

CULTURE AND THE PORTRAYAL OF IGBO HISTORY: THE NOLLYWOOD EXAMPLE, 1992 TO 2012.

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ABSTRACT

Scholars on culture history have identified culture as the people's pride and embodiment of their worldview. But when a peoples culture becomes impinged upon by innovations, especially the exotic (introduced from outside its microcosm), disarticulations are bound to be created into their socio-cultural, political and economic history. Apart from minuscule Aboh and Onitsha, the political system in Igboland is not centrally structured, thus the saying: "**Igbo Enwe Eze**" (the Igbo do not have kings). This paper sought to put into proper perspective the contradiction portrayed by the majority of Nollywood movies (Igbo) on the Igbo political system, as they emphatically assert that the Igbo (pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial) operated a centralized political administration, portraying a retinue of servants, princes, princesses, and non-farming palace chiefs

Introduction

Culture is the totality of a people's way of life: their norms, values and orientation. It is a phenomenon that is hammered on the anvils of a common history and shared experiences... Some of the ingredients of culture are beliefs, identities, traits, moral values, ethical ideas, virtues, as well as religion, arts and crafts.¹

People's culture must be in tandem with their every day-to-day way of life and not appraised from an outsider perspective. Whether a people run a

segmentary or centralized political structures or worship motley gods or one Christian God are responses to their needs and forms the way they perceive their world. Derived from the Latin word “cultus”, culture means the complex whole which includes the people’s knowledge spectrum, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.² But the culture of any society or cultural group must be connected to its geography, nutrition, diseases and challenges, such as accidents and wars.³ Regarding the topic being surveyed, culture is like a map, an abstract but approximate representation of a particular cultural entity which enables the young and stranger to find their way in particular cultural niches. Culture is a web of significance which man has spun for himself.⁴

The focus of this paper is to put into proper historical perspective the indigenous political culture of **Ndi-Igbo** vis-à-vis the portrayal of the political institutions by the Nollywood films.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE IGBO

According to Marvin Harris:

Before the evolution of the state, the average human being enjoyed economic and political freedoms which only a privileged minority enjoy today. Men decided for themselves how long they would work on a particular day, what they would work at, ... or if they would work at all. Women too... set up their own daily schedules. There were few routines. People did what they had to do, but the where and when of it was not laid out by someone else.⁵

People at this stage lived like peasants. But with the evolution of some forms of centralization, the peasants lost their freedom of participation and access to certain facilities without paying taxes, tributes and, generally, without permission. The communalistic system, the execution of warfare and commerce were taken away from the people and turned over to specialist soldiers, policemen and departments of commerce. Those who had amassed capital (wealth) acquired certain statuses that enabled them to lord it over those who had not. Importantly, they controlled the coercive organs of state. Therefore, kings and leaders emerged with the assistants of institutions such as military officers, police chiefs, judges, jailers and jails. Hitherto, the Ezes - in council and village assemblies executed these functions.

At what point did this change occur? Scholars have averred that the

evolution of states was the consequence of the intensification of agriculture, engagement in extra-territorial commerce and the accumulation of capital, which obviously led to differentiations in statuses. The Igbo engaged in intense commercial activities, and even with the existence of some militarily disposed communities, such as the Abam and Ohafia, had oracular deities, such as the Ibiniukpabi and Amadioha of the Arochukwu and Nri, respectively, yet did not evolve into states. Although the Onitsha seemingly possesses some political centrality as is evident in the paraphernalia of its Obi and Ozo title holders, and some peripheral Igbo communities such as the Aboh and Agbor, which portray centralized structures, the Igbo political structures, in all its variants, have remained non-centralized and non-professional.

In looking at the so-called non-centralized societies, Robin Horton and Henderson⁶ discerned three types: - the segmentary which is solely based on kinship and descent, the complementary type - where lineage and territorial principles obtained; and the complex - where the age grade and ability principles cut across the lineage and territorial principles. In most Igbo communities, it does appear that the lineage and age grade principles overlap. Thus, there is the territorial aspect of belonging to the society. Individuals also owe allegiance not only to their lineages but also to their age grades. The subgroups of villages could be defined as complementary parts of an organic whole. Relationship is conceptualized within each village and between the subgroups of villages. Each village has as its lowest unit the family or extended family. This is made up of the man, his wife (or wives), his unmarried daughters and sons, as well as his married sons and their wives and children. The man who is the household head, is responsible for sharing the family land at the beginning of the planting season, resolve conflicts, disciplines members in their inter-relationships, and represents their external interests. He exercises ritual functions as minister at family shrines.

Above the family unit is the compound, **ezi**. This comprises between thirty and fifty families with their separate household heads. The families in an **ezi** are patrilineally related, but live in most cases with their matrikins. They constitute the **umudi**. Irrespective of the household heads, the compound, **ezi**, had a head that lived in the compound's meetinghouse, **ezi obi**. Compound headship was, and is still, hereditary. He must be a descendant of the founder of the **ezi**. Every **ezi** has its land with the compound head, **Eze ezi** or **Ozo**, as the custodian. He performs ritual functions regarding the **ezi** and its land. Many lineages or compounds form the village. The relationship between the villages is to the highest degree and the village is regarded as an exogamous group because of the

consanguineal ties, real or putative, that binds the members together. As a result of the matrilineal traits of some Igbo communities, endogamy was practiced between larger maximal lineages. But the Igbo are essentially exogamous in their marital relations.⁷

Using the Abam as a case study, decisions concerning village affairs were taken by the **ukerabuo cheogo** (chiefs). These decisions are, however, not taken arbitrarily, rather the people, **ama-ali**, are summoned to the village square, **ebele**, where everyone is allowed to air his views on whatever issue is at stake. The **ukerabuo cheogo** usually withdraws to conduct and take the final decision. Because of the democratic nature of the Abam society, the decisions of the chiefs are at times disregarded. If it involves matters, like land disputes, other agencies, such as oath taking, **iri arunsi**, are resorted to before appropriate deities for remediation. The **arunsi** is expected to produce effects within a stipulated period, usually a year. If nothing happens after the period, it is assumed that those who took the oath are innocent. The villages have similar structures of coordinate lineages, which are equivalent to each other, minimizing conflicts between them. Crosscutting institutions such as village associations and age grades do not mar this equivalence. The age grade divides society into old and young, while the associations' divide society into the "qualified and initiated" and "unqualified and uninitiated"⁸ tensions and envy were averted because those in the lower status usually went up to the higher status through hard work.

Robin Horton, although classifying societies into three types, agrees that age grades and associations do not only exist in the complex type but also in the segmentary and complementary types too. He thus remarks that the "cross-cutting institutions then are much sufficient tools of organizing a harmonious village life than are the lineages; and this is undoubtedly why the communities are extensively compact settlements."⁹ These make internal political relations complicated in small-scale societies. According to Simon and Phoebe Ottenberg:

African political systems are characterized by the inter-relations of the factors of kinship, territoriality and allegiance. In some societies one may be more significant than another, but they all seem to be significant to some extent.¹⁰

Chiefs whose positions are determined by belonging to certain age grades play prominent roles in the running of the affairs of society. But there is an **Eze** who is at the head of Abam administration as a whole. This functionary

is not chosen by virtue of belonging to an age grade but to a lineage.

Age Grade Institution: As a Socio-political Factor

Age grade associations were locally called **Otu-ogbo, Ebiri, or Uke**. It was an organized group of people who were born within a given period of time. The age bracket used varied from one community to another. The predominant age bracket used was usually one to three (1-3) years, or more. It is an age-long institution whose origin the people cannot explicitly explain. As observed by Chief Agbai, "We met it at birth and our parents did not start it"¹¹. The composition of age grade varied from place to place.

In some communities, it maintained a particular sex line, while in others, it could cut across such lines. Chief Emenike said that in Ibeku, men form the **Uke** (Age Grade Association), and their wives could decide to come together to form their own. Also, married women in the community within an age bracket could form their own **Uke** without reference to the ones their husbands belonged to. The maidens of the community did not form any **Uke**¹².

In Ohafia, membership of the age grade association was based only on age brackets (usually 3 years) and not on sex. Once a **Uke** was formed, it was open to all males and females that fall within the age limits of the group. The wives of the male members did not have automatic ticket to membership, except their ages fell within the required bracket. Their wives could belong to other age grades, which accommodated their age. In the mixed age grades, the men held their meeting separately from the women, though once in a while, they held joint meetings. On occasions hosted by members, such as weddings, child dedication and burial, men and women of mixed age grades attended such functions together¹³.

With respect to personal benefits, the age grade was used to bind members together, which enabled among them mutual aid. They used the opportunity to leverage one another in the areas of farming, building, marriage, burial, et cetera. They usually ignited healthy competition among members, which was instrumental in inspiring them to achieve a lot individually. On community basis, age grades were very effective in community assignments and they also undertook public works. They were like pressure groups used to mobilize the people to achieve economic, political and socio-cultural gains for the community. These they achieved at different stages of their life span. Nwabughuogu¹⁴ has observed that through this system, the senior grades were differentiated from the juniors, which gave room for the senior grades to supervise the younger ones in the community works assigned to them. Other functions of age grades included,

among others, the maintenance of law and order in the society, settlement of disputes within and outside its membership, construction and maintenance of roads and markets, maintenance and cleanliness of the local streams, guarding the public morality and defending the people against any form of aggression.

Furthermore, age grade associations were very instrumental in maintaining peace within the community. The composition of membership of each age grade comprised people from different families and backgrounds. One of the major goals of the groups was that they strove to maintain the bond holding them together, which was a very formidable means of peace and stability among the people. Any differences that occurred in the community were investigated objectively and resolved amicably by members who saw themselves more as brothers and sisters, without taking sides based on family ties or other affinities. Besides, the system enabled capturing the census figure of the people. As an integral part of the society, everybody aspired to belong to age grade. In traditional Ibeku-land, for instance, the limit of the composition of every **Uke** in terms of numbers was thirty (30). At the completion of this number, commenced the formation of a new **Uke**, starting with the age grade taking a name. Therefore, it was easy to access the number of the matured men, who could be levied, by counting the number of **Uke** in the village. This was instrumental to raising capital and effective administration of the people¹⁵.

In traditional Igbo society, the economic benefits of age grade associations were many. The effectiveness of the system varied from place to place. It was very effective in Nkporo, Item, Alayi, Abiriba, Abam and other areas. The level of effectiveness of the system in the areas mentioned could not be compared to other places such as Anara in Isiala Mbano. Though the people had the culture of "**Iwa Akwa**", which will be explained subsequently, they did not look up towards the age grade for governance and development. Rather their radar focused on title societies for leadership and development of the area.

The age grade associations took formal character at about adolescent age. At about twenty (20) years of age, the group was formally initiated into manhood¹⁶. At this stage, it was believed that such a person would be capable of having a home, providing for his home and defending it. The initiation into manhood took different forms in different Igbo societies. In Nkporo, for instance, it was referred to as initiation into **Agbala**. Also, in Edda, the group initiated was formed into the **Egbela Edda** Secret Cult¹⁷. In many parts of Imo State it was called "**Iwa Akwa**", and "**Iwanyi Ogodo**" in Anambara. The initiation assured one some degree of social prestige in the

community. He could, for example, call on the community to accompany him take a wife, and they obliged him. Without being initiated into manhood, he could only make such a call through his father or relative who must have been initiated. The rite of passage has attracted comments from scholars.

According to one source, for example:

In many areas this rite of passage is a ceremony called Iwa Akwa. This is a mandatory entry into manhood. With this rite, those involved moved into adulthood and are expected to undertake the responsibilities such as marriage, payment of levies etc. At this stage, they can represent the village in the gathering of adults. Initiation is important as a process of age grade formation and membership because those who perform the Iwa Akwa at a period must belong to a particular age grade. At no time, do age grades enter the manhood stage at the same time. And when this happens, age grade has been formed and a stamp of responsibility put on the group initiated¹⁸.

Chief Agbai noted that Nkporo village in Abia State has a very elaborate, pragmatic and effective age grade system. My respondents stated that after the initiation into manhood rites, the next ceremony was performed when members were about the ages of thirty-eight to fourty (38-40) years. The ceremony was called 'Ingwa mmang'. At this age, they were believed to have acquired positive traits in life that would equip them to assume responsibilities. The ceremony conferred on the age grade the title '**Uke Ji Ogo**', which meant, the age grade that governs the community. They had the responsibility to maintain peace, law and order, and to defend the people from any form of aggression, as well as general governance of the community. They constituted the war generals that led the people during wars. They made laws, enforced discipline and initiated community development programmes and activities.

They also noted that, the **Uke ji ogo** governed the people in consultation with the Council of Chiefs and Elders (**Nde Ichie**) who belonged to senior age grades. They also had the support of theirs wives who participated actively in ensuring that the government of their husbands was successful. The wives took care and presided over the affairs of women in the society. The age grade could appoint a wise Elder as its patron, and would always seek his counsel on certain issues of their administration and

development.

Igwa mmang Ceremony was performed every seven years, which implied that the government of each age grade, **Uke Ji Ogo**, ended every seven years with the initiation of a new group. However the people and 'Nde Ichie' could push out a non-performing **Uke Ji Ogo**. The outgoing **Uke Ji Ogo** would perform a higher traditional ceremony known as 'Uche'. This was the ceremony of 'Igbotto Nma' (Laying down the matchet). It was a ceremony of retirement of the members from active duties to the community. Therefore, they became senior citizens of the community once they performed this ceremony. Their pride was the exhibition of the infrastructural and other development projects they bequeathed to the community. After the Uche ceremony, the Uke members were elevated to the level of 'Nde Ichie' (Elders). As has been pointed earlier, they would no longer participate in communal labour nor be levied any more. From the wealth of experiences they acquired over time, they became a source of advice and inspiration to the younger age grades. My respondents said that most of the infrastructural developments in Nkporo were achieved through the age grade system. From the traditional period to the modern times, age grade associations were very outstanding in making roads, building markets and bridges, et cetera. In modern times, they have embarked on building markets, schools, hospitals, churches and others¹⁹.

This could be said of age grade associations in Igboland, especially in communities close to Nkporo (like Edda, Ohafia and Abiriba). Their achievements were very outstanding. In Ohafia, a ceremony similar to **Igwa Mmang** was called '**Izara Afa**' (Taking Name). At this ceremony, the age grade will chose a project, which they strove to complete and bequeath same to the community at '**Igboto Mma**', '**Igboto Omu**' or '**Igba Uche**' ceremony, which marked their retirement from active service to the community²⁰. In Etiti Edda, the age grade that was involved in fund-raising and development levies was the Adumba Age Grade, which was the ruling age grade of the community. Through their efforts, schools, market stalls and other developmental projects were executed in the community²¹. Over a period of time, the achievements of age grade associations in the developmental programmes of communities are well noted. Each age grade wanted to outperform the other, thereby creating an arena for healthy competition and quality services. Belonging to an age grade means becoming a full-fledged citizen, and part and parcel of the political system.

In Abam, an age grade organization usually starts, when young people whose ages fall within approximately three years constitute an age set. The elders do not immediately accept the organization until it performs

the **afia ogo** (referred variously in different communities) ceremony, which is a maturity rite. This is usually performed at the expiration of every four years for any new age grade. Although the age grade members chose their names, it is recognized during the age grade naming ceremony at the **ebele**. Members of the would-be age grade embarking on a hunting expedition performed this. We may mention that each age grade is paired with a female counterpart, each supporting the other in festivities.

After the official recognition, the age grade members could claim to have become active participants in the community's affairs. The elders onwards watch their activities and would be liable to fines if they fail to carry out the orders of the elders. Every age grade among the Igbo undergoes this initiation ceremony. Among the Abam, for instance, the last maturity ceremony is the **oso**. This ushers members into the senior age grades which ranges between fifty and sixty years. It can be equated to the taking of the **Ozo** title in northern Igboland. Much importance is attached, to the **Oso** since it is the highest title one could aspire to in **Ohafor Abam**. It lasts eight years during which period two age grades would have performed their **Oso** rites.²² The two age grades then constitutes the **Ukerabuo cheogo**. They thus become chiefs next to the **Onyerubi, Eze ogo**. From this point, their function become advisory, being in-charge of the activities of the junior age grades known as **Umurima uke**.

The female counterparts of the **ukerabuo cheogo** are the **uke ekwe**. In Abam, therefore, it is the ambition of every young man to rise to the highest age grade, which means becoming a chief. Superficially the age grade system would appear to be a form of stratification, but the high degree of mobility in Abam society rules out the question of stratification. Moreso, it is someone's age grade and not necessarily wealth that determines his or her membership of an age grade. Secret societies played important roles in the maintenance of peace and order in Abam.²³ Most of the secret societies, among which were **Ekpe, Aku-akan** and **Obon**, held their meetings at night.

²⁴ According to informants, the essence of these nocturnal meetings was to avoid the prying eyes of the uninitiated. Again, they served as a check to possible invasion at night by thieves and slave hunters just as the **Uke uche** did at daytime.

The Igbo, however, pursued their socio-economic activities without interference by the **Eze**. Since a person is recognized for his achievements, a highly competitive society resulted, making interference unwarranted. Yet, the community norms, to a large extent, moderated and tailored the activities of individuals. Most often, allegiance is to the secret societies, titled societies and age grades to which one belongs and not to the **Eze** whose

importance is usually recognized in times of emergency.

To emphasize point made in the immediate last paragraph, it is worthy to emphasize that before colonial rule, authority was vested in the hands of the societies of secret societies, titled-men or age grade associations, whose members were traditional elders. The notable title societies were **Nze/Ozo**, **Eze-ji (Ezie ji or Di ji)**, and **Okonko**. These were elitist groups who performed religious, political, socio-cultural and economic roles for the people. Members were the custodians of the cultural heritage of the people. For instance, politically, the **Nze/Ozo** were the kingmakers and governed the land with the **Eze**. Before one was initiated into this prestigious titled society, he must be a man of integrity, always on the path of truth and justice, a peacemaker, good leader, avoids taboos of the land, a defender of the community and the poor. He was handed a staff of authority and a symbol of truth called **Ofo**.

In Anara, before one became the **Eze** of the community, he first became a member of the prestigious **Ozo** title-holders, and after his coronation, he was called 'Onye isi Ndi-Nze' (The head of all **Nze**). The **Eze** could not rule the people effectively without the help of **Ozo** titled men. They were wealthy men who used their resources to help in the development of their communities. They offered sacrifices on behalf of members of the family, and therefore, acted as high priests. Besides, they performed the role of judges among the people. They settled all forms of disputes within and outside their communities. Iheanacho stated that **Ozo** titleholders were instrumental to peaceful settlement of dispute among members of the community. Before their court, everybody was equal, irrespective of position or status in the society. Judgment was just, cheap and swift, unlike the conventional courts where justice could be costly, delayed, or even denied²⁵.

Members of the community benefited immensely from them, especially the less privileged. They were the protectors of the community and defenders of the defenseless. Their words were like bonds and were honoured. '**Inye or Izi Mkpara**' (Showing of staff), by **Ozo** title-holders, sufficed to explain how their words were honoured by the people. In times of need or difficulty, the poor could run to an **Ozo** title-holder because he had the capability of salvaging the situation even when he was not financially buoyant. An example was marriage. The titled man could take a poor member of his family or community to the family he wants to marry from. By symbolically giving or showing his staff or other insignia, the proposed family accepted the young man as their son in-law, and the process of marriage could commence. This was done in conviction that the title men

kept their words, and that therefore, he would definitely come to pay the dowry and other marriage rites in due time. Also, indebted men of the community benefitted from this practice. Through showing his staff or insignia, the **Ozo** title-holder could act as a guarantor of a debtor to a creditor²⁶.

The house of an **Ozo** titleholder was like a sanctuary to the people. If a fugitive ran to him, such a person was protected from immediate harm. He later produced the person at gatherings, like family, lineage or village assembly, where disputes were justly handled and resolved²⁷. Furthermore, it was used to ascertain the family backgrounds of members. Any family that had an **Ozo** titleholder guaranteed that members of the family were marriageable and that members of the family could take responsible positions in the community. The presence of the **Nze** showed that the family was no stranger or outcast. Therefore people associated with them freely. On personal ground, the titleholder acquired some privileges and advantages over ordinary members of the community. He represented the extended family or the lineage as a member of the elders of the village council. He presided and prescribed solutions to conflicts or disputes between members of the community. He was the religious leader of his people. He belonged to the social class of 'nobles' and enjoyed all the privileges that came with it. For example, he was first served in the gathering assembly of the community irrespective of his age²⁸. Other privileges were exemption from communal/manual labour, he took the lead in social functions, and would break the kola-nut before it was shared to the people²⁹. The **Ozo** titleholder performed these roles without reference to the **Eze** of the community, in fact, he is the **Eze** of his **ezi** or extended family.

Among **Ndi-Igbo**, the **Eze** only presided over meetings involving other chiefs. He does not participate openly in the running of the affairs of his village. His most useful role to his people is that he is always the fearless emissary, heading delegations on behalf of his particular village. In many Igbo communities, there are no ritual duties attached to the **Eze**'s office, and his removal, when necessary, is the prerogative of the elders of the ruling family, for instance, the **Obi-asato** who are the king making families in the Ohafor Abam.³⁰

Of Truths, Inventions and Imaginary Cinematography

The films or home videos churned out of Nollywood on the Igbo portray the existence of centralized political institutions, with powers and paraphernalia that doused the efficacy of village assemblies, that ape the structures of extant empires to the southwest and northern parts of Nigeria.

A closer look at the portrayals of some of these films show a king, **Eze**, who has princes, princesses and cabinets. This is in addition to the presupposition that a king must be wealthy. Thus, the portrayal of outlandish mansions and recalcitrant princes and princesses. Of some better-scripted ones, the king would own some businesses, which often embroiled his kingdom into squabbles over who inherits not just the kingdom but also his chains of businesses.

The picture often painted gives the false impression that the Igbo political structure in its entirety is centralized. *Deus ex machina*, there is a king who is the people's ruler with the means to support his kingdom and the throne. Regarding pristine societies, there were no organs of government, such as the judiciary, army, police and institutions for reprimands and corrections, such as penitentiaries and jails. Pronto, when a problem arises, there appears elders, often non-wealthy, to assist the king in the event of quarrels or warfare, drought, marriage of the princes and princesses, and consultation with the gods. Other than the elders who are unrelated with members of the communities, is the chief priest who is regarded as the eyes of the gods .

There is a disconnect between the Nollywood king, who in all ramifications is king, and the people. The elders are mere inventions by Nollywood scriptwriters to make these highly modernized Igbo palaces seem peopled. The point being made here is that while it could be naturalistic portraying Igbo socio-political structure hierachically as obtainable among the Onitsha and Aboh, who obviously learned such kingship structures or types from their immediate neighbours in the present-day Edo and Delta States, it does not represent the truth about Igbo democracy which is dependent on the village assemblies that had the latitude to disregard the decisions of the Eze-in-council and the elders, generally. While the Nollywood imput could be regarded as part of the cultural renaissance of the Igbo in the 21st century, it must attempt to put into correct perspective how the Igbo socio-political systems are operated. Again, it could be argued that time constrains the mainstreaming of the village assemblies and that the elders who are always seen in the kings palace would have consulted with the assemblies, the truth remains that while there are semblances of political structures on which centrality would have been constructed, they are stunted and cannot command the respect that accrued to kings in the extant empires in pre-colonial times.

Even in post-colonial times, the political structures of the erstwhile kingdoms subsist with their Oba and Emirs still revered. Perhaps, the Nollywood efforts at recreating the Igbo socio-political pattern has been

informed by, according to E. N. Ota:

The Igbo ... suffered excruciating culture blows from the British colonial administrators. Not only were their political and economic institutions and patterns grossly under-investigated vis-à-vis the Yoruba and Hausa, the extrapolations and generalizations made by European anthropologists and colonial administrators saw Igbo culture and civilization as inferior to those of the other two groups.³¹

It had been suggested the reasons that informed the position of colonial administrators as captured in the last quote came from the expectations and requirements of colonial rule. In the words of Ifemesia:

For instance, it was not only that the British came from a monarchy and so, consciously or monarchical authourities and institutions for establishing and promoting their inescapable expedient of colonial administration; an improvisation which they had glamorized into a philosophy of government called Indirect Rule.³²

What are Stateless (Non-centralized) and State (Centralized) Societies?

Non-centralized Societies are societies where the institutions for the organization of the day-to-day activities are less concentrated and non-specialist. Their recognition by the people they govern is marginal, except, of course, in times of need, such as wars. The people, in turn, do not owe any direct obligation to them, even when disputes arise, the governed resort to oracles, or to wars.³³ But in centralized societies, authority rests on full-time specialists, who unlike the rulers in non-centralized societies are so preoccupied with state functions that they hardly engage in other activities such as agriculture. The rulers here are not remembered only when danger knocks but occupy a central position in the affairs of society, in fact, they are the sole arbiters. In some centralized societies, such as Benin, the Oba was regarded as being divine.³⁴

It is not being suggested here that centralized societies are solely dependent on the activities of specialist individuals and, thus, peculiar to them, but that such individuals could be found in them. It is only that there are certain other factors such as commercial activities, complexity of the

economy and geographical location that could account for centrality.³⁵ These are not, again, peculiar to the centralized societies. Thus, there are similarities between non-centralized and centralized societies.

Non-centralization does not imply absence of political structures and commercial activities that could lead to accumulation of capital and, subsequently, to state formation. From the present distribution of non-centralized societies, they tend to be located away from the major trade routes. But it must be pointed out that it was not all the non-centralized societies that found themselves on trade routes that developed into centralized societies. While agreeing with Emeagwali on what she called the 'Groundwork Perspective' that the development of centralized societies do not depend on an individual or on a group, there are other obvious factors that could accelerate centralization. When non-centralized societies are situated on trade routes there would be a general involvement in trade. As time goes on a group of individuals are bound to accumulate more surpluses than others. Such individuals in village, assemblies, for instance, are easily recognizable and their suggestions for the well-being of the society have never been taken for granted.

They will continue the accumulation of surpluses and with time start making decisions. This will lead to the emergence within the socio-economic order of the society of a dominant class who will like to defend their interests and moderate conflicts in the society. This is tantamount to political practice and authority. Succinctly put, they have acquired economic power through surplus accumulation and political authority since they are now in a position to moderate conflicts. With time these would evolve into political specialists who constitutes the apparatuses of government. They would also introduce such organs as the army, police and courts to suppress those who might not want to adhere to their scheme of things. Of course they will collect revenues to maintain themselves and these organs, in the form of taxes (in cash and in kind).

It was not all centralized societies that were located on trade routes. Some grew by taxing traders who passed through their territories. Thus, the role of commerce in the development of centralized societies cannot be overestimated. Nonetheless some societies in pre-colonial Eastern Nigeria participated in the long distance trade, had political structures, and accumulated capital, yet, could not become centralized. There were some communities in pre-colonial Igboland, such as the Nri and Aro, who participated extensively in commerce and even had military and oracular backings, but could evolve into states. The position here is that it is not trade that transforms non-centralized societies into centralized societies but the

presence of facilitators who will appropriate these surpluses to develop into states. The reasons for these societies remaining non-centralized were because they practiced subsistence agriculture, had non-specialized political apparatuses and the backing of special organs like the police and army. It cannot be explained away by saying they could not evolve into centralized states because they were located away from trade routes; in fact, they were even found in-between centralized societies.

Conclusion

This paper identified the Nollywood efforts at re-creating the Igbo socio-political institutions in the light of the Yoruba and Hausa in post-coloniality. But in spite of this, the truth remains that the Igbo political systems precluded centralization at professional levels. There are mere semblances of the structures on which centralization would have grown on. All the elements for state formation were present. There were armed forces and the people accumulated wealth through intense commercial activities evidently personified by the Aro traders and Abam warriors. But these activities were not coordinated under a leader who could harness these resources into centralization. The village assemblies still predominated. Political leadership was exercised via institutions, not an individual. Among the institutions that performed political functions were age grade associations, titled societies and secret societies. In communities where they exist, each had a delineated function assigned to it.

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