, childless marriages enter deep crisis. A second wife may be the only solution! There must be a son to take over from the father and maintain the family name and ancestral lineage. Not even an uncountable number of female issues can make up for a baby boy! The question then is whether this foreign woman would be ready for such a *drama* at one stage in the marriage venture with an Igbo man? In order not to offend their foreign wives, some Igbo men in Diaspora are known to have secretly taken second wives, who remain in Igboland. In some few cases the first wives accept such arrangements. The Igbo does not usually take to divorce as a solution to his marriage problems. This true story of *Igbo/white marriage* illustrates our point. Sometimes such arrangements end in a disaster.

Dr. X, an Igbo doctor studied medicine in an East European country where he met and married a beautiful white woman. After graduation they moved to another European city where Dr. X practiced for many years before they returned to Igboland. They had three beautiful daughters and one was a replica of the father. I met them in Europe in the early eighties and Dr. X was my science teacher in High School in Nigeria. Dr. X did not care whether the marriage with the white woman produced a boy or not. He loved the woman dearly. As a medical doctor too, he knew that women are not always to blame in some marriage problems. The woman on her part wanted no further pregnancy. There was however, pressure from the family and community that Dr. X should take an Igbo wife. He tried to compromise in secret. The wife smelled a rat and immediately started preparing to leave Igboland for her native country with her daughters (the first then 20). Something inexplicable happened and the woman took ill and suddenly died. The daughter was angry and suspecting that her mother had been murdered, sued for redress. Before the trial began and in fact

shortly after the death of the wife, Dr X also took ill and died too! There was panic everywhere.

The Igbo families in the past vehemently opposed their sons taking wives from non-Igbo communities, principally because of cultural differences. In most cases there was the feeling of loss on the part of families and communities. And some of the wives, on account of prejudices and misconceptions refused to go back to Africa or even visit the land of their husbands. As the man may not be able to force the wife to go back to Africa, there is usually no other option for all - parents and children as well as grandchildren than to settle permanently in a foreign land! The Igbo community often believes that such cross-cultural and interracial marriage is a misfortune instead of a blessing to the entire Igbo people.

Search for Greener Pastures: Impact on African Development and Values

The following section discusses in detail what the Igbo people are losing in *human, material and spiritual resources* as a result of the massive migration of Igbo to other lands. Whether it touches Igbo sons and daughters living in the Great Britain and America or those living in the remotest parts of Western and Eastern Europe, the stories are the same. Is it truly reasonable to speak of *loss* when, in most cases, it is assumed that the Igbo in the Diaspora support their families and communities at home? Are the Igbo who have immigrated to foreign countries, found jobs, and settled there not the live-wire of their families in Africa? How could one speak about their sojourn in foreign lands as a *loss* to Mother Africa? These are some of the questions that will be addressed. It is not an exaggeration to maintain that in *human resources*, Igbo people are losing a great number of their sons and daughters living abroad. Even though official records are not easily available, reliable sources estimate the number of the Igbo living outside Igboland at no less than five million. This number would include all their children born and being raised in these places. In most cases, these children automatically become citizens of the countries of their birth. Even though the Igbo community does not recognize dual

citizenship, it is obvious that most of these children if they have any choice would prefer living the rest of their lives in Europe and America. Over 90% of Igbo families in the United States believe that their children and grand children have little or no bond with the Igbo race far away in Africa. Many of the kids can't even locate their towns and villages in the world or Nigerian map and fewer than 2% have actually visited the place they refer to as *Africa or village!*

The economic losses are great! The Igbo are very talented people who realized quite early that education is a source of power. The entire universe belongs to an educated person and he can get to the top if he wishes. Even the illiterate parents of the pre-colonial and pre-missionary era who never cared about the white man's new way of life as found in Christian religion and government were wise to send their children to the same white man to be educated. The white man was powerful and could conquer and rule over other peoples and nations because he was educated. His wisdom came from much learning, the Igbo thought. He knew much about the world around him. The Igbo families are serious about the education of their children. Some sell their most valuable properties, even land in order to be able to send their children to school. Not satisfied with the type of education offered at home by the colonialists and missionaries, Igbo communities as far back as the early 1940s and 1950s had devised scholarship schemes to enable them send some of their sons and daughters to Europe and America to acquire the white man's skills.

More than 98% of Igbo students who studied in England and in the United States from the early 1950s to the late 1980s were sponsored by their local communities in Igboland. They were among the first medical doctors; engineers, university dons and lawyers Africa ever produced. Some were successful and remained grateful to their people and communities that made their education possible. Unfortunately some of them did not live up to expectations. It was not because they did not achieve their goals in England and America. No. They did. These did not return to their fatherland to supply the needed manpower for economic, social, and political development. There was no justification for the sacrifices the communities made to sponsor

their studies overseas. The communities often were bitter with those folks. It was a great financial loss to the Igbo communities and Africa at large.

As a result of the massive migration of the most talented Igbo engineers, medical doctors, university dons, lawyers and even religious men and women to other parts of the world, particularly Europe and America, the Igbo race suffers chronically from lack of manpower needed for development in the black world. The greatest of the tragedy is that most of these talented Igbo people have taken up poorer jobs in their host countries. This is often a result of inability to secure the proper job in their areas of specialization. Most jobs these illustrious and talented Igbo sons and daughters take up overseas are really not befitting to their high level of education. It is not rare to find an Igbo University lecturer or engineer driving a *taxicab*. Some are *security guards* at supermarkets and public and private buildings. Many are sales clerks. Some of the highly educated Igbo women are *baby-sitters* and *dishwashers*. Surely there may not be anything wrong with one accepting such jobs in Europe and America. However the black race would have made a tremendous progress in development if their sons and daughters were engaged in the professions in which they had actually trained. What a loss to the community and nation!

Loss in hard currency is huge. As for most Africans in search of greener pastures overseas, such a venture often turns out to be a **Search for Security**. The feeling of insecurity often arises from fear of death through sickness and disease. The African, no matter his level of education can be very *superstitious*. Often feeling surrounded by some hostile spiritual forces, menacing him and even his entire household; he travels far and wide in search of protection. As far as he is concerned some persistent headaches or similar aches on the back or legs are some results of deadly poison ('*nsi*'). Perhaps an overseas medical check up would be necessary.

A staggering number of rich Africans - businessmen, government and military officials, professional and the clergy - would usually visit Europe and America several times a year for medical check-up for ailments such as eye, ear, heart, and kidney problems, suspected cases of cancer or some other ailment.

Many Nigerians visit Europe and America for dental check-up or even to get their broken eyeglasses repaired! Even when African physicians and medical experts working in African clinics and hospitals succeed in diagnosing the ailments and prescribe cures, the suspicious and wealthy African is never ready to take risks. He prefers overseas solutions to his problems. The cost of such medical treatment overseas does not worry him because he is able to foot the bills! Sometimes affluent Nigerians spend vast amounts of money in Europe. One Nigerian businessman once bought a *German trained police dog*. Unable to handle the dog, which it was alleged cost a life's fortune, he had to provide flight tickets for two German veterinary doctors to fly the dog to Nigeria. There had to be two doctors because one said he was afraid to travel to Africa alone for fear of wild animals! The dog, of course, had its own flight ticket!

Nigerians know how to squander money on obsolete and abandoned equipment. As Nigeria continues to experiment with various political systems, so also the craving for new educational systems continues. The most recent was the 6-3-3-4 system of education, which was to be the best comprehensive education for African high school kids. As technical equipment was to be the bedrock of the system's success, obsolete equipment for technical education was imported from East European countries. Most of the machinery and other useless stuff are still lying abandoned in the crates that brought them to Nigeria from Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czech Republic! There are endless examples of reckless spending involving millions of dollars in hard currency. Such ventures are often conceived as being the best for Africa. No adequate provisions are made for spare parts or trained personnel to operate the equipment. Environmental disposal metals bins and public toilet cabins imported to Nigeria from various European countries are abandoned after few months of service. They are littered all over the countryside and street corners.

Wealthy African women prefer overseas' maternity clinics to those at home. So they book appointments with the most expensive child-delivery clinics in London, Paris, and New York. After safe-delivery, some shopping and vacation they return home to continue their normal life among their

counterparts in Africa. It is sad to imagine how Nigerians and many other rich Africans spend their life fortune on medical treatments overseas, when indeed most of the cures are available in Africa. The staggering sums of money transferred to overseas' banks to facilitate easy payments of hospital bills, including hotel bills and other expenses are part of the huge loses which many African nations sustain as a result of search for greener pastures and security by the affluent Africans.

Search for security by affluent Africans has another side in the unpleasant story of search for greener pastures overseas. Fear of insecurity in black society usually generated by the state of political and economic instability has always had a devastating effect on development in Africa. Because the political situation that often dictates the state of the economy is unpredictable, many affluent Africans think it is safer to deposit their fat revenues (usually acquired illegally through embezzlement of public money and other fraudulent activities) abroad. Thus large sums of public and private money find their way into foreign banks, usually **Swiss banks**. It is public knowledge that many Africans in the highest rung of the economic ladder have huge accounts in banks all over Europe and America and such sums run into billions of dollars. While overseas on vacation the unpatriotic African draws from his foreign accounts. He uses a good part of it to purchase family houses, summer and winter resorts, and castles. Many African heads of state, top political and military leaders and civil servants are known to own fabulous estates overseas. They pay for the maintenance even though these facilities are rarely used during the year.

There is no doubt that their overseas collaborators and bankers make caricature of these mindless and unpatriotic Africans. While peoples of the world go to the International Court of Justice to press for the return of looted treasures or illegally acquired valuables deposited in Swiss banks, African leaders worry less about their own treasures, mostly hard cash stacked away in foreign banks. How can they talk about it or even enact legislation making such fraudulent activities criminal offenses, when in fact they indulge in such iniquities! Because these unpatriotic Africans feel their most valued treasures are

secure overseas they care little about security and stability in their native lands. In times of emergency they are the first to flee their fatherland for the *paradise* they have prepared for themselves elsewhere. Nevertheless, often caught by nemesis, not many of them live long to enjoy their loot. Because they have the resources to foot fat medical bills overseas, these discredited sons and daughters of Africa care little about good medical facilities in their fatherland. What a lamentable situation!

Loss of **Spiritual values** is enormous. Cultural differences have a great impact on foreigners who find themselves swallowed up within the dominant culture in a multi-cultural society. Many smaller ethnic groups in the United States, for example, have not given up the battle for cultural identity. In various ways these minority groups struggle to maintain their identity and teach their children their languages and culture. While not rejecting integration within the mainline society, they dread the loss of at least their ethnic languages, hence the debate on *bi-lingual education* in American schools. Most of the cultural and religious values found in the Traditional Religion of the Igbo people have continued to sustain the people in their search for development and self-fulfilment.

In a recent study, an Igbo clergy man, **Denis Chidi Isizor**¹⁷ underlines these values as a type of patrimony that must always be safeguarded from contamination or corruption. These values compare well with Christian religious values and in some areas range higher in the hierarchy of virtues highly sought after by peoples all over the world. Unfortunately some of these values that are placed under the larger umbrella of *Spiritual Values* are being undermined or contaminated by other foreign values. According to Denis Isizor's evaluation of *Igbo Traditional Religious Values*, the following are among the elements of the Igbo traditional religion that have perennially contributed to the spiritual, social, cultural, and political development of Igbo people everywhere. They cannot be ignored.

In the religious sphere there is widespread belief in a supreme God, unique and transcendent. And as the Igbo have a sense of the sacred and of mysterious; there is high reverence for

sacred places, persons and objects. Sacred times are celebrated. Religion enfolds the whole of life and there is no dichotomy between life and religion. Belief in the efficacy of intercessory prayer is widespread and Ancestors mediate between God and man. Bodily purification is required before one may approach to offer sacrifice to God and there are provisions for spiritual purification as well. It is believed that sin harms the public good, hence there are periodic purification rites to promote the public welfare. Worship requires a fundamental attitude of strict discipline and reverence.

In the ritual sphere, rites form an essential part of social life and ancestors and the dead are invoked by rites. The seasonal cycles and the stages of life are sanctified by ritual action. The whole person, body and soul are totally involved in worship and sacrifice. As there is co-responsibility each person contributes his share in a spirit of participation. Symbols bridge the spheres of the sacred and secular and so make possible a balanced and unified view of reality. Rites of passage, of initiation and of consecration are widespread. There are many rites of purification of individuals and communities and the sick are healed in rites, which involve their families and the community. Most of the traditional blessings are rich and very meaningful.

In the religio-moral sphere there is respect for life and as children are treasured, abortion becomes an abomination. Taboos and rituals guard the sacredness of human life. There is respect for the dignity of man and each man has his own inalienable **chi** ("selfhood", "destiny"). To be faithful in undertakings is regarded as becoming a man. That life makes moral demands is accepted, and this is shown among other things by the sense of the person and attachment to life itself. Sin is perceived in both its personal and communal dimensions. Moderation in the use of alcohol is inculcated and only adults may drink. Drunkenness is shameful. Indeed moderation is required in every aspect of human behavior.

In the religio-cultural sphere attention is given to locating man within his environment and making him feel at home in it. Tradition is handed down through stories, poems, hymns, proverbs, riddles and art. The whole community is

involved in training the young, and education itself has necessary community and social dimension. Therefore the moral education of youth is taken seriously. Old folk are held in high esteem. The community regards their wisdom as prophetic, that is, as able to give direction for living in the circumstances of the present day. Marriage is an alliance between families and persons and cultural provisions are made to uphold its stability. Youth is given a gradual initiation into life and society.

In the religio-social sphere hospitality is a duty and is the most common value in Igbo Traditional Religion. Between kith and kin and people of the same clan there is a very strong sense of sharing, solidarity, and belonging. Efforts are made to secure and promote justice and peace within the community. The nuclear family and the extended family have been the pivots of the African social system. Respect for authority, sanctioned by the ancestors, is strong and represents the common will. The poor and the sick are taken care of as well as widows and orphans.

African and Western Values in Conflict

As most of the African traditional values are self-evident in the Igbo cultural setting, we will illustrate our point using a few examples. In all we will be showing how some Igbo people are abandoning these traditional values in the face of the more dominating western culture. Massive exposure to the dominant foreign culture has had devastating effects on the moral, social, and spiritual lives of Igbo sons and daughters living outside Igboland. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the Igbo are usually vagrant in their search for new opportunities in other parts of the world. In his bid to gain acceptance and hence succeed in his new home or community, an Igbo man can engage any woman within his reach in marriage. She could be a non-believer, a Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu or even a Jew. As long as she is willing, the prospective Igbo husband does not mind accepting her in marriage in spite of her limitations and possible discrepancies in culture. Even in Nigeria, where marriage between the Igbo and peoples of other ethnic groups was for decades thought impossible, such barriers have since been

broken. This change is due to Igbo initiative and vision of the world as a family and global village, where enough exists for all.

But in spite of the successes of such racially mixed marriages, not all have been without problems, as we have already pointed out. In fact, not all such marriages have arisen out of true conjugal love entered in "for better for worse - till death separates us"! Some of the marriages have been contracted out of *convenience* to gain acceptance or advantage, usually *Permanent Residence* or *Citizenship* in the United States, for example. Often such marriages end in divorce or separation. But whatever the odds facing him, the Igbo basically accepts that marriage is permanent and endures for life, especially when such a union has been blessed with children. The Igbo marriage tradition has no room for *single parenthood*. Therefore the onus of raising the children falls on both father and mother. But often disaster strikes. The foreign wife, influenced by modern marriage laws and other economic and social factors, may decide to abandon the husband. The young man is thus suddenly thrown into despair. He may have to put up with problems of beginning again with a new wife as well as caring for the ex-wife and the kids! In Europe and America this is usually a very rampant and demanding situation.

Among the Igbo, marriage is a community affair. Every member of the family and community is involved right from the time of engagement to the consummation of the marriage and beyond. It is not usually easy to obtain a writ of divorce. The aggrieved partner may have to go round again, consulting, re-telling his or her stories to the whole community before his or her case may be heard. In fact, most of the marriage grievances are well handled by the elders of families and communities. Very few marriage cases are settled in court. In Europe and America, the problem is not simple. The court, the attorneys, and the state have a big role to play in marriage disputes. In the eyes of the Igbo, the European and American marriage laws are simply ridiculous. A few examples illustrate the situation. How is it that in a marriage that ends in divorce, the mother usually gets custody of the kids as well as huge maintenance revenue provided by the father? The man is often sapped to death as he continues paying for the maintenance of the kids until they are

eighteen! In Igbo marriage tradition, children belong to the father. The wife has no share. Where indeed the kids decide to live with their mother for sometime after divorce had taken place it is incumbent on the mother to send them back to the father or the father's family. That is where they belong.

In Europe and America, people go to court for the most insignificant grievances. It is not unusual to find a court awarding thousands and millions of dollars to the winner of a case. In most of the cases, the attorneys or lawyers, who often instigate the quarreling partners to go to court, get the lion's share of the *booty* as the losing partner is bled to death. His life fortune, including houses and estates can be confiscated and sold at auction. "**The Trouble with Lawyers**" a television documentary in the United States has exposed the evils of lawsuits in America. In one such lawsuit (not marriage), a family of a child who died in a car accident was awarded the staggering sum of \$236 million in a case with a car manufacturing company. It was alleged that the Car Company did a poor job with the car's door latch, which opened in the crash, and caused the death of the child.

There are many ridiculous *sex-abuse, sex-harassment, and sex scandal* court suits in the United States. In fact, they count in the thousands. It is not unusual to find married women who get up in the morning and file court suits against their husbands, alleging that they had been raped during the night! The court and the general public take such allegations seriously. In most cases the aggrieved wife receives thousands, even millions of dollars in compensation! Even renowned prostitutes are known to have connived with their lawyers to bring shame to highly placed public government officials in the so-called sex scandal suits. The ulterior motives in such sex-law suits are of course financial benefits. Sex-scandal or sex-abuse lawsuits against the Catholic Church provide lucrative means of making money overseas. Because such lawsuits brought against the Church and her ministers attract much public attention, many families and individuals take delight in accusing religious ministers of sexual scandal and child-abuse. True or not, most often Church leaders decide on *out-of-court settlement*. What is involved? Loss of Church revenue! It is public knowledge that

Churches in the United States and particularly the Catholic Church have lost millions of dollars in settlement of sex-abuse, child-abuse and sexual harassment lawsuits brought against the Church and the ministers of religion usually by some immoral, greedy, and selfish families and individuals. How such huge amounts awarded to people help repair their claimed damages is not easy to figure out.

Often they are simply motivated by greed and lust for *fast and easy wealth*. The only magic wand they have and which makes their stories credible is that they, in consultation with their attorneys, know how to frame their stories! There is no doubt that the Igbo living in Diaspora are greatly influenced by such foreign ways of life. The rich cultural heritage and values found in Igbo traditional religion are often abandoned in the face of the *politically correct* culture of western civilization. Too much media exposure of children to marital problems has of course, irreparable consequences on the family, whether it be Igbo or any other family on the globe.

CHAPTER THREE

Igbo Traditional Values in Jeopardy

Exposure to foreign lifestyles has tremendous consequences on the traditional values of a people. In Diaspora, among the Igbo of Nigeria, the long cherished traditional values of this people are indeed in jeopardy. We are recounting certain incidents in the lives of Igbo people and families in the United States to underscore our fears and anxieties about the consequences of massive exposure to foreign culture and lifestyle. Families all over the world, for example, experience daily incidents of domestic violence in one form or another. In some cases, family members without outside intervention settle their problems. But in other cases, matters may get out of hand and any member of the family calls in the police. This often is a daily occurrence in the United States. Any member of the family may dial 911 (Police and Fire Department phone number), calling for the arrest of any other member of the family or a neighbor thought to be causing unrest in the family or in the neighborhood. In most cases peace may be restored to the troubled family or neighborhood without further incident. But "peaceful settlement" is often never achieved without the police arrest of a member of the family and possible lock up in jail. The victim can be husband, wife, or any of the children. In most cases wives "lock up" their husbands in jail!

Many incidents of domestic violence leading to murder and grave physical injuries to persons are daily occurrences in the United States. Husbands have murdered their wives. Mothers have murdered their kids in cold blood. Kids have murdered their parents and siblings. These murder cases and other incidents of violence and brutality are truly distressing and are condemned by all God-fearing people. For the greater part of modern society however, such a phenomenon is becoming an accepted way of life. A jealous and vicious college student may

decide to gun down a fellow student who intrudes into a love affair with a girl friend. The aggrieved student may take his own life, too. An aggrieved divorced husband may decide to gun down an ex-wife, together with any other fellow associating with her after the divorce. A lover whose girl friend has abandoned may decide on a shooting-spree to redress the emotional injury done to him by the ex-girl friend. There are endless stories of shocking cold-blooded murders and they are usually widely reported by the news media.

Media reports confirm that in the United States acts of domestic violence and similar abuses occur every *18 seconds*. *Six million American women* are annually beaten and abused in domestic violence by their husbands or boyfriends. Out of this number at least *400,000* die every year as a result of injuries sustained during such beatings. One woman who appeared in a TV talk show reported that her violent husband blew off her mother's head in a violent domestic rage, shot and injured her father severely, and finally shot her on the face. The woman whose appearance in the television provoked pity and anger had undergone 59 surgeries to repair her too badly damaged face. What punishments are meted to such violent husbands, one would ask. The same media reports confirm that at least 85% of such killers in the United States serve fewer than six years in prison!

In Igbo society murder is an abomination. There is "nwunye ochu" - *female murder* - killing some one by accident. There is also its counterpart - "oke ochu" - *male murder* - deliberate killing of a person. In the first case, the punishment for the offender may extend to banishment into exile for a good number of years. When in *Things Falls Apart*, Okonkwo accidentally shot and killed a young boy at a funeral ceremony, he was banished from the land for seven years. Sacrifices were offered to pacify the gods who were naturally unhappy with such incidents. If Okonkwo's victim had been an enemy cut down during a tribal conflict with another village or community, Okonkwo, would have become a hero in the community. In fact, Okonkwo had won great fame among his people on account of his valor during inter-tribal wars. He was revered for his valor

and made an elder of his village because he was able to bring home several human heads during inter-tribal conflicts. But Okonkwo the elder-statesman and great warrior was to spend seven bitter years in exile with his large family, among the extended family of his mother, because he accidentally *killed* an innocent lad. The traditional chief priest, the bearer of the oracle of the gods also ordered the young men of the village to destroy and burn down Okonkwo's houses and all his belongings! If that had been *oke ochu*, premeditated murder, he would have paid with his own life. The gods might have even demanded the heads of the members of his family! Ndi Igbo in general value life and are distressed when innocent blood is spilled in an unprovoked aggression. Even when provoked no approval is given for murder. There are other ways of settling such conflicts. It is an abomination to take someone else's life whatever the circumstances. Where such incidents take place, usually the only solution to the problem is for the offender to pay with his life. That serves as a deterrent to others who have not come to the common knowledge that life is *sacred*. It is only the Giver of Life who has the right to take it away and when He wills.

Igbo families living in the United States are not shielded from incidents of domestic violence. Instead of settling their differences in the traditional Igbo way, some are known to have resorted to most extreme violence leading to the death of a family member. An Igbo husband is known to have murdered his wife in a domestic violence imbroglio. The murderer did not seem to have been pacified by the death of the wife who had borne him 5 kids. It was reported that he tied the dead woman on the back of his truck and dragged her along the streets of their neighborhood! He denied the charges when arrayed in court charged with the murder of his wife. There are many distressing accounts of Igbo wives who molest their husbands at the least provocation. Some Igbo husbands are said to be living miserably under the constant harassment of their wives. It is said that in the United States women are usually favored in family problems and have custody of children in cases of divorce. In Igboland the case is not as simple as that. Here we are faced with the ugly consequences of foreign cultural values that have come to

overshadow the Igbo traditional way of settling family conflicts and cases of domestic violence.

At Death, Nothing Like Home

Our second story is another ugly incident, that no true Igbo could wish in his life. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the first wish of every Igbo living abroad is that he should be buried at his family compound. Whether he is married to an Igbo or non-Igbo woman, it is the sacred duty of any surviving member of his family anywhere to see that his remains are buried at the right spot on the family premises. As a married man with children, the chances of this duty not being carried out are presumed non-existent. This custom finds its roots in Igbo Traditional Religion. Burial in the land of the forefathers assures that the dead is resting with the good ancestors, a true sign of eternal happiness. It is believed that the spirit of one buried outside Igboland will linger around and harass the living. Without proper burial there may be no rest for the dead. Lack of rest is one of the signs of eternal damnation.

While some Igbo people living abroad often violate some ancestral traditions, very few have neglected the obligation of carrying back to his hometown for burial the remains of an Igbo who died abroad. Only on few recorded occasions have the remains of the Igbo who died outside Igboland been buried in a foreign land. In some of these cases no contacts with immediate surviving families were possible. When such burials have become public knowledge, relatives have always exhumed the remains for proper burial at home. A celebrated case of a successful Igbo businessman who died overseas is still told among Ndi Igbo everywhere as a warning to those whose non-Igbo wives have not yet received enough education about these revered Igbo customs and traditions. While the Igbo can freely take wives from anywhere, it is equally incumbent on Igbo husbands to school their life-partners on the implications of ignoring this unique Igbo custom concerning the dead. A dead man does not speak. While still alive and hale, it is necessary to make proper arrangements for one's burial.

As the story went, this prosperous Igbo son who lived with his white wife and four children died after a brief illness. Unfortunately he was among those Igbo people who never visited home often. He had no family house and never thought one in the fatherland was necessary. None of his four children, all then grown up, had visited their *village in Africa*. As a result of pressure from the Igbo community the family only reluctantly agreed to fly the man's remains home. No member of his family - wife or any of the four kids - accompanied the remains of their father home! None of them thought that they had anything to do with the Igbo of Africa!

That was a real disaster in the eyes of Igbo people. The greatest hope of an Igbo while he is still alive is that his children will mourn for him at his death and as well give him a befitting burial. Of utmost importance is that he has at least one son who could replace his father. This son, too, would also marry and beget another son that would maintain the family lineage to the next generation and many generations to come. An unfortunate break on this transmission of life and maintenance of the ancestral lineage leads to a real calamity. Every family maintains a successive line of male representatives, stretching from the land of the living to that of the dead. When no son is there to maintain the link it is assumed that the lineage is virtually moribund. That is a curse and the worst calamity that can happen to any Igbo family.

Igbo Good Samaritan in a Sex-Scandal Imbroglio!

Igbo people are generally kindhearted people. They are kind to visitors and strangers because their kinsmen and women are also scattered all over the world. Presumably the owners of the land where these relations sojourn take care of these Igbo people, too. Of extreme importance, too, to Igbo people everywhere is the care extended to children. As the onus of raising children well falls on the entire community, an Igbo sees the need to care for an abandoned child or to correct and even discipline anyone who is misbehaving in public. The Igbo does not wait to get the actual

parents' permission before he performs what he sees as a *civic duty* toward the best upbringing of a child.

Unlike Europeans and Americans, the Igbo does not always resort to the services of police or security officers to intervene in a dispute or quarrel involving two parties. He sees himself as a *man of peace* as well as *his brother's keeper* and will use his initiative to bring peace and order to a situation where his services or intervention may not even have been sought. While such a person would be hailed as a hero and a true son of Igboland in Africa, it is not always a prudent step for one to get involved in other people's problems in other parts of the world and societies. Some Igbo *good Samaritans* have gotten into trouble as they tried to carry out a duty they thought was *Christ-like* and thus cherished by society, as the following story illustrates.

The incident took place in one of the big cities in the United States. An Igbo young man who had been in the States for only a short while saw what he thought was an opportunity to put into practice some act of Christian charity. He was to exercise this act on an abandoned child, lying at a busy street corner. The boy, about ten years old was said to have been covered with blood. In fact he was among the thousands of street kids in America who roam the streets. Most of them are products of single-parent families and belong to gangs as they search for food and other necessities of life. They are known to engage in mischievous activities too. It was believed that the boy in our story had actually been beaten up by the other members of the gang and left at the street corner *half-dead*.

As in the Gospel story, many that came across him went about their business and none thought of rendering help or even calling the security officials to rescue the needy boy. But when the Igbo young man in our story came across the corner and saw the bleeding boy, he stopped to examine him and to find out what type of help he could render to this victim who had *fallen among robbers and evil men*. As he questioned the boy who would not respond, he lifted him up and cleaned some of his wounds. The boy made some signs indicating that his home was a few blocks away from the street corner. Then stooping down,

in the typical African fashion, the young Igbo man beckoned the *dumb and lame* boy to mount on his back, which he did.

On reaching the house which the boy indicated was his, the Igbo *good Samaritan* got a rude shock of his life when he saw a young lady who started shouting at him, accusing him of attempting to kidnap the boy! A security agent soon arrived and before the *Good Samaritan* could open his mouth to narrate his story, the boy had slipped away behind the house. The young man was also accused of *child-abuse* as well as *sex-scandal!* What has an Igbo man got to do with a sick, dirty, and abandoned *boy* of ten in a sex-scandal imbroglio? But there we are! Many such stories are reported regularly by news media. Surely it took time for the Igbo *Good Samaritan* to recover from that shock. But sooner or later he, too, had to learn that *charity* or *civic duty* must be practiced with caution in some parts of our modern society!

Igbo Marriage Tradition in Crisis

In their bid to emigrate to Europe and particularly to the *Promised Land* of America, many Igbo women accept marriages with Igbo men living in the United States or elsewhere in Europe. Under normal circumstances, such marriages may not be possible, either because there is no true love that would sustain the union or both parties simply do not match. As for the men, tradition and pressures from families at home make them often accept *pre-arranged* marriages from home. An Igbo son in the United States has written on the consequences of such marriages. Bedford N. Umez attributes what he calls *High Divorce Rate among Nigerians in Houston*, United States to the *pre-marriage arrangement*. The phenomenon, which he refers to as Marriage by Arrangement (MBA), is obviously not limited to Nigerians and the Igbo living in Houston, Texas.

According to Umez,¹⁸ there were over 100 cases of divorce involving Nigerians in Houston, Texas alone. Out of the reported 100 cases, 80% were marriages in which the two parties are Igbo families. He describes the trend as frightening particularly to single men planning to go home to get married. He explored the possible reasons for the increasing rate of

divorce among the Igbo and Nigerians in America and suggested some ways of averting the disasters such arrangements bring upon numerous families as well as to the partners in marriage. Umez attributes the tragedy primarily to problems created by distance, dishonesty, the Nigerian economy, and the breakdown of family values in America. This breakdown of family values affects the Igbo and Nigerians living in the United States.

Dishonesty is the source of the second problem. According to Umez, the high divorce rate among the Igbo in the United States is closely associated with *dishonesty* on the part of some of the men. "It is common knowledge that some of our men lie to the would-be wives when they travel home. They lie about their occupation, their income, the type of cars they drive, the caliber of women they date, their degrees, and life in the U.S. Unaware of these flagrant misrepresentations, some of our ladies (who rigidly believe that the beauty of a man is his wealth) simply fall in love with utopia." On arrival in the United States, Umez observes, "hypnotic reality sets in—truths start pouring out, one by one. Worse still, these men start telling new lies to cover the old ones. Now, the poor ladies find themselves on the horns of a dilemma—to stay or to leave? If they decide to stay, they spend the rest of their lives in misery; if they decide to leave, we call it divorce. But who created the divorce? The men or the ladies? I say, don't blame the ladies."

The state of the Nigerian economy, is another source of anxiety and troubles for Igbo families -old and new- in the United States and elsewhere in Europe. Umez did not fail to point this out in his search for reasons for the high rate of divorce among Nigerians in the States. Among the problems created by the *search for greener pastures* is that some of the young ladies at home compromise their standard of love by falling in love with the greener pasture and not with the men they intend to marry. Upon arrival in the U.S., these women start realizing that the men they have married, after all, are not the type they could put up with in a lasting conjugal love. In a short time what could be a minor disagreement between a loving couple becomes a major problem capable of leading to divorce. There is no doubt that the major cause of failure of marriages

among the Igbo and Nigerians in America can ultimately be traced to the cultural changes and life in this part of the world. Foreigners are grossly affected by cultural, social, religious, and political changes in America. Igbo families are in no way shielded from such contamination or corruption. It is no secret that more than half of the marriages in the U.S. end in divorce. This fact, in part, provides some solace to some people, and thus, makes it relatively easier for them to file for divorce; after all, it is happening in America daily!

There are endless stories of deception and failure to keep promises entered into before marriage. It is not unusual to find prospective husbands who claim to be what they are not simply to impress their fiancées. One Nigerian man was known to have claimed he was a practicing physician and continued sending his photographs taken in doctor's surgical dress to his future wife back home in Nigeria. It was a rude shock to the young lady who on arrival in the States to join the husband discovered that the fellow was only a cab driver! Another had claimed he was representing a well-known American company in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. It was not true. He has been a security guard since he arrived in the United States of America some 15 to 20 years ago!

There are also stories of incidents and scenes of *strange dramas* on arrival and at first sight. Some of the ladies have bitterly confessed that the "husbands" they saw at the airport coming to embrace them never resembled those they had been communicating with or those they had been seeing in pictures. Had these women been really deceived or was it their eyes that were deceiving them? Some ladies were reported to have taken to their heels right on arrival at the airport and refused to join their "husbands." Perhaps it was the first time they discovered that the age difference was really much! It may not be the big difference in age that actually worries the ladies. Perhaps it is not unusual for men to be better qualified professionally than their wives. Some highly qualified Igbo women, including medical doctors and nurses, have rejected their pre-arranged husbands on arrival in the United States. For the ladies no matter how desperate they are in search of life-partners, living with a man who does not measure up academically or intellectually is

completely unacceptable. These ladies would rather remain single than enter into marital union they describe as *suicidal*. Age difference may not be a stumbling block to marriage contract among the Igbo in Africa. But for those in the Diaspora, foreign standards must usually apply.

Marriage is a fairly stable institution among Ndi Igbo. Its survival finds support in family and community setup. It is therefore dangerous to toy with family and community. Bedford Umez tries to find remedies to some of the problems arising from marriage among the Igbo living outside the traditional Igbo community. He discourages marriage arrangements made without the two parties personally and fully knowing each other and becoming fully involved. He suggests that Igbo young men in the United States who are looking for wives should first consider the yet-unmarried Igbo women living in the States.

The above suggestion looks reasonable. But some of the young men are not happy with their kinswomen living abroad. They think that these women are morally bankrupt that selecting them as life-partners would be a terrible risk. One unmarried young Igbo man vowed that he would be ready to remain single for life rather than taking a wife from among Igbo women living or working in America. This is shocking, indeed, as he enumerated his reasons with passion. Most of these young men who reject the idea of taking wives from among the Igbo women overseas think that these women have embraced the foreign culture and have no more regard either for the traditional Igbo marriage customs or for traditional family and community. Some of the issues the young men raise include the situation of the kids if the marriage ends in divorce, and, of course ways and means of settling marital problems. The last issue seriously demands a sympathetic hearing. Some young husbands complain that at a slight offense or misunderstanding women in America summon the police and take their husbands to court. This is unusual and not in keeping with the traditional Igbo method of settling marriage problems. Most of the unmarried young men are upset by the way wives treat their husbands when marriage problems arise. Problems, which could be settled by neighbors and friends are taken to court and made public show.

For the Igbo, and particularly for the tens of thousands of younger, not-yet-married Igbo daughters this is a very worrisome situation. If their young kinsmen will not take them in marriage, what are the chances that these ladies will find suitable life-partners from peoples of other races and cultures? Perhaps a more dangerous and sad situation would arise in which these ladies would remain unmarried or single mothers for the rest of their lives. This would not be a good picture for the traditional Igbo community anywhere. Already some Igbo families in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain are worrying over the fate of their grown-up daughters, born and raised in these countries, who are not married yet either to Igbo kinsmen or to any other men. But to a majority of younger Igbo families in the United States, this situation is not yet a disturbing one, as their daughters are yet too young to think of marriage. But it will not be long before such anxieties over the future of life-partners will arise. To forestall the inevitable future marriage problems, many Igbo parents and grand parents encourage their daughters to attend Igbo celebrations to socialize with their kinsmen from Igboland and Nigeria. Some may be lucky to establish early relationships that could lead to marriage with people of their own communities. Some grandparents encourage their unmarried granddaughters to visit home frequently and learn the customs and traditions of their people. This is an issue that may not be ignored.

Not only men can pour aspersions on women. Women have their grievances against men as well. Many are not happy with their husbands who contribute little or nothing financially for the upkeep of the family or who depend solely on their wives for the maintenance of the family. Igbo women like their counterparts in the developed world insist that they should be recognized and as well treated as equal partners in marriage. In this regard Igbo women in general should be given credit for their role as good mothers and in most cases breadwinners of their various families. Outside possible maltreatment or often-frequent financial neglect, Igbo men generally have come to respect the dignity of married women. Igbo women everywhere are progressive and fully emancipated like their counterparts all over the world. Most Igbo women are well educated and are

often the main breadwinners of the family. Some are powerful and respectable women who fight for women's liberation and rights. As far as these women are concerned, days are gone when women were treated like beasts of burden. Igbo women play leading roles in modern family planning as well as in the raising of children. Only in few cases can men impose their wills and caprices on their Igbo wives.

An Igbo student, Chima Jacob Korieh has done an extensive study on some of the problems still facing Igbo married women in modern times in his thesis – **Widowhood among the Igbo of Nigeria**¹⁹ - submitted for a Masters of Philosophy in History at the University of Bergen, Norway, 1996. Among some of the prevalent and oppressive practices Korieh discusses in his thesis and which modern Igbo women liberationist activists condemn and fight against include some aspects of Widowhood Rituals - *Igba Nkpe*, Ritual seclusion - *Ino na Nso*, Widow Inheritance or Levirate relationship- *Nkuchi*, and Widowhood and Polygamous Marriage. But whatever misconceptions there have been in the past concerning African women in general, modern studies, including that done by Korieh and others, show that it is sometimes dangerous to generalize about Africa. Korieh writes: "This study has highlighted the extent to which these conceptions are not so easily converted to the Igbo. Evidence has shown that Igbo women were sometimes active in economic and social processes. Quoting Uchendu, an Igbo scholar, Korieh restates the assessment of the contemporary Igbo woman.

The African woman regarded as a chattel of her husband, who has made a bride wealth payment on her account is not an Igbo woman, who enjoys a high social-economic and legal status. She can leave her husband at will, abandon him if he becomes a thief, and summon him to a tribunal, where she will get a fair hearing. She marries in her own right and manages her trading capital and her profit as she sees fit. Though women are not the normal instrument through which land rights are passed, and though their virilocal residence after marriage makes it impossible for them to play some important social and

ritual roles in their natal villages, yet they can lease, hold, take titles, and practice medicine.²⁰

Most Igbo women are powerful activists and progressive liberationist thinkers who may no more be relegated to the background when men speak. They have part to play in the family and society. Korieh agrees with this: "In spite of the fact that women generally have received little or no attention in historical writings in Africa, Igbo women were among the first to receive attention in anthropological research and literature as a group distinct from Igbo men. This study of Igbo women as widows revealed far reaching differences between their relationship with men as opposed to the general notion that women are a subjugated group in all societies." But whatever forms of oppression they have suffered in the past it is unlikely that modern Igbo women will tolerate further injustice and subjugation, including deception in marriage.

Things Fall Apart

How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man was clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan no longer acts like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. [Obierika in Achebe's Things Fall Apart]]

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, signs of danger confronting the unity and survival of the Igbo tribe of the pre-colonial days were already appearing with the settlement of the white man in the community and the imposition of his life-style on the people. His system of government and religious faith had even started to revolutionize the lives of some of the people. Worse still, some of the Igbo people had crossed over to the white man's side by embracing the system of his government as well as his religion. The reaction of the traditional elder statesman, Obierika in Achebe's novel points to the tragedy as

well as to the dilemma facing the Igbo traditional community at that point in time. The sacred traditions that had guided the lives of the people for centuries before the arrival of the white man were being violated or desecrated by the sons and daughters of Igboland. Some of the sacred shrines had been pulled down, destroyed, or burnt down to make space for the Christian Church and traditions. Some of the religious taboos were being violated. The sacred python, for example, had been killed by one of the new religion's enthusiasts. That was an abomination and the spirits were not happy. The dictates of the oracles were no more being heeded to and there was disunity and confusion from the inner circles.

Naturally things had fallen apart and the center could no more hold for Africa. Africa without imported *political systems* and *religions*, would have known and enjoyed more peace and development, and of course, unity than Africa experimenting on various *political ideologies* and adhering to thousands of Christian *religious sects*. The damage done was colossal and perhaps irreparable for "Our own men and sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government." To make matters worse, some of the first converts to the new religion, who were the sons and relations of the most respected elders and traditional rulers of Igboland, had taken the lead in the new wave of *abominable assaults* on the Traditional Religion. Even Okoye, the first son of Okonkwo, the would-be traditional head of the great Okonkwo family, had joined the white man's new religion and had received Baptism and taken the name Peter. The majority of those working for the white man's government and religion were Igbo. They had become clerks and security officers, carrying out the orders of the foreign government, even when such orders had violated the hitherto-cherished traditions of the Igbo people. Igbo security officers, police, or *kotma*, arrested, detained, and punished Igbo leaders who were resisting the white man's presence in their community. That was a tragedy and enough reason for the gods to take revenge on the entire community. But that was only possible in the days when the gods were really powerful! Their powers must have shrunk as little or no offerings were made to them again! Disappointed too by the actions of the

sons and daughters of land, no one would blame the gods for refusing to protect the people who had in fact deserted and abandoned them. The people had indeed become traitors. And as the same Ndi Igbo would put it: "Onye mbeghari akwa bechuru ndi mmadu nwulahara" - *a sympathizer at the funeral has wept more bitterly than the bereaved!* Today we would say, in religious circle, *they have become more Roman than the Pope!*

Things fell apart among the Igbo community those days because, philosophically, the structures that had held the people together had been, perhaps attacked by termites. The pillars or the cornerstones no more were strong or had been weakened and the center could no more hold. There had been much misunderstanding and confusion and the people no more could speak with one voice. The consequences were great and the entire community was in great disarray. There was nothing basically wrong with accepting new ways of live or changes in institutions. But for the Igbo of *Things Fall Apart*, the transition from tribal to colonial traditions was so rapid. And for some elders and leaders of the people the new structure was totally unacceptable or intolerable. It did not take a moment of reflection on the part of Okonkwo, for example to decide on suicide rather than live and to see the cherished traditions of the great ancestors trampled under foot or violated by the ignorant white colonialists, Igbo sycophants, and traitors.

Today among most Igbo at home and those in Diaspora, the violation and disregard for ancestral traditions can still be attributed to the influence of the white man's government and religion. Surely one must accept that not all aspects of the old tribal religion would today be entirely accepted as civilized. In fact, some, like the oracular injunction on the killing of twins and the cast system establishment, had been rejected and abandoned by the people. Nevertheless, some of the perennial values of the Igbo ancestral religious, social and cultural traditional heritage are still relevant today in the modern Igbo society. The continuous acceptance and observance of some of those old rules and regulations that had helped the Igbo survive in times of adversities will still go a long way today in sustaining the same people wherever they find themselves. Unfortunately, as part of those evils that destroy society and people, the

abandonment of the traditional Igbo way of life is contributing adversely to the unity and survival of most Igbo of the Diaspora. We will examine some of these factors that militate against the cherished customs and traditions of Igbo people.

Igbo Extended Family System in Jeopardy

The above institution for which Igbo people are known worldwide is today in jeopardy. This is principally a result of cross-cultural influences. In Igbo traditional society hospitality is regarded as a sacred institution, through which care, acceptance, and love are extended to the needy members of Igbo folk to generations. It is enough to show some proof of relationship, no matter how weak - remote and extended - an Igbo family is ever ready to show hospitality to an uncle, aunt, cousin, niece, or nephew. This hospitality is not limited to those closely related in the real sense of the word. Hospitality is usually extended to a friend, a former classmate, club member, or simple acquaintance.

A stranger finds shelter readily in an Igbo family and a family member may often not mind some days of inconveniences caused by an unexpected visitor. An Igbo will be ready to offer his private apartment or bed to the visitor and improvise for himself. Visitors are readily invited to meals and are expected to partake of such meals without qualms. There is always enough provision for the visitor. A hungry visitor does not need to request for food before such is provided where necessary. An Igbo housewife quickly fixes some food for the visitor while discussion with the father of the house or any other member of the family goes on. The Igbo kola nut tradition tells the rest of the story of Igbo *hospitality*. No traditional Igbo host may forget offering a kola nut to his visitor. The kola nut comes first in the hierarchy of food and drinks presented to visitors in private and public ceremonies. It is always regarded as the most essential and greatest proof of acceptance and affection, for any food offered without the kola nut ceremony is not often valued. During any casual or pre-announced visit, the presentation of kola nut comes first. After that any serious discussion may begin.

Because Ndi Igbo value hospitality and care for extended families, it is unusual to find an Igbo without a home.

Older members of the family are not abandoned or sent to retirement homes. Kids born out of wedlock are not sent to foster homes. They are accommodated within the framework of the extended family. "Even a street lunatic has a friend", is an Igbo aphorism. In reality a stranger discovers this at the death of such a deranged fellow. The family gives him a befitting burial. Because the Igbo is a constant traveler and enjoys acceptance among other peoples of the world, he finds it natural to show hospitality to others, especially visitors and strangers in his community. He cannot afford to maltreat a stranger because he, too, may have relations who are strangers in other peoples' lands. The Igbo is not a tribalist or a racist. His accommodating character confirms his support for fair treatment to all. His constant call for Igbo solidarity should never be interpreted as a form of tribalism, ethnicism, or racial discrimination.

Dispersion of the Igbo has for the past decades had some negative influences on Igbo *hospitality*. It is not unusual, among the Igbo of the Diaspora, to find Igbo families that have fallen short of expectation in the area of Igbo hospitality. While most Igbo born and raised in Igboland and now living abroad still cherish this important Igbo cultural value, in most cases Igbo children born abroad do not share this value. To them, for example, an unexpected visitor has no place in the family. Visitors should enjoy their own food in their own families and inviting a visitor to a family meal may sound odd. Some Igbo men who are married to foreign wives find it problematic going along with their wives and children in the practice of Igbo hospitality. Parents, friends, siblings, and extended family members are not easily accommodated in such mixed racial families. Stories of ordeals of parents who visited their sons married to foreign wives have always been told. In the absence of the father of the family, such parents have had to put up with hours of interrogation before they could be allowed into the family. They have to tell the *purpose of their visit* and *how long* they would stay. Some were known to have been accommodated in motels for entire period of their stay overseas.

It is a well-known fact that most non-Igbo wives married to Igbo men have often vehemently opposed financial support for families and extended families at home. One Igbo man

married to a foreign woman confessed that he had always quarreled with his wife each time he sent money or gifts to his old parents at home. His wife always inquired when those old parents would pay them back! In one other case, a wife filed for a divorce because she thought that her husband loved his family in Africa more than the one in the United States! There are other similar stories and incidents that illustrate the point that most of the traditional institutions which had for long held the Igbo together are *falling apart*. Such a phenomenon constitutes a setback to the progress and survival of Igbo people.

Lost Sons and Daughters of Igboland

Many Igbo sons and daughters in Diaspora are known to have lost touch with home people on the black continent. Some are those that came to Europe and America for studies but did not make progress. Others who had fantastic ideas about Europe and America were easily disillusioned when they discovered that their new home was really not a *land flowing with milk and honey*. Disappointments and failure to realize their dreams led some of them into unrecoverable state of shock. Consequently most of these people decided to cut all contacts with their people. Because they also decided to cut links with their kinsmen in the places they live, they are looked upon figuratively as *lost fellows*. Their kinsmen and women at home would have gladly sung their *requiem* and put everything about their son or daughter behind them, since no contact was possible again. These lost Igbo sons and daughters have decided to close all avenues of communication with their people and would not disclose their addresses to anyone, except to a few foreign friends with whom they prefer to associate. It is suspected that some of them have joined one or many of the dangerous cults revolutionizing the lives of young people in Europe and America.

It is not difficult to spot out members of the dangerous cults. Because they have lost hope of survival in the modern world they take to bizarre lifestyles, often manifested by strange apparel, tattoos, and other types of body makeup. Like hippies and witch doctors, members of the modern dangerous cults often

roam the streets day and night. They take to drinking and to drugs. It is easy to locate a lost son or daughter of the Igbo people. One unmistakable feature, which an Igbo elder has identified, is the *lip, nose, or earrings*. While it might be part of the cultural apparel of most other peoples of the world, Igbo men are traditionally not known for wearing rings on the ears, lips, or nose. Lip, nose, and ear rings are undisputedly women's ornaments. But many Igbo youths in Diaspora wear earrings and nose-rings. While this particular ornament may be the cultural apparel of some other peoples of the modern and ancient societies it disturbs a true Igbo to see a person of Igbo race putting on rings on the ears, nose, or lips. Without doubt such people who indulge in such bizarre practices are regarded as lost children of the Igbo race. The following story illustrates the seriousness of this matter.

A few years ago a well-known, prosperous Igbo family decided to organize a *rescue operation* for one of their sons living in the United States. Stories that the young man was dead and must have been buried there had circulated for sometime. People wagged their tongues. Some speculated that the young man had been languishing in prison on account of an undisclosed crime, they alleged he had committed. But close relations of the family in the States had always confirmed that the young man was alive and healthy. He had not committed any crime nor had he been incarcerated even for a day. He had only found himself in the group of those that had failed to realize their dreams in the *Promised Land*. It was only shame that had made him isolate himself from his kinsmen and women overseas. Why should this *prodigal son* be languishing in the States, when back home in Africa, his father had many mansions? Should he not confess his sins and quickly hurry back home and take possession of one of them? Surely there were many paid servants in his father's many flourishing business ventures and they always had enough to eat! Would he regain his senses? When eventually the parents sent an air ticket to their son to return home, the young man caused a stir in the village. When he finally got to the family home he was wearing earrings and in addition, plaited hair!

The mother wept openly, and it was only at that period in time that she believed that her son was truly *lost* in America.

But excitement and joy filled the whole house as the young man was persuaded to remove the rings before more people arrived to welcome the prodigal son back home. Out of joy, the people would forgive him. And truly sumptuous merriment was organized... "for this young man was once lost or dead, but now he had been found." But as he was being decorated with new orthodox traditional apparel and ornaments, the unorthodox ones had to be removed. I have not forgotten the question, the troubled mother of the young man put to her son: "We have even found a wife for you. We have planned the wedding. But tell me how on the wedding day both the bride and the groom would be wearing earrings and plaited hair?"

In the ancient times peoples of non-European world who carried tribal marks or decorated their bodies with cultural ornaments and apparels were thought to be *primitive* or *uncivilized*. But today such bizarre tattoos, apparel, and ornaments worn by young European and American youths are accepted as part of the *modern culture*. Many young European and American women shave their hair, wear long and untrimmed finger and toe nails. Some wear rings on their noses, ears, and lips. Some wear such ornaments and rings on some other parts of their bodies. But whatever their reasons for indulging in such bizarre practices, it is evident that members of these groups are not persons whose lifestyle should be emulated. Unfortunately many Igbo young men and women for one reason or another join such groups or imitate their lifestyle, which is not in keeping with the Igbo traditional way of life. It is exposure to the unorthodox lifestyle that has taken toll of some whom we refer to as *lost sons and daughters of the Igbo race*. What should be done to rescue those who have fallen victim to this culture and ways of preventing future occurrence will form another part of this study.

Why the Center Does Not Hold

Not all Igbo, young and old who find themselves outside their fatherland are happy or comfortable in these places. In fact not only a few are looking forward to a time when they will go back to their fatherland and finally settle down. But for many Igbo

people such a time of return from exile does not seem near. Those who find themselves and their families in unfriendly working places and neighborhoods have felt the pains of their exile. They do not fail to recount their stories of the circumstances that brought them to Europe and America. These Igbo men and women feel the pains of loss of home more when their *white neighbors*, for example ask them when they will be returning to their fatherland.

Why should this question even arise? Are there not millions of other immigrants who have settled in their new homes for good? Or does this mean that the Igbo has nowhere else to go? What of the relatives at home? Perhaps they might feel happier than those in the white man's land, in spite of poverty in Africa! For some of the perplexed Igbo in foreign lands life among close relations and communities must be sweeter than isolation and misery in a foreign land. In the traditional community and neighborhood, one could visit and talk with neighbors to release tension and frustrations. Here in Europe and America *radio* and *television* are not the best substitutes for the sweet village life! To face the matter squarely and in this dilemma it is necessary to reflect over the issue. All said and done, one particular situation in fact forced him to take the decision to look for a greener pasture.

A peaceful and a just society may still be an illusion. It was in fact *not necessarily* lack of opportunity or a better paid job that made him leave Igboland. He has been a successful medical practitioner and has even had his own flourishing private clinic. In terms of salary, there is no basis for comparison between what a university professor takes home in Africa at the end of the month and that which his counterpart in Europe or America takes home at the end of the same period. The difference is clear. But it is also necessary to compare the worth of a hundred dollars in America with its worth in Africa. About ten years ago one Naira [Nigerian basic currency] exchanged for 60 cents. At the end of 1997 one dollar exchanged for 80 Naira! But that devastating depreciation in the local currency was not the utmost source of worry for the Nigerian University professor trying to flee his fatherland. Nor was it *lack of space* to expand his business or build his family house. There are vast areas of

uncultivated land in Africa. It was *not* hunger, famine or poverty, caused by drought that drove him and his family out of Igboland. Igboland, and Nigeria as a whole are blessed by fertile land, and there is almost no type of crop that does not produce a rich harvest in Nigeria. West Africa is in fact blessed with abundance of rainfall and sunshine in the proper season. It would be absurd to count Igboland and Nigeria as a whole among the poor nations of the Third World. There was a time when Nigeria was exporting palm oil and palm kernel, rubber, cocoa, including cotton, sugar cane, and many other crops and minerals. At one point thousands of bags of groundnuts were stacked like Egyptian pyramids in the ancient city of Kano. As far as crude oil and other mineral resources are concerned, Nigeria ranks high among the oil-exporting nations of the world.

It was *not* religious persecution that precipitated the *mass exodus* of Igbo from Igboland. Many European immigrants in the United States were known to have fled their various countries at one time or another as a result of *religious persecution*. Are some of the unhappy Igbo people in Europe and America there on account of religious persecution? There is no such thing. There are thousands of *Christian Churches and Mosques* in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian nation. Everyone is free to practice any religion of his or her choice. One can found a Church, recruit followers and give his Church any name. Founders of Churches are free to make rules that guide members.

Is it lack of educational opportunities or institutions that has pushed many sons and daughters of Igboland and Nigeria into looking for admission into colleges and universities in foreign countries? At least among its African neighbors, Nigeria has the largest number of higher educational institutions that compare well in quality with their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, Asia, and America. Nigerian university lecturers and professors are among the best worldwide. It is perplexing to find Nigerians leaving their fatherland in search of admission into higher institutions of learning elsewhere instead of helping their poorer neighbors gain admission into such educational institutions in Nigeria. Nigerian universities do not perform

below standard nor can the degrees they confer be described as worthless.

Every year thousands of Nigerians, young and old, apply for the American Visa lotteries in the bid to gain *permanent residence* in the United States. Many succeed. Others continue applying every year, waiting for their luck to shine, as they gain entrance into the *Promised Land!* In fact, as late as the 1980s many Igbo families were against their sons and daughters applying for visas to study in the United States. Parents thought that their sons and daughters would be exposed to the many evils of modern society for which big cities all over the world are known. It is a paradox that today most of those parents and families who had vehemently opposed immigration of dear ones to Europe and America are urging them to leave their fatherland and communities.

This is a strange phenomenon indeed. Some who win the lotteries are well established Nigerians who have had successes in various fields of endeavor in their fatherland. They abandon everything they have - land, houses, and families - to begin a new life in a far-distant land. And as many such fellows have confirmed, the new life often becomes a *nightmare*. Squatting with a relation in an apartment or taking a nasty job as a dishwasher in a restaurant may of course not be the best alternatives to life back home. It is not always long before the *prodigal son* repents and bemoans his mistakes! Up to the late 1980s Nigeria was known to have been a *haven* for thousands of West African immigrants who were looking for new and sweeter live in this rich African nation. There was a time Nigerian military government had to send troops to patrol Nigerian borders to control the massive flow of illegal aliens into Nigeria. Why has the trend changed? What has happened? What has gone wrong?

It is *not* lack of patriotism for the fatherland that has made the Igbo abandon home. In fact Igbo people are very proud of their *color and race*. They like to be seen and heard, admired and respected. "What has gone wrong?" is a big question. But most of the Igbo in America and elsewhere in Europe confess their nostalgia - the desire for a return to the good olden times, to the maternal homes, to friends, families and communities in the

fatherland. They often add that it is the situation of things back home that has prevented them from making their journey home to Africa. They will surely return to the fatherland *as soon as it is possible*. And to make that return possible, to reverse the trend of events, it is necessary to examine that situation that is *repugnant, distasteful, objectionable, or offensive* to Igbo moral values and has long kept him away from the home and community he cherishes.

Search for a Clean and Just Society

Search for a clean and just society has often been the ultimate goal of many honest and peace loving people all over the world. In fact very few nations, communities and peoples can claim that all is well in their societies. But the search for better conditions of living, peace and justice will never cease. As Igbo and Nigerians join most peoples all over the world in such a search, we think it necessary to expose some of the evils of the modern times that hinder people from achieving self-fulfilment. With some major obstacles on the way to man's search for fulfilment removed, it is obvious that a brighter future awaits all.

The Igbo and Nigerian situation can be best exposed or appreciated if we refer to an address by an elder statesman and Igbo traditional ruler, Eze P.I. Acholonu, on the 60th anniversary of his reign. The address was delivered before a large crowd of Igbo and Nigerians. There was no sector of the Nigerian society that was not there - Federal and state military administrators and members of executive councils, local government administrators and councilors, Justices of court of appeal and other judges, commissioners of police and other security officers, directors-general, traditional rulers, spiritual leaders of the nation, gentle men and women of the news media and a staggering number of distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

On this occasion replete with reminiscences, the traditional ruler stood shoulder high above his guests as one of the most qualified leaders of the people to address the issues worrying every Igboman, every Nigerian at home or living abroad. Any one present could be as bold as he was or could have challenged him if he had not spoken the truth. Most heads

were surely bent low, in sorrow or shame. Honest and repentant listeners have reported their stories wisely and courageously and as well acknowledged that he spoke with authority, and his wisdom compared well with that of King Solomon. The Eze reminded, not only his listeners present at that memorable occasion, but all Igbo and Nigerians everywhere, that it was common knowledge that *whatever a man soweth, that man reapeth. If we sow truth and love, we reap truth and love. If we sow corruption and discord, we reap corruption and discord.* What are Nigerians sowing? What are they reaping? The traditional ruler did not miss citing the happy and nostalgic memories of the past.

In the ancient times, our fathers maintained a considerably just and clean society in the belief that anybody who committed evil would be accordingly punished for his evil deeds. Those days, there were no high walls, barbed wires, security guards and security gadgets to assure maximum security for lives and properties, yet people never worried much about insecurity. People traveled long distances on foot, through thick jungles and narrow foot parts in search of daily bread. Their safety was simply guaranteed by their faithfulness to the oaths they made with other people, and particularly with the owners of the land where they sojourned.

As the Eze recounted, those were better days when compared with the modern times. It was rare those days finding people who cheated or committed atrocities against their friends. People valued honesty and uprightness. The poor did not fear oppression by the rich and the powerful. Justice and truth reigned supreme. Disputes were easily settled among friends and communities. But alas! Those were the so-called days of idol-worship and primitivity. The modern man, as the Eze sees him is not better than the so-called primitive man. He has nothing to show for his great civilization as long he does not cherish and pursue those values that give life meaning in a peaceful and just society. He laments:

With modernity where are we today? With a million and more Churches, Mosques, and other religious establishments that teach the law of God, with copious quotations and stories from their sacred books, alas, our country is sinking under corruption, immorality, and scandals even in the highest quarters of society. Armed robbers, assassins and other terrorist gangs make life unsafe for everybody in our country. On top of that worrisome situation, notorious fraudsters and tricksters that go by the infamous designation 419 have continued to make life unbearable for both poor and the rich.

It is quite easy for the Eze and every honest Nigerian to identify these wicked and evil men and women whose nefarious activities are contributing to the downfall of the nation, as the panic-stricken people scatter in fear and misery. They are everywhere. The road *contractor* who does not do the job he is paid for, the *government official* who approves payment for an unexecuted project. *Officials* who collect salaries of their *ghost workers* are among the evil men and women. *Teachers, lecturers, and university professors* who promote or fail students who buy or do not buy their handouts are among the crooks. *Teachers* who organize special classes for money, at the detriment of the official and public classes for which they are paid from public coffers are corrupt citizens who have joined the rogues in betraying public trust placed on them. *Teachers, examiners, and members of examination boards* who encourage examination malpractice among students are among the worst enemies of the country. The *auto mechanic* who fixes a fake or old motor part in the place of a new one is a thief. These people are in one way or the other members of the 419 gang.

The activities of some Nigerians who rob their fatherland and deposit their loot in European banks are very disturbing. These unpatriotic Nigerians who collaborate with foreign nationals and companies to defraud their fatherland have inflicted irreparable damage on the image of the country and are really the most corrupt and heartless human beings. If the wealth of the nation which these individuals have wasted abroad were

put into proper use for the benefit of the masses; surely, Nigeria would be in the position to compete with the richer nations of the world. What worried the traditional ruler most is the future of the nation and its younger ones. So as the little bird has learnt from the mother to fly, so the younger generation, regrettably has followed the evil ways of their elders: "This tragedy has erupted into a plague of drug addiction and drug trafficking, armed robbery, sexual promiscuity, examination malpractice and dangerous secret cults now rampant in most of the tertiary institutions of learning." There is general breakdown of order as well as a misplacement of priorities. This is as a result of greed and selfishness. "This disruptive life-style can only emanate from spiritual bankruptcy. Everybody wants to run before crawling. Nobody wants to cut his coat according to his cloth or even size. Everybody wants to lead; but nobody wants to follow."

The Eze did not fail to point to measures that must be taken to bring back sanity to our troubled land. Much lies on the leadership in every level of society. Leaders must of course lead by example. "Things will get worse if we continue on our crooked parts. Let us not continue wasting our time pointing accusing fingers on one another. Rather should we boldly and humbly face the truth. Everybody's attention must be turned toward these glaring problems, which as yet look like sparks of light that will burn down the house if neglected." It is indeed the presence of these glaring problems that perturbs Nigerians wherever they are. A renowned traditional ruler of Igboland has boldly spoken and every worried Igbo and Nigerian would have wished that his fellow traditional rulers and other civil and military authorities had spoken like him. Unfortunately most of those leaders of the people have been chasing rats while their houses were burning. It is most remarkable that the Eze ended his address with a very passionate appeal for action and change of heart from all and sundry:

At this juncture, it is important to shed tears before our highly placed government officials. The deplorable state of our rural and urban roads is a sad part of our history. Most of our rural and urban communities must be

declared disaster areas as most have been cut off by erosion. It is a shameful catastrophe. For years we have been crying over the deteriorating state of our economy as well as over the state of insecurity. But alas! Our weeping has always fallen on deaf ears. I have hope however that this old man's cry this time will not again fall on deaf ears, but that our appeals would be considered by government authorities with compassion.

It is not only Igbo and Nigerians remaining in the fatherland who are making the fatherland a distasteful habitation for all and sundry. No! Those who have escaped from the fatherland and settled overseas are part of the black man's problem. In fact most of those Igbo and Nigerians that have fled their fatherland have little or no reason to complain about the poor situation of things back home. They have no reason to point accusing fingers at the leaders at home when they themselves are no better even in their new homes overseas. The poor image of Africa being painted in Europe and America is part of the handiwork of some discredited sons and daughters of Africa. These people indulge in nefarious activities, including trafficking in drugs and other illegal business dealings. Surely these people who have no respect for law and order in the land of their temporary sojourn will not make better leaders in their countries in Africa. The question about who would lead Africa to salvation will remain a perplexing one for long!

CHAPTER FOUR

Welcome to America!

To stop, check, and control the mass exodus of Ndi Igbo, Nigerians, and other Africans from the fatherland and their immigration to other parts of the world - all to the detriment of development and progress in the black world - there is, in the first place, a need to establish a basis for such a project. There is need, too to convince all that our propositions are not meant just for literary objectives. We are serious in stating the fact that the salvation of the black world would not lie in abandoning it for the greener pastures - where development and civilization have reached their highest peaks. Here **roads** are in perfect condition; there is always an uninterrupted supply of **electric power**, the **communication system** is working 24 hours a day; and grocery and other stores, littered all over the cities are overflowing with everyday human needs.

In these places into which other people too, (not only Africans) struggle to gain entrance, there is basically **good government**. In spite of some activities of evil men in society, security officials are always alert and are on their job offering **security** to all peace-loving citizens and visitors. The **judiciary** is functioning and people's rights are adequately protected. **Corrupt practices**, wherever they are found are publicly exposed and culprits receive well-deserved punishment. Here **justice** is no respecter of persons. The sins of every person, from the smallest toddler to the First Citizen are exposed to ensure equal treatment. Oppression of the poor and weak is not given a chance to thrive. **Health facilities** as well as **health insurance schemes** are in abundance and people do not need to travel beyond their neighborhoods to procure treatment for any type of ailment. There are in fact **opportunities** for those who want to achieve and who desire **self-fulfilment**. In fact if such opportunities and facilities were found in their home community,

fewer Igbo and fellow Africans will be abandoning their fatherland for these *greener pastures*. It would be foolish to embark on such a venture, except, perhaps, for *leisure*. It is basically on account of the failure of those entrusted with power to live up to expectations that citizens leave *en masse* for other places in search of comfort and security.

While not every nation under the sun can boast of possessing all that can satisfy human needs, there is a level of achievement, that in all fairness people would accept as *satisfactory* or even *fair enough*, as the struggle for improvement continued. On this note, we have need to assure all Africans scattered all over Europe and America in search of better comfort and opportunities that their fatherland could one day look like *Ala-Bekee* [the land of the white man]. It is possible to convert some African *jungles* into fields that can grow an abundance of wheat and corn enough to feed Africans as well as serve for exports to other lands. It is possible to convert some parts of African *deserts* into oases. Other peoples of the world have accomplished such feats. It is possible to turn footpaths and abandoned *roads* that have become death traps into *highways*, *boulevards*, and *avenues*. There is *water* everywhere, but none to drink! *Pipe-borne water* can be provided for everyone, particularly for the poor masses who trek many miles down the steep hills for water. An *Electric power supply* must be provided because without it no development will be possible. It is not necessary to talk about the need for easy communication because it is basic in any form of development. With some progress made toward the provision of some basic necessities of life, it is obvious that fewer Africans would be abandoning their fatherland for whatever reason.

In our contribution toward stemming the mass exodus of Africans from the fatherland and consequent immigration to other parts of the world, we would like to bring it to the awareness of individuals, families, and friends that the saying is true, *all that glitters is not gold*. Not even a little part of the New World can be described as *Paradise on Earth*. There are smooth and rough paths as well as thorns everywhere. There is no doubt that there are many families and friends who urge their loved ones overseas never to think of returning home. But has anyone

stopped to warn these people that there are many sources of disillusionment and disappointments overseas! To be *forewarned is therefore to be forearmed*. And, of course, people say that experience is the best teacher. Perhaps those Igbo and Africans who are thinking that their inability to secure tourist visa at the United States embassy or from any other European embassy has been a curse may reconsider their conclusions. In a dream-like state or in reality, from a distance it is wise to take note that in so many circumstances and situations *all that glitters is not gold!*

Land of Promise - Land of Frustrations

Not only for some of the newly arrived immigrants in the *Land of Promise*, some owners of the land have their own terrible problems. Some Africans find it difficult to understand that in the land of plenty and *Überfluss* (overflowing wealth) there are millions of Americans who are poorer and even more miserable than most Africans and other peoples of the Third World referred to as the underdogs of modern society. Paradoxically considered wealth and poverty coexist in the land of plenty. Frustrations and failures lead many people to curse the days they were born. Often wealth and prosperity do not resolve all problems. Africans do not understand why normal wealthy white people, young and old should commit suicide. There are daily reports of people taking their lives and leaving suicide notes for reporters and those who care. Mostly frustrations and failures contribute to suicide cases in the white man's land. One young man was reported for committing suicide because his girl friend abandoned him. There are also reports where both lovers like *Romeo* and *Juliet* in the Shakespeare's tragedy had taken their lives in mysterious circumstances of excessive infatuations.

Highly successful men and women of honor, military and civilian have committed suicide as a result of accusations of scandals leveled against them. Young adults have attempted suicide and some have been rescued during such attempts. The simple reasons in most cases range from minor scruples and disagreements with relations, to general frustrations in life. Life not worth living must be done away with in a most dramatic way in the most civilized societies! There may, after all, be nothing

shocking about these anomalies in the *Land of Promise*. Ndi Igbo put it this way: "Onweghi ihe mmadu na anaghi ahu na obi eze." "There is nothing under the sun that does not transpire in the palace of the king!"

A great number of American youth are among the millions of abandoned fugitive ragtag children referred to as **street kids** all over the world. Most of them are products of single parent families or families wrecked by drugs and other modern societal ills. Like their counterparts all over the world, these kids feed from garbage bins. When opportunity calls they steal from grocery stores and practice various crimes under the sun right from early childhood. Deprived of parental or societal care, these kids grow up to be the worst hardened criminals in modern society. Who would not agree with Rev. B. Herbert Martin, a minister of Chicago's People's Church, when he said in one of his sermons "This generation of kids we're raising now in these urban centers have no conscience, no values. They are growing up in isolation." What are the Churches and societies doing to rehabilitate these street kids? Perhaps Americans do not need to hear that biblical proverb, "*Physician, cure yourself. Do here in your native place the things that we hear that were done in Capernaum!*" [Luke 4.23]

Like millions of immigrants in the United States, many Africans reach their destination, their *Promised Land* with great expectations. There is no argument about it. Whether the Igbo settles down eventually for studies or for a job, sooner or later, disillusionment and frustration set in. Most of the *fantastic stories*, that still circulate over all Africa and beyond about the land of the whites, land *flowing with milk and honey*, in a short time, turn into myths and fables. Yet it does not take long before hidden facts begin to unfold and hard realities of life begin to emerge. Who lied or was it only a problem of misinformation?

Frustrations begin right from the port of entry into the *land of promise*. No warm embrace from any kind, gentle, and virtuous man or woman, black or white. Rather, serious interrogations by unfriendly and suspicious customs officials, immigration officials and security agents point to serious troubles ahead. These interrogations and investigations are complicated by hours of tortuous searching of the new-comer's

belongings, including the soles of his shoes and even some private parts of the body. At the end of the embarrassing welcome, there are no apologies from the security agents for the loss of time. As most visitors, especially those from the Third World are always told, the officials do not mean any harm. They are simply doing their job!

If the new immigrant eventually succeeds in settling down for a job (if he is lucky to get one), he must be prepared for more upsetting and embarrassing questions from his white colleagues: "When are you going back to your country?" "Are you staying long?" Surely this is one of the first signs of the unwelcome atmosphere that has greeted many newcomers. *Cultural shocks* are not absent. They greet the unwelcome visitor usually after a short period of arrival in the land of promise. Strange questions from presumed well-informed white friends can equally be upsetting. These questions have often to do with private matters of family background, African life, and culture, and range from language, food and clothing to mannerisms. Whether you spoke English in your country, or you learnt the stuff just a few weeks after your arrival. Whether you went to school in Africa. Whether you ever saw or had a car, radio, or television in Africa!

Some exercise in world or African history and geography may bring further shocks, revealing some deep-rooted prejudices or ignorance. The traumatized faces of black victims of wars point to the realities of ethnic violence, poverty, disease, and hunger in Africa. These pictures are regularly pasted on the television screens and remain the only impressions Europeans and Americans have about Africa and its peoples. No news ever comes from the black continent outside of disaster and death. Perhaps the African immigrant is merely fleeing his homeland to escape tribal massacres and hunger!

After a few years of frustrating life, and the Igbo will say "elu eru aka, ala eru aka"- "neither the sky nor the land comes within reach," the scales begin to fall from the eyes. Whether or not he had secured his permanent residence status or not, adjustment to the new situation may not always resemble the *picture* one had prior to arrival in the *Promised Land*! After all, it is not easy to accumulate dollars without much sweat! A story

was told about an Igbo teenager who was among the lucky ones who won the American lottery. He promised to reimburse his creditors any amount they were ready to lend him without delay, just a few weeks after setting foot on the American soil! But the truth was that this young man was never in the position to pay back what he borrowed for his flight ticket many years after his arrival in the United States!

Some disappointed Africans are known to have decided to return to the fatherland, only a few months after arrival in the *land of promise*. Definitely other disappointments leading to a decision to get back to Africa include issues relating to *racism* and generally entrenched *discrimination* against blacks. The once widely held belief that after the legal barriers to racism had been removed, black people had only the sky for their limits in their dream to be like the white man or even better, might not after all be true. In short, informal and institutional racism persists and constitutes a serious barrier to black people's search for self-fulfillment.

Unwelcome Visitors to the Land of Promise

Most Americans are very friendly, generous, and kind people. Most young Americans too are very friendly to visitors and strangers. They are ready to sacrifice their time to direct a visitor – black, white, brown, or red who has lost his or her way. Taking their visitors to breakfast, lunch, or dinner is almost a ritual and they spend a lot at cocktails and meals organized to welcome or sendoff their visitors. Americans may count only second to the Italians as far as friendship and courtesy to strangers and visitors are concerned.

On the international scene, there is no doubt that Americans rank second to the Germans with regard to charity to the poorer peoples of the world. But as for the bulk of donations to the needy all over the world, Americans for their population must be the most generous donors of all time. Outside some of the politically motivated economic aid to the poorer regions of the world, American Churches, philanthropic organizations, and individuals contribute much toward the alleviation of suffering all over the world. American aid or social workers are found in

all corners of the world. For their support for world peace and equitable distribution of wealth among the rich and the poorer nations, there is no reason why America and Americans should not be revered all over the world. Perhaps on account of the past history of persecution and poverty of the majority of its peoples and immigrants, the Americans have learnt to welcome and accommodate non-Americans in their midst.

In the black people's view the history of slavery and persisting situation of racism in America might puncture a glowing picture of American friendship and generosity. While not denying the validity of such allegations, it might not be fair to conclude that all Americans are racists. But that racism is a reality in corporate America is undeniable. While the older generation may be trying to seriously bridge the gap between black and white, it is most frightening that some few younger Americans are still filled with hate for black people. Young Neo-fascist groups in Europe and America referred to as *Skinheads* are terrorizing blacks in some places. A Skinhead who murdered a West African man and also shot a white woman who went to rescue the beleaguered African said that he killed the black man because he was simply black. Nathan Thill, a swastika-tattooed murderer, explaining why he shot defenseless Mauritanian immigrant Oumar Dia, was quoted as saying from his Denver cell that "In a war, everyone wearing an enemy uniform is an enemy and should be taken out." Dia's "uniform" was apparently his skin color! The situation was serious for black people in the United States, as residents of Denver wondered whether their city had become ground zero for a new Aryan offensive!

Negrophobia is a growing nightmare for government and security agents in the United States. Friendly whites warn Africans in particular never to immigrate to some well known cities of the States where it is believed that the activities of *Skinheads* and KKK [Ku Klux Klan], a vicious terrorist organization are very dangerous. *Ku Klux Klan* (originally from Greek *kuklos*, which means band or circle), whose founding fathers were of Scottish descent, is a secret organization mainly in the Southern United States known for its vicious activities for several years after the Civil War. This terrorist organization was known for its hatred for Catholics, Jews, and particularly today

Blacks whom they call *niggers*. As Lawrence J. Gesy points out in his book **Today's destructive cults and movements**,²¹ between 1944 and the present, individual Klan members or small groups within local Klaverns continued the harassment of blacks especially those who attempted to exercise their civil rights by registering at previously all-white public colleges and universities, or who worked to increase black voter registration. As the author also noted, in several instances this harassment, not only of blacks but also of anyone who dared to help them, was carried to the extreme of murder. No wonder then that the white woman who tried to help the African in the story above was also brutally murdered in Denver, Colorado by the KKK murder squad.

Race riots in the United States often triggered by Negrophobia were regular occurrences in the past. The Springfield Race Riots of August 1908 are still recalled with deeper hate in the present times by most whites. Nushawn Williams, the black teenager alleged to have infected many women, including whites with HIV must be a lucky fellow. A couple of decades ago he would have been lynched and burnt at the stake by white mobs. In the Springfield Race Riot of 1908, the brutal two-day assault by several thousand white citizens on the black community of Springfield was triggered by an alleged rape of a white woman by a black man (an accusation said to have been withdrawn later). The riot was symptomatic of fears of racial equality in North and South alike.

As reports went almost the entire Illinois State militia was required to quell the frenzy of the mob, which shot innocent people, burned homes, looted stores, and mutilated and lynched elderly black people. McDougal Littell in his book "**The Americans**" discussed the historical links between slavery, Jim Crow, and civil-rights movements. The book also presents disturbing facts about race violence in America. Here are two that should not be ignored. "Between 1885 and 1900, at least 2,500 blacks were lynched or murdered as the KKK consolidated its hold on the post-Reconstruction south. In 1741, 14 slaves were burned at the stake and 18 others were hanged because of fears of a slave revolt in New York City."²²

Gunnar Myrdal²³ summarized the state of race crimes in the old America. His accounts might not look much different from the present state of affairs today. As he observed, as long as only Negroes were concerned and no whites were disturbed, great leniency would be shown in most cases. The sentences for even major crimes were ordinarily reduced when the victim was another Negro. But for offenses, that involved any actual or potential danger to whites, Negroes were punished more severely than whites. Public tension and community pressure increased with the seriousness of the alleged crime. One Southern law student presented a vivid picture of what such a situation looked like:

One only has to visit a Southern community at a time when some Negro is on trial for rape or murder of a white person to obtain a vivid picture of the hate and passion and desire for vengeance, which is often aroused in the hearts of the whites. Nowhere is the spirit of mob violence so strong as it is in the courtroom or just outside while a black person who is accused of some particularly heinous crime is being tried. The air is charged with an undercurrent of tension and there is a feeling of surprise, as if some exciting incident may occur at any moment. Under circumstances of this kind it is rather difficult for the jury or even the judge to escape being influenced by the feeling which permeates the throng.²⁴

Anyone who followed the trial of O.J.Simpson in the murder case of his ex-wife and her boyfriend would see that the above description fits perfectly well in the unprecedented Simpson trial. The whole world witnessed the trial and naturally minutes before the verdict was announced the American nation and people stood still and breathless as everyone waited for the outcome! Surely there was sadness and grief that tore the human soul to pieces. Black and white reactions were obviously drastically opposed! The reason for the tension and the amount of publicity given to the trial points to the racial quagmire still in its worst state in modern America

As most Europeans and American civil rights groups are struggling to fight Nazism, still visible in its old garbs, a new wave of **Neo-Nazism** has continued to unleash an unprecedented state of fear and unrest particularly on Diaspora Africans everywhere. Most frightening is that white teenagers are spearheading the terrorist movement. Nazism has its foundation in the pseudo-scientific set of opinions on race developed in the 1800s by white philosophers and anthropologists expounding the notions of the superiority of the white race, especially the Anglo-Saxon/or Germanic branch. By the 1830s many southern writers in the United States accepted as fact not only the inequality of the races, but that blacks were innately inferior to whites and therefore unfit for freedom. "By 1850 the emphasis was on the American Anglo-Saxon as a separate, innately superior people who were destined to bring good government, commercial prosperity and Christianity to the American continents and to the world. This was a superior race, and inferior races were doomed to subordinate status or extinction."²⁵

Theories of racial purity and superiority of the German and Aryan race were said to have influenced the racist theories of Adolph Hitler, the German dictator. In *athletics*, as far back as September 12, 1913, **Jesse Owens** had become Olympic gold medallist and one of America's most legendary black athletes. A member of the U.S. track team in the 1936 Olympic Games held in Berlin, Germany, Owens won four gold medals. He won the 100-m dash in 10.3 seconds, equaling the Olympic record; set a new Olympic and world record of 20.7 seconds in the 200-m dash; and won the running broad jump with a leap of 26ft 51 ins, setting a new Olympic record. He was also a member of the U.S. 400-m relay team that year, which set a new Olympic and world records of 39.8 seconds. As the story of racism had it, despite Owens's outstanding athletic performance, German dictator, *Adolph Hitler* refused to acknowledge his Olympic victories because *Owens was black*. The emotion of the 1936 games in Berlin ran dramatically high, fueled by the host country's Nazi government, which preached the doctrine of *white racial superiority*. But whatever the case, the central figure in the most dramatic story of the Berlin games was nevertheless the black

American athlete, Jesse Owens, who disproved the Nazi ideas by successes in the Olympic athletic events.²⁶

If the past injuries and humiliations could be forgotten and the healing of wounds of racism and discrimination be embarked upon, how does the civilized world respond to the new waves of racism, harassment of black people and their sympathizers by gangs of Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi in modern Europe and America? This is a cause for great anxiety among all black people. In spite of reassurances from all well-meaning and peace-loving Americans and friends of black people everywhere, there are nevertheless many other sinister developments that point to the fact that black people are not cordially welcome to the places they think are their temporary or permanent homes in these modern times. Blacks everywhere may be wise to read the handwriting on the wall and plan for better future for themselves and their children.

Harsh Immigration Laws

Thousands of young Africans who cross great rivers and mountains in search of greener pastures languish in American and European jails for breaking immigration laws. Many enter the land of promise by air, sea and land without valid travel documents. As a result of massive in-flow of unwelcome African visitors to foreign countries, American and European governments enact many draconian anti-immigration laws, which they think would help stem the influx of black people to the borders of the *Promised Land*. Immigration authorities often believe that these African young men and women have no intention of returning to their fatherland. They believe that such laws would cut down on the number of new immigrants from Africa or even stop them completely. But they are often mistaken. It is never easy to beat these clever guys. The immigration officials are no equal to the clever Nigerians who visit a chain of European countries – from east to West, North to South with no valid travel documents. Some stay in the cities, work and earn decent living for years in various foreign countries without detection by the immigration officials. But sometimes, these guys can be unlucky. Some families at home

might be shocked to learn that some of their sons and daughters, thought to be "enjoying life in the Land of Promise" are really having rough time in various prisons in Europe, America, and Asia.

It shocks young Africans in particular to notice that they are not welcome to the white man's country. Anti-immigration policies are formulated by these governments to bar black people from setting foot on European and American soils or embracing the citizenship. While many East Europeans or even Asians easily gain acceptance in Europe and America, it has never been easy for Africans. And the phenomenon is not new. Not all whites, however, support this discrimination policy against blacks. Bob Zyskowski in an editorial in a Minneapolis newsmagazine decries what he calls *our anti-immigrant times*:

Limits on the rights of immigrants as the services they may receive in some parts of the United States reveal a shameful side of our country. How ironic that the people in the richest nation in the world at times find it difficult to share the fruit of citizenship, a gift that came not from our own doing for many of us, but through the courage of our ancestors.²⁷

He wonders what the American immigrant ancestors would say to those who propose to outlaw food, shelter, education, and employment to immigrants in this country today. Such an act he thinks shows selfishness and a serious moral failing. Bob Zyskowski called his fellow countrymen to a short reflection: and admonishes all:

Don't fall for the immigrant baiting of politicians who choose to divide people instead of sharing their vision for tilling common ground. Think for a while about how you would have wanted your own immigrant ancestors to be treated upon coming to a new land. Wouldn't you "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," be the policy your ancestors would have taught and lived by? And resist the temptation to refer sweepingly to immigrants as "illegal." Not all people who don't look

like you are undocumented. Many are citizens. And all have gifts to share to enrich the life and the culture of these United States.²⁸

It does not happen only in America. It happens elsewhere, in most of the industrialized cities of the West, where poor Blacks and other minority groups have taken refuge as a result of those same reasons many immigrants of various nationalities have abandoned their countries in search of greener pastures. Some left their dear countries in panic just to avert hunger and starvation; others to avoid religious and political persecution. Many decided peacefully to come to the United States or elsewhere, simply to try other opportunities not open in their areas of the world. History of immigration laws and stories told by immigrants are interesting documentaries that have offered much research material for this study.

In enacting *modern anti-immigration laws*, the industrialized nations of the world do not fail to unveil their motives. The underlying factors are once again mainly prejudice, racism and fear. As Igonikon Jack rightly points in an article - *Black People's Struggle Against Racism*²⁹ - xenophobia and Negrophobia are primarily responsible for the formulation of most anti- immigration policies in Britain, France, Germany, and Italy - all former colonial powers in Africa. In France, for example black African immigrants are quarantined or earmarked for deportation without comparative due process of law. More so, blacks have fewer privileges and opportunities for employment, welfare, and recognition than their white counterparts in these nations

The recent anti-immigration offensive by Western governments and the United States, particularly directed against blacks received the attention of the editor of the *African News Weekly*. An editorial titled *An Open Letter to Western Governments* was given enough space in the September 16 1996 issue of this weekly. As far as the editor of the paper was concerned there was no reason to make African immigrants the *scapegoats* for the ills or problems of these nations. To debunk that idea is in fact crucial:

We are greatly disturbed at the extreme measures being adopted by government policy makers in the West concerning the continuing influx of immigrants, especially from Africa. To combat this problem, Western governments are changing their laws such that citizenship no longer comes automatically for children born on their soil, even to legal immigrants.³⁰

The editorial traces the history of *African immigration*. Like their counterparts in the history of immigration, Africans have for one reason or another found themselves in foreign lands and in very hostile environments. In the early sixties and seventies many came to Western Europe and the United States to study. And without any prompting they went back to their native countries. But entirely different circumstances have forced many African families to return to unfriendly countries, to work and raise families. The editorial admits that this is never a situation that is well tolerated and promises that the sooner a conducive atmosphere is restored to their fatherland, there is no doubt that Africans would peacefully return to their lands of birth. Regrettably, however, many whites do not think that most Africans who have successfully reached the *greener pastures*, *the land of promise* would like to go back to their fatherland in any foreseeable future. But the *editorial* has a strong message for all white governments. It is a pathetic situation and it may be wise for western governments to think twice when enacting these immigration laws that are meant to keep Africans out of the European and American borders:

Today, most of us are back in the West, though we hate ourselves for doing so. Some of us came back as political refugees while the rest of us are merely economic refugees. We kick ourselves daily when we realize that we are raising children here who despite our best efforts may never want to go back to what we call home...Be assured that you can reduce to a trickle the number of Africans wanting to come to your shores if you would take the time to listen to concerns we have raised in the past.³¹

Most concerned Africans in Diaspora wonder why blacks should be singled out for persecution and rejection among many other immigrants of various ethnic origins. Why should it worry the whites if African immigrants, like other immigrants decide to spend the rest of their lives in their newfound home, in Europe and America? It has however dawned on the Igbo, and other Africans that they must live daily with the hard realities of rejection and discrimination. A phenomenon, hitherto associated with black Americans and slavery, has become a *caste system* into which most Africans in America find themselves. In most things, blacks are singled out for bitter persecution and discrimination. But when the frustrated and disenchanted Igbo finally decides to get back to his fatherland and settle down among his kinsmen, he will relate his experiences to other kinsmen and women, particularly to the younger generation who still may wish to visit the land of their dreams. He may like to write a book about his sojourn in the white man's land. One can easily guess the title of such a book: "*Back from America!*"

Back From America!

It is obvious that his book *Back from America* would contain stories of racism and other forms of discrimination that the Igbo and other fellow blacks must have experienced or endured during their sojourn in America or in Europe. Such a publication might have some disastrous consequences on the African relationship with some other nations. Back from overseas most Africans are always ready to contradict the once-held views about the *Promised Land*, *the Greener Pastures*. They prefer to discuss the *Myth of the Wonderland*. After a few years of sojourn in the white man's land, they had no illusions about most of the stories that have circulated in Africa about the white man's land, the white man, his virtues, vices, and institutions. Such stories will surely include incidents of frustrations, bitterness, regrets, wasted years, failure, and lack of fulfilment.

Back from America could serve as a handbook for all new immigrants to the Promised Land of America. For the younger generation in search of new opportunities and self-

fulfilment, it is necessary to let them know that the road is not smooth. The younger adults or the older generation of Africans who would like to have a quiet environment overseas offering the best security for life might have to think twice. Insecurity abounds everywhere. People are always on a state of alert – 24 hours everyday. Some families in the big cities of Europe and America are virtual prisoners in their homes as their neighborhoods are unsafe for early morning jog or late return from movies. Police are on the lookout 24 hours for armed gangs. In spite of the modern sophisticated gadgets invented by the most talented scientists in America to track down armed gangs, daylight bank robberies take place regularly in the big cities. In the complete view of visible and hidden cameras armed bandits engage police and security agents in open battles. Often the gangs outgun the police and move away safely with their loot! Police report confirms that at least 20 bank robberies take place everyday in the United States. Public and private parks are targets of terrorist attacks.

Modern science and the Internet have continued to provide the most dramatic and incredible sophistication in modern fraudulent practices. People and companies are robbed of millions of dollars every day through the Internet, credit cards, and the telephone. "**Welcome to America**" simply means, you are now in a turbulent and unsafe environment. Watch out for a rip-off! There is no doubt that the infamous 419 scam has its base in America. Visitors are seriously warned to watch out for **Sweepstakes scams**. You may lose all your life savings in a mad dream of winning a \$500,000,000 jackpot in sweepstakes! Most of the sweepstakes are fraudulent business ventures well organized to dupe gullible people. The business seems to be sanctioned by society, as the swindlers are not usually prosecuted. **Gambling**, like Poll Baiting, can equally ruin one's life. There are too many casinos. In many other matters and business deals, one may have to take extra precautions. Someone may defraud you. Read the *labels* on your wares well before paying for them. Read through the document meticulously before appending your signature. The most important portion of the *testament* may be in an obscure corner or in tiny print, which you may overlook! If necessary consult your attorney otherwise

you may be signing your *death warrant!* Sooner or later the scales would fall off your eyes! Be careful! Welcome to America!

Colonialism & Racism: Black Man's Burden

I don't think a conversation on race can take place without a discussion of the development and perfection of the doctrine of racial superiority that was more carefully and more successfully projected after slavery than during slavery. It was after slavery that you get some of the most barbaric, uncivilized manifestations of hate and of the sense of white superiority. I think in part that happened because whites are poor losers. Their country has never confronted its own Holocaust, its own violence [John Hope Franklin, author of "From Slavery to Freedom."

The cult of *inferiority complex*, like a *caste system* seems to have consumed what is left of the black man's self-esteem. There is strong evidence that as a result of the constant rejection and humiliation of black people in the past and today, the same black people seem to have been conditioned to accept the inferior status allotted to them in the white dominated society. As their repeated outcries against discrimination and injustice have received little or no significant attention, naturally many have unconsciously and unwillingly succumbed to great pressures they are unable to suppress. We will illustrate this phenomenon with what we refer to as the *Impact of white-black dichotomy in Igbo and African thought*. Outside the ugly picture of the black man created by the early white and racist anthropologists, there is no proof that God created black people differently and assigned to them the lowest status among all created beings. Born out of prejudice, there is no doubt that such a picture of the black man will have a lasting effect on the generations of both whites and blacks everywhere. On their own part the blacks themselves have thus been conditioned to accept low status as part of their destiny.

The ideology of "whiteness" as we will illustrate from Igbo philosophy and thought has a great impact on black peoples' persistent search for greener pastures, and there is need to address the issue. The results of our reflections as well as some of the conclusions from our friend's imaginary book *Back from America* might help in great measure toward stemming down the mass exodus of Africans from their fatherlands. There is need to revisit some of the old concepts to see what possible lessons Africans could draw from them in view of the present predicaments. No one will deny that race has been an issue to reckon with in the history of humankind. It has played a huge role in the division of humankind into big blocks and irreconcilable chasms: *Black and White*, *Red and Brown*. But the two biggest and easily recognizable camps are *White and Black*. The colonialists in Africa widened the chasm between *White and Black* that wherever they exercised control it was always easy to distinguish White from Black, not necessarily from the faces of people.

In South Africa "**Black and White**" was eventually entrenched in the system known as apartheid. Public life was dominated by the color bar. Everything from public conveyances and conveniences to national legislation was literally or figuratively stamped with that warning sign of racial segregation, expressed in the two official languages of the country: **Net Vir Blankes – For Europeans only**. In the United States the same inscription was plastered everywhere at the parking lots, swimming pools, restrooms, buses, Churches, grocery stores, and schools. *For Europeans only* perpetuated the system of racism, naturally still existing today in *Black and White*. The system that operated in South Africa was of course brazenly practiced in the United States of America in other forms such as the *separate-but-equal* doctrine applied to educational facilities or in the so-called *Jim Crow laws*. As for Andrew Hacker,³² something called "racism" exists. In the United States, he identifies it as a complex of ideas and attitudes that translate into action. No doubt it has taken a tragic toll on the lives of all Americans. Unfortunately, as he further points out, the term has been so used and overused that it loses serious meaning. It has served as a rallying cry, a bludgeon and as a diversion from other issues.

"But racism is real, an incubus that has haunted this country since Europeans first set foot on the continent. It goes beyond prejudice and discrimination, and even transcends bigotry, largely because it arises from outlooks and assumptions of which we are largely aware."³³

Housing patterns and neighborhoods tell visitors in white-dominated society most of the painful stories of the burdens of racism and discrimination. Everywhere in the colonial Africa "*For Europeans only*" was also in operation. Naturally the colonialists carved out their own *quarters*, known as *European quarters*, and organized their lives according to the patterns in their own countries. Such housing arrangements did not worry most of the natives. White people in Africa were free to set up apartments where they chose. They were not bound to live like Africans. But the implications of such housing features were not so simplistic as some Africans thought. In the European quarters, blacks, no matter their social status, educational achievements or work experiences might not succeed in obtaining living quarters within the white neighborhood. The phenomenon shocked many Africans, elite and ordinary people alike. In major cities and suburbs, in Africa, North and South America, in European countries where black people live and work it is not difficult to discover "*Black and White*" in housing, in living, and recreational facilities. Prejudices and discrimination force out whites as blacks arrive to settle. Abandoned and deserted by the landlords, these areas witness deterioration and evils of neglect. The consequences are great and have had devastating effects on the psyche of every black person on how he sees himself or thinks that other peoples of the world see him in the community of humankind.

Racism together with all the theories and assumptions associated with it has become the greatest burden of the black race. Unless the wounds are healed, it is unlikely that the black man could comfortably take his rightful place in world community. He might continue to languish under the influence of inferiority complex, unconsciously accepting the lowly position falsely assigned to him by the other races. It is necessary to examine the foundations of racism and find out whether there is any basis for the many centuries of prejudices against black

people. Should these assumptions and theories still be allowed to thrive in the modern times? There were prejudices stemming from some decadent *evolutionary and white supremacist theories*. Racism as a caste condition - a tradition handed down from one generation to the other is a firmly entrenched evil still in the modern multi-society. In every way one looks at these phenomena, it is obvious that black people have continued to carry the burdens of oppression and humiliation. In various ways, too oppressed black people everywhere unconsciously seem to have accepted the status quo! Yeah - too true about all oppressed groups - and then they beat each other up vying for top dog position!

The fundamental fact about racism is that its propagandists in theory and practice accept entirely that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others. Scientifically unproven yet there is among the white race a general acceptance of the theory that members of the black race represent an inferior strain of human species. Therefore, blacks everywhere, whether in Mother Africa or in the Diaspora - one time slaves and descendants of ex-slaves or immigrants in the America - North or South- are seen as languishing at the lower evolutionary level than members of other races.

To establish the theory of superiority of a particular race over the other and particularly over the black race, white anthropologists at one time agreed on the existence of three distinct groups of people, *Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid*. Such traits as skin color, hair and color, shape of body, head, and facial features and blood traits distinguish them. According to the Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, *Caucasoid* is a member of subspecies of mankind including the light-skinned people of Europe, North Africa, Eastern Asia and India and their descendants in other parts of the world. In a word, a *Caucasian* is a *white* man. A *Mongoloid* is racial division of mankind marked by yellowish complexion, prominent cheekbones, and epicanthic folds about the eyes, straight black hair, small nose and broad face. In this race are included the *Mongols, Manchus, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Annamese, Siamese, Burmese, Tibetans* and to some extent, the *Eskimos* and the *American*

Indians. The last group of mankind according to above characterization is the *Negroid* race, pertaining to black race of mankind, especially the indigenous peoples of Africa, generally characterized by brown to black pigmentation, broad flat nose, prognathism, everted lips, and wooly or crisp hair.

How far does intellectual development depend on genetics? No one would quarrel with any number of divisions in which anthropologists - ancient and modern- group humankind or the characteristic features that truly delineate one group from the other. What should preoccupy us here is how genetic differences in racial groups affect the group's intellectual and organizational capabilities, as white people believe that compared with other races, one particular race, namely, people with African ancestries are more likely to carry primitive traits in their genes. Therefore, given this premise and prejudice, the presumption follows that most individuals of African heritage will lack the intellectual and organizational capacities the modern world requires.³⁴ Genetically applied, according to white anthropologists, psychologists, and educators, the biological criteria of race can also be equated with mental characteristics, such as intelligence, personality and character. In the 19th and early 20th century some social philosophers attributed cultural and psychological values to race, proposing theories of racial superiority, an approach that was said to have culminated in the vicious racial doctrines of Nazi Germany.

According to *Joseph Arthur Gobineau*, French social philosopher, in his work, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1853-1855), the *Arya*, or *white race* is superior to all other races. *Houston Steward Chamberlain* (1855-1927), an Anglo-German writer, also known for his anti-Semitic and racist writings, proclaimed in *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, the superiority of the German people who, he asserted were descended from superior *Teutonic* or *Aryan* stock. Both his and *Gobineau's ideas* of racial *purity* were said to have influenced the racist theories of the German dictator, Adolph Hitler. *William Shockley* (Winner of the Nobel Prize) argued to show that people of African origin are the lowest on the evolutionary scale. And *Arthur Jensen*, a professor of psychology at the University of California held that black children were *genetically inferior*, that

even compensatory programs like *Head Start* will fail because the native talents are not there.³⁵

Theories of racial superiority preached by both the ancient and modern social scientists has been however thoroughly refuted and are considered worthless by modern anthropologists. Any learning deficiencies in children have always been traced to *environmental* rather than genetic factors. And these do not apply to black people only. However there is no cause to doubt that there are still many whites - educated or not who hold tightly to the inferiority of the *black race*. There are no strong reasons today to discriminate against Jews on the basis of race. Nor are there any justifiable reasons for all nations to join hands in the decimation of people whom Hitler considered "undesirable in German territory." These included professional criminals and the *asocial*, (Gypsies, homosexuals, prostitutes, Jehovah's Witnesses, Slavs and Communists.) In systematic genocide, about 6 million Jews, about a half million Gypsies and one million other people considered undesirable in German territory were destroyed by Nazi Germany during the World War II.

If the "sins" of these hitherto "criminals" and "untouchables" have been forgiven by the world community, one may ask why the "sins" of the black race have not been forgiven. Is there any evidence really, after more than a century of searching that any of the pools of race-based genes has a larger quotient of what we choose to call "intelligence" or "organizational ability" or "creative capacity?" No one will agree that even among the *supposedly* superior Caucasoid race there are no morons. Nor is it possible to accept that all whites are geniuses or that there are only a few people of average intellectual ability. Is it impossible to imagine that among black people there can be found geniuses as well as people of average intellectual ability? Why should *all* blacks be looked upon as *Tabula Raza* - *people of low intellect and porous memory, blockheads* who must always be led by the nose? No one should be shocked that it is racists who are the protagonists of racial superiority. They may award themselves Nobel Prizes, based on their miraculous inventions and new theories they propound, but no one should be deceived. The sentiments they hold give shape to what they see and believe. They end up seeing not what is

actually there, but what they want to see. This is nothing but intellectual dishonesty.

Gabriel Lasker, contributor to the Encarta 97 Encyclopedia, may not be the first to inform us that, today, anthropologists stress the *heterogeneity* of world population, and that many have rejected the concept of race outright. This means that many individuals can be classified into more than one race or into none. Races are defined in terms of membership into populations. They represent persons with the same pool of ancestors. Except for brothers and sisters, however, virtually no individuals have the same ancestors. It is impossible to divide all humans into a small number of discrete social, biological, or geographic groups in such a way that everybody belongs to one and only one. At last we arrive at the same old explanation for all genetic differences that might exist among various peoples. *Environment* has been traced to be the decisive factor; "There are no differences in native intelligence or mental capacity that cannot be explained by *environmental circumstances*. Rather than using racial classifications to justify human variability, anthropologists today define geographic or social groups by geographic or social criteria. They then study the nature of the genetic attributes of these groups and seek to understand the causes of changes in their genetic makeup."

White Attitude: The Age-Old Dilemma.

Global racism, which has continued to exert negative impact on black people all over the world can be compared to a caste *condition* - a *tradition* handed down from one generation to the other. Genetic theory does not in any way prove that one race is superior to another nor does it assign an inferior position to the black race, irrespective of the role of environment on people's performance or achievement. In examining racism as a caste condition that it has become difficult to eradicate, *James Baldwin*, the sensitive black author sees nothing but prejudice. He seems to be telling his countrymen that any battle against the evil is a lost one. He tells his fellow black folk: "You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. You were born into a

society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being"³⁶

No scientific evidence demonstrates that there is anything particularly wrong with the black race that is not found among the other races. Like an Indian caste system, one is born into it and has no cause to raise a voice against one's status, which has been assigned to his people, probably by the gods. No matter how progressive one may be, rich or of extraordinary intelligence, nobody is interested in you. You should simply accept your fate, remain silent, only to be seen and not heard. That your ancestors had been assigned that status tells you where you belong. Even innocent human beings, children alike, who have no cause to hate anybody no matter their color, language or race are conditioned to believe that those stories about the black people are true and should be held as self-evident truth. Such stories begin like this: *It is said that...I heard that...We learnt at school that...Our parents told us that...People hold that...If you ask for a proof I can't produce any...* And thus that "something" sinister about the black man is transmitted from one generation to the other. There are enough telltale stories about "them", those *black people*. Those tales are not new. Taken from the results of opinion survey, conducted by Newsweek magazine in the late, 60s at the heat of the American black civil rights revolution, most of the points can never be declared obsolete. They underscore the realities of the burdens of race and black people's terrible situation in the modern world.

Not a few whites still hold such views about their black neighbors or blacks everywhere. Newsweek titled this chapter of the study *White Attitude: The Age-Old Dilemma*. It summarizes white attitude - *today and tomorrow* - and tells blacks the bitter lessons they are bound to live with in a white dominated world. Some of the comments point to old prejudices, others to the impossibility of integration between white and black folks.

- "Oh, they are so forward. If you give them your finger, they'll take your hand." [A house wife, Dayton, Ohio]
- "They're asking for too much all at once. They should try the installment plan. People don't adjust that quickly." [22-year-old commercial artist, Arlington, Virginia]

- "They are trying to force themselves on us." [55-year-old man in Port Huron, Michigan]
- "He doesn't know how to act. He goes overboard. Rome wasn't built in a day." [A tools machinist in Wood River, Illinois]
- "They've come from cannibals in a short time." [A housewife in California]
- "It's like a dog you keep tied up for a long time. Then when you let him loose he goes everywhere." [A house wife]

Did the black civil rights crusade help to soften their oppressors' hearts? The questions we need to ask this time is whether emancipation meant anything to the whites. Did the *Gospel* of freedom and equality preached by the founding fathers of America mean anything to the people? That *Gospel* affirmed the following: *We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuits of happiness*" (Thomas Jefferson). Surely these were nice sentiments from slaveholders. But listen to the reactions of his fellow countrymen and women. The racial tension in America will always serve as a hard lesson to Africans everywhere, especially those who are on the verge of abandoning Mother Africa for the greener pastures! What are the reactions of white men and women in the present times?

- "When I see on TV these demonstrations it makes me think of them as savages." [Housewife, Joliet, Illinois]
- "I'd say 90 per cent are a bunch of nuts-yelling because they don't have anything better to do." [A young mother in Garland, Texas]
- "They're tired of being the underdog. This country is very prosperous, and too many Negroes have not shared in this prosperity." [Cleveland Heights ,Ohio house wife]
- "They should be treated like the Jews and put in a country of their own." [A 68-year-old widow, Idaho]
- "They want power - not only want to be in the show but want to run it, too!" [Dan Foster, Jr. Of Jacksonville]

- "I think they want to make slaves of the white people." [Wife of a service worker, Columbus, Ohio]

One of the co-editors of *Black and White* comments "It is hard to conceive of a set of episodes better designed to bring forth from white people all their worst prejudices about Negroes than the riots."³⁷ But have blacks any reason to blame the Almighty God for creating them black? What is intrinsically evil about the black race? These and many other questions should worry all people of good will, particularly those who wish to see the wounds of racism healed and structures separating black and white dismantled.

CHAPTER FIVE

Racial Slurs, Hate Crimes, and Images of Scorn

*Societies create vocabularies, devising new terms when they are needed and retaining old ones when they serve a purpose. Dictionaries list words as obsolete or archaic, denoting that they are no longer used or heard. But one epithet survives, because people want it to. Your vulnerability to humiliation can be summed up in a single word. That word, of course, is "Nigger" [Andrew Hacker, in *Two Nations*]*

Nigger & Negrophobia

In both Mother Africa and among Diaspora Blacks, particularly in the United States, the impact of racial slurs used by whites, colonialist schoolteachers, district administrators, and even missionaries had been tremendous on the self-image of black people in general. While some colonialist families and teachers who lived in segregated quarters, referred to as *Europeans Quarters* called African children *black monkeys, kangaroos, apes, chimpanzees, or badgers* and any other animal name that came to mind; in the United States, the repulsive term is *nigger*. Black American kids often react to racial slurs by fighting their aggressors or those who taunt them. Some weaker ones who don't understand the reason for such insults simply break down in distress. "Hey, Rodney, how does it feel to be a nigger? White kids taunt blacks. How does it feel to know that you'll always be a nigger? Is your mother a nigger too?"

The word *Nigger* is today surrounded with aura of *unholy* and *evil* and is usually mentioned *sottovoce* (in a whisper). *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* agrees that the word *Nigger* is offensive, disparaging or reproachful. It refers to the *Negro*, a *member of any dark-skinned race*. Its third application is in a figurative sense - *Nigger in the*

woodpile - a dubious or improbable element in a situation, especially when regarded as possibly harmful or undesirable. All this has the disparaging effect of reproach, discredit, lowering the estimation and prestige of someone or treating him slightly. It is enough for a parent, adult, older brother, or sister to allow a toddler to experience racism in a simple situation, by pointing at a passing black person or screaming: *Look there, a Nigger!* "But where is he?" "Who is he?" "What is Nigger?" These are unnecessary questions! The Nigger is actually not just that black person on the street. *Nigger* represents a race. The adult may go further with a *lecture*, but in whispers: "Make sure you do not address anybody as *Nigger*." It is offensive and forbidden by law. But you must note what *Nigger* represents: "Those evil people that should be avoided, that must be feared, that should not be trusted and that should not be loved."

The statement *He is black* is enough to generate various reactions from young people who have not received sufficient and systematic indoctrination from adults on the issue of racial prejudice. The toddler can at last agree and confirm "Oh, I see...I understand..." What does he see? What does he understand? Nothing! But one thing is certain, he is able to arrive at that inevitable conclusion: *Black should be associated with evil*. The rest of the lecture may be completed with a bunch of admonitions: '*do's or don'ts*': "Do not befriend a black person. You may not sit near him even in Church. Take care not to bump into him on a walkway. Do not shake hands with him. Try to avoid any conversation with him. You should of course not dream marrying a black person." Andrew Hacker paints an equally gloomy picture of the import of the epithet or the appellation, *Nigger*:

When a white person voices it, it becomes a knife with a whetted edge. No black person can hear it with equanimity or ignore it as "simple a word" This word has the force to pierce, to wound, to penetrate, as no other has. There have, of course, been terms like "kike" and "spic" and "chink". But these are less frequently heard today. And they lack the same emotional impact.

Some non-ethnic terms come closer, such as "slut", "fag", and "cripple". Yet, "Nigger" stands alone with its power to tear at one's insides. It is revealing that whites have created so wrenching an epithet for even the most benighted members of their own race.³⁸

In shops, departmental stores, and grocery stores, the experiences of black people are the same everywhere. It seems that special directives are given to shop attendants to keep special eye on blacks when they enter a shop. One black teenager narrates his story:

I entered an electronics shop to buy some empty radio cassettes. There were many people there. Some were moving around examining some products and selecting those to buy. There was also a long queue of people paying for their wares. The salesman was busy attending to them. Suddenly someone came behind me and said "Hi! Can I help you?" That was the busy salesman, who had temporarily abandoned the paying customers. Why has he left this group of people to attend to me, was my next reaction. Without taking any offense, I simply informed him that I didn't need any help from him. He left me with suspicious eyes. While attending his customers, I could notice he was not at ease at my presence. So I left in disgust.

Andrew Hacker confirms the above story and says it is a common scene in America. It is a situation that many blacks have to endure as the day-to-day aggravations and humiliations add up bit by bit.

To take a depressingly familiar example, you stroll into a shop to look at the merchandise, and it soon becomes clear that the clerks are keeping a watchful eye on you. Too quickly, one of them comes over to inquire what it is you might want, and then remains conspicuously close as you continue your search. It also seems that they take a usually long time verifying your credit card.³⁹

There is no doubt that this is among the pains blacks have to endure living in a white world, the rage that one must suppress almost every day. One might think that this type of embarrassment or humiliation is limited to the under-class black. But as Bob Blauner observes:

Even successful middle-class black professionals experience slights and humiliations - incidents when they are stopped by police, regarded suspiciously by clerks while shopping, or mistaken for messengers, drivers, or aids at work - that remind them they have not escaped racism's reach.⁴⁰

There are not a few neurologists who attribute the high rate of hypertension among black-Americans to the so many *black burdens* they have to bear. If ever an illness has social causes, this is certainly one! "To be black in America means reining in your opinions and emotions as no whites ever have to do. Not to mention the forced and false smiles you are expected to contrive, to assure white Americans that you harbor no grievances against them."⁴¹ On the walkways white mothers walking along with their toddlers take extra caution to protect their young ones when a black person is on their track. There is usually a feeling that the toddler needs extra protection as the black fellow may likely launch an attack on the defenseless fellow! There are so many such funny stories and moments, which anyone -white or black - may confirm, deny, or simply describe as *exaggerated*. Truly amusing as they look, they certainly point to the many "stumps of racism," which for long have kept many Africans and blacks everywhere in a perpetual status of servitude and depression. Some seem to have adapted unconsciously to a hostile situation while others suffer in agony. The psychological effects of such racial attitudes are felt worldwide and will continue to mitigate on the self-esteem of the black man. In such areas as housing and inter-racial marriage, to a great degree black people have continued to suffer inhumane treatment from their white neighbors. A sense of utter

rejection in society can be devastating to both the elderly and young black people. Examples abound.

According to reports, the feelings on *housing* in the United States are so strong that even the majority of the public who want discrimination outlawed in most areas of the community balk at an *open housing system*. Even where some type of integration has been enforced by legislation or other means, the whites easily find ways of escaping from the neighborhood, abandoning it to blacks. It may serve our purpose of study to determine the reasons for this situation. Why are blacks unwelcome visitors to white neighborhood? According to Newsweek Magazine survey⁴² more than 80 per cent of whites said blacks moving into their neighborhood would upset them. Hear them:

- "It would tear me up! The Negro is inferior and utterly impossible to live with as neighbors. I can't even stand to think about it!" [A retired policeman in Asheville, North Carolina]
- "If they were well behaved, it wouldn't bother me. But they are usually dirty and bring rats and bugs. They ruin a neighborhood." [A chain grocery-store manager in Chicago]
- "You hear so many people say things about them. They are trashy and mean. I don't want to mingle. I'll stay with my color and they should do the same." [A 71-year-old woman in Ohio].
- "Wherever they go they make a mess of everything. They have no pride in their home. They make a ghetto of it." [A 38-year-old housewife of Hyde park, New York]
- "They're dirty. They get housing project and in two years they look like dumps." [A housewife in Joliet]

Nobody would blame any person - white or black- for discriminating against persons with dirty habits. Certainly among peoples and families all over the world, we find geniuses and morons. It is possible that some can upset their neighbors by their lifestyle. Such way of life or social behavior cannot be generalized and attributed to an entire race. Certainly most social behaviors have environment as the primary determinant. An indecent living condition is not enough reason for subjecting the

blacks of the United States to centuries of discrimination and persecution, however. We may have to extend our searchlight to other areas. Once again the white folks were open to express their feeling and fears. These have to do with *inter-marriage* as the Newsweek survey revealed.

Hear them again:

- "I have nothing against Negroes - as long as it doesn't get too personal like dating and marriage" [A salesman in Lewistown, Pennsylvania]
- "Races should stay and breed with their own. It's the end result that bothers me - a white marrying a Negro." [Wife of a skilled worker in Salt Lake City.]

Although no barrier could stop intermarriage between blacks and whites today, there still exists strong evidence that many whites object to their teenage children dating blacks, while some still look on such contacts between whites and blacks with a fair amount of horror. But the views of one white man reported in *Time* magazine of November 24 1997 could be upsetting as well as devastating. The man in Bridgeport, N.J., in an interview, went on at length about his capacity for racial tolerance. He helps send holiday turkeys to poor black families. But when he was asked about the subject of interracial dating, he declared: "Listen, if Jesus himself stepped down off the cross asking to date my daughter, and he was black? I'd tell the guy to go to hell!" There are worse white attitudes that show that racial integration will for long remain a mirage in the white dominated American society.

Aftermath of Inferiority Complex and Discrimination

From the various scenes I had beheld on shipboard, I soon grew a stranger to terror of every kind, and was, in that respect at least almost an English man... That fear which was the effect of my ignorance, wore away as I began to know them. I could now speak English tolerably well, and I perfectly understood everything that was said. I not only felt myself quite easy with these countrymen, but also relished their society and manners. I no longer looked upon them as spirits, but as men superior to us; and therefore I had the strongest desire to resemble them, to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners. [Olaudah Equiano]⁴³

Black & White: "Whiteness" as Treasured Property: The Igbo Example

Right from their first contact with the colonialists and white missionaries, Igbo people have had great respect for the white man and his way of life. The Igbo have *imitated, mimicked* the white man, and admired his food, dressing and language. It is not only fine to speak English; more admirable and provoking is to be able to speak like an English man. A fine English gentleman in the nature of a colonial administrator or the District officer or his clerk is an embodiment of a human being that has been endowed with qualities and values that all must copy if possible or at least appreciate. That he is or acts like *Onye Ocha* or *Bekee* "white man" is the highest form of adulation by which one's manner is deeply commended or appreciated. At the same time "He is or acts like an *Igbo* or an *African*" is the worst expression of disgust and disapproval of one's actions or mannerisms. *Onye Ocha, Bekee*, "white man" is a decent man, prudent and honest in his dealings with people, *trustworthy*, and *loving*. He is an

absolute gentleman without any guile. But "Igbo" or "African" connotes all that instills fear, all that is distasteful, raw and crude. "He is an Igbo man or *acts* like an Igbo," simply means, "do not trust him." "Take his word with a grain of salt."

As part of wishful thinking or as an expression of approval of all good and values found in the white man, the Igbo may give a personal name *Bekee* to a son or a daughter. It does not only express bodily beauty; it also points to the qualities of the young fellow who bears the name "Bekee." "Bekee" has of recent become a household name among Igbo families. There is no doubt such an appellation confirms the deep admiration the Igbo in particular have for the white man. Consequently this goes to show his disapproval of anything that does not promote order and fair play. Through such an attitude, the Igbo have by implication come to despise most of their own things and values that in normal circumstances would compare well in quality with those of the white people. A double-edged sword! In fact by implication they betray themselves. It is not the white man who condemns the black man and his actions. The Igbo in particular is the one personally bearing witness to his *inefficiency, lack of power, and zeal*.

It is not rare for the African masses and even highly placed government officials to attribute the cause of the collapse of an African bank or financial institution, a company, a power station or any particular project to the absence of a *white manager* or *technician*. Because the white man is *efficient, responsible, and trustworthy*, he cannot do anything *irregular or unorthodox* that could jeopardize the interest of society. But his Igbo and African counterparts lack these qualities and it would be "dangerous" to entrust them with heavy responsibilities. Africans have great admiration for the white man. Wherever he was, in one of Africa's remote villages, on social development program, working to contribute his quota in the development of Africa, he is still seen as a *man of God*. He may be in another part of Africa, serving the interests of his home government, a secret agent or a Peace Corps volunteer, the white man stands shoulders high above those he has gone to help. His intelligence is not contested. "The white man is a spirit." [Bekee bu agbara] is the usual Igbo expression for white man's ingenuity in

scientific fields. The sophistication of his technology is summarized by the phrase "ogbara Igbo gharii" [unfathomable mystery and confusing]. In other words, "what the Igbo cannot comprehend!" African and *black things* are usually despised as *inferior*. In many areas of human endeavor black things - articles of clothing, food, livestock, and fruits, are *dichotomized* in *Black and White* categories. The white material is superior and the black one must be despised. "Igbo made" simply points to the *inferiority* of some commodity, whether true or not!

In reality, Igbo and other African products are not generally of inferior quality. Ironically an *Igbo-made* hardware may be preferred to *English or any foreign type*. Outwardly the Igbo product may not look as refined as its counterpart, but for solidity, durability, and value, it may be the best. This is true of some locally manufactured hardware like handguns and similar instruments of warfare, farming implements, and some food-processing machinery. Some locally manufactured drugs are even more highly valued than foreign or the imported ones. In the professional fields, *Igbo medical doctors, engineers, and educators* sometimes perform better than their white counterparts. Igbo medical doctors are known to have successfully performed complicated surgeries in their poorly equipped clinics. Igbo *pilots* are rated among the best in the world. Many have had clean flight records and are known to have performed *miraculous* feats in aviation history. They are more alert than their counterparts elsewhere. They can land or take off from the most difficult situations. There is no doubt about this since most African airports are not among the best equipped in the world. Hardship and poverty can equally be an advantage in some areas of human endeavor!

One may not deny, however that there are certain *white* things that may be of higher quality than *black* things. But this fact cannot form any basis for labeling everything Igbo or African *inferior*. It is the attribution of the superior and admirable black things to the handiwork of the white man that is definitely disturbing. The damage has been done. And to reverse the trend looks like an uphill task. It has taken many African writers, activists and statesmen - ancient and modern, enormous amounts of time and sweat to re-educate the black race. Some

African scholars, poets, and writers such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, the one time president and elder statesman of Senegal had to devote much of their time and resources to the glorification of the black man's culture through books, poetry, and scholarly works. But the problem still faces all blacks. Is it possible for the Africans themselves to bridge the gap between *Black and White*, a gap they in most part created themselves?

"Ala-Bekee": The Wonderland of the White Man

It is not only the Onye Ocha, Bekee, the white man, who is greatly admired and even worshipped, his native land is also thought by the Igbo to be the *Paradise* spoken about in the Bible. The Igbo's passionate desire to visit the land of the white man has no bounds. In fact, his dreams and excessive excitement about this land is beyond description. Any non-white who succeeds in getting to white man's land has achieved some ultimate goal in life. Wow! That may look amazing! "Ala Bekee," in Igbo language, does not simply mean, "white man's land" [Europe and America]. It is a generic term applied to any *superb*, very admirable, and a much-sought-after position. It connotes an elevation of one to a position of an eternal bliss. *Ono ala-Bekee* (He is in white man's land), figuratively speaking means that one has now attained the highest position one has been struggling for. *Orugo ala-Bekee* (He has reached the white man's land) simply means that the one has reached the zenith of his achievement. There is nothing to struggle for or worry about any more!

Even in modern times, the search for the treasures of the white man's kingdom has never been abandoned. The desire to visit it or dwell there for the rest of one's life is on the increase. A typical Igbo teenager will cross mountains and rough seas to get to *Ala-Bekee*, even to get a glimpse of it. The family is ready to sell their most valuable properties, including land, to purchase an air ticket to make it possible for their son and daughter to go to *Ala-Bekee*. Even after many years of academic studies in Africa, in the most prestigious higher institutions in the land,

even those established and run by white men, many Africans still struggle to *further their studies* in the white man's land. The white man's educational institutions must be of a higher grade as must be the quality of the degrees they award! There is an inexpressible immense joy when a woman relates to a friend of hers that "my son is studying or working overseas, in the land of the white man." It is a satisfaction beyond measure, for she has been praying for that opportunity for a long time. At least she has been assured of a decent burial. Money and all the expected "goodies" will flow in abundantly and those who helped make that dream a reality will get their reward sooner or later!

There is often the temptation to question the white supremacist ideology. Is it a myth or reality? In terms of hard work and ingenuity, it would be unfair to deny that the white man is preeminent in management and achievement. But the acknowledgment of this should not blur the image of other races or their contributions to world affairs. White supremacy, which asserts black inferiority, becomes rather a myth by all means, based on prejudice handed down from one generation of the white race to another. Afrocentric education, long suppressed by colonialists must unravel the success stories of the African past. The tendency to refer to Egyptian civilization as the only valid chapter in black African history is not correct. While acknowledging the unique role of Egypt as a cradle of world civilization in the black world, there is no reason to disregard the contributions of other African kingdoms and regions in world civilization. Lack of early documentation is not a reason to ignore the contributions of the rest of Africa.

There is no doubt that there were already powerful kings and kingdoms in Africa before the colonization and scramble for Africa. The ancient civilization and cultures of such kingdoms of Benin [West Africa] and the Congo [Central Africa] may be older than the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. Indeed the kingdoms' stolen artifacts are found in European and American museums. The sad phenomenon of slavery did not bring about an end to African civilization. Nevertheless the white supremacist theory has a tremendous dehumanizing impact on the blacks. Incessant references to African tragedies - poverty, underdevelopment, unstable governments, civil conflicts instill

despair in blacks all over the world and not the least blacks in America. Mockingly the whites tell African Americans: "look at your Africa you claim you are proud of. Look at your Black studies and Afro-centrist programs. What is Africa as a race up to?"

Unfortunately Africans have contributed to a great measure, by commission or omission to the exaltation of the white man, often to the detriment of the black race. The unpleasant consequences of that action have started to pinch hard on the black people. The dilemma is there: to debunk the *myth* of white man's supremacy or to put into action what good blacks have learnt from the white man, who for along time has been their mentor. While not refusing to acknowledge to some degree the truth of *white supremacy* in vast areas of human endeavor, many black people have taken time too to demonstrate that something good could also come out of *Nazareth*. Blacks, too have their good qualities and a lot too to offer the world.

White is Attractive; Black is Repulsive

Black people unconsciously acknowledge the distinction between *black* and *white*, as well as affirm the superiority of *whiteness* and the inferiority of *blackness* of anything under the sun. This notion has long been planted in the minds of most people, both *black* and *white*. In its global application, the adjective *black* is always associated with *evil, disaster, danger and bad omen*. A very dangerous terrorist group was *Black September*. The day on which an earthquake struck a city and obliterated over 5 thousand people from the face of the earth was described as *Black Saturday*. A week of torrential rains or hurricane or blizzards was described as *Black week*. The day some cultic group who committed mass suicide was discovered was called *Black Friday*. Many such references are employed to describe events of national and international catastrophes.

There is even some general notion that blackness instills fear and is *repugnant!* Such adjectival applications usually referring to sinister meanings of *Negro* are widely confirmed in the everyday usage of the word "black." Its unmistakable connotation includes lack or absence of good. In such a sense

black may not in any way be preferred to any other available color: Many dictionary applications clarify the various meanings attached to the terms.

- As a color among the traditional rainbow color, *black* is dark, producing or reflecting comparatively little light and having no predominant hue. Naturally people prefer light to darkness. "No one lights a candle to put it under a table. It is placed on a lamp stand so that those who enter will see."
- A *black (moonless) night* does not give joy to people who like to sit outside and gossip.
- Black refers to an evil, wicked act, as in "the pirates' *black deeds*."
- Cheerless and depressing mood, gloomy outlook, as in *black thoughts*
- Marked by anger, for example in "He gave me a *black look*."
- Most often "black" is associated with disaster, calamity, as in "The stock market crash on *black Friday*."
- Deserving of, indicating, or incurring censure or dishonor, as in "Man has written one of his *blackest records*."
- In clothing, *black mourning clothes*.
- Tastelessness, as in serving coffee without milk or cream: *black coffee*.
- *Black lie* (a more serious falsehood) is contrasted with *white lie*, little, almost insignificant offense).

Fake or appearing to emanate from a source other than the actual point of origin, used chiefly of intelligence operations: *black propaganda, black radio transmissions*. **Black crime** as opposed to *white crime* - black crime is a more serious offense, often punishable by death. In this category one finds *criminal acts* like *rape, first degree murder and acts of violence, causing death or seriously maiming people*. Usually offenders face the death penalty or life imprisonment. *White crime* is usually associated with *non-violent* but serious offenses of cheating or fraudulent practices. These are "sins" of greed. While *black criminals* are housed in prisons with sophisticated enclosures to deter any possibility of escape, *white criminals* do not need such enclosures of high walls and a well-protected environment.

- *Black magic* as opposed to *white magic*: A *black magician* is an imposter in devil's garb. His performances are viewed

with suspicion. He is there to deceive people. A *White magician's* acts are learned art in psychology and other sciences. Only smart minds can detect the secrets of his art. He does not deceive. A White magician is a godly fellow, while a black magician is a devil.

- Hidden, mysterious, but disclosed for reasons of security, only to an extremely limited number of authorized persons; very highly classified documents, e.g. *black programs* in Defense Department; government's *black* budget.
- In its phrasal verb usage, as in *black out*, blackness carries no positive connotation, as the following examples show:
- To lose consciousness or memory temporarily: *blacked out* at the podium.
- To suppress (a fact or memory, for example) from conscious recognition: *blacked out* many of my wartime experiences.
- To prohibit the dissemination of, especially by censorship: *blacked out* the news issuing from the rebel provinces.
- *Black out*: to extinguish or conceal all lights that might help enemy aircraft find a target during an air raid.
- To cause a failure of electrical power in, "Storm damage *blacked out* much of the region."
- To withhold (a televised event or program) from a broadcast area: *blacked out* the football game on local stations.

In writing and publications, controversies over the capitalization of the word (maiuscola) "Black", whether the word is used as a substantive noun or as an adjective continues to rage. Many black intellectuals, writers and mostly anti-racist groups have often argued that white writers' use of the small letter 'b' (minuscola) always carries racial overtones. In other words the minuscola is used to belittle the black race. The whites on their own part respond to such views as uncalled for. Pertti J. Pelto,⁴⁴ points out however that Black is often capitalized in its use to denote persons, though the lowercased form (minuscola) is still widely used by authors of all races.

In **religious art and literature**, of course, it has become traditional to paint the *devil black* and *angels white*. Catholic Catechism books usually portray *evil in black colors and good in white*. In the eschatological portrayal of *heaven, purgatory and hell, a white person is usually shown to be in heaven, a mulatto*

in purgatory and a black person in hell. The same thing with sin: *mortal sin* is shown in *black* colors, *venial sin* in *semi-white or orange* and *virtue* in *white*. Some wicked biblical figures, like **Cain** who killed his brother Abel, **Judas**, who betrayed his master or **Herod**, who massacred innocent children, are portrayed in **black** colors. The stereotyped opinions of the black race that circulated in American literature from the 18th century to well deep into the 20th century should offer concern to all who care about the future and dignity of the black race. More or less the Negro became a "contrast conception."

He is the "opposite race" - an inner enemy, antithesis of character and properties of the white man. His name is the antonym of white. As the color white is associated with everything good, with Christ and the angels, with heaven, fairness, cleanliness, virtue, intelligence, courage, and progress, so black has, through the ages, carried associations with all that is bad and low: black stands for dirt, sin, and the devil. It becomes understandable and "natural" on a deeper magical place of reasoning that the Negro is believed to be stupid, immoral, diseased, lazy, incompetent, and dangerous - dangerous to the white man's virtue and social order.⁴⁵

To most peoples of other races, everything about the black people is detestable, and the younger generation has been taught by adults to believe that the black person's situation is an unfortunate one. All the stigmas of the black people may also be embedded in prejudice. The Negro is segregated, and one deep idea behind segregation, writes Myrdal, is "that of quarantining what is evil, shameful, and fearful in society."⁴⁶

When one speaks about "Americans", the Negro is not counted in. When the "public" is invited, he is not expected. Like the devil and all his synonyms and satellites, he is enticing at the same time that he is disgusting. Like them he is also humorous in a way, and is possible to pity him. As the devil with his goat's foot is earth-bound in a sinister sense, so the Negro is also

more part of "nature" than the white man. The old theologians of the South meant something specific when they equipped the Negro with a disproportionate amount of original sin just as Christian theologians generally characterized the devil as a fallen angel.⁴⁷

The blacks themselves, as a result of their respect and admiration for the white man, have also helped to perpetuate the inferior status of **black things** or **blackness**. Terms originally invented by the colonialists to degrade, ridicule, cajole and dehumanize Africans have unfortunately found themselves in the everyday phraseology used by both black and white people to make a caricature of the bad members of society and communities. Such caricatures are built around the phrases such as **painting someone black**, **black sheep of the family**. We all know the evils associated with **black market**. Criminals and prisoners are usually conveyed in a special van called **Black Maria!**

One does not need to talk of the impression generally created when references are made to **black neighborhood** in Europe and America. Its counterpart is *European quarters* in the colonial Africa. While **European quarters** in Africa meant special areas, segregated quarters marked out for colonial masters and their families, in Europe and America they refer to areas meant for *Whites only*. Blacks are excluded from such areas. But where they (blacks) stubbornly insist on moving in to mix with the whites, these can after all abandon the entire area for the unwanted visitors. Blacks move in and whites move out! Black neighborhoods may not necessarily refer to quarters where black people live. No. *Figuratively speaking*, they refer to dangerous zones of a neighborhood where evil thrives and criminals roam about often unchallenged by security agents. Here trafficking in drugs and alcohol is the order of the day. Any sane person crossing such a neighborhood before sunrise or after sunset is doing so at the risk of losing his or her life!

Racism & Low Black Self-Esteem

“Black Jesus” stirs Community Racism

The following story may throw more light on our discussion, namely how *white is always attractive and black repulsive*. Diehard *racism* is also at the root of black-white dichotomy. It was in the early seventies when a new psychedelic form of Christianity was revolutionizing the youth in North America. Although most of the religious activities which included *baptism in the Spirit and Jesus Revolution* did not seem to be bringing the expected moral regeneration among the youth in the United States, Church leaders were nevertheless happy that most of the new religious enthusiasts were young people.

Then appeared the musical movie **Jesus Christ Superstar**, which compared well with **Jesus of Nazareth**. Many high Church officials in Rome watched *Jesus Christ Super Star*. Many priests and students of theology and religious studies, among them Africans studying in Rome, also watched the movie. Some liked it, and many others criticized it. Not surprisingly many Africans who saw the movie were very sad and did not hide their feelings. What was hurting about *Jesus Christ Superstar*? African students were angered by the decision of an **African-American actor** to portray **Judas** in the movie. Why should a black man play the role of a widely rejected disciple of Jesus who turned a traitor? No other human being, within and outside Palestine - ancient and modern - had taken the name *Judas*. The name is odious even to non-believers. Even in High School Passion plays, students don't easily accept playing the role of Judas and other characters associated with evil deeds.

Why should this *African-American* portray the black race as *evil - fraudulent, devious, hypocritical and devilish*? Did he know the worldwide and racial implications of his action? Perhaps these questions did not worry the actor or the promoters of the religious movie. Surely money - the dollar- was the bait. The young African-American in the **Judas' garb** must have collected a good sum of money. He did not mean to instigate any racial tension. But for millions of black people everywhere, *there*

is something in name. Names always point to some realities associated with birth, role models, and destiny. A satisfying explanation was therefore required to pacify the enraged African students in Rome who protested against casting a black man as Judas in the movie *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

For whites, perhaps the choice of a black man to portray **Judas the traitor** was a perfect decision. And the black man accepting the gracious offer had demonstrated that he resembled the creature in a joke or mockery speech used to make a caricature of a person. But this should not be the end of our story. What of a **black man portraying Jesus the Christ** in a movie or play? Here the story becomes even sourer, as we learn from another incident. Many United States dailies and magazines carried the headline: "**Black Jesus opposed in New Jersey!**" The opposition of the white population of the Holy Family Parish, Newark, NJ, to a Union City theater's decision to have an **African-American actor** portray **Jesus Christ** in a passion play, was embarrassing to the Catholic Church authorities there. At least that has once again given reconciliation and healing of the wounds of racism another deadly blow in God's own country. It is specifically in the Church.

As reported in several newspapers in the United States, many derogatory phone calls and cancelled reservations from many groups of theatergoers followed an announcement that the play's casting director had decided on an African-American, 34-year-old Desi Arnaz Giles, to portray **Christ** for the first time in the 82-year history of the Union City play. Giles was to alternate the role with a white actor through the run of the play, which was staged in a theater built and owned by Holy Family parish in the Newark archdiocese. Only older people and members of youth organizations from New York and New Jersey attended the production.

Giles, the **Black Jesus**, it was reported, received several death threats and the Church authorities were equally disturbed. In a statement, Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick of Newark said, "I was deeply disturbed by the reaction of a few people." Having an African-American play Jesus "reminds each one of us that men and women of every community are invited and challenged to become like the Lord", McCarrick was quoted as

saying. He expressed, however the wish that the opposition did not spread, "especially in this area where we live shoulder to shoulder with sisters and brothers from every race and nation".

Although it was also reported that the opposition and negative calls were replaced with positive phone calls, wired messages and letters, mostly from across the United States, England and South America, there was no doubt that this blatant racism in the Catholic Church was a big setback on the efforts being made to reconcile black and white in the United States of America. The consequences are great. Will artistic directors take such risks in the future to the detriment of their financial gains? Will black Christians have the courage to join their "brothers and sisters in Christ" in future Christian fellowship programs? Will many blacks not decide to abandon white Churches and groups where they are not welcome and seek fellowship with black brothers and sisters elsewhere?

Surely such incidents of "racial discrimination and protests" have contributed to the Church's silence over the issue of race in the past. Afraid of losing the membership of the white majority, Church authorities have usually not taken any significant condemnatory attitude to racism. Pastors and evangelists have either maintained a neutral position or ignored the issue of race in their gospel message and homilies. In some cases they have sided with the persecutors. No wonder, then, that the alienated blacks have decided on founding their own Churches, where they can worship in freedom and joy.

But whatever the case may be, the reaction of Giles, the *Black Jesus*, was not disappointing. Giles was quoted as saying he would continue to play the role despite receiving death threats. He called the part "the most important role of my life.... I will never do anything more important than this." But as courageous as he was, the *Black Jesus*, Desi Arnaz Giles was equally not surprised that things would turn sour for him. When he accepted the role of Jesus Christ in the Passion Play, he expected some stunned looks. He had been acting long enough to know that being the first Black man to portray the Biblical figure in the Park Theatre Performing Arts Center in Union City, NJ, would be breaking new ground. And not everybody would be exactly happy about the change in hue.

"As soon as you're cast in something like this, you know it may stir some people," Giles told reporters. "You know people are going to cancel." It was reported that one would-be patron wanted to know "when the *white actor* would be playing. I don't want to see that *black thing*." Another, spouting profanities, called the artistic director a *lowlife and a scumbag*. And groups - including at least two Church organizations - canceled their ticket orders. What was the cast's response to the onslaught of negative public reaction? Francine Trevens, the production's press agent, characterized it as shock. He informed the equally shocked reporters that they had had a Hispanic play the role of Jesus Christ. He warned: "I think anything like this has to be stopped in the bud."

For blacks in America and all over the world, the episode may not be dismissed as trivial issue in a small corner of North America. There may be some consoling news. Although it was said that was the first time in the 82-year history of the theater company's annual production of *The Passion Play* that the multicultural city had had to deal with the race issue, the overall reaction was said to be positive. According to Giles "The positive re-enforcement, the positive support, outnumbered the negative at least 20-to-1." He added, "I would say every actor prays for this kind of publicity."

But what worried the Black actor, and of course quite a remarkable factor in the controversy was the fact that in the previous year, Giles had played **Herod** (the king who, after Jesus was born, tried to have him killed by ordering all the children in Bethlehem slain). Nobody had a problem with that! He also played **Lucifer** in another production, and nobody seemed to have had a problem with that either. "I guess they can accept a Black man in a negative role," said Giles. "But, I'm out to show them something different." If a black man could portray **Judas the Iscariot, Herod the tyrant, Lucifer the devil**, why couldn't he portray, **Jesus, the Christ**? This question should worry everybody - *Black and White*.

The Black Jesus drama in New Jersey should not be seen as an insignificant piece of racist protest. It has deep religious roots too. Tracing the roots of racist and ethnic prejudice in America, Lawrence J., Gesy⁴⁸ did not forget the role of the first

settlers of the American Colonies who came here to seek religious freedom. Like the Puritans, strictly Calvinists (ca 1629) their belief in a chosen people, *an elect, the saved and the savage* was obviously strong. And almost from the beginnings of the colonies, race was a problem. The difficulty arose from the fact that the colonialists inevitably met with at least some degree of opposition from the Native Americans as soon as the colonists wanted more land. Not only did the Native Americans, a.k.a. Indians, appear differently; they spoke a non-European language and had a totally different culture. Moreover, they were not Christians, not *saved*, not of the *elect*. Hence the term often used for them savages.

The text of the American declaration of independence, signed on July 4, 1776 on behalf of the Congress by John Hancock, President and representatives of the 13 colonies certainly bore the marks of the *Calvinist heritage*. Part of the atrocities which the colonists were alleged to have committed against the people of the United States included "the transportation of large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy." Another most painful allegation was that: "The enemy has also excited domestic insurrection among us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless *Indian Savages*, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions."

How did the blacks come to be identified with savages? As for the Calvinists, the biblical foundation of that is clear. Blacks could not represent anything good. As Gesy⁴⁹ pointed out, the Native Americans did not make good field hands, so quite early in colonial history the Southern planters began importing Africans to use as slaves. They were sufficiently different in appearance from the white colonists that they could be treated as chattel without a feeling of revulsion on the part of the most colonists against that treatment. Moreover, anyone who interpreted the Bible in the strictly literal sense could point to Genesis 9:18-27, in which they could read that Ham, as the father of Canaan, is called "cursed" and "...the lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers." [Gn. 9:25.]

Cult of Mediocrity? African Concept of Time; Colored People's Time - a.k.a. C.P.T.

Is this another way of accepting an inferior status in a multi-cultural society? What does *African time*, *Colored People's Time* connote? Why do the Igbo in particular succumb to the temptation of accepting unconsciously an evil or its symbol, which other peoples reject? "African time" is no doubt a foreign expression imposed by the colonialists and early missionaries. In their naivete, the Igbo and perhaps some other Africans accepted and accommodated the term. Not only has the expression been accepted as a rule of life, it is actually perpetuated in most circumstances by most black people and particularly the Igbo, Nigerians, and African Americans.

The Pre-colonial Igbo had good concept of time. If they had no clocks to regulate the time, the sun and shadows were always there to help regulate time and almost always accurately. As with all sciences the technique had to be mastered in the traditional way. People were expected to be punctual at community gatherings. The traditional wooden or metal gong must be obeyed promptly. Habitual later-comers to public meetings often paid fines. The Igbo could not have invented *Igbo time*, as there was no need to contrast with any other people's system of time regulation. Hence the African or Igbo time factor can be traced to the white man, particularly to the missionaries.

The missionary had his car or motorcycle. The roads from his premises to the mission compound looked better than those in the villages. He lived usually within the mission compound. But the natives might have to walk long distances to the missions for Sunday services. Some actually walked up to five miles or more. But the impatient white man must keep to his watch as he did in his country. Naturally the old and new, foreign and local, white and black were destined to clash. Ridiculed for not being at his Sunday services exactly at the scheduled time, the Igbo naturally accepted his inability to meet up with the *European time schedule*. There is no sufficient reason to blame him for his inability to overcome some of those

circumstances beyond his control. But that he has carried over the concept of *African time* to Europe and America is enough tragedy and a cause for alarm!

We can therefore appreciate their predicament when it comes to time schedules everywhere. Most Africans, and particularly the Igbo of Nigeria, perpetuate the *cult of mediocrity* in their concept of time in relation to business. The ideology of *time is money* has no place in their dictionary of business ethics. This phenomenon no doubt leads many non-Africans and their friends to despise some Africans as well as cast suspicious eyes on their sense of responsibility and trust. When they throw parties, or send out invitations for meetings, conferences and other gatherings, no matter their level of education and position in life the Igbo generally do not consider time factor of much importance. When they indicate in writing or orally that an event would be taking off at the stated time, they always have a different *time set up* in mind. It is generally presumed that an event scheduled to begin at 2.00 PM would actually begin at 5 or 6 PM. This is the African time!

African time or *Igbo time* is *counterfeit* time. It is *false* and *deceiving*. So while giving out an invitation to a white or non-African friend or neighbor, the Igbo privately reveals to the friend the *real time* the event will begin. Some uninformed non-Africans have wasted precious hours attending African parties and meetings that never began at the scheduled time. Many have vowed never to have anything to do with Igbo or other Africans who show little or no interest in time factor. Many Igbo men and women working with white managers and heads of departments of industries and corporations have lost their jobs because they regulate their own time differently.

Once again we are faced with one of those frustrating dichotomies or distinctions that Africans themselves make between *white and black*, thereby assuming a perpetual status of inferiority when it comes to management and achievement. If the white manager is not there to check on time, production goes down and an industry may close down. Much mismanagement in most African business ventures may not always be linked to funds, but time. While **white time** would regulate how each

worker should spend an 8-hour period daily on his or her job, **black, colored, or African time** may not spell out such details!

I strongly maintain (with no fear of contradiction) that less than 2% of Igbo, Nigerians, and some other Africans have changed their African mentality on time during their many years of sojourn in Europe and America. Many believe the "addiction" to the African concept of time is beyond remedy. It is so chronic that many who in principle do not approve any distinction between *white and black time*, think that it would take time to find a remedy. Some have given up the war against African time because they believe it is a war that no single Igbo or African can win. So if you cannot beat them, you join them!

Whatever the case may be, Africans once again find themselves in a very miserable situation where progress or development has been hampered by lack of responsibility on a simple factor like *time*. There is need for change and surely someone has to begin the revolution. The "Search for greener pastures" should include genuine commitment to embracing those human qualities that have made the white man attract peoples of other races to his own land. **Time is money** says it all! An American businessman was not mincing words when he declared:

Wasted time is not a prized commodity in twentieth century American society. We are people ruled by the clock. Time is money because time is to be filled with purposeful controlled activity, which is productive of things, which can be sold. We are convinced that we must be in control of time. The last thing the productive American would want to do is waste time playing around with realities that do not produce a saleable commodity.⁵⁰

Time consciousness is an interesting concept in terms of development and progress. Whether myth or reality, the ideology of white/black dichotomy should no more be allowed to perpetuate a culture of self-pity or mediocrity among the black people. Africans should not accept inferior positions among the peoples of the world, nor should they assume such a position either by omission or commission.

CHAPTER SIX

Diaspora Africans and Crisis of Identity: The African-American Example

Crisis of identity is not a new phenomenon in the history of black people, ancient and modern. Olaudah Equiano, the best-known Igbo and African slave had terrible struggles with identity. As we learn from his autobiography, when his long time friend and captain Robert King, the Quaker merchant passed away, he was forced to endure the racial prejudice of the man who acted as replacement. After returning to Europe, Equiano's life followed a path of struggling for identity. He faced the realities of a prejudiced and unkind world. He was similarly disoriented about his goals.

He dabbled in hair dressing. He longed to return to sea and found work on trading ships to Turkey, Italy and Jamaica, among others. During this period Equiano struggled greatly with his religious beliefs. He wanted to be as perfect a faithful to God as possible and faced the guilt of breaking his commandments. He saw and participated in many debates between the Catholic and Evangelical Protestant doctrine. On a voyage to Cadiz, Spain, he had a vision of Christ and was converted to Evangelism. While in the plantations in Jamaica and the Mosquito Coast, Nicaragua, he attempted to Christianize some of the Indian population, to no avail. Equiano's disorientation gained momentum as he continually tried to assert his freedom. He was often exploited and once greatly abused on a vessel, when the captain, Mr. Hughes, decided he would sell Equiano.

I simply asked him what right he had to sell me? But, without another word, he made some of his people tie ropes round of my ankles, and also to each wrist, and another rope around my body, and hoisted me up without letting my feet touch or rest upon anything. Thus

I hung, without any crime committed, and without judge or jury; merely because I was a free man, and could not by the law get any redress from a white person in those parts of the world. I was in great pain from my situation, and cried and begged very hard for some mercy, but all in vain...I therefore remained silent, seeing not one white man on board who said a word on my behalf.⁵¹

About 34 million Africans who go by the name *African-Americans* or *black Americans* live in the United States today. They constitute about 12.8% of the total population. The number of blacks in America has continued to grow from 30.4 million in 1990 to the present figure of 33.9 million. In 1790 when the first census was conducted, Africans in the United States made up one-fifth of the total population and about 6% of about 650 million Africans in Mother Africa. We know that the total number of Africans in Diaspora would double that of blacks in the United States of America. It will not be out of place if we devoted this chapter to the situation of these sons and daughters of Africa.

Often questions have been raised by Africans in Mother Africa concerning the attitudes of their brothers and sisters, particularly black intellectuals in the United States and elsewhere in Diaspora, toward Africans and African affairs. If they have the interest of Africa at heart why, for example, don't blacks in America, the most advanced and richest nation on earth, come to the rescue of their brothers and sisters on the black continent, still languishing under the yoke of neo-colonialism and oppression? Although referred to as a *minority group* in the multiracial American society, blacks cannot be written off as insignificant *minority* as statistics above show. If the blacks constitute a force to reckon with in the United States, like their Jewish, German, Japanese, Polish counterparts, why are they not able to bring succor to their brothers and sisters in Mother Africa? Some authors suggest that Black Americans and the descendants of ex-slaves are still bitter toward their African ancestors who sold their great grandfathers and mothers into slavery, thus being responsible for whatever misfortunes the present generation of African-Americans must face. No one

would blame black Americans of African descent who react this way, but there are no sufficient reasons to assume that African-Americans express such sentiments and decide to erase Mother Africa from their memories.

The contrary is true. Blacks in America still love Africa and have no plans whatsoever to forget Africa and their black African cultural heritage. Their fight for civil rights has never been limited to equality with the whites in all aspects of human endeavor. African Americans have always continued to fight for the promotion of black African cultural heritage. Promotion of Black culture and studies in their black schools, colleges, and universities is a confirmation that blacks in America are in touch with Mother Africa and are not expressing bitterness over the history of tragedy and the role of African slave chiefs. They understand the attachment Africans have to families and communities, their love for being "brothers-keepers." Their special love for Mother Africa is deeply manifested in the celebration of the African festival of *Kwanzaa*, which in most respects is the African *New Crop Festival* or in some West African regions *New Yam Festival*.

Chinua Achebe in one of his talks to black and African intellectuals in Birmingham, Alabama refuted the insinuation from right wing black intellectuals that Martin Luther King Jr. a revered leader and great son of Africa didn't really care about Africa. "That was not true," the Nigerian author said and went to demonstrate King's love and concern for Africa. According to Achebe, throughout King's early years, he had always aimed to cultivate friendship with Africans in the United States. At the age of 28, he took his wife to the independence celebrations in Ghana. Ghana was the flagship of modern African independence from colonialism, and Martin Luther King wanted to be there. There are so many things he *did and said*, citing King's very words from an interview in 1965:

The world is now so small, in terms of geographic proximity and mutual problems, that no nation should stand idly by and watch another's plight. I think that, in every possible instance, Africans should use their governments to make it clear that the struggle of their

brothers in the U.S. is part of a worldwide struggle. In short, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, for we are tied together in a garment of mutuality. What happens in Johannesburg affects what happens in Birmingham Alabama, however indirectly. We are descendents of the Africans; our heritage is African. We shall never seek to break the ties, nor should the Africans.⁵²

Martin Luther King Jr. is truly a great son of Africa. He is one of Africa's great *ancestors* and *chiefs*. In an interview after those lectures, Achebe said about Martin Luther King Jr. "I think certainly in my view, that Martin Luther King Jr. is an *ancestor*. Although he died at the age of 39, this is something we do not often remember- how young he was when he was cut down. But his achievement was such that some that lived to be 100 didn't achieve half as much. So does he deserve that status, that standing of an *ancestor*." If Martin Luther King Jr. was an Igbo, Achebe insisted, he would be venerated and invoked at times of need. He would be remembered always. It is his achievements for his people and for all black folk that qualify Martin Luther King for the status of African *ancestor*. Giving insight to King's achievements, Achebe went further: "We are thinking not about a sportsman who can achieve his peak at 18; we are thinking of a philosopher, a thinker, who had to mature in action."

As a role model and great black nationalistic leader, *Martin Luther King Jr.* qualifies as a great ancestor of greater Africa. According to African Traditional Religionists, in Igboland he would have "*re-incarnated* many times!" There are many other African Americans who qualify for the status of great *ancestors*. They cannot be forgotten. Their *Doings and Sayings* testify to their great achievements. Their biographies must be featured in history books in high school civic studies curriculum in African countries. In spite of the colonialist opposition, African nationalist leaders should have included these Afro-American ancestors in the list of great world leaders whose activities influenced humanity and world events. If some of the great African-American nationalists have no monuments and epitaphs built in their honor or streets named after them in

European and American cities, their high status must be perpetuated in Africa as great African ancestors. In this list the following figures feature prominently: *Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad, and Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa)*. There are many other African-American great ancestors who are remembered for their contributions and support for self-determination for their oppressed people.

Most available records confirm that more African-Americans in various fields of endeavor have been featured in the black movement for liberation and self-identity than Africans of Mother Africa. More have identified with black Africa than their brothers and sisters elsewhere. Africans in general must be grateful to African-Americans for saving whatever respect remains for the black race. While the descendants of ex-slaves in *Sierra Leone* and *Liberia* would like to identify with their *white-American roots*, referring to themselves for example as "Liberian Americans," African Americans in the United States have consistently pointed to their *African roots*.

It is not only the white man who can be great. Thanks to African-Americans who have to a large extent succeeded in giving the despised Africans cause to be proud of their color: Black is also beautiful! The discovery of black beauty in the search for identity, unity, authenticity, and self-reliance is a big step in the right direction. In a free society devoid of racism and prejudices, it is possible that the once conquered and enslaved black Africans could rise to the challenges of building a self-reliant society for all citizens of the black race. Finding themselves in the strange situation of slavery and faced with continued discrimination and racism in the white-dominated American society, these African sons and daughters have not given up the struggle for survival.

Back to Africa Movement

Black nationalist groups in the United States have never relented in their demand for social and political equality for blacks in America. Many decades before the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, Negro intellectuals met in summer of 1905, at Niagara

Falls, Canada to form a national protest organization to wage battle against all forms of segregation and discrimination against Africans in America. The three prominent leaders of this movement are well known by students of African history in Mother Africa – Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey.

The Niagara Movement represented the first organized attempt to raise the black protest against the great reaction after Reconstruction. Its main importance was that it brought to open conflict and wide public debate two types of black strategy, one stressing accommodation and the other raising the black protest. W.E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington became national symbols for these two main streams of thought, and two groups of followers would assemble behind them. Blacks in America were to face a brutal dilemma: to accept racial segregation, thus second-class citizenship, as part of the deal with whites for their survival and acceptance in the wider American society or to step up the protest for full integration, and full social and political equality. In the minds of some racists and black African-American leaders an ultimate solution to the black-American problem was conceived in terms of the *Back to Africa option*.

From one side of the spectrum, there were not a few whites who saw the ultimate solution to the black people's problem in terms of bundling the ex-slaves back to their native land of Africa. Integrating the descendants of slaves in the white-dominated American society was for many not a welcome idea. Integration constituted an evil in the minds of racists. A lesser evil would be "Back to Africa." This is what we refer to as the *induced Back to Africa movement*. Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish author and sociologist has given a comprehensive account of the black American history of racism in his book **An American Dilemma**. As Myrdal points out, the idea of sending American blacks back to Africa or to some other place outside the United States, had in the main been confined to the whites. As Bunche observes, the real significance of the colonization schemes was to be found in the conception of the black person as an evil that had to be done away with. This is true also in the case of such humanitarians and liberals as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln when they showed interest in such projects. Such ideas

surely led to the organization of the *American Colonization Society* in 1817 to rid America of the freed slaves who were considered a danger to slavery in the Southern States. For most Africans in America however, nothing short of total freedom from slavery would give them satisfaction. Most of the blacks who went back to Africa under the auspices of America Colonization Society agreed to leave in return for their freedom. Surely they considered colonization back in Africa preferable to their anomalous and hopeless position in America. But black intellectuals were known to have been practically united against the "induced back-to-Africa" proposal. This was understandable. They did not think it was a fair deal. They preferred to remain in America and fight for their freedom. But it was Du Bois who set the scene for a possible "Back-to-Africa" program. From an entirely different perspective, he states clearly his reasons for not ruling out that option:

My plan would not decline frankly the possibility of eventual emigration from America of some considerable part of the Negro population, in case they could find a chance for free and favorable development unmolested and un-threatened, and in case the racial prejudice in America persisted to such an extent that it would not permit the full development of the capacities and aspirations of the Negro race.⁵³

If blacks could not be persuaded, refusing to leave America for their native Africa, there were many white American Southerners in those days who were ready to embark on the expulsion of the blacks just as Jews were expelled from Germany and other parts of Europe. Some other more bizarre options were even considered by other arch-white racists as part of the solution to what they had always referred to as "the Negro problem." These included settling the blacks in the regions of the un-exploited North. There were even some advocates of a "Negro forty-ninth State" or a "Negro-governed Black Belt!"

Back-to-Africa-Movement: Garvey Tradition

African historians consider Marcus Garvey (1887 - 1940) one of the most influential black nationalist leaders, who in the United States was particularly known for his advocacy of the "Back to Africa Movement." The situation of slavery and inherent racism and discrimination associated with that sin made black survival impossible. Garvey saw this long ago and thought the ultimate solution was a return to Africa. Who would blame him even today, seeing that the very realities, that prompted him to embark on "Back to Africa Movement" still exist and the situation has continued to grow worse? "Back to African" might not have been a bad idea, after all.

Marcus Garvey was the founder of the *Universal Negro Improvement Association* and the *African Communities League*. He was also the founder of the weekly newspaper, the *Negro World*. He was described as a persuasive orator and author, who urged American Blacks to be proud of their race and preached their return to Africa, their ancestral homeland. He founded the *Black Star Line* in 1919 to provide steamship transportation and the *Negro Factories Corporation* to encourage black economic independence. His achievements were remarkable, but like most political activists, his adversaries and colleagues disliked some of his ideas.

It is particularly Garvey's contribution to "back-to-the-roots" that has continued to inspire blacks wherever they are. Like his counterparts he continued to remind fellow Africans to be proud of their color and race. Such ideology has a unique place in the current debate about the future of Africa and the entire black race. In practice, the "back-to-Africa" movement may not have been successful, but in theory there is much to learn from it. In practice, for example the following projects were undertaken but neither yielded satisfactory results nor gained approval of most blacks.

- The Peace Movement of Ethiopia, a back-to-Africa movement was founded in Chicago in 1932 in support of repatriation

- The General Assembly of Virginia supported the repatriation bill and took the initiative to acquire the territory now called Liberia.
- The National Union of People of African Descent was formed in the Garvey tradition mainly to create an extraterritorial independence for the black people. The organization was to obtain a nation, a flag, and an army and navy formed exclusively of black people. Through these media they would ultimately throw off the yoke of white domination, white culture, and white mores.
- The National Movement for the Establishment of the 49th State wanted to establish a territorial state in some less populated part of America. Such a state would not be an isolated, uncivilized, hostile colony around which to build a figurative wall of China shutting out the possibilities of travel and growth from within and without. It was not to be a separate nation, but an independent Commonwealth like any other of the 48 states.⁵⁴

As the author of "An American Dilemma" pointed out, these movements like others held fatalistic and pessimistic views of the future of blacks in white America. It was clear, however, that "back-to-Africa" ideology would not bring the expected solution to the "Negro problem." And a black doctor heading the New York division of the then *Universal Negro Improvement Association* spoke the minds of most black intellectuals:

We don't advocate going back to Africa. That will come in time. The main problem of the Negro is economic and that is what we must face. It's the Negro's problem and he must solve it by himself...I say, if we can solve our economic problem, then to hell with the white man and that is exactly what we propose to do.⁵⁵

Whether or not the time was ripe for "back-to-Africa" one thing was certain. There was need to set up solid machinery for the development and survival of the black people wherever they might be, in America or elsewhere. Such machinery must have many perspectives, social, political, cultural, and spiritual. It was

a framework to be founded on the rich African heritage that would assure the practicality and survival of any economic or political program that would grant all Africans their hearts' desire in an atmosphere of *free and favorable development unmolested and un-threatened* as in Du Bois' vision. Socially, culturally, and spiritually, Africa has a rich past. There is need to rediscover it and apply the results of the findings to economic development. But dishonest leadership has always marred black peoples' progress in Mother Africa as well as in Diaspora. It is at the center of Africa's predicament today. Some concerned friends of Africans and African-Americans have never failed to point this fact out to the N.A.A.C.P.'s leadership. The admonition remains valid for the modern African leadership.

To the Negro people dishonest leadership is a most important cause of weakness in concerted action. It should be preached again and fought against. It should be a main topic in the teaching at Negro Universities, in the Negro journals, in Negro adult education. If a generation of young Negroes could be brought up to understand how scrupulous honesty could tremendously strengthen the Negro cause - and, incidentally, in the long run advance them individually much more than the petty handouts by which they are now tempted - this would mean a great deal for Negro progress.⁵⁶

It is precisely in this area of moral and ethical uprightness that "**Back-to-Africa**" has meaning. "**Back-to-the-roots**" will definitely reveal much of the African lifestyle and code of conduct that must have something positive to offer the present generation of black people. And many had ridiculed "Back-to-Africa" movement. What was it that enticed black leaders in America to "Back to Africa Movement"? Perhaps such ideology became a dead issue with the death of its first protagonists in the United States. Are there intellectuals and ordinary black Americans who want to return to their ancestral land today? There may be very few indeed. There may be even no one as most of their brothers and sisters who would happily join in the

development of the black continent have taken to their heels and are scattered all over the world, in search of greener pastures!

Descriptions of appalling conditions in Africa are part and parcel of theory of "Negro inferiority and incompetence" in running a stable government. Only a few white intellectuals ever took the "back-to-Africa-movement" seriously right from the early days of that movement. To most whites the *return to African ancestral land* was simply a crazy idea. They could not understand what on earth could entice blacks in America to return to Africa, even where black Americans were to be subjected to the worst inhuman treatment in America. What was it that they would be looking for in Africa? Andrew Hacker expressed one of the reasons why the "back-to-Africa-ideology" seemed strange:

Today, Africa is the least developed and most sorrow-ridden of continents. It has more than its share of malnutrition and debilitating diseases, and at least its share of tribal rancor and bloodshed. It seems always to be petitioning the rest of the world for aid. Since the close of the colonial era, over a generation ago, there have not been many African success stories.⁵⁷

Two other quotations from fairly recent exponents of the theory go to a great length in demonstrating the "Negro inferiority." Perhaps Stoddard Lothrop was not representing the majority of ordinary white people in America in his views, nevertheless, there are no strong reasons to ignore such views:

To begin with, the black peoples are practically devoid of that accumulated mass of beliefs, thoughts, and experiences which render Asiatics so impenetrable and so hostile to white influences...Left to himself, he (the Negro) remained a savage, and in the past his only quickening has been where brown men have imposed their ideas and altered his blood. The originating powers of the European and the Asiatic are not in him.⁵⁸

If some white folks hold such views, it may not be enough to dismiss such sickening views as rhetoric of white bigots and racists. But hold your breath!

The black race has never shown real constructive power. It has never built up a native civilization. Such progress as certain Negro groups have made has been due to external pressure and has never long outlived that pressure's removal, for the Negro when left to himself, as in Haiti and Liberia, rapidly reverts to his ancestral ways. The Negro is a facile, even eager imitator, but there he stops. He adopts, but he does not adapt, assimilate, and give forth creatively again.⁵⁹

Is our author writing from experience or is he one of the numerous racist ideologues? But whatever his convictions, there will be need to prove him wrong. And this is a duty for black intellectuals and all black leaders. But before these patriotic blacks take their positions it might be good to listen to some more scorching rhetoric in order to be better armed for any form of counter-attack!

Unless, then, every lesson of history is to be disregarded, we must conclude that black Africa is unable to stand alone. The black man's numbers may increase prodigiously and acquire alien veneers, but the black man's nature will not change.⁶⁰

Whatever provoked such reactions from black people's detractors, there is no doubt that most of the thoughts have been born out of racial prejudice and to greater extent ignorance. Volumes of books on Africa and its peoples have been produced by Europeans and Americans and most of these authors have never set foot anywhere in the black continent or learnt much about the culture of the people. In most cases the results of their investigations have remained deceitful and misleading. Such writings will not scare true African sons and daughters of America who still have their ancestral land at heart. But they, too, may have to respond to their critics and prove beyond any

reasonable doubt that there is plenty to gain by returning to Africa or defending her against detractors. It has become necessary to strike a blow to white man's prejudices against the African continent, regarded as a place of cultureless savagery. Sad enough, however to observe that the assumption of African inferiority has continued in the white world, long after the American Indian, the Polynesian, and the Stone Age man were given applause for high cultural achievements! Why has the situation not changed in the favor of black people? Will any new stories and explanations lead to brighter future?

Black People's Tribulation: Exilic Periods

Like the ancient Diaspora Hebrews, Israelites, or Jews, Africans share a similar fate through their history of colonialism, slavery, and neo-colonialism. The **Pre-exilic** Africa has nothing to report about her achievements to the civilized world. It was regarded as a "Dark Continent." But its primitive people could still serve a useful purpose to the white plantation owners in Europe and America. So began the **slave trade**. At home, and at least on account of its natural and mineral resources, Africa could still serve European and American industries. Then came the **scramble for Africa** and each European power got its share of the booty. These powers were to rule the natives as colonial masters.

The **Exilic** period was marked by struggle for independence among various African states. While Africans who had been carried away in *Babylonian captivity* were languishing in agony in various parts of Europe and the New World many longed to return to their ancestral land. Like the Israelites of old, they sat on low stools facing Mother Africa as their captors, cheeky and contemptuous neighbors taunted them: *Sing to us those African songs! Dance for us the tunes of the African drums!* Like refugees and political exiles in foreign land it was not easy to sing the *Songs of Zion* in the land of exile! Most of them must have felt like the Jews of the old who sat by the rivers of Babylon mourning as they remembered *Zion*. "On the poplars of that land we hung up our harps. There our captors asked us for

the words of a song; our tormentors, for joyful song...But how could we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land?" [Psalm 137]

The **Exilic** period of captivity was not an entirely wasted period of slavery among the blacks in America. As in the Israelite history it was a period of reflection and questioning. What had led to such a tragedy? During the exilic period Israelite historians, writers, prophets, and inspired leaders kept the faith in Yahweh alive among an enslaved and persecuted people. It was a period of growth of a religious literature that told and retold of past stories of Israelite patriotism and enviable history.⁶¹ In the Greek period, the history of Judaism revealed much about the religious and cultural life in Diaspora. The large Jewish community of Antioch and Egypt, according to Josephus the historian, had attracted a particularly large number of converts to Judaism. It was in Antioch and Egypt that most of the apocryphal books such as Tobit and the Maccabees were composed to encourage wayward Diaspora Jews to return to their ancient religion – Judaism. In Egypt the Jews produced a considerable literature intended to inculcate in Greek-speaking Jews pride in their past and to counter an inferiority complex about Jewish cultural achievements. During that time one Jason of Cyrene (c. 100 BC) wrote a history, of which I Maccabees is summary, glorifying the temple and violently attacking the Jewish hellenizers. II Maccabees is a work of propaganda intended to counteract those Jews who sought to win citizenship in Alexandria. Such stories helped lighten the hearts of a depressed people.

On their own part Africans in captivity did not fold their arms watching their enemy making mockery of Africa and its cultural values. In the early 1920s and 1930s, when most of the African nations and kingdoms were still under the crushing heels of colonialism, the African slaves and their descendants had taken up the challenge in America. This period saw the rapid growth of movements geared toward exalting the historical background of the black race. The *Garvey movement* did a spectacular job; black people were to be provided with a respectable past. Numerous *slave biographies* were reviewed, the most important of which was a *Narrative of the life and times of Frederick Douglass* [First Edition 1845]. It served a purpose.

As Gunnar Myrdal points out, any black who emerged to prominence had usually had a remarkable life, and autobiographies have always played an important role among black writings. Still more directly, the searching of historical sources to unveil the deeds of black people in the American Revolution and in other American wars revealed the partial black ancestry of prominent individuals all over the world.⁶²

The black "Exilic Movement" was to be a success story akin to the exilic biblical revival movement in literature of ancient Israel. Myrdal notes that much of this was zealous dilettantism, sometimes of quite fantastic nature. He cited an example of pseudo-history that fantastically glorified the achievements of black people: "**The Black man the Father of civilization**," by James Morris Web found its support in biblical history. In times when life and culture of a people are in jeopardy, fantastic claims and writings can play a salvific role. So it was in Israelite history.⁶³ Among the Diaspora Jews in Egypt, one Demetrius, a historian near the end of the 3rd century BC, was known to have written a work *On the Kings in Judea*. The work was surely intended to refute an anti-Semitic Egyptian priest and author, showing considerable concern for chronology. One Eupolemus (c. 150 B.C), like Demetrius, wrote also "**On the kings in Judea**," asserting that Moses taught the alphabet not only to the Jews but also to the Phoenicians and to the Greeks. Artapanus (c. 100 B.C), in his book "**On the Jews**," went further in romanticizing Moses by identifying him with the Greek Musaeus and the Egyptian Hermes-Thoth (god of Egyptian writing and culture). He asserted that Moses was the real originator of Egyptian civilization and that he even taught the Egyptians the worship of the deity Apis (the sacred bull) and the Ibis (sacred bird). There were many such writings, which were, no doubt, conscious imitations of biblical books. But true or not the writings for the most part achieved their purpose. An oppressed and despised people needed some type of uplifting.

In recent times research into the African past has taken a momentous turn in African-American history. It is easy to show that Africa, especially Egypt was the cradle of civilization. There is enormous literature today in departments of Black Studies all over America giving testimony to the revered ancient memories

of Africa and Africa's contributions in world history. It was not only the white man's world that produced kings and queens or people of honor. African ancestors were also heroes and accomplished people in various areas of human endeavor. Black people's history could also become a source of pride and inspiration for younger generation of sons and daughters of great African ancestors.

It was a necessary venture, to which black historians applied themselves. They saw tasks both in rectifying wrong notions by white historians and in concentrating on the neglected aspects of the black history. An excellent illustration of the "protest" nature of black history book of this type by Merl Reppse is the popular title: "**The Negro, Too, In American History.**" It was evident that black intellectuals at that moment in black history lived up to the challenges posed by the writings of white racist authors, which presented a distorted history of Africa and its peoples. The "Black Autobiographies" no doubt rank among the classic American autobiographies. Besides *Douglas's Autobiography*, the following, too, were great contributions in this area.

- **Up from Slavery**, by Booker T. Washington
- **Along this Way**, by James Weldon Johnson
- **In spite of the Handicap**, by James D. Corrother
- **A Long Way from Home**, by Claude McKay
- **The Big Sea**, by Langston Hughes
- **Dusk of Dawn**, by W.E.B. Du Bois

This moment was given impetus in 1915 by the organization of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and its chief publication, *The Journal of Negro History*. Its avowed purpose was to enhance self-respect and race-respect among blacks by substituting a belief in race achievements for the traditional belief in race inferiority. The field of African culture, for which anthropologists also manifested a new interest and appreciation for new discoveries emerged. As Myrdal observes, only recently have even the anthropologists realized that Africans have surpassed most other pre-literate groups in at least the fields of government, law, and technology.⁶⁴ With the black

movement of the 1920s there developed something of an appreciation for African music and art. One white anthropologist, Melville J. Herskovits had written a book to glorify African culture generally and show how it survived in the American Negro community.

To give the Negro an appreciation of his past is to endow him with the confidence in his own position in this country and in the world which he must have, and which he can best attain when he has available a foundation of scientific fact concerning the ancestral cultures of Africa and the survivals of Africanisms in the New World. And it must again be emphasized that when a body of fact, solidly grounded, is established, a ferment must follow which, when this information is diffused over the population as a whole, will influence opinion in general concerning Negro abilities and potentialities, and thus contribute to lessening of interracial tensions.⁶⁵

Black People in Search of Salvation

But the distressed *exilic* black nationalists wish only a *reversal of fortunes* as the ultimate manifestation of victory over the forces of darkness and oppression that have hindered the self-determination of black people. As far as they were concerned, the colonialist, the slave master, and the racist have been responsible for the miserable and humiliating situation of black people. God in his goodness did not create Africans to be poor and powerless. Almighty God was called to show his power, as in the days of the old, by bringing about the fall of the mighty and the exaltation of the lowly!

As far as these nationalists were concerned, an apocalyptic, fatalistic, and retributive reversal of fortunes must usher in *black people's victory over evil* and a cataclysmic doomsday for those people who have oppressed Africans. The black people's problems should not remain forever. The colonialism, slavery, and subjugation of the black race would come to an end. There was a rebirth of the old *Ethiopian*

movement. In both political and religious circles, the term *Ethiopianism* had long been adopted by African liberationists as a general term for *African nationalism*. In Southern Africa, Churches of the Ethiopian type are known to represent such movements. These Churches have seceded from white Mainline Churches - Protestant and Catholic - chiefly on *racial* grounds. They exhibit strong race-antipathy toward whites, expressed in the form of nationalistic or pan-African ideas. Ethiopianism surely represented a reaction against Negrophobia.⁶⁶

The Ethiopian movement, which quickly spread to other parts of Africa and America during the colonial era was not limited to Church movements. It had its links with political movements in various African countries struggling for independence. But before and after the First World War, the African Church became the sounding board for social and political aspirations expressed in an *Ethiopian myth*. The noble name of *Ethiopia* symbolized the whole of Africa, a free black Africa, liberated from colonial lordship and led by the Africans themselves! *Ethiopianism* as a Pan-African *social, political, religious, and cultural* movement thus offered a challenge to enthusiastic African youths who started reacting against the humiliation Africa had suffered at the hands of the colonialists. The effort was to arouse the enthusiasm of Africans for the idea of *Africanization*, with powerful messianic overtones.

For the nationalists, the signs of the apocalyptic dawn were there. The successful military resistance of the Ethiopian Empire against the Italian colonial occupation in 1896 gave blacks in South Africa stirring hope. Perhaps in a similar manner, the whites in South Africa would be faced with a devastating defeat at the hands of these Africans whom they had oppressed. There were not a few members of the thousands of Zionist Church movements in South Africa who thought the **Day of vindication; the Day of Yahweh** for the blacks of South Africa came on the day Nelson Mandela was released from prison. It was further confirmed on the day apartheid policy was officially dismantled in South Africa ushering in the era of black majority rule in government. Elsewhere, the heroic struggle of the British Indians for independence was acclaimed. Every

instance of rebellion in Africa, the Dutch East Indies, the West Indies, was hailed as victory for the black cause.

Every outbreak of trouble in Europe was considered of utmost importance to the black people of the world. The internecine conflicts, the conflagrations in the white world were all regarded as certain signs of the ultimate decline and fall from dominance of the white race, upon which the black people will invest the chancelleries of the world. These are but part of an augury of that future day when the world will see the "bottom rail on top," when black men will rule and their past will be vindicated.⁶⁷

Most of the black writings of this period in American History surely reflected the dramatic events of the Civil Rights struggles. Elsewhere, too in Africa, *Independency* embraced vast movements in areas of religion, politics, and culture. In whatever form protest movements appeared, almost all had some apocalyptic overtones and hope for a dramatic intervention of God in history. Such intervention was expected to usher in an era of prosperity and freedom for the long persecuted black people.

Ancestrlogy in African Traditional Heritage

As a result of the highly revered place of the ancestors in African Traditional Religion early missionaries mistakenly described the African Traditional Religion as *Ancestor Worship*. Even today this view has not been abandoned. For decades many African theologians have continued to explain to critics that African Traditional Religion should in no way be seen as ancestor worship just as Islam or Christianity is not described as *Ancestor worship*. Just as the Muslims and Christians do not worship their *saints* and the *Virgin Mary*, Africans do not *worship* their ancestors. In no way can Africans be described as *idol worshippers*, just as Catholics are not *worshippers of images*. Ancestors form part of the religious thought of Africans as a result of the unique role of the dead virtuous ancestors in the lives and affairs of the living. African ancestors are *venerated*,

just as Christians *venerate* their saints and ask for their intercession before God. So in times of need Africans run to their good ancestors for help?

As far as Africans are concerned, ancestors, although dead, are *still living* and are regularly invoked by the living especially in times of misfortune and calamity. Their intervention is sought. Not all ancestors are invoked of course. Only the *saintly ancestors* are venerated and are spoken well of. Having lived exemplary lives, they are the pride of the community. They are called as *witnesses* and *judges* in cases of unjust treatment of the poor and downtrodden. They are the hope of the oppressed. Like Christian *saints* they have been *canonized* and are enjoying a blessed life in the land of the dead. The sinful man cannot approach the Great God directly. Sometimes he must put his requests through the *saintly* ancestors. The adjective "good" or "bad" is not usually applied to the ancestors to differentiate those who should be venerated from the ones who should be cursed. When ancestors are referred to, Africans are referring to their *African saints*. "Heaven," for the Africans generally, and the Igbo in particular means *resting with the ancestors after death*. One who does not rest with the ancestors is suffering, perhaps in a miserable situation referred to as "hell." Separation from the ancestors in the land of the dead is *loss of eternal life*.

How do the Igbo Traditional Religionists, for example know that a dead ancestor is resting in *paradise*? The ancestors, according to the exponents of theology of *life after death*, must *re-incarnate*, namely *come back to life* as a child. After a child is born it is usual to consult the oracle through a chief priest who reveals the name of the ancestor who has come back to life. This may become the first or second name of the new child after birth. I, for example, am considered the reincarnation of my mother's father, that is the grandfather on my mother's side. My mother has called me by this name till today. And I use the name for my *password* in secret documents. With little or no risk of error, one may generalize that every Igbo has a *third, secret, sacred* name, that of the ancestor who had reincarnated in him or her. The ancestor who does not re-incarnate is not enjoying eternal bliss and is therefore not invoked.

During the missionary days it was *anathema* for Igbo Christian converts to speak about ancestors in positive terms. The missionaries thought that any non-baptized dead Igbo person went to hell. Today such ideas have been abandoned and those Igbo ancestors who lived well enjoy eternal salvation. Reincarnation in Igbo Traditional Religion has nothing in common with the ancient Greek or oriental concept of *reincarnation* and *transmigration*. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, baptized dead ancestors are believed to "reincarnate" today. But the old rigorous ways of obtaining the information through the oracles have changed. Criteria similar to those guiding canonization in the Catholic Church are followed. Sufficient and solid ground must be established before an ancestor may be declared *saintly* and hence able to reincarnate. And usually one of the criteria must be the quality of life lived and how he touched other people's lives as well as that of the community - in a simple expression - his contributions that have helped to improve the quality of life of his people. Today one must look for spiritual values and virtues like *love, humility, selfless service, and honesty*. As a *role model* in the black and African community, the ancestor is one who must be revered and emulated by all.

There is more to ancestorship. During their earthly lives the ancestors must have been people of honor and integrity role models in their communities. What made people saints in Christian religion could easily serve for "promotion" to *ancestorship* in African Traditional Religion. Their contributions to the development of their communities and the laws of the land and their personal achievements must be among the factors recalled by those appealing for their succor in times of need. And by reason of the radical change of mode of existence, it is believed that the ancestors have acquired powers that are greater than those powers human beings possess. But neither they nor the lesser gods could act independently of the will of God, the all-powerful, eternal and all-knowing. Our idea here is to give Ancestrology its proper place in Black Studies and African heritage. There are no written records of the so-called heroic activities and virtues for which these dead and long-forgotten personalities are revered or venerated. Were they not simply

tribal heroes in those fireside heroic stories of great warriors who brought victories to their people in imaginary wars with unseen enemies who wandered in darkness?

Groups of people in various cultures have wonderful stories to tell about their *heroes* and *ancestors*, and these stories are preserved in historical records, and legends. They are referred to as *sagas*. The stories are told and retold generation after generation for both nationalistic and religious purposes. The pursuit of a specific people's past can contribute much to the general understanding of life in past centuries and ought to be encouraged. At some stage all humans have need to be recognize that they are the products of their forebears, even if these forebears must remain individually anonymous and remote in the minds of historians.

Ancestrlogy has a positive impact on African traditional heritage. What is often of utmost importance is not the historicity of events (as in many biblical accounts) associated with the ancestry, but the lessons society draws from the activities associated with them. Jesus did not put down anything in writing. This is true of most of the prophets and great teachers of religion who came before and after Him, but their followers did testify to the validity of the *doings and sayings* of their leaders. Most other religious founders and their immediate successors have their *doings and sayings* recorded by their scribes for posterity.

Africans advocating for a return to authentic African heritage as one of the surest ways to restore moral sanity to modern society and modern way of life are simply pointing to the good ancestors as *role models*. The present political and religious leaders who are not living up to expectations are being asked to borrow a page from their exemplary forefathers. People are remembered for various reasons. Honorable people's lives are chronicled for those who aspire to rise in virtue to emulate. At the same time people who have lived vicious lives are remembered for their evil records. Such may give every man the occasion to eschew dishonorable deeds, which may leave shameful records many years after death.

African *Ancestrlogy* is not limited to the remote past. There are many African ancestors in modern times among blacks

all over the modern world who are recognized through their achievements in life. These achievements are measured in terms of their learning and extraordinary human qualities. Their achievements are also assessed by their contributions to their communities and the black race as a whole. In modern terms society judges them by their civil rights activities and their struggle for the liberation of their people from colonialism, slavery, and other evils that have brought about hardship. How an African ancestor has kept the laws of the land and promoted peace and justice is an important factor in his *canonization* after death. If he was a selfish man who, through greed for power and wealth brought great suffering to his people, he will not be remembered and no one will invoke him at prayer. *Unjust rulers* and those who committed any type of abomination or lived scandalous lives are sometimes remembered on account of the atrocities they committed when they were alive. It is believed that they sowed the evil fruits, which their people are now reaping. One frustrated African exile wrote the following about one notorious and wicked African leader who ruled his country with iron hand and brought untold suffering on the people for many years. It was reported the ruler died under mysterious circumstances:

His death was the necessary escape from the network of political mess he entangled himself with and only a man without a heart would survive such deeds. I have a prediction for members of his gang. All scavengers who have squandered our wealth and left our children to die of hunger, poverty and disease, and amassed millions in foreign banks to help the developed countries and punish us economically will reap the fruits of their deeds.⁶⁸

There is no way by which wicked ancestors, such as the one above would *re-incarnate*. That would be a worse tragedy in the African situation. Every effort is made to forget him and his evil deeds. Instead of praying for him, people curse and pour abuses on him, as the African exile passionately further expressed in his reaction to the African leader's death:

Dead or alive, he is gone forever. We await others in his gang to follow. May their souls never rest, as their deed have deprived millions the blessings of the natural wealth they are endowed with. Their deeds have brought so much pain and tears and hardship to so many homes as child mortality escalates and our hospitals full with kwashiorkor babies in the midst of plenty. May their children never see the happiness as they "enjoy" the wealth of the nation. No escape, there is only one outlet, death.⁶⁹

The wicked ancestors are believed to be suffering in the land of the dead. Their souls are restless. They often visit the living to continue perpetrating evil. They are the *evil spirits*. On account of the devastating influence of *stroke or heart attack*, the African Traditional Religionists refer to such deadly ailments as a calamity caused by the evil spirit of the bad ancestors. *Stroke or severe heart attack* is called the *evil spirit's grip*. Often it leads to instant death. To stop the appearance of such an evil spirit, a final solution is often sought for his restless soul. His body is exhumed and burnt!

Judging from the number of achievements attributed to them while alive, as well as by their virtuous lives, many African sons and daughters qualify for *ancestors* in modern times. Those African sons who fought for *liberation from colonialism and slavery* must definitely qualify. The same can be said about those who fought for the *unity* of black people in the form of *Pan-Africanism*. Those whose political struggles and sagacity brought peace and progress and who relinquished power when it was due must be reckoned as good African ancestors. Through the short summaries of the biographies of some of the African ancestors - ancient and modern - we will be able to establish some of the criteria that qualify them for *ancestors*.

Great Black Leaders and African Ancestors

Most Africans political leaders, not only led liberation struggles against oppressive forces, but also left good memories of their individual and collective efforts toward development and unity

of the African continent and black people everywhere. Most of them rose beyond their ethnic boundaries to identify with *Pan Africanism*. When they taught and sang *freedom songs* in schools and colleges during the pre-independence periods, they laid emphasis on the liberation of Africa as a whole from political, social, economic, and religious forces that had hindered development and progress.

Africans everywhere will never forget the following people, which is why they should be featured in black studies curriculums, which in the most elementary levels include civic education, history, and social studies. - Herbert Macaulay , Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmedu Bello, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Kingsley Ozuomba Mbadiwe, Mbonu Ojike, Francis Akanu Ibiam, Alvan Ikoku, Ken Saro Wiwa, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (Nigeria); Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana); President Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga (Kenya), Dr. Milton Obote of Uganda, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda and his one-time veteran foreign minister Mr. Simon Kapwepwe (Zambia), Leopold Senghor (Senegal), Sir Albert Margai (Sierra Leone), Albert Bongo (Gabon), Sylvanus Olympio (Togo), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania) Sekou Toure (Guinea), President Houphouet Boigny (Ivory Coast), Ahmed Ahidjo (Cameroon) and most recently Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe) and Nelson Mandela (South Africa)

As in every continent and nation, leaders come and go. Some are remembered more than others for their unique contributions to their nations or humanity at large. In certain circumstances some qualify to be included among the most influential politicians the world has ever produced. It is the legacy that each has left behind that is the ultimate judge of their successes or failures. Even where outright success or woeful failure is the criterion for remembering such leaders, new aspirants to leadership positions as well as people everywhere have some lesson to learn about how they have touched the lives of others. Africans are also proud of their African-American great ancestors.

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

Washington founded several organizations, including the National Negro Business League, to further black advancement. Three of his books were well known in African schools as far back as the early 1950s. They are *The Future of the American Negro*, *Up from Slavery* and *The Story of the Negro*. He disagreed with W.E.B. Du Bois on the best option for the blacks in the United States in the face of the overwhelming problems of the emancipated American slaves. Washington differed also with some of the black leaders, as he tried to compromise with the whites, and by urging blacks to accept their inferior social position then and to strive to raise themselves through vocational training and economic self-reliance. It was reported that many whites were (naturally) pleased by his views, and many blacks, awed by his prestige, accepted Washington as the chief spokesman for the American blacks. But his quiescent tactics did not please other black nationalists who felt that higher education in arts and humanities instead of industrial education would enhance the chances of the black campaign for civil rights.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868 - 1963)

Du Bois is one of the most renowned Black American historians and sociologists. He conducted the initial research on the black experience in the United States. His work paved the way for the *Civil Rights*, *Pan-Africanism*, and *Black Power* movements in the United States. Although he enjoyed a privileged upbringing, he was nevertheless quite unhappy with the fate of blacks in America, particularly in the South: "As violence against blacks increased in the South throughout the 1880s, Du Bois's scholarly education was matched by the hard lesson he learned about race relations. He followed reports about the increasing frequency of lynching, calling each racially motivated killing 'a scar' upon his soul"⁷⁰

This led to his researches into the historical and sociological conditions of black Americans. His doctoral dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the*

United States of America (1638-1870) cleared the way for further studies on the issue of slavery. He was said to have initiated a series of studies on the "Negro Problem," which had profound impact on the study of the history and sociology of blacks in the United States. Another remarkable contribution Du Bois made to Black Studies was through his publication, *The Souls of Black Folk (1903)*. This was a powerful collection of essays in which he described some of the key themes of the black experience, especially the efforts of black Americans to *reconcile their African heritage with their pride in being U.S. citizens*.

Du Bois was popularly known as the *Father of Pan-Africanism* and the *First Citizen of Africa*. His complete dedication to the progress and unity of African nations earned him these appellations, which speak for themselves. He attended Pan-African congresses with African leaders to nurture *worldwide unity among people of African descent*, and at the same time *opposed colonialism*. As one of the founding fathers of NAACP in 1910, Du Bois' contributions to the advancement of black *civil rights movement* can never be fully evaluated. Through the NAACP's magazine, of which he was the editor and through his various publications, his separatist ideas were made known.

Du Bois spent the last years of his life in Ghana as a Ghanaian citizen after renouncing his U.S. citizenship. The Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah, welcomed him to Ghana and deemed him *The First Citizen of Africa*. Du Bois wrote 20 books during his lifetime. In addition to the previously mentioned titles, he wrote *Africa - Its Place in Modern History (1930)*; *Black Reconstruction in the South (1935)*; *Black Folk Then and Now (1939)*; a trilogy, called *Black Fame*, which included *The Ordeal of Mansard (1957)*, *Mansard Builds a School (1959)*, and *Worlds of Color (1961)*. His third and last autobiography, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois (1968)* was published posthumously.

Malcolm X (1925 - 1965)

Malcolm X, b. May 19, 1925, Omaha, Neb., U.S.--d. Feb. 21, 1965, New York, N.Y., was a black militant leader who articulated concepts of race pride and black nationalism in the early 1960s. After his assassination, the widespread distribution of his life story--*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965)--made him an ideological hero, especially among black youth.

His childhood experiences - the murder of his father by Ku Klux Klan terrorists, resulting in the various family setbacks, including his own imprisonment, must have influenced Malcolm's political ideas, which he was able to express through the *Nation of Islam*. He was among the Black Muslim leaders who advocated racial separation. His racial convictions and hatred of whites whom he labeled *evil*, surely landed him into serious trouble, which led to his assassination, while he was addressing a meeting of the *Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU)* in New York, Feb. 21 1965.

Elijah Muhammad (1897 - 1975)

Elijah Muhammad, b. Oct. 7, 1897, Sandersville, Ga., U.S.--d. Feb. 25, 1975, Chicago) was the leader of the Nation of Islam (sometimes called Black Muslims) in the United States. After World War II an Islamic movement arose among blacks in the United States; members called themselves the *Nation of Islam*, but they were popularly known as *Black Muslims*. Although they adopted some Islamic social practices, the group was in large part a black separatist and social protest movement. It was alleged that Muhammad claimed to be an inspired prophet and interpreted the doctrine of Resurrection in an unorthodox sense as the revival of oppressed ("dead") peoples. Malcolm X broke with Elijah Muhammad and adopted more orthodox Islamic views. After the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, the group was renamed *World Community of Islam in the West* and officially abandoned its separatist aims. The name was again changed in the late 1970s, to *American Muslim Mission*. Black American Muslims are known today as the Nation of Islam.

From 1934 till his death Elijah Muhammad was the accredited leader of the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad was a controversial and fanatical leader who advocated the establishment of an autonomous state for blacks Muslims. As a result of his stand on black self-determination, many other non-Muslim blacks appreciated his leadership. It was a clear indication that on matters of survival blacks are never divided by religious faith.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 - 1968)

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his positions, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others. In dangerous valley and hazardous pathways, he will lift some bruised and beaten brother to a higher and nobler life (Martin Luther King Jr.)

The presence of a leader of great power and influence is always indispensable in any meaningful revolution and particularly facing the challenges of a New Age. Blacks in America have never lacked leadership in their civil rights movements. History has complete records of such leaders. But it is an accepted fact that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stands shoulder high above all, that both friends and foes of the black people have agreed unanimously to *canonize* him, the first Black American impressive and successful leader. Many whites agree they would not hesitate to vote for Martin Luther King Jr. as the first black president of the United States if he was alive today! What qualities had this black martyr and leader that others before or after him may not have possessed?

Martin Luther King must have had an extraordinary charisma that caught the attention of both friends and foes. It follows that there was something unique about the leadership of this great black man. All his qualities, which made him an acceptable leader among his people and adversaries, are there for one to read up in Black American and African history books. Like one of the giant prophets and leaders of the old Israel,

Martin Luther King Jr. acted as a modern-day *Moses* as the leader of the black people. The multi-office of a *judge*, a *law-giver*, a *cultic-leader*, and a *prophet* is evident in the key roles he played in the struggle for the survival of his people in the United States.

- The leader could confront *Pharaoh* to plead with the king to let *My People* go. In the modern times this would be a revered *political leader*.
- An acceptable interpreter of the law (*Lawgiver*) that should be kept and obeyed. Such a figure would receive the law from author of law and order and present it to the people who were bound to keep it. He was in the position to speak with the Great Spirit face to face while the people waited. He was an acceptable *negotiator* and the people would not dispute the terms he arrived with the Great lawgiver.
- As a *cultic leader*, he would ratify the covenant treaty with the Great Spirit and the people would signal their acceptance. This *priestly function* marks him out as a *cultic leader*, for "No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was." [Hebrews 5:4] Dr. Martin Luther King was also an ordained minister of the Christian religion.
- His *prophetic* mission was to be the culmination of a successful leadership role among his people as well as the true messenger of the Great Spirit. As a prophet he was to be the mediator between man and the Great Spirit, and always spoke with authority, and not like any of his type.

That he was the "Moses" of the black People, there is no doubt that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. fulfilled the multi-leadership role among his oppressed people in the most spectacular way during that crucial period in the Civil Rights Movement, just like the Moses of the old - *Prophet- Messiah - Priest - Law Giver*. His successful combination of these functions - *civil and spiritual* - has consequently placed this black leader in a very enviable position, decades after his martyrdom. The testimony that the ancient Israelites gave about their leader Moses summarizes as well the qualities of the African *Moses*, Dr. Martin Luther King.

"Since then no prophet has arisen in Israel like *Moses*, whom the Lord knew face to face. He had no equal in all the signs and wonders the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh and all his servants." (Deut 34:10).

Olaudah Equiano -- Gustavo Vassa (1745-1797)

*Olaudah Equiano, (a.k.a. Gustavus Vassa), an Igbo man, a foremost antislavery activist, in words and deed, and the father of American autobiography, in **The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the Africa**, wrote "I am Eboe." (Abu m Igbo). Even though he was 10 when they kidnapped and carried him away, and given another name, this Igbo son of neither a king nor a pauper, hung on to his Igbo names. He remembered enough about his culture and, most importantly, he put it down in writing and devoted his life fighting slavery. He is with our Ndi Ichie.*⁷¹

Prominent Igbo scholars and historians knew this remote figure and son of Igbo people of Nigeria, kidnapped from his village Isseke, near Orlu at the age of eleven, among his people recently through some studies. Chapter One of his book: "My early life in Eboe" reveals his background. Equiano is today revered in the tradition of the great African ancestors. His autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, written in London in 1789 sheds much light on his origin and contributions toward the liberation of his people from slavery and oppression.⁷² Through his daring Igbo ingenuity, Equiano [Ekwuano] was able to gain his freedom and obtain sufficient education, which enabled him to become an author. His autobiography, which became a best seller, is recognized not only as one of the first works written in English by a former slave, but perhaps more important as the paradigm of the slave narrative, a new literary genre. Equiano published nine different editions of his book before his death in 1797.

The main contribution for which he will be forever remembered as a great Igbo and African ancestor was his role in the abolition of slavery. As a major voice in the British Abolitionist Movement, Equiano was said to have petitioned the Queen of England in 1788. He was appointed to the expedition

to settle London's poor blacks in Sierra Leone, then a British colony on the West Coast of Africa. Equiano's description of his first encounter with a slave ship and with the white men in particular, brings to life the heightened sense of terror felt by Africans sold into slavery at that time - a terror that drove many to take their own lives as he movingly described. Tremendous brutality was visited on the African slaves in the slave ship, shockingly more vicious than any Equiano recounted as a slave in Africa. The brutality, savagery, and deceit that epitomized the slave trade became a constant theme throughout Equiano's Narrative.⁷³ Equiano left behind an impressive and extensive legacy of achievement and experience. They not only underscore the strength of his character, but also the grace of chance as he himself admits:

I believe there are few events in my life, which have not happened to many. It is true the incidents of it are numerous; and did I consider myself as European, I might say my sufferings were great: but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a particular favorite of Heaven, and acknowledge the mercies of providence in every occurrence of my life.⁷⁴

But whatever the case, Equiano is assured a place among African ancestors and great men of our time as a result of his ability to rise above the tremendous confines of slavery and to play a leading role in the dismantling of the institution of slavery. The virtues of courage, fortitude, bravery, and particularly compassion that he demonstrated for his oppressed people of African descent confirm his enviable status as a great black leader who should be emulated today. The Igbo community in Diaspora dedicates a "Holy Week" to Olaudah Equiano and one Igbo writer puts the case for Equiano well:

He was a true Igbo man, the foremost antislavery activist, before William Wilberforce, whom we were told about in school, but NEVER the story of Olaudah; how his letters to the English monarch and his book

touched the heart of men. In words and deed, Maazi Ekwuano was the father of American autobiography. The fact that he was later granted British citizenship has been used to deny him his accomplishments. That was bad enough. He was sold to the Americas, bought his freedom in the Americas and only moved to Britain to fight the source of chattel slavery doctrine with his pen. His letters got the imperialist thinking. What he saw done to human beings by fellow human beings, savages never did to their kind.⁷⁵

These modern black African ancestors and many others we are unable to name here are of special interest to all sons and daughters of Africa wherever they may be - in Mother Africa, in the Americas or elsewhere in the Diaspora. They are of special importance on account of their contributions to the advancement of black people. Their activities, which always demonstrated a Pan-African character, helped influence the Black Power Movement and black self-determination at the present times. Black Power represents as black insistence on racial pride and self-reliance, usually interpreted as economic and political independence, as well as freedom from white authority and domination. Black Power has also emphasized the cultural heritage of blacks, especially their African roots and identity.

Poor and oppressed blacks everywhere are expected, in the tradition of black cultural heritage, to summon the African ancestors and ask for their intercession before the Mighty God of the universe in times of crisis. Whether it is the foreigner oppressing them or their own black leaders, it is the most appropriate time to tell the ancestors that *if they had been there the enemy would not have brought disaster and shame to the African Household!* They, the ancestors should intervene to restore order. This is the *Prayer of Lamentation* and some examples will make our point clearer here. In the **Songs of Sorrow**, a poetic lyric by *Awoonor Williams*, a Ghanaian poet, we find a typical example of a **Prayer of Lamentation** in the African Traditional Religion, addressed to the *ancestors*.

Dzogbese Lisa has treated me thus. It has led me among the sharps of the forest; returning is not possible and going forward is a great difficulty...I am not sitting in the row with the eminent; I am in the world's extreme corner. But those who are lucky sit in the middle and forget. I can only go beyond and forget... Something has happened to me. The things so great that I cannot weep... Agosu if you go tell them, tell Nyidevu, Kpeti and Kove that they have done us evil.⁷⁶

According to Donatus Nwoga, who annotated the *West African Verse*, an anthology of African poems, **Dzogbese Lisa** is a god among the *Ewe-speaking peoples of Dahomey and Togoland*. The two names represent the male and female components of the one god. **Agosu** is the founder of the clan and **Nyidevu, Kpeti and Kove** are the *ancestors*. The poem definitely catches most pleasantly and successfully the tone and content of African elegy - a general lament, in the first place, about the unequal distribution of the fortunes of this world. It is an unfortunate and disastrous situation as the following verse shows:

Ask them why they idle there while we suffer and eat sand. And the crow and the vulture hover always above our broken fence, and strangers walk over our portion. Tell them their house is falling and the trees in the fence have been eaten by termites, that the Martels curse them.⁷⁷

The African American ancestors have a lot in common. The various movements they founded and promoted have helped in the advancement of black people, in both Mother Africa and in the United States. Their interest in the history and culture clearly marks them out as true ancestors of Africa who should be remembered for their great contributions also in the fields of politics, religion, and education.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Future of the Black Race: Post-Exilic Period

*Africa is still in bondage. An era of peace and prosperity will emerge only when African leaders realized that salvation for their countries lies in the hands of Africans, not Europeans and Americans. African leaders should fashion a political system of government that is most practicable for Africa alone. Such a system does not need to pass a political litmus test by the Western powers.*⁷⁸

Why it's so hard to predict

All African nations have virtually been liberated from the clutches of colonialism and full political independence has been achieved. Civil rights have been restored for blacks in America. In spite of the presence of institutional racism, African-Americans should have nothing to complain concerning equality. The messianic leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. helped to usher in an era of freedom as enshrined in the Constitution of the United States. For Africans in Mother Africa and those in *Diaspora* an era of true freedom, development, and peace has continued to elude black people. The search for solutions to black people's problems has been the main preoccupation of black intellectuals and patriots everywhere. Africa's friends are disappointed that the much sought after political independence has not brought economic development or political stability. There is still a lot of work to be done in the area of politics. Africa is often in the news, though there is not much in the news that would make Africans everywhere happy. News of civil strife and ravages of famine, poverty and disease dominates. Alas! Africa is still in bondage. Salvation is not yet in sight. There is

need to accept the inevitable proposition, namely, that peace and prosperity will emerge only when Africans and their leaders of today and tomorrow realize that salvation for Africa lies in the hands of Africans and not Europeans and Americans.

It is easy to determine where the true problem of Africa lies and why things seem to have fallen apart. Salvation for Africa will remain a mirage, until for example, Africans learn to reject all systems of government that are Western, European, and American. African leaders should fashion out a political system of government that is most suitable and practicable for Africa and Africa alone. Such a system does not need to pass a political litmus test designed by the Western powers. Of recent, most leaders of the blacks in America seem to have noticed where the immediate problems of blacks lie. These are both *moral* and *spiritual*. In this case, an ultimate solution lies in getting back to African roots. The emphasis is on *spiritual cleansing*. The live-wire of the traditional African society is the family. Where the family is in disarray, the entire neighborhood and society are in trouble. While bad political, social, and economic situations in Mother Africa are contributing adversely to the misfortunes of black people, the same blacks must accept their unfortunate part in the moral malaise that has continued to mar their progress, particularly in the United States. Dr. Martin Luther King's dream that one day "*my children will be judged by the content of their character, NOT by the color of their skin*" is *not* being realized. There is need to find out to what extent the poor content of black people's character is marring the realization of that dream and what should be done to rectify the situation.

Turbulence in African-American Community

There is no doubt, too, that *racism* is apparent in the attitudes and behavior of some law enforcement officials and in the unequal availability of legal assistance. So many incidents of police brutality unleashed on young blacks accused of various criminal offenses testify to treatments based on *racial prejudices*. But racism cannot account for all black people's problems. Experts testify that in the field of criminology the professional literature is one of the root causes of violent crime.

According to a *TIME* survey, Black and White Americans were shocked by recent statistics showing that one in three black males between the ages of 20 and 29 now is either in jail, on probation, or on parole, compared with one in four just 5 years ago. This revelation is no doubt very disturbing. There may be other root causes traceable to racism, leading to breakdown of the family and community. While there may be truth in the alarming rising rate of black criminal records, we insist that most of the ugly phenomena identified with the root of crime, particularly in the United States are in fact *un-African*. If African-Americans have lost their roots in any way, there are some perennial enviable African values they must not lose. Africans everywhere have always cherished the *family and community life* as the basis for survival and salvation. To abandon family values means death and loss. Some of these cherished African values include respect for life, respect for the aged, love, care, and unity founded on extended family systems. The African is "the brothers' keeper."

While *teen pregnancy* is a worldwide phenomenon today, it is abhorred in African communities. Single parenthood is a disaster and single mothers must have to hide their identity in order to avoid certain community recriminations and even ostracism. A single mother parading "fatherless kids" is an unfamiliar sight in Mother Africa. Any unmarried girl who gives birth to a baby at home only qualifies for a "second wife or third wife" in a polygamous family tradition. Africans know that it takes a village to raise a child. The community assumes the responsibility of preventing any type of evil that might affect the future life of a child. Even where paternal authority is lacking the community supplies it for in a healthy environment, this is critical for the prevention of psychopathology and delinquency among children, especially boys. And it has been shown that a boy abandoned by his father is deprived of a deep sense of personal security. Often that leads to inappropriate aggressiveness and in many cases to delinquency and crime.

Who is the 13-year-old girl walking along the street with a toddler? Is the toddler her brother, her sister, or her own child? If the toddler is her child, it is unusual that a 13-year old girl should be allowed to nurse a baby! Something must be done to

protect the over-exposed teenagers from the corrupt influences of a sex-intoxicated modern society. By engaging in illegal dating and uncontrolled sex, these teenagers are bringing into the world illegitimate children. If nothing is done to put the situation under control, there is no doubt that society will continue to pay the heavy price of uncontrolled illegitimacy in the modern times.

In Mother Africa *the family and the community* still serve several needs and purposes. They serve as a breeding ground for moral, ethical, religious, social, and spiritual teachings usually inculcated into the youth in educational institutions and houses of prayer. Getting to the roots of violent crime, particularly among the blacks in the United States is an important step in the right direction. The root of the *disarray* in the family and community that leads to gun-trotting, bank-robbery, rape, kidnapping, and other violent crimes are not ills usually associated with Mother Africa. African-Americans should search their souls and discover the sources of their malaise. The following data reveal the depth of the damage in the African-American communities.

- New census Bureau figures released on the eve of Million-Man March showed that 2 out of every 3 United States black families with children are headed by single parents, 92% of whom are women. For white families, 1 in every 4 is headed by single parents and 84% of them are women.]
- The root of violent crime includes breakdown of marriage, family, and community. Teenage criminal behavior has root in habitual deprivation of parental love and affection going back to early infancy. Future delinquents invariably have a chaotic, disintegrating family.
- The growth in crime is parallel by the growth in families abandoned by fathers. In healthy families, paternal authority is critical to the prevention of psychopathology and delinquency among children, especially boys. A boy abandoned by his father is deprived of a deep sense of personal security. Often that leads to inappropriate aggressiveness and in many cases to delinquency and crime.
- Some 70 per cent of all black children are born to unmarried women

- More than half of all black children live in single-parent families. Only one sixth of white children do.

Black Families in Disarray

The thing that makes African-Americans special is the period of Jim Crow, which was very much a kind of slave system except without individual masters. The problem of blacks is not so much poverty as this legacy of slave owners breaking up families: It's not normal for men to abandon their children the way you see in underclass behavior. In no part of the world do you get this phenomenon except among ex-slaves populations in the New World. You can't explain that in terms of poverty; in fact, poverty often brings families closer together. You have to explain it by over 275 years of assault on the key roles of father and husband. It messed up the gender relations of African-American men and women, and they're still very fragile. [Orlando Patterson, Black Harvard Professor]

The above *sins* are always related and the consequences are shocking. On crime, it is alleged that a black man is six times as likely as a white man to be murdered, and his murderer is likely to be black. The widely publicized story of the 21-year-old Nushawn Williams, a product of a Brooklyn, New York neighborhood, referred to as an *AIDS predator* and accused of infecting scores of women with HIV, paints a miserable picture of the black American family. If no serious steps are taken to salvage the family, there is no doubt that many black families are doomed to failure as a result of chaos and disastrous parental upbringing of kids. The neighbors of Nushawn Williams provided an exclusive look at the tangled world that influenced Williams and why his victims fell prey to the man. It is the same gloomy picture of poor black American family in a black neighborhood with a bleak future. Nushawn (Jojo) Williams' lifestyle revealed the following:

- His grandmother smokes *crack*.
- He has no idea who his father is.
- His mother has prostituted herself and even made his little sister turn tricks in front of their apartment in order to support her drug habit.
- His uncle, the man of the house, is in and out of jail.
- His mother used drugs and his grandmother used drugs
- His own mother was trading off his sister, at 13, to grown men so she could buy *crack*.⁷⁹

This is the type of home environment neighbors and friends said produced Williams, who allegedly exposed more than 100 people to HIV. The biblical saying *by their fruits you shall know them* fits correctly here. And again the rhetorical question; *do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit.* (Matt: 7.16ff)

There is no doubt that the number of unwed mothers - black and white - may have doubled since the above statistics were drawn about seven or eight years ago as the breakdown in morality and family remains a scourge of the modern society. But whatever the case may be there is nothing in these statistics to prove that Africans or blacks in general are in any way more promiscuous than their counterparts anywhere. Here again culture plays a role. Depending in the part of Africa one is considering, a researcher will always find examples of extreme and rigorous sexual traditions that produce virgins and celibates even in modern times. In some cultures where laxity in sexual tradition reigns supreme single parents control family life. In general however, single parenthood is not a cherished tradition in any part of Africa.

The Black Neighborhood

A few writers in their cynicism went as far as asserting that Negroes transplanted to the New World lived there under better conditions than their folks in Africa, that plantation colonies were, compared to Africa, a genuine paradise for blacks. These writers in their desperation to wash Europeans of their guilt would liken the dreadful plight of slaves in the plantations to a haven of peace. (Ndiaye Joseph, in "The Slave House of Goree-Island")

Although David Simon and Edward Burns's Book, *The Corner*,⁸⁰ makes no pretense of solving knotty racial questions in America, it has some chilling notes on the nature of the *black neighborhood*. An extract from the *Newsweek* review of the book, chronicles a year spent in a predominantly black, drug-drenched neighborhood in West Baltimore where death comes early and hopes hard. The authors of the book returned with fascinating snapshots of life on the streets and a vivid sense of why it is so hard for some members of the underclass to find their way into the light. One leaves this book with a voyeur's sense of having witnessed lives in depraved and desperate states, and with absolutely no inkling of what can be done to improve them.

Whether there is reason to believe that there is *always* conspiracy to link every crime committed in the United States to blacks, United States army spokesman, in connection with the sex scandal in the army, reminded the general public that the issue had nothing to do with *racism*. As he put it, it was an *issue about sin and not skin*. While it may not be easy to ignore the impact of past sins on the present, at the same time this has become the right moment for black people to search themselves and see whether all the accusations of misconduct are always framed to bring the black race to ridicule. Truly if Martin Luther King, Jr. were alive today, he would be in the position to tell the world whether the black folk are being judged by *the content of*

their character, or by the color of their skin. While racism may not be ruled out, it is certain that most of the judgments about black people of the United States today are based on their *character*. The white folk continue to maintain their ground. "We are *not talking about skin but sin*. We discriminate against you because we don't like what you are doing."

- We don't want you in our neighborhood because it will be infested with every type of crime if we allow you settle in. That is why we have abandoned the inner city too.
- We wouldn't offer you any job because you are not law-abiding and hardworking.
- We will not give you any responsible position because you are not responsible, honest, or trustworthy.

Prejudice may have its place in the judgment of black people, but again, Africans, after defending a presumed persecuted victim of injustice, turn to the victim and ask: "But, boy, what put you into that mess?" Why should serious offenses of crime, drugs, murder, and sex always be associated with black youth? It is time emphasis is shifted to the *content of character* rather than the color of skin. *The Million-Man March* would have set a record on *moral orientation*, if it succeeded in letting black folks know that the content of character is a priority in the march to self-determination and racial healing. There is need for black people to *atone* for their sins and at the same time take responsibility for their own salvation.

Moral and spiritual regeneration must have an exalted place in the black crusade for racial salvation. The moral records of black youths in particular have never been impressive. This moral malaise has helped worsen the situation of the blacks and at the same time justify racism as white people find legitimate reasons to fear and avoid black folks. There is no doubt then that most Africans in Mother Africa are often shocked and disappointed that their big brothers and sisters in America are despised people, victims of various evils associated with affluent and depressed societies of the western world. If they would like to help out fellow Africans in predicament, it may be necessary for them to put their own houses in order. It seems there is a full

realization of this fact among blacks in the United States; a full commitment must be made toward moral re-armament.

The Returning Exiles

Where does Africa move from here? Is there any hope that the exodus of Africans from Mother Africa in search of greener pastures could be stemmed down and a reversal of direction effected? What are African and African-American intellectuals up to in a genuine search for solutions to black peoples problems? Can the blacks of the Diaspora come to the rescue? Jews in Israel, working through many Jewish organizations, are united and committed to the survival of *Erez Israel*. What are blacks and black organizations doing to rescue their people and ancestral land from desecration and destruction and from the hands of their enemies within and outside their fatherland?

There are many other questions that anybody could ask in relation to black peoples' problems. The war to wage is clear and the enemies of Africa and black people are not in hiding. The enemies are not just the erstwhile colonial masters. The enemies are not the white people in their own countries and fatherlands. They are primarily African politicians in civil and military uniforms. The enemies of Africa are the economic saboteurs, those who steal, loot their countries' treasures, and bank their loot in foreign banks from where they withdraw and squander Africa's wealth while millions languish in poverty and lack of basic necessities of life. Surely many other enemies of Africa are among Africa's illustrious sons, scholars and intellectuals, medical doctors, scientists, engineers, economists, and even ministers of religion who have abandoned their fatherland at the hour of need in search of greener pastures. With the absence of these *cornerstones* how can the building stand and the inevitable question arises: *Who will develop Africa?*

One prominent Igbo intellectual who has spent many years in the United States was angry with me for what he referred to as "dumping us together with true enemies of Igbo people, Nigeria, Africa and the black race." He denied he is an enemy of African development in any way. He lamented however over the circumstances that had made him stay so long

in America. The catalogue of woes was morally devastating. He insisted that he was speaking for a great number of Africans residing either permanently or temporarily in the United States, Canada, or elsewhere in Europe or Asia. As far as this Igbo son was concerned, many Nigerians overseas are waiting anxiously for an honest leadership to emerge in their fatherland. The true sons and daughters of Africa in Diaspora are ready and willing to return to their fatherland in Africa "provided that the political atmosphere is conducive." But our question: "Who will create this *conducive* atmosphere to convince the returning exiles that the venture is worth all the troubles?"

There are more than a few Africans overseas who are, however, afraid and disenchanting. These believe that any step toward African development in whatever direction is a painful one. Even the mere thought of catching up with the Europeans, Americans, and Asians is frightening. The price of such a venture in both human and material resources must be prohibitive. Where should Africa begin? The political and economic machinery is almost nonexistent and the overwhelming magnitude of work ahead makes them confess that the way is long and tedious. It may be foolhardy to think of competing with the white man. Privately the African exiles confirm that Africa is still in the dark ages. At least in the field of technology, there is a long way to go!

But should such realities *scare* or rather *encourage* Africans to pursue their own development? There is need to summon courage instead of taking a flight from an inevitable job of developing Africa and the black world so that other peoples of the world would long to visit Africa and see what makes the black continent unique among other continents and nations of the world. The owners of the land should take the initiative by realizing that their own destiny lies in their own hands. The exiles must return to the fatherland to embrace the inevitable task of development. The task of creating a conducive atmosphere for development lies, too, in the hands of the patriotic Africans who accept that their own people at home have need of the good things of modern life.

Misconceptions and Prejudices

Africa, a continent of overwhelming size and diversity, is home to almost a billion people. Yet, Africa remains virtually invisible to most Americans. Apart from the considerable attention given to humanitarian crises or ongoing conflicts, the U.S. public receives little information about developments in Africa beyond stereotypes and voyeuristic images. Success stories contradicting these perceptions somehow escape the mass media's gaze. This incomplete and misleading portrayal, coupled with an inadequate understanding of contemporary African realities, has obscured Africa's importance to the U.S. and to the global political economy [The African policy initiative 1997-2000]

Black people's problems are being compounded not simply by the deteriorating political, social, and economic situations in most African countries and among Diaspora Blacks. Misconceptions and ugly pictures of Africa that have been planted in the minds of the whites may be impossible to correct or contradict by even the most honest disputation by the best black scholars. Old prejudices die hard and they are the sources of black peoples dilemma in their bid to assert their position in the modern world.

Prejudice is in fact the heaviest burden that racial differences have placed on the shoulders of a great population of humanity. Some prejudices are deeply buried in the human mind. Overtly, they surface in racial controversies, as "action speaks louder than voice." Overtly or covertly, racial prejudices remain like *stumps*. The primary origin or basis of racism is of course *prejudice*. It is any preconceived opinion or feeling and is usually unfavorable. Prejudices are generally unreasonable feelings, opinions, or attitudes, especially of a hostile nature, directed against a racial, religious, or national group. The saying "war against prejudice is never-ending," shows that prejudice is an evil that takes long to eradicate. When we talk about prejudice, *bigotry* comes to mind. Both are great evils. Bigotry is

excessive intolerance of creeds, beliefs, or opinions that differ from one's own. Bigotry does not mean believing that those who disagree with us are in error. It means believing that they must be dishonest. Many people believe that once we are aware of bigotry, we can fight against it and conquer it.

But as far as prejudice is concerned, it is widely believed that it is far more difficult to root out than any other evil. It is the tendency to judge exactly the same set of facts differently according to whether they are on our side or the other. It so permeates our mind activity that it is immeasurably difficult for us to consider the other point of view. An accusation is made against our side and we demand the most rigorous proof. A similar accusation is made against the other side and we accept it out of hand - it is exactly the kind of thing those people would do! Prejudice conditions our judgment. It conditions our memory too. The transmission of racial prejudices from one generation to the other, from parents to children, from adults to young people is easy and infectious. No explanations and lectures are required to stamp the notion to memory. It can only be experienced. Prejudices therefore form the strongest foundation of all the poor and humiliating pictures of the black race.

Images of Poverty, Hunger, and Disease

Images of poverty, disease, and death painted by charitable organizations, aid workers and the news media with the purpose of raising funds and helping to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, victims of ethnic conflicts and natural disasters in Africa may be contributing after all to the irreparable damages on the image of Africa and its people. To bring their message across and arouse the sympathy of the donors, charitable organizations and aid workers have never ceased to think that they must strike the right notes in the hearts of their listeners and benefactors. They do not fail to support their sympathetic stories with pictures and images of death. It is a sorry situation.

A few examples may help to illustrate our point. There is no doubt that white people are tired of hearing about Africa and its problems. Many are sincerely bored with countless appeals for rescue operations in times of famine, civil conflicts, and

natural and man-made disasters. One Catholic director of a relief agency for poor blacks in the United States was suspended for embarrassing the blacks on his committee, when he complained that "white people are tired of spending their money on these niggers." He was surely speaking for thousands of other whites.

Posters or brochures put up by western-based charitable organizations soliciting aids for the poor in the third world and particularly Africa carry miserable pictures of hungry and dying faces of victims of poverty and disease. There is an almost impeccable conviction that without these depressing images, donors will not respond to appeals for charity. But many, including serious donors, would confirm that such distasteful images of death do not motivate them. They donate, as they can, knowing that poverty is a world phenomenon and its existence does not need any scientific proof.

Most often the images of death on Church posters get a booster when supported with statistics. Charitable organizations tell donors that at least *one million* children die every day in Africa as a result of hunger. About the same of number of African women die everyday at childbirth. Another *one million* Africans die daily during ethnic violence. No one may doubt that some women everywhere die at childbirth. But that so many women in Africa die everyday during childbirth is not only *false* but also a misleading way of trying to touch the hearts of donors. If such a number of children die every day in Africa, how has African population continued to grow? How many births are given in Africa everyday? How do the African benefactors come up with their statistics? No matter their good intentions, this sort of misinformation can only be very damaging to the image of Africa. We maintain that such details are in no way necessary to achieve the promoter's goal, namely that of arousing the sympathy of the donors. Again one may not dispute the accuracy of some of the reports. But the inevitable question; is it really necessary to give such distasteful, ugly, and pitiable pictures to convince donors to come to the rescue of these poor Africans? We do not agree that such detailed reports and pictures are necessary no matter the effects or impressions they leave on people from whom charitable organizations solicit help.

An example of a bad case for charity and Africa: From a poster published by a western based charitable organization

To become a sponsor is to extend friendship and love to desperately needy children in East Africa. War, drought, famine, and disease have left millions of children orphaned or in extreme poverty in Africa. In Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda half a million children die everyday from hunger and malnutrition...I saw some who fled their villages and walked thousands of miles on foot. As they walked they passed the remains of many others slaughtered along the roadside. They stayed off the roads to avoid the soldiers, **but then faced attacks by animals and snakes!**

There are so many ridiculous posters and brochures put up by charitable organizations to solicit aid for victims of injustice and oppression all over the world. Often more harm is done than good. If **500,000** children die in four African countries everyday, what remains of African population? The young generation of white children used to be fed with exaggerated and false stories about black people and their cities. Ask any American or European child what he knows about Africa. He will not waste a second before pointing at the images of poverty, disease, war, famine, and state of helplessness. How can anyone doubt stories heard from parents about Africans who have tails and sleep on top of trees? Any history lesson on Africa must generally begin with dying people that must be pitied.

The good intentions of aid workers notwithstanding, it is imperative to change these methods of soliciting money for charity in Africa and elsewhere. People can still donate generously without being given the impression that Africa is nothing but a bunch of living skeletons. Missionary workers, no matter their good intentions, must re-assess their strategies for appeal for aid programs. Many such ugly headlines appearing in international magazines, Church newspapers and bulletins can be counterproductive. The poor and false image of Africa created in the minds of millions of people is simply intolerable. Consider these captions in Church newspapers:

"Wasted Goods" Could Be Rescued, Used to Help Third World's Suffering Poor"

This was a heading in a Church magazine working on behalf of African hungry children. "Wasted Goods," no matter how the solicitors would want their donors to understand, generally would include bad and condemned stuff meant for animals and garbage bins. There is no way anybody could justify making Africa a dumping ground for wasted and often harmful and rejected products. There is no surprise that many donors actually rush to clear their old stuff and unusable materials for the Third World! Some poisonous materials may find their way into the containers for starving African children!

After the hullabaloo about the *mad-cow disease* in the English beef industry and the millions of confiscated cows died down, rumors were rife that the *mad-cows* were really not destroyed as recommended by world health authorities. They were presumed to have been shipped to Africa where the poor, hungry Africans could do with *crumbs from the master's table!* But the mad cows were really no crumbs. They had been declared unfit for human consumption. No one should be surprised if the *mad-cows* actually were shipped to Africa.

"African schools desperate for used furniture and supplies"

This was another caption of a Church appeal program for aid for African schools. Then follows a more desperate appeal:

A group of barefoot boys and girls stand at the door of a large, dilapidated shack - a patchwork of sticks, wires cardboard, rusted tin sheets and discarded lumber. A young man walks up, carrying a worn book under his arm. He opens the shack's door and the children rush in to take their seats on crude wooden benches...

There may be no need arguing whether some poor African children walk around the dirty slums of villages and communities barefoot. Likewise, there is no doubt that African

classrooms are not as modern and well equipped as European and American schools. In short, there is no basis for comparison. But the only relevant objection to the above type of report and the inevitable question is whether such detailed description is necessary to get the required response for the aid to African schools and children. It is certainly not. White benefactors and donors already know too well about Africa. The detailed report is a mere mockery of the poor and raises doubts about the reporter's motives.

"St Francis -St James pupils hope gift will ease Ghana priest's path"

This was another front-page headline in a diocesan Catholic newsweekly in the United States, soliciting help for a poor African pastor. The details are as follows:

Father Francis Arthur made such an impression on students at St Francis-St James United Catholic School that they took up a collection to buy him the one thing they thought he could use the most: a new *pair of athletic shoes*. Father Arthur, a diocesan priest in Ghana, Africa, serves 40 villages in his native land, where walking is his only way to travel to most of them... The school also took up a collection to ship its *old text-books* to Ghana...

The abridged news story followed Father Arthur's photo in his new brand shoes! According to the above news story the white school children took up a collection to ship their *old textbooks* to the poor school children in Africa. While not trying to jeopardize mission appeals for the poor anywhere, and particularly Africa and the black world, it may not be out of place to ask why **old textbooks** should be shipped to Africa. How current are these textbooks? How useful will they be in Africa? What subjects do they treat?

This old textbook story recalls the famous shipment of library books from the United States to Nigeria in the late seventies. The shipload of textbooks, including encyclopedias

landed at the Lagos seaport and a lot of money was spent claiming them. The donors in America only agreed to pay for the transportation from America to Lagos. There were more than 20,000 books covering almost every level of school - high school, college, university textbooks. There were also simple novels, children's story books, books for college math, architecture and engineering. It was an amazing collection and covered vast areas of knowledge. But one thing was completely wrong and shocking. Clearly marked or stamped virtually on all the books is the word or phrase "**obsolete**" or "**Not for use in the United States.**" Some of the books were published between 1700 and 1930s!

With the rapid changes in technology and upgrading requirements in order to remain current in knowledge today, who thinks that such books shipped to school children and college students in Africa from overseas would do any good? As one aggrieved schoolteacher remarked, "it was another sample of *toxic waste* for poor Africa!" It was a rare opportunity for schools, colleges, and university libraries in the United States to get rid of their *obsolete books* and of course the best place for the books is Africa! Social workers, missionaries, and charitable organizations that use the issues of hunger, disease, and poverty to identify Africa and Africans are promoting and perpetuating *racism*. The matter is worse when European kids are taught directly or indirectly to associate Africa and Africans or black people with these *evils*. The damage to the image of Africa is colossal. Most white people know a *Credo*. What they know or do not know about Africa is virtually plastered on the faces of all black people everywhere. Every black man is a poor fellow who needs some help, and of course, some obsolete, abandoned, and useless stuff.

Aids Originated in Africa?

The conclusions have no scientific foundation. The only basis is prejudice. It is in the area of sickness and disease. "All deadly and incurable diseases come from Africa or the black world," for many whites is an *axiom*. Nevertheless *Time's* story on the origins of AIDS may throw more light to the ridiculous

assumption that AIDS originated in Africa. **"When did aids begin?"**⁸¹

According to the *TIME*, a new study of the oldest known HIV suggests that the virus jumped from animals to humans in the 1940s. The year was 1959 and the location, the central African City of Leopoldville, now called Kinshasa, shortly before the waves of violent rebellion that followed the liberation of the Belgian Congo. White scientists or reporters, according to this story were able to recall what happened in that central African region in 1959. A seemingly healthy man (presumably a black man) walked into a hospital clinic to give blood for a Western-backed study of blood diseases. He walked away and was never heard from again. Doctors analyzed his sample, froze it in a test tube and forgot about it. A quarter-century later, in the mid-1980s, researchers studying the growing AIDS epidemic took a second look at the blood and discovered that it contained HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

As the reports concluded, not just any HIV, the Leopoldville sample is the oldest specimen of the AIDS virus ever isolated and may now help solve the mystery of how and when the virus made the leap from animals (*monkeys or chimpanzees*) to humans. A close look at the genetic mutations in the Leopoldville sample strongly suggests that all it took to launch the AIDS epidemic was one unlucky turn of events. From the 39-year-old specimen of blood, as speculators concluded, one theory is that AIDS started through contact with infected *monkeys* in a *remote* area and spread to the rest of the population through urbanization and mass inoculations.

Who will doubt the Western experts? Africa presents the key features required to arrive at "valid" conclusions that most evils, such as AIDS originate in Africa. Africa has jungles and millions of wild animals, including monkeys and *chimpanzees*, and in the minds of most Westerners Africa is the *remotest* area of the world! According to the *Times*, there should be little doubt that AIDS originated in Africa. Providing further evidence through statistics, which it captioned "OUT OF AFRICA," more than 30 million people are infected with one of 10 subtypes of HIV. By far the greatest variety and the largest number of cases occur where the epidemic began, in sub-Sahara Africa. The

breakdown according to various regions of the world is as follows: **Africa** - 21,000,000, **Asia and Pacific** - 6,450,000, **North America** and the **Caribbean** - 1,170,000, **Latin America** - 1,300,000, **Western Europe** - 530,000, **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** - 150,000.

At the rate the western news media report that people are dying in Africa of the deadly disease called AIDS, in thousands, every hour, or even minute, how can anybody believe that there is one human being alive in Africa today? According to statistics claimed by the press to emanate from health officials and the World Health Organization, in the United States African-Americans constitute over 80 per cent carriers of the HIV. In Israel, health authorities claim that **Black Ethiopian Jews** were more liable to contract the virus than the white or brown Jews. A racial controversy was bound to erupt in one ugly incident. It was the right opportunity for the oppressed and humiliated black Ethiopians to fight prejudice in the land where they thought equality of races existed at least on the basis of religious faith!

Israeli riot police, according to reports, battled with Black Ethiopian Jewish demonstrators. It was a big controversy over the purity of the *black blood*! According to the story, quantities of blood denoted by Black Ethiopian Jews were systematically destroyed by the Israeli health officials and therefore not used for the purpose for which the donation was made, namely, saving life. It was alleged that a higher percentage of blacks contract the AIDS virus than whites. Therefore, the best solution for the dilemma was to throw away both the good and the bad! For black people everywhere - Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians, it was time for another war on *racism and prejudice*. The reason behind the shameful treatment of blood donated by black people was not only scandalous but also another landmark in the history of racism, discrimination, and prejudice. Racial problems are everywhere and have continued to increase as blacks and whites are geared up for confrontation at the least provocation. The situation continues to deteriorate.

Wildlife and "Strange" African Names

Identifying Africa with wildlife and wild ferocious beasts breeds racism and scorn. It is another source through which European animal and wildlife lovers promote and perpetuate racism. Ask any average European and American schoolchild what he or she knows about Africa. He does not search his head to locate Africa or African countries in the world map. Whether Africa is a continent, a town, or a village does not bother him. But he is sure of one thing: Africa is a land of wild beasts - lions, tigers, apes, elephants, wolves, wild dogs, and rattlesnakes. If any history or geography lesson should be learnt about Africa, the only meaningful association with the continent is always *wildlife*. Many Europeans and Americans find it hard to believe that Africans do not live with wild beasts or that over 90% of Africans have seen a lion, tiger, or any of those ferocious animals for the first time only on display in the European or American zoos!

"That name sounds or looks African" automatically indicates *strangeness*. White people everywhere maintain without qualms that African names are difficult to pronounce no matter the length of the name. Many European missionaries who worked in Nigeria had no interest in learning any of the Nigerian languages. Most of those who worked in Igboland simply identified some Igbo names with fetishism. It seemed as if they took a vow never to pronounce any Igbo word with their lips. Even after the Second Vatican Council Fathers had encouraged *inculturation* in the liturgy there was no attempt to put into practice the recommendations that involved the language of the people.

The first question an African might be asked after announcing his African name to a white person would be "How do you pronounce it?" With little or no effort to master the pronunciation of the name, the next step is usually to request for the permission of the African to be addressed by his *English* name (if he has any). Even after all the exercise in learning to pronounce a simple African name, the observation that it is difficult to pronounce or even commit to memory is indicative of

prejudice and usually shows disregard for anything African or to mock and humiliate Africans.

Prejudice is a serious sin. The same fellow who claims he is unable to pronounce a simple African name succeeds without extra effort to pronounce such really difficult words like *Sylwinztykechovic*, (East European), *Solusambandislenskra*, *Fiskframleioenda*, *Hafnarfjordur* (Icelandic), *Troms Siskeekstort* (Norwegian). There are many Chinese and Japanese names and words that are really difficult to pronounce, but European newscasters experience little or no difficulty in pronouncing them. The same with many Europeans of all walks of life. Why should African names and words sound *naturally strange* to them?

Whatever their motivations, interests and intentions, it is obvious that the distasteful image of Africa and its peoples being perpetuated by foreign charitable organizations has done a lot of harm to the continent. It is not true that all Africans are poor and would all perish if tons of foodstuffs and drinking water were not hurriedly transported by air, land, and sea to the victims of civil conflicts and natural disasters. While those short-term measures may alleviate suffering in emergencies, long-term remedies are usually most salvific. Instead of transporting drinking water from Europe and America, for example, to forestall the ravages of cholera epidemics in one African region, or tons of wheat for the starving children, perhaps timely measures to prevent war by the super powers might bring about a more lasting remedy.

Salvaging the Image of Africa

There is nothing wrong admiring good qualities found in other people. There are many patriotic Africans at home or abroad who have *not* lost all hope. The final solution to Africa's problems does not lie in mass exodus from Africa and immigration to other nations that have worked hard to improve the lots of their own people. It is not even honorable to accept defeat in a battle, surrender to the enemy, and become a vassal perpetually in the enemy's land. All the bad stories about Africa are not true. And there are many Africans who think that salvaging the poor image of Africa created mostly by prejudice

and misinformation should form part of the crusade for "Back to the Roots." The amount of misinformation is big and a short reflection here will serve a useful purpose. It is necessary to correct many impressions and to teach or inform the ignorant correctly. It is the duty of all well-meaning Africans to undertake this project wherever they find themselves. The centuries of misinformation have no doubt continued to bring untold suffering and agony on many Africans.

The best way to furnish the correct information may not necessarily lie in denying that Africa is poor. Surely Europeans and Americans, including missionaries, aid workers, and pressmen know that there are large sections of African communities that compare well with European and American cities in development and basic infrastructure. There are many honest and successful African businessmen and intellectuals. Africa has many good sides. The odor emanating from Africa is not always foul. The best way to prove that Africa has a bright future, no matter how gloomy the sky looks, is, as the Igbo of Nigeria would put it; *never in reality resemble the creature in the story*. (Ime isi ka ihe akoro gi). In other words:

- Do not appear or behave as your detractor has painted you.
- Prove in *reality* that your enemy had only misrepresented you.
- Make your enemy a liar.
- Show that the story was only a myth and has no foundation in *reality*.

Africans need to convince the skeptical world that there is hope for salvation. While the exiles prepare to return to the fatherland for a project of reconstruction and reconciliation, there is need to take another look at the issue of leadership. It is an overwhelming conviction of 100% of Africans everywhere that the heart of black people's problems is that of leadership. The "dead horse" has truly been over-flogged. But the problem remains. It is our conviction that any meaningful project toward salvaging the image of Africa and the entire black world must address the issue of leadership as black leadership has for long remained a perplexing problem. Who will salvage the black world?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Political Leadership: Back to the Roots

Michael Southwick, former U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, is representative of Westerners who blindly believe that a Western form of democracy is the only form for every society. But in Africa, as in many other societies, tradition and culture cannot be separated and replaced with foreign ways of life (Yunus Badat, in a letter to TIME Sept 22, 1997)

One of the greatest tragedies that has befallen most African nations is the failure of the political systems that were set in motion before and after the colonial masters left the political scene. Political independence was expected to usher in an era of prosperity for the long-oppressed and exploited Africans. Those who fought to expel the British, French, Belgians, Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards from African soil were, naturally, the first politicians to take over political leadership from their erstwhile colonial masters. Most of the African nationalists and freedom fighters had hitherto suffered untold hardship during the struggle for independence and black majority rule.

People such as Nelson Mandela served long and torturous prison sentences in South Africa on account of their love for their fatherland and the liberation of their countrymen from colonialism. In some situations such as in Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe the struggle was long and bitter. In other cases the intervention of the superpowers as well as ethnic rivalries raised serious questions about the motives of the colonial masters and those African leaders who had taken over leadership in their various countries. In most cases signs of trouble loomed only a few years after the independence celebrations. The assassination of Patrice Lumumba of the Congo shocked Africans. Few Africans saw any need for the death of that illustrious African son.

Eventually, it became obvious that the western powers were behind his assassination. A promising, great black political leader, who was thought to represent true black aspirations, had been eliminated from the face of the earth. African youths expressed their sorrow at the death of Patrice Lumumba and the Congo/Katanga tragedy was recorded in music and songs. Some of the songs condemned the enemies of black people as well as blacks who had become tools in the hands of Africa's enemies. African youths everywhere yearned for another true leader of the Kingdom of the Congo who would stand out boldly for the black cause. But in the Congo such was not to be. A leader according to colonial standards took over the reins of government. His name was Mobutu Sese Seko. He reigned for more than 30 years and became an embodiment of oppression and corruption in African rulership.

The Obote/Idi Amin saga in Uganda marked another sad chapter in the post-independence political history of the black continent. African children consciously have been taught to hate tribal conflict, genocide, pogroms, and everything associated with a discredited African leadership as epitomized in the reign of Idi Amin Dada of Uganda. Generations unborn will repeatedly learn the details of that drama through the movie "*Idi Amin, the African dictator*." In the words of one Igbo musician, the Idi Amin drama "was a shameful catastrophe that all nations of the world witnessed and lamented over."

Unfortunately such drama is repeated everywhere in modern Africa. The players go by various names and titles. Not much seems to have been learned from the past tragedies! But whether or not all evils attributed to him were true, most African schoolchildren everywhere know what Idi Amin stands for. The Nigerian/Biafran war of secession had much in common with the Rwandan Tutsi/Hutu genocidal war. The *Hausa/Fulani/Igbo – Tutsi/Hutu* ethnic rivalries - as well as similar ethnic-political arrangements in various African nations - put to question the workability of the current systems of western government adopted by most African states. What steps are modern African political leaders taking to forestall ethnic uprisings as they fashion new systems of government suitable for Africa?

The Nigerian civil war was in progress when the death of an illustrious black leader was announced. The assassination of *Martin Luther King Jr.* in 1968 was another blow to the black people's cause. The hopes of the African youths who thought blacks in America would come to the rescue of black Africa were dashed to the rocks. Once again Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became a household name in Africa. The violent death of these black leaders no doubt saddened most African youths and increased their hatred for the enemies of black people everywhere.

The murder of **Steve Biko**, (the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in 1977 in South Africa) by white police while in custody horrified African youths and confirmed their fear that only violent uprising could bring about the demise of apartheid and oppressive regimes everywhere. It would bring about a disaster to allow other emerging African nationalist leaders and possibly an **African Messiah** - to die in the manner of Martin Luther King Jr. or Patrice Lumumba. Such a savior will live to lead his people and the whole black race to freedom; hence the "**Free Mandela**" song! Both young and old people were caught by *Free Mandela* fever. All over Africa the campaign for freedom in South Africa and the abolition of the apartheid policy intensified as ecstatic youths including, college and university students were caught up in a crescendo of *Free Mandela* disco extravaganza. African youths everywhere were possessed by the spirit of freedom, and there was hope that the spirit of African liberation had reincarnated in Mandela. Will he live up to expectations, to usher in the messianic age for the black people?

As the "Free Mandela" drama was unfolding everywhere in the black world, I remember vividly the reaction of one elderly Igbo man during an argument with some Igbo youths. Physically distressed by the activities of the Mandela-intoxicated Nigerian youths, this man wanted to know what the excitement was all about. A young university student leader tried to explain what the apartheid policy implied. As he tried to lecture the old man, apartheid did not only involve discrimination and segregation against blacks; the whites had taken all the land away by force and left little or nothing for the Africans. What

was worse, he continued, the whites all over the world had ganged up to exterminate black people. Mandela had challenged them and that was why they had imprisoned him to die in jail.

The student leader went on to explain why all black people should abhor apartheid - a policy of discrimination against nonwhites instituted as far back as 1910. Apartheid made marriage between whites and blacks a crime, and education for blacks was defined differently. Most drastic was the Group Areas Act of 1950, which provided that specific areas be reserved for the four main racial groups in South Africa - Europeans (whites), Bantu (blacks), Colored (mixed race), and Asians. These laws and the concept of "Homeland," which denied blacks the right to live in cities without special permission, were in fact the foundations of apartheid. All blacks were assigned to specific tribal areas and had to carry passes when they entered restricted (white areas.) The student leader went expounded on the dangers facing black people everywhere, within Mother Africa and in the Diaspora.

In America, it was learnt that the whites had tried to exterminate the real owners of the land, the Indians. The survivors were living on Reservations or concentration camps or what resembled the South African Bantu Reserves. Perhaps, in due course the blacks might suffer the same fate as the Indians. Africans had reasons to fear for the safety of their brothers and sisters in America as reports of maltreatment of the blacks, the lynching, and assassinations of black civil rights activists were duly reported in the foreign press.

Most disturbing were reports of assassinations of black leaders and prominent American political leaders who were said to be peace-loving and supporters of Negro campaign for liberation from slavery as well as equality with the rest of their fellow Americans. When in 1963, a local pastor, announced the assassination of John F. Kennedy, there was wailing in the Church, even by people who had never heard about the American president or what his life or death meant for black people.

The pastor explained that John F. Kennedy was the first Catholic president of the United States, a good man, peace-loving president. John Kennedy, he implied was assassinated

because of his love for the Negroes. His death therefore was a big setback for liberation and civil rights movements in the United States as well as in African countries, most of which were still under colonial rule. Not surprisingly John Kennedy became a household name throughout Africa. Infants were given the name **John Kennedy**.

Thus an assassinated president of the United States became an African great *ancestor* whose love for black people everywhere (real or imagined) must be celebrated among the Africans for whom he died. There was no better way of showing how he had touched the lives of millions of black people everywhere than in making him *re-incarnate* in new African lives. As we have indicated elsewhere in this work, among the Igbo of Nigeria, only *good*, *exemplary*, and *eminent* ancestors re-incarnate. No matter how the Americans would choose to paint their assassinated president later in history (holy or immoral president), for the Africans, John F. Kennedy was a hero whose role model and support for freedom of the black people should be remembered for all times. By taking the name - John Kennedy - Africans show that there is always something in name!

The elderly man in our story was, however, not impressed by what he regarded as a student political agitation and rhetoric. He was skeptical and tried to reason with the young man: "Perhaps the white man's rule is better. Why don't we allow them govern us while we follow their directives?" As far as the student activist was concerned, that was *anathema*: "How can you talk of leading and following, when you are not sure of your life? The white people are wicked. They don't like us. They have destroyed our culture, lives, and made us their slaves. We can't tolerate it any more. Mandela must be freed!"

Like Martin Luther King Jr. in America, Nelson Mandela was expected to emerge as the awaited *messiah* at this point in time. The black voices and protests could no more be swallowed by white police intimidation and the international white conspiracy to relegate black Africans to a perpetual second-class citizenship in the land of their forefathers. Indeed Mandela would not be allowed to die in prison like Steve Biko and other black leaders. No wonder, then, that after 26 years this

illustrious son of black Africa was released from prison and was on May 10, 1994 inaugurated as South Africa's first black president since the apartheid policy was instituted in 1910.

The expectations were so high. The release of Mandela from prison and the dawn of the **Day of Yahweh** that the event would usher in formed the *sitz im leben* of the movie **Saraphina!** The arrival of the *Messiah* would mark the beginning of liberation for Africans from the long and painful oppression by their bitter enemies. There was no need for any further proof that an international conspiracy inspired by the most powerful nations of the world had as its goal the subjugation of black people to the perpetual status of slavery. This conspiracy started many years ago and received its boost from the *scramble for Africa*. The *messianic age* will even usher in a reversal of fortunes. It will also be a day of vindication as well as reconciliation. This great event will take place on God's own mountain "*for on this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth*" (Isaiah 25.7-8)

But, surprisingly, not all African traditional and religious leaders and ethnic groups were very enthusiastic for political independence. The elderly were equally skeptical about the ability of black leaders to operate the white man's system of government in the black world. They were skeptical, not necessarily because they didn't want freedom; they thought that white ways would not suit black people. The system of white man's government was not only sophisticated but also unsuitable for Africans. The terms used to describe this system of government sounded Greek - *parliamentary democracy, socialism, communist totalitarianism*. How did the operators of these systems want the *lower house and upper house, congress, and house of representatives* to function in Africa? A particular system described as *presidential democracy* has three groups of political leaders, each performing a different function - some are lawmakers (legislators), others are judges (judiciary), while still others have to enforce the laws (executives). There are parties with various political convictions. Some are called Democrats,

others Conservatives or Republicans - whatever these terms mean.

African Political System: The Igbo Example

As far as the Igbo of Nigeria are concerned, the white man's political setup has no defined place for *Ndi Ichie* – The Elders. How can a system that ignores the wisdom of the Elders and the Ancients survive? What of *Ndi Eze* – The traditional rulers, representing the various families, kindreds, villages, and communities? In this New Age political system, where do the *Ndi Nze na Ozo* - the titled men, the community arbiters, or the traditional Igbo supreme judges and lawyers fit in? In the Igbo judicial system, *Ndi Nze na Ozo* are the most revered supreme court judges. Like the jury in the Western judicial system, their word is final.

Titled men in Igboland are people of honor and may not be relegated to the background in any meaningful political set up in the black man's world. Whatever changes the traditional chieftaincy institution has undergone in the modern Igbo society, it is still a cherished institution that has a big role to play in any political system suitable for Africa and the black world. The Igbo example may apply to many other ethnic groups anywhere in the modern African society. In the first place, the holder of a title must be a man of honor and respect and is expected to live aboveboard. He cannot be described as a dubious character, a criminal or a thief. He cannot embezzle public funds, nor can he encourage such an act. He cannot compromise an exemplary life of honesty and decency in dealings with others. He cannot be a debtor nor be associated with any fraudulent business practice. He cannot be a liar for his testimonies in any event are accepted as Gospel truth. "*Nze anaghi ekwuhie*" ("Nze - the titled man - does not lie") is an Igbo saying implying almost a status of *infallibility*. Nze cannot deliberately tell lies in order to deceive or hide the truth. His testimony, his witness to the truth is generally presumed to be correct. Peace, truth, fair play, and harmony are believed to be ritually symbolized and enacted in the conferment of traditional titles in Igboland.

What is the position of the Eze – the traditional ruler of every Igbo autonomous community - in the new political system of government that will assure peace, stability and, development in the African community? The Eze with his local chiefs (the cabinet) is the embodiment of peace and order, fair play, and progress in the community. Besides the Eze, who would assure the people that some greedy, powerful fellow would not confiscate their land and property? The Eze is the defender of the defenseless, the poor, the orphan, and the oppressed. That the Eze would become an oppressor would be the worst calamity that could befall any Igbo community.

The white District Officer (D.O), on whose shoulder lay the entire colonial administration, did not discard the offices or functions of the Igbo chiefs and elders. He used them, the "warrant chiefs," judiciously in the smooth running of the colonial administration. The District Officer and his District Clerk (D.C.) knew right from the beginning that without the African chiefs his administration would run into grave difficulties. He reserved their special place in his administration and both arms of government worked harmoniously together. As it soon became clear when they took over from the white administrators, the African leaders of the new political dispensation were not as "wise" as the white masters!

The foreign system of government that black African leaders embraced without study is clearly not for Africa - not only that functions are duplicated in certain cases; there is often another independent group, referred to as the **opposition party** whose function is to *oppose* the ruling party and *disrupt* the running of government. This group of politicians usually assumes its aggressive posture as a result of its failure at the polls. More time is usually spent reconciling the opposing political views of the two - plus political parties than on the business of government.

The Igbo system of government has no place for *opposition*. The community is one. Who are being opposed? There is one Eze, one group of supporters (cabinet), one people or community - in one word "**Ohanaeze**" (Eze and the People), one judicial system, one party, and one executive. The Igbo government is naturally a *unitary system* because the community

is made of families and extended families united under one head, the traditional ruler. The system is "**Representative**" and there is no need for the Western system of voting. Each family or kindred sends its own **representative**. It is the business of each community to send a wise man or an imbecile! It is the kindred's business to send the same man each time or to make a change. Usually experience teaches best.

Part of the useless system of government that the new African political leadership embraced was the sophisticated and costly voting system. The people are expected to comprehend the voting system and vote in the manner of the whites. They have to vote at the "Primaries" and "Secondaries" and "Run-offs" etc. In some cases they are to troop to voting stations three times or more to select leaders who would govern them like whites. They would then vote for those who would operate government on the *local government* level; then those for the *state* and finally for the great leader of the country - the president, who will operate on the *federal* level.

The Trouble with Africa: No Basis for Unity

In times of setback in any nation's history there is always the tendency for the troubled people to point accusing fingers at other people or institutions thought responsible for the bad situation. Scapegoats are not difficult to find. For the global weather conditions thought to be responsible for poor harvests, drought conditions, or extreme temperatures, *El niño* must be responsible. Who or what must have contributed to the crash in the stock market? As far as most Africans are concerned, independence has not ushered in the peace and prosperity promised by the African freedom fighters and other nationalist leaders. In the people's minds, the greedy, heartless, corrupt leaders of Africa are responsible for all the ills. Many older generations of African mothers and fathers are quick to point out that they were really skeptical from the beginning about the freedom songs, and about whether Africans could govern themselves. As far as the old parents are concerned today, their fears and suspicion have been justified. The difference between

the white style of government and that of the blacks is clear. Most African old parents vow they would be ready to vote for the erstwhile colonial masters if they returned to compete with African politicians.

An elderly Igbo man did not need an electronic calculator or computer to prove his case that the black man is responsible for all the catastrophes that have befallen the black race. As he reasoned, one could easily take an example from the Nigerian situation. "Check my fingers and toes," he said. "Since the departure of the last white man from our land, we have been in turmoil. Our sons said they brought us *udubendenti* (meaning independence). No. It is not freedom, if that was what they meant. Our sons have brought truly *udubendenti*, (which, rightly interpreted means misery") In the literal sense, *udubendenti* is a type of disease whose malnutritional effect is obvious from the swollen cheeks of the victim. As far as these elderly people are concerned, black people are neither real patriots nor true nationalists who have their people's welfare at heart. These leaders, whether civilian or military, have grabbed power from the colonialists to oppress the very people they claim they are liberating from oppression. The older generation wished God would bring about a *reversal of order*. Perhaps the old would be better than the new!

Ethnicism in Modern African Politics

African political leaders in their enthusiasm to govern like the colonial masters quickly forgot that *ethnicism* or *tribalism* could dominate and ruin the new administration. The whites introduced ethnicism or tribalism when the colonial administration, for various reasons brought many different groups of people together in a new political arrangement. The pre-colonial *Igbo nation* was not a *tribe* or *ethnic* group. It was a community of *clans*. And a clan, such as that of the Igbo in this context was simply the *extended family* best identified as a *coterie*, an *association*, and a *brotherhood*. The language is one – *Igbo* – with many dialects like in any other world language. Even in the post-colonial era in which local government has come to replace the old Igbo traditional government, the clan system is still

gainfully employed to give meaning to the new local government administration.

Because the basis for unity does not exist among the people, clans, or tribes that find themselves within the new political boundaries drawn by the colonial masters, Africa may not have peace for quite a long time in the future. World wide, the phenomenon of incompatible ethnic groups has exploded in various regions – in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the old USSR, India, and Pakistan. Is there doubt that the biggest problem facing the present set of political rulers in Africa or their future successors is that of finding ways of bridging the gaps or gulfs of ethno-political differences separating Africa's numerous peoples? Such differences are basically cultural and cannot be ignored. Ethnic differences are not confined to Africa and the phenomenon has for long been the center of debates on local, national, and international levels worldwide. If Africans could get over such differences, there is little doubt that peace and prosperity would boom in the black continent and the search for greener pastures would become a thing of the past.

North-South Dichotomy and Ethnic Racism

It is not only in Africa that tribalism or ethnic problems exist. Religious factors are not always responsible for tragedies arising from discrimination and hate among people of the world. There is no doubt that the early 1990s were characterized by racial and ethnic conflicts throughout the world. These ranged from ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other parts of former Yugoslavia to new and continuing conflicts in various parts of the former Soviet Union. There are increasing levels of racist violence in Western Europe, particularly in Britain and Germany, and continuing violence in the Indian subcontinent and South Africa.

On the **Asian** continent, ethnic Koreans are said to be subjected to discrimination, particularly in Japan, even though racially they are near identical to other Asians. Racial slurs that angered Malaysians sent thousands of the people to the streets protesting remarks by Singapore's elder statesman, Lee Kuan Yew, in April 1997. His remarks, which Malaysians construed as

racist, brought to the surface simmering resentments between the two Asian neighbors. According to reports, Lee remarked that Malaysia's Johor State, just across the Singapore Straits, was "notorious for shootings, muggings, and car-jackings." True or not, the remarks were enough to spark uproar. Even though the elder statesman apologized for his statements, reports indicated that the wounds might take time to heal, thus underscoring the sensitivity of racial issues between Malaysia and the predominantly ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans. Singapore and Malaysia, once a federation have had a complicated relationship. Malaysians have often felt that the Singapore government looks down on them. Ethnic racial problems no doubt also contributed to Singapore's breakaway from Malaysia in 1965.

Ethnic clashes in Indonesia's West Kalimantan province in early 1997 left up to a thousand people dead, reports from that Asian region indicated. At least 2,500 houses were reported burned down. Confirmed reports showed that clashes were based on racial hatred between the indigenous *Dayaks* and the migrants from the island of *Madura* off the coast of the main island of Java. Residents reported often-vicious attacks that included acts of cannibalism and that *Dayaks*, known in the past as headhunters, decapitated *Madurese* and displayed the heads on bamboo sticks. Forty-two percent of West Kalimantan's population is said to be *Dayak*, 31 percent *Malay*, 11 percent *ethnic Chinese* and the balance from a number of ethnic groups including *Madurese*.

The internecine slaughter in the Balkans point to ethnic racism. In East European countries, ethnic discrimination within the former **Soviet Union** no doubt accelerated the disintegration of that union. There are differences between the *ethnic Russians* and *non-Russians* (*Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Ukrainians, Moldavians, and Chechnyains*). If a close look is taken at **Western Europe**, it is clear that ethnic racism exists in the form of *Northern-Southern dichotomy*. In Germany for example, the Northern and Central parts often speak scornfully about the southern Germans, namely the *Bavarians*. North *Italians* often refer to the Southern Italians as "Africans." Fellow Italians often subject southern Italians to ridicule. Italians of the North have always nursed the desire to secede from the rest of the Republic.

The same pattern is found in *Spain* and some other Western European countries. Surely, the *British and Irish* have not been best of neighbors. Both have remained worlds apart in race relations, and have engaged in bloody conflicts for decades; *Northern Ireland* has for decades become a reference point for scandalous ethnic violence and dilemma.

In **Africa** ethnic violence captures world attention largely on account of the frequency of its eruption in this continent and its devastation to human and material resources. It is a paradox, too, that the Africans and blacks who complain about white racism and discrimination turn to their own race to inflict horrendous wounds on their brothers and sisters. Whites interested in racism debate seem to be telling black people everywhere to remove the wood in their own eyes so that they can see the speck in the white people's eyes! Africans will continue to battle with ethnic strife, usually provoked by politics and religious intolerance. The sharp line is always seen in the face of each nation: The *Moslem North* verses the *Christian South*. Even apart from religious differences, the cultural differences are always there - lifestyles, customs, tradition, and language.

Most northern and southern sectors of the same African country have little or nothing in common except the skin color. The European colonial concept of Africa as a village has created a false impression that Africans are completely one, at least in language and culture! Surprisingly few Europeans care to know that there are more than 55 countries in the African continent and in larger nations, like Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zaire there can be as many as 250 ethnic groups, each with its distinct language. There are more than 1000 dialects on the continent.

The burden of race or ethnicism faces citizen and foreigner completing immigration papers or job applications. In the colonial era, Africans were required to fill in their tribes of origin in documents where personal data were required - census records, job applications, and in school registrations. "What are you and where do you belong?" African leaders thought it sensible to suppress tribal groupings and to emphasize *unity* and *nationality*. But despite the massive crusade for unity mounted

by African governments, the burdens of ethnic and tribal divisions have continued to remain a thorn in the flesh.

In larger nations of the world, such as the United States, race is a major issue in religion, politics, and society. Race is plastered all over the walls of the super power nations and no visitor may skip the frustrating effects of the racial tradition in American society. The word, that separates the largest racial group from "others," is *minorities*. If two "major racial groups" are identified as black and white (as a result of skin color), where do the children of mixed racial marriages fit in? These and many others are already asking to be identified, since strictly speaking they are neither totally *white* not totally *black*. The rainbow colors cannot be ignored.

On local, national, and international levels many groups of people will continue to carry the burdens of racial and ethnic dichotomies. Some who escape their fatherland as a result of racial, tribal, clannish, and ethnic oppression often find themselves in their newfound lands facing worse burdens of ethnicism. This may continue to be so into the future, unless there is a complete change of heart and direction in the way the dividing lines are drawn. But the real paradox lies in the fact that those who have known and suffered racial, tribal, and ethnic persecutions are among those who through acts of omission and commission perpetuate atrocities against those who do not belong to their own race, tribe, or ethnic group. Surely the burdens of race, like the caste system, will continue to worry many people for a long time to come. What faces all people of goodwill today is to find ways to lessen these burdens, which have weighed on many for too long. There is need for the healing of wounds inflicted on people all over the world by differences of racial or ethnic divisions. Africa is not alone in this tragedy.

African nations have no choice but to search for unity among the numerous ethnic groups making up the modern city-states in the vast continent. The existing wide ethnic divisions must be closed. And one of the best ways of tackling the problem is by inventing a system of government that must take care of the interests of the various ethnic groups in Africa. It is meaningless to cross rivers and mountains in foreign lands in

search of such a system. If it is one *man*, a *dictator*, a *tribal chief*, who should assume leadership and perform well, why should any one worry about the name of the system? Where Africans think that a *group of people*, perhaps *representatives* of the various ethnic groups, carefully selected should govern the nation, why should any one worry if this system does not resemble any other anywhere in the modern world? *Parliamentary democracy* and the *presidential system* of government may be the best for the West but may not necessarily suit Africa.

Whichever system of government African leaders choose to operate must take into consideration the diversity of ethnic groups, the usual source of conflict in the present western-modeled systems of government. They must watch out for *ethnic cleansing* and take adequate measures to avert such disasters. Racial, tribal, clannish, and ethnic differences have been responsible for major world conflicts, including world wars and regional genocide, pogroms, and massacres of peoples. *Ethnic cleansing*, a familiar term in the modern times is a form of genocidal war, whose sole purpose is to obliterate a particular racial group. Centuries of ethnic differences can trigger animosities and a larger group may single out one minority group for destruction. Systematic suppression, intimidation, and mass killing may be sought as a lasting solution to a problem conceived as a "thorn in the flesh" by the larger society. While it may not be possible to eliminate such a hated group of people in normal peaceful situations, a civil war or civil unrest may offer the best opportunity for "ethnic cleansing." The Holocaust is a good example. The Bosnian, Rwandan, Burundian, and Biafran tragedies are other good examples. Never again should such tragedies be allowed to take place in Africa or elsewhere in the civilized world.

Language is no doubt a unifying factor as in the United States. In Africa there are thousands of languages and no one can replace the other. English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese are not among the African languages. Igbo is spoken by only a small percentage of Africans, as is Hausa or Swahili. In Nigeria alone more than 250 ethnic groups speak about the same number of languages. Most of these languages are spoken and written as English or French is spoken and written.

Culture is another unifying factor among a group of people. *Culture*, as civilization, customs, and traditions, or way of life of a people, is important for stability in any political setup. The greater the *diversity*, the more difficult it is for the nation to bind together. American culture is basically *English* or *Western*. Cultural assimilation has been most effective means of maintaining the stability of the country. Is this possible in a "United States of African nations?"

It is an acknowledged blunder on the part of Europeans to look at Africa as one nation, usually compared to Germany, Austria, France, and Spain. Africa has a population of more than 750 million. To illustrate the differences in culture, let us take the Nigerian example. The Igbo, one of the three major ethnic groups, have *nothing* in common (except the Nigerian nation and color of skin) with the Hausa or Fulani of Northern Nigeria. The Hausa/Fulani for the most part speak Hausa and Arabic. They are basically Moslem and their religious beliefs are part and parcel of the Hausa/Fulani culture. Their marriage laws and taboos, the food they eat, the type of wine they drink, the way they dress, their attitude about life are different from those of the Igbo, the Yoruba, the Efik, the Edo, the Ijaw, or the Igala of Nigeria. On the diversity of ethnic groups in Nigeria Encyclopaedia Britannica has the following information about Nigeria:

Virtually all the native races of Africa are represented in Nigeria, hence diversity of peoples and cultures. It was in Nigeria that the Bantu and Semi-Bantu migrating from southern and central Africa intermingled with the Sudanese Negro. Later smaller groups such as the Shuwa Arabs, the Tuareg, and the Fulani, who are concentrated in the far north, entered northern Nigeria in waves of migration across the Sahara.⁸²

No wonder that Eyantu Ifenne, once a Director General of the Commission for Women in Nigeria, has this to say in response to a Newswatch Opinion survey on *What we like about Nigeria – People's Verdict 1995*: "To know Nigeria is to know Africa. Everything African is here in our various ethnic groups." With

such diversity of peoples and cultures and such a large population it is no surprise that ethnic tensions will always dominate the political, social, cultural, and religious life of Nigeria. The Federal Republic of Nigeria is the largest of the western African coastal states. Its population, the largest of any country in Africa and one of the largest in the world, was estimated in the 1994 census at 91,549,000, and rose to more than 104,000,000 at the end of 1997. Nigeria's ethnic diversity, neither noted nor managed by the first politicians who took over from the British colonial masters disclosed some hidden cracks even before independence. Encyclopedia Britannica's summary of the problems that ensued tells the rest of the story of ethnicism in Africa, a situation not unlike that in some other parts of the world where governments find *Unity in Diversity* a hard nut to crack.

After a honeymoon period, Nigeria's long-standing regional stresses of ethnic competitiveness, educational inequality, and economic imbalance again came to the fore in the controversial census of 1962-63. In the west the government fell apart in 1962. At the center, a boycott over the federal election of 1964 brought the country to the brink of breakdown. The point of no return was reached on January 15, 1966, when, after the collapse of order in the west following the fraudulent election of October 1965, a group of army officers attempted to overthrow the federal government, Prime Minister Balewa and two of the regional premiers were murdered. A military administration was set up under Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, but his plan to abolish the regions and impose a unitary government met with anti-Igbo riots in the north. He was assassinated on July 29, 1966 and Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon came to power.⁸³

Up to mid 1998 the Nigerian political crisis had continued to dominate African news. Woeful failure in parliamentary and presidential democracy allowed the most incompetent and corrupt military regimes to dominate the political scene. Out of

the 38 years of political independence, the military governed the nation for more than 30 years. And as this work was nearing completion there were no good signs that the military dictators who succeed one another were leaving the political scene in Nigeria. The annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections by the military, the imprisonment of Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the elections and his consequent death in prison are all parts of the ugly political history of Nigeria. The fact that the then military dictator, Sani Abacha, with the support of the vast majority of Nigerians had the intention of succeeding himself in "democratically organized elections" before death struck further demonstrated the absurdity as well as the tragedy of the senseless experiment in foreign political systems that are unsuitable for Africa.

The rest of the tragic political history of Nigeria could be better assessed from the circumstances that led to the Biafran war of secession from the Nigerian nation [1967 - 1970]. Because these groups of peoples have little or nothing in common, they find it difficult to dwell together under any known western political arrangement, hence the constant social, religious, and political upheavals. Surely a former Nigerian head of state saw the unworkability of the foreign colonial arrangement in Africa when Nigeria reached its dead end in 1967. As both sides in the Nigerian civil war were gearing up for battle, the then Nigerian head of state, Yakubu Gowon was quoted as declaring that **there was no basis for unity!** The paradox remained. If there is little or no basis for unity and faith in the foreign political systems of governance, why are the present Nigerian political leaders still clinging to these arrangements? If an imposition of **unitary government** would spark an unprecedented protest from a majority of people and lead to a civil war - considering that the **federal** or **presidential system** now shows no signs of workability - why are the leaders of the people "chasing rats when their houses are on fire"?

What a calamity! Most of the freedom songs did not last. And as the elders had predicted, the new leaders have not been able to operate the system. Nor can the system itself work for the Africans. It has been a colossal failure because the systems have not been modeled after the pattern of government that the

forefathers of Africa operated and which kept the communities and great African kingdoms together till the coming of the whites. Since the first day the baton of political leadership was handed over to the blacks, most African nations have not had peace. With these complex and often popular new systems *installed* in Africa the new African political leaders thought they had in their grip a magic wand that would resolve the political and social problems of their respective African nations. Yet with the collapse of one regime after another African leaders have not ceased to shop around Europe and America, from North to South Pole, to experiment with each new political system invented by the white man. They have not ceased borrowing from Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and the United States of America. But nobody stopped to find out what these countries have in common with Africa.

Because the type of government that Africans operated before the coming of the white man had no place for **the opposition**, the new African leaders do not tolerate the opposition party's role in the modern political structure. In modern Africa, **party politics** is simply **ethnic politics**. It is futile to think that ethnic groups will unite overnight to form a political party devoid of ethnic alignment. Africans will normally vote on ethnic lines, and support their own ethnic politicians, even where such politicians are morally the most depraved of human beings. It is not that Africans do not love democratic principles. They do. But alas - the infrastructures and the basis for unity are simply not there. They have not been established, and in certain African nations politicians and the people have not debated the importance of such structures seriously. At present, it is hypocrisy to think that such formula exists. So in a short time a leader who succeeds in installing himself *king* through one political strategy or military *putsch* soon degenerates into a hair shy of dictator. He assumes the role of the traditional **African King - The Emir, The Obi, The Oba, The Obong**. These were the pre-colonial African chieftains who, despite their weaknesses ruled vast kingdoms and commanded respect from their subjects, like their counterparts elsewhere - **Pharaohs, Kings and Queens, Emperors and Czars**. Although their autocratic oppressive principles and styles were

unchallenged, history has made good record of their downfalls and shameful deaths at the hands of their very subjects. Volumes abound about modern dictators and tyrants whose despotic rulership affected millions of people - dead or still living.

With the coming of the white man and the establishment of a new political administration the powerful African rulers not only lost their vast kingdoms; they were also deprived of all the privileges they had enjoyed among their people. Their massive wealth disintegrated. They no longer benefited from the free labor supplied by the women and young men of their vast kingdoms. They were no longer permitted to impound properties, like the Israelite Kings. And with little or no sources of income, they could no longer support the large number of wives, children, and servants they had. With their kingdoms divided by the colonial powers into pockets of political enclaves, the African kings lost power and influence. Some fought against the colonial encroachment into their areas of influence, but were soon forced to surrender to the more powerful colonial armies.

It did not take long before the new African political leaders realized that they could not perform like the African kings of the pre-colonial era. Perhaps without knowing it, the new leaders had embraced a system of government incompatible with the African way of thinking and acting. And soon the dreams of freedom and prosperity became nightmares. Unable to tolerate opposition or criticism of their western style of government, the new African leaders turned their attention to fighting or intimidating their political opponents as well as groups that opposed their rule. They degenerated into tribal or ethnic overlords and therefore commanded little or no national respect. A lot of money that could have been used to develop Africa has always been placed at the disposal of the military forces to keep the emerging dictator in power. Given such a scenario sooner or later civil wars are bound to erupt.

The consequences of such nightmares are great: destruction of lives and property, pogroms, genocide, ethnic cleansing, farmlands laid waste. Survivors of massacres become refugees and thousands of children are made orphans. A state of poverty, hunger, and disease that can decimate the greater population of the region of Africa soon attracts the attention of

the civilized world, and Africa is now at the center stage of a long-lived political drama. The best brains that escape the land seek refuge in various parts of Europe and America as political exiles. And with the total breakdown of law and order and destruction of educational institutions, Africa again switches over to the status of underdeveloped continent and possibly a return to the Dark Ages. Thus the political leadership degenerates in Africa because the present leaders are unable to operate the foreign systems of government, either inherited from the colonial masters or self-fashioned after the same colonial system. Equally agonizing is their inability to acknowledge that the systems do not suit Africa. And if the systems are *not* for Africa what should be done?

Pre-Colonial Government: The Igbo Example

Historically the Igbo people have a complex and very sophisticated form of political life. Governmental power as well as governance was much more diffused in this region than elsewhere in Africa owing to a strict representative and republican nature in the people. At the lowest level of governance or community life, Igbo people adhere to a strict "No representative, no support or community involvement." Representation evolves from elders through chiefs and then the general populace.⁸⁴

There is a way out of the present political impasse in Africa. Africans should fashion a system of government modeled after pre-colonial Africa. Here, there is need to rediscover the rich values of the African traditional system of governance. Where necessary such values could be used to enrich anything profitable in the modern system of government anywhere. During the colonial period, European history dominated the curriculum in most high schools and higher institutions of learning in Africa. Many materials, which were available on political science and culture, had little or nothing to do with the African past. British history, British government, and British constitution for example, were popular courses that students

writing for the Advanced General Certificate of Education, London were constrained to register for.

It was not only about Great Britain and its other satellite states that African schoolchildren even at a tender age were well schooled. France, Germany, and South Africa were on the top list of foreign countries about which African students were to know the culture, language, political system, religious affiliation, and geography. Even some of the dreaded apartheid masters of South Africa - including **Cecil Rhodes, James Barry Hertzog, Hendrik Verwoerd, and Balthazar J. Vorster** - were featured prominently in the History books of colonial African schools. These archenemies of Africa were among the "great world leaders" that Africans were expected to admire "for their great achievements in world history and politics." While institutions of learning, airports, libraries, and streets bore their names, African nationalists and freedom fighters were offered nothing to immortalize their contributions toward the black struggle for freedom. They were labeled rebels and political agitators. African schoolteachers were to use the *approved syllabus* and were forbidden to teach anything outside the *approved syllabus for African Schools!*

In most British and American history or government courses, the impression was always given that the concept of democratic government originated in Britain, America, or other European nations. No one would deny that the European or American federal system of government with the three distinct branches and elected representatives was, and continues to be unique in these countries. But there is no proof that the white government has a monopoly on democratic principles. Before the arrival of the colonialists in Africa, some African communities and clans had run their local administrations using democratic ideals.

Indeed while Americans were fighting their War of Independence against the British colonialists and the Russians were organizing their Bolshevik Revolution to overthrow the czars from their kingdoms, democracy was already established and working in some areas of Africa. A *government of the people, by the people and for the people* was firmly established in the pre-colonial Igbo system of governance and the Igbo

political life-style has continued to bear witness to this system of government. The Igbo people of Southern Nigeria have operated a system of democratic rule from time immemorial. "*Ochichi nchigbu*" (dictatorship) is opposed to "*Ochichi onye kwuo uche ya*" (democracy) (literally, "*say what is in your mind*"). One is encouraged to express oneself without fear. The *Village Square* is still the people's (Ohanaeze) seat of *local government*, while the Eze's palace is the *Government lodge*, the *White House*, or *the Pentagon*. Decisions on crucial issues are reached by majority opinion. The village head, local chief, or his deputy addresses the people and throws open any topic for discussion. It is only after an exhaustive discussion of a particular issue that the traditional head gives a summary and the people disperse. No one has any right to overrule or overturn the majority decision.

Ndi Igbo are so fascinated by the ideology of democracy or majority opinion that the English word *opinion* is today overused to emphasize the role of the people in decision-making. It has recently earned another "corrupt" rendition: **OPI-UNION**. "Opi" is a horn or a trumpet. "Union" stresses *togetherness* or *unity*. When the Igbo asks whether an "OPI-UNION" has been *fashioned* or *reached*, he simply wants to ascertain whether a named decision had the *approval of the people*. "OPI-UNION" figuratively becomes a mandate from the people. The Igbo then remains satisfied that his own views have also been taken into consideration. At least he has been summoned to the meeting place like others. He has also been granted the chance to air his views. The wooden gong summons the people to a gathering at the Village Square or at the Eze's Palace. It invites the people to deliberate on the matters of the moment. This is still the system of government at the local or village level. Any system of government - imported or homemade - that neglects it will not gain any grassroots support. Such a decision is usually not considered binding on the community.

How does it work? In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the missionaries asked the people who the king of their village was and the villagers told them that there was no king, confirming the saying "Igbo Enwe Eze" or (Igbo Ekwe Eze) (The Igbo are not ruled by kings.) They went further to explain: "We have men of high title and chief priests and elders." In the pre-colonial Igbo

society elders and these men of title often gathered together to make decisions that affected an entire community. They met to discuss going to war or carrying out the wishes of the religious leaders. They served as judges at trials and guarded the traditions of the clan. These were men who had earned the respect of the villages because they had worked hard. Most importantly, the clan judged a man by the work of his hands. That was why Okonkwo, the protagonist had been chosen to carry a message of war to their enemies.

Despite the colonial political system of government in operation in Nigeria today, the Igbo have not abandoned their long-established democracy. The Nigerian judicial system, modeled on that of Britain or America, is not always able to handle many cases, particularly those dealing with land ownership and inheritance. Such cases are referred to the traditional rulers who handle them following the long established laws of the land. The contemporary Igbo have chiefs, also known as *Eze*, who are appointed or elected by the council of elders. Also known as the *cabinet*, the council of elders together with the *Eze* formulate policies and legislatures known as *Ome-na-ala* (revered, recognized laws of the land) "Ome-na-ala" is opposed to "aru" or "Ome-na-elu" (strange, unusual - in other words, an abomination). And to repair the damage, "aru," there is always a fine and ritual imposed by the elders. One's action is easily condemned or exonerated by a simple reference to this action, which is described as either "Ome-na-ala" or "aru." And a person asserts his innocence in a matter by claiming that he never committed any abomination. In other words, he has not broken the law of the land.

There is no reason to doubt that the Igbo of Nigeria were among the first ethnic groups in the world to practice political democracy as a form of government. Although in the field of modern science and technology, the Igbo, prior to the invasion of western civilization, may not boast of having contributed much to the wider world, it is unfair to dismiss their claims in the realm of democratic government as unimportant or unfounded. The Igbo society, with its rich cultural heritage, has much to offer and teach the modern world in the science of government

But many concerned sons and daughters of Igboland - and perhaps many Nigerians and Africans too - are not happy today because the modern chiefs, the Eze, the elders, the council of elders, members of the cabinet, and the Eze's councilors are no more serving the people and their land well as in the past. Most have abandoned the practice of those virtues with which good leadership was associated. The guiding principles that helped to maintain democracy and fair play are being brutalized by selfish and greedy charlatans who by various questionable means find themselves in leadership positions. Some buy their way into the *Council of Elders* and have nothing to show for their qualification or the *work of their hands*. Some are not men of honor, nor have they accomplished anything for their communities. This is precisely why there is an outcry among Igbo people - in Igboland and in Diaspora - among well-meaning Nigerians - men and women, young and old - for change in their fatherland and Africa in general - a going *back to the roots*.

Rotational and Representative Government

There is need to change not only the present western system of political administration but also a system of selection or voting to ensure that thieves, crooks, and opportunists do not seize the chance to rule. **Government by representation** may at last serve Africa best. If the people decide to send a bad politician to represent them, they will bear the consequences of their action. While the possibility that criminals could still maneuver their way to the top is always there, in most cases the number of such people is kept low when well-organized process of grassroots selection is carried out. What works for the Europeans and Americans may not be the best for the Africans. If the **Presidential system of government** is best for the Americans, the **Confederate system**, for the Swiss, the **Parliamentary**, for the British; **Socialism**, best for the Chinese; **Communism** for Cuba - there is no guarantee that these systems would work well for the African states. African politicians and elders of the people should be able to devise a system of government, preferably modeled after the traditional pre-colonial system of democracy in Igboland. It is not necessary that the African

political system should take its bearing from the western pattern. The structure of African communities, the ethnic diversity, the cultural differences, and the religious differences must be taken into account when drawing up Constitution that will guide leaders in running the affairs of government. But if African political leaders neglect these issues and continue their overseas shopping for systems of government for Africa, they may continue to fail. Africa has now experienced enough *copycat* systems. These systems have let Africa down, portraying its people as ungovernable and uncivilized.

Depending on the duration of the term of office of any political administration, the *rotational system* will also guarantee stability and honest support from other ethnic groups. Although equitable representation of all ethnic groups in any government in power already assures confidence in the administration, the *rotation* of power among the various ethnic groups would sound the final death-knell to partisan politics and vicious political alignments. *Representative and Rotational System* would in practice show that the government is that *of the people, for the people, and by the people*. No one will claim to be ignored, left out, or cheated. There must be opportunity for all to contribute in nation-building. Such a delicate matter should not be left in the hands of charlatans or opportunists irrespective of their population and influence in the multi-ethnic societies characteristic of most African nations. Representative and rotational system of government in Africa would help eliminate the expensive and sophisticated electoral system that encourages dirty politics all over the world. Politicians wishing to represent their communities would not need to advertise themselves on national television or spend money in selling their *worth* to the people, for by their fruits they would be known! These politicians should limit their "stories" and "promises" to their areas of influence within their own ethnic groups. As for the **overall head of state, president, king, chief, prime minister, chairman of the ruling council, or the moderator of government**, it should be the duty of the house, the representatives of the people to elect the African **head of government, the great father of the nation!**

Certainly the phenomenon of ethnic domination will continue to feature in whichever system of government Africans may decide to adopt. To allay the fears of the minority groups, there is need to include a *zonal structure* that would make the top leadership (president, head of state) *zonally rotational*. This fits again into the representative structure of ancient African government. Each zone is destined to produce the *Head of State* when it is its turn to do so. In modern times, this is expedient and would take care of the people's quest for *justice* and *fair play*. Who will deny that in most African countries today, domination by the most populous or powerful groups in political and economic power has been responsible for most of the political and social upheavals that have beset modern African government since the colonial powers handed power to African leadership?

The military does not need to feature in the government of modern Africa. Their intervention in politics has often been welcomed because politicians have not been of "the right stuff." In the pre-colonial era every able-bodied young man was a soldier and took part in the interethnic wars. Any new political dispensation to salvage African nations from the present impasse must assure that the military is not given any loophole to intervene in politics. Staggering amounts of financial resources from poor African nations have been spent *not* in repelling enemy forces from other countries or continents but on military hardware to finance ethnic and fratricidal conflicts, coups, and countercoups. The military in Africa should stay out of politics as this institution does in all civilized nations. In peace times, the military serves government and people in various ways. Even though the military sees its role as *messianic* when politicians "mess up" political institutions in various African nations, experience shows that the place of the military must be in the barracks. It is necessary that African politicians fight to keep the military within the barracks. Honest leadership may be the best and only way to ensure peace and stability in Africa.

Upon close examination, it is clear that the problem with Africa lies with her political leadership. The failure of the *new-breed politicians* to run the system of administration inherited from the colonial masters as well as their failure to live up to expectations, following the examples of the African ancestors -

have exposed these politicians to ridicule. Their regimes are usually characterized by terror, systematic murder of political opponents, and unchecked corruption. Most of these African politicians soon leave no one in doubt that the country and people are in for a long period of chaotic political turmoil and experimentation. In desperate attempts to unseat the dictators, coups and countercoups are organized by soldiers and concerned citizens. In these military operations, most of the African problems are compounded, as innocent people are killed in crossfire. There is no peace nor does prosperity flow like spring water in the African jungles. There is need, therefore, to go back to the old system of government by the elders of communities. Here the important factor does not lie in the *name*, but in the *quality of system and leadership*. The criteria for choice of leadership in ancient Africa are well preserved in African myths, legends, aphorisms, proverbs, and sayings that incorporate words of wisdom. We can elaborate on some of the qualities here, using the Igbo of Nigeria to illustrate

Quality of Leadership

(Mobutu Sese Seko: 10/14/1930-9/7/1997); The last of Africa's old-time dictators was toppled in May. Throughout the cold war, the flamboyant Zairian strongman's leopard-skin cap was a familiar sight in the capitals of the Western countries where he found support – and loved to spend his looted fortune – From Newsweek's Pictures of the Year, 1997 (Sinners and Saints, Philosophers, Movie Stars, Businessmen and Artists)

In the pre-colonial African community only *men of honor and integrity* could rise to leadership positions. The leader had to have something recognizable to show for his greatness. Leadership positions were *not for sale to the highest bidder* nor could they be seized through greed. *Things Fall Apart* gives insight into the Igbo community of the 1800s. Okonkwo the *great*, the hero of the novel, had risen to great heights of respect and admiration. He had achieved much in his life. He was a

champion wrestler, a wealthy farmer, a husband to three wives, and a title-holder among his people. He was also a *member of the jury "egwugwu"* whose members impersonate ancestral spirits at the settlement of disputes within the community. The members of the *egwugwu* had the final word in the justice system. As they spoke in the name of the ancestral spirits, their word was final. There was no appeal.

A Champion Wrestler had a great advantage as a successful community leader. Wrestling is an art. It is equally a game. A wrestler requires great strength as well as courage and discipline. He must be shrewd to be able to master the opponent's tactics and outwit him. Okonkwo's fame had from his youth grown like wildfire because he brought honor to his community by throwing *Amalinze*, the "*Cat*." Amalinze, "the Cat" was a great wrestler ("Like a cat his back never touched the ground.") "No one could throw him" who like the Goliath of the Philistines had terrorized the Israelites, until David humiliated the giant. What *David* stood for Israel, *Okonkwo* stood for Umuofia, his native town. His people would not forget him for bringing honor and respect to their community. There was no surprise that in biblical history, great King David was bound for leadership in Israel, perhaps right from that encounter with Goliath. David was the second of the Israelite kings, after Saul. He established a United Kingdom over all Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital. In Jewish tradition he became the ideal king, the founder of an enduring dynasty around whose figure and reign clustered messianic expectations of the people of Israel. As he was a symbol of fulfillment in the future, the New Testament writers emphasized that Jesus was of the lineage of David.

A Wealthy Man or a wealthy farmer those days was naturally preferred to a pauper and lazy man. An indolent fellow, a debtor, or a loafer was personified in Unoka, the father of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Unoka could not have been a community leader in the ancient Umuofia Igbo community. In pre-colonial Africa wealth was also counted in the amount of land one had and cultivated or leased to sharecroppers. One's wealth, too, was measured by the size of the barns of yams one harvested each year. Naturally, wealth showed itself also in the size of one's household, hence the number of wives and children.

There was always need for large families to cultivate large farmlands. A wealthy farmer with many wives and children was without doubt a great man as he was always able to maintain and control a big household. An African saying points to the leadership quality inherent in such a figure - "You show your worth at home, before you are recognized in the community." This shows that one who aspires to community leadership position must begin from his household. A poor leader at home cannot make it at any higher level!

A **Titleholder** has reason to vie for leadership position in Igboland. This is an important institution in Igbo community as we have already pointed out. Title-holders are revered in their communities. Like the *Knighthood*, it can be conferred on individuals for various reasons. In Igboland four categories of titles are won or awarded. Titles have been awarded as a result of *heroic achievements*. They have been conferred on persons who have showed exceptional bravery in various difficult situations, for example, the title of *Ochiagha*, a General, a Great Warrior could be conferred on one who performed well in a battle. A great wrestler could receive the title of *Dimgba*. One who has killed a dangerous animal like the lion or leopard could receive the heroic title *Ogbu agu* (Lion killer). So it is possible to see these titles appended to people's names: Okechukwu Okonkwo (*Ochiagha of Obibi Ezena*), Omemgbeoji Chukwujekwu (*Dimgba of Orumba*), Chinyereugo Chiebuka (*Ogbuefi of Nnokwa*) and so on.

In the second category we find awards described as *Honorary*: A citizen who distinguishes himself in any human endeavor and who has used the achievement to help his community can be rewarded with an honorary title. The community leaders confer this title. *Nze Okaa Omee*, describes a philanthropist or generous donor as a *man of action*. "As he speaks (promises) so he puts words into action. He is a man of his words."

In the third category we find **titles of institutionalized social force**. These are usually the titles reserved for the *traditional rulers* of the autonomous communities. The traditional ruler may be elected. The office can equally be inherited. Both systems operate in Igboland. The title is *Eze*

(Chief). Eze, the traditional ruler in Igboland is distinguished from the modern chieftaincy title conferred by the Eze on some selected citizens. There is a proliferation of chieftaincy titles in Igboland today and there are a lot of controversies surrounding the conferment and the criteria for selecting the chiefs. However, some modern Igbo writers use small letter "c" to indicate this local honorary title, while *Eze*, the traditional ruler of an autonomous Igbo community is the *Chief* with a capital "C."

The last category includes titles emanating from **acquisition of wealth**, as partly discussed above. In Igbo traditional society the quality and quantity of accumulated agricultural products and domestic animals have been used to measure or assess a person's success. The number of wives and children a farmer has also shows his affluence. The number of titles taken distinguishes a man as great.

Most of the criteria which helped the Igbo of the pre-colonial era in assessing the qualities of leadership, do not apply generally in modern times. One may be correct in presuming that many other African nations and communities experience the same contradictions. The most suitable people are no longer elected into political offices. Wealth - usually accumulated through various fraudulent means - has come to replace the most important and honorable qualities for leadership positions. In the modern Igboland, people have come to interpret Ohanaeze (People and Traditional Rulers) as Ohanandijiego - namely "The Poor, The Downtrodden *and* the Wealthy Citizens."

No one should, therefore, be surprised that concerned Africans are calling for a return to the past. Africa's past is also full of good memories of responsible and accountable leadership. "Prosperity and extravagant lifestyle may not have been the lot of Africans," as an Igbo musician puts it, "yet people were satisfied and lived in peace with their neighbors." It may not be possible that each of the tens of hundreds of ethnic groups scattered all over Africa should seek autonomous political existence. **Unity** may be preferable to *balkanization* for the Igbo maintain that "**Igwe bu ike**" - "the larger the crowd, the greater the strength."

But to keep these "variegated" crowds of clans, ethnic groups, and communities together in a *united nation*, there is

need to adopt a system of government that must respect the diversity of cultures in the *unity of peoples*. This system has the most urgent and primary task of addressing the ethnic differences among the various groups and peoples who were brought together by an accident of history. A disinterested awareness of the monster referred to as *ethnicism* should bring home to the new leaders of Africa the immensity of the problems they must confront in the bid to reconstruct homogeneous African states that are free of "out-of-control ethnic upheavals."

Religious Fundamentalism

Having dealt a deathblow to ethnicism in the new political dispensation that would usher in the desired peace and development in Africa, the new leaders of African governments have yet another monster to deal with. This is usually referred to as *religious fundamentalism*. It is a well established fact that the waves of ethnic violence that erupt now and again in many parts of Africa and most often lead to genocidal wars and near extermination of a group have their roots in religious faith. Generally the Moslem-Christian relationship cannot be described as cordial in any African country or region. Christians and Moslems are not known to be good neighbors at least when it comes to politics.

There is always tension in most African countries where religious fundamentalism reigns supreme. Typical examples are Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, and Gambia. The religious leaders of these countries and their fundamentalist supporters try to establish Islamic governments akin to those found in some parts of the Middle East and Asia. Terrorist organizations in these states have naturally become a nightmare to their governments as non-believers become targets of terrorist attacks by the Muslim Holy War mongers or "jihadists." Politicians and other religious bodies opposed to them are assassinated regularly. Tourists, visitors, and the common people who visit these regions and states for whatever reasons are shot, killed, or maimed as Islamic terrorist groups instill fear in people all over the world. The vibrations of their murderous activities

are felt in all corners of the earth. Who says that religious fundamentalism can bring peace to Africa or any nation on earth?

If African leaders who seriously desire to restore tranquility to their nations battered by ethnicism and religious fundamentalism might still wish to shop around for a political system of government that would bring peace to Africa, they need to do a better shopping *jamboree* this time. First and foremost, they should shun any political system that has any religious roots – Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Hinduism, Jewish, or any other World Religion. Any political group or alliance that would direct the political affairs of New Africa should not be motivated by religious gains. Such political groups include those that are easily identified by their roots, creeds, and fruits – Christian Coalition, Christian Democratic Party, Christian Association, etc. Others include Islamic Revolutionary Council and Organization of Islamic Conference, to name but a few. These so-called "democratic parties" are divisive in their constitutions and alienate other citizens who do not share their views or tow their party lines.

Democracy in the strictly traditional African environment includes the freedom to practice one's religion without any molestation or interference from government or any other body. It has no place for the imposition of any political system of religious worship without the individual's or group's free choice. While the same principle of democracy should not forbid any groups forming religious organizations to deepen their adherents' faith, it should equally not admit the interference of such organizations in non-members' own affairs. Moslems all over the world may have their freedom in forming the *Organization of Islamic Conference*, for example, to promote the members' economic, social, cultural, and religious interests. The Christian Coalition or Christian Association of Churches should, in fact, benefit world peace if their members and ministers meet regularly to discuss how to put into practice the Gospel messages they preach.

But outside these domains, these religious-oriented organizations and associations should have no part in politics. As religious fundamentalism and bigotry has wreaked much havoc

on humankind in the past and has in present times remained a thorn in the flesh of many governments and all well-meaning peoples of the world, it is obvious that religiously based parties should have no business in modern governments and political systems. Some governments in the past and present have been wise in establishing political systems that remain neutral in religious matters. Shoppers of political systems of government may have to borrow or copy from such governments and admire their wisdom as well.

Religious bodies should restrict their religious practices to their churches and mosques and temples. The head of state can belong to any religious body, but he must not allow his religious faith and convictions to influence the running of government. Christians and Moslems may organize pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Mecca as many times a year but government should have no hand in the financing or organization of such religious trips to the places that religious bodies claim to be holy.

Christians should have no reason to impose their religious laws or Church precepts on the whole nation. Christian Churches and denominations are free to establish religious norms regulating the behavior of their members on moral and spiritual matters. Catholics have their Code of Canon Law, which should be restricted to their faithful. Likewise Moslems have no reason to impose *Shari'a* on the nation because the dominant religion happens to be Islam. There is no doubt that only chaos can reign in such a nation. If by force, intimidation, or coercion leaders of such governments succeed in imposing such religious laws on the masses, surely the bitter fruits of such a fatal error will continue to be reaped in many years to come. Some of the fruits planted or being planted by Islamic governments in Africa and elsewhere are no doubt yielding an abundant bitter harvest of woes, genocidal wars, devastation of farmlands, and millions of destitute refugees.

"Live And Let Live"- "Egbe Bere Ugo Bere"

"Live and Let Live" ("Let the kite perch - Let the eagle perch" "Egbe bere ugo bere") is an African philosophy of life

and is part of the cherished African traditional heritage that must be rediscovered by all well-meaning leaders of Africa who recognize peace and tolerance as important ingredients for any stable political arrangement. It is a clear manifestation of fair play in our dealings with other groups of people – be they religious, social, cultural, or political organizations. This African philosophy of tolerance and fair play epitomizes the Gospel injunction, "Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you." The Igbo of Nigeria state that same policy or philosophy of fair play succinctly in another aphorism: "Ori anu mmadu, ya tuo onwe ya mbo." "The person who likes human flesh should pinch himself and see how painful it is to kill or harm others." It constrains selfish and unsympathetic people to put themselves into other people's shoes, to consider how others feel about certain events and situations in life. It means we should tolerate one another, live together in peace and harmony. There is always accommodation for everyone.

When an aggressor closes his ears to reason, as many religious and political bigots, fanatics and fundamentalists often do, the Igbo have no alternative solution to the problem so created. They simply revert to the God of retribution, the ultimate Judge in human affairs. Let God decide who is oppressing the other. In other words, the aggressor who insists on his selfish actions and continues to wreak havoc on peoples and communities should not be allowed to have his own peace. Let an ignominious death be his lot! If the present political and religious leaders of modern Africa give the African philosophy of *Live and Let Live* a chance, there is no doubt that peace would reign in Africa.

African political and religious leaders should eschew religious and political intolerance and should borrow a page from the Igbo traditional government system. In most Igbo towns and communities the most effective leadership on the grassroots level is exercised through the *town unions*. Independent of government control, town unions like the ever-present Igbo Unions operate at home and in Diaspora. The leadership of such union puts it down in black and white in their constitutions that the town union is non-sectarian or denominational. Politically it is neutral. Political activities are not part of the union's business.

While members are free to play politics, politicians are not allowed the town union's platform to launch political campaigns.

In some Igbo town unions, presidents or important executives are renowned leaders of some Independent African Churches, commanding large memberships, but in the union they are not allowed to bring their religious faith into the affairs of the community and the union. It is a paradox that most African communities remain homogenous when they come together in the union to discuss their problems. But when religious sentiments are allowed to penetrate the union, the community is usually in disarray. Ndi Igbo come together in the unions to discuss and execute costly community projects – road constructions, rural electrification and water and educational projects - with little or no government support. As there are great numbers of religious bodies and affiliations, so too are many divisions among the people of even one small community.

In the hands of fanatics, fundamentalists, and bigots, religion becomes an institution of disunity and chaos. Religious fundamentalism, more than any inappropriate political system imported into Africa, has wreaked havoc on the African continent, and any attempts to establish **Government of God** in any African nation will always have grave consequences. It includes the contention that one religion is supreme over the others. Religious supremacy breeds the cult of religious intolerance, and consequently non-adherents are subjugated to terrible persecution.

And at long last we realize that in the past Africans, as religious as they were, never allowed religious differences (if ever there were any) to disrupt community life. Religion, when it has any role to play in people's life, basically gives directives, which the people must follow freely to form the correct moral conscience. If the philosophy of *live and let live* is firmly embedded in the New Constitutions to usher in an era of peace and prosperity in Africa in the third millenium, there is little doubt that the search for greener pastures overseas will be a thing of the past. The returning African exiles will be happy to join hands in helping build a new nation with new national anthems based on the perennial values of the traditional African heritage.

CHAPTER NINE

Slavery – Ancient and Modern

*We recall what is best in our national heritage: Human beings, simply because they are human, must be recognized as persons with fundamental human rights. Our nation fought a terrible civil war because the practice of slavery was **finally** recognized to be inconsistent with our national ethos enunciated in the Declaration of Independence: All are endowed by their Creator with the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Slavery is repugnant because it treats human beings as property to be disposed of at the will of another. (From "Light & Shadows, Our nation 25 years after Roe v. Wade." A Statement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America. Nov. 12, 1997)*

The Igbo and Slavery

It is important to consider the problem of slavery as far as this issue touches on the self-esteem of the Igbo and Diaspora blacks, particularly in the Americas. The topic has also far-reaching implications in the modern times for all Africans in **search of greener pastures**. What was the concept of slavery in Igboland and Africa in the ancient times? Should fellow Africans be held responsible for the tragedy of slavery and its aftermath in the form of contemporary racism in America and elsewhere in the modern world? These are sensitive issues we must never shy away from discussing and investigating as far as possible. While some authors maintain that there is no consensus on what a slave was or on how the institution of slavery should be defined, there is nevertheless general agreement among historians, anthropologists, economists, sociologists, and others who study slavery that slaves share some characteristics. The slave was a species of property and thus belonged to someone else. The slave was an object of law, not its subject, and the slave usually has no

rights. As an "outsider," "marginal individual" or "socially dead person" in the society where he was enslaved, his rights to participate in political decision making and other social activities were fewer than those enjoyed by his owner. The product of a slave's labor could be claimed by someone else, who also frequently had the right to control his physical reproduction.⁸⁵

As for attitudes toward slavery in the matters of race, the following clearly reveal the sociology of slavery. Slaves in most societies were despised. Throughout history slaves have often been considered to *be stupid, uneducable, childlike, lazy, untruthful, untrustworthy, prone to drunkenness, idle, boorish, lascivious, licentious, and cowardly*. In China slaves were considered to be "mean" and "base." In India they were fed table scraps. And various dictionary definitions of "slave" imply the concept of "property" of another person wholly subject to the owner, one who is entirely under the dominion of some influence or person. Slavery therefore, is a condition of a human being in bondage. This state of bondage implies that the labor or services are obtained through force. Slavery is a very abominable practice, a most vicious form of human servitude.

Some Biblical passages of the Old Testament carry several references to slaves and how slaves should be treated. The Bible approved the practice of slavery and the Messengers of Yahweh provided guidelines for the treatment of slaves: "Slaves, male and female, you may indeed possess, provided you buy them from among the neighboring nations. You may also buy them from among the aliens who reside with you and from their children who are born and reared in your land. Such slaves you may own as chattels, and leave to your sons as their hereditary property, making them perpetual slaves. But you shall not lord it harshly over any of the Israelites, your kinsmen." (Leviticus 25:44ff)

As in ancient Israel, most groups, whether national or religious forbade the enslavement of their own people; thus the Spanish could not enslave Spaniards, Arabs could not enslave Arabs, and Christians and Muslims could not enslave their co-religionists.⁸⁶ It follows therefore that legally the slave ordinarily had to be an *outsider* and in law was usually defined as property, movable (chattel) or real estate. There is no doubt

that the **Igbo** just as Spaniards, Arabs, Hebrews, and other Africans could not have indulged in the selling of their kinsmen and women into slavery as **chattels**. According to Moses I. Finley, a specialist in classical slavery: "The slave generally was an outsider. He ordinarily was of a different race, ethnically, nationally, and religiously from his owner. As a general rule no society could withstand the tension inherent in enslaving its own members. In most cases, the slave was an outsider because he was enslaved against his will on society and then taken by force to another."⁸⁷

In ancient Greece, later Greek philosophers did not consider the condition of slavery as morally objectionable, for more typically, slaves were employed in *domestic service*, in *trade*, as *laborers on county estates*, and as *seamen and oarsmen*. Where they were employed in private domestic service, it was not uncommon to find them on friendly terms with their masters. "Throughout most of Greek and Roman civilization, slavery was an accepted way of life, and slaves often assumed managerial and secretarial posts as well as their usual domestic and agricultural duties."⁸⁸ There is no doubt that at the peak of its power and the building of the great empire, *slaves* were really essential in the development of the economy and social system of Rome.

As a "legitimate" practice, therefore, right from the ancient times those who could afford such a luxury possessed slaves or "servants." Even in the Biblical period, a man could sell oneself or any of his sons or daughters to wealthy persons as a result of poverty. But the sold human being could be redeemed when a ransom was raised (Leviticus 25.44ff). Such a **slave** was to be treated by the master like a **hired servant**. It is clear that slavery featured in Chinese society down to the 20th century. Slaves were generated in the same way they were elsewhere, including capture during war, slave raiding, and the sale of insolvent debtors. Moreover, it is said that the Chinese practiced self-sale into slavery, the sale of women and children, and the sale of the relatives of executed criminals.

Slaves were "made" through war or conquest. Latin classics, in "Caesar's Gaelic Wars" provide vivid accounts of Julius Caesar's conquest of ancient Britain or Britannia and

ancient France, or Gallia. When Caesar invaded Britain in 55 BC and initiated the systematic conquest of the island there was no doubt that the Romans made slaves of the *Britons* and the *Gauls*, particularly as the tribes resisted conquest. In one of Caesar's *Commentaries*, he reported that the inhabitants resisted stubbornly for many years and, shortly, after AD 115, the natives rose in great revolt against their overlords and annihilated an entire Roman garrison.

Relationship between the Britons and their conquerors were never cordial and Caesar described the *Britons* in severe and humiliating language as *barbaric* and the most *uncivilized folks* on earth! British and Gaelic slaves surely served their masters both at home and in the other Roman colonies. Despite their humiliation, however, the conquered people benefited from the technology and culture of their conquerors, for it was clear that during the period of conquest and military campaigns, Britain was a military stronghold of the Roman army. The native tribes became familiar with many features of Roman civilization, including legal and political systems, architecture, and engineering. Numerous towns were established, and a vast network of military highways, many remnants of which survive, linked these strongholds. Archaeological evidence from the occupation period indicates that the Romans brought their entire culture to Britain.⁸⁹

A distinction has been made between two major types of slavery: **household** or **domestic slavery** and **productive slavery**. Slaves of the first type served their owners primarily as menials in the household, while productive slaves were mostly employed to produce marketable commodities in mines or on plantations. Historically, it is interesting to trace how "domestic service" turned into the evil that has had a devastating impact on the development and status of the black race. It is generally believed that slavery developed after civilization reached a pastoral, rather than hunting and gathering stage. The slave helped the master tend the flocks and was treated as a member of the household. In somewhat more advanced civilizations such as those of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, slaves in cities worked in large gangs in the fields and mines of the master. As society's economy changed from one of subsistence-level agricultural

production to that of a market type capable of producing surpluses, the status of slaves was lowered considerably. The slave was no longer a servant but rather became a commodity who was bought and sold for profit.

"Domestic Service" Turns "Evil"

With this introduction to the topic of this Chapter, we are in the position to investigate the situation of slavery in the New World, particularly its impact on the present situation of Africans in Diaspora. Through conquest, too, African slaves came to the Americas. But unlike the slaves of the ancient Britons and Gauls they received nothing from their conquerors but humiliation and subjugation. According to records between 1444 - when the Portuguese began the practice of slavery - until the abolition of slave trade in 1870, at least 10 million Africans were forcibly brought to the Americas - about 47% of them to the Caribbean Islands and the Guianas, 38% to Brazil, and 6% to mainland Spanish America. About 4.5% went to North America and roughly the same percentage went to Europe.⁹⁰ The first black slaves to arrive in the Virginia Colony came ashore in August 1619 from a Dutch privateer whose booty included Spanish plate and "twenty negars."⁹¹ In Britain, Parliament had opened the slave trade to British merchants, who in some cases carried on a *Triangular Trade* from New England to Africa to the Caribbean Islands to New England. The merchant vessels carried New England *rum* to African slavers; African *slaves* on *The Middle Passage* to the West Indies, and West Indian *sugar and molasses* to New England for the *rum* distilleries.

Undoubtedly slave trade had been an ancient practice in Africa but the purpose was quite different from what the Europeans made of it. As Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye, the principal curator of the *Slave House of Goree-Island*, Dakar, Senegal pointed out in his book "**The Slave House of Goree**,"⁹² Europeans exploited the African practice in slave trade by driving the Africans to seek in slavery the most substantive part of their resources. The main aim of slave trade in ancient Africa, according to Ndiaye was essentially to re-integrate within society individuals who had lost their families in the aftermath of wars

or other disasters. Naturally the structure of the African family excludes isolation and individualism and the community is based on powerful family relationships.

Foreign influence and material gains led fellow Africans to increase raids against their neighbors. The volume of the trade increased, too, with the appearance of the Arab slave traders. A relatively dense traffic took place in West Africa in the 15th century. A central net work started as well from Lake Chad region, in Hausaland and followed the Trans-Saharan caravans. The urgent need for labor in the New World marked a rapid increase in the demand for black slaves. As Joseph Ndiaye informs us, this need made the slave dealers adopt a better system that worked better than "abduction." African populations living near the coasts had learnt to beware of vessels. As soon as they saw their masts they fled. Therefore the Portuguese tried to establish normal trade relationships with Africans on the basis of trade by barter:

The slaves were bartered against the trading items brought by the slave traders. The items included iron, firearms, cooking utensils, textiles, and alcoholic beverages. But iron bar quickly became the measure. The quantity of iron bar proposed depended on the age and bodily condition of the slaves - whether the slaves were young or old, small or tall, healthy or sickly. Prices fluctuated according to the variable curves of the iron. The stud-slave who served as a criterion for the setting of prices was the "center-piece." It used to be a Negro of 15 to 20 years of age, strong, well built and without defect.⁹³

There were other ways to determine the "price" of a slave. The value of a child depended on his teeth and that of a woman on her bosom. A young girl would be considered a maiden only if her breasts held up firm. The price of a man was also commensurate with his weight and muscle strength. And once weighed, the men were sent to be auctioned to the prospective European buyers.

Each African ethnic group had their own quotation and specialization, just like cattle or horse. The highest bidden race was the Yoruba from Western Nigeria and Eastern Benin (former Dahomey). The Yoruba were considered good breeders for reproduction purposes and they were often called "stud slaves" or "stallions."⁹⁴

The "eye-witness" documentation by the curator of the *Slave House of Goree-Island* in Senegal confirms the role of the African middlemen in the slave trade as well as the ill treatment of the slaves. The slaves sat with their backs to the walls and with shackles around the neck and arms and were freed only once a day to enable them relieve themselves. Often in the same dungeon, one could find a whole family, the father, the mother and their children separated. Their departure to the Americas depended on the potential purchasers. The possibility that the members of the family would not see again was always there; the father could at last find himself in Louisiana, in the United States, the mother, in Brazil or Cuba and the children in Haiti or West Indies. They left the Island of Goree, not with their African names, but with registration numbers.

Why were Africans brought to the Americas? They were to work on the plantations, producing sugar, coffee, cotton, tobacco, rice, and other crops. They were also to serve as domestic servants. Africans were imported to counteract the precipitate decline in the native American populations in the Spanish colonies of South America - Mexico (New Spain), Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia etc; in British Jamaica, French colony of Saint-Dominique (Haiti), and Spanish Cuba. Records showed that Africans were strong and could survive the labor force better than the native Americans and most of the African slaves who came from Sub-Sahara states.

When slavery is discussed, Africa comes quickly to mind. Did Africans sell their kinsmen and women to foreigners as chattel slaves? The African concept of "slavery," as it is obvious from the Igbo concept has surely nothing in common with the European and American concept. Shall one categorize as "slaves" the millions of **guest workers** (*Gäste Arbeiter*) from every part of the globe - white, yellow, brown, and black people

- who leave their various countries for Europe and America in search of greener pastures? Millions of these foreign workers who flock from most underdeveloped and developing parts of the world live in the industrialized cities of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the United States of America. Without these guest workers the economy of these richer nations may not be waxing strong. Most of the foreigners are highly skilled workers, while a great number undertake more menial jobs which the citizens of the industrialized nations refuse to do. These menial jobs range from domestic and household affairs to street cleaning and security jobs. Indeed there is nothing dishonorable about such work as long as workers received just wage. Immigrant workers who supply some agricultural and industrial needs of host nations cannot be called "slaves". Nor should domestic servants, in whatever age, be referred to as "slaves."

It is obvious that the terms **servant**, **guest** or **foreign worker**, acquired their sinister meanings in the modern period when trafficking in human trade proved a lucrative business. Its sad history, which began in 1444 and continued to 1870 and beyond, has seen millions of Africans forcibly transported to the Americas to face the most brutal servitude ever suffered by any human race since creation of the world. There would have been no sad stories to tell about guest workers in foreign lands, earning their living by doing any work assigned to them by their hosts and managers, if brute force and inhuman treatment had not been applied. The beneficiaries of the employment opportunities would have remained grateful to their masters and their descendants forever. But such was not to be!

The scramble for Africa by European nations leading to the Berlin Conference (1884-85) did not end in the occupation and partitioning of African territories by the great powers. The conference legitimized the sovereignty these nations were already exercising over their African colonies. African populations were uprooted and transported to foreign lands to develop those territories. As Africans were made slaves their new masters defined their status and definitive characteristics: their labor services obtained through force; their physical being regarded as the property of another person, their owner and they are entirely subjected to their owner's will. Classified as *things*,

they can among other possibilities, be bought, sold, traded, given as a gift, or pledged for a debt by their owner, usually without any recourse to personal or legal objection or restraint.

Today no one would dare declare that there was nothing sinister about slavery or "service." But one does not need to scratch one's head to see how the concept of "foreign" or "locally" hired labor has changed dramatically. It is the type of treatment accorded human beings, particularly, Africans employed to help out in the plantations of North America and the West Indies, that has given "service" a sinister meaning. Abundant records exist, both in Africa and in overseas libraries and museums, showing that European and Arab slave dealers lured African chiefs and business opportunists into supplying them with **domestic servants** in exchange for rum, hot drinks, tobacco, and gun powder. There was strong evidence that the so-called slaver traders who indulged in this nefarious *trade by barter* - human beings in exchange for materials benefits - had no "sinister motives". The chiefs and the "slave suppliers" had often thought that once they had taken their gifts, it was the responsibility of the white man to guarantee that his "slaves" did not run away. But many did and the white man would not be deceived; hence the use of chains and excessive force to prevent any insubordination or treachery.

The white slave dealers confessed that the captured and bonded African slaves gave their masters tough times as the very strong ones among them always rebelled, and when possible, escaped from bondage. Many, already subdued, chained and bundled into slave ships still struggled for liberty even on the high seas. Instead of experiencing forced servitude, most of the slaves decided to jump into the sea and thereby some perished. Deaths during the Middle Passage were also caused by epidemics, fixed melancholy and mutiny. Many bodies of dead or dying Africans were often jettisoned into the ocean that sharks were often said to have followed the slave ships on their westward journey. Oppressive heat and noxious fumes in the unventilated and unsanitary conditions also caused fevers and dysentery, with high mortality rate. Such was the fate of most Igbo sons and daughters sold into slavery.

The British slave traders who operated from the Bonny River oil ports of Nigeria acknowledged the stubbornness, aggressiveness, and strength of *Heebo slaves* ("Heebo" mutilated spelling of *Igbo*). Even faced with white man's guns and possible beatings if they ventured toward insubordination, most Igbo slaves were known to have rebelled. The Igbo found it humiliating to be bundled into slavery to far distant lands. The Igbo slaves were among those insurgent groups in the United States who carried out various acts of insurrection in order to gain freedom. Some black nationalists in the United States, including **Gabriel Prosser**, **Jack Bowler**, **Nat Turner** and a host of others staged revolutionary slave uprisings. On August 21, 1833, for example, Turner and five other slaves were reported to have killed their master and his family and, joined by about 60 blacks from neighboring plantations, started a general revolt. By August 24 the rebellion was brought under control by white militia and volunteers. More than 50 whites were slain during the uprising and an unknown number of blacks lynched in reprisal by white mobs. After they were tried and convicted, Turner and 15 of his companions were hanged in Jerusalem, Virginia.

It was known too, that in 1839, Africans aboard Spanish slave ship - **La Amistad** escaped their chains and killed most of the crew. Two months later, the ship was found drifting off the shore of Long Island, New York, where the mutineers were taken into custody. As reports went, former president John Quincy Adams ended up arguing before the U.S. Supreme Court the case for giving the Africans their freedom. In the spring of 1800 **Jack Bowler** and as many as 1000 armed slaves gathered outside Richmond, Virginia to seize the arsenal there and in the process killed many whites. A torrential downpour and thunderstorm disrupted the insurrectionists' march and the rebels were captured and hanged.

Described by their slave masters as *sagacious*, *levelheaded*, and *daring*, Igbo slaves were said to have persistently resisted subjugation and sought freedom even before emancipation. Other writers describe the activities of some daring African slaves and among whom were the Igbo. Before the formation of the British Anti-Slavery Society in 1823, the thrust for full emancipation of the enslaved Africans had begun

with the successful revolt of the slaves in the French colony of Saint-Domingue in 1791, during the French Revolution. The radical French commissioner, Leger Felicite Sonthonax emancipated all slaves and admitted them to full citizenship in 1793. The move was ratified the following year by the revolutionary government in Paris, which extended emancipation to all French colonies. Napoleon Bonaparte revoked this measure in 1802. Nevertheless, emancipation remained permanent in **Haiti**, which won its independence under *black leadership* two years later. Elsewhere slaves worked for disintegration of the slave system, but the official acts of emancipation lay outside their hands. Only in Haiti did blacks seize political power.

There is strong evidence that the **Heebo slaves** were behind the Haitian struggle for independence from the white masters as early as 1800. When on May 30, 1967 the secessionist Igbo Leader in Nigeria, Odumegwu Emeka Ojukwu, declared the independence of Biafra, thus forming a separate Igbo nation, Haiti was the first foreign country outside the black continent to accord diplomatic recognition to the secessionist Biafra. Others were Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Zambia, and Gabon. It was not difficult for Biafran Propagandists to trace the roots of Haitians to Igboland. Perhaps not all Haitians can trace their roots to even the West African nations, but certainly the key political leaders of Haiti; past and present could trace their roots to the Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria. Although the Haitian political history today looks no different from that of some of the African states, that initial struggle for independence from white rule and domination nevertheless was an inspiration for other black territories under foreign hegemony.

In the first week of November 1996, there was an interesting exhibition at the Afro-American Cultural Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. The center hosted a show of drawings from Tom Feelings's book - **The Middle Passage: White Ships, Black Cargo**. The book comprises narrative drawings that transport the viewer to the holds of the slave ships that brought many Africans to the New World and slavery. The exhibit naturally recalled the sad history of African slavery. But as one of the observers at the exhibition noted, "All was not negative.

The book, and the exhibit, are also about the will to survive and the triumph of the human spirit."

The Igbo Concept of Slave

Omenuko, by Pita Nwana, is a high-school Igbo novel for the Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria. On account of its popularity, *Omenuko* has recently been "dramatized" and has become a home video. It is a simple story of African slave trade as it was practiced among the Igbo of Southern Nigeria before the colonial period. The prosperous businessman Omenuko was never a slave trader by profession. But he was forced into the business as a result of a flood disaster that ruined his business mission as he lost all his merchandise in the flood. Depressed and bankrupt, Omenuko and his attendants would not return home with only stories of woe. An idea came to him and he encouraged his attendants to continue the journey until they reached their destination. On reaching their destination, which coincidentally was a big market visited by foreign merchants, Omenuko struck a deal with an Igbo businessman who used to keep large number of servants. This wealthy husbandman offered Omenuko money in exchange for the seven young men who had served him for years as attendants during his business missions. Among the seven young men were two of Omenuko's nephews. The businessman kept these young men as his domestic servants. They were never sold to the Arab and European slave traders who paraded the coasts of West Africa in search of African slaves and indeed never left the borders of Igboland.

Omenuko had broken the laws of his native land. It was an abomination to "sell" or exchange human beings for money or any other commodity in Igboland. When the news of Omenuko's crime reached his countrymen he knew he was in trouble. As Omenuko fled the land and went into exile young men went on rampage, demolishing his home home. Not until Omenuko made reparations was he allowed back to his native land and only after many years in exile. He was required to rescue the young men he sold into slavery. It was only after he had reclaimed the people he had sold that the chains of ostracism were removed from this evil man and he was able once again to associate with his kin.

Sacrifices were performed by the traditional chief priests to cleanse the land Omenuko had desecrated by "selling his own kinsmen into slavery." Most Igbo children think that slave stories like *Omenuko* are fairy tales. They find it hard to believe that humans could be sold or bought like any other commodity. But when they hear modern true stories of trade in human heads or other parts of the body and the exportation of such commodities to other parts of the world, they are filled with fear. True stories of abduction of children and the disappearance of some parts of mutilated bodies confirm the realities of trade in human beings.

Many Black African authors (the writer inclusive) have maintained that with the exception of a few African chiefs and slave dealers who collaborated with professional European and Arab slave dealers, "professional slavery" was never in vogue in pre-colonial Africa. Where such was practiced during the inter-tribal wars, captives became **servants** of the conquerors and could be redeemed with ransom money or property. This position has been confirmed by Ndiaye's account of slavery at the Goree-Island, Dakar, Senegal. This resembled the ancient Hebrew concept of slavery. And where this was allowed, it was only **foreigners** who could be transformed into slaves in the modern European concept. Diaspora Igbo, who find themselves in the Americas or elsewhere in Europe, should be told that as a people the Igbo **never** sold their kith and kin into **chattel slavery**. The word for slavery in Igbo language is "**Ohu**" and *Ohu* is an entirely different phenomenon among the Igbo of Nigeria. It is necessary to explain the Igbo concept of slavery to white friends, Diaspora Africans, and the younger generation of black people. History has much to reveal.

What represented slavery in the pre-colonial Igbo community was a caste system into which certain persons were born. The "**Osu**" (victim of the caste system, a human being dedicated to the gods) is discriminated against and does not enjoy equal rights of citizenship as the "**Freeborn**." In the books, "**Facing the Osu issue in the African Synod**" and "**Search for Security**" this phenomenon, the Igbo type of slavery, has been discussed. There are many other books on "Osu caste system." The Osu bears a specific connotation and designates persons or a group of people who have been

stigmatized as social outcasts. The Osu was a person sacrificed to a deity by a community, a group of people, or a family.

The Osu system was rooted in the ancient practice of human sacrifice in Igboland. Like the "scapegoat" in the Judaic religion, the Osu was meant to bear the sins of other people who would have faced the wrath of the gods offended by the sins of a community. Often a whole community was involved, and individuals contributed to the common purse used to procure a "**slave**" (**Osu**), who was thus dedicated to a patron god. It was believed that the Osu or the Osu's ancestors and descendants were forever consecrated to the service of a particular god because the Osu and his descendants were the "special property" of that particular god. Other people (the freeborn) regard them as taboo for all purposes, especially marriage.⁹⁵ But this was, strictly speaking in pre-Christian Igboland. Although some concepts of Osu-slavery still linger in some parts of Igboland it is nothing to compare with slavery in the Euro-American situation. The *Osu* or *Ohu* does not directly translate into the English term *slave*. The Osu caste system is a decadent practice among the Igbo of Nigeria, and any Igbo who regards the system as having any value in modern times should be ashamed of himself.

Were African "Slaves" in Diaspora Worthless Folks?

This question is crucial in determining why blacks, particularly African-Americans, continue to be subjected to inhuman treatment. The bad treatment is not limited to the surviving ex-slaves (if there are still some around) but extended to their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and even the youngest folks of the present generation. What are the reasons for continued maltreatment of blacks, much of which is still evident in the public and private sectors of society? Is there any cause for the debate to continue - namely, whether the African slaves imported to the Americas and their descendants should be seen as worthless creatures who should not deserve any fair treatment in a multi-racial society such as the United States? Is there sufficient evidence to show that blacks everywhere perform

below standard and are unteachable? Or are we still faced with prejudices and assumptions, passed from one generation of the white race to another?

Surely not all African Americans came from slave ships. More than 90% of them were born in America and are primarily Americans, although they do not deny their roots as do many other United States immigrants. What were the primary motives of the importation of Africans to the New World? Were the slave owners attracted to Africa by the *worthlessness*, *imbecility*, or the *un-teachability* of those servants? Certainly not! If those slaves were *ignoramuses*, *imbeciles*, and *morons*, what could have been their usefulness in industrialized America? How could they have been entrusted with any tasks, domestic or otherwise? How could they have contributed meaningfully to the development of the New World? The truth is that in spite of obstacles to success and scholarship, many African slaves and descendants of ex-slaves were self-taught and excelled in great learning and scholarship.

Africans are industrious and intelligent people. It is only prejudice and racism that painted black people as worthless "niggers" inferior to the white race, thus deserving only a second-class citizenship. The low status allotted to slaves and ex-slaves was not on account of their poor performance as slaves, whether plantation or domestic workers. Historical records of slavery testify that most slaves who worked on American plantations and as domestic servants were intelligent and industrious human beings. Most of them performed so well that they had wonderful relationships with their masters. Their masters, on account of their slaves' decent behavior, the hard work and intelligence granted some of them freedom, even before the emancipation laws were enacted. Some of the slave masters were so impressed with the performance of their servants that after freeing them from institutionalized bondage, they helped them to establish their own business ventures.

African women have been known for their hard work, extraordinary strength, and ability to provide for their families when the men were unemployed. Even after up to 10 births, African women still remain young and strong tending for their large families. African women engage in various types of

farmwork and trade, walking long distances in order to sustain their families. Even at their mid-forties and fifties and with children, African women seize the least opportunity to better their education. Some nursing African mothers have enrolled in college and university studies and have passed their examinations with distinction. There should be little wonder that the foreign slave masters on account of the black women's strength of character and wisdom treated most of the female slaves better than their male slaves.

The African slaves - male and female - were hardly deadwood, ignoramuses, or simpletons imported to the Americas to act as jesters. They were needed for serious business and, like the British and French slaves under the Roman slave masters, were crucial to the development of America and Europe. A sizeable portion of the black population in Latin America and the Caribbean spent their lives in domestic service or as agricultural laborers. And many - both slave and free - were sailors, artisans, nursemaids, merchants, small shopkeepers, or itinerant street vendors. Most of them fought gallantly in war and competed favorably with their counterparts - black and white - in many fields of human endeavor.

Africans, mostly from the West Coast of Africa, were in high demand in Europe and America on account of their *strength* and *sagacity*. Africans were in high demand for the same reasons ancient Romans recruited foreign workers - to tame the wilderness, build cities, establish plantations, and exploit mineral wealth. The Europeans and Americans needed more laborers than they could recruit from among their own metropolitan masses. Because of their strength and ability to withstand adverse conditions, Africans were preferred to the native populations of the West Indies. African slaves constituted the highest proportion of laborers on the islands and circum-Caribbean lowlands where the native populations had died. If the descendants of ex-African slaves in any part of the world today are not doing well, something must account for their present dilemma.

Lingering Influence of Slavery in Africa and in the New World: Slavery in a New Garb

There are many political materials today on Neo-colonialism, Neo-nazism, Neo-communism, Neo-fascism, and Neo-Slavery. These monsters have continued to rear their ugly heads in the fields of politics and economic affairs in the modern times. Once again Africa is in the news. Politicians and businesspeople employ these terms when they wish to speak or write in *politically correct language*. Some Africans blame Neo-colonialists "in black or white skin" for the post-independence ills of most African governments. Although the old colonial masters have officially left the political scene in Africa, some still meddle in African affairs for various reasons. In order to maintain a firm grip on the economic resources of the African nations, the erstwhile colonial masters through foreign companies and businessmen still dictate the systems of government Africans should run and who should head those governments. A system of government that would jeopardize the economic or political interest of the former colonial masters may not be tried. An emerging African political leader who shows anti-Western sentiments may not be allowed to seek any political office. An unqualified person who by crooked means succeeds in grabbing the public office of the "First citizen of the state" may be preferred to a better-seasoned politician who has earned several degrees in political science. Is that Neo-colonialism at work?

The economic interests of the meddling foreign powers and neo-colonialists are usually their main reason for intervention in any African region where political problems erupt. If there are no economic gains, very likely little or no attention will be shown by the neo-colonialists to that particular region. Few Africans are fooled by the stand of some white news media and governments on some African problems. A typical example is that of Mobutu/Kabila in the Zaire (Congo) political crisis. Why did the West not persuade Mobutu to apply democratic principles in his many years of hegemony over that mineral-rich Central African Kingdom? Why did the Western banks and governments help Mobutu loot his country's treasures

and oppress the people for so many years? Why did the Western governments not press for Mobutu's trial for all the atrocities he committed against his people for more than 30 years?

Having helped bring the Bosnia war to an end, Western governments immediately began investigations into the atrocities that took place in that region during the 3 years of civil war. Those alleged to have committed war atrocities have been brought to justice. Why didn't the Western governments investigate the Biafran genocide? Why didn't they pay any heed to the more than one million people who died in those 3 years of civil war in Nigeria? The Biafran genocide was even greater in magnitude when compared with the Rwandan tragedy. Why did the Western governments not intervene in Rwanda to save the lives of millions of innocent men and women who died in the conflict? What have the Western powers done so far to bring to justice the perpetrators of such heinous atrocities in Africa? Such actions (or non-action) could surely serve as a warning to future murderers and criminals.

Having fought and deposed a vicious dictator who ruled Zaire for almost 40 years, the West wanted Kabila to organize democratic elections immediately after his victory. Human rights abuses should be investigated and Kabila and his men should be brought to justice for alleged atrocities they committed during the war to unseat Mobutu! President Mandela of South Africa expressed shock at Western hypocrisy in African political and economic tragedies. He has wondered aloud why Western governments that had been quiet about democracy in the former Zaire for the past 40 years, would want Kabila to accomplish the impossible task of restoring democracy in Zaire within two months of assuming power in that country. "What is most strange," Mandela said, "is that some Western countries that have supported the most vicious dictators for decades are now taking it upon themselves to lecture Congo leader Laurent Kabila on democracy."⁹⁶ Most worried Africans may be right when they talk of neo-colonialism also being responsible for the post-independence political, social and economic chaos in Africa. Nazism after all did not die with Hitler and the end of the Second World War. It did not end with the death of six million Jews in the Holocaust.

Neo-Slavery or slave trade in a new garb - like neo-colonialism and neo-nazism in the history of black people for survival and development today - cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. Neo-slavery is a by-product of the **search for greener pastures** and a very dangerous obstacle to black people's self-realization. There is no doubt that many people, white and black are tiring of constant recriminations over present-day racism, which in part is a product of the institution of slavery. One school of thought thinks that slavery should be forgotten or should be less frequently discussed. "You can't win by constantly thinking about your injuries." Another school of thought argues that the issue must be kept alive and should be taught in school. Many black writers and activists refer to slavery as "America's original sin" and "a hole in the American soul." To Dr. James Meredith, a black scholar and activist, "black Americans must not forget the past, but negative attitudes will only cloud our future."

As an integral part of African and American history there is no way the issue of slavery can be closed or ignored. If the problems slavery raised in the Old and New World had been taken care of, then there would be no need to re-open the wounds. But sadly enough, for both white and black people the old problems are getting more complicated. Slavery is assuming new postures and names. But this time it is not the whites who are importing slaves from Africa to work in their plantations and factories. Africans themselves - young and old, men and women, highly educated and abysmally illiterate - are offering themselves freely to anyone who cares in Europe, America, and Asia! Perhaps the only difference is that these "new African slaves" get a salary, however miniscule.

Slavery is the same irrespective of where the trade is carried out or who the middlemen, the buyers, and the sellers are. Only few differences exist between the modern slavery and the institutional slavery of the 1500s. Africans sold into slavery resented it because they were made "slaves" against their will. It was an involuntary servitude. The slaves demonstrated their resentment in many violent ways. Many refused food and preferred to starve themselves to death. Some committed suicide by jumping into the sea and drowning. The story of those who

were strong fought to free themselves from involuntary servitude, was the central point of Steven Spielberg's film *La Amistad*, about a slave's mutiny. Having overpowered the captain and his crew, the victorious African slaves demanded that the slave ship should return them to Africa. Whatever was the outcome of that mutiny, one thing remained clear: it was not the will of Africans to become slaves of others or to submit to rude force and to servitude.

Using the Igbo example, before things started falling apart and search for greener pastures intensified, the Igbo resented any attempt by anyone to enslave him. The Igbo is an obedient "servant," but *never* a "slave." He is ready to serve his brother, uncle, and master for many years until he feels he can fend for himself. An Igbo girl can baby-sit more than 4 babies for her mistress and do all the domestic work assigned to her. She will not be worried if her education is delayed. But trouble will erupt any day the obedient Igbo servant feels that he is being treated as a "slave." He rebels to free himself from enslavement. The following expression leaves a clear message for the master: "Abughi m ohu gi! Abughi m odibo gi." (I am not your "slave." "I am not a chattel.") Another expression is: "Ina enye m nri?" "Ina azu m nri?" (Are you feeding me?). The Igbo generally does not like to be a burden to anyone. He does not like to beg. He believes in self-determination and self-reliance. Here, once again, the distinction between **slave** and **servant** is clear in Igbo language and setting.

The Igbo is ready to forfeit a big fortune, a rare gift, a high position in the public or private sector if he senses that the acceptance of such gift or honor would bring degradation or reduce his honor and integrity. Once again, the message to the benefactor is unmistakable: "If your gift would make me your slave, you better hold it. I will not be your slave." In other words, he would prefer to remain poor rather than accommodate a situation that might impinge on his freedom. Here the Igbo is judged as an arrogant and disrespectful person. But whether one is ready to accept it or not, the Igbo does not compromise his freedom. An Igbo scholar in one of the American universities had no doubt that *Joseph Cinqué*, the leader and hero of the African slave mutiny in the *Amistad*, was an Igbo. "La Amistad"

adventure began with Cinqué breaking his shackle, and leading the 53 Africans in mutiny, slaughtering all but two of their captors. What Cinqué achieved through that brave encounter with slave dealers, Olaudah Equiano also achieved with his pen.

The Igbo will not be a slave of anybody! But can any Igbo writer defend this position today? Regrettably, things have rapidly changed and there is cause for alarm. Now comes the controversial question: Is it possible that the Igbo who by nature resents *involuntary* servitude, today readily offers himself or herself *voluntarily* as a "slave" to new and modern "slave dealers?" The answer is that the *search for greener pastures* has pushed him or her into accepting the status of slavery in modern times. John Hope Franklin, the African American author of *From Slavery to Freedom* minced no words when he expressed the impact of slavery on Black Americans today. For him the vestiges of slavery are yet alive.

It's both a historical fact and a very powerful force that casts a shadow over the present. When you talk about the role of slavery, ask why do people look at me and think that I'm their servant if they haven't somehow come to the conclusion that I'm here to serve them the way my ancestors 150 years ago were there to serve theirs. Imagine asking an 82-year-old man to fetch anything? Or to serve them, to get their coat or their car or to call me "boy."⁹⁷

It is not just the remnants, ruins, or ashes of slavery that remain today. Slavery is here with us in new garb. Africans themselves are voluntarily selling themselves into slavery. Often from the ruins of forgotten monuments something new and significant emerges. We shall examine some of what John Hope Franklin refers to as "vestiges of slavery" and see how they apply perfectly into the picture of the modern slavery. Such a detailed examination will reveal who the modern "slaves" and "slave traders" are.

The Modern Slave: a "Servant"

Irrespective of his age, the "slave" is "servant" in the Igbo concept of "Ohu." His owner orders him around and the "servant" has no choice in the type of job assigned to him. Many Africans who come to America and Europe in search of greener pastures are always ready to undertake any type of job, no matter how filthy and humiliating. Opportunities exist everywhere in the industrialized world for domestic servants, day and night guards, dishwashers, office cleaners, garbage removers, street-sweepers, office messengers, and cab drivers. In their bid to escape the harsh economic and political conditions prevailing in most African nations, many Africans, young and old, who find themselves in the industrialized world, have taken to jobs not befitting their status and talents.

Imagine the reactions of Igbo parents who visit their sons, daughters, and in-laws overseas who work as "servants," and like John Hope Franklin, an 82-year old man, are ordered around like "boys." When an Igbo professor accepts a car-washing or dishwashing job, would he not be under the command of a fellow who would treat him like a "servant" and hence "slave?" There are thousands of Igbo and Africans who are "servants" in the white man's world. A slave does not know what the master does. He is not consulted in decision making. He is there to obey orders. So Jesus would clarify the new status of his followers: "I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing" (John: 15.15).

The Slave is a "Boy"

A "boy" is a young fellow, a little guy, a junior, a lad. He is immature and needs guidance from the adult. He is still under the control of parents and adults. He is under constant supervision by an adult. We can understand why an adult African-American is upset when addressed as a "boy." Such an appellation reminds the black man about the tragedy of his race. Martin Luther King Jr. pointed this out in one of his speeches. The brutality and pain caused by deprivation or exclusion from a particular place or sector of the economy, on account of skin color can hurt. But

more devastating is the use of such *diminutive terms* while referring to black people. That also made Dr. King nervous and he did not fail to point this out in the "**Letter from a Birmingham jail.**"

When you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored," when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John" and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degeneration sense of "nobodyness" - then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.⁹⁸

The controversy over "**Tiger Wood - the boy**" continued for a good length of time and the smoke from the fire set by that racist slur smothered for long. In the eyes and minds of whites, blacks irrespective of their age are immature. Therefore such references as "African school children," or "black kids," when actually one is referring to Africans in their 20's and 30's is not rare in white man's special English vocabulary selected to insult, humiliate, cajole, and ridicule Africans and blacks. While the expression "high school and university kids" is appropriate for blacks and Africans, it may not be applied to the whites. During the college and university riots by black South African students who were protesting the apartheid regime's imposition of the Afrikaner language in black educational institutions, the Western press was telling the world that **black schoolchildren** were boycotting classes in Soweto.

Apologies for past sins of racism will continue to be made, and surely such sins will be forgiven. In the case of Tiger Woods, a fellow golfer, Fuzzy Zoeller, who found the young nonwhite's achievements perplexing, had to apologize to the African-American golf champion for the racist remarks he made. Fighting back tears before reporters, Zoeller read a brief

statement in which he apologized for calling Woods "**that little boy.**" CNN interview reads as follows: "That little boy is driving well, and he is putting well. He's doing everything it takes to win. So, you know what you guys do when he gets in here. You pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it and tell him not to serve fried chickens or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve next year." Zoeller apologized to Skip Alston the acting president of the North Carolina chapter of NAACP and to Woods himself. Both Alston and Woods accepted the apologies, but Alston was quick to add that the incident was not an isolated one. It was equally serious. "He didn't insult only Tiger Woods, but the entire African-American community."

Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water

We have, at the national level become nothing but a hodgepodge of glorified ethnic nations - forever searching for identity within our own country, and every able-bodied citizen escaping our shores to become janitors and security guards in Europe and America. (Nigeria: A New Paradigm: KWENU, Spring 1998)

Among the most serious accusations leveled against colonialist governments in Africa by African nationalists was that the colonialists operated a system of government that kept the conquered Africans under the perpetual status of enslavement. While the colonialists occupied top positions in both private and public sectors of the economy, they were accused of making Africans *hewers of wood and drawers of water*, irrespective of the Africans' educational qualifications. Africans were assigned the most menial jobs as servants of the whites. In other words, the colonialists were in Africa to subjugate Africans and were perpetuating slavery on the black continent.

Not long ago the Igbo of Nigeria have boasted that they were the most educated people in the black world and no one really doubted them. Because they knew the value of education, Igbo families and communities were ready to spend their lives fortune in order to send their sons and daughters to school. Those

were the days when things had not fallen apart and most Igbo had not taken to the greener pastures. The educational gap between the Nigerian North and South has been wide. This factor has pressured the government to undertake various remedial measures to see that the North catches up with the South particularly the Igbo. Measures that have been adopted by the government to help the North catch up with the South include the "**Quota System**," which in the United States is referred to as "**Affirmative Action**." Recently the Nigerian "Quota system" has added the so-called "**Nomadic education**."

The government program has not stopped at "equalizing" or "leveling up" standards. "Education for all Moslems" has become the slogan. By all means, education must be extended to all Moslems wherever they live or work, whether they want it or not. In the nomadic education program, wherever the "nomads" are, teachers must teach them. If the nomads are fishing in the deep waters of Sokoto, Katsina, or Kaduna rivers or if they are wandering about the desert or the green pastures with their cattle - they must be pursued with blackboards, slates, books, pencils, chalk, and other teaching aids. They must learn reading, writing, and the Koran. Millions of naira have been poured into this project since its inception in the early 1980s.

Recent newspaper reports from Nigeria have confirmed that in most northern states of Nigeria, nomadic education has gathered momentum. Some state governments have established nomadic schools, including mobile classrooms. The schools are scattered around the states, wherever there were large concentrations of nomads. Moslem leaders in Nigeria find reasons to justify some of their attitudes about the nomadic education. The most important reason is to "equalize" educational standards between the North and the South. Christian missionaries are blamed for Moslem backwardness in education, especially during the pre-independence period. Babs Fafunwa, a Moslem scholar and one-time federal minister of education in the Babangida administration, heaped the blame on the early Christian missionary education policies in his book *History of Education in Nigeria*.

Moslem education in Nigeria was retarded... because "education" in those days tended to mean Bible Knowledge, Christian Ethics, Christian moral instruction, Christian literature, some Arithmetic, Language, and Crafts – all geared to produce Christians who could read the Bible. When the Christian Missions started converting animists and a few Moslems, the majority of Moslem parents barred their children attending the "free Christian schools" for fear of conversion.⁹⁹

Several efforts have been made to build Moslem schools to compete with Christian mission schools in number and quality. But this measure does not seem to solve the problems of the worried Moslem educationists. Many strategies have been devised to achieve the desired objectives. One of these was instrumental to the government's takeover of mission and voluntary agency schools in 1970, at the end of the Nigerian civil war. Long before that action was taken, Moslem educationists had suggested a long-term measure for equalizing or leveling the educational imbalance between Christian and Moslem schools as Babs Fafunwa suggested in his book:

Without laboring the point, the most effective solution would be for all Nigerian schools to become secular and citizen oriented for they (the Christian missionaries) have failed in the last one hundred years to produce Nigerians and the sooner all these schools direct their attention to this issue the better. But they cannot successfully do so until all the children are completely free from religious bias.¹⁰⁰

Another strategy being employed by the Moslem educationists to "equalize" educational standards between the North and the South is by suppressing Christian education or closing down Christian schools. Newspaper reports have confirmed some of the Moslem measures. It was reported that on the 4th of March 1996, in the Kwara State, the government of Nigeria formally closed three private Christian schools on the pretext that the

Christian schools were not teaching Islamic Religious Knowledge. Armed policemen were sent in to remove the students and teachers from the premises. The state ministry of education alleged that the closed schools violated the statute that allocated 80 percent of student population to Ilorin, capital of the state. Ilorin is mostly Moslem. Newspaper reports added that the proprietors, parents and students of the affected schools were angry at the treatment and harsh conditions laid down by the state ministry of education under which Christian schools were to operate. These conditions included the following: "They must admit more Muslim students, recruit Muslim teachers, and teach Islam." But other Muslim schools and colleges were not made to accommodate Christian students in this matter.

Whatever good policies the government in Nigeria adopts to help all Nigerians obtain basic education should be supported by all well-meaning Nigerians. Such measures should however not leave the rest of the citizens in a disadvantaged situation. Most Igbo are not in any way worried about the "equalization of educational opportunities" policies in Nigeria. Igbo people are, rather, facing other major educational problems. While the opportunities for qualitative education may not be the best in Nigeria, no government or private person is placing any obstacles in the way of the Igbo people's once-cherished love for education. This period the younger Igbo men and women are refusing education. They prefer **greener pastures overseas**, where they can earn a living as **hewers of wood and drawers of water**. The incentives to be like the white man in educational achievements are no more there. This is a tragedy for the Igbo people.

In the early 1940s and 1950s "travelling to America or Europe" simply meant, "to study, and obtain university and college degrees from the most prestigious higher institutions of learning overseas." That was because without education one would not obtain a good job. **Gutter-cleaner, prison warden, day or night guard, baby-sitter, car washer, dish-washer, taxi-cab driver** – all were jobs for the "uneducated" or for those who as a result of the government law on compulsory education had been "forced" to attain that minimum "Junior High School or Elementary Six" standard. Ambitious Igbo students were always

eager to travel overseas to obtain the maximum standard of education. They never wished to travel to overseas "to work." Some work could be undertaken, if need be, but such was not the primary motive of travelling outside the fatherland.

Today, the colonialists are no longer blocking the way for Africans to attain the highest academic qualifications in order to compete with their white counterparts in any field of endeavor. These same Africans, irrespective of their high academic qualifications, have voluntarily descended to accept jobs that are worse than drawing water and cutting wood. Worse still, they have made very long and costly journeys to foreign countries to look for and accept "joyfully" such humiliating jobs. Who is enslaving Africans this time?

The Igbo of Nigeria are fast losing their once cherished initiative in academic excellence. Losing their advantage in education amounts to their losing their most valuable property and position in life. Who is to blame for the tragedy? The Igbo academic, scholar, writer, or professor who has abandoned his or her teaching position in a Nigerian university, college, or high school for greener pastures should be held responsible for the falling standard of education in Nigeria. He is also responsible for the lack of motivation of the younger Nigerians in the pursuit of qualitative education. The argument is that government must be held responsible for the crash of education in Nigeria. As sound as the argument may be, it must equally be realized that politicians (in civil or military uniforms) are not educationists. They are not classroom teachers.

It is a tragedy when young Africans who could become scientists and engineers competing with their counterparts in the developed world feel satisfied with a college degree in business administration, home management, college football, or music. Once again the inevitable question: "Who will develop Africa?" The same question is addressed to the Igbo, Nigerians, and African professors who teach in the American and European universities and colleges while ignoring the cries for help from the suffering students in Mother Africa. The students want to learn and compete favorably with their counterparts overseas. Who will help Africa from falling back into the Dark Ages as we approach a new millenium? This is a disturbing question.

From Triangular to Rectangular Slave Trade

However authors describe the modern slave trade - "Triangular" or "Rectangular" - the truth is that new forms of slavery exist today. Africans are once again at the center of the debate. Roughly 11 million black slaves survived the excruciating journey to the New World between the mid-1500s and the mid-1800s. It is estimated that about a million died along the route to the New World through exhaustion and torture by the murderous slave dealers. Many also died as a result of suffocation under filthy and congested conditions in a journey, which often took three months from Africa to the Americas. About half a million died on the long trek under chains from the villages to the harbors, and these included pregnant mothers and young children. About 39,000 voyages were made from Africa in the transportation of slaves to the New World. These are very nauseating stories. But one may ask whether such ugly situations exist today? They do indeed.

Stories of the African young men and women who risk their lives hiding away in foreign ships from the West African coasts, heading to Europe and the Americas, are confirmed by regular media reports. Some of these Africans have actually been shot or thrown into the sea by wicked European sailors when the sailors discovered them during sea voyages. Many have been marooned on strange islands where some of the ships they boarded anchored. Africans today experience the same agonizing situations that the African slaves of the earlier days encountered on their way to the New World. These young Africans who are fleeing their fatherland for the greener pastures board cargo ships for their hazardous journey to an unknown world and future. Little has changed in the nature of slave trade. Perhaps the significant difference is that slavery is now voluntary!

From Slave Trade to Toxic Waste Trade

Today it is no longer the Spanish slave ships that are carrying Africans away as "slaves" to the Americas to work in the plantations. Geographically, another region of the world, Asia, is

taking part in the business. So a type of *rectangular trade* can be seen. It is a crude type of trade. Once again Africa is at the center of the trade. Crude oil and mineral products usually mined by foreign companies are transported to the United States and European countries where these products are processed for the manufacturing industries in Asia. Labor is cheap in Asia. From Asia the finished products, which are usually of inferior quality are transported to Africa, while the *waste products* from the major industries in Europe, Asia, and the United States are sent back to Africa as toxic wastes.

There has been heated argument about the peoples or nations that should be held responsible for the modern slave trade. According to an article - "**The Long Shadow of Slavery**,"¹⁰¹ Hugh Thomas, an eminent British historian, noted in his comprehensive new book, "**The Slave Trade**" that responsibility for slavery extended more widely through the British and American Northern establishment than was generally known. "Every one from the founder of Brown University, to John Locke, philosopher of liberty, were at least in slave-trading companies if not traders themselves."¹⁰² But the list of perpetrators of slavery, according to Thomas, is longer than this. He argues that the worst blame should be assigned to royal families, among them Louis XIV of France and Ferdinand of Spain, as well as the African rulers of Benin, Ashanti, Congo, and other Kingdoms who for generations sold Africans from other tribes to European traders, often in exchange for cloth. "Even today," Thomas insists, "pockets of slavery remain in Mauritania. Slavery is also present in the Islamic world." He may not be far from the truth. African chiefs and the black middlemen may not be exonerated from the evils of slavery. If the African elite - kings and chiefs - and various leaders of African communities had not collaborated with the Europeans in the nefarious trade, it would have been impossible for slavery to take root in the African heartland.

Our agonizing concern today, however, is with the "neo-slave trade" and the role of the "African elite" and European and American middlemen in the business. Is history not repeating itself when Africans collaborate with these foreign neo-slave dealers in reviving the trade? African elites are helping European

and American companies to export **toxic wastes** to Africa to make money. It is assumed that it is poverty that lures people and nations into accepting substances that otherwise they would refuse. Poverty continues to encourage the importation of waste products into Africa. The well-publicized toxic-Koko-waste case that took place in Nigeria in 1987 between Italian and Nigerian businessmen is still fresh in the minds of many Nigerians. Italy alone produces 40 to 50 million tons of industrial wastes and 16 million tons of household wastes each year, and most of these are exported to the developing countries for disposal.

According to reports on the Italian-Nigeria toxic-trade, more than 100 workers from the Nigerian Ports Authority were employed to remove the wastes. The Nigerian government supplied the workers with equipment, protective clothing, and gas masks, but the protective clothing was insufficient and many did not even have gloves to protect their hands. The wastes were more toxic than many had realized and many of the workers suffered from various ailments, ranging from chemical burns, nausea, to paralysis. Although the Italian toxic waste products were later carried back to their port of origin, severe damage had been inflicted on the Nigerian psyche. Many deaths resulted from exposure to the toxic waste materials. Premature births that occurred within a few weeks period in July of 1987 were no doubt due to the high toxicity of the dumpsite.

In spite of the hazardous effects of toxic wastes, many African states and businessmen still engage in toxic waste business. African chiefs and businessmen are not attracted this time by cloths, gunpowder, tobacco, and intoxicating wines. Raw cash for private or state purse is the attraction, and for these people, money seems to be more valuable than millions of Africans who are exposed to danger, disease, and death. Dumping of toxic wastes in Africa began in the mid-1970s and despite protests from students and various groups in Africa, the trade continues to flourish. In 1979 it was known that the American company, **Nedlog Technology Group, Inc.** offered Sierra Leone \$25 million to use the West African territory for waste disposal.¹⁰³ The president of Sierra Leone eventually had to back out of the deal as a result of pressures mounted from student organizations and concerned individuals.

Despite crackdowns by both the industrialized and the less-industrialized countries, the business in hazardous waste products continues. As reports confirm, in recent years several contracts have been signed with some African states. One of the largest waste disposal networks is the **Italo-Swiss Intercontract-Jelly Wax group**, which has tried to negotiate contracts with Guinea-Bissau, Djibouti, and Senegal. European industries have discovered that black African soil serves as the best dumping ground for toxic industrial wastes. Having exploited Africans for years, having looted and carried away raw materials from the black continent, Europe developed its land and its peoples, thus constituting itself the First World. Now the waste materials have to be disposed of.

The extent of this tragedy is well illustrated by Enrico Falgui, a member of the Italian Green Peace Movement and a professor of human ecology at the University of Florence. He writes: "We Europeans started stealing materials and natural resources from African countries for our benefit. Now we are sending the wastes from our benefits to Africa. This, indeed, is most abominable."¹⁰⁴ History thus continues to repeat itself. From the 1500s to 1800s it was clearly trade in African "slaves." Today the "commodity" is **toxic waste**. Such a trade will continue to have disastrous effect on African development and self-esteem.

Prostitution Trade: The African Connection

The promotion of sex, in thought, word, and deed by European and American news media is disturbing. Pornographic materials are available in enormous quantity on the television, in magazines and on the Internet. They are within the reach of everybody who cares, including children. Pornography is in fact a commodity that is sold openly to customers and the rate by which the general public patronizes sex-shops and pornographic web sites on the Internet shows that modern society accepts the sex-culture. In the large German cities of Frankfurt and Munich, and in most American cities and state capitals, sex shops are open for business twenty-four hours a day.

The Igbo, as well as peoples living in these cities, are exposed to the evils of modern excesses in the sex industry. *Investigative Reports: Sex Business in Modern Society*, a popular television documentary in the United States, exposes the evils of the sex industry today. No one will be left in doubt from where African women who take to prostitution overseas learn the nefarious trade. This documentary, featuring prostitution in selected European, American, and Latin American cities, reveals that prostitution is a flourishing business in modern times and many women take to the business as a result of the attractive sums of money they make daily from it. According to reports some women make as much as one to two thousand dollars a day as prostitutes. Some of these women - black and white - who were interviewed on camera confessed that they had no intention of abandoning the sex business on account of the fat revenue it fetches them. They do not lack clients either, as most of the men who patronize them are among the richest in society. Most of these people, too, are married men with wives and families. Most of the women revealed that in most cases, their families or relations have no idea of how they make their living.

Surely the traditional Igbo as well as any other African society has its taboos on sexuality. But with such massive exposure of the younger generation of Igbo to dark sides of sexual morality, there is bound to be a great loss in the traditional moral values. The Igbo as a people are not known for sexual excesses and aberrations. While not claiming to be the best of all peoples in sexual morality, the Igbo are known to be decent people and are usually moderate in matters of sex. Parents, adults, and the Igbo traditional community take it as their primary duty to raise their children in a friendly, sex-scandal-free environment. Sex is usually not discussed in public, and when necessary, it is discussed or talked *sottovoce*.

Prostitution is not a rampant practice in Igboland, and prostitutes, if they show up publicly, are treated as *outcasts*. Men who patronize prostitutes are equally treated with spite. A responsible Igbo who deserves public respect must be in full control of his or her sexual passions. Some of the modern sexual aberrations predominantly revolutionizing the sex world today have no expressions in Igbo language. These include *rape*,

sexual harassment, and *child-abuse*. This may point to two facts, namely that such sexual excesses are not practiced or they are not of frequent occurrence.

If the Igbo are such decent people in matters of sexual morality, how is it that some Igbo women living in Europe and America practice prostitution? There are many of them in Italy, Austria, Brussels, Amsterdam, Germany, London, and in the United States. Newspaper reports confirm that in most European cities young female Igbo and Nigerians throw morality aside and profit from the ever-growing prostitution racket. Who are these Igbo women who bring shame to their communities at home? Who taught them the trade? And where did they learn it? These are some of the questions that worry concerned Igbo people when they hear media reports that their kinswomen are among the international prostitutes.

We do not need to surf the Internet or consult encyclopaedias to discover the sources of this tragedy. There is no doubt that unmarried and divorced Igbo women look for some easy ways of making a living overseas. In these places they have no more family and community support or shield. They, like peoples of other cultures, easily succumb to the irresistible pressures of the free and open sex-intoxicated society of the western civilization. Most Igbo single mothers, like their counterparts everywhere, find themselves in worse situations. With little or no family support to raise their offspring, there is no doubt that their children grow up worse citizens of the Igbo people. Exposed to many abuses and reckless lifestyles, the activities of such young people are usually loathsome to society. What a great loss in human resources, when the *fruits* of single parenthood and prostitution become drug addicts and criminals!

Igbo and Nigerian women are among the notorious international prostitutes found all over Europe and America today. Prostitution is an ancient institution. But what worries us here is the new face this institution has assumed with relation to Africans. Like the slave trade of the 1500s, Africans are once again at the center of this institution. In a well-organized fashion, Nigerian middlemen and women in collaboration with their foreign counterparts "sell" African women into prostitution in Europe and America. It is not difficult to find "recruits" for

many African women are ready to cross over to the "greener pastures of Europe and America." Some who have practiced prostitution for years overseas and have become "mistresses" in Italy, Germany, Austria, France, Britain, and America fly in and out of African airports regularly and return with their human commodities. They have no doubts about the success of their mission overseas. While most Africans wishing to travel overseas, generally find it difficult to obtain visas for their trips, African prostitutes imported into the New World have no problems obtaining their visas from the overseas embassies. As in the "Middle Passage," the journey of the Africans to the New World has become a well-organized international business. The "slaves" this time do not make their journey by ship and are not expected to work in the plantations. Their journey is by the fastest means of transportation by air and the "slaves" are found in big hotels and on the highways!

Not all African women involved in this trade understand the type of "job" their visit to the Promised Land offers. Some have attempted suicide when they learned about the type of "job" they have come to the white man's land to do. Nigerian women, who honestly believed that the "middle men and mistresses" were helping them to further their education or to get better jobs overseas, are usually shocked when they are told about their new "job. Some have "mutinied" like Joseph Cinqué of the Amistad and refused to embrace such a shameful lifestyle. One Nigerian medical student, among a group of the recruited would-be prostitutes, according to one report reacted violently, pleading with the police and Italian immigration officials in Rome to send her back to Nigeria. With the help from the Nigerian embassy in Rome, the student and a couple of other decent women in the group were flown back to their fatherland. They were not ready to become slaves of white playboys and philanderers.

It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of African women who roam the streets of Rome, Austria and other European capitals are imported **slave-prostitutes**. While in some of these cities public prostitution is banned and those caught are sent to jail, many of the prostitutes enjoy maximum protection from security officials, most of whom patronize the women. Some of these women are Igbo and Nigerians. It is common

knowledge, however, that some other African prostitutes who get into trouble claim to be Nigerians, thus helping to smear the already poor image of the once-giant of Africa. Once again the bid to abandon their fatherland - believed to be sinking deeper into an ocean of economic and political chaos - and join their fellow countrymen and women - believed to be enjoying better life in the greener pastures of Europe and America - has pushed many Igbo, Nigerian and other African women into prostitution. It is a disgraceful spectacle of modern sexual aberrations to behold these African women line some notorious streets of Rome, almost stark naked in stiff competition with one another to attract "customers!" Search for greener pastures overseas has continued to push most African men and women into various shameful and humiliating occupations. The condition of most African job seekers overseas is no doubt worse than that of slavery.

CHAPTER TEN

Back to the Roots

Mother Africa as a whole is reeling in pain and there is a feeling of loss and abandonment. Sons and daughters of Africa abandon Africa for greener pastures in times of peace and trouble. Some decide to uproot and destroy any existing structures in their flight to Europe and America, while others loot any remaining treasures and settle somewhere outside the borders of their nations or the black continent. Often only ruins, old people, and orphans remain. Some who provoke genocidal wars in their fatherland settle comfortably well in foreign countries as political refugees, while vultures continue to hover over the mess of destruction in human and material resources in Africa. If the sons and daughters of the land flee their motherland who should remain?

Africa is still a forgotten continent. Outside of a few religious and charitable organizations very few western governments or world bodies rush to Africa's needs. Consider the civil wars in Sudan and Liberia, or the scandalous massacres in Burundi and Rwanda. And then take a look at Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia, the Iraq/Kuwait conflict, the Kurdish Rebels in Iraq, the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. When violence erupts in any of these non - African regions, the western powers rush to defuse tension and make peace. Their diplomats are ready to make countless numbers of trips to the capital cities of the disturbed regions and hold political talks to achieve peace. Incredible amounts of resources in manpower and money are committed to safeguard peace in these regions.

But Africa! When Africa bleeds, only pressmen cluster around for a moment to collect bad news. No diplomatic missions are undertaken to stop and settle conflicts until millions have been displaced or killed. Humanitarian aid is usually sent after the worst has happened. As the western powers are able to restore peace in Bosnia, protect Kuwait and Kurdish rebels inside these areas, is it not possible to find a lasting peace to the

conflicts and bloodshed in Burundi/Rwanda, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and host of other troubled African nations? Certainly the world powers have the resources to resettle all Tutsis and Hutus in Burundi or Rwanda as a lasting measure to end the ethnic conflict in these African regions. Who are there to blow the trumpet and summon the superpowers to action when the sons and daughters of the soil are the first to take to their heels at the least sign of trouble? If they flee the land even in times of peace, who can blame the foreigners for turning their faces the other way when Africa bleeds, when Africa continues to languish under the burden of poverty and unrest of every shade?

There is urgent need to summon the sons and daughters of Africa not only to get back to their black African homes, but also to get back to the **roots** of black heritage. That will surely be the greatest sign of hope and salvation. If Africans are able to discover their roots, there will be no need for the mad rush for greener pastures. The rich, ancient customs and traditions of Africa may point to the new ways of life and possible liberation. We shall see what lessons the present generation of black people can learn from the memories of Africa's past. In times of despair and emergency, it is never a bad idea to stop a while and consider how it had been in the past. Old or abandoned footpaths could be re-opened to help make a long and tedious journey shorter.

We strongly believe that most Africans residing in various parts of the world for whatever reasons should consider their absence from home as temporary situation. Whether they have been forced out of their homelands as a result of political agitation that the current leaders did not favor, they should know that one day they may be required to take up leadership among their people. They will be welcomed home with banners and songs of joy as they are entrusted with power to conduct a selfless revolutionary crusade against the forces that have kept Africa in perpetual darkness. History, ancient and modern bears witness to the liberating and revolutionary activities of true leaders and true *sons of the soil*.

Let such true and patriotic leaders of Africa who may now be in exile realize that once political stability has been re-

established in the fatherland, there are millions of sons and daughters of the land, scholars and intellectuals who are ready to return to their various countries, communities and villages to assist in development and nation-building. Many African *exiles* have vowed to return to fatherland as soon as there is an assurance of political stability. Even where they are not entirely ready to settle permanently in the homeland, they may vouch their support for the survival of their fatherland from their various locations all over the world. Africa, Igboland, the Nigerian nation thus becomes the center of their world and they would not exchange it for any other *pasture* no matter how *green*. Paving the way for the return of the exiles is a serious project. From various perspectives – *social, political, spiritual and cultural*, there is need to survey the *present* and *past* situations in Africa, including *movements*, that will contribute toward the realization of the desired goals, the return of the **African exiles** to the fatherland.

Afrocentrism vis-à-vis Eurocentrism

*Afrocentrism is an intellectual and ideological movement largely among African Americans whose central proposition is that all blacks are syncretic Africans who exist in a cultural and political Diaspora and that their worldview must be African-centered and positively express African values.*¹⁰⁵

Afrocentrism, a term that was coined by Molefi Asante, professor of Black Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, among other things, emphasizes the need for blacks to learn the glories of their history in order to combat feelings of inferiority. It seeks, too, to articulate an alternative history and system of values. In spite of colonialism and slavery, Africa has had a proud historical past that should always be linked with the ancient Egyptian civilization. Egypt in its era of glory was the birthplace of core African values, or Akan culture, that promise to re-authenticate black people in the present. In fact the place of Afrocentrism in the present era of Black people's struggle for self-identity cannot be overemphasized. Afrocentrism argues that

the world of the Africans and nonwhites, has been dominated by Eurocentrism, the race-conscious values of the Europeans and the vision of themselves as the center of the world. Afrocentrism disputes the claim that European values are universally accessible expressions good for the Europeans and non-Europeans alike. It posits that the values and culture of the Europeans are, at worst, diametrically opposed to the self-determination of non-European peoples, and at best irrelevant to the life and culture of Africans.

Many Afrocentric scholars, including Molefi Asante, have consistently been confronted with barrages of questions concerning the goals of Afrocentrism. Once in late 1996, proponents of Afrocentrism argued the case for Afrocentrism in a TV Documentary¹⁰⁶. Asante made it clear to those whites who think that Afrocentric curriculum for African-American kids is detrimental to their educational achievement in a competitive American society that their view was wrong. As the professor of Black Studies argued, it was rather ignorance of the history of black people in America that ruins the future of the blacks in the United States. There is therefore no more time to waste in introducing black kids to the culture and history of their ancestors. "Afrocentrism therefore encourages the preservation and elevation of African-American expressive culture – language, cuisine, music, dance, and clothing. Renewed attention to this culture advocates, therefore the psychological benefit of showing African Americans, who have long been a part of a culture that has devalued their presence, that they indeed have a heritage of value."¹⁰⁷ As one of the black kids, who was interviewed during the TV Program put it: "In Afrocentrism, we learn that our ancestors were also kings and queens and Africans are also smart people and not idiots!"

Reversal of fortunes for black people was conceived as a political and cultural agenda. But the white man may after all not be entirely responsible for the black people's problems. Blacks themselves could effect a reversal of fortunes, not in terms of wishing evil for any other people or race. The post independence leadership should be in the position to reverse the misfortunes of blacks by assuring peace, political stability, and economic advancement. If the sons and daughters of Africa and black

America could take the lead, surely other nations would join in the crusade for liberation. Part of this agenda lies in the rediscovery of the perennial values of the African heritage. It involves a return to the roots. Reappraisal of African past must form the basis for the Afrocentric studies. As part of an *Exilic Movement*, its findings must establish a view of what it means to belong to black race and to be proud of one's culture and history.

For better or for worse Africans and blacks everywhere and in whatever level of education, from kindergarten to universities should know the history of Africa and the black world. Whatever term black leaders decide to give the curriculum of studies - *Afrocentrism* or anything similar, it is clear that an exposure to past and progressive history and the history of culture of the black race will contribute immensely toward development and survival of the people of the black world. Knowledge of history will help the younger generation to appreciate the present. Such a project will help whites, too, know more about Africa outside of what they can presently boast of knowing about the continent and its peoples. Africans themselves have identified African ills as centering on the failure in leadership. But it may be unfair to think that all African leaders, past and present, are failures. Surely some of them have made significant contributions toward African development in various fields. There is need for African children to study these African leaders and ancestors as well as the institutions that helped them achieve their successes. No one is perfect. But as the Igbo maintain, *there is always something in name*.

Black History and Studies have to do with personalities as well as events. This is the more reason why we should highlight some of the leaders of the **African American communities** in the United States right from the era of slavery to the Civil Rights movement to the present day. Africans, in Mother Africa, elsewhere in the Diaspora and particularly in the United States have reason to know about their leaders and their contributions to the promotion of black interests. Such studies should replace such courses like *European History*, *British Constitution*, and *History of the Commonwealth*, which for some time had dominated courses in colleges and African High schools. These should be replaced with *African History*, *History*

of African-Americans, Organization of African Unity and National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples. Black people's political and religious leaders, kings, and chiefs should be known as well as their contributions to the promotion of black culture and values. Regarding blacks in the Americas, the biographies of most of their past influential leaders should be featured prominently in the history, civic studies, and social studies in the curriculum in African schools and colleges.

Negritude Movement

Afrocentrism shares much with the Negritude Movement that was launched by Francophone-African intellectuals in the early 1930s. It asserted that blacks had certain qualities that made them more *spiritual* than the whites. The *Negritude Movement* was closely associated with **Leopold Sedar Senghor**, first president of Senegal, poet and Africa's leading intellectual. Among his publications is *Negritude and Humanism* (1975), which is a reaffirmation of the values of traditional African culture. The effect of the movement, which the poet-president led, was felt worldwide and it was extremely influential in shaping the thinking of not only of French-speaking intellectuals, but other blacks elsewhere in Africa, America and in the Diaspora. The Negritude movement, which reached its height in the 1930s and 1940s, was basically protest movement against the French policy of *assimilation*. It became, however, a platform for the reassertion of the positive values of African culture. And like earlier movements before it, including Ethiopianism, Negritude Movement emphasized the need for blacks to learn the glories of their history in order to combat feelings of inferiority. "Ethiopianism and nationalism in turn contributed to the late 19th century emergence of Pan-Africanism, the idea that blacks worldwide form a Diaspora in which they share cultural traits, have a common political mission, and assert on varying levels the worth and legitimacy of a kind of broad-based African civilization."¹⁰⁸

As expounded by Kamgang Sebastien,¹⁰⁹ the word *Negritude* was for the first time used by Aime Cesaire, a West Indian poet and political leader in his publication "**Return to My**

Native Land". In it Césaire explores what he calls Negritude, black culture as a valid and independent entity. According to him, "Negritude is the simple acknowledgment of the fact of being black, the destiny of the black people, their history and cultural values."¹¹⁰ With passage of time the concept of Negritude expanded to include an entire movement of political, cultural, religious and social liberation of the black race from all that had hampered its development and progress. It included massive movements against colonialism in Africa and anti-slavery movements in the Americas, extending from the beginnings of the 1930s to modern times. The Negritude movement also involved most political activists and liberationist thinkers in Africa as well as civil rights leaders in America. On the forefront of course, have been black intellectuals.

In a general sense one can affirm that *Negritude* was a view of the universe as envisaged by black people - the world around them, nature, people and the environment. It is clearly brought out in black civilization and history. "There is no people without culture," writes Levi-Strauss. From time immemorial, Africa has been blessed with a culture rich and original in nature. In every aspect of this culture it is always easy to discern a civilization, a way of life that can be characterized as *African*. From whichever view one approaches it, it is easy to see that this culture dominates Africa in entirety and is in fact the expression of her being. It is not a question of race. It is not simply because he is black that an African as such *dances* in this or that fashion, *prays* in a certain manner, has a certain concept of *time* and *work, authority, justice, and family*. The African is different from other peoples of the universe, simply because he has inherited a different type of civilization which shapes his life. All ethnologists today agree that Africa has a unique civilization that does not exist elsewhere. There is little doubt that long before the arrival of the white man, Africa was fully developed in the arts, literature, religion, family, law, and politics. It was this African civilization and the resultant psychology that formed the basis of the *Negritude Movement*.

As Sedar Senghor sees it, Negritude is the cultural patrimony, the values, and above all the soul of black civilization. Yet from an historical point of view, unfortunately,

the harmony that existed in these African cultural values, so solid that they had helped black people live happily for generations was shattered by the Portuguese adventure in Africa in the 15th century. The carrying away of millions of Africans into slavery thus brought irreparable loss and disorder in the region. Slavery and colonialism thus heralded the beginning of a most devastating human genocide. But worse was the *cultural genocide*. As Senghor put it "The black man gives the impression that he can easily assimilate, but now he is the one that has been assimilated."¹¹ It could be said, therefore, that Leopold Sedar Senghor represented a group, a movement toward Africa's past and Black Studies. He was an apostle of the movement "**A Return to the original African sources.**" He gave the ideal response to the nagging questions facing the African brothers and sisters in America: "**Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?**" For Senghor, Africa, the land of his birth, is the legitimate home of his brothers and sisters of color.

In spite of foreign education and influences, Senghor was still at home with his black roots, thus contributing much to the re-orientation of fellow black intellectuals to the values of the black culture. For him, *Negritude* is a struggle against *racism*. *Negritude* underlines the values found in the civilization of the black world - *emotionalism, rhythm, human warmth, mysticism, symbolic art, and communal spirit*. Re-discovering this way of acting and living it in the black man is also a way of restoring his dignity. It is **going back to the roots**. In 1934, Senghor, together with Leon Gontran Damas and Aime Cesaire founded in Paris the *Black Studies Revue*, expounding African values before colonialism. Today most African writers and elder statesmen strive to promote African cultural values. A very important area is in *languages*. Julius Nyerere, first president of Tanzania (1964-1985) is a strong supporter of indigenous African culture and has widely promoted the use of *Swahili*. Under his leadership Tanzania became the only country on the African continent with an internationally recognized native African official language. He also translated the works of Shakespeare into Swahili. Nyerere's *Ujamaa* (familyhood) project, a unique form of rural socialism received wide support throughout the

black continent at a time when *self-reliance* was the watchword in African economic development.

A rough estimate of the number of languages indigenous to the African continent is 2000. English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish - the languages of the colonial masters - have so far remained the official languages of most Africans. None of the African language groupings - Afro-Asian, Nilo-Saharan, Khoisan, and Niger-Congo family - is spoken by a good percentage of Africans. Language barrier has so far remained a set back in cultural activities that are truly African. But after the onslaught on African languages by colonialism, many African countries defy the obstacles placed by the staggering number of individual languages spoken by the various peoples of Africa to devise means of removing the language barrier in cultural events. Some of the major languages are now studied from elementary to university levels. In Nigeria, for example, among more than 250 languages spoken in this West African region, three - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba - are taught in schools on national level, while other minority groups encourage the learning of their own languages in their own local regions.

The Harlem Renaissance

The *Harlem Renaissance* has much in common with the *Negritude Movement*. While black African leaders in Mother Africa were asserting the perennial values of the African culture that colonialism sought mercilessly to destroy, black leaders in the United States were also fighting the war of cultural identity. They never remained idle watching slavery and conquest put an end to what remained of Africa and its heritage in Diaspora. What would the African ancestors do to those sons and daughters of Africa who neglected to fight to salvage the cultural values of the black people? If the culture were not kept alive, how would the communities survive? How would the ancestors be remembered? How would the living bond between the living and the dead be maintained? These and many other questions were naturally worrying the black leaders of *Negritude* and the *Harlem Renaissance*.

Like the Negritude Movement, aesthetically and ideologically affirming the independent nature, quality and validity of black culture, the Harlem Renaissance produced sophisticated explorations of black American life and culture that revealed and stimulated a new confidence and **racial pride**. Stripped of any meaningful identity, except that of skin color, with no trace of native **African names, religion, language, and community**, the lost slaves were enabled to identify with their brothers and sisters in Mother Africa through the celebration of **black traditions, black voices, and black ways of life**. The poetry of the Harlem Renaissance was especially evocative. Like the leaders of the Negritude Movement, the growth of race pride among the African Americans who had migrated from the rural South in the 1920s to the industrial North in the Harlem district of New York was greatly stimulated by great black nationalists. On the forefront was **Marcus Garvey**, who founded the *Universal Negro Improvement Association* in Jamaica as far back as 1914. He came to the United States in 1917 and established a branch of the association in Harlem district of New York City, and by 1919, the association had become the largest mass movement of American blacks in the nation's history.

It was said that colorful pageantry and appeals for the rediscovery of the black African heritage characterized the **Garvey movement**. Its goal was to establish an independent Africa through the return of a revolutionary vanguard of black Americans. Although critics maintained that Garvey's great attraction among poor blacks was not matched among the black middle class who resented his flamboyant lifestyle, the black movement Garvey inspired, nevertheless was a step in the right direction toward black cultural revival. Although he remained one of Garvey's sharpest critics, **W.E.B. Du Bois** shared Garvey's basic goals, namely rediscovery of black African heritage. In his Magazine, the *CRISIS*, Du Bois urged racial pride among African Americans. He believed that an educated Black elite should lead Blacks to liberation. He further believed that his people could not achieve social equality by emulating white ideals, that equality could be achieved only by teaching Blacks racial pride with an emphasis on an African cultural heritage. Here Du Bois was not in accord with **Booker T.**

Washington, believed by many to be perhaps the most important person in black effort for complete equality. Booker T. Washington emphasized practical skills for blacks and believed that vocational skills would afford blacks the quickest entry into the mainstream of American life.

The Harlem Renaissance had begun with the flowering of African American creative talent in literature, music, and arts centered in New York and was to mark a rise in race consciousness among blacks. It embodied countless artistic innovations occurring within the African-American community all of which produced a wealth of music, literature, poetry, dance, social discourse, and visual art. The energy and excitement of the artistic movement also flourished elsewhere in Europe, especially in Paris. The principal contributors to the Harlem Renaissance included literary figures - poets, novelists, artists, performers, and musicians. Black journals also helped stimulate the cultural movement of the time. These journals published works by promising black writers. The journals include the *Crisis*, *The New Negro*, and *The Negro History*. *The Association for the study of Negro Life and History* also helped to popularize the Harlem Movement.

The numerous major writers and composers are usually viewed as part of the Harlem Renaissance - Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer and, of course, W.E.B. Du Bois. Critics agree that their collective efforts not only established a new African-American identity, but also contributed to the development of modern American culture. But worthy of note too, were their common purpose and bonds. They dealt with black life from a black perspective. Their movement no doubt has contributed to the re-awakening of Black Studies in higher institutions of learning in the United States and in Mother Africa.

Authenticité Africaine

Colonialism and slavery had taken a great toll on Africa's past values and things seemed to have fallen apart. But the road to the re-discovery of the lost African values was not closed. The

Négritude Movement, Harlem Movement and finally *Authenticité Africaine* were movements in the proper direction spearheaded by black intellectuals and many others who felt an urgent need to seek ways of making Africa wake up. A sense of loss and despair has continued to haunt many well-meaning sons and daughters of Africa. The tragedy has clearly manifested itself on two emotionally irreconcilable levels of modern African life, namely humiliations visited on Africans by colonialism, and the utter worthlessness of what replaced colonial rule. As some Africans thought that salvation lay with the pursuit of foreign values, there were not a few African intellectuals, statesmen and governments who were convinced that only a return to the past would lead to a brighter future. This movement toward the rediscovery of the lost African values has continued to revolutionize the lives of most Africans from the early seventies to present times.

Devised and promoted by various African governments and cultural organizations, the *Authenticité Africaine* is geared toward a **return to the roots**, the discovery of rich values of African culture in modern times. It was widely felt that most Africans, especially those who had studied overseas or were raised there, were assimilating foreign culture to the detriment of their African cultural values. The protagonists of *Authenticité Africaine* were telling Africans, white people and anybody who cared to know that Africa was not as ugly as her detractors were painting her. Although, like any other set of peoples of the world, Africa has its woes and blessings, there are certain aspects of the African culture, that not only the Africans should learn to appreciate. Peoples of other cultures and races, if they open their minds, and shun prejudices they, too, have also much to learn from Africans. Many Africans did not ignore this message. There was a need to re-examine the whole aspect of culture and tradition and the entire way of life of the peoples of the African continent. The devastating effect of slavery and colonialism notwithstanding, Africa was not a lost continent!

But there has been a snag. The question was being asked, if the re-discovery of these values in African cultural heritage is crucial for the survival of the black race, who will

carry out this crusade for restoration? This question is important because many Africans - intellectuals as well as the best professionals of the black continent - have abandoned their fatherland for Europe and America in search of greener pastures. These include medical doctors, professors, technicians, and politicians. Most well educated politicians have taken asylum in Europe and America as political refugees. One of the many accusations every other African has leveled against the post-colonial political leaders is that African leaders stepped into the shoes of the colonial masters to perpetrate the same atrocities they said the white man masterminded. The whites have been accused of plundering the economic resources of Mother Africa and enriching their fatherlands - England, France, Belgium, Holland and Italy. But the corrupt African political leaders have not only filled their pockets with the loot from the government treasury; they have exported some of the loot to white man's land. They have shared their booty with the managers and agents of international banks while the African masses languished in hunger and poverty. They have built or bought mansions and castles in some parts of Europe and have spent happy summer or winter holidays in the comfort of European weather.

There is surely need to stop the atrocities being committed by these African leaders and restore sanity to leadership in post-colonial Africa. But who will carry out the war on corruption, when most of the Africa's illustrious sons are no more within the black continent and some have vowed never to do anything with their fatherland? Where are the African freedom singers and liberationist thinkers? Will those freedom songs finally be swallowed up in the sea of excruciating pain and burden of the illusory post-independence dreams of prosperity and self-determination? What are black people up to? How is black beautiful? What can Africans in Mother Africa point at to prove to their critics that Africa has anything unique to offer the world? What are those things special about Africa that will make her exiled sons and daughters yearn to return to the land of their birth? Is it peace and tranquility among its peoples? Definitely not! There is no peace in most parts of Africa. Is it unity? Surely not! Colonialism brought so many strange peoples together in an artificial political union. Millions of African sons and daughters

were carried away to distant lands to work on white held plantations as slaves. Lack of unity has led to civil wars, pogroms, genocide and these have taken great tolls on the population of the black continent.

Nor have the African sons and daughters in the Americas fared any better. From the early days of slavery they had to bear terrible burdens that have come to affect their lives badly. The burdens of racism, the fruit of slavery, have hampered black progress in America. As among the African nations, blacks in America cannot boast of unity. Full citizenship rights extended to African Americans have yet to be realized. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1 1863, like the lowering of the colonial flag on the eve of independence in Africa, never brought the expected dreams to fruition. Martin Luther King Jr. clearly made sense of the situation in his famous "I have A Dream " speech: delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963:

But two hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition.¹¹²

In truth there isn't much that Africa or black America can be proud of when reference is made to the black continent. There is nothing specifically beautiful about the face of modern Mother Africa. But there is enough to show that Africans are not a completely lost race. It is perhaps the *past* that bears evidence to this reality. The *present* has not much to show for the desirable values. It is precisely because all is not well with black Africa, her sons and daughters, institutions, customs and traditions that the longing for the *past* has continued to grow. It is basically as a

result of these disappointments and lack of faith in the present that the need for the rediscovery of the black African cultural heritage becomes relevant.

Whether or not the African peoples and nations were prepared for the revolution, *Authenticité Africaine* was already sweeping across the entire continent of Africa like a bush fire. The *Black is Beautiful* movement had already infiltrated Africa from North America and the youths were not amused. It was a serious business joining the **Crusade for Authenticity**. In other words, the protagonists were telling all Africans to discover and appreciate all the good values in the African culture that seemed to have been suppressed by the colonialists for selfish reasons or had been branded "UN-European," hence "primitive." There was a need to make a powerful presentation of the beauty, strength, and validity of traditional life and values without any appeal for a return to the ways of the decadent past. Only what was *genuine, sound, logical* and best for Africa must be sought after. Experience has shown that obviously from their unworkability in the African context, some of the inherited European systems of government and ways of life were not for Africans. This is why there is need for a rediscovery of the valid African past. Perhaps some of the pre-colonial systems may work better for Africa today.

The old order, which was disrupted as a result of the appearance of the white man in Africa, was not morally bankrupt. The results of crushing blows leveled at traditional values by alien and more powerful cultures causing, in the end, the traditional society to fall apart are still felt today all over Africa. They represent the tragic consequences of the clash of two cultures - the *African-European collision*. Some early observers and leaders saw the dangers facing the dismantling of ancient traditions and customs. They recognized that the consequences would be great. The reactions of Africans brought the truth to the surface. The areas of religion and culture experienced much anxiety. The situation could be diagnosed in terms such as these: "Since the impact of Western civilization on this continent, and since the advent of the missionary, the real spirit of the African has been suppressed. Whatever there was in Africa was stamped down as primitive, heathen or sham." But as

a black church minister put the crucial question: "If one accepts Christianity, does it mean that everything in one's former culture has to die out?" The other side of the question may be framed this way: "If one accepts white values does it mean that all African values should be thrown overboard?" The clash of the two cultures has had its most devastating effect in the post-colonial era and most Africans are serious when they talk about re-discovering the past. Perhaps they can borrow from past systems, philosophies and values to solve their present problems, which have defied the white man's solution.

Contributions of African Writers

In times of emergency, writers and intellectuals form part of the group that strives to effect changes to help restore order. Perhaps African writers and intellectuals, like their counterparts all over the world, can still help to bring some change. There is a lot that could be done. Achebe exposes the role of the modern black writer or activist in a situation in which most African nations find themselves. "A writer has a responsibility of trying to stop the damaging trends to which Africa is heading. Unless our culture begins to take itself seriously it will never get off the ground."¹³ Achebe states his mission as a writer in his essay "**The Novelist as Teacher**." It is a sacred duty that every African owes the present generation during any trying moment for Africa. Unequivocally he states: "Here is an adequate revolution for me to espouse - to help my society regain belief in itself and to put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of society meet."

Are African writers and intellectuals accepting the challenge? There is no doubt that many Igbo and African scholars are striving to live up to expectations. "**Olumefula**" - literally - **let my language not perish** - is the title of a stimulating paper delivered by an Igbo scholar during one of the annual Igbo cultural festivals organized for the purpose of rediscovering the lost cultural values of the Igbo of Nigeria. "**Odenigbo**" - the name of this Igbo *cultural harvest* is

organized by the Archdiocese of Owerri, Nigeria. It places emphasis on Igbo cultural heritage and on its perennial values. Featuring the best intellectual harvest of cultural values and traditions found among the Igbo of Nigeria, each lecture takes up an aspect of Igbo culture, exposing its rich values in both local and global context. There is no doubt that they are helping African society to regain belief in itself.

"**Olumefula**" emphasizes the great importance of language as the official vehicle for the transmission of these cultural values. "Olumefula" surely has a strong message for Ndi Igbo, particularly those living overseas. They and their children will be a lost people if they forget their language. Other similar topics in these lectures include "**Ahamefule**" - literally - **let my name not be forgotten** and "**Omenala-Igbo**" - Customs and traditions of Igbo people. "**Ahamefule**" calls Igbo and Africans to look closely and rediscover themselves by embracing their native names, which are more meaningful than the foreign names imposed on the protesting African mothers who brought their children for baptism in the Christian Churches. "Ahamefule" reminds Africans in general that without an African name, there is an irreparable loss of identity. Today a very tiny percentage of Africans in Mother Africa or in the Diaspora would still like to be called by foreign names. The fruits of such rich harvests serve not only the Africans; they also open up a new world of the black race to non-African scholars and other people who want to know more about the rich forgotten treasures of the black world.

Among the highlights of the "**Igbo Kwanzaa**" today is the **Ahijoku Lectures** Ahijoku is the God of Harvest. It is an annual intellectual event that offers distinguished Igbo scholars some opportunities to share their thoughts and reflections with Africans everywhere on various aspects of African culture and civilization. Through this event traditional Igbo organizations provide the fruits of an intellectual harvest based on the research findings of eminent scholars to many international cultural bodies. Many Igbo scholars as well as those who can afford it return from overseas to participate in the *Ahijoku lectures* in Igboland. Diaspora Igbo are included in the cultural revival of Igbo heritage through conferences, seminars, and lectures. The first "**Igbo Uzo Lecture**" has been inaugurated in the United

States. An organization that goes by the name "Committee of Concerned Igbo People Abroad" rooted in the "Igbo-net family" thinks that with time the "Igbo Uzo Lecture" would become the "**Diasporic Ahiajoku Lecture**" and will rotate in major cities worldwide. The organization has encouraged Ndi Igbo to research on topics pertaining to an Igbo legacy, more cultural than political.

Other programs that the Committee of Concerned Igbo People has in the pipeline include the "**Diaspora Day**" - a day set apart for the remembrance of all past and present Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans who made great contributions to the black cultural heritage among the black people in Diaspora. These will include African-Americans who are principally the Diaspora Africans. Most of their leaders have made contributions toward the political and economic development of Africa, more than actually Africans in Mother Africa. "**History Week**" will be part of the Diaspora Day. Igbo people abroad will be encouraged to tell their children stories about Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans in general. Igbo children, born abroad should not be ignorant of the history of their people.

They should know the importance of the Igbo language to the promotion of cultural identity. They should know the true history of the slave trade and not the distorted views as presented in history books written by whites. Diaspora Igbo, young and old should know "**Omenala Ndi Igbo**" - **Customs and Traditions of Igbo People**, the unique place of proverbs in Igbo cultural heritage. This has surely prompted a concerned Igbo son living in the United States - Mazi Richard Mbachu - to write these two books: "**African Tales in Igbo proverbs**" and "**Akwukwo Ezi na Ulo Igbo - Igbo Family Reader.**"¹¹⁴ In many parts of the United States "Party Weekend" forms an important program of the Diaspora Day. "Ndi Igbo Memorial Weekend Party" is part of "**Iri Ji Festival**" which the Igbo in the United States have named "IGBOUSA." Ndi Igbo in some parts of the States feature already, the "Oru Owere Festival" and "Iri Ji Aro." These are part of the Igbo cultural heritage celebrations, which still remain crucial in the education of the younger generation of Igbo in Mother Africa and in Diaspora.

The *Authenticite Africaine* movement has since spread to many institutions of higher education in Africa. Through the programs organized by departments of history, African thought and culture, African scholars have been able to look at African history to rediscover the rich treasures of the continent. **The Griot** in traditional West African culture, the storyteller, for example, has preserved much of the unwritten tradition of the people. His role has been to preserve the oral traditions of his ethnic group. He relates stories of his people to the newer generations either orally or through music. Griots have been instrumental in orally preserving the varied literature of Africa, which has grown since the beginnings of African societies and continues to flourish today

For African writers, and educators today, it has become imperative to imbibe and adapt the African traditional literary genre in writing, preaching, and general communication. The written word has always shown a debt to oral literature, which takes a variety of forms. *Proverbs* and *riddles* convey the accepted social codes of conduct, while *myths* and *legends* teach a belief in the supernatural as well as explain the origins and development of states, clans, and other important social organizations. Legends and myths are usually regarded as grounded in fact and in many instances, have proved to be extremely accurate accounts of the history of a people

Very few writers, preachers, and educators in Africa would be successful today if they ignored the African traditional literary genre in communication. Speeches, lectures, talks, and sermons devoid of such artistic features usually sound like broken musical instruments and have insipid flavor. A fairly comprehensive list includes various forms of oral tradition, *storytelling, fairy and folk tales, songs and music, riddles, aphorisms, maxims, dance, drama and mimicking*. The *Griots* use the most famous African folktales, which usually feature the *tortoise, the spider, the rat, the goat, and the lion* to teach the perennial lessons of the virtues of *wisdom, prudence, fortitude, and bravery*.

Various peoples and cultures all over the world may have these forms of expression, but the Africans possess them in abundance. Folktales and other oral literary genres that are also

widespread on the continent have been carried from Africa to the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States. In their original forms, in spite of the influence of modern communication media, folktales have a revered place in speech making or public speaking in Africa. Regarding the place of such artistic modes of expression Chinua Achebe, reckoned as one of the most successful African writers, writes in *Things Fall Apart*: "Among the Igbo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten." Achebe's novels are sprinkled with proverbs. Among the *Anang* and the *Ibibio* of Nigeria, anthropologists have recorded actual cases in which judges were swayed by *proverbs*. On one occasion, one anthropologist - John Messenger - marveled at the Chief judge's advice to the plaintiff and his witnesses: **"If you visit the home of the toads, stoop."** The plaintiff and his witnesses had refused to make their statements under oath and thereby forfeited their case!

The nearest and mostly recommended prudent admonition in modern times would be: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do". Reports indicate that among the **Bambara-speaking people of Mali** in North Africa, the *Griots*, customarily "warm up" before their recitations and during breaks in their lengthy performances by singing *proverbs* in rapid sequence. This practice gains the attention and respect of the audience, who think of *proverb sayers* as wise men knowing how society works. Hence the listeners will be ready to credit the historical tradition that follows.

Some Perennial African Traditional Values

In whatever form it is demonstrated or taught, black cultural heritage, usually portraying racial pride, is laid open for other racial groups to appreciate. It is not an appeal for a return to the ways of the past, into the decadent era of primitivity, or a demonstration of blind obedience to the oracles of the gods that demanded human sacrifice. There is no return to the *Dark Ages*. But naturally some lessons taught through the moonlight taletell of the pre-colonial era are still valid today. There is however no place to discover these traditional African values better than in

the *African Traditional Religion*. Some African scholars have recently chosen to refer to a plurality of African religions. But whatever their reasons for seeking *diversity* instead of *unity* among the various forms of traditional religion practiced in different parts of Africa - past and present - we have chosen to emphasize *unity* and common values found among the various forms of the *traditional religious practices*. Differences may exist as in various Christian denominations and sects, but there are still many areas of agreement.

The colonization of many areas of Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries no doubt affected the traditional and religious life of the Africans. The onslaught on Traditional Religion was most devastating as Christian missionaries sought to convert Africans to Christianity. Terrible mistakes were made akin to throwing away the baby with the dirty water. Everything that had to do with Traditional Religion was castigated as *pagan, heathen, fetish, animist, or idol worship*. But after years of experimentation, it has become clear to both Africans and missionaries themselves that the Traditional Religion has much to offer to Africans and humanity in terms of cultural and spiritual values cherished by various peoples at all times. These have to be rediscovered. They form the point of departure for a return to the cherished African past and a returning to the roots. A few of the themes we shall discuss in the following paragraphs will expose those African traditional values that seem to be suffering from neglect. They need to be given their rightful places once again by Africans in both private and public life.

African Family and Community Life

The *extended family system* in its global application and reference to the biblical concept of *brother's keeper*, is the bedrock of African community life and survival. It is a cherished value Africans cannot afford to lose whatever the foreign influence they have imbibed. In a world today described as a *global village*, in which people are nonetheless separated by enormous differences in culture, language and race, there is no other time more profitable for Africans to rediscover their roots. Peter K. Sarpong - an African scholar and religious leader, draws

a fascinating picture of an African family and community which both Africans and whites should appreciate in the debate "Can Christianity dialogue with African Traditional Religion?" The African lives in community. His **father** is not just the person biologically responsible for conception. His **mother** is not necessarily the woman who physically gave him birth. He may have as many as **fifteen fathers** and **ten mothers**. In the ideal situation, each one of these would treat him as his biological father or mother would. As he has several "mothers" and "fathers," obviously he has many more **brothers** and **sisters**, **nephews** and **nieces**. In fact, in some African languages, the words **cousin**, **aunt**, **uncle** do not exist. One's father's brother is one's "father" and one's mother's sister is one's "mother." Therefore the African family is very much extended.

Peter Sarpong is an **Asante** from **Ghana**. What he is saying applies on hundred per cent to the **Igbo** of **Nigeria**. Igbo words used by the younger ones to express the close relationship between these many "fathers" and "mothers" include "**Dede**" (male), and "**Dada**" (female). More affectionate and closer relationships between the two are indicated when an "m" is added to the appellation. "**Dede-m**" indicates *ownership*, a very close relationship - "My *own* uncle or brother." These words are used too as a sign of respect for elders. It would be indecorous for a younger fellow to address his senior, close relation or stranger, by a personal name. Where it is necessary to identify this elder person by name, it becomes imperative to append "Dedem" before the name, for example "Dedem Okoye," "Dedem John" or for female - "Dadam Ngozi," "Dadam Mary." It is unusual to hear a kid call their parents by name. Igbo children born and raised overseas who unfortunately have not been taught to appreciate these cultural values often get into trouble when they visit their kinsmen and women in Igboland. A story was told about an Igbo young man who visited home and went to pay a courtesy visit to the traditional ruler of his community. In the American fashion he told the chief that he had come to say **Hi!** He also asked the chief: "**How are you doing?**" The embarrassed chief ignored the young man and inquired who must have given birth to such an uncultured fellow. The chief gave instructions that the "American fellow" should be

helped with some re-education, since it seemed he had lost direction in a foreign land! In Igboland, it is the elder person who asks the young one how he or she is doing? Unlike in Europe and America, in Igboland, usually, no one asks the other how old he or she is? If such an information is required for whatever purposes, it is usually not got from the person directly.

As far as good mannerisms are concerned, including courtesy and respect for seniors and elders, African children have much to teach their counterparts in Europe and America. African children are well brought up and show good manners while talking to their parents and adults. They greet everybody they meet on the way as a sign of courtesy. It is usually strange to pass somebody on the way without exchanging words of greetings with the person, even where the person is unknown to the younger fellow. Among the Igbo it is a sacred duty of a younger person to pass courteous words of greeting or salutation to an elderly person on the way. He says to the elderly person, returning from some place "**Nnoo**," - Welcome! If the person is going somewhere, the greeting is "**Gaanu**!" - Go well. If nothing is known about the person's destination, the simple courteous greeting is "**Daalu**!" or "**Ndewo**!" This is not the American "**Hi**!" The person greeted responds with great pleasure "**Chukwu gozie gi nwam!**" - May God bless you my son or daughter as the case may be.

A well-brought up Igbo young person may not pass by someone or a group of people on the farm without greeting them. He encourages them to work harder by saying "**Jisie ike**" (singular); "**Jisie nu ike**" (plural). The response is: "**Dalu, Chukwu gozie gi**" - Thank you. God bless you! In the same way, no good Igbo kid would pass by an elderly woman or man without offering some nice greetings to the person. Igbo children, even the smallest toddlers, are well behaved at public gatherings. They know their place when it comes to sitting positions and at table. African children do not generally compete with adults when it comes to eating in public places. They do not grab seats or places reserved for adults. They usually look for directives from adults before taking any steps in public gatherings. Parents and adults through facial expressions indicating prohibited actions as well as those actions that should

be observed often communicate such directives. Well brought-up, well-behaved Igbo children are often shocked at the behavior of their counterparts in Europe and America – how these white children grab the first seats at table, cause commotion in public places when they fail to get all they ask for. African children in general know that their counterparts elsewhere are no better loved by their parents than they are by their African parents. Africans strongly believe that others should emulate them as far as child-care, upbringing, and love are concerned.

While an African child would resist maltreatment from parents and adults it is uncommon to behold African children challenging adults, cursing them, or even exchanging words with adults publicly. An African child whose feelings had been hurt by an adult might grumble and hide away quickly, but would not confront an adult in a showdown. Reports of European and American children sending their parents to jail on account of minor cases of domestic violence are rampant. A recent media report related how an offended daughter sent her mother to jail. She claimed her mother was harassing her and not allowing her to go out or return late at night! Reacting to her sentence, the mother of the girl warned parents to take care of their children and never allow the court to take over such a sacred duty. By sentencing a woman who scolded her daughter for unruly behavior, the court was getting down bad precedent for young people in modern society.

It is easy to get lost somewhere and make references to *how it is done in America or Europe* or *how the white brother treats his parents and siblings*. Little is known about *how Africans take care of their aged parents*. African parents are not sent to "nursing homes" and adults are not sent to "retirement homes" when they suffer from terminal illness or when they become old. There are few "nursing/retirement" homes in Africa. Those who should have gone there are happily received in the homes of sons, daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters or even relations who may have some remote link with the family. Support rendered to such extended family members in cash and kind is not recorded as a *debt to be repaid*. Africans should rediscover this harmonious bond that has always existed among families as well as extended family members. It is imperative to

remember, particularly in modern times that foreign and individualistic lifestyles influence Africans, too. Instead of sharing their wealth and good fortune with the rest of the family, the tendency is to keep all to themselves. As the African traditional way helps to keep families and communities together and even promotes equitable distribution of wealth, it is necessary that such traditions should be kept alive.

African traditional religion pervades the whole life of the African. And as Peter Sarpong emphasizes, this religion is not a fashion. Neither is it like clothes to wear today and change or discard tomorrow. Religion is like one's skin. One takes it where one goes. Hence it is not taught or learned as a classroom subject. Religion is absorbed imperceptibly through imitation, observation, participation in religious rites, and in just being an African. African religion promotes human values such as hospitality, kindness, love, unity, gratitude, and hard work and, above all self-help. It promotes fidelity in human relationships. It molds and shapes the characters of human persons. It is an acknowledged fact that among Igbo - ancient and modern - there is no dichotomy or clear-cut division between the **spiritual** and the **secular** world. *When the Igbo eats, he eats religiously; when he sings, he sings religiously, when he works, he works religiously and when he dances he dances religiously*, is famous allusion to Igbo moral conduct and lifestyle, which is strongly connected to the unseen world of the Supreme Being and his messengers. The Igbo therefore knows that his public or secret conduct has far-reaching consequences on his entire personality. The law of the civil government is not simply influencing him. Basically, it is the code of conduct as found in the Traditional Religion that forces him to act *morally correct*. And this code of conduct does not change nor can anyone manipulate it.

Hospitality is related to community life and impels one to open one's house or door to a neighbor. It is a duty and should be the most common value shared by all Africans wherever they may be. Food and shelter are provided with alacrity and cheerful face and no bills are presented to the visitor. Even the poor share what they have with their guests. The spirit of **sharing** is placed high above that of selfishness and greed. For the African, it is not necessary to send a fax or to make a telephone call before one is

assured of a warm reception in a neighbor's house. Such an attitude of **openness** and **warmth** should be valued more than that of **indifference** or **individualism** among neighbors, even those not living in the same buildings or in close quarters. In some European countries and in the United States some neighbors live in same apartment buildings for years and many do not know one another or interact in any way. In such neighborhoods many people languish under isolation. Some virtually die of loneliness. Some do not know the names of their neighbors or where they come from. Inquiries about one's neighbors from visitors receive cold replies. Such is the state of relationship among close neighbors too, as each family protects its own interests and cares little about the rest of humanity. Here the African has something to share with neighbors. He has warmth and hospitality in abundance.

Birth, Initiation into Adulthood, and Sexuality

Names must have bearing on the circumstances of birth; these circumstances are thus reflected in the first names given by parents at the birth of a child. The culmination of the naming ceremony is the *official* presentation of the child to the community where prayers are offered by the elders. The community, like the parents of the new child shares in the *moral, intellectual, cultural and social* upbringing of the child. The community owns the child, in a particular sense. The much-quoted dictum: "**It takes a village to raise a child**" is a typical African aphorism. As the child grows into adulthood and assumes certain adult responsibilities, the rite of passage, in the usual African fashion is celebrated. In most African communities, **age grade** is an important institution. This acts as a shield to protect the youth from societal evils, and helps to mold their character. One is expected to belong to an age grade through which one shares in both the benefits and obligations of the community. Taboos regulate the moral life of young people. Punishments are meted out to those who misbehave, and certain offenses are punishable by ostracism.

That it takes a whole village to raise a child in Africa clearly demonstrates the importance Africans attach to the good

upbringing of children. This sacred and delicate duty is never delegated to an immature person. On this account unwed mothers in Africa are rarely entrusted with the burden of bringing up their children. Immediately the child is weaned, it is taken away from the unfaithful lady and given to the charge of a mature adult. The young unwed mother is thought to be a "baby" too. It is a calamity to allow a baby to go on nursing a baby for more than a short period of time. In spite of their orchestrated poverty, Africans are known to dislike giving away children for adoption. This factor emphasizes their love for children as well as the distrust that the foster parents or family will care and raise the children well. The upbringing of a child is not a business that any person can undertake. What is involved is more than providing for the material needs of the child. Life and family are close realities and are very much valued in African society. The sacredness of human life is guarded by taboos found in the Traditional Religion. There is absolute respect for life. Offspring are treasured, while their absence can be seen as a calamity. Abortion is consequently an abomination.

While the modern world plays around with life and sexuality, a better knowledge of African Traditional Religion could serve as a corrective measure to the anti-life crusade manifesting itself in various governmental legislation in the West and in some other parts of the world. Western culture has inflicted an irreparable wound on life, marriage, and sexuality - sacred realities in African Traditional Religion. It is therefore imperative that Africans rediscover the teachings of the Traditional Religion on these important issues. African Traditional Religion for example does not approve **homosexuality** or any form of marriage that is not between a man and a woman. There are many aberrations in the modern conjugal unions. **Same-sex marriage** is inconceivable and there are no loopholes for exceptions. African Traditional Religion, which should guide Africans everywhere, has no place for same-sex marriage. While many Westerners find homosexuality, same-sex marriage, procreation outside wedlock and other forms of sexual aberrations acceptable, Africans abhor them as unnatural lifestyles not in accord with African cultural heritage.

This has been recently demonstrated by one of African nations, Zimbabwe. An ongoing anti-homosexual campaign by Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe and a condemnation of homosexuality by Zimbabwe's Council of Churches prompted a Dutch Church to withdraw from the Assembly of the World Council of Churches scheduled to take place in September 1998 in Zimbabwe. According to newspaper reports, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands cited what the Church referred to as "Zimbabwean anti-gay campaign" as a human rights violation and the main reason for its decision not to attend the 1998 meeting in Harare, the Zimbabwean capital.

Mugabe, a Catholic, had said publicly on several occasions that homosexuals were not welcome in Zimbabwe and had described them as *sodomites* and *perverts*, saying it was "extremely outrageous and repugnant" that they had any supporters. A number of the council members had wondered, whether gay delegates from Churches would be allowed to attend the African meeting and, whether they would be harassed while there. According to reports, the Council had negotiated a "Memorandum of Understanding" with the Zimbabwe government to guarantee that the government would not interfere with the meeting. It is not only Zimbabwe. No African community would welcome sodomites, gays and lesbians into its ancestral land. The Zimbabwe *anti-homosexual* posture is a victory for African Traditional Religion. In this issue Africa has not been influenced by Christianity, which has either not taken a stand or is still straddling the issue. The Traditional Religion of the African ancestors does not admit such aberrations in family and sexual matters.

There is no doubt that as far as moral sanity is concerned, the future looks bleak. Most of the future parents and leaders may not be able to handle the situation, as the adults are not laying good foundation for the younger generation. Many African sons and daughters, the future hope of the black continent are not receiving the right training in the role they are expected to play in society. This sad situation is enough to provoke a new crusade for moral and ethical revolution that would form part of the grand project for a return to the forgotten roots.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Igbo Predicament: The Black People's Predicament

"Learning would make him unfit for slavery." [Hugh Auld]

Whither Ndi Igbo?

The above quotation, attributed to Hugh Auld, may help the Igbo, Nigerians, Africans, and blacks in general to reflect on the consequences of abandoning education or exchanging its fruits with any "garbage" found in the "greener pastures." It should not surprise anybody that before the abolition of slavery it was a criminal offense in the United States for slave-owners to educate their slaves. What slaves needed were some doses of biblical instruction, to oblige them to be "obedient to their masters" and never to revolt in the face of inhuman treatment meted to them.

We learn from *Life and Times of Frederick Douglas* - the autobiography of Frederick Douglas - the black American who was one of the most eminent human-rights leaders of the 19th century, that as an infant, he was separated from his slave mother. He never knew his white father. Frederick lived with his grandmother on a Maryland plantation until the age of eight when his owner sent him to Baltimore to live as house servant with the family of Hugh Auld. It was in this family that Douglas' march to greatness began. According to the story, the wife of Hugh Auld defied state law by teaching the boy to read. The revolutionary attitude of this white woman led to a conflict with her husband who declared that learning would make the boy unfit for slavery. Later, however, Douglas continued his education surreptitiously with the aid of schoolboys in the streets.

Our distressing question: "Whither Ndi Igbo?" is as well addressed to all Africans who find themselves outside their fatherland. The Igbo of Nigeria, as we have pointed out in the early chapters of this work, have been a vagrant people. Some Igbo elders who had mixed feelings about Biafra secession from Nigeria expressed fears that an Independent Biafra would limit movement of Igbo people to other parts of Nigeria. In fact over 40% of Igbo live, work, or do their business in other parts of Nigeria today. Before the civil war the percentage was even higher. But on account of the pogrom or genocide committed against the Igbo in Northern Nigeria, which led to the civil war in 1966, most Igbo feel insecure in other parts of Nigeria. Some have settled permanently at home or have left for other places. A series of massacres they have suffered in the hands of fellow Nigerians have continued to haunt Igbo people today.

A chronicle of such massacres by "**Nzuko Igbo - Igbo Memorials**"¹¹⁵ highlights the following events: During the 1945 general strike in some parts of Northern Nigeria, the Igbo living in Jos were attacked and massacred. The District officer representing the colonial administration blamed Azikiwe and the Igbo for the scarcity of food and housing for Hausa traders that precipitated the strike. On March 31, 1953, Chief Anthony Enahoro of the Action Group Political Party tabled a motion for Nigeria's independence for 1956. The Northern Nigerian leaders were not ready. The Sarduana of Sokoto moved for amendment to the motion replacing 1956 with "as soon as possible." The motion was rejected by southern leaders. Violence and attacks on Igbo people erupted in Northern Nigeria and many Igbo people were killed. On May 24, 1966 in Zaria, Northern Nigeria, a systematic execution of Igbo people was carried out, following a military decree by General Aguiyi Ironso. This action, aimed at a unitary government for Nigeria, was the beginning of the genocide against the Igbo people. From May 29 - 30, 1966, there took place massive escalation and organized killings of the Igbo people following the overthrow of Ironsi's government as a retaliation for the 1966 coup. Approximately 5,000 Igbo people were killed in the two days of massacres and mayhem in Northern Nigeria. From September to November 1966, an all-out genocide was committed against the Igbo people in all parts of

Nigeria except in the Eastern Region and the Igbo-speaking parts of the Mid-Western region of Nigeria. Igbo civilians - men, women and children alike were killed or snatched and burnt alive in places like Katsina and Kano. It is estimated that more than 100,000 Igbo people were massacred during the wave of the atrocities. As a result of the blockade of Biafra during the civil war more than 1 million Igbo, including children died of starvation and as a result of the bombardment of the civilian population.

The catastrophic end of the Nigeria civil war seemed to have worsened the Igbo predicament. Twenty eight years after the end of the war the Igbo feel strongly that little has been achieved in the way of Igbo reintegration within the Nigerian nation. There are no signs that the program of reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation proclaimed by the Nigerian leadership at the end of the war has been achieved. Rather than full reintegration what the Igbo experience is marginalization and rejection. Have the Igbo any significant role to play in the political, economic, cultural, religious, and social development of Nigeria? This and many other questions have continued to worry the Igbo as new political arrangements are sought by all well-meaning Nigerians to ensure the survival of the once giant of Africa.

Perhaps it is not too late for the Igbo to realize that they should put the memories of the Biafran war behind them and think of building a better future for their children and their fatherland. Igbo people thought they lost heavily in human and material resources during the Nigerian civil war, but they fail to calculate what they have lost since the end of that war. Part of the big loss has been in the search for greener pastures in the other parts of the world. As we have pointed out, more than 5 million Igbo people are living outside their ancestral homeland. From this number about two million are said to be living, studying and working in places as far away as North America, South America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. No accounts are rendered about those who in the last 3 to 5 years have left their fatherland in search of the greener pastures. No account is taken of many who had died on their way to the New World. Nor can

any good account be rendered about those who have died from toxic waste products exported to Africa.

As an Independent State or part of Nigeria, it had been the dream of Igbo people to excel in education and compete favorably with peoples of the developed world. Igbo leaders have never ceased to point to the role of education in the modern world. John C. McCall, an American professor of Anthropology whose regional interest includes Africa, Nigeria, and Igbo speaking peoples, describes Ohafia, Igbo region of Nigeria located west of the Cross River in Southeastern Nigeria as "A Land of Mighty Warriors, Erudite Scholars, and Successful Entrepreneurs." In the past, Ohafia was known for its war dance and head-taking business. The dance still remains at the heart of Ohafia identity, but great changes have taken place.

While the age of head-taking is gone, modern markers of achievement serve equally well as tokens of proven courage and affirmed manhood. New signs have become structurally equivalent to "heads", worthy of celebration just, as in the past, the hunter who killed a leopard was celebrated as having "taken a head." This idiomatic transference is frequently explained in blunt terms by Ohafia people who remark: "we used to go to war and bring back heads, now we go and bring back degrees."¹¹⁶

As McCall further observes, the War Dance is about achievement of manhood by way of incorporation and appropriation of foreign sources of power. The head continues to stand as a resonant symbol of this achievement, but the actions that constitute the appropriation of power have transformed to embrace the structures and relations of modernity - the corporation, the academy, and the state. Hence, when a man returns to Ohafia with an academic degree he is said to have "taken a head." Now follows McCall's point, which is most relevant to our discussion here. The identity realized here is not in the appropriated objects themselves or even in the power that they represent. The bottom line is the all-important action of returning with those achievements to the fatherland.

Those who stay in the city and lose contact with their natal villages are referred to as "lost," as were the warriors who failed to return from battle. Material rewards are not enough to constitute an authentic identity. The sojourn must be completed. The warrior must return, be celebrated, meet his ancestors, and join in the community of heroes.¹¹⁷

This is a great lesson for the Diaspora Igbo. Truly, days of tribal wars and headhunting are gone yet the modern world is still an arena of "warfare" and struggle for survival. As the Igbo put it, one does not need to stand or sit at a spot to get the best glimpse of the masquerade ("Anaghi ano ofu ebe ekiri mmanwu"). There is often need to shift position, to travel outside the village and ancestral land to achieve the best in business and academic pursuits. But the crucial question: "Has the hunter returned with his kill?" What has his community gained from his rare achievements? Igbo people have never relegated education to the background. Its importance in the survival of the people and the entire black race has always been emphasized in times of peace and trouble, prosperity and poverty. Education is the gateway to industrialization and modernization. Igbo leaders in their greatest period of crisis in history have reiterated the role of education in development.

Our revolution recognizes the very importance of the mental and emotional need of the Biafran people. To this end, the Biafran State will pay great attention to education, culture and arts. We shall aim at elevating our cultural institutions and promoting educational reforms, which will foster a sense of national and racial pride among our people and discourage ideas which inspire a sense of inferiority and dependence on foreigners. It will be the prime duty of the revolutionary Biafran state to eradicate illiteracy from our society, to guarantee free education to all Biafran children to a stage limited only by existing resources.¹¹⁸

The issue at stake now is *not* whether the "Biafran Revolution" succeeded or not. Are those principles still relevant to the survival of the black people today? Why should black people not make their own contributions toward development among the nations of the world? At least the ambition and the incentive

must be there and the younger generation of black people must be aware of the consequences of remaining always at the receiving end:

Our nation will encourage the training of scientists, technicians and skilled workers needed for quick industrialization and modernization of our agriculture. We will ensure the development of higher education and technological training for our people, encourage our intellectuals, writers, artists, and scientists to research, create and invent in the service of the state and people. We must prepare our people to contribute significantly to knowledge and world culture.¹¹⁹

An Igbo scholar, Uzo Okoroanyanwu, bemoans the tragedy that has befallen the Igbo people in the field of education. He does not doubt that the abandonment of education is the main source of Igbo people's crisis of identity. He recalls with nostalgia the contributions that the pre-civil war "Igbo popular market literature"¹²⁰ (also referred to as "**Onitsha Market Literature**") made toward the eradication of illiteracy in Nigeria. As Okoroanyanwu notes, the Igbo popular market literature sprang up with the express purpose of disseminating the message on the printed matter to our people at a time when there were shortages of such materials. It marked an era when the pursuit of education as we know it today started in earnest in Igboland. During that period, it was recorded that people with barely six years of formal education wrote their "little pamphlets" on any imaginable topics – all with the goal of spreading good news of modern education to our people. Unfortunately the Nigerian civil war devastated the wellspring of that once flourishing civilization. In spite of all odds, however, Okoroanyanwu remains optimistic that Igbo people can still play a leading role in modern education in the black world.

"The journey we must embark upon is not unique to us. It is journey numerous others have embarked upon before our time," he writes. Perhaps Okoroanyanwu's accounts of the ancient "journeys" of those important figures we have all met in our mathematics, science, and geography lessons might help us further in our present discussion. Recounting the contributions of those ancient personalities the following facts are taken note of:

- Pythagoras (circa 6 BC) visited ancient Egypt and on his return to his people, the Greeks, he formulated the well-known "right-angled triangular theorem." Surely the ancient Egyptians built their pyramids on the basis of this theorem more than one thousand years before the birth of Pythagoras himself.
- Leonardo of Pisa (circa 1180-1250) took a journey to many important cities of the ancient world to translate ancient Egyptian, Syrian and Greek scientific texts into Latin. That helped his people, the Latin-speaking world and the Romans to read and understand the scientific texts in their own local language. Leonardo developed the Roman Figures as the Arabs invented the Arabic numerals.
- Marco Polo (ca. 1254-1324), a Venetian traveler, visited China and brought back the technology of gunpowder to the western world.

An important corollary to these accounts is that those great scientists, linguists, mathematicians, and explorers traveled to other countries in search of knowledge. They obtained knowledge and used it to help their people and the rest of the world advance in various fields of human endeavor. Like their counterparts, Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans who have traveled abroad in search of knowledge are expected to return to their fatherland and help their people catch up with the developed world. Truly the Igbo have not lagged behind in their efforts to develop communities that compare well with the developed world. Unfortunately these efforts are not yielding the desired results. Something is wrong somewhere.

Improvement, Development, and Progressive Igbo Union

Surely the "Igbo Union," as the name implies, is supposed to unite Ndi Igbo, whether they are in Igboland or in Diaspora. With little to gain from government in terms of economic, social, and cultural development, the Igbo - ancient and modern - have always invested in the "union" for the ultimate salvation. The "union" is supposed to function as an establishment ready to come to the rescue of the people and the community at all times,

particularly during emergencies. Igbo at home and in Diaspora know what they mean when they talk about "Improvement Union," "Development Union", "Progressive Union." Almost every town or community in Igboland today has an IPU, OPU or IDU, ODU, IIU, OOU (where "I" or "O" stands for the name of the town and community.) Igbo people know that there is need to reduce the infant-mortality rate and **improve** the health of the people. They realize the importance of education. So they embark on the building of health clinics, and schools and appoint committees to manage these institutions. Modern medicine and health facilities help move the people away from the Stone Age of evil spirits and fortune telling. Diseases and ailments formerly attributed to the works of malignant spirits and evil men are diagnosed with modern medical gadgets and cured with modern medicine.

Ndi Igbo understand what **development** implies. Black people should abandon the Stone Age and join the rest of the developed world in the race to conquer space. They know why some parts of the modern world are referred to as **developed** and others **developing** or **underdeveloped**. Among the first signs of development are good communication systems – the telephone, the television, the radio, and most of the recently developed sophisticated systems of communication – fax, e-mail, and, of course an improved traditional postal system. As no development can be planned without electric power, the **development unions** embark on rural electrification of their towns. How can any industrialization be achieved without effective communication systems? Many towns in Igboland have built **post offices** and handed them over to government to manage. The people would like their mails to be delivered quickly and most efficiently as it is the case in most developed nations of the world.

Igbo people establish "**Progressive Unions**" to help their communities move along with the developed communities of the world. Movement must be "**progressive**." There is need for the Igbo in Africa to abandon the long and dangerous footpaths, often extending 10 to 15 miles down the steep hills to the streams. Why should the people not have running-tap-water systems in their villages? Why should the people at this modern

age still trek long distances to sell and buy their goods? There is need to establish modern daily markets in villages and cities. Why should the people still keep their money "safe" in their homes for thieves to break in and steal? What are the functions of banks in the modern business world? What of the stock market? Business will not prosper without efficient banking systems. So many Igbo Progressive Unions establish **Community Banks** to help their people.

The **Improvement, Development, Progressive Unions, or Associations** had their forerunners in Black American History, in the African Diaspora among the ex-slaves and descendants of ex-slaves in the United States. Perhaps the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League, usually called the **Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)**, Marcus Garvey, was an Igbo. The UNIA had the primary goal of achieving self-reliance or economic self-sufficiency and reviving racial pride among black people. Garvey spoke of a "new Negro," who was proud of being black. His newspaper, *Negro World*, told of the exploits of heroes of the race and of the splendor of African culture. Garvey taught that blacks would be respected only when they were economically strong, and he preached an independent black economy within the framework of white capitalism.¹²¹ The present NAACP - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - in the United States has the same goals - economic, social, cultural, and political - as the Igbo Improvement, Progressive, or Development Unions. Therefore in worldwide, Pan-African and *diasporic* perspectives, Associations and Unions - ancient and modern - NAACP, identified with W.E.B. Du Bois; UNIA, identified with Marcus Garvey; and the IPA, IIU and IDU, identified with the Igbo of Nigeria - have had as their main goals to make black people look like other peoples of the developed world. The associations' areas of activities have always included political, educational, and economic goals.

Who says that Igbo are not an intelligent, ambitious, and progressive people? But the sad fact that should worry every well-meaning Igbo and their friends now is that most of the "Unions" are no longer *progressing, developing, and improving*

much. In the first place there is little basis for unity among the unions. Both at home and in Diaspora, the unions are no longer symbols of unity, development, and progress. There are too many voices speaking on behalf of various factions. Back in Igboland, some of the unions are bedeviled with leadership tussles, and as a result of court litigations some of the unions have closed down. As in most other institutions in Nigeria, the leaders of some of the unions have at one time or another been accused of corruption and embezzlement of union funds. Selfishness and inordinate greed for power have contributed to the demise of that most cherished institution in Igboland.

In spite of their insatiable taste for progress, improvement, and development, there are enough facts to show that Igbo achievement currently is at its lowest ebb and everybody is complaining. A group that has referred to itself as "Concerned Citizens of Ndi Igbo" released their "concern" to the press sometime in 1994.¹²² "We have watched our nation, with great regret, drift from peace and plenty to crisis and want over the past years." The group enumerated the "Nigerian woes," which, incidentally, are also "Igbo woes."

The majority of Nigerians are starving. Our children in schools - nursery to the university - no longer go to school due to instability in the nation. Movement of people has come to a halt as there is complete paralysis of our transport system due to lack of fuel which has affected air, land and sea transport nationwide. Our economy has come to a halt and our oil production slowed down. Banks are closed. Production in our factories and industries has grounded. Many information media houses have shut down. There is breakdown of law and order as armed robbers have taken over our roads. Industrial unrest is the order of the day. Sabotage of our vital sectors of production is on the increase. The list of measures of this bad state of affairs is endless. We cannot, like the proverbial ostrich, bury our heads in the sand and pretend to be out of danger. Indeed, we shall be saying the obvious by stating in the language of Chinua Achebe "Things have fallen apart and the center can no longer hold."¹²³

The "Concerned Citizens of Ndi Igbo" may not be the only group of the Igbo and Nigerians who can enumerate the endless list of

the problems besetting most African countries and particularly Nigeria. There is virtually nothing new in the list of the "woes." If Nigerians had taken note of the "observations and predictions" of a one-time Northern Supreme Court Judge of Nigeria at the beginning of the critical phase of the Nigerian crisis, many would have prepared in time.

Some Nigerian dailies and magazines reported this elder statesman's statements in 1993. After the Ibrahim Babangida regime annulled the 1993 democratic elections people expected another civil war in Nigeria. In an ecstatic mood people packed their belongings, and in private and chartered buses began heading home for their towns before the expected "Abiola War" erupted. It was widely believed that, like the Igbo, the Yoruba of Nigeria would go to war to redress the ugly treatment of their leaders by the Nigerian military junta. The Nigerian elder statesman advised Nigerians not to panic and assured them that there would be no war as it was only a political and not an ethnic crisis. As a military or political issue, there could be a coup. He reassured his interviewers that he himself had no reason to panic, but would have had some concern for "disorder" in Nigeria if it was an Igboman who had been treated as the military treated Abiola. Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba politician, was presumed to have won the democratically organized elections that would have ushered in a civil government in Nigeria in 1993. As the Nigerian elder statesman predicted there was indeed no "Abiola War" like the "Ojukwu War," which precipitated the Nigerian civil war in 1967. Many people who fled the major Nigerian cities for their towns and villages regretted their actions.

As for corruption and insecurity in Nigeria, the elder statesman predicted that corruption would be on the increase, as a result of instability and the system of appointing people to political offices and dismissing them. Instability would breed lawlessness. He predicted, too, that armed robbery would be on the increase. As a result of the meaningless industrial actions, the closing of schools and universities, young people would have nothing to do than "to look for trouble." On a very sad note this Nigerian elder statesman predicted that unless immediate steps were taken to restore confidence in the people, a stage would be reached when most people would abandon their fatherland in

panic. And as he predicted, most of his "prophecies" came to pass!

Who says that corruption has not been on the increase? One European news magazine survey reported that Nigeria is the most corrupt place to do business. In Berlin, German business executives viewed Nigeria as the world's most corrupt country next to Singapore, according to a survey of 54 nations. Who would doubt them? Nigerians themselves made such observations some 30 years ago! Some of the evils that the "Concerned Citizens of Nigeria" as well as some other international bodies thought had bedeviled economic and political development in Nigeria have been enumerated by other Nigerians in the past as well as in the present.

Bribery, corruption and nepotism were so widespread that people began to wonder openly whether any country in the world could compare with Nigeria in corruption and abuse of power. All the modern institutions – the legislature, the civil service, the army, the police, the judiciary, the universities, the trade unions and the organs of mass information – were devalued and made tools of corrupt political power. There was complete neglect and impoverishment of the people. Whatever prosperity there was, was deceptive... There were crime-waves and people lived in fear of their lives. Business speculation, rack-renting, worship of money and share practices left a few people extremely rich at the expense of the many, and those few flaunted their wealth before the many and talked about sharing their national cake.¹²⁴

Surely the terrible events following the years of independence have not helped to change Nigeria and Nigerians for the better. Rather an indisputable state of deterioration has completely blurred any successes of the pre-colonial era. Most of the improvement, development, and progressive Igbo unions have become virtually moribund. Some have even turned into oppressive forces worsening the situation of insecurity and mass exodus of the people. What is happening to the Igbo people of Nigeria may not be different from what other ethnic groups in the African continent are experiencing. Indeed, the Igbo predicament is the black people's predicament.

CONCLUSION

Charity Begins at Home

The well-known Igbo adage "**Ana esi na ulo ama mma apu ama**" - Your beauty should radiate at home before your kinsmen for it to exert any force in the world community - is the English aphorism, "Charity begins at home." Those whose achievements, fame, and honor have little or nothing to do with their people or community are not regarded as great men and women in Igboland. Surely it is the same with other peoples of the world. It does not make much sense when the impact of such achievements is not felt within the local community of Igbo people.

What sense does it make to Igbo people if their sons are "Members of the British Empire" or are decorated with Royal and Papal honors, when these "illustrious sons of the British Empire" have not been honored in their own communities in Igboland with any of the traditional titles? A true, honest, illustrious son of Igboland, a philanthropist, the lover of his people who has helped in the development of his community would receive many cherished traditional titles. He would begin at home by extending his wealth to the poor masses of his community, awarding scholarships to poor students, and helping to provide the basic amenities that the local communities need to survive.

What sense does it make to the Igbo people if one of their sons has received many medals and international awards in various fields of modern research - through scientific breakthroughs in medicine or computer technology - when the community is not even aware that God had endowed that son with such talents? If the Igbo scientist has placed at least some of his contributions at the disposal of his people at home, surely the people would have crowned him "king" overnight. Igbo people cherish greatness and adore celebrities. They take to the streets in celebration when any of their sons and daughters is recognized

for a great achievement. If the achievement is on the international level, celebrations last days. After all, it is not only the white people who can be great!

What sense does it make to Igbo people if their son, now a naturalized American or British citizen, is elected mayor of New York or London when he has contributed nothing to the development of a political system in Nigeria or Africa? Surely he must have been an extraordinarily talented politician or businessman to be honored by white people. There are many Igbo sons and daughters who are highly respected philanthropists in Europe and America, but are little known or heard of in Igboland and Nigeria.

Of what practical significance are the achievements of Igbo medical researcher who has discovered the most modern cure for **obesity** or **Alzheimer's disease** in the United States or Great Britain when most Africans die of **malaria** and **malnutrition**? Does he not think that it is important research to find out how most African foodstuffs could be enriched to supply the needed nourishment? Does the Igbo researcher not know that obesity is not a particularly problematic ailment in Africa? Obesity could be caused by too much consumption of food and drink. Often certain people spend a fortune in medical treatments to lose weight, while millions of people look for scraps of food to put on some weight during the year! "Prosperity diseases" are not familiar African ailments.

What of the Igbo professor of linguistics who teaches foreign languages in European and American universities and does not even speak his native language or encourage the development of African languages? If he were to be "a man of his people," in what language would he address them when they gathered at the village squares to listen to his speeches? Would he need an interpreter to communicate with his fellow Africans who have not learnt foreign languages? There are numerous examples to show that many Igbo intellectuals and businessmen have continued to disappoint their people and have failed to realize that "charity begins at home." If these illustrious Igbo sons, as Ohafia people would think, have gone to foreign countries to "hunt for human heads" (in the modern sense, academic degrees), what are the sons bringing home to their

people? As Mc Call recalls, as for Ohafia people, it is not what one has achieved outside his fatherland that matters, but with what he has returned home!

By taking the perspective that charity begins at home, it would not be difficult for Igbo intellectuals, scholars, political agitators, and all ordinary and well-meaning Nigerians and Africans to realize that the battle for social, cultural, economic, and political change in the black world cannot be won from exile. Even the publication of many books and posting of articles on Web Sites on the Internet may not produce the desired results. Even in the most developed world very few people surf the Internet or even own computers. As for such material reaching the Africans in Mother Africa, it may be a crazy idea to place hope in modern electronic media for easy communication in African program of mass education and empowerment for any sensible revolution for change. After all the phone lines are not there - or rather, most of them are dead!

The Igbo, Nigerians, and Africans truly concerned about the critical situation in the fatherland should borrow a page from our brothers, the African-Americans – ancient and modern. African-American leaders, from the earliest days of civil rights movements, have in word and action, been "Men of the People." In the face of danger and threats to their lives they have always in times of crises identified with the masses. The leaders who organized civil rights marches themselves used to take the front row in those long marches. They never asked the people to walk while they flew into the cities in their jets and helicopters. Even today, American "Leaders of the black people" march hand-in-hand and side-by-side with the masses in peaceful demonstrations when blacks are oppressed in any way.

Martin Luther King Jr. didn't write many books. But his moving speeches are contained in large collections. He could not be silenced even when he was thrown into prison. His "Letters from Birmingham Jail" offer many memorable materials for Black Studies Curricula today. His incarceration did not put to an end his ambition of achieving a defined dream for the American nation. In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. was hauled off to jail in the aftermath of the Birmingham confrontation with the Public Safety Commissioner and

municipal authorities. Beatings, hosing, and the unleashing of vicious dogs did not deter thousands of demonstrating blacks from risking serious injury, even death.

When King was criticized by a group of white clergymen who blamed him for precipitating the violence, he penned subdued but passionate letters to reply to his colleagues, smuggling the letters out on toilet tissues, the margins of newspapers, indeed on any scrap of paper available to him. Excerpts of the letters indicated more than just extreme despair and anxiety; they offered eloquent testimony to the flaming moral concern for oppressed humanity, which was King's legacy to his fellow Americans. Black American leaders, direct descendants of the ex-slaves, did not flee America into exile to fight their cause for freedom and equality in the United States. They did not look for a safe spot outside America, or a more sympathetic foreign government or power whence to wage their war of independence and freedom. They were ready to argue their cases from Church pulpits, from makeshift platforms at civil rights rallies. Where their voices were not clearly heard they sought redress in the High Courts of the land. These leaders could not be intimidated, either by physical threats from government or other enemies. Boldness and courage guided their battle for the freedom of their people and for justice. In various ways today African-Americans have continued to express their grievances through marches and protest rallies.

Olaudah Equiano, an Igbo slave, fought and gained his own freedom and was bold enough to present his anti-slavery petition to England's Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III, in his campaign for the freedom of his African brothers and sisters languishing under the dehumanizing chains of slavery. It was the unprecedented courageous action of Joseph Quincé, the young African leader of the Amistad mutiny that led to the hearing of the case of the enslaved Africans in the highest court of the United States. Prosecutors argued that, as slaves, the mutineers were subject to the laws governing conduct between slaves and their masters. But trial testimony determined that while slavery was legal in Cuba, importation of slaves from Africa was not. Therefore, the judge ruled, rather than being merchandise, the Africans were victims of kidnapping and had

the right to escape their captors in any way they could.¹²⁵ Victoriously Quincé led the remaining African freed slaves back to Sierra Leone in Africa. One of the youngest African captors of the Amistad was bold enough to write a short letter to the president of the United States, John Quincy Adams, appealing for the intervention of the president on behalf of the marooned Africans. Who would not evaluate the impact of that letter on the later history of slavery?

True leaders of the people should focus their primary attention on the people. When they have won the hearts of the people, then they may address their protests to the right quarters. Such battles against oppression and injustice are not fought and won from enclaves in exile. They begin with summons from concerned leaders of the people that take the nature of "A Million Man March" to a designated political arena. Government should not always be held culpable for all of the people's misfortunes. Indeed, the people also have their own responsibilities and all must be taken into consideration for any equitable resolution of any problem - political, social, economic, religious, and cultural. In some cases, leaders point out the people's own "sins." A complete change of lifestyle or attitude might even help to resolve problems hitherto thought to be political or economical. It is often inexpedient to "separate" religion from politics. Religion can help resolve some political questions. In this regard, African new-breed leaders and politicians can borrow a page from the black brothers in America. Martin Luther King Jr. was a minister of a Christian Church; so also is Jesse Jackson. Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, and a host of others were and are ardent Christian and Moslem religious leaders. They put their religious faith and convictions to the advantage of their battle for the freedom of their oppressed people.

They did not use their Moslem religious leadership to molest and subjugate peoples of other religious convictions. In fact the majority of their followers are non-Moslems. This is in great contrast to what is happening in Africa today, where many African Moslem leaders put their Islamic faith first in all things. They do not fail to carry out Jihad - the Moslem Holy War - against fellow Africans who do not accept Islam. Millions of

Africans have perished in the past on account of religious differences. The case is even worse today and accounts for more than 90 percent of African political problems.

Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Reverend Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan, and a host of other Church ministers have used and continue to use their positions as "prophets of Yahweh," "ministers of the Christian religion," "apostles of Prophet Muhammad" - as well as their positions as political leaders of their people, - to fight for the freedom of their oppressed people. What are the millions of Church ministers and Moslem religious leaders doing to liberate their people from oppression and suffering in Africa today? How are they using the Bible, the Koran, and the pulpits to address the problems of the people and the political impasse in most African countries today? It was reported that Quincé stunned Americans when he was allowed to address the people in a Church during the financial appeal in the American Churches to raise funds to hire a ship to bring back the freed human cargo of the Amistad to Africa. He quoted the following verse from the bible: "After that, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Let my people go. (Exodus: 5. 1) What are the bishops, pastors, and other ministers of African Christian Churches and Independent New Religious Movements doing about the suffering of their numerous flocks? What are they preaching to them on Sundays and Sabbath days?

The miserable and shameful state of insecurity of life and property in our fatherland is a naked fact that should be acknowledged by all concerned Igbo people, Nigerians, and Africans. Stories of armed robbery and lawlessness in public and private life have kept many who find themselves and their families in the greener pastures of Europe and America from visiting their fatherland. This is a tragic and most disturbing development in the struggle of black people for survival. Most of the African problems require **spiritual** solutions. Pastors of souls, leaders of the millions of Churches and Mosques in Africa, must come out and join the crusade for moral renewal. Young people who terrorize their fellow citizens in the nights and broad daylight have to be brought back to the fold of those who fear God and keep his laws. They need spiritual healing.

Black African leaders should not forget the importance of spiritual regeneration in the modern society.

Although no one will deny that evil thrives everywhere; in our case we are able to draw the conclusion that the deplorable state of black teenagers in Africa and the United States has been worsened as a result of deprived family and community care and support. It is not in the nature of the black person to be violent, evil, immoral, irresponsible, delinquent, and burden to society. **Louis Farrakhan**, the black Islamic leader, seemed to have realized this loss at the **Million-Man March**. He addressed his fellow Black Americans; but he was, in fact, not addressing only Black Americans. Ndi Igbo, Nigerians, and all Africans should take Farrakhan's words to heart:

Now, brothers, moral and spiritual renewal is a necessity. Every one of you must go back home and join some Church, Synagogue, Temple, or Mosque that is teaching spiritual uplift. There are no men in the Church, in the Mosque. The men are in the streets and we have to get back to the house of God.

What are the young men doing in the streets, in the dark hours of the night, threatening lives and carrying away people's belongings? If they are on street corners looking for jobs, employers of labor should kindly take note and help keep the youths out of the streets. If they are on the street corners drinking and trafficking in drugs, that is surely an unwelcome news for every well-meaning government authority, Church minister, and other community leader -black or white. Something must be done to rehabilitate these idlers who often terrorize families and communities. Are they gathered at bus-stop shelters looking for opportunities to commit crime? It is not only security agents who have a job to accomplish here. Where are the itinerant Evangelists, the Jehovah's Witness Brothers – the Assemblies of God Mission preachers? Where are the Muslim Brothers? Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Traditional Religionists have to witness to the same God of the Universe who "makes the sun to rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." (Matt. 5.45)

It is clear that the mass exodus of the Igbo, Nigerians, and other Africans from their fatherland in search of better conditions overseas will not resolve the black people's problems. After exile, and a sweet or bitter life in a foreign land, there will arise sometime the need to return to the fatherland. The situation should not be allowed to deteriorate beyond redemption. Igbo elders put it clearly to those who fail to consider the remote consequences of their action by reminding such people that "the palm wine tapper who defecates on his pathway to the palm tree must be ready to face the menace of vicious flies when he returns to his business later." In spite of their education and claim to be the most progressive and civilized people of the black world, it is not difficult to discover that Ndi Igbo have lost ground and Nigeria may no more be the giant of Africa. An Igbo scholar makes this clear to his people:

Today, we are faced with a modern day version of that very scenario that our ancestors and members of their respective generations faced: a near total stagnation (if not destruction) of Igbo civilization; persistent superstitions that have no rational basis, but have rather tended to stifle the progress of our civilization; impoverished state of education in general; lack of meaningful technological advancement, moral decay, greed, corruption, disease and an overwhelming poverty all through Igboland. This is a situation we must do something about! We have enough Igbo scientists and engineers, scholars, and artisans, etc who have the skills to tackle the aforementioned problems. We must not allow this mess to continue!¹²⁶

Surely everybody wishes that this bad situation would change for the better. But the crucial question once again: "Who will bring about the desired changes?" Who will "bell the cat?" The *exiles* must consider a return to the fatherland and contribute their quota in the Herculean task of reconstruction of the devastated villages, communities, and cities. But whatever measures concerned Ndi Igbo, Nigerians, and other Africans recommend for a return to sanity in the black world, there is no doubt that

education can never be relegated to the background. The renowned Igbo based scientist, Philip Emeagwali, makes the point:

Education is a life-long process and Nigerians must continue education at the public libraries. Nigerians who do not read widely will not be politically aware or concerned about reducing the moral decay, corruption and injustices in the country and in the world. They will not understand that it is a crime for a police to request bribes and a crime to offer bribes to a police officer."¹²⁷

Perhaps a "**Back to the Roots Movement**" might help tremendously toward finding solutions to most of the black people's problems. Deeper reflection over the issues at stake will help in finding answers to Emeagwali's questions addressed to the members of World Igbo Congress: "Where can we find the good leaders of tomorrow? Where can we find the medical doctors to take care of us tomorrow? Where can we find the civil engineers to repair our roads?"

It is not enough to lament over the past and even the present. Urgent solutions must be sought to avoid any further drifting of our fatherland down the steep mud of political instability, social anarchy, and economic chaos. Surely many wise lessons could be learned by taking a meticulous and painstaking look past structures - remote and not-so-remote structures - and institutions that have brought progress to the people, communities, and governments of African nations and black peoples worldwide. But whatever contributions Africans - scholars and intellectuals as well as common people at home or in Diaspora - are making to improve modern society in whatever field of endeavor, the saying "**Charity begins at home**" can never be ignored. It is a worse tragedy to imagine that the past - the **Stone Age** - should be thought to be better than the present times in the black world.

Igbo sons and daughters, Nigerians, and Africans in search of greener pastures do not need to be reminded by their hosts that they could serve the black continent better if they went back and settled in their fatherland. They do not need to be

caught by some new immigration laws before they begin to think about Mother Africa. It should neither be recommended that these Africans who feel that they have settled permanently in Europe and America should wait until they are forced to reconsider their intentions by one form of disappointment or misfortune. They have to think seriously of returning to Africa because their services are badly needed by their countrymen and women there.

Africans can save Africa. They have the resources, but lack the courage and discipline to face the situation. There is no doubt that in terms of natural resources, Africa is the world's richest continent. It has 50% of world's gold, most of the world's diamonds and chromium, 90% of cobalt, 40% of the world's potential hydroelectric power, 65% of the manganese, millions of acres of untilled farmlands, as well as other natural and mineral resources. But despite its natural wealth, Africa is still home to the world's most impoverished and abused people. It is true that the legacy of colonialism should in part be blamed for Africa's troubles. At the same time, it is a shame and sickening to think of a situation where it can be said that the average African was better off under colonialism than he has ever been under independence.

Critics are quick to point out, and rightly, too, that before independence, every African country was self-sufficient in food production; today most depend on imports, and others stand at the brink of famine. At the time of independence, the average growth rate among African countries was 3%. By 1980, it has fallen to 1% and by 1990, to minus 2.8%. Very few critics - white and black - believe that more foreign aid to African countries is the solution for the Africa's economic predicament. They point out that the money either winds up in the hands of the elite and is deposited in Swiss bank accounts, or it is used to pay bribes to keep corrupt governments in power. Reports about how Nigeria's most vicious dictator, Sani Abacha squandered millions of dollars on personal security alone started emerging just after his mysterious death. The dictator was known to have operated a 3000-man personal security service that indeed inspired fear. Obsession with security to the point of paranoia was watchword of Abacha's rule. Abacha's special bodyguards, an ethnically

drawn force were trained by North Korean and Libyan experts. Throughout the four years of his rule of terror, Abuja, the Nigerian capital and Aso Rock, the luxuriously marbled official mansion of the head of state were always heavily guarded by soldiers and minutely policed by plain-clothed agents. Nobody dared criticize Abacha and his government publicly, and even conversions were tight-lipped.

Rebounding quickly from a devastating civil war that nearly broke Nigeria up in the late 1960s, Nigeria was hailed as model of African democracy and prosperity. Its press was among the freest anywhere. Nigeria was indeed seen by her neighbors as the leader of African nations. On diplomacy, strengthened by the country's emergence as a leading petroleum producer, Nigeria forcefully was in the position to challenge United States and Britain over questions like apartheid and Western support for guerillas in Angola. There was no doubt that Nigeria contributed much to the reversal of the fortunes of the blacks of South Africa and in the return of peace in Angola. There can be no other convincing explanation why many Nigerians fled to South Africa when the economic situation in their home country started to worsen. Some younger Nigerians who remembered the "Free Mandela Campaign" in Nigeria had thought that on arrival in South Africa they would be welcomed with open arms out of gratitude to the government of Nigeria for its role in providing arms and cash to the African National Congress during the protracted battle to end the last bastion of white rule on the African continent.

In the late 1990s Nigeria was the "Super Power" in the West African regions of Sierra Leone and Liberia as Nigerian military engaged in the restoration of peace in those troubled nations. Nigeria's campaign in the restoration of peace and democracy among her neighbors in West Africa was a piece of paradox. Not a few critics have addressed Nigerian military leaders in the following words: "Physician, cure yourself. Do here in your native place the things that we hear were done in Capernaum." (Luke: 4.23) Several peace talks between the Sudan's two warring parties have been held in Abuja, as Nigerian leaders mediated to resolve that country's shameful war of

genocide that had led to the death from starvation of hundreds of thousands of Sudanese Children

That was Nigeria of the "ancient good days!" The Nigeria of 1990s is a country in steep decline. Electricity and water supplies in most cities are unreliable, at best. When Nigeria became independent in 1960, it had more than 60,000 kilometers of main roads. By the mid 1980s the country had more than 150,000 kilometers of main roads including great highways that compared well with others in Europe and America. Today, less than 10,000 kilometers of roads remain usable in Nigeria. In the oil boom years of the 1970s Nigeria had the 33rd-highest per capita income in the world, but by 1997, it slipped to the 13th-poorest nation, according to UN figures. In the late 1970s, the national currency, the **Naira**, was worth twice as much as the dollar. Nowadays, one dollar fetches 80 naira. The economic decline, no doubt is a result of corruption as top military and civilian leaders siphon off billions of dollars in oil revenue for personal profit.

The tendency to admit failure, incompetence, and an inferior status, consciously or unconsciously, is always there and may remain the greatest stumbling block to progress and development in Africa. In order to regain consciousness and face the challenges of our times in the black world, Africans and black people all over the world should get rid of the culture of mediocrity and self-pity, rejecting those negative attributes that seem to have been falsely imposed on the black race. It is for all blacks everywhere to prove their detractors wrong instead of confirming the impression that Africa, the black world, and black people are irredeemable or that the past is better than the present.

When I saw the title and read excerpts from "**OUT OF AMERICA - a Black Man Confronts Africa**," an explosive book written by an African-American journalist **Keith Richburg**, I was delighted I had got in my hands useful materials provided by a fellow black who shared my views about our fatherland. I thought I would read Richburg's book several times and quote from it copiously to support my views about Africa, her problems, and her future. Alas! I was disappointed. Even though most of the things the author of "Out of America"

was saying are true, I decided not to read the book twice and never to quote from it to support my arguments. Richburg's audacity to express, without apology, that which many an American black and blacks everywhere will **never** like to hear - namely, that black Americans are lucky that a "quirk of fate" brought their ancestors to the shores of the New World; which means that American blacks by being made slaves in the New World have been saved from the never-ending problems of modern Africa!

I saw in Richburg's book elements of frustration, indeed the dilemma of most Africans of Diaspora. There may be some Africans in the United States, Canada, and some parts of Europe who like Richburg believe that they are fortunate to be living outside Africa. Surely a little reflection would convince them that they are wrong. Richburg, no doubt is well informed about the supposed reasons for the ongoing chaos that still sweeps most of the African continent - about the consequences of white colonialism, unsuitable political systems, the time that is still required for all this to be overcome and so on - yet he maintained his extreme position on the black continent's tragedy. There is no doubt that Africans and Americans alike were angry with the author and not a few denounced him with venomous words.

There is no way **slavery** should be preferred to any other status, no matter how poor or degrading. No Native American Indian in his right senses would thank the gods of their ancestors for allowing the invaders and colonialists to perpetrate atrocities against the Indians by grabbing their lands, decimating the population and squeezing a few survivors into Reservation Camps. One angry African said of Richburg: "A shallow low-grade African-American who has sold his soul." Not a few whites and journalists ridiculed Richburg's nauseating reckless utterances and conclusions as well as his comparisons of Africa and Asia. Most were convinced that Richburg had one or two things in mind - to please a white audience or to make money. Africans who have read Richburg's book may forgive this African son. But whatever the case may be, both those who support or denounce his views will find his writing useful in their reflections on the black people's search for redemption, rather than in the search for Greener Pastures.

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