Negotiating Culture: Christianity and the Ogo Society in Amasiri, Nigeria

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Edinburgh
May 2011
DEDICATION

To
Carol Finlay for her love, encouragement and motivation to undertake the PhD studies.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all the materials in this thesis, except where I have duly acknowledged, is my own research and writing. Any uses made within it of works of other authors in any form (e.g. quotation, ideas, figures, text and tables) are properly acknowledged at their point of use.

Signed

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Date: May 2011
ABSTRACT

There have been two key difficulties concerning the study of indigenous rituals, religious conversion and change among the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria, both before and after the missionary upsurge of the mid-nineteenth Century. First is the inadequate awareness or lack of reflexivity by some scholars regarding the resilience of the Igbo indigenous religions. Second is the neglect of oral sources and the over-dependence on missionary archives. This thesis draws on field research on the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN) and the Ogo society in Amasiri. The research method follows a triangulation research design which incorporates an ethnographic methodology. This involves participant observation and interviews, thus allowing for a set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical data. Within the Amasiri clan it is expected that every male will be initiated into the Ogo society as a means of attaining manhood as well as incorporation into the adult group. Refusal to be initiated into the society amounts to ostracisation and a loss of social relevance. The thesis examines the establishment, growth and impact of Christianity among the Amasiri clan in its different phases (colonial and post-colonial eras) - 1927-2008. It demonstrates the interaction between Amasiri indigenous religions and Christianity, in order to show how and to what extent the Ogo society has endured over time. The thesis analyses specific beliefs and ritual practices of the Ogo society and Christianity, paying close attention to the resultant tensions as well as the dynamic of acquired and lived religious identities. In view of the complex patterns of interaction between Christianity and the Ogo society, the thesis explores the following questions: What makes the Ogo society an integral part of the socio-religious life of Amasiri and what powers and identity does it confer on initiates? How are these predominantly indigenous cultural features, expressed within Christian spirituality? What effect does the construction and negotiation of religious identities have on the interaction and co-existence of Christians and members of the Ogo society? Furthermore, three themes were central to this research: the first is the gender dynamic of initiation processes into the Ogo society. The second is the pattern of religious change, identity and politics of Christianity and indigenous cultures. The third is analysing the need for and limits on effective dialogue between Christians and members of the Ogo society. The thesis raises a crucial question, whether religious conversion is partial or total repudiation of indigenous cultures. These analyses propose a viable means of negotiation between Christianity and the Ogo society in Amasiri. It sets the stage for a dialogue between Christianity and the Ogo society, a dialogue that takes the indigenous context seriously.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page
Dedication.................................................................1
Declaration..................................................................2
Abstract....................................................................3
Acknowledgements....................................................4
Table of Contents......................................................6
Abbreviations............................................................9
Illustrations.............................................................10
Glossary.................................................................11

CHAPTER ONE
DEFINITION AND OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Introduction................................................................13
1.1 Research Questions..............................................16
1.2 Objectives of the Thesis.......................................17
1.3 Methodology.....................................................17
1.4 Significance of the Thesis.....................................28
1.5 Literature Review.............................................28
1.6 Historical and Socio-Political Background.............32
1.6.1 Indigenous Organisational Structure................39
1.7 Organisation of the Chapters............................50

CHAPTER TWO
RITUAL PROCESSES AND THE OGO SOCIETY

Introduction ............................................................53
2.1 Ritual Phases and the Ogo Society.......................54
2.1.1 Nde Ena (Boys’ Society).................................56
2.1.2 Nde Nwoke (Adult Group)...............................59
2.1.2.1 Prelimiality (Separation).............................62
2.1.2.2 Liminality (Transition)..............................63
2.1.2.3 Postliminality (Incorporation/Integration) ........................................70
2.2 Ritual: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework .........................................71
2.3 Ritual and Symbol .......................................................................................74
2.4 Ritual and Myth ..........................................................................................78
2.5 The Ogo Society: Identity and Power ............................................................86
2.6 The Ogo Society and Concept of Community ..............................................93
2.7 The Ogo Society: Arts, Music and Masquerades .......................................102
2.8 The Ogo Society and Gender .....................................................................110

CHAPTER THREE
LOCATING THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (UPC) WITHIN
LOCAL AND GLOBAL LANDSCAPE
3.1 Historicising Christian Mission to Nigeria ..................................................117
3.2 Mapping the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN) .................................119
3.3 Mission Expansionism: the PCN at Amasiri .................................................126
3.4 Local Agency and Mission .........................................................................135
3.5 Interface of Ritual Within the PCN ..............................................................139

CHAPTER FOUR
DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE: TRANSITION AND
TRANSMISSION
Introduction ........................................................................................................149
4.1 Western Missions and Discourse of Religious Change ............................150
4.2 Conceptualising Conversion ......................................................................159
4.3 Dynamic of Conversion to Christianity .....................................................165
4.4 Religious Conversion and Relationship ....................................................171
4.4.1 Intra-Personal Relationship ..................................................................172
4.4.2 Inter-personal Relationship ..................................................................175
CHAPTER FIVE
NEGOTIATING CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Introduction
5.1 First Phase (1927-1945)
5.2 Second Phase (1945-1970)
5.3 Third Phase (1970-1990)
5.4 Fourth Phase (Era of Charismatisation/Pentecostalisation, 1990-2008)
5.5 Discourses on Conflict: The Ogo Society and Christianity
5.6 Conflict Resolution

CHAPTER SIX
PARADIGM SHIFT: INTERACTION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND THE OGO SOCIETY

Introduction
6.1 Engaging the Two Models: Dialectic and Dialogic
6.2 Mapping the Factors for Dialectic Approach to Culture
6.3 Engaging the Dialogic Model
6.4 Christianity, Culture and Dialogue
6.5 Dialogic Model: Key Implications

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABFN</td>
<td>Amasiri Believers’ Fellowship, Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AROS</td>
<td>Association of Returned Overseas Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMS</td>
<td>Baptist Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN</td>
<td>Christian Association of Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGIT</td>
<td>Christian Girls in Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COS (CofS)</td>
<td>Church of Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSM</td>
<td>Church of Scotland Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMS</td>
<td>Edinburgh Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACS</td>
<td>Fellowship of Amasiri Christian Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Glasgow Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HFMC</td>
<td>Home Foreign Mission Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRH</td>
<td>His Royal Highness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMP</td>
<td>Jamaica Mission Presbytery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. G. A.</td>
<td>Local Government Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>Men’s Christian Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB</td>
<td>Presbytery of Biafra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCB</td>
<td>Presbyterian Church of Biafra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCEN</td>
<td>Presbyterian Church of Eastern Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCN</td>
<td>Presbyterian Church of Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYPAN</td>
<td>Presbyterian Young People’s Association of Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REV.</td>
<td>Reverend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Scottish Missionary Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFCS</td>
<td>United Free Church of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPC</td>
<td>United Presbyterian Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>WG</td>
<td>Women’s Guild</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1  Map of Amasiri………………………………………………..12
Figure 2  Map of Nigeria……………………………………………….12
Figure 3  Ogbo Ogo – Ogo square, sacred space for the display of
masquerades and other activities of the Ogo society…………59
Figure 4  Ulo Ogo – Ogo sacred house, were some of the initiation
Activities take place…………………………………………………60
Figure 5  Males for initiation into the Ogo society with a man
undergoing the process of taking the Omezue title……………65
Figure 6  Isiji – Pre-initiation masquerade……………………………67
Figure 7  Ikpem – post-initiation masquerade…………………………68
Figure 8  a) Indigenous drummers and b) Enya Chenkwa masquerade
dancing to the beating of the drum……………………………103
Figure 9  Sketch map – part of Southern Nigerian showing the work of
UPC…………………………………………………………………127
## GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahor</td>
<td>The first market/first day of the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akpafu osighiri</td>
<td>Ostracism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>The earth goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eburu</td>
<td>Age grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eke</td>
<td>The third market/third day of the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekpu Uke-eto</td>
<td>Assistant leaders to the Essa at the clan level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essa</td>
<td>Supreme leaders at the clan level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezeke</td>
<td>One of the autonomous villages of Amasiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezeogo</td>
<td>Traditional ruler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibinukpabi</td>
<td>Arochukwu Long Juju</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ihie</td>
<td>One of the autonomous villages of Amasiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ikwunne</td>
<td>Matrilineal relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isiji</td>
<td>A name of a masquerade, also means initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kpokpo</td>
<td>A preparatory masquerade for the initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndie Ichie</td>
<td>Retired Elders also used for ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndukwe</td>
<td>One of the autonomous villages of Amasiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkwo</td>
<td>The second market day of the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwanyi</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwoke</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogo</td>
<td>The village square; it also refers to the society itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oha</td>
<td>Community or crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohaechara</td>
<td>One of the autonomous villages of Amasiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okpaa</td>
<td>A masquerade only performed by initiated persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omeali</td>
<td>Adultery/Atrocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orie</td>
<td>The fourth market/fourth day of the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oririe Nso (Nrie Eze)</td>
<td>Lord’s Supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oroghoro</td>
<td>A masquerade performed only by initiated persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poperi</td>
<td>One of the autonomous villages of Amasiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uke-Ezi</td>
<td>Indigenous rulers of the compound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uke-Ogo</td>
<td>Indigenous rulers at the village level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umudi</td>
<td>Patrilineal relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amasiri is a clan within the Igbo, Southeastern Nigeria. It is a combination of autonomous villages, including Ezeke, Ndukwe, Poperi, Ihie, and Ohaechara. Amasiri is a part of Afikpo Local Government Area in Ebonyi State.

Figure 2 Map of Nigeria showing the different states
CHAPTER ONE
DEFINITION AND OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Introduction
For many Amasiri Christians, the transition processes into a new religion are characterised by experiences of change and continuity. This uncertain process, normally expressed in terms of understanding a new culture with new requirements, highlights many Christians’ endeavour to regain equilibrium. That is, they attempt to integrate their new context, culture and experiences into the existing frame of reference or attempting to repudiate their past. The frame of reference is one that is carved out of the histories and experiences of the indigenous worldview (especially the Ogo society) and therefore forms the primary interpretative lens through which the convert may engage with the new context. The Ogo society is the institution or group into which every male within Amasiri is expected to be initiated.¹ The initiation is an integral part of Amasiri traditional life; it defines a male’s manhood, acceptance and social mobility. The resilience of the Ogo society to and its conflict with Christianity is of note, as well as the strength of its hold on many Amasiri indigenes, despite its years of contact with Christianity, modernity and other change agents.

The issue of modernity leads to further speculation regarding the nature of indigenous religion itself and how some indigenous structures including rituals, myth, symbols and institutions respond to contact with foreign traditions.² The societal and cultural significance of religion during the age of modernity has traditionally been portrayed in dichotic and often ambiguous ways. Proponents of secularisation theses argue that the rapid economic, social and cultural transformation that modernity embodied linearly weakened the hold of religion on

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¹ The initiation into the Ogo society defines both self and community identity, it is also a covenant within a community including the born, unborn and ancestors.

This has led many scholars, even of indigenous communities, to underestimate or even ignore the significance of religion as an explanatory factor in nineteenth and twentieth century history. Re-considering modernity, change, conversion and continuity, it appears, paradoxically, that instead of religion fading away, this encounter rather enables the adjustment processes between Christianity and indigenous religions. This creates a space that facilitates the continuous transformation of the Christian; their new context and their indigenous frame of reference. It is the interactions, transitions and transformations within this creative space over the last eighty years (1927-2008) since Christianity was first established at Amasiri that this thesis focuses upon. It is within this space that many Christians - especially in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN) - live, work, practice their religious beliefs and negotiate their various community ties. Religion continues to play a prominent role in the life of the clan; however, many Christians still have huge problems accommodating the Ogo society. Focusing on the different patterns of interaction within Amasiri, allows for an understanding of the complex interplay between Ogo society and Christianity within the clan.

On the one hand, many indigenous practices, especially those in the Ogo society, seem to have been designated as evil by some early converts to Christianity as well as many contemporary members within the PCN. On the other hand, many members of the Ogo society seem to perceive Christians as having betrayed their heritage. At the heart of this interaction are the power, identity and culture which determine how individuals perceive themselves and others. The tendency of religious adherents to misunderstand and misrepresent each other can therefore be seen as playing a major role in some of today’s conflicts. While many Christians seem to

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5 Christianity was first established in the Amasiri clan through the work of the United Free Church of Scotland (UFSC) in 1927 and since 1959 the church has been called the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN).

insist upon the rejection of the Ogo society, some secretly initiate their male children into it and others openly advocate a point of convergence between Christianity and the Ogo society. Indigenous symbols and practices among Amasiri therefore present the views, concepts and perspectives of the interaction between members of the Ogo society and the PCN as well as stories and images. Attempts to negotiate these varying perspectives often result in conflicts between many Christians and members of the Ogo society, and such tensions have both intra-personal and inter-personal dimensions.

When undertaking this thesis, three themes were of particular interest: the first is the gender dynamic of the initiation processes into the Ogo society. The second is the pattern of religious change, identity, power and politics of Christianity and indigenous cultures among the initiated and uninitiated males into the Ogo society. The third is assessing the need for and limits on effective dialogue between Christians and members of the Ogo society. These themes are drawn on and discussed in terms of the field data. Within the Amasiri clan identity and power are constructed and negotiated through both indigenous and church rituals. Identity therefore does not only exist within a person, but is produced and negotiated between persons.⁷ It is produced and embedded in social relationships, and worked out in the practice of people’s everyday lives. Identity therefore, involves inclusion and exclusion, similarity and difference, and may not be expressed in the singular, as individuals consciously or unconsciously identify themselves in multiple ways.⁸ Examples of the multiple identities include, being female, male, African, Christian etc. The process of negotiating these multiple identities is very complex and involves a variety of simultaneous, inter-related and sometimes conflicting actions.

The thesis presents an interdisciplinary interpretation of appropriating religious practices and educational issues in teaching and training through ritual processes. By focusing on dynamic patterns of negotiation, the thesis aims to provide conceptual tools to help analyse empirical case studies. This thesis examines some of

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the conceptual issues (nature, functions and core elements) relating to the analyses of the negotiation processes among Christians particularly between the PCN and members of the Ogo society. It identifies the power dynamic, identity, role and influence of indigenous religions on Christians and the Ogo society, thus providing explanations for the limited interactions between many Christians and members of the Ogo society.

The thesis highlights the complex identity crises among many Christians as they negotiate their new identities, religious ideas and convictions as both Christians and still members of the Ogo society. In view of this, there is the need to recognise and appropriate the powers of indigenous cultures when constructing community identities. This thesis advances a series of proposals for understanding, and negotiating intra-personal and inter-personal identity issues via the use of cultural understanding and a continuous learning process through dialogue. A holistic, personal and cooperative arena for creative dialogue can stimulate a fruitful combination of practical and ethical concerns and theoretical reflections. The thesis emphasises those aspects of the Ogo society and Christianity that promote harmony among communities, which help people to live and practice their individual religions while living together in mutual respect of each other.

1.1 Research Questions

In view of the varying and complex patterns of interaction between Christians and members of the Ogo society, the thesis explores the following questions:

i) What makes the Ogo society an integral part of the socio-religious life of Amasiri and what powers and identity does it confer on the initiates?

ii) How is the PCN within Amasiri responding to the Ogo society through its religious practices such as baptism, confirmation, local auxiliary ministries and organisational structure?

iii) How does the understanding and application of conversion within the PCN impact on its members’ response to the Ogo society?

iv) What effect does the construction and negotiation of religious identities have on the interaction and co-existence of Christians and members of the Ogo society?
1.2 Objectives of the Thesis

The thesis has the following aims: to examine the establishment, growth and impact of Christianity among the Amasiri in its different phases (colonial and post-colonial eras). It demonstrates the nature of the interaction between Amasiri indigenous religions and Christianity, in order to show how and to what extent the Ogo society, identity and indigenous understanding of community have endured over time. The thesis assesses the various strategies used by the state and local government administrations in conflict resolutions between members of the Ogo society and Christians. It analyses the practice of the Ogo society and Christianity, paying close attention to the resultant tensions as well as the dynamic and complex nature of acquired and lived religious identities. The research raises a crucial question, whether conversion to Christianity means total or partial repudiation of indigenous cultures. These analyses propose a viable means of negotiation between Christianity and the Ogo society. It sets the stage for a dialogue between Christianity and the Ogo society, a dialogue that takes the indigenous context seriously.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis is the outcome of a research process that involved living among, listening and talking to many members of the Ogo society and the PCN at Amasiri over six months, firstly in 2006 and 2008 and then again in 2010. The process of establishing the research interest began with my awareness of the pivotal role that religion plays among the Amasiri. I grew up within a Christian family and had little or no experience of the Ogo society. However, in 1987 I was forcefully initiated into the Ogo society. My father then was going to contest for a local government election, but some of the ruling elders (as I later heard) decided that they would not give him their support with me being uninitiated into the Ogo society; they referred to me as a ‘female’. My grandfather too was one of the oldest in the clan and for him not having me initiated into the Ogo society was a distressing situation. My initiation took place through the night and in the morning I was released to rejoin my family. I continued with my primary school education and membership of the local church (though I had to make countless explanations as to how I was forcefully initiated into the Ogo society). However brief the initiation process lasted and however unacceptable it
was to me, at the end of the process I was then seen by many within the clan as having been transformed into a 'man', thus underscoring the centrality of the Ogo society.

The following year (1988), there was conflict between members of the Ogo society and some natives of Amasiri who were accused of trading in Ogo ritual objects. The conflict led to much destruction of property which resulted in government intervention. At the time, prayers were being said by many Christians for the demise of the Ogo society, which they perceived to be an impediment to the socio-economic and political development of the clan. Despite government intervention and all the prayers which were enacted by Christians, the Ogo society has remained central to the lives of Amasiri clan in the 21st Century.

My interest and enthusiasm was, to a large extent, drawn to this research after an initial ethnographic observation of the PCN and some of the Ogo rituals in 2006 and some informal discussions with few ritual officiants and church leaders in Amasiri. The contacts showed the extent to which boundaries are constructed and negotiated among Christians and members of the Ogo society. I was attracted to this theme because of my interest in sociology of religion and my personal experiences as both an initiate of the Ogo society and now a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN).

The themes relating to ritual, identity, conversion, gender and the construction of boundaries/difference emerged following repeated contacts with members of the Ogo society and some Christians and analysis of initial unstructured interviews and three focus group meetings. Two of the focus group meetings were held on 25th July 2008 with youths – boys and girls numbering twenty in each group – age 13-30. I had another focus group meeting on 28th July 2008 with a group called ‘Oganiru’, a group of seven friends (male) who said their objective is the revivification of the Ogo society. The focus group consisted not only of regular church attendees, but active members of the Ogo society. It provided new insights as it gave participants the opportunity to articulate their beliefs and practices. The focus group meetings were particularly helpful in ‘gaining access to a sense of participant
commonality... During the group meetings, the participants exchanged views and sometimes contradicted or challenged one another’s interpretations. According to David Morgan, the ‘hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.’ The focus groups helped to illuminate the differences and commonalities in perspective between groups of individuals on their experiences of both Christianity and the Ogo society.

Having established the focus of my research, it became clear that I would have to triangulate my investigative technique, in order to respond to the research questions, so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon the topic. Norman Denzin argued for triangulation in 1970 and is credited by some scholars with initiating the move towards integrated research that mixes methods. He argues that ‘the sociologist should examine his problem from as many different methodological perspectives as possible’. Thus I triangulated three techniques to enable me to produce relevant background history on the PCN and the Ogo society and also explore issues of identities and difference. These techniques included ethnographic/participant observation, unstructured in-depth interviews (including focus group) and analysis of documents. Laurel Richardson identifies these methods as the major methods used by qualitative researchers. The ethnographic/participant observation method was employed because it is useful, appropriate and intuitively satisfying for research questions that seek to understand the nature of the phenomena and the essence of social and religious processes. This enabled my participant

observation of many church worship sessions, conferences, weekly meetings and other auxiliary programmes and sitting with and observing some ritual practices of both the boys’ and adult groups of the Ogo society.\(^{14}\) The participant observation technique enabled me to approach the research participants in their environment rather than having them come to me. In this process I was able to learn what life is like for an ‘insider’ while remaining inevitably an ‘outsider within’. According to Patricia Collins, an ‘outsider within’ possesses ‘a special standpoint’ that enables him or her to produce ‘distinctive analyses’.\(^{15}\) My descriptions of the ritual activities within the Ogo house, the drumming, the church services, and the masquerades were a result of my personal observations.

The PCN was chosen for the case study due to its history and the time it was established at Amasiri. Although it was the first Christian group to be established at Amasiri, the PCN has interacted with and been influenced by other Christian groups. The three branches studied have had huge internal renewal which has affected the PCN’s public outlook and responses to the Ogo society. As such, the PCN is a recognisable representation of the belief systems among many Christian groups within Amasiri. An examination of the varied practices among members of the PCN, especially with regards to its mission to members of the Ogo society, enables the observation of the various aspects of the PCN’s religious life and the practices that affect its members’ responses to the Ogo society. By undertaking this comparative analysis, the research design ‘implies that we can understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations’.\(^{16}\)

The research features a critical interaction with my personal experiences and dual identities. As I am an initiate into the Ogo society and now an ordained minister of the PCN, the issue of subjectivity (insider/outsider problem) is discussed. The notion of ‘outsider within’ earlier described relates to William Du Bois’ idea of

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“double consciousness”. Du Bois, in relation to African-Americans, notes that 'every black possessed two souls, thoughts, two unreconciled striving, two warring ideals in one dark body; whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder'.\(^{17}\) Furthermore, Georg Simmel’s conceptualisation of what he calls the ‘stranger’ offers a helpful starting point for understanding the dynamic of outsider/insider and the usefulness of the standpoint it might produce. Using the terms ‘nearness and remoteness’, ‘concerned and indifference’, Simmel notes the ability of the ‘stranger’ to see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see. He further employs the conception of social distance in his idea of the ‘stranger’ as the combination of the ‘near and far’.\(^{18}\)

It should be pointed out that the categories of insider/outsider are incomplete and unstable in nature, and should be constantly negotiated.\(^{19}\) My field-based experience highlights the fact that a researcher’s notion of self intersects in multiple ways with those of the people studied. The experience also raises questions about the formulation of knowledge and its interpretation. The emphasis remains on maintaining a balance between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status; to identify with the people under study and get close to them whilst maintaining a professional distance which allows adequate observation and data collection.\(^{20}\) It would be extremely naive to ignore insider/outsider dynamics of research relationships, but neither is it sufficient to treat bias, social identities and insider/outsider status as self-evident or fixed. The categories of insider and outsider are socially constructed and are therefore constantly changing. Negotiating this dynamic was particularly insightful.


because as a researcher I found myself to be perceived as an outsider in a context I thought I was familiar with.

My insider experience was particularly helpful and it affected balanced relationships with many Christians and members of the Ogo society. A few interviewees were however apprehensive as they perceived me as a ‘White man’s spy’ whose duty it was to gather information and sell to others. A few others could not make sense of why I spent so much money to travel from Edinburgh to Amasiri just to meet and ask people questions, questions which according to one interviewee could be asked over the phone. To these people, further explanations were made about the intention of the research after which the interview was conducted. Conversely, it was fairly easy to establish contacts and relationships with interviewees from both groups. However, some other interviewees required clarification of my status, i.e. whether I had been initiated into the Ogo society before they could continue with the interview. According to Denzin and Lincoln, interview is not a neutral tool, but, ‘a negotiated text’ and a site ‘where power, gender, race, and class intersect’.  

Other interviewees expressed willingness and freely offered as much information as they knew, regardless of my status. To some interviewees the issues which the research examines raised considerable interest in that some of the interviewees asked for a second meeting by coming to the place where I was staying or by inviting me to their homes. Some others required privacy or a location where only males were present. A few stopped talking when they realised that a female had entered the interview location, as they considered the information they were giving to be reserved for males only.

The interviews were conducted personally by me with a digital voice recorder; notes were taken and the recorded interviews were transcribed afterwards. During the interviews, my writing and audio equipment did not constitute a distraction as many interviewees saw it as an innovative way of recording history. The interviews were unstructured, that is, very close to a ‘naturally occurring’ conversation. This enabled the interviewees to be more open and discuss the issues

with which the research engages. Denzin and Lincoln note that ‘Each interview context is one of interaction and relation; the result is a much a product of this social dynamic as it is a product of accurate accounts and replies.’ With the topics to be explored and the research questions in mind, I made attempts during the course of the interviews to direct the conversation without imposing much structure on the interaction. There was no language barrier as all the interviews were conducted in British or Pidgin English or the local dialect of which I have a good knowledge. Although demanding, interviewing serves as an extremely useful method of gathering information which is not otherwise available to the researcher. Altogether, one hundred and eight interviewees (eighty-eight males and twenty females) were interviewed, including children. Most of the interviewees were interviewed in their own social environment which made the research more situational. The choice of interviewees was not based on any strict statistical computation; ages, status, religious affiliation and gender varied. However, I endeavoured to have a fair representation of different age groups as well as villages that the interviewees came from. The interviewees included elders (titled and untitled) who serve as the custodians of the Ogo society. Others included church leaders and members (initiated and uninitiated males into the Ogo society), men and women, boys and girls. A full list of the interviewees and their details is found in the bibliography.

In some cases, at the end of a session a few of the interviewees referred me to other interviewees they considered to be more knowledgeable about the indigenous practices and history of Christianity in Amasiri. This scenario enabled the use of

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22 Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, p.94. Davies observes that the actual interview formats adopted by social researchers whose principal research strategy is participant observation is often virtually unstructured. Furthermore, she argues that unstructured interviews nearly always take place between individuals who share more than simply the interview encounter; usually the ethnographer will have established an ongoing relationship with the person being interviewed. The points made during the interview Davies further notes ‘are usually with reference to both a shared history of a relationship and with awareness of a future connection’.

23 Denzin and Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research." p.64.

24 R. G. Burgess, *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research* (London: Routledge, 1984). p.102. Burgess refers to unstructured interview as ‘conversation with a purpose’. Like Davies it implies that engaging in a face-to-face encounter is possible so that it appears almost like a natural conversation between people with an established relationship.

snowball sampling; which uses recommendation to find people with a specific range of skills and information. Much like a snowball that rolls and increases in size as it collects more snow, in snowball sampling as more relationships were built through mutual association, more connections were made through these relationships and a plethora of information was shared and collected.\(^{26}\) Interestingly, some elderly people who although, neither Christians nor members of the PCN, provided useful information on the establishment of the PCN and its interaction with the Ogo society. Although the Ogo society is male-oriented and essentially only incorporates males into the adult group, females were also interviewed in order to assess the gender dynamic of the ritual. It is however necessary to note that the interviewed population was not structured to represent the gender distribution within the churches nor the Amasiri clan, because although the majority of the church members are females, membership of the Ogo society remains predominantly male. Similarly, although males are fewer within the branches of the PCN, they seem to assert lots of authority over females.

In order to interview children below the age of sixteen, the oral or written consent of their parents was sought. In keeping with the University’s ethical requirements, the content of the consent form was read in the local dialect to illiterate interviewees while the literate read through and signed it themselves. On another level, informed consent was also obtained from the administrative level of the PCN. A meeting was scheduled with the ministers and later with the ordained ruling elders of the three branches of the PCN during which the research project was discussed and permission was obtained to conduct the research. As McConnell-Henry, James, Chapman and Francis note, ‘the aim of qualitative interviewing is to allow the participant a platform to recount their experiences. The data obtained is privileged; it is more than just words… it is the participant’s experience.’\(^{27}\) In order to ensure a fair level of confidentiality and privacy of my interviewees, I adopted Graham Gibbs’ advice by anonymising the names of some of the research participants.\(^{28}\)


applies to the participants who asked for anonymity. In this case, I have used pseudonyms rather than blank, asterisks or code numbers. However, to other interviewees who consented to not only having their interviews recorded, but to also having their names in the thesis, so that the ‘unborn can read them in future’, I have used their names.

In some homes, parents and children were interviewed together and separately in order to examine the impact of the ongoing interaction of the Ogo society and Christianity at family level. The fieldwork was capital intensive. The elderly interviewees were presented with a gift in the form of wine before each meeting, as a symbolic, and a traditional way of expressing respect for them. Among Amasiri, it is said ‘anaghi agba eka nahu eze’ meaning that one does not visit an elder or king empty handed, i.e. without a gift. Drawing on my field experience it can be argued that being an insider or an outsider is not a totally defining role, but depends on the particular interactive situation, which is determined by the changing attributes or patterns of action and interests of the actors. Furthermore, the constantly shifting and ambiguous boundaries between people are important parts of the research process.

After transcribing the interviews, I realised that I had too much materials for the size of a PhD thesis. Most of my interviewees were passionate narrators who extensively shared some of their stories. These stories demonstrated the complex relationship between belief and practice and articulation of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Many of the narratives had shared multiple themes, which constituted the essence of the narratives. I had to make a selection from the narratives in order to achieve the depth of analysis to address my research questions and also to make my data manageable. As Harry Walcott observes:

The rationale for capturing and reporting details in ethnographic presentation is not to recount events as such, but to render a theory of cultural behaviour…The details recorded in ethnographically oriented field work fall into convenient *etic* categories that have evolved in standard conventions of reporting … or can be presented in more *emic* fashion through informants’ own words.29

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Conflict of role can however occur in the process, ‘when the researcher perceives or responds to events or analyses data from a perspective other than researcher.’ My role as a researcher was to generate data with the participants and to reflect the similarities and dissimilarities of the narratives. John Maanen has identified three forms of ethnographic writing: ‘Dramatic ethnography’, which rests on the narration of a particular sequence of events to the cultural members studied. Second, is the ‘critical ethnographies’, in which the represented culture is located within a larger historical, political, economic, social, and symbolic context that is said to be recognised by cultural members. Third is ‘self’ or ‘auto-ethnographies’ in which the culture of the writer’s own group is textualised. In this situation, some researchers often offer a passionate, emotional voice of a positioned and explicitly judgemental fieldworker. It should be pointed out that while these identified forms of ethnographic writing are important, there may be fluidity in their usage. On one hand, Denzin and Lincoln note that the presentation and interpretation of data ‘is both artistic and political’. On the other hand, as Richardson notes, writing is not simply a true representation of an objective reality, out there, waiting to be seen. Instead he argues, through ‘literary and rhetorical structures, writing creates a particular view of reality.’ In presenting my research data, I am fully aware of the theoretical, political, moral and methodological dimensions of the exercise.

Richardson highlights the challenges of ethnographic writing: ‘sociologists tell the collective stories of constituencies to which they may not even belong; this of course, raises central postmodernist problems about the researcher’s authority and privilege’. However, ‘there is no principled resolution, no alternative, to the problem of speaking for others.’ With this background, I have endeavoured in my presentation to highlight the narrative structure by making the voices of my

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34 Richardson, "Narrative and Sociology." p.215.
interviewees prominent and respected. According to Richardson, the narrative structure offer writers opportunity to reduce ‘their authority over writing for others’ and consequently increase their ‘credibility as writers of interpretative social science.’ Marlene de Laine, further observes, that ‘narrative may provide those who were previously voiceless to ‘give voice’ to their personal experiences in an emotionally charged rendering of personal experience.’ Avoiding moral evaluations may not necessarily imply a departure into an assumed value-neutrality or objective. Through dialogic model of presentation, I have decentred my voice (reducing my authority), while increasing the presence, voice and power of my interviewees.

In order to gain a thorough understanding and insight into established knowledge regarding the topic, previous studies related to the scope of this thesis were reviewed, thus providing another framework. The literature review surveys scholarly articles, books and other sources including dissertations, providing a description, summary and critical evaluation of each work. It also helps to contextualise or frame the thesis and give readers the necessary background to understand the thesis questions. Related archival and special collection materials including articles, church minutes, missionary diaries, inauguration addresses, and colonial government documents from individuals, the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, and Andrew Walls’ Centre for World Christianity Library, University of Edinburgh are used. Although with less success, due to a lack of proper cataloguing, other archival documents were also sought and used from the National Archives Enugu, Nigeria. The data I gathered from printed materials enhanced my analysis of the history, activities, and relationship between Christianity and the Ogo society. These are analysed for the purpose of critiquing what seems to be an ongoing fragile relationship between many Christians and members of the Ogo society. In order to prepare for the fieldwork and data analysis, I attended research method courses at the School of Social and Political Studies and School of Divinity in September 2007 – April, 2008, September 2008 – December 2008 and February 2010.

1.4 Significance of the Thesis
This thesis is significant primarily because it provides a historical and analytical perspective of Christian mission activities among the Amasiri clan and its interaction with the Ogo society from the 1920s to 2008. This aspect of the clan’s history has not been given sufficient attention in academia. The result of the thesis therefore enables scholars, Christians and members of the Ogo society to come to terms with the beginning of Christianity at Amasiri. This sheds light on the historical perspectives of some of the ‘Christian-culture’ problems that exist within the clan. The thesis may also create increased mutual respect and understanding between Christians and members of the Ogo society. An assessment of the mission strategies of the PCN may enable its members and some other Christians to better develop their particular mission approaches to the specific circumstances of Amasiri. Furthermore, this thesis highlights the gender dynamic of religion, for example why are so many Christian women and why is the initiation into the Ogo society restricted to males. It also demonstrates the intellectual significance (religion and identity) and contributes to existing theorisation or concepts including social identity theories. The thesis shows what Christians and members of the Ogo society can learn from each other, and thus sets the stage for a dialogue between Christianity and the Ogo society.

1.5 Literature Review
The study of Christianity and the Ogo society demands that the context in which they are practiced should be identified. This is because many similar practices exist across diverse African contexts, although each tends to emphasise the expression of certain norms and values. Victor Turner in his comparative study of Ndembu Mukanda demonstrates that despite similarities between rituals, each system serves as a mark of identity and connection to the peoples’ worldview. While the works of Chris Mbe and Anthony Oko on Amasiri are helpful, neither of them engages with the interaction between Christianity and the Ogo society. Mbe’s work focuses on

education and presents a list of graduates within Amasiri since 1927, while Oko briefly presents the historical origins of Amasiri. Furthermore, in my Master of Theology dissertation I examined the responses of the Scottish Mission to the Ogo cult, 1927-1945, but due to the scope of this work I did not address contemporary issues such as the relationship between members of the Ogo society and Christianity.\textsuperscript{40} This dissertation did not include the centrality of identity, power, gender and politics of Christianity and cultures in the interaction between Christianity and the Ogo society.

The work of Simon Ottenberg describes the practices of the boyhood ritual, but not its early or contemporary encounters with Christianity.\textsuperscript{41} The Christian mission among Amasiri is not mentioned, since his research was focused on Ehugbo (Afikpo), a neighbouring clan to Amasiri. Moreover, the fieldwork upon which his study is based was conducted during the 1950s and 1960s, but he does not offer any explanation as to why it took him so long to analyse the data. As helpful as Ottenberg’s works may be, he did not engage with the gender dynamic of the ritual. He did not make use of historical data in his analyses; neither did he acknowledge the historical sources that existed.\textsuperscript{42} Furthermore, Agha’s work presents a general discourse of the interplay of culture and Christianity within Unwana, another neighbouring clan to Amasiri.\textsuperscript{43} A small volume, the work does not discuss the conflicts between the early missionaries and the Ogo society.

Felix Ekechi’s work on the missionary enterprises among the Igbo is limited to Onitsha, Owerri and its environs and is focused on the rivalries between the missionary agencies rather than on their interaction with the indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{44} The research design and method of the work is clouded with ambivalence as Ekechi did not interact with the locals during his writing. According

\textsuperscript{40}E. Obinna, "Scottish Mission to Amasiri: Response to the Ogo Cult, 1927-1944" (University of Edinburgh, Master of Theology (Dissertation) 2007).
\textsuperscript{43} A. U. Agha, Christianity and Culture: A Case Study of Unwara (Enugu: Snaap Nig. Inc., 1996).
to him, this lack was as a result of the break out of the Nigerian – Biafran Civil war. His work seems to have developed from library research which he conducted in Europe, to the neglect of oral sources in the field. Yet, Ogbu Kalu in his work, surveyed the nature of the Igbo religious landscape before the establishment of Christianity. He further highlighted the ‘covenant’ clashes between Christianity and indigenous religiosity. However, the issues of identity crises and the relationship between Christianity and indigenous cultures are not addressed.

Writing from historical standpoints, Ajayi and Ayandele’s work seems to offer essential views on West African and Nigerian mission histories. The authors present outlines of the formation and development of many Christian missions in the mid-nineteenth century, although with less attention to the collaborations and ingenuities of the local agents. Although Christian missionary activities were intensive among the Igbo during the period of these studies, less attention is paid to it. Furthermore, the issues of power and gender are hardly addressed, nor did their works engage with the complex responses of the early local converts.

Although focused on Dipo (female initiation) the work of Marijke Steegstra like that of J. K. Adjaye questions how modern Ghanaians should relate to ‘culture’. Steegstra showed how the performance of Dipo relates to and is shaped by the Krobo encounter with missionary Christianity, colonial intervention and modern nationalism. While the two authors agree on the integral nature of Dipo to the life of the Krobo people they seem to disagree on the implications of the ritual. Steegsra argues that it is Dipo not marriage which marks the boundary between childhood and womanhood. But Adjaye insists that far from terminating feelings of youth and

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locating graduates into the secure state of adulthood and womanhood, Dipo initiates find themselves at a dangerous crossroads. According to Adjaye, this intersection is laden with anxiety, ambiguity and ambivalence. While these works raise the complex nature of rituals and their purpose, they fail to account for the role of the community in the processes and how gender issues are weaved into and negotiated through the ritual.

Wotsuna Khamalwa takes the reader through the labyrinths of rituals in general and initiation in particular.\textsuperscript{51} He examines the seven phases of the Bamasaba (Uganda) initiation ritual, themes of identity, power and other related cultural practices. Under what he identified as ‘change agents’ Khamalwa briefly describes Christianity as one of the agents, but did not show how early and contemporary Christians are negotiating the \textit{Imbalu} initiation and the impact of such interaction on the society. Similarly, F. B. Welbourn’s narrative of an initiate from Keyo, Kikuyu in Kenya highlights the different stages of the ritual.\textsuperscript{52} While emphasising that the initiations since the 1960s have become more casual than in the past, he did not show the importance of the ‘Keyo initiation’ or the contemporary patterns of its appropriation. However, M. N. Wangila’s work offers a helpful insight in understanding the missionary attitude to ‘African communities and culture’.\textsuperscript{53} She impresses her readers with the notion that Christianity in Kenya promotes female circumcision through interpretation of ambiguous texts as though there is a ‘Kenyan’s’ single interpretation of Scripture.

The literatures reviewed provide helpful insights into understanding some of the questions in this thesis. The historical approach of some authors enables a clarification of the contexts and the central concerns at the time of their writing. However, the material raises questions about methodology in terms of how researchers can best be situated in the empirical world, thus connecting them to specific sites, persons, groups and institutions. The issue regarding the inter-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Khamalwa, \textit{Identity, Power and Culture: Imbalu Initiation among the Bamasaba in Uganda}.
\end{itemize}
relationship between Christianity and indigenous cultures remain unresolved and some authors’ description of Christianity appears too simplified and neglects its cultural and historical development. The variety of ways in which people appropriate and relate to official representation appears to have been given less attention, thereby implying some sort of uniformity. Furthermore, although important, the literature reviewed does not explain how gender, conversion and rituals are constructed and negotiated within their respective contexts and the underpinning place of identity and power in the processes. Such processes are most pronounced within the Amasiri clan especially in the practices of the Ogo society and Christianity, hence the need for this thesis.

1.6 HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Amasiri is the traditional name of the autonomous village groups which include Ezeke, Ndukwe, Ohechara, Poperi and Ihie. The Intelligence Report of 1932 offers further insight into the clan:

Like the Afikpo the Amaseris are a strong virile race famed for their wrestling and powers of endurance. They are conservative to a degree and have withstood the advance of civilization despite their proximity to the government station….Although it may be said that civilization has made little impression upon Amaseris; they cannot be termed a timid or retiring people…

While this extract can be considered to represent a colonial perspective, it gives an insight into the Amasiri life including their fame in wrestling. These characteristics were especially visible through the activities and initiation rituals of the Ogo society which tested the strength and endurance of the males. Amasiri has a history of origin which seems to demonstrate a fragmentary account in which different groups migrated at various times to settle there. Any attempt to establish seniority based on the emergence of the component villages has always proved unsuccessful, but one fact is generally acknowledged, that of the Aro (Eru) antecedents of the villages.

54 Oko, Amasiri: A Legacy. p.22.
The approximate date of their departure and arrival is estimated to be between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\(^5^7\)

According to oral history, around that time, Igiri-Ator, Utom Okolu, Obia Okpa Enunu, Ubaghala and Isakaogu, who were great warriors, left Aro for a more peaceful location. They made a brief stopover at Ikwini in Cross River State, but could not remain there due to a ‘whispering’ notice about the invasion of the White man and his agents as well as the unfavourable topography.\(^5^8\) Thus they moved in different directions; Ubaghala led a group in the company of Oko Ali Ocha – an elderly man – who was noted for observing a taboo of not sitting on bare ground and so traditionally moved along with his seat (Ekweke). It was believed that when Oko Ali Ocha sat on the ground it meant that the party had to remain in that particular location, and until he did his party kept moving.\(^5^9\) They met a group at the present day Eri and wanted to settle there, but their attempts were met with hostility. They therefore moved further down the hill called ‘Ugwu Okazi’ and there again met Aja Iberekwu who equally resisted their attempts to settle and so they finally moved westward to the present Amaekuma compound at Amasiri.

Another group led by Utom Okolu migrated through present day Edda with ‘great fights’ and finally settled at the present location of Ohaechara. Utom Okolu first settled at Amangwu, the name being taken from an ‘Nguru tree’ which used to grow there. Utom Okolu had two sons who in the usual process split up to form two separate quarters. Obia Okpa Enunu, who was gifted in indigenous medicine, led his group via Ikwini to the present Ihie village. The next group was led by Igiri-Ator through Mgbom village at Afikpo to the present Poperi. The Ndukwe group was led by Akpurida. They migrated through Udumeze – Ohafia to their present location. As highlighted earlier, each of these five villages was autonomous, but according to

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\(^5^7\) “Intelligence Reports and the Formation of Native Administration, His Honour's Confidential No. S. P. 6752/96.” p.13.

\(^5^8\) Oko, Amasiri: A Legacy. p.20. See also, Kalu, Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841-1991. Kalu writes ‘it’s most striking how oral information from various areas speaks of the major deities in the communities whispering to the priests that some white folks would arrive and would pose a threat – perhaps by proposing a new covenant.’

\(^5^9\) “Intelligence Reports and the Formation of Native Administration, His Honour's Confidential No. S. P. 6752/96.” p.15.
Oko, they later united in order to increase their fortification against invading enemies.\(^{60}\)

Amasiri is united by kinship and descent, which is defined by an actual or perceived descent from a common ancestor. Although the different villages recognise and appropriate their specific ancestors, the clan as a symbol of unity recognises Ekuma Ubaghala as its ancestor, thus the clan is also called ‘Amasiri Ekuma Ubaghala’. When many Western missionaries first encountered ancestor veneration among Amasiri, they dismissed it as mere superstition without understanding the complexity of the clan’s cosmologies. Ancestors are deceased members of their families, villages or clan that are still communicated with through an array of rites, rituals and dreams. They are the ‘dead-among-the-living’ and hold considerable power over moral actions and social order, so much that it can be argued that spiritually, ‘the living exist under the shadow of the dead’.\(^{61}\)

Ancestors are believed to be the disembodied spirits of people who lived upright lives on earth, died ‘good’ and natural deaths, that is at a ripe old age, and received the acknowledged funeral rites. They are normally males, although Amasiri descent is matrilineal. According to an interviewee, Omezue Akwuba, males can only be ancestors because they are permanent members of their father’s compound unlike females who are often in transit.\(^{62}\) The reason for this, he argues, lies in the fact that the women among Amasiri are often married outside their fathers’ compounds and therefore are not permanent residents like the men. This reasoning is ambiguous, as there are some cases where women are married within their parents’ compounds, but Akwuba insists that does not make any difference. The religious attention paid to ancestors is of great importance to the Amasiri’s understanding of the world around it.

Belief in ancestors underscores certain social ideals: the vibrant reality of the spiritual world, the continuity of life and human relationships beyond death, the


\(^{62}\) Personal interview with Omezue J. O. Akwuba 17:07:08. A full list of the interviewees and their details is found in the bibliography.
unbroken bond of obligations and the seamless web of community. Thus the life of individuals is a participatory one within a community, which includes the born, the unborn and the ancestors who constantly conserve and enhance it. Ancestors are present at the indigenous rites of passage and are honoured regularly through rituals and sacrifices and thus they are not simply experienced as a memory. This belief occupies a central place in the understanding of the role of religious rituals in inculcating the ideal of harmonious living among the clan. Ancestors are believed to play prominent roles in the stability of family and village lives and they are the intermediaries between humanity and supreme deities, agents of destiny and guardians of moral values, family affairs and traditions.

Ancestors are held to be the closest link the physically living have with the Alamo (spirit world), they are believed to be bilingual; they speak the language of the people with whom they lived until their transition, and they also speak the language of the spirit and of the gods. Ancestors are felt to be present, watching over their household, directly concerned in all the affairs of the family and property, and giving abundant harvests and fertility, thus they hold the power that sustains earthly endeavours. In an interview, Egwu Nwosi notes that success in life including the gift of children, wealth and prosperity, is believed to be a blessing from the gods and the ancestors. Such gifts accrue to people who work hard, and who strictly adhere to the customs and norms of the clan, people who uphold community ideals of harmonious living. Only such persons can entertain a real hope of achieving the highly esteemed status of ancestor in the hereafter. It should, however, be pointed out that as much as the clan relies on ancestors, ancestors also rely on the clan to keep

68 Personal interview with Egwu Nwosi 26:06:08.
them ‘alive’ and are thus part of a reciprocal universe.\textsuperscript{69} Furthermore, ancestors are thought to give quick and severe punishment to people who disregard the traditions of the community, or infringe taboos and norms of acceptable behaviour in the clan. They are seen as dispensing both favours and misfortune: thus ancestors could be accused of being capricious and of failing in their responsibilities. However, their actions are often related to possible lapses on the part of the living and are seen as legitimately punitive.

This traditional understanding of Amasiri and its world appears to follow Emile Durkheim’s conceptualisations of functionalist/structuralist social order, which assumes the primacy of society over the individual.\textsuperscript{70} Religion, according to Durkheim, serves the interest of social cohesion, and this plays out in the relationship between Amasiri and its ancestors. This functional role of religion further seems to agree with the view that religion is indispensable to society due to its social functions of conveying moral conduct which results in social unity.\textsuperscript{71} Durkheim further suggests that ritual and participation are essential to religion’s unifying role. In his view, religion was not only normal, but socially healthy or desirable.\textsuperscript{72} Abel Ugba, describes Durkheim’s interpretation of religion as ‘uni-focal and ultimately inadequate tool because it overemphasises the role and uses of rituals to the detriment of religious contents and the role of social actor’.\textsuperscript{73} It seems rather that Durkheim’s functional approach to religion does recognise the importance of religious actors. He notes the importance of the ‘expressions and formulae which can be pronounced only by the mouth of the consecrated person’ which make objects sacred.\textsuperscript{74} Belief in ancestors thus acts as a form of social control by which the

conduct of individuals is regulated. The constant reminder of the good deeds and the presence of ancestors act as a spur to good conduct on the part of the living; and the belief that the dead can punish those who violate traditionally sanctioned mores acts as a deterrent.

Belief in ancestors, therefore, represents a powerful source of moral sanction for they affirm the values upon which society is based. Ancestors are thus held as models to be copied in an effort to strictly adhere, preserve and transmit the traditions and norms of the clan. As the benevolent spiritual guardians of their families and villages, ancestors are believed to reincarnate as newborn babies among the clan. Many children are often named after their family or village ancestors that are believed to have been reincarnated. Special attention and favour are often bestowed on such a child as a mark of respect to the ancestor. Among the Amasiri clan child-naming is regarded as very important, thus names are not supposed to be randomly selected, but thoughtfully chosen through divination. It is believed that given names are so profound, meaningful and powerful that the names which children bear can influence their entire life cycle, integrity and profession. A name provides a person’s identity and a window on one’s culture and self. It links individuals and families to their past, their ancestors and forms a part of and an expression of spirituality.

The ancestors are appealed to through sacrifices in times of crisis such as a serious sicknesses or a series of misfortunes. Other sacrifices are offered to them during ritual festivals celebrating farming, New Yam, harvesting, and more regularly, on occasions such as marriages, naming ceremonies, and the initiation rituals of males into the Ogo society. Most of these rituals are still observed in order to affirm the relationship between ancestors and their families. Agriculture among Amasiri appears to be ritualised and the seasonal farming activities determine most of the clan’s festival calendar. The crops too are ritualised, especially yam, cocoyam and, in the past ten years, cassava. As Nna Oko Abua highlights in an interview, these crops have spirit forces which laid down the specific code of conduct for

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cultivating and harvesting them. Such gifts are often used as an example of ancestor worship. However, an interviewee, Omezue Akwuba argues that such gifts are nothing but tributes symbolising the gifts which the departed elders would have received had they been alive and which the living elders now receive.

Sacrifices occupy a central place within the Igbo indigenous religion. According to Francis Arinze sacrifice is the ‘soul’ of Igbo indigenous religion and if it is removed the religion will be almost emptied of its content. Sacrifices thus offer a means of pleading for protection from superior powers and also a principal means for expressing gratitude to the ancestors for past blessings and asking for more in the future. This follows a popular saying among Asisiri, ‘Ekele dike nanke omeri nomie ozo’, meaning, ‘when a great man is appreciated for the past he does more’. Afe Adogame notes that ‘sacrifice is meant to counteract the evil machinations of the malevolent spiritual beings on humans and to invoke the benevolence of the deities, ancestors, and spirits in order to ensure and maintain cosmic balance and cohesion in the society’. Thus sacrifice is expected to express faith, repentance, pleas for forgiveness and adoration. Sacrifice is a religious act in which an offering is made to ancestors or spirits in order to attain, restore, maintain or celebrate friendly relations with the deities.

Many nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries and mission teachers dismissed the importance of ancestors and rituals. They saw sacrifices and divinations as useless and wasteful exercises. Accordingly, it was taught that ancestors and deities were man-made objects which were incapable of intervening in the affairs of the clan. Odunoye asserts in relation to Africa in general that the African belief in the Supreme Being, was trivialised, as he was described as remote and removed from people’s life. She further argues that some missionaries even

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76 Personal interview with Nna Oko Isu Abua 17:07:08.
77 Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba 17:07:08.
insisted that Africans had no religion at all.\(^{80}\) While Oduyoye’s point is helpful, it is important to highlight that such an attitude towards the indigenous practices has continued even in contemporary Christianity among Amasiri.

Such continuity, however, does not undermine the appropriation of some indigenous religiosity within the PCN. The indigenous attitudes to sacrifices continue to be reflected in the emphasis often placed on thanksgiving, prayer and the search for explanations, prediction and the healing of daily problems in life by Amasiri Christians. Furthermore there appears to be continuity in the understanding of the two identifiable real worlds; the world of people, which is made up of all created beings and things, and the spirit world, the abode of the creator, deities and the ancestral spirits. These worlds are understood, including by many members of the PCN, as inseparable; they make one whole and constantly interact with each other. Thus, people’s existence appears to be a total and interrelated phenomenon involving the interaction between the material and the spiritual, the visible and invisible, the good and bad, the living and the dead. This background is crucial in order to understand the socio-religious context of Amasiri and their rigid observance of seasons, sacrifices and rites of passage. Moreover, this totality appears to provide meaning for the essence of life, the source of moral power, authority and indigenous leadership.

1.6.1 Indigenous Organisational Structure

The contemporary Amasiri clan has three autonomous communities which include Ezeke, Ndukwe and Opi (an acronym for Ohaechara, Poperi and Ihie). The villages of Amasiri are compact, with populations in the thousands. According to the 1991 Nigerian census, the clan has a population of forty-nine thousand; however, the figure has often been contested as being far lower.\(^{81}\) Although Amasiri villages are organised along (Ikwunne) the matrilineal system, the villages and compound are built around (Umudi) patrilineal lineages. As such, each individual member of the


clan belongs to a double descent. The matrilineal system consists of a descent traced through female lines. An individual’s initial relationship is to his or her mother and through the female.

This descent system regulates individual rights, duties, residence, marriage, inheritance and succession. However, within the Amasiri clan, women and their children live at the compound or village of her husband. At death, the women are buried within the compound where she had her first son, while the daughters might be buried outside their fathers’ compound. Yet, although males belong to a different matrilineal descent from their fathers they are expected to maintain membership of their father’s compound throughout their lives.\(^{82}\) This offers insight into the central role of rituals (especially initiation into the Ogo society), the purpose of which is to incorporate males into their father’s compound. As discussed, the matrilineal system has internal strains and external pressures to which it is vulnerable. Kathleen Gough writes of the elementary family being ‘torn’ between two descent groups – that of the husband and that of the wife and children.\(^{83}\) Similarly, Claude Levi-Strauss writes:

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\text{The husband is a stranger, an outsider, even an enemy, and yet the woman goes to live with him, in his village, to bear children which will never be his. The conjugal family finds itself broken up again and again, endlessly. How can such a situation have been conceived in the mind, invented and established?}^{84}\]

The comment by Levi-Strauss draws attention to the conflict of authority which, although not peculiar to it, can be found within the matrilineal system. Such a situation has been described by A. I. Richards as ‘the matrilineal puzzle’.\(^{85}\) This system is characterised by gender roles which imply that women are responsible for the care and social placement or affiliation of children, whereas adult men have authority over women and children. This does not mean that every female member of Amasiri must care for at least one child, but that this is part of the definition of the

\(^{82}\) Personal interview with Osuu Simon Uche 20:07:08.


role for a woman and that as far as possible women are expected to play such an allotted role. This background offers insight as to why the positions of highest authority are ordinarily vested in males. Nonetheless, the status of women has relevance to the domestic sphere, and the status of the mother’s brother in the matrilineal system.

However, it must be observed, as David Schneider does, that the allocation of authority within the domestic sphere must be distinguished from the allocation of authority within the descent group and this in turn distinguished from the religious leadership and political sphere.\(^6\) In essence Schneider is arguing for a clearer definition of categories which provides a platform for negotiating gender roles. Among Amasiri, for instance there is interdependence between brothers and sisters within the matrilineal system. A sister depends on her brother for protection, care and authority functions, while the brother depends on his sister for the perpetuation of his descent line and the provision of an heir. The metaphor of descent stresses the tie between people born from the same womb or fed from the same breast. In her interview Madam Elem Udu argues that blood is believed to be passed through the woman and not through the man, and as such the male’s role is limited to the quickening of the foetus already formed in the uterus.\(^7\) On the basis of this, Udu argues for the rationale of the matrilineal system as practiced within Amasiri.

Nonetheless, the past twenty years have witnessed an increasing emotional interest by fathers in their children which places a further strain on the matrilineal system. Moreover, there is an increasing demand for loyalty to one’s immediate family than to the extended families. With regards to the father-daughter relationship, a father is always consulted about the marriage of his daughter even if he is divorced from her mother. Investigations are often made about the family of the would-be husband, with the hope of not introducing ‘bad blood’ into the family.\(^8\) Yet, the mother’s brothers can still intervene in matters of marriage, and have powers such as

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\(^7\) Personal interview with Madam Elem Udu 19:07:08.

\(^8\) Personal interview with Chief Geoffrey Oko 02:08:08.
ending the marriage of their sister’s daughter if it is considered to be unsafe for her.89

In view of this, authority over an Amasiri child continues to be divided between the
father and the mother’s brothers and each of them maintain competing interests
during the growth of the child to adulthood. One point of common interest is always
in the initiation of the male child into the Ogo society as it continues to serve as an
entry point into having a ‘fulfilled’ life as an adult.

As shown earlier, these double belongings (matrilineal and patrilineal) have
enormous privileges and responsibilities, whilst they also place conflicting demands
on individuals as they seek to define who they are. On a smaller scale, Amasiri
families generally live in Ezi (compounds), each a small segment of the village
groups. The people born into a particular compound are regarded as Umudi
(patrilineal) relations, claiming descent from one of the patrilineal ancestors, while
maintaining their matrilineal kinship. A compound could be occupied by more than
one patrilineal lineage; where that happens, each of the patrilineal families would have
their family heads there and also abide by the leadership of the compound. The head
of the compound is usually the oldest male, who also settles family disputes. A
Christian or an uninitiated male into the Ogo society may not play such a role, as
such a person is perceived to be a stranger and thus the next in order of seniority
serves as the family head.90 Within each compound are a cluster of houses belonging
to different domestic families. Seniority by age regulates social placement and
leadership, thus belonging to age grades forms a prerequisite for defining one’s age
group and growth into leadership. At the compound level, leadership is vested in Uke
Ezi (the male elders) while the execution and implementation of decisions are
undertaken by the appointed age grades. This idea of living and sharing together in
compounds tends to provide a platform for the construction and negotiation of
identities. However it means that, although they are neighbours, there are cases of
sharp rivalries between the constituent families.

Another important facet of Amasiri organisation is marriage, which has
remained the expected norm for adults. Twenty years ago polygyny was perceived as

89 Personal interview with Hon. Dickson Osim 30:07:08.
90 Personal interview with Osuu Obiahu Ekehie on 21:06:08.
ideals, as it acted as an important indicator of social status for both the husband and wives. This was so since each wife was to be taken care of and only a wealthy husband could do so. Marriage provides the possibility of ties between a person and his or her spouse’s matrilineal and patrilineal groupings. Wives were ranked according to the order in which they married their common husband. However, the first male child of the family, irrespective of the ranking of his mother, was given special status and occupied a very important position, not only in his father’s family, but also in his village.

Isi Ogo (the village) is the next organisational group within Amasiri. Villages are made up of their compounds and leadership is vested in Uke Ogo (the elders and leaders of the village). Each Uke Ogo serves their village for a period of seven years before being promoted to leadership at the clan level, first as Ekpu Uketo (assistants to the Essa), later as Essa (clan ruling elders) and finally as Ndie Ichie (the retired elders). The Essas run a court system and adjudicate on matters; however, their functions can both complement and run into conflict with the government judicial system. Until ten years ago, many cases were withdrawn from the civil courts at the request of the Essas to be handled by them. They preside over cases involving individuals, families, and villages. Around the age of 75-80 the Essas retire from active roles to join Ndi Ichie. The prestige and influence of Ndi Ichie is derived from the fact that, among Amasiri and several other Igbo communities, wisdom and knowledge of indigenous practices and beliefs are associated with age.

Thus, the concept of age is constructed and interpreted within social and religious contexts. Physical signs of aging, such as wrinkles and grey hairs, are often reinforced by association with roles higher in the hierarchical structure of the clan. Ndi Ichie often invokes memories of the ancestors; among Amasiri it is said

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92 A. K. Agwu, “The Role and Nature of Age Grades in Community Development: Amasiri in Focus,” Amasiri Monitor 2007. p.3. Agwu’s view regarding Ndi Ichie appears to be misleading as he describes them as ‘Shidden looks’ implying that they ineffective and make little or no inputs into the clan.
that ‘to say that my father told me is to swear the highest oath’. Thus *Ndi Ichie* often cite previous precedents to support a course of action, or deny knowledge of any and thus weaken or avert a particular course of action. When there are disputes over land ownership, *Ndi Ichie* are often consulted and their evidence is expected to be taken seriously. However, it must be pointed out that there is often some fluidity in the functions of families, compounds and villages: matters affecting families could be discussed at the village assembly. What is important, at every level of discussion and decision-making, is the need to respect and to be fair not only to the individual members of the society, but also to maintain a cordial relationship with the *Nnochewo* (ancestors).

Another indigenous institution is the ‘Age Grade’, one of the oldest institutions used in the administration of indigenous communities, like Amasiri before and after the emergence of the British colonial administration. The system has been graphically described as ‘that method by which communities organise themselves for work, war and government.’

94 The age grades serve as the traditional ‘police’ of each village. Furthermore, they also serve as a means of allocating public duties and distributing public goods. Through its internal code of conduct, the age grade serves as a means of guarding public morality through the censorship of its members’ behaviour. The system has shown itself to be the most potent vehicle for accelerated community development among the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria.

More than the government, age grades are responsible for most of the infrastructure development in Amasiri. Age grades are involved in the construction of roads, bridges, culverts, hospitals, schools, and other social amenities.95 Thus the age grade among the Amasiri clan remains an instrument of local administration as well as a medium of community organisation and development. The security and judicial processes are also vested in the system and it is the pivot on which the socio-economic well-being of the community and its members revolves. Under this system, age grades below the age of forty concern themselves with clearing the paths,

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95 Agwu, "The Role and Nature of Age Grades in Community Development: Amasiri in Focus." p.3.
streams and public squares and enforcing the decisions of the elders and village assemblies.

The age grade system grew out of the many years of association; some through group hunting, playing together, or their initiation into the Ogo society: often those who were born around the same time were initiated at the same time. Until twenty years ago, wrestling was also central to the formation of age grades. Oko summarises this formation process of age grades among Amasiri as follows:

Normally during wrestling contests, there is the first group called ‘nchifu ogbo’. These are children between the ages of two and say seven. They will all crowd the wrestling arena. Each child is free to challenge any other child there, and before you know it, one has emerged the champion and is carried shoulder high... This will continue until a named age grade will begin their turn. On the above note, and without being told, one will automatically know which age grade one belongs to.96

Wrestling has always served as the key sport among the Amasiri. It is usually held during the Omoha festival in March of every year. Those who form a particular age grade were usually born within a period of three to five years (depending on the village involved).

However, since the 1990s there has been less emphasis on wrestling as those people born within a range of three years identify themselves and start meeting informally as an organisation often called Eburu Enwugu Eha (Boys no Name). After a period of about five to seven years of such meetings, they gain the recognition of the elders and are guided to choose their name. The names of age grades usually reflect specific historical events linked to the period of their birth or a representation of that age grade’s philosophy. For instance, those born during the period of World War II chose the name ‘Ngwogu’, meaning weapon of war. Others include, Ighemgbo (bullet box), and Soja (Army or Soldier). Chief Hilary Nzagha, in an interview, argues that this choice of name enables the indigenous Amasiri to locate itself within a global historical map. In the early days of Amasiri, the strength and prestige of any age group was based on the extent of its effectiveness in its defence of the clan against hostile neighbours.97 The age provides a platform through which the young people grow to adulthood.

97 Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
Another dimension of the indigenous organisational structure of Amasiri is that of title taking and its role in defining individual and group status within Amasiri. Although leadership among Amasiri is by the elders, not all the elders have an equal say. The possession of wealth, a poetic gift, leadership abilities, and the talent for oratory, as well as knowledge, wisdom, hospitality, courage, tactical acumen and personal strength defines the status and extent of influence of an elder. The most prestigious titles for men include: Okwa Ozu and Ome Omume; for females they are Ogbueku and Utara Ogo. The Utara Ogo title is sometimes considered to bring about gender equality. At present there is only one surviving female holder of the title. In his interview Chief Godwin Osondu acknowledges the expensive nature of the Utara Ogo title, but insists that there is no title for females that makes them equal with men, thus asserting male superiority over females. However, among the male and female folds the same principles are visible; the delineation of titles presupposes that the higher the title, the greater the prestige, political participation and power the title holder has.

As indigenous leadership is tied to age and individual abilities, the elders do not rule as autocrats, but rather, they are expected to lead in consultation with the oha community. This is demonstrated by the emphasis upon group solidarity, and cooperation often summarised in the adage, Igwebuike (‘strength lies within the community or group’). As I observed in 2008 during my field research, women and uninitiated males are hardly present in such village and clan assemblies as they are often held at the village (Ogo) square, which also serves as the sacred space for the activities of the Ogo society. However, since women and uninitiated males are not allowed to speak at the Ogo square, in order to include them, some assemblies are held within compounds. According to an interviewee, Geoffrey Oko, the key characteristic of Amasiri organisational structure is that no single individual should effectively change the network of the law and regulations governing the clan. The

98 Personal interview with Chief Godwin Osondu 15:07:08.
village or clan assembly is usually convened in order to discuss matters of clan or village interests, such as untraced murder, land disputes, cases of theft, and external threats to the village or when new proclamations are to be made.\textsuperscript{100}

To announce such meetings, the services of the village or clan \textit{Onye ozi} (town-criers) are employed. Often they go round their respective villages with a metal bell or a wooden gong to announce the date, time and venue of the assembly. When the assembly meets, the matters to be discussed are introduced by the spokesperson of the elders who summoned the assembly, after which those in attendance are allowed to respond in turn to the subject under discussion. All matters are usually debated before decisions are taken. When they consider matters to have been thoroughly exhausted the conveners of the assembly usually withdraw in order to consult (\textit{okwa izu}) among themselves. After such consultations, the elders return and address the assembly through its spokesperson. The elders are expected to speak the truth on all matters and to be full of wisdom in order to understand the thoughts represented during the discussion so as to reach a compromise which the \textit{Oha} (assembly) will accept.

The appointment of the spokesperson by the elders is usually based on the person’s power of oratory, persuasive talents, and ability to put the decision in perspective. Writing in relation to Mandaya, Aran Yengoyan affirms that a good speaker not only has a fine sense for turning a phrase, using a metaphor, or stressing repetition, but also possesses the wisdom and experience for animating knowledge and thoughts in a meaningful way.\textsuperscript{101} As I observed during my field research in 2008, such decisions are usually accepted by the assembly through general acclamation or rejection by shouts of derision. In essence, the view of the majority at the assembly often prevails. Ideally no one is to be given an advantage during the process, and the assembly is supposed to listen to the different views. The decisions of the assembly can be appealed to the same assembly by unsatisfied groups or individuals.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} Personal interview with Chief Geoffrey Oko 02:08:08.
\end{itemize}
Writing in relation to the Igbo, Webster, Boahen and Tidy describe the system highlighted above as ‘a segmentary political system’. They argue that ‘segmentary’ is the word used to describe the political organisations of societies without a central government. They further note that the Igbo judicial system was noted for its lack of set rules.\(^{102}\) However, the indigenous organisational structure of Amasiri, as I argue, contradicts such assumptions. As shown there are laid down structures which although unwritten are known and which seek to promote fairness and justice. The leadership structures described earlier are also often portrayed in the proverb: ‘Igbo Enweze’ (meaning, ‘the Igbo have no King’).\(^{103}\) This saying does not imply that the Igbo do not respect their leaders, but that they do not believe that power should be vested in a single individual but in a college of elders and among the oha (community).

The elders who rule among the Amasiri are expected to do so in consultation with the community in order to sustain and retain their powers and claim to leadership. Bishop Crowther of the Church Missionary Society is cited by Ekechi as saying: ‘One common disadvantage which characterises the Ibo country is want of a king, who is supreme head of the nation, or even of a tribe, as Yoruba, Benin, Nupe and Hausa. Instead of which, there is often more than one king to a village.’\(^{104}\) Crowther’s comment demonstrates attempts by some missionaries and colonial officers to place every indigenous community into one category. Such attempts failed to recognise the diversity of and unique approaches to governance by indigenous communities.

In order to remedy this perceived disadvantage of the Igbo, the colonial administration hand-picked people they believed to represent the village groups in the court area and made them Ndisi (warrant chiefs).\(^{105}\) The warrant chiefs were individuals appointed to leadership with no particular reference to their positions in


\(^{104}\) Ekechi, Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914. p.46.

their communities. Furthermore, the warrant chiefs were answerable to their colonial mentors, who hired and dismissed them at will. It was the warrant which these chiefs possessed that gave them the authority to collect taxes and mobilise their villages to participate in colonial court activities.

The formation and operations of the indirect rule system were characterised by many ambiguities and did not last as long as the colonial administrators had wanted. However, unlike the earlier colonial period, when the emphasis was on establishing chiefs, later efforts were made to create alternative leadership institutions built on a ‘traditional’ basis. Following this development, the position of Ezeogo (Traditional Rulers) or His Royal Highnesses was introduced in post-colonial Eastern Nigeria. This came into effect through the 1971 East Central Government’s Divisional Administration Edict which stipulated that every autonomous community in the Igbo must have a traditional ruler. The office of the traditional ruler is not hereditary, has no age limit and candidates are elected by popular vote. The political role of the traditional ruler is interesting in that it is not like that of a monarch. The Ezeogo does not undertake any ritual duty, neither is he considered to be an indigenous leader of the clan.

At its inception, Amasiri had one traditional ruler, who was installed in 1976. He had a cabinet which was made up of counsellors appointed to represent their villages. The counsellors were referred to as ‘Chiefs’. However, it seems that there were no ceremonies to mark the appointment of the chiefs and like the Ezeogo they exercised no indigenous authority. The appellation ‘Chief’ appears to be a carry-over from the colonial indirect administration and has witnessed further reform in contemporary Amasiri. Following the creation of States – Ebonyi – on 1st October 1996 by the military administration led by General Sani Abacha, two autonomous communities were created in Amasiri, increasing the number to three. Each of these

108 Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 05:08:08.
autonomous communities has their traditional rulers, cabinets and palaces but the Amasiri clan remains under a unified indigenous leadership of the Essas.

Even in contemporary times it remains impossible for an uninitiated male (into the Ogo society) to either serve as a traditional ruler or be elected to a political office within Amasiri. Furthermore, the organisational structure described demonstrates the dynamic of the indigenous autonomy; the solidarity and direct democratic system of the clan. Indigenous institutions among Amasiri appear to be pluralistic in that they are simultaneously perceived as sacred and civil institutions. They represent a synthesis of numerous traditions that serve diverse religious and secular functions within communities. Without an understanding of these public rules of kinship and institutions, it will be difficult to fully grasp the form and content of Amasiri indigenous leadership and its contemporary patterns in negotiating modernity.

1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One
Introduction
This introductory chapter gives an overview of the thesis. Along with the presentation of the thesis statement, there is a discussion of the following: the background to the thesis, statement of the problems, significance of the thesis, literature review and historical and socio-political background of Amasiri. The methodology employed during the course of the research is also stated and discussed. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the contextual and internal factors in relation to the practices of Christianity and the Ogo society in Amasiri.

Chapter Two
Ritual and the Ogo Society
This chapter examines the ritual processes within the Ogo society. The initiation rituals are discussed using the paradigms of Van Gennep, Victor Turner and Catherine Bell. It engages with the conceptual and theoretical discourses of ritual, and undertakes analytical interactions with the following: ‘ritual and symbol’, ‘ritual
and myth’ and ‘ritual and identity, power and culture’. The different phases of the initiation processes into the Ogo society are outlined and described including preliminal, liminal and post-liminal phases. In engaging with the symbolic nature of the Ogo society among Amasiri, the following questions are raised: How does the ceremonial performance centred on the Ogo society transform boys into adults? Do these rituals really resolve contradictions and ambivalence? How are questions of identity and gender enjoined in such ritual transformation?

Chapter Three
Locating the United Presbyterian Church (UPC) Within the Local and Global Landscape
This chapter presents the historical establishment, development, beliefs and mission perspective of the PCN. It highlights the background for the early interaction between missions and indigenous communities. This chapter engages with the roles of local agencies in shaping and advancing the early mission of the United Free Church of Scotland which has grown to the three branches of the present PCN at Amasiri. The interface with ritual is discussed in order to demonstrate the complex nature of identity and cultural issues within the church communities.

Chapter Four
Dynamics of Religious Change: Transition and Transmission
This chapter discusses the dynamic of religious conversion, presenting it as a complex process of change with personal, cultural, and social implications for self and community. It explores the nature of the theory of conversion and provides an overview of the resources for the study of conversion from indigenous religions to Christianity especially among members of the PCN. The often undervalued continuities and discontinuities are highlighted in order to demonstrate the complex nature of religious change within an indigenous community.
Chapter Five
Negotiating Culture and Identity
Efforts are made in this chapter to critically analyse the conceptual construction of the Ogo society and the PCN in the light of the conflicting understanding of ritual. It responds to the following questions: How does the PCN respond to the Ogo society in both official and daily situations? To what extent is the PCN and its members engaged in mission and what are their driving strategies? In what ways has the PCN been influenced by other neighbouring churches and how have these impacted on the PCN’s attitude towards indigenous culture? In accomplishing these, this chapter also offers an analysis of and understanding of conflict between many members of the PCN and the Ogo society.

Chapter Six
Paradigm Shift: Interaction between Christianity and the Ogo Society
Religious symbols, idioms and scriptures are often used directly or indirectly to promote interests, causing tension and conflicts within communities where people of different religions live together. The model for meaningful co-existence therefore needs to be built on a comprehensive understanding of unique individuals rather than on abstract systems of thought. This chapter sets out the paradigm of dialogue rather than the dialectic model as a tool for engaging with the tension between many Christians and members of the Ogo society. It is argued that as religions are increasingly regarded in one sense as sources of intolerance, it is vital to achieve a deeper understanding of others through creative aspects of religious engagement.

Chapter Seven
Conclusion
This concluding chapter presents a summary of the thesis and concluding remarks. The areas related to the thesis and those yet to be addressed in current scholarship are highlighted. These include questions which arose during the course of the thesis as well as the ones that could not be addressed within the thesis. These emerging questions will provide future opportunities for ongoing academic research and inquiry.
CHAPTER TWO
RITUAL PROCESSES AND THE OGO SOCIETY

Introduction

It appears to be widely accepted that ritual is a particular instrument of communication which goes beyond the explicit propositional content into the realms of implicit symbolic meaning. However, Fritz Staal has questioned this concept and contends that ‘ritual is pure activity without meaning or goal and transmits no socio-cultural values other than the ritual itself.’\(^{109}\) While it must be understood that there can be ambivalence and ambiguity around meanings, the initiation into the Ogo society examined in this chapter appears to contradict Staal’s view. It argues that beyond ritual itself, the Ogo society appropriates symbols to convey its meanings to the initiates, ritual officiants, families and the community. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, initiation into the Ogo society forms the primary rite of passage among the Amasiri and remains an institution into which every male is expected to be initiated.

This chapter examines ritual processes and the Ogo society. It highlights how the initiation rites not only impact on the initiates, but also on their families and the community. The gender dimension is also brought into focus, in order to demonstrate the complexity of gendered religious roles within the society. The complex initiation process into the Ogo society is compelling and evocative and its continuance rests on the conviction that the process transforms boys into men, thereby giving them a higher degree of indigenous knowledge and power.\(^{110}\) According to Harper Lee ‘you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view…until you climb into his skin and walk around in it’.\(^{111}\) This metaphorical allusion seems to articulate one of the most significant issues in ritual studies, an enigma which, in the study of religion, is often termed the insider/outsider

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\(^{110}\) Initiation into the Ogo society seems to divide males into two distinct categories, immature boys, whose lack of indigenous knowledge and authority is indicated by their exclusion from public affairs and the initiated who are concerned with public affairs. This implies that it is not enough to be a male, but that to attain manhood every male is expected to be initiated into the Ogo society.

During the interview, interviewees were asked the following questions, why is the initiation into the Ogo society central to the clan? How can the ritual transformation through the Ogo society be accounted for? How does the initiation enact, enhance or facilitate the understanding and experience of members of the Ogo society? Attention is therefore given to the construction of how an indigenous transformative effect of the Ogo society is attained. It is argued that if the process of ritual transformation and the complex ways in which meaning is communicated through activities are to be fully appreciated, attention must be given to ritual actions (shifting location, dance, songs, and speeches) as found within the Ogo society.

2.1 Ritual Phases and the Ogo Society

It is believed that Ogo society is as old as the Amasiri clan. In an interview, Omezue Oko Isu Abua notes that the Ogo society was brought to the Amasiri from its neighbouring clan, Ikwini Ekumubaghala at the present Cross-River state. He observes that although their fathers did not give them details as to why they introduced the Ogo society to Amasiri, it has remained central to the clan’s pursuit of unity and maintenance of social order. Abua further observes that there were questions young people and even elderly people could not ask, especially with regards to the reasons behind the introduction of the Ogo society, but that they were meant to accept, believe and defend it. According to him, ‘that is what our fathers have been doing these past years, and none of us is ready to break what our fathers started, even if we want to, we do not know how, as we were not told’.  

Abua’s comments suggest that the question of how the Ogo society was introduced to Amasiri is not central, but what its initiation does and why the clan believes it. The Ogo society is open to all males, and its initiation is a prerequisite for participation in adult roles. The initiation focuses on the centrality of the


\[113\] Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08. Abua specially requested that his name be used in the thesis to authentic his words, so that future generations would be able to cite him and not merely say ‘our elders used to say’.

\[114\] Personal interview with Osuu Eze Otuu on 17:07:08. He argues that the society has remained a crucial agent of cohesion in the clan.
society, and the images which are created to encourage participants to experience transcendence. Initiation into the Ogo society defines boundaries between members of the society and outsiders; between different statuses and ideas. However, one difficulty in analysing the data is how to determine the stages at which the different phases of the ritual (pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal) take place. As such it is argued that while the three-phase structure of the ritual introduced by Van Gennep and advanced by Victor Turner is helpful, the processes in ritual - especially initiation into the Ogo society - are characterised by fluidity. Nonetheless, the importance of the three stages of initiation for the study of religions is evidenced, not only by its usage, but more significantly by its usefulness in raising important questions about rituals and rites of passage.

Robert Torrence argues that the pattern underlying different rites of passage may indeed be remarkably stable using the three phases of separation, including pre-liminal, liminal (or threshold) and post-liminal stages. Ritual thus can be seen as the immutable substratum of religious behaviour, which pertains not only to social stability, but to transition, passage and change. Benjamin Ray further asserts that the purpose of these stages is to create and maintain fixed and meaningful transformations in the life cycle of the initiates. However, while James Cox underscores this point, and recognises the importance of the various phases, he observes that the phases seen within many rites of passage may not always be distinguished sharply in the minds of those undergoing the rituals. Cox’s observation is particularly helpful in understanding the complexity of theoretical application especially within indigenous contexts like Amasiri where not only initiates, but many ritual officiants may not be literate enough to appreciate it. Like many other theories, these phases have not exhausted their interpretative power as they have often focused attention on certain questions and neglected others.

However, because the three stages are so important for an interpretation and analysis of initiation rituals, it forms the framework for this thesis.

The Ogo society has initiation processes for both the boys’ and adult groups. However, the three-stage pattern is particularly used to describe the processes within the adult group: each stage has their symbolic meanings, including death to the world, purification and rebirth. Furthermore, the phases reinforce the clarity or rigidity of the Amasiri’s categories of boys and men, male and female, initiated and uninitiated, while simultaneously moving people from one category to another. The initiation processes into the Ogo society thus depicts the structure of the clan, as it reformulates social status as well as enhances the sense of community. Therefore the Ogo society (although with the recognisable fluidity in its processes) offers a significant pattern to indigenous life and enduring social institutions.

2.1.1 Nde Ena (Boys’ Society)

Four days after the birth of a male child, he is taken to the *Obu* (the male rest house, where the initiates are often secluded) and laid in a wooden tray and presented before the *Mma Obu* (gods of the *Obu*). The gods are believed to be the inspiring spirit that will guard the child through his life. Materials needed for the ritual (*Odo n’obu*) include: *agbu* (a rope), *apia* (a spear), *nzu* (white chalk), *apa* (a metallic object). This ritual is followed by *ose onu-utu* (male circumcision) that often takes place eight days after the birth of a child in which some of or the entire foreskin from the males’ penis is removed. Another post-circumcision ritual also called *Ose onu-utu* is often performed when the child is aged between three and six. It is a ceremony which prepares the boys for active participation in the boys’ society of the Ogo society and subsequent initiation into adult society. Ritual materials such as a goat, some tubers of yam, a piece of red chalk and clothing are usually required. On the day of the ritual the celebrant is dressed in expensive clothes, and is accompanied by his peers and at least one male aged about eighteen years old to be displayed around the market areas. The display is usually done on the clan’s market day (*Orie*).118

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118 Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
The rituals described set the stage for a gradual withdrawal of the boys from both their mothers and sisters at the age of five as they incline more to their fellow boys. Thus, they stay more often in the adult male residence (ulo ote) or with their fathers. These processes often prepare the boys for participation in the boys’ group, which comprises of boys aged five to nine. This group merely mimics the activities of the adult society (to the amusement of the adults) so that as they progress into the Ogo society’s adult group, they do not enter into it as novices. Initiation into the adult Ogo society is thus a series of events, rites and activities which are interconnected psychologically, symbolically and experimentally. Boys within the boys’ society learn much about punishment and social control from their peers. The group is operated by the boys and they are autonomous in their operation, but are occasionally monitored by the elders lest the boys go beyond their limits. Most of their activities take place at the Usoho Umu ena (‘sacred space for the uninitiated boys’).

The boys use the space as their playground and for dressing in their different masquerades (including: Okpa, Orogoro, Enyaho, Ikpem, and Okumkpo) which are often kept secret. As I observed during my field research in 2006, the boys are expected to treat the area as a sacred space and so regular sanitation is often carried out by the boys themselves. The boys make the costumes themselves and also dress and undress themselves. Females are not expected to identify the person who is dressed in a masquerade, as they are believed to have turned into spirits (mma). However, mothers would always know that their son is involved and are expected to send some meals to them through their peers at the boys’ sacred space. In her interview, madam Elem Udu observes that although the boys’ activities may appear childish they remain highly secretive to females. It is thus an offence for females to touch the boys’ materials or to see them in their sacred areas. In order to avoid this, females are meant to shout elookwe! (excuse me) if they have to pass through the

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119 Other boys would make jest of any boy who at about that age is seen to spend much around his mother or sisters. He is called some derogatory names including Onwu era ‘breast sucker’.

120 The boys’ group enables them to learn some of the secrets of the adult Ogo society, to which they should be initiated. They are taught some of the sign languages and terminologies used by the society.


122 Oko, Amasiri: A Legacy. p.73.
sacred space. This shout is not just ordinary: it is a plea and an indication that the female recognises the power of the Ogo society and does not wish to undermine them in any way.\textsuperscript{123} Kenneth Agwu asserts that the sacred area of the boys’ society also serve as the first stage and space for the formation of age grades and the indigenous leadership organisations described in the first chapter.\textsuperscript{124}

The boys even mimic the adult initiation, though theirs is often considered to be less tough. Okechukwu Otta observes that during the boy’s initiation rituals, the initiates pay fees, present eggs, peanuts and other food materials to their leader. These materials are communally consumed, although the leader often takes a greater share (\textit{oriee nze}). Such leaders are never permanent, for according to Otta, ‘it takes the strongest at any time to be the leader’. Those who break the rule are often punished by a fine, beaten or suspended. In most cases, defaulters present some gift like food items, oranges, eggs and other items to appease the group.\textsuperscript{125} During the boys’ involvement in the group, many of them seem to record a high level of skill, ranging from strength, dancing, the playing of musical instruments, or the art of composing songs and satiric performances. The younger ones learn some of the skills from the older ones among them or by trying them out.\textsuperscript{126} Osuu Oko Chukwu notes that many boys gain incredible leadership and organisational skills by organising their groups themselves, and such skills enable them to fit into the community during their lives as adults.\textsuperscript{127} In addition, for most boys, their time in the boys’ group can be exciting, allowing them to grow in aesthetic sensibilities through their societies. For others it can be a difficult period as their lives and activities become more regulated. Moreover it raises a longing among the boys for the adult initiation, because although boys are initiated into their group they are still perceived as uninitiated (\textit{Enna Oherioheri}) in relation to the adult Ogo society.

\textsuperscript{123} Personal interview with Madam Elem Udu 19:07:08. She observes that such moments are exciting times for many mothers, who enjoy preparing special meals for their participating sons. On the other hand, the boys also find it exciting, and if even they sustain injury in the process they are not allowed to cry out.

\textsuperscript{124} Agwu, “The Role and Nature of Age Grades in Community Development: Amasiri in Focus.” p.3.

\textsuperscript{125} Personal interview with Okechukwu Otta on 20:07:08.

\textsuperscript{126} Personal interview with Festus Nkama on 24:07:08.

\textsuperscript{127} Personal interview with Osuu Oko Chukwu on 02:08:08.
2.1.2 *Nde Nwoke* (Adult Group)

Every male is expected to be initiated into the adult Ogo society from the age of ten, or otherwise remain limited in his social mobility and the exercise of power or influence. In addition, those who - for whatever reasons - do not pass their initiation at an early stage of their lives are often mocked and described as *oke enna* implying ‘an overgrown uninitiated person’. Initiation into the adult group marks a transition from the time when the boys use children’s masks and imitate adult ceremonies to the period when they participate in the adult society and its masquerades. The boys thus cease being mere emulators and observers of the Ogo society and become active
Each village within Amasiri has its own reserved sacred areas where initiation into the Ogo society takes place. They are located, in most cases, around the Ogo square or at the edge of the village. The Ogo square also houses the ‘ulo ogo’ that is the sacred house of the Ogo society. The house serves as a rest house and has limited access for uninitiated males. The Obu (sacred house where the initiates are often secluded during the initiation process) is also located at the Ogo square. On selected days during the initiation processes the Ogo squares in different villages are closed to both females and uninitiated males. However, the activities of the adult group are still under the surveillance of the elders of each village and they can therefore suspend or extend some ritual activities.

Figure 4 Ulo Ogo – Ogo sacred house where some of the initiation activities take place.

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129 Personal interview with Osuu Eze Otuu on 17:07:08.
Before the establishment of Christianity and educational institutions it was common at Amasiri for initiation into the Ogo society to last for seven years. This was believed to give subsequent initiates sufficient time to grow and mature for the initiation. However, the initiation processes have shorter processes which last for three months, twenty-eight days, four days or even over night. One argument for the shorter processes is that it enables the society to respond to modernisation.\textsuperscript{130} However, such a reduction in the duration of the initiation rites raises questions as to when and how the different phases of rituals take place as well as the efficacy of the rites. Nna Oko Abua insists that ‘it all depends on the choice of sponsors and an initiate, what is important is the remarkable transition to manhood.’\textsuperscript{131} Abua’s explanation however does not deny the pride which the elderly males express in relation to contemporary rites of initiation into the Ogo society. In his interview Omezue Hilary Nzagha insisted that ‘what young people do today in the name of initiation is watered down. They cannot see what some of us saw and survive.’\textsuperscript{132}

Nzagha’s comment draws attention to and gives some idea of the multiple meanings of a ritual. There are different grades and ranks within the Ogo society, known by members and entered through specific rites, thus highlighting the interplay of power within the structures of the initiated males. Being aware of this dynamic, a female interviewee argued that her sons would definitely pass through the longer version of the initiation and not through what she described as ‘quick service’.\textsuperscript{133}

The ritual process described is the \textit{Isiji udumini} (the initiation process that lasts for three months). The peak of the initiation takes place from September to March, and the period is often characterised by several communal meals as part of the ritual processes. However, whichever version of initiation one adopts, the three-stage pattern can still be read and for the purpose of in-depth analyses of the ritual the processes are described under pre-liminality, liminality and post-liminality.

\textsuperscript{130} Personal interview with Chief Geoffrey Oko on 02:08:08
\textsuperscript{131} Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
\textsuperscript{132} Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
\textsuperscript{133} Personal interview with Mrs. Nkechinyere Oko on 15:07:08.
2.1.2.1 Preliminary (Separation)

Before adult initiation into the Ogo society commences, consultations are usually made by sponsors or the parents of the candidates with the *dibia* (diviner) to ascertain if the intending initiates would survive the rigors of the processes. When that is confirmed, the initiates and their parents - especially their mothers - begin to observe certain regulations. Such as, mothers are expected not to speak while preparing meals for the intending initiates. Where pounded yam is to be served, these mothers are restricted to standing while preparing it and they are not to take a break once they begin pounding the yam. Thus, during the period of preparing meals for the initiates, sign language becomes the means of communication for these mothers. On the part of the initiates, they should not talk to females from the beginning of the process until the end. Osuu Eze Otuu argues that these regulations are not to be taken lightly, and as such parents and the initiates are expected to abide by them to assure their survival through the initiation processes.

Following this first stage of separation, the initiates are later separated from their previous environment and women and children during which they spend much of their time at the *Ekoo* (a sacred space). This stage is called *agbaba nohia*, which literally means ‘running into the bush’. It features further dietary restrictions on the initiates and each of them has their hair shaved to skin level. Mircea Eliade describes such a period as a ‘break with the community of the living’. Although Eliade does not explain the term ‘living’, it appears that what he is referring to is seclusion from their familiar environment including their families. However, during this stage, the initiate might have some sort of link with his mother and family, but at some point, apparently by a violent force, the initiate is separated from his family.

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134 Personal interview with Omezue Idam Ome on 10:08:06. Ome could not give any reason for such regulations, but insisted that it is the tradition of their fathers.

135 Personal interview with Osuu Eze Otuu on 17:07:08.

136 Personal interview with Osuu Obiahu Ekehie on 21:06:08.

and uninitiated friends. In his studies of the Kumai, Alfred Howitt summarizes the reasons for such separation thus:

The intention of all that is done at this ceremony is to make a momentous change in the boy’s life; the past is to be cut off from him by a gulf which he can never re-pass. His connection with his mother as her child is broken off, and he becomes henceforth attached to the men.

This seclusion signifies the death from which the initiates will be delivered only upon their successful completion of the initiation rituals. Oko observes that at this stage the initiates eat barely enough to keep the body alive; he argues ‘they do not attract sympathy and in case of very severe illness, they may die and be buried without much regard’. Being aware of this, the sponsors and families of the initiates, often attach much importance to the divination stage mentioned earlier and are careful to live up to the regulations of the ritual processes. Surviving of these processes assures them of the initiates’ level of strength and gives them a place within the social strata of the clan.

2.1.2.2 Liminality (Transition)

On the Eke market day before the new yam festival (usually celebrated at the end of August or in the first week of September) the initiates are offered a preliminary introduction to the following ritual items: Akpuru (which has been replaced with udo, a plaited rope); Ozi (used on the head); Ogbata used to cover the isiji masquerade’s face; Agu (lion’s teeth); Mba (mask for covering the Ikpem masquerade’s face – the last masquerade following the initiation); and finally the Chieje (ritual necklace).

Two days later on the Ahor market day, three ritual leaders, one of which is a dibia (diviner) appointed from specific families (Amalato, Umekuma and Okpotobazia) of Amasiri assemble for divination. This time the divination is carried out at the Ogo square in order to select Uke Nwohia (the leading age grade for the year’s initiation

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141 Personal interview with Osuu Obiahu Ekehie on 21:06:08.
rituals) and afterward the *Uke Nwohia* selects the *Isiji Nwohia* (leader among the initiates for the year). Sacrifices are offered during the divination for the protection of the initiates, their families and the leading age grade during the remaining rituals.

Following divination and introduction to the ritual items, the initiates are dressed in a towel around their waist, a red necklace, and arm and leg bracelets and they are called *Kpokpo*. The initiates’ hair is usually shaved to skin level and red chalk applied all over their bodies. The initiates are forbidden from showing their teeth in public, and they often look gloomy and serious.\(^{142}\) Also, at this stage the initiates are not allowed to talk to females, and if they must speak to the uninitiated males, they can only do so after turning their back to them and covering their mouths.

with their hands. This kind of conversation can only be done outside the Eko where the initiates into the Ogo society have been secluded.

As I observed during my field research in 2008, the initiates (Kpokpo) fetch their water with special earthen pots, and often go out to gather palm fruits, bananas and other fruits. They are usually expected to move in and out of their sacred space (Eko) quickly. At night the initiates sleep at the village rest houses (Obu) which are not accessible to the uninitiated males, but they are expected to leave the Obu for Eko first thing each morning.\footnote{Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 17:07:08. He notes that the initiates can sometime be destructive, and to avoid this, the elders and other ritual leaders are always on hand to direct them. The elders also offer them protection from bullying (self-harm and physical abuse) by the initiated males and from the older ones among them.} Interestingly, even in the face of such ordeals, the initiates are still considered as neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. It implies that the journey has not yet ended and until it is victory is never celebrated.

As highlighted earlier, at every initiation year a leader is usually appointed among the initiates. Such leaders are not meant to exercise power over their colleagues, but they help to maintain the ritual fire within the Eko and also ensure the orderliness of the initiates within the sacred space. This phase of the initiation helps to create a sense of bonding and community as the initiates suddenly find themselves in a common environment and doing the same things. However, the often argued uniformity of initiates at the liminal stage may be questionable especially as it is difficult to ascertain the emotional and psychological development and readiness of the initiates. Nonetheless, the initiates at this stage usually seem to develop a greater sense of unity and cooperation which may not end with the initiation process, but is continuous all through their lives as adult members of the clan, through the age grades and indigenous leadership described earlier.

Initiates into the Ogo society at this stage also participate in a range of masquerades especially Isiji. This masquerade is performed for seven Orie market days (28 days: a month according to the Amasiri calendar) and it is the first time that the initiates wear the Ogo society’s mask. The first outing takes place from ‘Orie Mma’ a day after the new yam festival. On the second day of the performance
(Ngbom) the isijji will usually dance at the (Ogbo Ogo) village squares of Amasiri. This individual is wearing a mask, a reddish orange headpiece that projects upwards in the middle of the head at the front and covers the sides and back of the skull. Furthermore, the Isiji masquerade wears a light yellow raffia dress which goes from their shoulders to their feet, which are bare. The materials for the masquerade are usually gathered by the friends and relatives of the initiates a day before the outing and they also assist with dressing them. The relatives, friends and special instructors train the initiates in the expected dance patterns during rehearsals. It is usually a village affair and so some elderly men from the initiates’ compounds often go to the Eko (sacred space) to supervise the dressing. Many mothers contribute money in order to buy the necessary costume for their sons.

As I observed in 2008, the Isiji masquerade dance and songs are rendered by the village musical group one after the other from the Eko. They dance facing backwards to meet the anxious crowd at the Ogo square, including men, women, boys, girls and visitors from the other clans or villages. At the Ogo square they take turns to dance, in twos or threes, to the songs in front of the musical group and then dance back to the main entrance of the Eko. There they wait for the end of the performance, when they all return to the sacred site at the same time. A poor dance among the Isiji is usually laughed at. The dance is expected to be gentle and the music quieter because of the use of hand clapping rather than drums. Isiji masquerades are an unusual performance in that while the masquerades are its central feature, many unmasked people also take part. It also has a strong familial element; mothers, fathers, siblings, friends and relatives are all involved and they sometimes dance around their Isiji. As Ottenberg observed in relation to Afikpo, the Isiji is believed to be a (Mma) spirit but it is also known to those involved, and is cherished as much as a son.

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144 Personal interview with Joshua Otuu on 27:06:08. It is interesting to note the organisational structure of the initiation. From start to finish, it appears to be well ordered, this includes the choice of songs, patterns of dance, costumes and the order of procession of the singers and masquerades.

145 Personal interview with Osuu Oko Chukwu on 02:08:08.

146 There is a contrast with the gentle nature of the songs and the dance of the Isiji masquerades. The event has strong physical movement: Isiji dancing, the handclapping of the musical group and the dance of the initiates’ family and friends.

The performance is important for the status of many fathers, while the mothers take pride in their son’s achievement. However, this atmosphere of celebration is usually cut short by the quick withdrawal of the boys for the main initiation rituals, thus the boys are separated by a ‘violent force’ from their mothers, sisters and uninitiated friends. The initiation space is usually opened to the initiates on an Nkwo market day.

On the following day Eke, the initiates go through the initiation (Okpu Ohia) which is done to test their endurance, and strength. The ritual processes enable the initiates to experience both a physical and mental weakening which is intended to make them lose their childhood existence. On such days all the initiated males (ohia okochi) leave their homes for the ritual space, while all the females and the uninitiated males have restrictions on their movement.148 The day usually begins with a loud noise (Obu onwu o! – meaning “Oh death”) as the initiated males leave

148 Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
in the morning for the ritual space, and when they return in the evening they shout “Nwoke bu Nwoke o”, meaning ‘man is a man’ or ‘a man is born’. This implies that the successful initiates have been transformed into real men.  

This acclamation underscores Turner’s point that the ordeals and humiliations - often of a gross physiological nature - to which the initiates are subjected to, partly represent a destruction of their previous status in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities. Turner further argues that the initiates ‘have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society’. The ordeal at this level is followed with a display by the initiates on the day following the harshest treatment that they may ever receive. At about 6am the initiates are dressed with palm leaves, their faces covered with masks and they sit at the Ogo house (Ulo Ogo).

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149 Personal interview with Osuu Oko Chukwu on 02:08:08.
This masquerade is called *Abam*; presented to the admiration, singing, dancing and celebration of their mothers and relatives. They sing and celebrate in songs the success of their children; and praise is often showered on their ancestors who protected the initiates.\(^{151}\) At about 10am the initiates are withdrawn from the Ogo square and are dressed for another display, this time as *Ikpem*.

In the *Ikpem* masquerade the initiates are usually dressed to match the *Mba* on their faces. They also wear an oversized coat, *ujara* on their feet, and carry a fan (*nza*) in their hands. The *Ikpem* masquerades usually perform first in front of their mother’s homestead and later are escorted by their family, friends and peers alongside a male aged between twenty and thirty while they visit other relatives. At each of the places, the *Ikpem* sits and dances in front of their hostess’ house until sunset and are presented with gifts. Many women often sing and dance alongside their neighbours to celebrate the success of the initiate.\(^{152}\) The visit to relatives is perhaps the most expressive sign of friendship and bonding which does not end with the initiation processes.

Mircea Eliade considers initiation paramount to introducing the candidates into the human community and its cultural values.\(^{153}\) The initiation into the Ogo society not only enables the initiates to learn the behavioural patterns of the clan, but also teaches them the techniques and institutions of indigenous leadership described in the previous chapter. Initiation into the Ogo society transcends social functions to assume the means through which the initiates are introduced to the gods and ancestors of the clan. The initiation thus not only moves boys into new social roles but it also transforms them inwardly by moulding their moral and mental disposition towards the world.\(^{154}\) The initiation inserts and integrates the initiates into the inner life of the clan. This scenario depicts what Pierre Bourdieu describes as ‘cultural capital’. He argues that culture shares many of the properties that are characteristic of economic capital and that classes are differentiated from one another in terms of the overall volume of capital (economic or cultural) controlled by individuals and

\(^{151}\) Personal interview with Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.

\(^{152}\) Personal interview with Osuu Obiahu Ekehie on 21:06:08.


families. Cultural capital is a relational concept and implies that cultural habits and dispositions comprise a resource capable of generating profit. They are also potentially subject to monopolisation by individuals or groups and under the appropriate conditions they can be transmitted from one generation to the next. Initiation into the Ogo society therefore confers a secret knowledge on the initiates, which can be equated with power, and this power is based on the control of ritual rather than material resources.

**2.1.2.3 Postliminality (Incorporation/Integration)**

Initiation leads to the incorporation of initiates into the clan with their new status as adult. The initiates are instructed on indigenous knowledge about the clan, as well as the mysteries of life and death, domestic and social virtues, sex and sexuality and forms of identity. However, Omezue Idam Ome observes in an interview that sex and sexuality are often emphasised most strongly because the transmission and preservation of life depends on them. C. R. Tabar observes that such a phase is often completed with the initiates acquiring ‘new names, new clothes, a new hairdo, and or adornment …and of course new rights and duties’. The power thus attributed to the newly initiated males is confined within the regulations and norms of both the Ogo society and clan. The power thus should be viewed as one’s own capacity to perform social acts, a capacity regulated and constrained by the limits established by membership of the Ogo society. Though admitted as full members of the society, there are still other things they may not yet do.

This therefore demonstrates the hierarchical dimension of the rituals as well as the power dynamics. Initiated males into the Ogo society are not expected to sleep with their mothers or sisters in the same bed, cry in public or go naked before females. Females are not allowed to touch the head of the initiated and their sisters,

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157 Personal interview with Omezue Idam Ome on 10:08:06.

mothers and later wives are to follow specified procedures when preparing their meals. In his interview Festus Nkama further describes this:

No female is to stand and address an initiated male; otherwise it would amount to a public performance of some rituals within the Ogo society. An initiated male is not allowed to cover his face for any reason with anything before females. The act of clapping one’s hands as is often the case in church is forbidden except during the Ogo activities. Other regulations includes that an initiated male should not show his teeth and must refrain from touching the ground with his hand.\textsuperscript{159}

The comment by Nkama highlights only a few of the rules, deviation from any of which can attract a severe fine or reprimand by the elders. Hilary Nzagha also insists that secret offences against the Ogo rules can lead to sudden death, unless they are identified in time and appropriate sacrifices offered to appease the gods and ancestors.\textsuperscript{160} The initiation thus brings the boys directly under the authority and control of the older males and the ancestors.

These scenarios raise enormous challenges for many males especially upon becoming Christians as they negotiate the powers and identities within congregations that often have more females as members and leaders. However, Joshua Otuu observes that this situation is not just a male issue as some females often decline leadership positions in church as they consider it unfit for females to lead a group with a male membership.\textsuperscript{161} As has been shown the Ogo society serves as a means of creating boundaries which define social status and assigned powers. Furthermore, the ritual processes of initiation into the Ogo society appear to bind the clan together creating \textit{Communitas}.\textsuperscript{162} The full significance of the rituals can therefore be understood if one considers their effect as well as their purposes and the social relevance of the symbolic actions.

2.2 Ritual: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework
One of the most enduring theoretical formulations relating to initiation rites derives from Arnold van Gennep’s \textit{Rite of Passage}. He defines rites of passage as those that

\begin{itemize}
\item Personal interview with Festus Nkama on 24:07:08.
\item Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
\item Personal interview with Joshua Otuu on 27:06:08.
\item Turner, \textit{The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure}. p.94.
\end{itemize}
accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age. According to him each ritual change of state is characterised by three phases (separation, margin and reaggregation) which have been explained previously. Central to an understanding of these transformational phases is the concept of liminality, etymologically derived from the Latin *limen* ‘threshold’. Although as earlier argued, there is fluidity in the different phases, the liminal phase is a limbo, devoid of permanence and characterised by ambiguities. Van Gennep argues that the passage from one frontier to the other, from the profane to the sacred, is so great that one needs an intermediate stage, which in conventional terms would be ‘no man’s land’.\(^{163}\) Thus, the initiate is neither what he has been, nor the new person that he intends to become.

Victor Turner further advanced Gennep’s idea of liminal phase, bringing into sharp analytical focus the ‘statuslessness’ of initiation subjects, as demonstrated earlier in 1967 with the Ogo society. Although he agrees with Gennep that initiation insert initiates into the community, he argues that liminality is creative space, which allows ritual to do the work of transformation. Turner focuses entirely on the middle stage – liminality – and notes that ‘the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible’.\(^{164}\) Many successive studies of liminality are based at least in part on Turner’s theories as demonstrated in his works – ‘Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in Rites de Passage; ‘Liminality and *Communitas’;\(^{165}\) and ‘Passages, Margins, and Poverty: religious Symbols of *Communitas’\(^{166}\). He argues that ‘Liminal entities are neither here nor there’. They ‘are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial’. Characterised by anonymity and ambiguity, ‘the neophytes are merely entities in transition, as yet without a place or position’.\(^{167}\)

Turner further detailed the statuslessness of the initiate, the neophyte in liminality must be *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge

\(^{163}\) Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. pp.1-10.


and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status. As earlier argued, the transitional stage of initiation into the Ogo society is designed to ensure that the initiates neither act in a harmful way nor become victims of dangerous forces during the processes. Secondly, the group of liminal individuals is not a typical social hierarchy but a communal group in which all are supposed to be equal. Thirdly, the liminal individuals have nothing, ‘no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, and kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows’.  

Furthermore, the ordeals and humiliations, to which neophytes are subjected, partly represent a destruction of their previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges.

While recognising the importance of the ritual phases, Vincent Crapanzano, argues that the three-stage structure ‘may reflect less the reality of the ritual than the culture of the anthropologist.’ He notes that the perspectives of the individuals involved in the ritual are often varied and as such he argues that any general theory of what the ritual does would have to deal with such variety. Drawing on his studies of the Moroccan rite of circumcision, Crapanzano suggests that what the ritual does is much more complicated, and theories that emphasise a ritual as a functional mechanism for legitimate passage and incorporation into social groups are misleading. The earlier description of the Ogo society and its initiation processes underscores the complex nature of the ritual, as highlighted by Crapanzano. Furthermore, the issue of the ritual doing what it says it does also remains complex. However, within the Amasiri clan, many members of the Ogo society and clan hold the view that initiation into the Ogo society transforms boys into men.

One of the main contributions that Turner’s analysis of liminality has made to initiation processes is his emphasis on symbolic exegesis that is the indigenous interpretation of knowledge and meaning that derives from the contribution of symbols to ritual efficacy. He expounded on the role of dominant symbols as crucial

to ceremonial action, as much as they are highly evocative, multivocal, multilayered and condensed. In diverse ways symbols – both ideological and sensory – are endowed with the capacity to generate emotional power, thereby amplifying ceremonial interactions and relations. Yet, Turner’s analyses appear to have been couched in ‘canonical’ terms without much specific reference to ceremonial performance. However, there is a need to integrate symbol analysis with performance aspects, thus Turner’s analyses have failed to show how the emotional power in individual symbols combines to effect ritual efficacy. As highlighted earlier, initiation into the Ogo society demonstrates how individual symbols interact with one another to collectively affect ritual efficacy as well as the dynamic relationship between ceremonial progression and the enhancement of emotional efficacy.

2.3 Ritual and Symbol

Edmund Leach sees ritual as that which ‘serves to express the individual’s status as a social person in a structural system in which he finds himself for the time being.’ The meaning attached to rituals within contexts will highlight the importance of Leach’s definition. As earlier shown the Amasiri clan is comprised of social systems with what seem to be clearly defined rights and obligations for its members, thus ritual phases define and reinforce such roles and rights within the clan. Furthermore, Fred Clothey observes that ritual is so important for understanding religion that it functions as a paradigm and dramatisation of the intent of religion itself. It does this, he adds, by the use of symbols, both visual and aural ‘along with intellectual and sensual images and provides the participants with a sense of identity’. Whether the identities highlighted by Clothey are official constructs or individually affirmed and experienced, the point remains that there is a strong sense of connection between ritual practices, identity construction and affirmation. The paradigmatic element of

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ritual is that in their performance they transform the participants into a new mode of being.\textsuperscript{173}

This view is reinforced by James Cox who insists that ‘ritual is a repeated and symbolic dramatisation directing attention to a place where the sacred enters life thereby granting identity to participants in the drama, transforming them, communicating social meaning verbally and non-verbally, and offering a paradigm for how the world ought to be.’\textsuperscript{174} Rituals have their symbolic representations; symbols therefore are the essential ingredients of rituals. Rituals utilise symbols to express and convey meanings and thus serve as a means of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Emmanuel Ifesieh observes that ritual behaviour can be seen as both ‘expressive’ and ‘symbolic’ forms of religion. He further notes that an expressive ritual behaviour is a symbolism which can be regarded as a kind of language that opens a way to symbolic behaviour.\textsuperscript{175}

Such symbols not only assert, but establish the significance of some indigenous values. Rituals within the Ogo society may appear to be a drama, but it is never an empty one as each step is loaded with symbolic meanings and is closely supervised by the elders who often insist on avoiding mistakes. Mistakes are to be avoided as much as possible during the ritual performance, since according to Omezue Oko Abua, unnoticed or uncorrected mistakes can have severe consequences for the clan. Although unwritten, the initiation rituals are repeated according to set patterns of the Ogo society which presupposes that there are correct and incorrect ways of performing the ritual that determines its overall efficacy as a source of transformative power. Nna Abua argues that in view of the severe consequences of making mistakes during rituals, the elders and ritual officiants often undertake training for ritual participants and are quick to caution offending participants.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{174} Cox, “Introduction: Ritual, Rites of Passage and the Interaction between Christian and Traditional Religion.” p.x.
\textsuperscript{176} Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
In his early works Edward Tylor divided ritual into performance and communication, with rites being the ‘expressive and symbolic’, the ‘gesture language of theology’ and ‘directly practical’ as a means of intercourse with and influence upon spiritual beings." The performative aspect of ritual is therefore crucial because ritual addresses the relational aspect of the roles and of self and other. Ritual both posits boundaries and allows the transition between boundaries. However, by recognising limits, rituals also provide the vehicle for transcending them. Initiation into the Ogo society employs symbols in repeated patterns to effect ritual transformations in the lives of the participants and clan. Ray Rappaport’s definition of ritual is particularly helpful in accentuating this point ‘the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers’.

Rappaport’s point is crucial, as it emphasises the question of ‘intentionality’ with regards to ritual performances.

Responding to the debate on ‘intentionality’ Adam Seligman, Robert Weller, Michael Puett and Benne Simon note thus:

"In any ritual…performing the act marks acceptance of the convention. It does not matter how you feel about convention, if you identify with it or not. In doing a ritual the whole issue of our internal states is often irrelevant. What you are is what you are in the doing, which of course is an external act."

Although it is not clear what ‘acceptance’ as used in the above comment means, as there are cases where some males can be forcefully initiated into the Ogo society. However, La Fontaine argues that initiation serves as an instrument that recreates social distinctions and categories. According to him initiation rituals involve ideas of hierarchical order, being that the initiates are not only transformed but they also gain status. While Fontaine’s position appears to be laudable, he falls short of demonstrating how these ritual acts take place in his study of Gisu initiation. He furthermore did not give consideration to the subtle distinctions between the official

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and unofficial versions, thereby ignoring the multiple perspectives upon the same ritual actions. Analyses of events as complex and multilayered as initiation into the Ogo society may not be expressed through only one mode of discourse, but should rather account for the ambiguities in ritual meanings.

The variety of meanings which rituals and symbols can make to observers cannot be undervalued. Abner Cohen observes this in his definition of symbols as: ‘...objects, acts, concepts, or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meaning, evoke sentiments and emotions and impel men to action’. According to Evan Zuesse, what makes the same cognitive content religious for one, and not for another, is the presence or absence of transcendental intentionality. Raymond Firth rather contends that the ‘essence of symbolism lies in the recognition of objects as standing for (representing) another, the relation between them being normally that of concrete to abstract, particular to general.’ Firth, unlike Cohen, seems to demonstrate the generating and receiving effects otherwise reserved for the object to which it refers. This understanding is helpful because the symbolic effects can change the impressed objects (those who see or use them) in a remarkable and emotional way. Furthermore, an understanding of the full ritual transformation should be fore-grounded in recognition of not only the multiple voices but also the different gradations at which language use, symbol application, and ritual actions intersect.

Nonetheless, Michael Bourdillion has shown that although members of a particular society may regard a ritual as having ‘the effect of moving them from one status of one grade to another’ in practice social change is more complex. Further to this, it is possible to find that some participants may not pay attention, while others may or may not be serious. Although it is difficult to decide what it means to be serious or not, Osuu Eze Otuu, in an interview, insists that the efficacy of the Ogo society does not depend on how the initiates feel or even how they behave in the

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process. The important thing, according to Eleje, is making sure that the essential stages of the initiation rites are carried out.\textsuperscript{185} Furthermore, shifts in status are gradual, informal and correspond to physical age as well as experiences. As such, rites of passage offer mental constructs around which communities like Amasiri can organise their perception of the social order that acts as both a model of the way things actually are and a model for how they should be. As argued earlier, initiation into the Ogo society therefore presents an ideal picture of what the world ought to be. Furthermore, the initiation constructs and affirms a world of social convention and authority beyond the inner will and understanding of any individual.

2.4 Ritual and Myth

The study of ritual began with a prolonged discourse on the origins and significance of religion. The question which motivates the discussion is whether religion is originally rooted in myth and ritual. Furthermore, modern scepticism towards myth and ritual (especially towards rituals), has perhaps resulted in an underestimation of their significance. Thus by making myths and rituals the heart of religion and by making ritual at least as important as myths, the ‘myth-ritualist’ theory compels one to reconsider the importance of both in modern as well as within indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{186} Myth, like many other concepts, remains loaded with meanings and its relationship with ritual has been variously interpreted. By incorporating myths into rituals, the theory suggests, by extrapolation, that beliefs and practices are generally more united than separate. Rather than leading to practice, belief becomes part of practice. Although there are differences, generally myth-ritualists presuppose that a relationship of some kind exists between myth and ritual; they differ only over what the relationship is.

The pioneering myth-ritualist, William Robertson Smith argued that myth is inferior to ritual. It raises an explanation of a ritual only after the ritual, which antedates myths. In other words, ‘myth was derived from the ritual and not the ritual from the myth’. Myth arose only once the reason for the ritual had somehow been

\textsuperscript{185} Personal interview with Osuu Eze Otuu on 17:06:08
forgotten, thus myth was created to explain and perhaps to justify the ritual. Religion, he argues, did not arise in the explanation of ‘animism’, but in activities that cemented the bonds of community. In other words, Smith saw religion as rooted not in ‘speculative myth’ about the nature of things, but in rituals that essentially worshipped divine representations of the social order itself.  

Ritual according to Smith, is conspicuously more important than myth, without ritual there would be no myth, whether or not without myth there would cease to be ritual. Conversely, myths can flourish apart from rituals. In claiming that myth is an explanation of ritual, Smith appears to be denying that myth is an explanation of the world. Furthermore, his theory appears to have been limited to myth and not ritual which is simply presupposed.

On another hand, the classicist and anthropologist, James Frazer, insists that myth is the equal of ritual and alongside it serve as its script: myth thus explains what ritual enacts. Myth operates while ritual retains its power. Myths describe the character and behaviour of gods while rituals seek to curry divine favour. Thus rituals in Frazer’s opinion may presuppose myths, which would suggest what activities would most please the gods, but they are otherwise independent of myths. Unlike Smith, Frazer sees myth as arising prior to ritual. The myth that gets enacted in the combined stage emerges in the stage of religion and therefore precedes the ritual to which it is applied. In this combined stage, myth, as for Smith, explains the point of ritual. Another notable scholar in ‘myth-ritual’ discourses is Joseph Campbell. His synthetic approach outlines four functions of myth and ritual thus: a) a metaphysical or mystical function that induces a sense of awe and reverence in human beings, b) a cosmological function that provides a coherent image of the


190 Segal, "Introduction." p.3.

cosmos, c) sociological function that integrates and maintains individuals within a social community and d) a psychological function that guides the individual’s internal development.¹⁹²

Campbell notes that myths can be told as entertainment in the ‘spirit…of play’, but when they appear in a religious context they become ‘the verities of which the whole culture is a living witness and from which it derives both its spiritual authority and its temporal power’.¹⁹³ Campbell’s emphasis draws attention to and raises the importance of context. His point implies that myth differs from other types of stories as a matter of extent: the religious person discovers fundamental meaning and encounters a depth of reality through myth; giving the category ‘myth a sense of gravitas lacking in socio-moral stories or those told simply to entertain.’¹⁹⁴ Campbell further demonstrates both the local and universal application of myth and ritual. He argues that myth and ritual intersect by ‘disengaging’ a member of any religious group ‘from his local historical conditions and leading him towards some kind of ineffable experience’.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, Edward Tylor argues that myth should not be interpreted as a misunderstanding, but as a deliberate attempt to explain and understand the world. Although Tylor admits that the results of mythological attempts at explanation were wrong, still myth cannot be dismissed ‘as mere error and folly.’ Rather it should be studied ‘as an interesting product of the human mind’ for insight into what Tylor sees as ‘primitive’ ways of reasoning.¹⁹⁶ The study of myth, according to Tylor, makes provision for laying bare prehistoric connections between peoples that have been totally lost in memory and of which we have no material evidence. As such in Tylor’s opinion it is reasonable to inspect myth and other religious statements and


extract from them whatever factual content they may have, discarding the quantities of rubbish that remain. Mircea Eliade agrees with Tylor that myths should not be dismissed out of hand, but analysed for what they reveal about human perception and cognition. However, he rejects Tylor’s conclusion that myth is a misguided explanation and argues instead that myth is only explained by reference to cosmic creation and symbols that express the awe and tremendum of an encounter with the sacred. Ninian Smart describes a myth as ‘a moving picture of the sacred’, which is depicted in the form of a story.

However, according to James Cox, for a story to be classified as myth it must have two components: firstly telling stories of sacred beings which are usually divided into good and evil. Secondly, such a story must be an account that features the relationship between the sacred (the transcendent and supernatural) and the world. Smart further argues that myths are not mere entertainment, although they may be quite entertaining. He argues that ‘the primary context’ of myth is ritual. He notes that myths relate ‘the event and transactions between divinities and men.’

This could explain why myths are often told during celebrations and ritual processes such as the initiation into the Ogo society. Amasiri also has cosmological myths from which it is possible to derive a notion of the Supreme Being, deities and spirits. Ancestors are honoured in recognition of their continuous relationship with the living. Attitudes toward the belief in the Supreme Being, ancestors and deities are embedded in ritual and symbols. Myths about the origin of the world, of death and of various indigenous institutions, as described in chapter one, are thought to be the key to the understanding of indigenous religions. Thus, from these myths information

201 Smart, The Phenomenon of Religion. p.94.
about the nature, characteristics and functions of the Supreme Being, ancestors and deities could be derived.

The ritual provides an occasion to retell the story of the clan’s encounter with the gods and the ancestors and in doing so, the ritual officiants and elders create a sacred time, when the myth comes to life, and thus transforms the lives of the ritual participants. 203 Certain anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Edmund Leach see a direct relationship between myth and practice. 204 Malinowski, for instance, argues that myths give ritual a historic origin and thereby sanction it, including other cultural phenomena as well. According to him, society depends on myth to encourage obedience of rules and customs of all kinds, not merely to rituals. 205 In his words, the myth comes into play when rites, ceremonies, or social or moral rule demand justification, warrant of antiquity, reality and sanctity. 206 By implication a myth about the Ogo society and other indigenous practices among Amasiri would make the practices as ancient as possible, so that to tamper with them would be to tamper with traditions. As such social myth says ‘Do this because this has always been done.’ 207 Thus, for Malinowski myth is not merely a story told, but a reality lived. Myth expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficacy of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of the community.

Conversely, Levi-Strauss demonstrates quite conclusively how misleading such views can be. He rather points out how mythology is so often a speculation on practice, exploring all imaginable possibilities in what must remain an intellectual search. 208 Levi-Strauss further argues that ritual is not a reaction to the world, emotional or otherwise, nor an enactment of the conceptual categories of the cultural

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203 Cox, An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion. p.92.
205 Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays. pp.76-78.
group found in myth. He insists that ritual is rather a reaction to what thought and myth have done to the world, a rather doomed attempt to restore a mindless continuity to experience.\(^{209}\) However, the distinction between myth and ritual is not quite as sharp as Levi-Strauss puts it, nor does it correspond exactly with the dividing lines between the two phenomena as they are usually understood.\(^{210}\) Catherine Bell argues that myth plays a crucial role in establishing a system in which any activity has its meaning by ritually identifying the activities of the here and now with those of the gods in the period of creation.\(^{211}\) Therefore Myth can be said to have an active force and may not be an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of moral wisdom.

On the question of the relationship between myth and ritual, Clyde Kluckhohn argues that some myths, but certainly not all, are clearly related to ritual. According to him, not only is such a claim impossible to prove, but there is also substantial evidence for a variety of relationships between myths and rituals, including their complete independence from each other. He therefore concludes that ‘neither myth nor ritual can be postulated as primary.’\(^{212}\) Yet, Eliade sees ritual as a re-enactment of a cosmogenic event or story recounted in myth, thus ritual can be considered to be dependent on myth, since it is the story that assures people that what they are doing in the ritual is what was done in the earliest ages when the gods, heroes and ancestors enacted and controlled the world order and established divine models of all subsequent meaningful ritual activities: thus the gods did; thus men do.\(^{213}\) As highlighted by Eliade, ritual cannot be separated from myth, for if such separation exists myth would cease from being myth. Cox summarises the interaction between myths and rituals in the following points:


\(^{211}\) Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions*. p.11.


As described earlier, myth appears to be inseparable from the ritual processes of the Ogo society. Myths carry the power to transform the lives of members of religious groups, and this is done through ritual enactments. The initiation into the Ogo society enacts the roles of the invisible members of the indigenous community including ancestors and spiritual beings which are all powerful and by far superior to human beings. Their reality and presence in the community are dully acknowledged and honoured. Neglect could spell disaster for human beings and the community. The presence of these spiritual beings is equally recognised through the many existing taboos found among many villages of Amasiri. The taboos are said to exist in order to assist members of the clan to live up to the expectations of the ancestors and other spiritual beings.

The above scenario accentuates Javier Ruedas’ observation that the way in which information about past times becomes templates for social representation is strongly affected, not only by the social context in which the past is narrated or performed, but also by the social context in which that information is interpreted. Suffice to say that a story which might be received as sacred may not convey the same meaning to others. Thus, while recognising the place of myth and ritual, the local context continues to shape and re-shape them. Smart has argued that within academic circles ‘myth’ implies a neutral category aimed at promoting understanding of ‘what is believed’. In essence, it can be argued that myth does not refer to a ‘false belief’, but relates a story which for many members of the religious tradition is true precisely because it describes the world as they may be experiencing it.

However, Cox points out that this may not mean that the elements within the story are always considered by many members as literally or historically accurate, but that the symbols disclosed in the myth help them to attain meaning within their

214 Cox, An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion. p.99.
lives.\textsuperscript{217} The crucial point highlighted by Cox is whether or not myths have any historical basis, or whether they may be of the highest religious importance. Its essence lies in the fact that myth embodies a situation of profound emotional significance, a situation, moreover, which is in its nature recurrent. As shown earlier, under the different phases of initiation into the Ogo society, one finds that the different stages of the ritual evoke many possibilities and highlight the complex nature of the interaction between myth and ritual. Amasiri myths have contents that, after being interpreted, indicate that certain moral patterns are to be valued and others are not. When elders and ritual officiants interpret myths, they make statements of how proper Amasiri indigenes - especially those initiated into the Ogo society - should behave. Myth represents and supports the narratives of kinship, affinity and socialised sexuality as discussed earlier in chapter one. By learning how things came into existence the initiates at the same time learn that they are the creation of another, ‘the result of such-and-such, and the consequences of a series of mythological occurrences, in short, of sacred history’.\textsuperscript{218}

The initiation into the Ogo society represents one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in the history of Amasiri. As argued earlier, it involves not only the religious life of the individual, but also his entire life and it is through this that the initiate becomes what he should be. The initiation is thus the revelation of and bonding with the sacred, which includes the whole body of the indigenous mythological and cultural traditions. It could be said that it is through this ritual process that males attain the status of human beings; before initiation, they do not yet fully share in the human condition precisely because they do not yet have access to the religious life of the clan. Furthermore, this involves a means of refining an identity over time or ‘finding’ it at any one point in time. The identity may have a long and esteemed evolving history.\textsuperscript{219} As has been argued earlier in this chapter, initiation into the Ogo society not only involves the initiates, but is a community affair. Through the repetition of indigenous ritual, the entire clan is regenerated.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{217} Cox, \textit{An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion}. p.97.
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The ritual process provides a space for highlighting the place of the indigenous Amasiri in the world; enabling them to know themselves and others. Myth like ritual simultaneously imposes an order, accounts for the origin and nature of that order, and shapes people’s dispositions to experience that order in the world around them. The initiation into the Ogo society is much more than a ‘social event’, for society as understood among Amasiri includes the ancestors, divinities and the unborn children. As such, to remain faithful to their religion is to live a worthy life; to live in peace with the ancestors and to enjoy good health. To break religious taboos or to disassociate oneself from the religious practices of the clan appears tantamount to incurring the wrath of the ancestors. Thus, religion appears to permeate people’s lives and expresses itself in multifarious ways including the vehicle of myths, folktales, proverbs and sayings and is the basis for their philosophy. The past history of the clan appears to be preserved by words of mouth which are transmitted from generation to generation. The oral histories, though not written, are very active and they are passed on through ritual ceremonies. The myths on which the rituals are founded and preserved contain many explanations of common occurrences and facts of human existence, answers to serious riddles like those involved in the phenomena of birth, human life in all its phases and death, including questions relating to ancestors and deities.

2.5 The Ogo Society: Identity and Power

In his study of Imbalu initiation, John Khamalwa notes that the notions of culture, identity and power are so intertwined that they become virtually inseparable. He argues that one informs the other and one cannot be unravelled without necessarily affecting the other adversely. The concept of culture therefore suggests that members of a community or social group share common norms, values and ways of interpreting the world around them. This implies that how people see (identify) themselves can only be understood in relation to their cultures. Elizabeth Koepping

however draws attention to the complex nature of ‘culture’ arguing that there are neither fixed boundaries nor, logically, unitary and agreed content within. Nonetheless, she further notes that division – gender, age, status, class, ethnicity, dialect – within attributed entities is inevitable, for people recognise and reflect on ‘both similarity and differences in a finely discriminating context.’

Thus identity that Koepping appears to refer to is used to describe the way people or individuals see themselves in relation to others. However, Kath Woodward argues that ‘there is no one fixed, coherent identity, but several in play’. In other words, people’s identity or image of themselves is formed through their interaction with other people. The identity of an individual is therefore inseparable from his or her place in society and how the individual is defined by the cultures of that society.

Stuart Hall points out that the sociological conception of identity as developed by George Mead sees identity as a bridge ‘between the insider and the outsider – between the personal and the public world.’ In essence identity provides a link between people’s inner sense of self and the place they occupy in the wider social and religious world. It is important to consider the multiple and degrees of difference and sameness constructed and negotiated by my interviewees based on religiously-informed understandings of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through ritual processes. However, Michael Foucault denies that there is any essential factor which determines one’s identity or sense of self. He argues that people’s sense of self is determined neither by biological factors nor by any specific social factors such as class or status. Foucault rather sees the way people view themselves and those around them as shaped by discourses or ways of seeing, describing and thinking about things. Foucault’s explanations fail to show how discourses are informed and shaped. Furthermore, an examination of the Ogo society raises doubt about his view, which like certain Enlightenment thinkers saw individuals as autonomous and self-

sufficient. Roger Brubaker, has further broadened our understanding of identity by suggesting three alternative conceptualisation of identity; identification and categorisation; self-identification and social location; and commonality, connectedness and groupness. This classification is not less problematic as other sociological concepts, but it offers helpful tool for understanding identity.

On the contrary, the sense of self appears to be formed through people’s interaction with others, for example, their roles and positions within families and community. In his interview, Nna Okpara Ocha, argues that the Ogo society creates ‘worthy adults’ who accordingly are expected to take their duties as men in line with the requirements of the clan seriously. As such, he continues, whenever a male initiated into the Ogo society acts childishly, the other men and even the elderly women will remind him of his initiation and its covenantal requirements. As pointed out earlier, during the initiation processes the ancestors are usually invited to witness and safeguard the vows. Thus, as argued by Nna Ocha, the ancestors play a central role in sanctioning the vows by offering credibility and authority to them. Strict compliance with the requirements of the Ogo society is taken so seriously that defaulting is usually not countenanced. The vast majority of the norms, taboos and prohibitions are directed towards protecting the community and promoting peace and harmony.

Laurenti Magesa observes that taboos play a significant role in the ethical duty of transmitting and preserving life and the breach of such taboos endangers the health and well-being of the society. Writing on the main function of ritual, John Beattie considers the expression and reinforcement of certain sentiments and values necessary for the smooth running of the performing society. Among Amasiri it is believed that spiritual being - especially the ancestors guarantee - and legitimise the ethical code and they invoke severe sanctions on anyone who opposes or disobeys the laws of morality. However, many people acknowledge the social basis of ethical

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227 Personal interview with Nna Okpara Ocha on 29:07:08.
norms and, as such, fines may be imposed or material reparation demanded, as explained earlier. Whatever measure of sanction is deemed appropriate they appear to reinforce the norms with the supernatural authority and sanction of invisible beings. Thus agents of divinities, including ritual officiants, indigenous healers and many masquerades representing deities or ancestral spirits, often participate actively in the execution of communal law and morality. Thus to be initiated into the Ogo society can be said to imply being ethically and morally distinct, accentuating the ‘us’ and ‘them’.

As highlighted earlier, initiation into the Ogo society is represented as the ritual which separates the men from the boys, the brave from the cowards. The initiates are often made to feel that initiation is an attainment, a goal to be coveted and achieved as a symbol of maturity and communal identity. The pain inflicted on the initiates serves to remind them that to be ‘a man is no simple matter’. It involves preparedness for any hardships which might come. Moreover, incessant war with other neighbouring clans required a fighting force of tremendous fitness. During the initiation, each male’s capacity for endurance is tested to its limit. The successful initiates can then be trusted with the ultimate test of war, in which they might have to march for days without food or water. On the part of the initiate, there is the conviction of his bravery, the pride and the self-confidence that there can be no greater hardship ever to be met. The pains of initiation into the Ogo society are also believed to create fearlessness in the later life, thus the ritual is designed to debase the initiates in order to exalt and frighten them in order to make them become brave.

On another level, Anthony Oko notes that initiation into the Ogo society serves as a springboard for a male’s qualification to marry and even have sexual intercourse with a woman. However, in the past ten years, uninitiated males can marry, but in most cases they are not allowed to inherit family and village landed property. Moreover, children born within such marriages carry a stigma, even if other

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231 Personal interview with Omezue Idam Ome on 10:08:06.
233 Oko, Amasiri: A Legacy. p.68.
relations of theirs help them to be initiated. This is because people are often identified through their parents or families or ancestors. This scenario creates a longing for ‘belongingness’ and esteem which the community alone confers upon those who successfully undergo the training and tests during the initiation processes. Although a son of an ordained elder in one of the PCN’s branches, Francis Agu tells of his experiences which informed his quest for initiation into the Ogo society:

I was born into a Christian family and was baptised as an infant in the church. My parents and I used to live in another city (Ikom – Cross River State) outside Amasiri, but I was used to visiting home on some occasions. I had some friends and peers who I used to go out with, but often they would ask me to excuse them in order to discuss some issues which they considered to be meant for the men. Such situation repeated itself on many occasions and more than that they referred to me as being a ‘woman’ and in fact I was made miserable. On several occasion I shared my experiences with my father, who only insisted that there was no way I could be initiated into the Ogo society. Worse still, he did not give me any explanation as to why he opposed it. As such I secretly went to my uncle in another village who sponsored me without the knowledge of my father and had been initiated. Although my father was angry with my uncle and I, I am happy because after that I became more accepted within the community.234

The remark by Agu is simply a representation of the quest for identity which is particularly common among many young people within Amasiri irrespective of religious affiliation. This follows Hans Mol’s argument that ‘Rituals articulate and reiterate a system of meaning and prevent it being lost from sight…they restore, reinforce, or direct identity.’235 The longing for participation and belonging within the community appears to draw a lot of boys into the Ogo society. Kenelm Burridge asserts that, ‘to become it is first necessary to belong; and belonging makes it possible to define just who or what one is.’236 It appears that there was a vacuum within Agu which the church community could not fill. His baptism into the church could only incorporate him into the church community, but not within the wider social community, thereby leaving him in limbo. Agu’s father could not give a sufficient explanation as to why he should not be initiated into the Ogo society except that he insisted that it was unchristian to do so, hence Agu’s use of alternative sponsors to be initiated.

234 Personal interview with Francis Agu on 26:06:08.
Initiation into the Ogo society thus appears to establish the initiate’s identity as a member of the clan and unites him in a very special way with his ancestors and families. Initiation thus leaves an indelible mark on the initiate, which continues to remind him of his place, responsibility and rights within the clan. In his interview Hon. Dickson Osim lauds the contemporary relevance of initiation into the Ogo society. In terms of its importance he asserts ‘As it was in the beginning, it is now….’ Osim notes that an uninitiated male still will not be involved in the discussion of serious family, village or clan matters. Such males, he insists, can only attend the meeting if females are invited along, and can only speak if females are permitted to speak.\(^\text{237}\) Initiation into the Ogo society thus continues to set up the platform on which initiates acquire what is perceived to be a higher status where they cease to identify with boys but identify with men. As shown, a male’s status is essential to understanding his identity, while an individual’s consciousness as a human being is determined by their relationship to their community. Cases of individuals within Amasiri who have been isolated from contact with other people demonstrate the importance of socialisation or the learning and acquisition of cultures in the formation of identity.

Further on the power dimension of the Ogo society, in his interview Osuu Simon Uche argues that fully initiated males hardly die in accidents, since such deaths are believed to be the act of evil spirits and witches and the initiation serves as an antidote to this. He insists that the efficacy of the Ogo society is not simply a thing that lies in the past, but that its strength remains even today. He underscores his point thus:

A young man wanted to marry my daughter and happened not to have been initiated into the Ogo society. I warned him that he should first be initiated before proceeding with the marriage rites, but he refused and both he and my daughter had declared themselves Christians. They went ahead with their marriage plans, neglecting my advice, but after marriage my daughter kept having stillbirths. I approached my son-in-law again and warned him to get initiated as quickly as possible in order to avert further dangers. After some hesitation, he yielded and was initiated into the Ogo society and following that they started bearing children who are all alive today.\(^\text{238}\)

\(^\text{237}\) Personal interview with Hon. Dickson Osim on 30:06:08.
\(^\text{238}\) Personal interview with Osuu Simon Uche on 20:07:08.
Although there is no empirical proof of Uche’s claims, he insists that his daughter’s stillbirths have a strong connection with her husband’s attempt to reject indigenous practices. The comment from Uche further re-affirms a popular story among many members of the Ogo society that once a male child is initiated and has worn a mask he becomes untouchable by evil spirits. So, Uche argues that had his son-law been initiated as he advised, the ancestors would have fought for him. Omezue Oko Isu Abua asserts that whenever a fully initiated male in good standing was about to be attacked by evil spirits some of the masquerades would appear and fight such powers, often without the knowledge of the initiated male.\(^{239}\) Osuu Eze Otuu, a retired teacher and a member of the PCN, reinforces this point:

\begin{quote}
Precisely in 1970 I was forced to relocate to Cross River State in search of healing for my first son who was critically ill. Unknowingly, we found accommodation in a house belonging to a landlord who was into witchcraft. Each night the landlord made an attempt to kill my son and I, but as he later confessed his attempts were met with opposing forces with masks which used to stand around my son and I as we slept. The masquerades therefore served as strong protection for us, such that the landlord later gave up and confessed to us.\(^{240}\)
\end{quote}

Otuu believes that initiation into the Ogo society is not an ordinary ritual, but a powerful one even today. The idea of protection from evil remains strong, but the appropriation of the ritual as an antidote can be complex too. According to Nna Ocha, full initiation into the Ogo society is not enough in itself, except there is a complementary strict obedience to the guiding principles of the society. The power of witchcraft is based on the strong notion that the soul of the living could leave the body of an object while sleeping and travel a distance to commit havoc against an enemy. Augustine Iwuagwu affirms this when he observes that many Africans believe that certain illnesses which defy scientific treatment can be transmitted through witchcraft. However, Iwuagwu notes ‘these claims by the African may require investigation before they can be accepted.’\(^{241}\) Iwuagwu’s point is helpful in understanding the place of witchcraft within an indigenous clan like Amasiri; however, his call for an investigation raises some doubt especially as he failed to

\(^{239}\) Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
\(^{240}\) Personal interview with Osuu Eze Otuu on 17:07:08.
show how such a belief can be investigated. The question of the authenticity of belief in the power of witchcraft may only be understood by engaging with contextual life experiences. Furthermore, witchcraft is not only recognised as powerful, but also as controllable through ritual powers.

2.6 The Ogo Society and Concept of Community

Ritual has been considered the most conservative and repetitive kind of performance. Victor Turner wrote that wherever individualism, novelty, and change develop, rituals perish within a short time. He believed that only in stable societies with a strong corporate life – those least influenced by technological change – is ritual able to maintain its function and that only with stabilisation would a widespread revival of ritual be possible. Even in his later writings Turner insisted that ritual liminality in Africa largely meant the maintenance of an existing social order. However, studies of the Ogo society rather suggest that rapid social change stimulates a traditionalising process in which ritual and ritual symbols proliferate, constructing their past at the same time as they reconstruct themselves. This is further exemplified in that instead of dying away the Ogo society has rather proved resilient even in the face of Christianity and social change, such that the ritual officiants are able to design some shorter versions of the rituals in order to accommodate the choices previously discussed.

Yet, ‘community’ as noted by Cohen is one of those terms which although is found in everyday language has a variety of meaning within social science. Like ‘ritual’, it has been argued that the characteristic features of community cannot survive industrialisation and urbanisation. While for others, the domination of modern social life by the state and the essential confrontation of classes in capital society have made community a nostalgic and anachronistic concept. According to Cohen, such definitions are based entirely upon a highly particularistic and sectarian definition. It should be understood that people’s upbringing, peer groups and

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experiences affect their perception of the world; as such, those who grow up in industrialised cities may have different attitudes towards the traditional understanding of community. However, attempts to polarise societies might undermine the persistence and reconstruction of community through social online networks and social support group, within industrialised societies.

Community is used in three different ways that seem to be consistent with the ways in which it is used among Amasiri. First is ‘place’ (locality); implying a territory or place where people have something in common and this shared element is understood geographically. Second is, ‘interest’ (elective). This refers to people who share common characteristics other than place, linked together by factors such as religious belief, occupation or ethnic origin. The third usage is, ‘communion’ which entails a profound meeting or encounter – not just with other people, but also with the invisible beings, ancestors and the Supreme Being. Community therefore simultaneously implies both similarity and difference. The word thus expresses a relational idea, the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities. Community suggests that its members have something in common with each other which distinguishes them in a significant manner from the members of other groups. The symbolic aspect of a community called a boundary therefore is fundamental to gaining an appreciation of how people experience communities and communion.

This defining boundary places some people within and some beyond the line. The benefit of belonging to a particular group is denied to non-members, as with the case of the Ogo society which defines who is a ‘man’ or not within Amasiri. The sense of communal living remains a highly cherished value of the traditional Amasiri. This is exemplified through the persistent attempts to keep Amasiri as a

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‘unity’ despite contemporary inter-village conflicts. A visitor to Amasiri may be struck by the frequent use of the first person plural ‘we’, or ‘ours’ in everyday language. Even in urban cities, the primary community loyalties of one’s extended family and village continue to exert their hold over people who live away from their villages. As observed by Karen Cerulo, such collective identity is grounded in sociological constructs: Emile Durkheim’s ‘collective conscience’ and Karl Marx’s ‘class consciousness.’ Cerulo observes that such a notion addresses the ‘we-ness’ of a group, which subsequently stresses similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce.

The village and community are expected to hold central positions in the life of individuals. Until recently, men from the same village acted as a fighting unit during the frequent raids and inter-community wars. The families and villages hold the land for cultivation, and are passed on from father to son. Cultivation was carried out by single households with the occasional help of neighbours, friends and relatives. Furthermore, lineages, families and villages were corporate units, and were collectively responsible for alleged wrongs carried out by any of their members and so acted jointly in the case of disputes. Beyond this, lineage groups were of crucial economic importance since property was inherited within the lineage. Moreover, the lineage was also supported by common rituals and ancestors. It further encapsulates the ethics of the traditional Amasiri, as it mobilises the community, thereby ensuring its social cohesion and identity.

This scenario appears to form a critique of the understanding that community fades away in the face of modernisation and industrialisation. Many indigenous people often return to their compounds and villages to celebrate important rituals such as initiation into the Ogo society, title-taking, or festivals and other ceremonies including marriages, funerals and family meetings. From their residences in urban cities, many of them continue to contribute towards community self-help projects like the provision of pipe-borne water, the construction of schools, and the award of

250 Personal interview with Chief Godwin Osondu on 26:06:08.
educational scholarships to members of their families and villages. Anthony Oko highlights this contribution by Amasiri indigenes who reside outside the clan, ‘…some found themselves in Lagos and a good number in the Cameroonian Republic. In fact, those who travelled to the North, as well as other parts of Nigeria and outside Nigeria, are all contributing immensely to the glorification of their town.’

Joseph Harris emphasises the ways in which diaspora ‘affects the economies, politics, and the social dynamic of both the homeland and the host country or area.’ Even in diaspora, there are close primary communities or groups based on clan, villages, age grades, or church affiliation, often represented thus ‘Nwanne din a-mba’ implying that there should be brotherhood in a strange land.

Such community affiliations serve as a surrogate for the extended family, village or clan to those who are away from home. Furthermore, Amasiri villages share things in common: there is communal farmland, economic trees, streams, yam barns, and markets. There are also communal sacred places, Ogo squares, ritual objects and festivals for recreational activities and social, economic and religious purposes. Members of a particular kindred or family could distinguish themselves in a specific trade, skill or profession. This process can be described as social capital: the individual appears helpless socially, if left alone to him or herself, but if individuals connect with their neighbour they may be an accumulation of social capital. The community as a whole will benefit from the corporation of all its parts, while individuals will find in such an association the advantages of help and sharing with neighbours.

John Field insists that the central thesis of social capital is that ‘relationship matters’. The central idea is that ‘social networks are valuable assets’ interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit

253 Such groups include, Amasiri Town Union, Amasiri Believers’ Fellowship, Village Development Associations and Age Grade Associations.
the social fabrics.\footnote{J. Field, \textit{Social Capital}, Key Ideas (London: Routledge, 2003). pp.1-2. See also, J. C. Raines, "Capital, Community, and the Meaning of Work," \textit{Christianity and Crisis} 43, no. 16-17 (1983). pp.375-379.} Such interaction appears pronounced in the community sense of living highlighted among Amasiri. As previously demonstrated, rituals especially in the Ogo society further helps to promote such bonds which Turner describes as ‘\textit{communitas}’.\footnote{Turner, \textit{The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure}. p.95.} To further demonstrate the community sense of living among Amasiri, the houses of many members of an extended family are joined together to form \textit{Umudi} (patrilineal) and, as highlighted in Chapter One, most of them live in one compound. The community system is such that the residents of each compound or village are interrelated and knitted together one way or another; hence people tend to know one another. Emphasis on a person’s individuality thus is always related to the person’s identity as a member of an extended family; thus, a person cannot exist as an individual except in relation to the community. Community therefore appears to be prioritised and tends to subsume individual choices.\footnote{Ray, \textit{African Religions, Symbols, Rituals and Community}. p.92.}

Community is much more than simply a social grouping of people bound together by reasons of natural origin or deep common interests and values. It is both a society as well as a unity of the visible and invisible worlds; the world of the living, on one hand, and the world of the ancestors, divinities and unborn children on the other hand.\footnote{C. Gore, "Religion in Africa," in \textit{Religions in the Modern World}, ed. L. Woodhead, et al. (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: London, 2002; reprint, 2005). p.207.} In a wider sense therefore community encapsulates the totality of the world of an indigenous Amasiri experience including the physical environment, as well as all of the spirit beings acknowledged by the clan. The network of relationships is remarkably extended and sometimes deep, the words ‘family’, ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ express far more for many Amasiri people than what they could possibly mean to many people in the West. To many indigenous Amasiri, ‘family’ usually includes one’s direct parents, grand and great grand parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews. Normally a child would refer to any of his uncles, or aunts as his father or mother, his nephews and nieces as his or her brothers and sisters. However, in recent times there is increasing emphasis on the
nuclear family system, especially in cities as a result of external and economic influences. Nonetheless, the extended family structure still remains the model, one in which parents, grand-parents, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces live together and are cared for by their children, grand-children and other relatives and are given mutual love and respect. John Mbiti, writing in general about Africa, argues thus: ‘what happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and what happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say, I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’. Therefore, individuals owe their existence to others, including the ancestors, a view that is often expressed in a slogan *Igwebuike* (strength lies within a group). One person’s failure is often regarded as that of the community, which implies that people tend to keep watch over each other. Fred Hord and Jonathan Lee summarise this point further: ‘I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am; If individual identity is grounded in social interaction, in the life of the community, then that individual’s good life is inseparable from the successful functioning of his or her society’. It is therefore common for people to speak of ‘us’ and not ‘me’. To address a village assembly or a family gathering as previously described in Chapter One, the speaker begins with a greeting, ‘*Nde nwoni nworwo kwee*’! This is a public acknowledgement by way of greeting that an individual does not own him or herself, but is directly a part of a group. As highlighted earlier, initiation into the Ogo society serves as an entry point to such participation in age grades, leadership, title-taking and even marriage. Relations arising from an individual’s participation in these social activities securely anchor the individual in a community oriented existence. People thus do not exist merely because of their identity, but due to their involvement.

Conversely, isolation and ostracism (*Akpafu osighiri*) constitute the worst form of punishment within the traditional Amasiri. Ostracising an individual or

group that have disobeyed the clan is thought to be the worst punishment that could
be meted out to anybody. It feels like death for anyone to be so punished since such a
person is regarded as an outcast. He or she would not be allowed to share in the life
of the community. There would be no visits to the person or group, no exchange of
greetings and no one would sell or buy from such persons. So severe is the
punishment of ostracising that every member of the clan dreads it, thus showing the
tremendous power of the community over individuals and groups within Amasiri.261

While the community appears as but an aspect of cultures, it occupies a privileged
position within indigenous cultural formations.262 As such, within Amasiri, people
tend to live in community and, an individual loses humanity when he or she is thrust
into isolation from other people. Vincent Mulago observes:

The life of the individual is understood as participated life. The members of the
tribe, the clan, the family know that they live not by a life of their own but by that of
the community. They know that, if separated from the community, they would lack
the means to survive; above all, they know that their life is a participation in that of
their ancestors, and that its conservation and enhancement depends continuously on
them.263

As noted by Mulago, in this situation the values of community are rooted in
religion which provides the spiritual framework for the analyses of issues about the
universe and its realities. Anthony Cohen argues that ‘communities’ are best
approached as ‘communities of meaning’. In other words, ‘community’ play a crucial
symbolic role in generating people’s sense of belonging’.264 The reality of
community, Cohen argues, lies in its members’ perception of the vitality of its
culture, ‘people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and
repository of meaning and a referent of identity.’265 When it is said of a culture that
its members share a symbolic system, or set of values, or a common idea of the

261 Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 17:07:08.
262 P. L. Berger, The Sacred Cannopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (New York:
263 V. Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," in African Traditional Religions in
Contemporary Society, ed. J. K. Olupona (Minnesota: Paragon House, 1991). p.120.
264 G. Crow and G. Allan, Community Life: An Introduction to Local Social Relations (Hemel
in Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures, ed. A. P. Cohen
sacred, it means in essence that such people share the potential space of shared religious beliefs and practices. This enables religion to permeate other sectors of life including activities and attitudes. Not only is the individual’s participation contingent upon a social process, but his or her continuous cultural existence depends upon the maintenance of specific social arrangements.

Issues of sexuality, morality and procreation as earlier noted are central to the initiation ritual of the Ogo society. This is as a result of the belief that marriage ensures the continuity of the community and the immortality of the ancestors. Khamalwa argues that sex is a fundamental element in the origin and sustenance of community life. Little wonder then that sexual abuse is considered to be an abominable offence among males initiated into the Ogo society. It also forms one of the areas on which exhaustive education is offered during the initiation rituals. Nna Okpara Ocha, in an interview, notes that the Ogo society aims to bring about not only responsible husbands but also fathers whose sexual activities will ensure the continued flow of the ancestral stream of life. According to him, the future of the elders and ancestors depends largely on the young males who go through the initiation rituals. This could explain why marriage is considered important within the clan.

However, in an interview Egwu Nwosi argues that marriage is not enough in itself, ‘a male is not considered as such simply because he is married, and he is considered a man because his marriage has produced children, especially males.’ Admittedly this situation can put undue pressure on couples and leaves families with little or no choice. Vincent Mulago notes in relation to Africa that individuals count in the eyes of the society to the extent that they participate in life and giving life. The logic, he argues, is ‘whoever gives life or any means towards life is to that extent superior to him’. Drawing on this, marriage without the intention of having children appears incomprehensible among many indigenous Amasiri. However, such

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268 Personal interview with Nna Okpara Ocha on 29:07:08.
269 Personal interview with Egwu Nwosi on 26:06:08.
a perception can be considered problematic as it can impact on individual choices, and there is the possibility of placing undue pressure on individuals.

Omezue Akwuba argues that ‘marriage has a multiplier effect on both families and communities’. It means a prolongation of the ancestors and preparing one’s own prolongation through descendants. He insists that ‘whoever a person is, without marriage and children, the person is nothing and is seen as damned, a lost soul.’ As such marriage is not a personal affair, but rather a communal matter in which the ancestors are believed to be interested too. As argued earlier, initiation into the Ogo society serves as a gateway to married life within Amasiri and also provides a means through which the males encounter and build a lifelong relationship with their ancestors. On another level the initiation processes create space for the initiates to take an active role in developing relationships with their kinsmen. This enables the males to cultivate and sustain a relationship with their age groups with whom they will live in solidarity. The rituals of the Ogo society, as described, do not only leave indelible marks on the initiates, but also on the body of the community. According to Osuu Oko Chukwu, the rituals also promote harmonious living which could be referred to as the essence of the clan’s existence. Thus as shown, the Ogo society plays a central role in inculcating, promoting and the realisation of such a harmonious inter-relationship among individuals and the community.

Initiation into the Ogo society exposes the initiates to the experience of the ancestors; who are believed to be present and participate in the rituals. This dimension is clearly important as the traditional Amasiri continues to rely on the spiritual powers and authorities of the ancestors and other spiritual beings to validate their activities and to ensure the lasting success of their initiation rituals. Charles Gore observes that the conceptualisation of the ancestors among many African communities plays an important role in structuring religious experiences and social life. Such invocation offers credibility to the initiation rituals. The initiation therefore offers space for the cultivation of a life-long relationship with the ancestors who are considered important members of the community.

271 Personal interview with Omezue Akwuba on 17:07:08.
272 Personal interview with Osuu Oko Chukwu on 02:08:08.
Cohen, in his study of the Shetland Islands, observes that members of a community orient to its symbolic boundaries in distinct ways. Like participants in great social movements, they gather behind a highly generalised statement of the community’s character, in order to advocate the distinctive interests of the community or to promulgate its collective identity. However, the meaning of symbols, myth and ritual can be varied among members of any community, but the consciousness of the community has to be kept alive by the manipulation of its symbols. This understanding may not necessarily imply subordination to a collective idea, because often in the private internal discourse of the individual members of the community they may render their generalised statement meaningful in terms of their particular interests, experiences and identities.

2.7 The Ogo Society: Arts, Music and Masquerades
Initiation into the Ogo society enables the initiates to participate in the other activities of the indigenous Amasiri including masquerades. However, Omezue Oko Abua notes that men would in most cases wear a mask until about the age of forty to forty-five and that it is considered undignified to do so afterwards. This is unlike the Liberian societies where, according to Beryl Bellman, senior men with political power use masking to express their influence. The initiation rituals, as described earlier feature masquerades which often re-invigorate the entire clan with new life through the strengthening of family, age grade and friendship ties. Public masquerades constitute extremely important symbolic forms among the Amasiri: they are a means of mediating between the Ogo society which appears to dominate Amasiri social life and community. The masquerades are symbols of the spiritual forces that validate the acts and precepts of the elders and ritual officiants. They serve as the visible expression of spiritual forces or authority that validate the basic

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275 The difference between the adult’s group from the boys’ group is the maturity displayed and the materials used to prepare the masks for the masquerades.
276 Personal interview with Omezue Oko Abua on 18:07:08.
beliefs of a society and reinforce acceptable social modes of conduct and symbolise the spiritual authority that eradicates evils.

Figure 8 a) Indigenous drummers  
b) Enya Chenkwa masquerade dancing to the beating of the drum

Therefore, the meaning of these rituals is not merely the sum total of the movement or dance, gestures and words that accompany their celebrations, but their meaning only becomes discernable through an interpretation of its contextual symbolism. By observance of these rituals members of the Ogo society seem to mark their adherence not only to a superior power, but also to a way of seeing their society and their experience of the world. Through masking performances the public is kept informed of important events which occur in the secret domain and are

allowed carefully limited participation in the activities of the Ogo society. Maskers personify and dramatise the powers of the Ogo society and exact respect and tribute from spectators. Michael Merrill lauds the point thus:

Ceremonial masks serve as important symbols of myth and spirituality in culture through secular and religious practice. However, even as a performer of and participant in such practices, and as a maker of ritual masks, I find that satisfactory explanations for the aesthetic and mythic power of masks are frustratingly elusive.....The transforming metaphor activated by ritual performance employing ceremonial masks creates a privileged space of common belief and understanding.

Merrill’s comment reveals the extent that masks communicate, often beyond the knowledge of maskers, mask carriers and observers. The use of masking and other symbolic ritual materials can be seen as crucial in achieving an effective transformative experience in which the distance between the human and sacred is bridged by a legend that is religious and closer to the spiritual experience of the members. The significance of masks within the Ogo society is in its role as a constructive transformer to ritually celebrate the spiritual experience through its meanings and symbolism. In this sense, the ritual mask becomes the thread that temporally re-establishes the delicate connection between the essential self and the ancestors through the process of transformation.

Strangely, since the 1980s, Amasiri has witnessed, the selling or burning of its indigenous antiquities or the exposure of materials to rain. Such practices are undertaken by some Christians and more strangely by members of the Ogo society for economic reasons and as a way of expressing conversion experiences. One’s preoccupation with the superficial decorative features of a mask overlooks the mask maker’s intention to choose certain materials with which to construct not only the mask’s aesthetic image, but more importantly, to properly align the medium of wood, leather and shell with the mask’s desired ritual efficacy. However, such destruction of what are considered artefacts among Amasiri is a source of

280 Personal interview with Okoche Osim on 20:07:08. Interview with Pascal Ibe on 07:08:08. This interviewee among others was involved in the burning down of a sacred space at the entrance of their compound. According to him, that particular ‘shrine’ was responsible for setbacks in business and the education of their young people and so after prayers they marched out to destroy it.
puzzlement due to widespread unfamiliarity with the notion of the mask as a ritual object. HRH Ezeogo Patrick Aja decries the extent to which Amasiri has lost its treasured ritual materials owing to carelessness and ignorance. There is usually great interest in how well masquerades are organised and in the quality of their masks, music and dance. Any single performance is usually compared to one organised in the past by one village or another. Ritual performances can therefore be understood in terms of how they were in their ‘original’ setting; what immediately preceded them and what follows. Furthermore, Omezue Akwuba observes that the level of organisation which characterises any particular performance is often symbolic of the social state of a village’s organisation and also serves a public record of their social cohesion.

This underscores Ruth Philips’ observation about Mende Sande Society, when she argues that beyond dramatising the powers of the gods, masquerades at the same time draw the participants and audience into a common experience, which is aesthetically heightened by techniques of theatre, dance and music. A mask created by an artist who has tapped into the vein of ancestral wisdom thus awakens something liminal in the unconscious awareness of the viewer. In so doing; this awareness transcends cultural, religious and social boundaries. While Philips’ point is crucial it should be highlighted that participant and audience experience can be complex, as demonstrated earlier with regards to ritual. However, masquerades among Amasiri depict, act out, and give form to the dominant values that hold the clan together. Furthermore, masquerades dramatise ritual activities and it is through such processes that ritual does what it alone does. Thus, the relationship of art and ritual is one of unity rather than of two separate states of being.

Ajume Wingo describes the functional role that art, especially in the form of masks, plays in the everyday life experience of Africans as one in which the intended functions are carried out in a way that is enjoyable for participants. The resultant

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282 Personal interview with HRH Patrick Aja on 30:06:08.
283 Personal interview with Omezue Akwuba on 17:08:08.
feeling of unity and harmony may help to overcome the threat of disunity. Omezue Nzagha underscores this point thus:

As war often unites a divided nation so also do the initiation rituals in the Ogo society unite families and community making them forget their domestic differences. Often lots of grudges and other family problems between individuals and villages are over-shadowed during the rituals, while many new relationships are engendered between families and individuals following the gifts offered to the initiates.²⁸⁶

Nzagha’s comment is helpful and further highlights earlier discussion on the involvement of the entire community in the initiation processes. The processes involve singing, dancing and celebrations, which further explains Turner’s argument is that many forms of ritual serve as a ‘social drama’ through which the stresses and tensions built into the social structure could be expressed and worked out.²⁸⁷ Yet, Max Gluckman agrees with Turner that ‘every social system is a field of tension, full of ambivalence, of co-operation and contrasting struggle’, but stresses the difficulty of achieving social unity. Gluckman argues that rituals are really the expression of complex social tensions rather than the affirmation of social unity; they exaggerate very real conflicts that exist in the organisation of social relations and then affirm unity despite those structural conflicts.²⁸⁸

The initiation rituals and the use of masks and masquerades do not attempt to suppress existing tensions, but serve as mechanisms for constantly re-creating and not only affirming the expected unity within the clan. Gluckman’s observation is particularly helpful in view of contemporary inter-village conflicts within Amasiri especially over land ownership. Rituals (especially initiation into the Ogo society) continue to serve as mechanisms for social cohesion among the clan. The far distant relatives who are visited in other villages during the initiation processes are usually brought nearer into the family relationships, thereby relegating space and separation among kinsmen. Thus, ritual and art do not simply restore social equilibrium, they are rather part of the ongoing process by which the community is constantly

²⁸⁶ Personal interview with Omezue Nzagha on 26:06:08.
redefining and renewing itself. Through this process many children often come to
know one another, many for the first time, but certainly not for the last, thereby
inaugurating what would for many be life-long relationships.

Initiation into the Ogo society therefore, not only passes on the customs and
indigenous beliefs and knowledge, it also creates space for a network of relationship
which is passed on to successive generations. Geoffrey Oko insists that ‘without this
process family and community links would wither and be forgotten by the children as
they grow and the family and community bonds die away thereby allowing
individualism to set in.’289 Initiation into the Ogo society therefore, has far-reaching
implications (psychological, social, economic, political) for the life of individuals
and the community at large and provides a renewal for the community. Khamalwa’s
observation in relation to the Bamasaba of Uganda notes, that whenever the initiated
males participate in subsequent initiation processes they are reminded of their own
initiation.290 Many other ritual officiants and the elders who participate in the
initiation processes use it as an opportunity to renew and rededicate their vows and
belief in the community. Nna Okpara Ocha, an Ogo ritual officiant, accentuates this
thus:

You know that I am a Priest, so before I commence the initiation of young people, I
normally cleanse myself first, in order to appear before the ancestors clean.
Participation in the initiation processes enables me to re-examine myself to see if in
reality I have internalised the values of the Ogo society.291

As Ocha’s comment shows the initiates are not only expected to live rightly, but the
same, if not a higher expectation, is laid on the ritual officiants. Furthermore, by
serving as witnesses to the initiation of the boys, the elders realise the passage of
time, as they would have become a generation of elders with new and specified roles
in the clan. Thus, ritual, arts, dance and masquerades, all play central roles in
reinforcing both belonging and group-like structural experiences of communitas.292
Furthermore, as has been demonstrated, rites of initiation into the Ogo society are not just about religion, but also about education, sports, leisure and knowledge. It serves as a means through which young people are trained in the skills of living what is perceived to be a useful life in society. B. J. Soko describes such rituals as ‘A higher school of learning’, whereas Metuh observes that rites of passage among the Igbo regulate not only the social relationship, but more profoundly, they regulate the relationship between humans and the invisible world of spiritual beings and powers. Young people are taught how to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another obey and learn the secrets and mysteries of man/woman relationships. The initiates are instructed on the indigenous laws and cultures. Each stage of the initiation processes has its school and specially trained teachers (instructors). The young males who pass through this school grow to respect their people and traditions and may be in a position to defend them. The legitimacy conferred on ritual officiants and elders is often that of indigenous knowledge, the information, understanding and experience needed to ensure the correct performance of the rituals.

Prior to the introduction of Western-type schools, initiation rituals provided a most effective avenue for socialisation and the transmission of key beliefs, ideas and values of the community to successive generations. Socialisation refers to the way in which people absorb the rules of behaviour which are common in their society. Learning norms and values is a key part of the process of socialisation into a culture, and they equip individuals with what they need to take up roles in society. As argued earlier, these values and norms are all enforced by the indigenous Amasiri through a system of sanctions. Sanctions are rewards or punishment, and a society can force its

296 Personal interview with Omzue Akwuba on 17:07:08.
members to follow its rules by applying these. Against the background of oral culture, people relied on such oral media as speech forms, dramatic performances and ritual symbolic forms to communicate their important ideas, beliefs and values to members of the community. The awe that often characterises the initiation processes described earlier appears to prove particularly favourable for the successful communication of the accumulated wisdom of the ritual officiants and elders. The initiation provides a favourable avenue for the transmission of the clan’s oral histories which contains explanations of human existence and answers to riddles like those involving the phenomena of birth and life. By performing these rituals, participants thus identify the historical here and now with the sacred past period of the gods and ancestors. Mircea Eliade observes that through the ritual enactment of past events human beings come to consider themselves truly human, sanctify the world and render meaningful the activities of their lives.  

Initiation into the Ogo society represents an introduction to the world of spirits and indigenous cultures. If there is anytime in a male’s life in the Amasiri clan during which a veritable ‘forest of symbols,’ is employed for the sake of instruction, it is during this period of initiation. The secrets about the clan and its religious practices are only revealed to those initiated into the Ogo society; hence a male is not considered to be a man until he is initiated. As highlighted earlier, this is because religious knowledge is often restricted in access and only gained by induction into a long apprenticeship or initiation. Thus, within this framework there is an emphasis on participation in ritual activities which usually precede the acquisition of such indigenous knowledge. During the initiation rituals into the Ogo society, the mysterious communion of the candidates with the spiritual beings - including the ancestors - provides the theatre through which the identity, power, community and gender ideals are impressed in the minds of the young initiates who as expected will pass them on to the next generation.

2.8 The Ogo Society and Gender

As shown earlier, gender ideologies within Amasiri have readable meanings which are located in everyday discursive practice.\(^300\) The meaning of gender is ensconced in stories which do not just describe or report religious events, but create them; stories about how males and females act in terms of how they ought to act. These are stories about power and status as models for relationship. Paul Taylor has shown that at the age of five most children often acquire gender identity, which in other words implies that they come to know the gender they belong to and become aware of gender-appropriate attitudes and behaviour.\(^301\) Until the 1980s it was common among Amasiri for girls and boys to study different subjects if females were sent to school at all. Girls were traditionally inclined to domestic subjects such as cooking, needle work, house keeping and other art subjects while the boys were encouraged to study sciences. The same pattern appears to be replicated within the PCN where the Christian Girls in Training (CGIT) devotes its programme to training the girls in house keeping, sewing, cooking, baking and other related activities. Such perception of women remains problematic and continues to serve as a continuity of indigenous hierarchical structure within the Ogo society.\(^302\) As already described, the Ogo society sets boundaries which define relationships, and inclusion and exclusion.

Anthony Oko underscores the place of females in Amasiri thus:

> Women are placed at the abysmal of the traditional strata of the society. Women, girls inclusive, have one characteristic in common – they are the burden bearers of the society. They have few or no rights in any circumstances and can only be allowed to have such property as their husbands permit. But it could be that they have been so marginalised and used that they do not grumble against their position. They accept the situation humbly as handed down by their grand-mothers.\(^303\)

Oko’s comment appears to be perpetuated by common sayings such as ‘nwoke bu nwoke, nwanyi buru nwanyi’ meaning a man is a man, while a female is a woman no matter how much they try. This implies an emphasis on the difference

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\(^302\) Personal interview with Elder Itiri Agwu on 23:06:08.

between males and females. Initiation into the Ogo society therefore, serves as a dramatic reinforcement of sexual distinction, designed to underline the separation between genders. Thus the ritual which marks the division of sexes also produces the justification for a perceived male-dominated religious landscape. It further lays emphasis on the different levels of being a man, thus a person is not just a man because he is a male, but he is counted as a man when he passes through the initiation ritual which ends with an incorporation into the adult male society.

Every individual is a product of a community with specific cultures, beliefs, norms and values. All of these characteristics are communicated to individuals early in life, and through this process (a lifelong one) individuals come to learn what is expected of them in the society. Gender is often culture and context-bound; it is a concept imbued with notions of difference – hierarchy, identity and power relations. However, gender construction may not translate into notions of oppression and the domination of women by men, because it is mediated by the indigenous principle of complementary relations. This notion of complementary roles appears visible within the socio-religious interactions. This notion is replicated in a wider understanding of the relationship between the ancestors and their communities. As earlier argued, both the communities and ancestors depend on each other for the sustenance of their influence and authority. Both males and females play central roles for the smooth living experiences of each other and during ritual processes including the initiation into the Ogo society.

However, the ritual is intertwined with knowledge acquisition and use, thus the performance of rituals within Amasiri is informed and guided by knowledge. While some knowledge can be available to everyone, other knowledge is only restricted to a specific set of persons or group. However, access to restricted knowledge can translate into power. As earlier argued, initiation into the Ogo society not only confers power on the initiate, but it does the same to the ritual

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306 Olajubu, ”Seeing through a Woman's Eye: Yoruba Religious Tradition and Gender Relations.” p.53.
officiants, their families including their mothers and sisters and the community on who it lies to admit the young people into the adult society.

The idea that the Ogo society oppresses women has been contested, as women were the original custodians of the society and still play a central role in perpetuating its relevance today. What can be rather seen is negotiated identity and power between the females and males and between the community and the ancestors. However, it is complex how these transformations take place, especially given that today boys at the age of six or seven can be initiated into the Ogo society.

Okechukwu Oko who is aged eight insists:

I have become a man and no longer an ‘Ena’ and so not a woman. I no longer sleep with my mother or sisters in the same bed. My family respects me and nobody should talk to me anyhow, because I am a man. I now join in the clearing of the Ogo sacred spaces.307

However, Okechukwu’s elder sister, Onyinyechi, when asked how she relates to her younger brother who has been initiated into the Ogo society notes:

It does not matter in anyway to me whether or not he has been initiated into the Ogo society. He still has wet pants and talks disrespectfully not as the man he ought to be. However, my mother has always warned me to be careful of how I relate to Okechukwu because of his new status as ‘a man’ and to treat him with respect to avoid being punished by the gods and ancestors.308

Onyinyechi’s comment demonstrates that the expected behavioural change of an initiated male appears to be known by many females through indigenous instructions. Notwithstanding the perceived inability of Okechukwu to live up to her sister’s expected standard as a ‘man’ she is still warned to give him his due respect. La Fontaine’s comment highlights this transformation thus:

Initiation rites establish a distinction between childhood and adult status which is a matter not of psychological development but of social definition. This distinction and the related one of gender, the social roles designated by the term ‘man’ and ‘woman’ which is also constructed by initiation, are fundamental to the organisation of society. They are thus of significance to all who participate not merely to those being initiated.309

307 Personal interview with Okechukwu Oko on 15:07:08.
308 Personal interview with Onyinyechi Oko on 15:07:08.
Furthermore, Amarachi Agha’s experience of the Ogo society further throws some light on this:

I am the first daughter in my family, but I am told that I must respect my brothers who are initiated into the Ogo society. During Ogo rituals I find it hard to attend church activities. Where I must attend I leave earlier and sometimes sleep in the church. If I must return, I must do so by following some dreadful village paths which are unsafe at night. My mother and grandmother have always warned me to stay clear from the Ogo society, as according to them it is deadly.\footnote{Personal interview with Amarachi Agha on 21:06:08.}

This process of the transmission of religious ideologies highlighted by Amarachi and Ngozi has remained even among many Christian women due to fear of the unknown and the harsh treatment of offenders by members of the Ogo society. The Ogo society therefore serves as a marker and a dramatic reinforcement of sexual distinction. As previously demonstrated this background explains the persistent desire of many couples to have male children irrespective of religious affiliation. As a symbol for the birth of a baby boy, families and friends normally rub the local nzu (white powder) on their right ankle (signifying strength), while it is rubbed on the left to symbolise the birth of a baby girl. However, within Amasiri there appears to be strong mother-son tie which necessitates the special childhood activities to turn mothers’ sons into adult males. However, such activities, as noted, serve as a means of distinction between sexes.\footnote{Personal interview with Madam Elum Akpu on 12:07:08.}

Moreover, Akwuba points out that beyond the punishment, most Amasiri women know the grievous nature of an offence against the Ogo society, because according to an oral history women were the first to introduce the Ogo society into Amasiri, but it was usurped by men, as such ‘women know the dangerous nature of the Ogo and so they warn their daughters to avoid it.’ Omezue Akwuba further notes that, ‘Amasiri women are too strong for the control of many men, so the Ogo society is the one and only means of subjecting them under control’. He further observes that the Ogo square often serves as a safe haven for males especially when they have wives who engage in long quarrels. In such situations it is common to hear other men shout at their fellow men, ‘hafua jee no-ogo’ meaning stop being a woman, leave
your wife and have some peace in the Ogo square.\textsuperscript{312} It is believed that a woman cannot quarrel with her husband once he lives for the Ogo. However, Madam Martha Otu sees the situation rather as the cowardice of many men, for her, ‘he who runs from a fight, lives to fight again’ and demonstrates in her opinion the weakness of many Amasiri men.\textsuperscript{313}

This attitude of males towards females has remained over the years even in the face of Christianity and western-influenced education. However, it rather appears that some women play central roles in its perpetuation. For instance Madam Ogeri Obiahu, a member of the women ruling group and a member of the PCN, notes that their group has been seeking dialogue with their male counterparts to restore what they consider as ‘the lost glory and fear of the Ogo society’ since 2004. According to her, the increasing immorality among some young girls and boys was not the case during their days, because people lived in fear of the Ogo society.\textsuperscript{314} Her group believes that sanity can only be restored, not by the church, but through the elders when they revive the Ogo society and make it take the usual central place within the clan. Furthermore, Madam Elum Akpi insists that in a meeting involving both men and women, ‘it would be disrespectful for any female to stand while addressing the males; to address them the females would rather sit’.\textsuperscript{315} Furthermore, at the family level, males are to be treated with respect, so it is considered an offence against the ancestors to beat a male who has been initiated into the Ogo society, but it is less offensive, if an offence at all, to beat females.\textsuperscript{316}

The initiation into the Ogo society brings the males into full adult life and establishes a lifelong pattern of a loving but separate adult relationship with their mothers and sisters. The initiation rituals incorporate the boys into the adult life, which allows them to share in the full privileges and duties of the clan. During the initiation rituals women are often not allowed to pass through the village (Ogo) square. Interestingly, uninitiated males also experience the same level of restriction

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{312} Personal interview with Omzue Akwuba on 17:07:08.
\textsuperscript{313} Personal interview with Martha Otu on 19:07:08.
\textsuperscript{314} Personal interview with Ogeri Obiahu on 21:07:08.
\textsuperscript{315} Personal interview with Madam Elum Akpi on 12:07:08.
\textsuperscript{316} Personal interview with Mrs. Dorothy Agwu on 23:06:08.
\end{flushright}
on their movement. The females are often told that if they ever see or touch any Ogo ritual materials they would end up having difficulties in child birth or may not give birth to children at all or even die during delivery. While again there may be no empirical evidence to support such claims, Madam Elem Udu insists that such death or punishment may not be sudden but gradual. However, if for any reason a female has to pass through the Ogo, she is meant to shout ‘Elokwe ee’ meaning ‘please a woman is passing by could you give her access.’ However, in contemporary times, many women feel reluctant to shout that and, according to Madam Elum Akpu, the situation has increased the rate of unexplainable deaths within the clan.  

Interrogating the role of women within Amasiri religious landscape highlights the extent to which some women perpetuate what may be considered oppression against them. As demonstrated in the earlier part of this chapter, many women play a key role during the initiation rituals of the Ogo society. In most cases women provide the ritual items including eggs, cloths and chicken, cook for the initiates, and hire costumes, hence they bear most of the expenses involved in the rituals. Moreover, a boy who is reportedly shown to have expressed fear in the face of the initiation rites might have several women treat him with disrespect afterward. This often amount to a lifetime of humiliation, which might even result in the person moving to a far away place. Initiation into the Ogo society is expected to be a celebration of courage in the face of danger. Even then, irrespective of their religious affiliation, many women encourage their sons to undergo the initiation rites, as that is a means of incorporating them into the clan. Timothy Agu observes that some women are still not willing to marry an uninitiated male as some of them may not be willing to expose their children to prejudice.  

The highpoint of the initiation ritual into the Ogo society is the day that has already been described, in which the women stage dances accompanied by songs to celebrate the success and achievement of their sons. They could also satirise in songs and mime weak and unsuccessful males during the ritual. In performing such roles,

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317 Personal interview with Madam Elem Udu on 19:07:08.
318 Personal interview with Timothy Agu on 26:06:08.
Joseph Agbasiere argues that women serve as ‘watch dogs’ of public morality. Furthermore, women are also in charge of the initiation rituals for females within Amasiri which does not fall within the scope of this thesis, but which needs to be investigated. Such investigation would further show the dynamic features and religious roles of women within Amasiri. However, a point that needs to be reiterated from Chapter One is the case made by Godwin Osondu that there is no such ritual for females which makes them equal to men within indigenous Amasiri. The gendered identity in relation to the practices of the Ogo society appears therefore to be a contextualised dialogic practice in which the construction of concrete individuals as females and males may be questioned, contested, assumed, constructed and negotiated.

The dynamic of the ritual processes with the Ogo society creates space for the construction of gendered identities, as has been shown and has implications for both males and females. The gender dynamic and the social role of initiation into the Ogo society raise the need for a closer assessment of the ritual instead of an approach that appears dismissive. As shown, power and identity can only be ascribed by the community through initiation into the Ogo society, and the practices as demonstrated remain acceptable to many members of the Ogo society and, to some degree, by some Christians. However, to some members of the PCN, since the 1920s when the church was first established, the practices of the Ogo society have continued to be perceived as negating Christian teachings. This is without regard to the socio-religious implications of the rituals, which has left it resilient over the years. A reassessment of the integral nature of the Ogo society could enable the PCN and other Christians within Amasiri to rethink their responses towards the Ogo society.

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320 Personal interview with Godwin Osondu on 26:06:08.
CHAPTER THREE
LOCATING THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (UPC) WITHIN LOCAL AND GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

3.1 Historicising Christian Mission to Nigeria

The history of Christian mission in Nigeria falls within the larger picture of European enterprise in Africa. The earliest attempt to establish Christianity in Nigeria was undertaken by the Spanish and Italian Capuchin Fathers who arrived in Benin in August 1515 and the Portuguese Augustinian monks from Sao Tome who entered Warri in the 1570s. However, at the dawn of the eighteenth century there was little to show for these earlier missionary endeavours, except a few relics like a huge cross in the centre of Warri, a few church decorations that had survived in the indigenous ritual space and a few memories preserved in oral tradition. With the nineteenth century missionary awakening in Europe, which was precipitated by the abolition of the slave trade, several freed slaves including some Europeans made efforts to establish Christianity in Nigeria. The leaders of the missionary movements were highly concerned about the failure of the sixteenth century missions and were determined to make a cultural impact on the coastal part of Nigeria. However, the failure of the Niger Expedition (between August and October 1841) at an estimated cost of £100,000 further raised doubts among some of the missionary movement as to the success of undertaking missionary work in Nigeria.

Forty-five out of the 150 European members of the expedition died, the agreement which they had signed with the Obi of Aboh and the Attah of Igalla consequently was not ratified and the model farm which they had planned to start was never attended to. Although, the expedition failed, the following years saw unprecedented missionary expansion in Nigeria. The missionary societies appear to have set out to accomplish the programme outlined by Thomas Buxton for the ‘civilisation’ of Africa which the expedition that was launched by the government

could not accomplish.\footnote{324} In 1842, the Wesleyan Methodists in the Gold Coast and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Sierra Leone extended their missionary works to Badagry. On 10\textsuperscript{th} April 1846, the Scottish Presbyterians established themselves at Calabar. Furthermore, in 1850 the Southern Baptist Convention began work in Nigeria and, in 1853, some Brazilian emigrants, who were mostly Portuguese-speaking Roman Catholic, gathered together and acquired a piece of land for a church in Lagos. By 1863 when a Roman Catholic Father first visited Lagos, a church had already been established, but it was not until 1867 that the first resident Father arrived to take charge of the church. In the southern part of Nigeria, where the missionary work was most concentrated, the Protestant missions (especially the CMS) maintained an unchallenged missionary influence. However, in 1885, the Roman Catholic missionaries began work in the Lower Niger. The establishment of French Roman Catholic missionaries raised a challenge about what was perceived as the ‘unquestionable spheres of English national life’.\footnote{325}

Following the Berlin Conference of 15\textsuperscript{th} November 1884 – 26th February 1885, the continent of Africa was partitioned by the imperial colonial bodies into artificial zones for European convenience. The countries represented at the time included Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway (unified from 1814-1905), Turkey, and the United States of America. Of these nations, France, Germany, Britain and Portugal were the major players at the conference, controlling most of colonial Africa at the time.\footnote{326} The conference which was called by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of Germany marked the formalisation of the European scramble and partition of Africa as well as the expansion of missionary interests in the region.

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\begin{enumerate}
\item \footnote{325}{Ekechi, \textit{Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914}. pp.70-71.}
\end{enumerate}
3.2 Mapping the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN)

The establishment of the present PCN has a link to the missionary enthusiasm which followed the 1\textsuperscript{st} August 1838 emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies.\textsuperscript{327} The emancipation took about thirty-one years to be effected; the bill abolishing the slave trade was passed on the 25\textsuperscript{th} March 1807.\textsuperscript{328} The length of time it took to abolish slavery (1\textsuperscript{st} August 1834) raises crucial issues as to whether the emancipation was simply effected because the slaves in the West Indies had become redundant at that time.\textsuperscript{329} That is, whether the industrial revolution and free trade which had begun, meant that products could be created more cheaply elsewhere. Although the role of the Church of Scotland in the emancipation campaign remains ambivalent, it had joined efforts to establish a foreign mission around the end of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{330} To demonstrate this, an understanding of the historical trajectory of the Church of Scotland is required.

The Presbytery of Relief was constituted in 1761 by three ministers of the Church of Scotland who in 1773 formed a Relief Synod.\textsuperscript{331} Furthermore, the United Secession Church (the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church) was formed in 1820 by a union of various churches which had seceded from the established


\textsuperscript{331} K. B. E. Roxburgh, \textit{Thomas Gillespie and the Origins of the Relief Church in 18th Century Scotland} (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999). p.95
Church of Scotland and which existed until 1847.\textsuperscript{332} In 1843, some congregations and ministers seceded from the Church of Scotland in what is called the ‘Scottish Disruption’ to form the Free Church of Scotland.\textsuperscript{333} However, in 1847 the United Presbyterian Church (UPC) was formed through the union of the United Secession and Relief churches.\textsuperscript{334} In 1900, many Free Church of Scotland congregations joined with UPC to form the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCS) and in 1929 the UFSC joined with the Church of Scotland to form the present day Church of Scotland.\textsuperscript{335}

On 29\textsuperscript{th} February 1796, the Scottish Society (known later as the Edinburgh Missionary Society – EMS) was formed, and from 1818 the EMS was renamed the Scottish Missionary Society (SMS).\textsuperscript{336} The SMS joined with the Glasgow Society (GS) to establish foreign missions in the West Indies (from 1800), the Caucasus (1802) and India (1823). The works of these societies was supported by the United Secession Churches and the Church of Scotland.\textsuperscript{337} While the work of the SMS and GS continued, there was growing pressure for the founding of a missionary society by the national Church of Scotland. Following this, the 1824 Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed a committee to inaugurate foreign missions. According to Geoffrey Johnston, it was not until then that the SMS really began to build up their staff. Amongst the earliest of them was Hope Waddell, an Irish missionary who served under the SMS.\textsuperscript{338} In 1836, the Jamaican Mission Presbytery (JMP) was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item McFarlan, \textit{Calabar: The Church of Scotland Mission Founded 1846}. p.6.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
formed by agents of the SMS and the United Secession Church. Following the 1838 emancipation of slaves, there was strong willingness among the former slaves to take the gospel back to Africa and to actualise this they initiated ‘freedom offerings’.

In the meeting of July 1841 at Goshen, the JMP resolved thus:

That the time seems to have arrived, and to be in an eminent degree favourable for introducing the blessed gospel into central Africa. That the long neglected and critical conditions of the inhabitants of that vast country, hitherto sunk in the deepest darkness, and exposed to all the miseries of the most iniquitous system that ever defiled or desolated the earth, together with the duty which the Church owes to the Lord Jesus, to go into all the world and preach to every creature…

JMP’s resolution was considered by the Home Presbytery in Scotland to be,

Premature, displaying more zeal than judgement, not accordant with the state of dependence in which our Jamaican church stood, both for means and missionaries; (it was) highly presumptuous after the failure of vastly greater efforts by others than we could possibly put forth.

The intended mission to Africa could not be possible without the support of the Home Presbytery, but as highlighted, the efforts of the JMP were met with scepticism and a cold attitude by officials in Scotland. Elizabeth Hewat cites Hope Waddell as saying that the letter they received was ‘enough to frighten us.’ Agha has identified those factors which could have informed the disapproval of the JMP’s missionary intentions to Africa as follows. First, was the overestimation of the efforts and desires of the Home Presbytery. Second was the failure of early missionary efforts in other parts of Africa by other sponsors. Third was the Scottish Disruption of 1843 of the Church of Scotland and fourth was the prevalent rate of famine and hardship in Scotland which, as expected, would leave many people with little to donate towards an African mission. As a result of these factors, the Home Presbytery concluded that it would be a failure to embark on any foreign mission to Africa at

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that time.\textsuperscript{344} Admittedly James Buchan describes the period during which the mission was conceived as the ‘Hungry Forties’; highlighting the harsh economic situation of the time in Scotland.\textsuperscript{345} Although the Home Presbytery clearly resented the venture, the JMP was far from daunted.

In the meeting of 1842 at Stirling Park, Westmoreland the JMP reaffirmed its commitment to the mission to Africa and agreed thus:

\begin{quote}
… to record that the desire to gain the support of members to aid with introducing the gospel into Central Africa is unabated, that the proposed mission with increasing interest, and entertain the same sense of their duty in relation to it as the first, willing to go forth to the help of the Lord in the conversion of Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{346}
\end{quote}

This stance was followed with efforts by Rev. George Blyth and Rev. Peter Anderson, who served as missionaries at Jamaica. During their furlough in Scotland Blyth and Anderson engaged in wider consultations, which led to an acceptance of the African mission by the Home Presbytery. Following this, Blyth and Anderson established contacts in Liverpool with Dr. Ferguson, a merchant who had been a surgeon in West Africa, to put them in touch with the supercargoes trading on the coast.\textsuperscript{347} Agha notes that Ferguson expressed delight at the plans to send missionaries to Calabar, South-eastern Nigeria. Ferguson had had an encounter with Calabar; he was one of the passengers on a super slave ship that was once wrecked at the neighbourhood of Calabar. The natives of Calabar on that occasion treated him and the other passengers on board with kindness, thereby leaving a lasting good impression about Calabar and its people in his mind.\textsuperscript{348}

Furthermore, John Beecroft of Liverpool, who was engaged in West African trade, had at one time discussed the possibilities of establishing some missionary work with the Chiefs of Calabar. Raymond of the Royal Navy had also mentioned


this to the Chiefs during the signing of the antislavery trade treaty in 1841.\textsuperscript{349} Donald MacFarlan observes that following these contacts, the Kings and seven other chiefs of Calabar promised to donate parcels of land between the two towns of Old Calabar and Henshaw Town, which was about a mile apart. In addition, the Kings and Chiefs wrote and signed a letter of appeal thus:

\begin{quote}
We the undersigned Kings and Chiefs of Old Calabar, having together agreed to those things before written, and request you to come amongst us. King Eyamba IV, Ekpojack, Henshaw Duke, Adam Duke, Mr. Young, Bassey Offary, Duke Ephraim and Antern Duke.\textsuperscript{350}
\end{quote}

Similarly on 1\textsuperscript{st} December 1842, King Eyo wrote in a separate letter to Her Majesty thus:

\begin{quote}
One thing I want for beg your Queen, I have too much man now, I can’t sell slaves, and don’t know what to do for them. But if I can get some cotton and coffee to grow, and man for teach me, and make sugar cane for we country come up proper and sell for trade side I very glad. Mr. Blyth tell me England glad for send man to teach book and make we understand God all same White man do. If Queen do so I glad too much and we must try do good for England always.\textsuperscript{351}
\end{quote}

Furthermore, King Eyamba II on 4\textsuperscript{th} December 1842 also wrote thus:

\begin{quote}
….Now we can’t sell slaves again, we have too much man for country, and want something for make work and trade, and if could get seed for cotton and coffee, we could make trade, and plenty sugar canes live here and if some man should come for teach book proper and make we all saby God like white man and then we go on for same fashion.\textsuperscript{352}
\end{quote}

It is not clear who wrote the letters for the two kings, as the content appears similar, but it seems the two Kings wrote separately to further their own rivalry, competition and influence. Further contact was made with Mr. Turner, captain of a vessel trading on the Old Calabar coast to ascertain the Kings and Chiefs’ readiness to receive missionaries.\textsuperscript{353} On 19\textsuperscript{th} January 1843 Turner wrote to Rev. George Blyth and Rev. Peter Anderson thus:

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\textsuperscript{350} McFarlan, Calabar: The Church of Scotland Mission Founded 1846. p.8.
At the consultation of the chiefs, held this morning at the King’s house, it was settled that to sell the tract of ground required was out of the question….There seems no doubt of your obtaining land when once here and established, sufficient for plantations for a number of families.  

With these letters before the United Secession Synod which was held in Glasgow in May 1844, and following Waddell’s address, the Synod resolved to undertake the mission to Calabar and appointed Hope Masterdon Waddell to lead the team. In accepting to lead the pioneering mission, Waddell wrote:

Hitherto the Lord has graciously prospered our plans, though with some unexpected delays, and perhaps we may yet find, even by the delay; our eyes are continually up to Him, for without Him we know not what to do. Brothers, pray for us, and ask your congregation to pray for us ….For my part, I have the sentence of death in myself, and if I can only begin the blessed work, am ready to die in the breach, if thereby others may follow and succeed in attempt.

Waddell, in a space of few months, created overwhelming interest in the Calabar missions especially from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Liverpool. He raised about £4000, and in addition Provost Baikie Kirwali gave him a coasting vessel. Robert Jamieson, on the other hand, offered splendid schooner, the Warree, to transport the missionaries and to be used by them as long as they needed it. Jamieson also gave a donation of £100 every year to assist with keeping her afloat.

However, before leaving for Calabar, Waddell almost had a disagreement with the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), about their new missionary field. According to Waddell, BMS had missions at the Island of Fernando Po, and at, Cameroon and Bimba on the mainland; and supposed that Calabar was also one of its stations. As a result of this, the BMS sent a deputation to the JMP’s mission committee to remonstrate against their going to Calabar to disturb their missionaries. However, Waddell observes that although he knew that Calabar was not occupied by the BMS, he waited on BMS’s secretary, Rev. Angus in London to discuss it before leaving. Following the meeting with Angus, Waddell agreed thus: ‘that, if his

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357 McFarlan, Calabar: The Church of Scotland Mission Founded 1846. p.12.
missionary brethren were there when I went out, I would go elsewhere with my little pioneer company; and if they were not there, they should leave it entirely for us – the coast being wide enough for us all."358

Finally in 10th April 1846, Hope Waddell, Samuel Edgerly (Samuel was a native of England, a printer and Catechist) and his wife, Andrew Chisohm (Carpenter), Edward Miller (a freed slave, who had been a Doctor’s assistant) and George Buchanan Waddell arrived in Calabar.359 Upon arriving in Calabar they began work at Duke Town and Creek Town and in the following year when another team arrived work began in the Old Town of Calabar.360 The composition of the pioneering team draws attention and highlights the central role of the JMP in not only motivating the missions, but in serving as missionary agents. The pioneering work was limited to Calabar as the natives appear to have resisted attempts to expand the work beyond their area. Moreover, Waddell was also in favour of the idea of concentrated efforts. However J. D. Plessis observes:

Although the work of evangelism was faithfully carried on, it was an uphill task, hence there was slow progress. In the early period, only Duke Town, Old Town, on the left bank of Calabar River, and Creek Town were occupied by the missionaries because they were close to one another. It was not until after ten years of hard labour did they make any remarkable progress in establishing new missionary stations at Ikunetu (1856) among the Okoyong people, at Ikotofiong (1859) and Ibibios.361

As highlighted by Plessis, the pioneering mission to Calabar had a little influence on the life and people of Calabar. After thirty years of labour (1876) for instance, only 174 natives were baptised and eighteen people were appointed as local agents with only one native ordained into the ministry in 1872. However, in 1885 a mission station was opened at Iktotana under E. N. Jarret from where an extension was made to Biakpan, Ukpem, and Akuankuna. On 25th October 1888, Rev. John P. Cartshore,


accompanied by other missionaries, established a mission station at Unwana, and in 1927 a station was opened at Amasiri.\footnote{Agha, \textit{Light on the Hill Top: A Contemporary History of the Missionary Work in Unwana, 1888 - 1988}, p.33.}

On 1\textsuperscript{st} September 1858 the mission stations around Calabar were constituted as the Presbytery of Biafra (PB) of the (United Presbyterian Church Scotland - UPC) and on 4\textsuperscript{th} May 1921 it metamorphosed into the Presbyterian Synod of Biafra (under the United Free Church of Scotland - UFSC). On 19\textsuperscript{th} October 1945, it was constituted as the Presbyterian Church of Biafra (PCB) (under the Church of Scotland) with Synod as its highest court. In June 1952, the PCB had become independent and was renamed the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Nigeria (PCEN) and upon completion of the Mission Church Integration in 16\textsuperscript{th} June 1960 the name of the church was changed again to the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN).\footnote{P. B. Clarke, \textit{West Africa and Christianity} (London: Edward Arnold Publishing Ltd, 1986). p.102. Clarke quotes 1954 as the date in which what he calls ‘The Scottish Presbyterian Mission’ became the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Nigeria. The PCN’s available records rather show that the change took place in 1952 and not 1954 as reported by Clarke.} On 20\textsuperscript{th} July 1985, the Synod met at Afikpo and agreed to create regional Synods with the General Assembly as the highest court. The decision was implemented on 22\textsuperscript{nd} August 1987 when the General Assembly was inaugurated. In 1988 two Synods were created; East and Southeast and today the PCN has nine Synods and fifty-two Presbyteries.\footnote{I. Ukpuho, ed. \textit{The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria; Diary} (Lagos: Board of Faith and Order/ Doxology Publishers,2006). pp.231-239.}

\section*{3.3 Mission Expansionism: the PCN at Amasiri}

As already shown, the present day PCN was first established at Amasiri as the UPC and later it was renamed UFCS and now it is called PCN. This is because the separation and rejoining of the Church of Scotland congregations impacted on their foreign missions. Although the UPC mission was established in Unwana in 1888, the mission did not get to Amasiri owing to some factors including ethnic conflicts, the influence of Arochukwu Ibinukpabi (Long Juju) and the impact of the Ogo society.\footnote{Personal interview with Rev. Eze Nwonu Eze on 07:08:06. Ibinukpabi is a oracle among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria.} The UPC’s encounter with the Ibinukpabi had huge implications for
missions around Arochukwu and its environs including Amasiri. Gwilym Jones asserts that Ibinukpabi was ubiquitous in Igbo and non-Igbo-speaking areas, but notes that it had little or no influence on the Niger region.\(^{366}\)

On the contrary, Eze Nwonu Eze, in an interview, argues that the missionary and colonial agents perceived the Ibinukpabi to be a hindrance to missionary work and colonial occupation in many parts of the Igbo and beyond.\(^{367}\) Ibinukpabi was noted for its wide spread patronage and effectiveness as the ‘highest court of appeal,’ as the supreme judicial and religious institution in the Niger, Cross River basins and beyond. Kenneth Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba further underscore the crucial place of Arochukwu and its Ibinukpabi thus:


\(^{367}\) Personal interview with Rev. Eze on 07:08:06.
The 200 years preceding the British conquest of Arochukwu in 1902 saw the economic and military ascendency of the Aro over most of the ethnic groups inhabiting the area east of the River Niger and South of the Benue River. Their oracular activities enabled them to establish colonies and, on some occasions, chiefdoms among non-Aro groups. In this way, they directly and indirectly brought many neighbouring people under their influence.\footnote{The 200 years preceding the British conquest of Arochukwu in 1902 saw the economic and military ascendency of the Aro over most of the ethnic groups inhabiting the area east of the River Niger and South of the Benue River. Their oracular activities enabled them to establish colonies and, on some occasions, chiefdoms among non-Aro groups. In this way, they directly and indirectly brought many neighbouring people under their influence.}{368}

Furthermore, William Baikie observes that Arochukwu and its oracle became the Mecca of Eastern Nigeria; pilgrimages, as Baikie termed it, were made to the shrine of the Ibinukpabi from far and wide, ‘not only from all parts of Igbo proper but from Old Calabar, from tribes along the coast and from Oru and Nember.’ \footnote{W. B. Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwóra and Bínue (Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsádda)* (London: J. Murray, 1856). p.265.}{369} Furthermore, the Ibinukpabi was perceived as an Aro invention designed in response to the foreign slave trade to facilitate Aro interests and trade. Hence the assertion was that Ibinukpabi was the medium through which most of the slaves exported through Delta ports were collected. \footnote{C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London, New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1937). p.5.}{370} Second, the Ibinukpabi was considered to be purely for economic gain, the seemingly religious character being a form of camouflage. \footnote{S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860-1960* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977). p.100.}{371} Ijeoma further notes that the Ibiniukpani was perceived by some British colonial officers and missionaries as a hindrance to the expansion of the British commerce, authority and the missionary work. \footnote{J. O. Ijeoma, “The British Encounter with Arochukwu,” in *Arochukwu History and Culture*, ed. J. O. Ijeoma and U. O. Umuzurike (Lagos: Markson Nigerian Ltd, 1982). pp.146-147.}{372}

It appears that such claims were made to justify the colonial government’s attack on the Ibinukpabi. Furthermore, this colonial and missionary stance seems to have undermined the central place occupied by the divinities and ancestors among the Igbo. Apart from the prompting of the British officials, the UPC Mission, which had been established in Calabar in 1846, had hinted that to the protectorate government that Arochukwu should be sacked. Ayandele supports the view that the Presbyterian missionaries helped to trump up charges for the invasion of Aro. \footnote{Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914; a Political and Social Analysis* (p.116).}{373}
support of the UPC for the attack on Ibinukpabi is highlighted further by the material and moral support which the mission gave to the invading military forces. Donald McFarlan notes:

When the operation began, the up-river missionaries were evacuated to Creek Town and Duke Town, and Unwana and Itu became for the time being military bases. Dr. Rattary was attached to the expedition as medical officer, and Miss Graham and Miss Scott as nurses, while the mission launch Jubilee was used as floating ambulance.\(^{374}\)

The attack on Ibinukpabi officially began on 1\(^{st}\) December 1901 and lasted until 24\(^{th}\) March 1902 and started again in January 1913. Felix Ekechi insists that such collaboration by the UPC mission demonstrates that Christian missionaries were not merely religious propagandists, but collaborators in British imperialism.\(^{375}\) The working relationship which the UPC had with the British colonial government enabled the colonial officers to subdue aggression by members of the Ibinukpabi.\(^{376}\)

Following the attack on Ibinukpabi, Arochukwu and its environs were opened for mission work. Miss Mary Slessor relocated to carry out the missionary work at Arochukwu in 1903. There she established a school at Amasu. Thomas Dennis, a serving missionary wrote to his mother afterward, ‘Now that the Long Juju had been destroyed and the Aro priests taught a sharp lesson, prospect for missionary evangelism in the country looked brighter than ever.’ Toyin Falola argues that the link between the colonial powers and the missionary enterprise of the mid-nineteenth century in many parts of Africa enabled the two groups to proscribe many aspects of the natives’ religious lives. He further notes that there was the psychology of inferiority fostered by the very nature of the colonial conquest and governance.\(^{377}\)

This foundational problem has lingered and has been transmitted to contemporary Christianity within Amasiri. However, it must be pointed out that the colonial administration supported some of missionary activities because they saw that it was useful to the colonial interest and its objectives. Thus, the missionary relationship

with the colonial administration was often one in which each gave and received. Furthermore, Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba insist that the military attack against Ibinukpabi did not destroy it as was claimed. They rather argue that Ibinukpabi continued to enjoy a wide clientele among the Igbo and beyond including Amasiri. Frank Hives, Resident Officer of Owerri Province, underscores this point thus:

The Aros still appear to have some wonderful power over the natives which would appear to prevent anyone from reporting their actions or appealing to the government for help. Through occasional remarks which come out of hearing civil and criminal cases, it is apparent that people still preferred its decision to those of the established courts.

Belief in spiritual forces among the Igbo could explain the continual confidence in the powers of the Ibinukpabi in spite of vigorous campaigns and attacks against it. The sacred space of Ibinukpabi was considered to be mobile. Such a belief was accentuated by the explanation that the spirit of Ibinukpabi was driven out of its abode, but it took shelter elsewhere. Hives observes, ‘when the original grove of the Ibinukpabi was blown up during the expedition, many Aro priests escaped and established oracles along the lines of the original both in Arochukwu and in areas away from Arochukwu, out of the reach of the government.’ Furthermore, even within Arochukwu, the vigilance of the government officials rather drove the activities of Ibinukpabi underground and its sacred space proliferated so that in 1912 these spaces had increased to six instead of one as in 1902. The patronage of Ibinukpabi for such a long time by non-Aros especially Amasiri demonstrates its functional roles and the substantive element of the Ibinukpabi.

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380 F. Hives, "Minutes of Frank Hives (Resident, Owerri Province) to H. M. Governor of Eastern Provinces," (Extract from the Annual Report on Owerri Province, Cse/1/54/4 31-12-1921).
381 Personal interview with Osuu Obiahu Ekehie on 21:06:08.
An understanding of the central place of the Ibinukpabi and the Ogo society discussed in Chapter Two highlights the religious landscape of Amasiri and how it shapes the interaction between Christianity and indigenous communities. Nna Obiahu Orie recalls that the first of the UFCS’s mission visits to Amasiri was led by Dr. John Hitchcock in 1912. According to him they sought to build a hospital and a church at Amasiri (at Okpuorie), the present location of Amasiri’s main market, but the ruling elders at the time declined the offer.\textsuperscript{384} Elder Atu Ogburu recalls that upon the arrival of Hitchcock and his team, some Amasiri people did not think that they were human beings, but supposed them to be ghosts. In order to verify that they were human Ogburu notes that some people threw sand at them, as it was believed that ghosts could not withstand sand.\textsuperscript{385} HRH Ezeogo Ugwu Itiri further highlights the reasons for the the ruling elders’ refusal to grant the request of Hitchcock and his team. According to Itiri the reasons include:

\begin{quote}
That building a hospital would attract diverse kinds of sicknesses to the clan. That building a church would definitely conflict with omenala (indigenous practices). Moreover, the elders were naturally suspicious of any Whiteman’s presence; they saw no difference between missionaries and colonial officers. The attack on Ibinukpabi was still very fresh in the minds of the elders who felt that allowing John Hitchcock and his team to establish a hospital would amount to exposing Amasiri to a worse danger than that of Arochukwu.\textsuperscript{386}
\end{quote}

The above comment highlights some central issues. First was the perception of the missionaries and colonial officers as arrogant and rapacious imperialists. Second was a popular understanding that Christianity was a monolithic and aggressive force that missionaries imposed upon defiant communities. Thus it was thought that Christianity and indigenous practices were mutually incompatible and should not be given a place within the clan. Ayandele observes that there was no distinction between ‘one white man and another’, irrespective of their vocation. He notes that all Europeans, whether merchants or civil servant or missionaries, were lumped together as ‘Christians’ and their actions interpreted as a demonstration of


\textsuperscript{385} Personal interview with Elder Atu Ogburu on 20:06:08.

\textsuperscript{386} Personal interview with HRH Ezeogo Ugwu Itiri on 07:07:06.
their religion.\footnote{Ayandele, \textit{The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914; a Political and Social Analysis.} p.261.} It was against this background that Hitchcock and his team proceeded to Uburu (a nearby community to Amasiri) and there they established a hospital and later a church. The hospital not only served Uburu, but its environs (including Amasiri) and since then Uburu has had a large market which attracts indigenous people from near and far. In 1922 Rev. William Marshal Christie was posted to Okposi, a neighbouring town to Uburu, after serving as Vice Principal at Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar.\footnote{"Minutes 8112," (Edinburgh: United Free Church of Scotland, Foreign Mission Committee (FMC), 19th February 1946). pp.209-210. See also, E. U. Aye, \textit{Hope Waddell Training Institution: Life and Work} (Calabar: Paico Ltd. (Press & Books), 1986). p.55.} At Okposi Christie built himself a house with a mat roof and half walls made of clay. He undertook the mapping of the area as yet there was no government survey map.\footnote{J. A. T. Beattie, \textit{The River Highway: A Personal Record of the Scottish Mission in Nigeria from 1927 to 1957} (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Overseas Council, 1978). pp.50-51.} He oversaw the mission works which had already begun at Uburu, Okposi and Akaeze.

Twelve years after the first attempt to establish the UFSC at Amasiri Omezue Idam Ome notes that four traders from Amasiri including, Egwu Chiogwu, Ewa Idam, Aghachi Aghalu and Chukwu Omaka invited the missionaries to establish schools. The earliest converts in that school were Paul Eze Orie, Jack Isu Obia, Oko Mgbo Ewa, Eze Aja, Unya Aluma, Aghalu Aghachi, Nwokpo Oria, Osa Nwaeteke and David Oko.\footnote{Personal interview with Omezue Idam Ome on 10:08:06.} The four traders appear to have been motivated as a result of complex factors including the disadvantages which the four traders appear to have suffered owing to their lack of education. Rev. Christie was hesitant given the earlier refusal of the elders, but gave in to the request and so established a school in Amasiri in 1927.\footnote{Oko, \textit{Amasiri: A Legacy.} p.52.} The decision of the traders appears to have been unpopular, and so it was the four traders who assisted with building the first temporary shelter after which the school took off. The first sets of pupils were taught under a big tree (\textit{achi}) at Ayandele, \textit{The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914; a Political and Social Analysis.} p.261.
Amokpu, Ezeke village.\(^{392}\) Given the unpopular nature of the establishment of the school and later a church, the mission recorded minimal success.

According to Omezue Joseph Akwuba, some of the people who insisted on not giving the missionaries land to establish at Amasiri also refused to send their children (especially the males) to school.\(^{393}\) In 1932 the following was reported of the school:

> School controlled by the Church of Scotland Mission, Uburu supplies the educational and spiritual wants of Amasiri. The attendance is not very large – total roll being about fifty with an average daily attendance of about twenty. Standard two is the highest standard attained.\(^{394}\)

However, Paul Eze (one of the earliest converts) ensured that he took his children to school every day before leaving for the farm. Eze believed that ‘education, not religion was the white man’s source of strength.’\(^{395}\) Furthermore, Itiri notes that as time progressed, the few that went to school began to demonstrate a remarkable change in their use of English. Many young people who attended the mission school also received instruction in Christianity, accepted baptism while at school and began a gradual process of transition into Christianity.\(^{396}\) It appears to have been a difficult process especially for the young people, who at school and church were instructed about new beliefs, but at home were continuously exposed to and expected to defend many indigenous practices.

The clan elders however later offered some parcels of land to the missions at Azuhu, which before then had been used as a communal burial ground. The school was called UFCS Mission School, later the Presbyterian Primary School and soon after the civil war (1970) it was renamed Amasiri Central School and was taken over by the government.\(^{397}\) Omezue Idam Ome, in an interview, observes that although


\(^{393}\) Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 05:08:06.

\(^{394}\) "Intelligence Reports and the Formation of Native Administration, His Honour's Confidential No. S. P. 6752/96." Appendix 1. p.2.

\(^{395}\) Personal interview with Omezue Akwuba on 05:08:06.

\(^{396}\) Personal interview with HRH Ezeogo Ugwu Itiri on 07:07:06.

\(^{397}\) Idam, "A Brief History of St. James Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Amasiri Parish Presented by the Inauguration Planning Committee During the Inauguration Service of Amasiri Parish." p.2.
those who attended the mission school were also members of the church, many of them did not seem to have had a personal attachment to the teachings of the church. This, he explains, resulted in a huge number of pupils and mission teachers lapsing back to indigenous practices soon after the mission schools were taken over by the government. However, the UFSC at Amasiri (currently called the PCN) remained under the Uburu Parish and later under the Afikpo and Unwana Parishes until 7th August 1994 when it was inaugurated as a parish. The congregation was renamed Saint James PCN, Amasiri Parish.

The parish has had the services of the following ministers, Rev. Ndukwe Mong – interim Minister (1994-1995), Rev. Kalu Oti (1995-1999), Rev. Anthony Okoroafor (1998-2003), Rev. Nmecha Agwu (2003-2007) and Rev. Okorie Ume (2007-2011). The Amasiri Parish established a branch at Ndukwe on 24th March 2001 and on 16th March 2003 another branch was established at Amasiri Junction. On 30th April 2006, the Amasiri Junction was inaugurated a Parish and became known as St. Peter’s PCN, Amasiri Junction Parish. Rev. Peter Unegbu served as the Parish’s interim minister (April 2006 to August 2006) and currently its minister is Rev. Anthony Ufere (2006 to 2010). Before 1994 the ministers who oversaw the missions at Amasiri resided outside the clan, thus leaving much of the work in the hands of local agents. The local agents include, Elder David Okoh, HRH Ezeogo Ugwu Itiri, Elder Enyim Oko, Elder Obinna Oka, Elder Eke Uchendu and others. However, since 1994 the ministerial leadership of the PCN branches at Amasiri has influenced the rapid growth of the congregations and its members’ patterns of engaging with the Ogo society.

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398 Personal interview with Omezue Idam Ome on 10:08:06.
401 Personal interview with Rev. Anthony Ufere on 18:06:08.
402 Personal interview with Elder Atu Ogburu on 20:06:08.
3.4 Local Agency and Mission

The role of local agents in a mission cannot be underestimated given the history outlined in the previous section. Although one can observe some resistance to Christian mission by indigenous communities, one also observes undeniable collaborations with local agents in the establishment of Christianity at Amasiri. Ayandele points out that Igbo were quite receptive to European civilisation and Christianity, implying that the Igbo indigenous communities were a mere house of cards which collapsed at the instance of change. Conversely, Njoku contends that the Igbo did not uncritically accept any aspect of Western influence. Furthermore, Ogbu Kalu underscores this point thus:

In our contemporary efforts to revitalise our traditional culture, it is often asserted that the missionaries uprooted our culture and that this explains our underdevelopment and other failures. This is a propagandist use of the past which only contains one side of the story. The Igbo were neither passive recipients of the protestant Christianity nor were their responses a mere rejection or acceptance of the religious change-agents. The truth of the matter lies in the medial position between these polarities.

The Igbo, including Amasiri, may not be treated as victims of ‘colonial evangelism’, an approach which considers missionaries as mere ‘human vehicles of a hegemonic worldview’. This is because, as Kalu observes, such an approach tends to undermine the central roles of indigenous teachers, helpers, and elders in spreading Christianity. As Ajayi notes, from 1881, some parishes, hospitals and schools were

403 Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*. pp.164-165. She observes that ‘Another category of notable Igbo Christian pioneers were the catechists. Poorly paid, often of humble origins and little educated, they did the real work of bringing Christianity to the villages.’


406 O. U. Kalu, "Protestant Christianity in Iboland," in *Christianity in West Africa: The Nigerian Story*, ed. O. U. Kalu (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1978). p.315. Kalu cites a conference of Missions in Liverpool (1860) during which Hope Waddell addressed the participants. Waddell observed that the rousing welcome accorded to a new missionary did not usually mean acceptance of the gospel. Some people, Waddell noted, were interested solely in material gains and others in education. Some he said were intrigued by the novelty and others wanted protection from the brutality of the colonial government.

established by the Scottish mission and many of them were headed by local agents due to a shortage of staff. Nonetheless, within the UFCS structures, the few serving missionaries still held onto power and continued to control indigenous congregations. The history of Christianity in Amasiri is thus not simply the story of what missionaries did; the responses and collaborations of the indigenous agents are a crucially important part of the story.

Although the UFSC missionaries were first refused leave to establish Christianity in Amasiri, it was some indigenous traders who later invited them to establish Christianity there. As such the foreign missionaries may not be blamed or praised alone for the impact of Christian missions among indigenous communities. The missionaries noted earlier did not reside at Amasiri, but only visited from time to time. Rather the clan had some local mission teachers who were considered to be stricter than the missionaries, an attitude which Chinua Achebe, in a novel, describes as ‘an outsider who cries more than the bereaved.’

Andrew Walls suggests that such a strict attitude to indigenous practices was informed by the fact that some of the local agents had been exposed to European influence and education. However, the ability of the local agents to speak the indigenous language, work for little or no pay and their immunity to certain diseases made them a significant addition to the missionary corps.

The expansion of mission among the Igbo resulted in the need to recruit more local agents. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1904 established a Training College at Akwa, in order to train both women and men in the church’s services. On the other hand, UFCS resorted to what Ogbu Kalu describes as the ‘ward system’ whereby smart natives lived with the white missionaries as apprentices. Although the UFSC also used elders and mission teachers, Kalu underlines that the ‘ward system’ has caused huge problems for leadership development for the present PCN. Adrian Hastings has shown that there were few Africans in leadership positions in

411 Kalu, "Protestant Christianity in Iboland." p.313.
the mission churches prior to the 1950s. Hastings observes that ‘it could easily look as if many missionaries did not want …clerical leaders to arise, or at least not to arise too soon or too far.’ However, Alastair Brown, in an interview underscores Hastings’s point, but he observes that the ‘Nigerian-Biafran’ civil war (1967-1970) appears to have helped in returning the PCN to Nigerian indigenes.

Brown notes that many foreign missionaries were refused re-entry to Nigeria after the civil war which meant that indigenous ministers took up the PCN’s leadership positions. Furthermore, Brown notes:

> It pained me that I could not return to Nigeria as I expected, as I had made friends and was enjoying the work I was doing. Furthermore, the war was not a good experience for Nigeria and the church; however, it provided the church an opportunity to step up to the leadership of their church. It could be that we (the foreign missionaries) would have remained in power and leadership longer. Although we kept talking about handing over power to the indigenous leaders, hardly any of us gave serious thought to its implementation.

As Brown highlights, it seems there was a gap between the official idea of handing over to the indigenous agents and the real experience of the foreign missionaries, perhaps because doing so would have rendered some of them redundant. Furthermore, it was an unpopular idea for Europeans to serve under indigenous leadership. Thomas Beidelman asserts, ‘however, experienced and competent, an African would still be left technically subject to some newly arrived European.’ In addition, lack of training for indigenous workers was often claimed to be caused by insufficient funds, but Felix Ekechi notes that when circumstances ultimately forced the missions to train indigenous workers, the resources became available. Within Amasiri there appears to have been a lack of commitment to the active recruitment and training of indigenous workers for the church’s ministry. However, Chukwu Oko notes that the problem was much more than that, ‘being a church member in those

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413 Personal interview with Alastair Brown on 17:05:07.


days was considered to be demeaning, let alone being a minister within the
church."\textsuperscript{416}

These scenarios do not undermine the roles of the local agents in Christian
mission, but highlight the power relationship as well as the different sides of the
story. The point remains that Christianity was spread among the Igbo ‘mostly by the
agency of Igbo people.’\textsuperscript{417} However, Victor Uchenna has used the phrase ‘we want to
make our place…get up’ to describe the intention of some indigenous elders who
invited or accepted the missionaries to establish themselves within their
communities.\textsuperscript{418} He simplifies a rather complex phenomenon arguing that many
elders or chiefs invited the missionaries in order to fulfil their desires for personal
greatness and the community’s development. Uchenna therefore appears to give
more attention to the socio-economic interests rather than the overriding participation
of the indigenous elders in Christian mission.

The historical formation and establishment of Christian mission across the
pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial eras, demonstrates the interaction between
Christianity and indigenous religions. Furthermore, it underscores the point that
indigenous religions especially that of the Ogo society continues to play a crucial
role among the Amasiri clan. However, it should be noted that its practices have not
remained unchanged in the face of Christianity and western-influenced education.
The interface of religions in Amasiri therefore needs to be located against the
backdrop of the interlocking relationship and expected mutual enhancement of the
indigenous heritage. Indigenous practices among Amasiri are characterised by their
negotiation between continuity, change and transformation. Thus, by giving an
insight into the dynamic of the co-existence of Christianity and indigenous religions
within contemporary Amasiri, the complex nature of transition from one religion to
the other is highlighted. These interactions provide a basis for understanding both the
initial and contemporary tension between Christianity and indigenous practices and
for the ways in which many Christians negotiate these varying identities.

\textsuperscript{416} Personal interview with Elder Chukwu Okpara on 16:06:08.
\textsuperscript{418} V. C. Uchenna, \textit{The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria} (Chicago: Holt: Rinhart and Winston Inc, 1965).
pp.34-35.
3.5 Interface of Ritual Within the PCN

The term ‘ritual’ often carries strong religious values within different Christian traditions. Douglas Davies observes that Catholicism and Orthodoxy see ‘ritual’, along with ‘liturgy’ and ‘ceremonial’, in a positive light, whereas within Protestantism the idea of ‘ritual’ is more negative. Davies hints at the inauthenticity of faith, with conservative Protestants tending not to see their own religious behaviour as a ‘ritual’, ritual being for those who lack the real essence of faith. While one can deduce some over-generalisation in the case of Davies’ point, it should also be noted that the problem may simply lie in use of terminology and not in the religious practices. A careful observation of the rites of baptism and the Lord’s Supper within the PCN shows a clear communicative simplicity which features in most rituals. The Christian mission to Amasiri at its beginning introduced the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper which was to serve as alternative to the Ogo society.

It was thought by the mission teachers that these two PCN sacraments would serve as rites of passage for converts. However, the dynamic of the rituals are yet to be studied. Firstly is the extent to which the rituals impact on PCN members in relation to other Christians and members of the Ogo society. Secondly, are the patterns of conflict which arise as a result of attempts to combine these rituals within the Ogo society and the PCN. Each of these rituals however, is performed within a community. The understanding of community, as highlighted in Chapter Two, is central to the Ogo society. Emphasis on an initiate’s change of status during rites of passage tends to obscure a fundamental aspect of initiation rites: the renewal of the religious quest of the community who are also participating in the rites. As demonstrated earlier, the father who gives his son, the mother who prepares the meals and perhaps provides the costume and community networks in which they participate each appear to renew their own past encounters with the sacred symbols. As social actions, the performance of rituals requires the organised cooperation of individuals, directed by officiants.

Perhaps, like initiation into the Ogo society, baptism, especially infant baptism, emphasises a community’s renewal of its religious quest, since the small child cannot possibly know what is happening. Furthermore, the content of the information passed on within the ritual events remains virtually constant and repetitive in each performance, as with initiation into the Ogo society. La Fontaine observes that in rituals there are rules indicating which persons should participate and on which occasions as well as a general recognition of a correct pattern that should be followed in any particular performance.420 These features are not uncommon within both the PCN and the Ogo society, as demonstrated earlier. Following set rules, the sacraments including baptism are performed during the regular public church worship. However, within the PCN, ministers may ‘where it sees cause, authorise the administration of baptism elsewhere than in the church.’421 Although this is an exception to the rule, Benebo Fubara-Manuel argues that the communal dimension of the sacrament enables the church to express itself as a community, often viewed as the family of God.422

Although, different Christian traditions vary in the forms of baptism they practice, within the PCN both adult and infant baptism are practiced despite the fact that infant baptism has received criticism over the centuries. The PCN reaffirmed its belief in the infant baptism during its August 1988 General Assembly thus:

\[\text{It shall be expedient for the Church to ensure that emphasis is placed on safe delivery and on such occasions, a prayer shall be said for the mother and child; more so, such thanksgiving for safe delivery shall ideally be combined with infant baptism within the first three months of the delivery of the infant.}\]

420 LaFontaine, *Initiation*, p.11.
422 Personal interview with Benebo Fubara-Manuel on 22:07:08.
423 "Child Blessing and Infant Baptism, Minutes Ga 0113," (Aba: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, 1988). See also, P. Reiss, *Children and Communion: A Practical Guide for Interested Churches*, vol. 149, Groove Series (Cambridge: Groove Books Ltd., 1998). p.6. Reiss argues that ‘The baptising of infants is justified on the understanding that baptism is to do with grace, and that the child is to be brought up within the family of the church. In exactly the same way adults are baptised, as a sign of God’s grace, and so they may belong to the family of God. There is one baptism, whether the person is an infant or a centenarian, and it is done to us, however able we might be.’
Such occasions offer opportunities for the expression of gratitude for the new child and the acknowledgement of the addition to the family by both kinsmen and friends. For most families within the PCN the service is inclusive but the most important part is the reception that follows.\footnote{Personal interview with Rev. Anthony Ufere on 18:06:08.} An interesting aspect of these processes is the issue of belief with regards to the parents who are presenting their child or children for baptism. Clearly, as mentioned in Chapter Two, it is difficult to test members on their beliefs. This is the case for both adults and infants. Most ministers therefore draw their conclusions on the basis of responses to questions during an interview on church policy and practices posed to parents or guardians who seek to present their children for baptism. Such questions include:

In bringing forward your child for baptism do you anew profess your faith in God as your Father, in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit as your guide and upholder throughout life? Do you promise so to behave that your child will have in you an example of Christian living? Do you undertake to bring up your child in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ as the Lord of life?\footnote{”The Practice and Procedure of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria.” p.95.}

These questions have both personal and group implications and place some demand on individuals. However, Rev. Okorie Ume observes that parents hardly ever give ‘no’ for an answer to any of these questions. As such he notes that often belief is further accentuated on the basis of the parents’ participation in the auxiliary ministries of the congregation, including up-to-date financial contributions.\footnote{Personal interview with Rev. Okorie Ume on 20:06:08.} This question of belief and participation becomes even more complex when parents who seldom or never attend church services present their children for baptism. Within the PCN, for instance, if one of the parents of the child to be baptised is not baptised or is considered not to be in good standing with the congregation, a substitute is often required. Such a substitute stands in for one of the parents, but only for the purpose of the service. As already highlighted baptism appears to be an event which affects not only a family and close friends, but also the lives of each member of the church community.\footnote{D. Holeton, ”Children and the Eucharist in the Tradition of the Church,” in Nurturing Children in Communion: Essays from the Boston Consultation, ed. C. Buchana, Groove Liturgical Study (Nottingham: Grove Books Limited, 1985). p.11.}
explaining this, ‘Do you promise to receive this child (children) in love as fellow members of the church; and to pray for them and help them by your examples in the Christian life?’

A question such as this seems to be a locus from which individual members of the congregation role of Christian nurture is to be taken seriously. The climax of the baptism is the pronouncement that the child or the adult baptised ‘has been received into the worldwide family and company of the saints’. In the case of a child he or she is integrated and is continually nurtured until the child is considered grown and ready to receive the Lord’s Supper. However, David Holeton argues that age was not a factor in determining who could be baptised and that infants who were baptised participated in the Lord’s Supper as well. Like initiation into the Ogo society, baptism redefines members’ status and presents them with additional responsibilities. Within the PCN, the completion of initiation in confirmation or admission to full communion is seen to be necessary to leave an opportunity for the confession of personal faith, especially if personal confession of faith is not present within the event of baptism itself. The practice was developed following a Reformed tradition, which was concerned about the historical problem of some people participating in the Lord’s Supper with little or no comprehension of its meaning. Many Reformed churches like the PCN do not claim that confirmation was integral to the Gospel or even that it was a New Testament rite as such. However, it was incorporated into the Prayer Book as a means of testing comprehension of the Scriptural meaning of the Lord’s Supper as one ingredient, along with faith, confession and obedience, of a publicly acknowledged ‘readiness’ to receive the sacrament.

The studies so far on rituals within the PCN raise questions about meaning. Meaning according to Seligman, Weller and Puett, ‘implies something beneath the

428 "The Practice and Procedure of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria." p.95.
429 ———, Infant Communion: Then and Now, vol. 27, Grove Liturgical Study (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1981). p.4. See also, F. A. J. Macdonald, "Confirmation and Profession of Faith," in Children at the Table, ed. D. G. Hamilton and F. A. J. Macdonald (Edinburgh: The Department of Education, the Church of Scotland, 1982). p.13. Macdonald argues that ‘it is highly appropriate that we receive infants into the membership of the church through baptism, nourish our growing children with the fellowship of the Lord’s Table, and then seek to mark their transition to responsible, adult status within the church in a ceremony characterised by profession of faith…’
surface, something other than what the participants or observers can immediately know.' As highlighted, it is rather complex to understand how and why people respond to ritual symbols, why they may be drawn to one and not to another. The search for meaning and disguised motives by observers, participants and leaders in rituals can be almost endless. There can be a wide range of reasons for some peoples’ participation in rituals within the PCN. According to Ogeri Aluu, baptism and confirmation enabled her, ‘to be accepted within the PCN as a full member, thereby giving me entitlement to all rights and privileges and also shows that my decision to be a Christian is real.’ On the other hand, Eze Otuu notes thus, ‘I was a titled man before joining the PCN and as such submitted to baptism and confirmation in order to retain the same status within the church as I cannot afford to be unrecognised.’ Dorcas Oko however, sees baptism and confirmation as ‘a means of dying and rising with Christ and a means of public confession of my faith conversion to Christianity’. It is difficult to engage with belief and its connection with practices and the comments above underscore the divergent perceptions and motivation for participation in rituals. Although Dorcas, for instance, may not understand the details of what it means to ‘die’ she simply insists that the sacraments have enabled her to affirm her faith. Confirmation however, remains a prerequisite for participation in the Lord’s Supper, often preceded with attendance at catechism classes. The classes provide space for teachings on the basics of the Christian faith to the candidates; in some cases they are required to memorise the catechism by heart and later tested before they are confirmed. The practice of confirmation, although a later development of the ninth century, holds some ambiguities about whether candidates are confirming their faith or whether God is confirming or establishing their faith. On the other hand, successful candidates are said to be incorporated into the

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432 Personal interview with Ogeri Aluu on 03:08:08.

433 Personal interview with Eze Otuu on 17:07:08.

434 Personal interview with Dorcas Oko on 19:07:08.

‘worldwide family of God’, thus creating a community which includes the departed saints. This process simultaneously includes and excludes some members of the church. Members who, for instance, do not conform to certain religious standards are denied communion. Within the PCN congregations at Amasiri, polygynists are denied communion, but their wives are served with the Lord’s Supper. Furthermore, children and other members who may be under one form of discipline or those who may feel ‘unworthy’ are also excluded from partaking in the Lord’s Supper. As such it is argued that although the Christian rituals serve as a means of incorporation it also serves as a means of exclusion.

In addition, for many members of the PCN at Amasiri who undergo the infant or adult baptism there is an increasing pressure to be re-baptised especially for those who seek marriages in some Charismatic or Pentecostal churches. Moreover, there is the question of an authentic mode of baptism. Within the PCN three modes are practiced including sprinkling, pouring and immersion. However, most baptisms are done by sprinkling. This mode has continued to be objected to by a few members within the PCN and more so by many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches at Amasiri. As a result of this, some members of the PCN end up being re-baptised by immersion or suffer prejudice from other Christians. The dynamics of identity and the incorporation of members of the PCN into the ‘family or community of faith’ through the process of baptism and admission to the Lord’s Supper is complex. This further raises identity and power issues for many PCN members and accentuates the point that ‘common baptism’, a shared baptismal identity, does not seem to have proved the foundation for building a visible union in such areas of church life and corporation among Christians within Amasiri. Similarly the incorporation which these rituals offer appears not to anchor many Christians within the social community. As mentioned in Chapter Two, some girls or families may still not be willing to marry or allow their daughter to marry an uninitiated male. In order to address this situation, Egwu Nwosi notes that ‘at a younger age we have our males

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436 Personal interview with Benebo Fubara-Manuel on 22:07:08.
initiated into the Ogo society, so that at a later age if he chooses to join the church he would have saved himself from the shame of being an uninitiated male.\footnote{Personal interview with Egwu Nwosi on 26:06:08.}

On the contrary, Rev. Ufere argues for ‘zero tolerance’ on initiation into the Ogo society. According to him, ‘if a parent is a member of my church and initiates his son into the Ogo society, he will be suspended from partaking in the Lord’s Supper until he shows a sign of repentance.’\footnote{Personal interview with Rev. Anthony Ufere on 18:06:08.} Nonetheless, Ufere admits that such suspension does not nullify the initiation into the Ogo society. The issue of balancing the quest to belong to the society and family networks while maintaining membership within the PCN remains an enigma. However, the long process of socialisation, cultural identification and incorporation into the wider community has not been replaced with the Christian sacraments, thus raising implications for the PCN’s missions within Amasiri. The pursuit of a kinship community derives from the basis that no person can find life, protection, meaning, identity and status except by becoming an integral part of the community. This community has its origins centred in ancestry and is governed by kinship values, loyalty and obligations. Such a community, according to Omezue Joseph Akwuba can only survive if it has a good relationship with both the ancestors and neighbours.

On another level, gender construction has remained within Amasiri and is marked with fluidity and ambivalence. Ritual plays a central role in defining individual members of the Amasiri clan, in terms of who is a man, women, titled and untitled, initiated or uninitiated into the Ogo society. These modes of identification seem to impact on relationships and the exercise of power. It does appear that Christianity has rather reinforced a patriarchal tendency within Amasiri. Elizabeth Isichei notes that the role of Christianity in empowering women appears ambiguous; ‘it gave them a place on which to stand, from which they could challenge the male-dominated world, but it also paved the way for new forms of marginalisation.’\footnote{E. Isichei, “Does Christianity Empower Women?: The Case of the Anaguta of Central Nigeria,” in \textit{Women and Mission: Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions}, ed. F. Bowie, D. Kirkwood, and S. Ardener, \textit{Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women} (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993). p.209.} Such a teaching as the first woman being created from Adam’s rib quickly comes to...
mind as the frequently cited passage to perpetuate the ideology that women are inferior to man. A female elder who asked for anonymity observes: ‘though am an elder, alongside other female colleagues we often tread carefully in meetings, as often some of the male elders would want us to know that we are their wives. For me it has often been difficult to disagree sharply with male elders, as in my opinion that would sound very disrespectful’. It seems that the expected complementary role and respect of males and females does not translate easily in real life situations. Silas Okpara further notes that some men within the PCN are happy to simply come to church, but not to identify with auxiliary groups that may bring them under female leadership. Furthermore, Eze Otuu asserts that he has no problem with having a female leader, but is always uncomfortable with a woman, (‘Nwanyi Nta) meaning ordinary woman, exercising authority over him. To him it is more like having an uninitiated male exercising authority over him.

The role of female leaders within the PCN thus appears to be complex and ambiguous. The expressed discomfort of having a female leader exercising authority over males appears to be in continuity with initiation into the Ogo society. As has been argued earlier in Chapter Two, the initiation usually ends with a re-identification of the initiates. As I observed during the field research in 2008, it appears that the expected limited interaction between males and females is evident within the PCN. This is shown by men sitting separately from women and in most cases girls sitting separately from boys during church worship. Christianity therefore appears to present a world of ideas and values independent of the male-structured sphere of indigenous communities, but plays out differently in daily life experiences. Within the context of negotiated powers, some women within the PCN are assuming leadership positions within the Women’s Guild group; some are ordained ruling elders and even ministers. This perceived openness can be traced to the PCN’s constant interaction with other churches, especially the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. However, as Dorothy Agwu observes:

440 Personal interview with Mrs. Adannia Nkata on 07:08:08.
441 Personal interview with Silas Okpara on 13:07:08.
442 Personal interview with Mr. Eze Otuu on 17:07:08.
It seems that women only enjoy some freedom within the few hours they spend in church and on return to their homes they return to the sphere where men are visibly in control. Until now, I am not allowed to stand and address males during a compound meeting in which females are invited. My male children are often invited and allowed to stand and speak, but not I, simply because I am a woman.\textsuperscript{443}

This particular situation is interesting, for unlike some churches, women within the PCN are officially allowed to participate in most aspects of its life and ministries, yet they are unable to do the same in the community in which they live. Benebo Fubara-Manuel attributes this development to ‘a function of internalised formative indoctrination which several women have had.’\textsuperscript{444} Interestingly, Mercy Eze in an interview admits that women are part of the formative structure on which this power relation is built.\textsuperscript{445} Madam Elem Udu, in an interview, notes the ongoing dialogue between the women leadership and their male counterparts to restore indigenous sanity to the clan. According to Udu’s group, many women, especially those who go to church are becoming more disrespectful to their husbands, in addition to the indigenous leadership authorities.\textsuperscript{446} The issue does not simply lie with elderly women, but even with younger females. Cinelo Candy Uba, a young woman writes:

> Good dressing is one of the good qualities of a good mother or any responsible woman in any responsible society, but what our future mothers put on these days is beyond human comprehension. The Western ways of life seems to have thrown morality into the wild winds. This is more evident considering the type of clothing our females, particularly future mothers, put on in our community in the name of fashion.\textsuperscript{447}

Ubah blames the Western world for the ‘indecent’ dressing which in her opinion is becoming prevalent within contemporary Amasiri. It should, however, be pointed out that cultures are in constant flux and context influences behaviour in multiple ways. The complexity and ambiguities of the discussion of gender shows that there may be no short or single response to whether or not Christianity and the Ogo society empower male and females. Females play an important role within

\textsuperscript{443} Personal interview with Mrs. Dorothy Agwu on 23:06:08.
\textsuperscript{444} Personal interview with B. F. Fubara-Manuel on 22:07:08.
\textsuperscript{445} Personal interview with Chief Mercy Eze on 02:08:08.
\textsuperscript{446} Personal interview with Madam Elem Udu on 19:07:08.
Amasiri indigenous space, but such roles have often been subsumed under male-focused interpretations. Nonetheless, there is inter-dependency of the females and males, a recognition which is crucial for any meaningful understanding of the clan’s indigenous practices. Furthermore, the continuous presence of members of the PCN and the Ogo society implies some level of tension as a result of the different and competing individual and group ideologies. Such tension has continued to evolve since the establishment of Christianity in 1927.

The rites of initiation into the Ogo society bind the initiates to the family, village and clan groups. It is also a covenant of relationship with the living members, ancestors, gods and divinities of the clan. These religious and social dimensions of the initiation into the Ogo society have huge consequences for many members of the PCN who may insist on refusing to be initiated into the society. The community, according to Anthony Cohen, is ‘the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of their home. In it they learn the meaning of kinship through being able to perceive its boundaries.’

As demonstrated, the inadequacy of the identity, power, community and sense of belonging which many members of the PCN derive from the church community can explain their attempts to negotiate the varying networks. The ways in which many members of the PCN respond to or interact with the central place of the Ogo society often depends on their understanding, experience and appropriation of religious conversion and the dilemma of sacrament as tools for integration at various levels - Christianity and society.

CHAPTER FOUR
DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE: TRANSITION AND TRANSMISSION

Introduction
The dynamic nature of the transition processes from indigenous religion to Christianity or from Christianity to indigenous religion remains the most significant, but the least studied, feature of change within indigenous communities like Amasiri. The phenomenon of religious change remains complex, and the factors involved many. However, the following factors can be identified: the policies of the missionary agencies; the agents of change (interpretation of Christianity); strategies and methods; the nature of the indigenous societies; and, the varied nature in which the missionary teachings were received by indigenous communities. Erik Hallden notes that within many missionary circles conversion to Christianity among indigenous communities meant the advancement of European ‘civilisation and enlightenment’.  

The underlying assumption was that nineteenth century Britain constituted a model of Christian culture and society.

According to Brain Stanley, missionary magazines including that of the United Presbyterian Church (UPC) sometimes contained descriptions, graphically illustrated, of what early Britain was thought to have been like before the coming of Christianity – primitive, barbarous and idolatrous. It was thus believed, especially within mission circles, that it was Christianity and, above all, the national recognition of God and the Word of God in Protestant Reformation, which made Britain what it was. The Bible, it was argued, made Britain great; it was the archetype of the Christian nation, and God’s design was to create Christian nations according to the same pattern. Although such an assumption appears wilfully blind to the social evils of the first industrial nations, it formed one of the bases for nineteenth and twentieth centuries mission. In order to achieve these set objectives, many missionaries including those within the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCS), advocated that

new converts should abandon all contact with their indigenous religions and worldviews. It is therefore not surprising as earlier highlighted in Chapter Three that many Amasiri elders were hesitant to receive the missionaries when they first arrived to see the clan.

When missionaries make converts in a society different from their own, the religion they introduce is usually in competition with a well-developed and entrenched indigenous cosmology. No matter how great the benefits of such an encounter may be or how earnest or sincere the desire for change is, the indigenous cosmology can hardly just be set aside. The converts thus inevitably retain something of their indigenous perspective, combining it in various ways with the new version of the world being offered. While, on one hand, the encounter between Christianity and the indigenous people led to the denigration of some indigenous practices, on the other hand, the encounter served as a catalyst for innovation and creativity thus portraying them as versions of indigenous modernity. This chapter explores the theoretical conversion discourses and demonstrates the wider implications especially within indigenous communities like Amasiri. It suggests that a viable model of understanding conversion should take into account and appreciate the metaphors and images of the transition and transformation envisioned and techniques deployed by religious groups to accomplish their goals.

4.1 Western Mission and Discourses of Religious Change

Prior to the spread of social change that was engendered by colonialism, commerce and Christianity; many indigenous communities like the Amasiri lived in largely small-scale communities with their religious structures. It was the worldview with which people explained, predicted and controlled space-time events. It underpinned every facet of life and was particularly significant in inculcating and promoting the

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451 Wangila, *Female Circumcision: The Interplay of Religion, Culture and Gender in Kenya*. pp.120-121.


454 Gore, "Religion in Africa." p.205. Gore argues that modernity in sub-Saharan Africa can be related to the colonial annexation of the territories imposed on Africa by competing European nation states.
sense of community-living. As highlighted in the previous chapters, Amasiri indigenous religion suffuses and gives meaning to life and pervades and permeates all its aspects. Despite having this importance, indigenous religions seem to have been misunderstood and misrepresented. The misconception is evident from the many derogatory names by which it has been described.

It is, however, difficult to understand the basis on which the indigenous religions have been termed a ‘primal’ religion. Evidently, the term is often used to distinguish it from the so-called great or world religions. A primal religion is supposed to have neither founders nor a literary source. However, one cannot but wonder if it is the written source and an identifiable founder that make a religion a religion. Interestingly, Christianity developed only gradually to what it is today, and even its authoritative source of reference, the Bible, existed first as an oral source before it was transmitted to a written source in about 180 AD. Furthermore, the term ‘Christianity’ often evokes the notion of a clearly defined static religious system, existing independently of its agents in the past and present. However, as shown in Chapter Three, ‘Christianity’ rather designates a dynamic religion shaped by historical events and cultural peculiarities. The same historical context has shaped indigenous religions; the ancestors, divinities and other spiritual beings have served as architects of the indigenous Amasiri and have shaped its belief and socio-cultural systems.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith once argued that scholars interested in the study of ‘non-Christian’ religions should devote their time and energy to the study of the living world religious traditions (Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism). He argued that the study of primal religions should be shelved, as their traditions have no relevance to contemporary society. Smith’s point is often lauded on the basis that indigenous

religions have no founders, reformers, or prophets and are handed down in much the same form from one generation to another." 459 Such views appear to undermine the progressive and changing nature of indigenous religions and societies. Furthermore, Ake Hulkrantz remarks that Cantwell Smith’s view unveils the general apathy towards preliterate religion and culture. 460 Okot p’Bitek observes the disdainful attitudes of some scholars towards African indigenous religions. 461 As a result he spends considerable time debunking such ‘fundamental’ notions – which Bolaji Idowu mildly calls ‘error of terminology’ 462 as ‘tribe’ ‘primitive’, ‘fetishism’, ‘animism’, ‘savage’, ‘paganism’ and ‘ancestor worship’.

These notions were popularised by some influential Western scholars in the nineteenth century such as Edward Tylor and Herbert Spencer, among others. 463 Thus, although those notions imply the identity and representations of the ‘Other’, the point is that indigenous cultures, according to such views, have little or no meaning apart from the colonial and imperial cultures in the modern period. 464 P’Bitek considers these not simply as mere errors of terminology but suggests that they are indicative of a ‘profound condescension’ and ‘a nuisance in the proper understanding of African religions’. 465 William Gairdner observes that African indigenous religions were perceived by many Western missionaries as ‘the religious beliefs of more or less backward and degraded peoples all over the world’. 466 The essence of the claim that other cultures were under the direct control of evil spiritual

powers remained most plausible especially in Africa, where the Victorian missionaries were still engaged in first-hand encounters with people they had no hesitation in describing as ‘savages’. The impression made by the ‘darkness’ of African society could be so overwhelming that some missionaries were tempted to adopt racially prejudiced attitudes which many colonial contemporaries had espoused.\footnote{Stanley, \textit{The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries}}

In many ways colonialism and mission went hand in hand, although there were also cases of conflicting interests. However, many Western missionaries and colonial officers have been described as cultural ‘imperialists’ incapable of, or unwilling, to fairly evaluate and respect the culture of the indigenous people.\footnote{D. M’Passou, “The Continuing Tension between Christianity and Rites of Passage in Swaziland,” in \textit{Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa}, ed. J. L. Cox (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1988). pp.28-29.} It is against this backdrop that some scholars have often rejected the religious motivation and Christian ideology of some missionaries while giving more attention to the economic and political motivations. Ogbu Kalu, however, draws attention to the complicated nature of missionary motives.\footnote{Kalu, \textit{Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841-1991}. pp.53-54.} John Beattie further underscores this point thus: ‘our motives were not entirely single minded, for we were young and human. We were adventuring into an exciting foreign country, which was emerging from backwardness into the status of a modern, self governing state…’\footnote{Beattie, \textit{The River Highway: A Personal Record of the Scottish Mission in Nigeria from 1927 to 1957}. p.1.}

Hans-Werner Gensichen notes that a mission crisis often manifests itself in three areas: the foundation, the motives and aim and the nature of a mission.\footnote{D. J. Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission}, vol. 16, American Society of Missiological Series (Maryknoll; New York: Orbis Books, 1991). p.4.} However, a reflection on missionary motives and the aim, of a mission, as shown by Beattie’s comment are often complex. Johannes Verkuyl identifies the following motives including: ‘impure motives’ a) the imperialist motives (turning ‘natives into the docile subjects of colonial authorities); b) the cultural motive (mission as the transfer of the missionary’s superior culture); c) the romantic motive (the desire to go
to far-away and exotic countries); and d) the motive of ecclesiastical colonialism (the urge to export one’s own confession and church order to other territories). Verkuyl further identifies other motives which he terms ‘missionary motives: the motive of conversion; the eschatological motives; the motive of church planting; the philanthropic motives.’ However important the classification by Verkuyl is, it remains crucial to note that an inadequate foundation for mission and ambiguous missionary motives and aims are bound to lead to unsatisfactory missionary practices. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that these motives may not be mutually exclusive and thus they remain fluid.

Not only were motives an issue, the recruitment strategies of missionaries raised another dimension to the problem. The debate concerning nineteenth century missions was partly about how to balance scholarship, technical ability and spiritual commitment as competing criteria for recruitment. Kalu observes that most mission bodies did not place great emphasis on proficiency in Biblical scholarship, but rather on moralist theology and doctrine. Kalu and Beatties’ points are helpful in demonstrating the complexity of motives. However, Nwachukwuike Iwe insists:

The fact is that the Christianity that came to Africa was in general fully steeped in Western Personnel, Western culture, Western Philosophy, Western theology and Psychology and cultural values – such as monogamy, institutional celibacy, flowing garments…Western patterns of prayer and incantations, rituals and ceremonials and Western names and concepts of authority…The early planters of Christianity did not seek to enter into the thought world and pattern of the Africans, into their religious psychology; their ethos, and ethical conceptions and values…

Iwe appears to underscore the point that many nineteenth century missionaries failed to separate the Christian religion from European cultural trappings, and as such sought to impose an all-inclusive package upon the indigenous people. Hope Waddell, for instance, argued that polygamy is ‘unscriptural and pernicious’. He

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observed that it denies a woman any rights. While this point is laudable, it neglects the role of local mission agents who were often antagonistic to indigenous practices. Such holistic understanding may pave the way in demonstrating its continuities within contemporary patterns of Christian mission among the Amasiri clan.

Summarising the works of Blyden, Kingsley and Morel with regards to missionary impact on the Nigerians society, Ayandele asserts:

….Missionary activity was a disruptive force, rocking traditional society to its very foundations, denouncing ordered polygamy in favour of disordered monogamy, producing disrespectful, presumptuous and detribalised children through mission schools, destroying the high moral principles and orderliness of indigenous society through denunciation of traditional religion without adequate substitute, and transforming the mental outlook of Nigerian in a way that made them imitate European values slavishly…

Ayandele describes the encounter as ‘a disruptive force’ implying that it amounted to a collapse of the indigenous structures. Furthermore, Julius Spencer a Sierra Leonean missionary of Igbo parentage, notes, ‘The good old news is quietly turning Igboland upside down as it did the Empire of the Caesars of old.’ Although there appears to be an exaggeration of the situation by Spencer, his comment offers a helpful insight into the initial tension between Christian mission and many indigenous Igbo communities. However, as argued earlier Christianity did not supplant the indigenous worldview, but each has continued to shape and reshape each other. One crucial point which Ayandele draws attention to is the problem of denouncing indigenous practices without providing an adequate substitute. The situation has lingered and has increased identity and power issues, especially among the Amasiri. Many Christian missionaries and their local agents appear to have focused on emphasising aspects of discontinuities between Christianity and indigenous religions to such an extent that they underplayed the aspects of continuity between them.

According to Richard Gehman, reasons for such historical neglect are because ‘the goal of mission was to preach the Gospel, call people to repent, baptise


477 Cited by, Ekechi, Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914. p.162.
converts, build churches, and extend the Lordship of Christ and the uniqueness of Biblical revelations…The emphasis was more on the discontinuity than continuity.’

Jude Aguwa notes that the missionaries who came to Nigeria were burdened with inherited prejudices, which manifested in the strict intolerance they exhibited towards the indigenous cultures which according to them was inferior.

As observed, the points of continuity between Christianity and indigenous religions were underemphasised; however it is important to note that the link between the old and the new, between one form of religious system and another may not be severed. Had most missionaries taken time to view the indigenous forms of religion from a more friendly perspective, they would have discovered common ground for cooperation.

Having noted the critiques of the Christian missions, it should be pointed out that not only did some of the missionaries disagree with their colonial counterparts they also sometimes disagreed among themselves. Peter Clarke, for instance, observes that among the UFCS missionaries (1846-1890) there was no agreement on how they should carry out their missionary works. Clarke notes that while some of the newcomers advocated an aggressive onslaught on the local practices, which they considered barbarous, the older ones seem to have advocated more caution and respect towards the indigenous practices. However on the question ‘Should slave-holders be received into church fellowship?’ Waddell and his team of pioneer missionaries to Nigeria made a case to the Home Foreign Mission Committee in 1853, noting that slave-holding was a social evil which would be reformed with time. They argued that if such persons were refused admission into the church, ‘We can

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form no Christian church in Calabar.’ Hope Waddell argued that it would mean that ‘we cannot accept as Christian brethren those whom our Lord receives and saves….You treat him as a heathen after he has believed in Jesus for salvation and that for no fault of his own.’ Following this argument the Home Foreign Mission Committee (HFMC) decided that the slave-holders could be baptised if they signed a pledge declaring that since ‘there is neither bond nor free in Jesus’, they would regard their slaves as servants, not property; that they would never sell or treat them badly.

In another development some UFCS converts in Abiriba, South-eastern Nigeria went about desecrating indigenous sacred spaces and attacking secret societies. The community reacted in anger, with all the school children being led to the shrine where each of them had to throw in sacrificial eggs to pacify the gods. In this case the Colonial District officer supported the community’s actions. And so J. Hitchcock informed the Mission Council at Calabar thus: ‘A teacher and two boys at Abiriba had been sentenced to imprisonment for one year for desecrating jujus. It was admitted by them that they had removed part of the communal jujus, but when objection was taken, they had been replaced.’

This highlights some points of disagreement between the mission and colonial interests. It further accentuates Beattie’s point that the missionaries had divergent attitudinal responses to the indigenous people. Their individual personalities, background, orientation and character-types, had a huge influence on missionaries’ roles and attitudes toward the indigenous practices of their host communities. Furthermore, some of them experienced some level of respect after a while in the mission field. John Roscoe observes:

> Having spent twenty-five years as a missionary in the heart of Africa in intimate relations with the natives, I have had greater opportunities for obtaining some knowledge of their mode of life and habits of thoughts, as well as becoming


Roscoe’s assertion underpins the possible progressive attitudinal changes as a result of closer encounter with others. Therefore, the advice of Kwame Bediako becomes helpful: he suggests that the negative side of missionary history in Africa must not be exaggerated.\textsuperscript{486} This is because there have been attempts by some missionaries to come to terms with the indigenous religion and culture in which they worked. Van Rinsum observes:

I consider Western missionaries like H. A. Junod, T. Cullen Young, J. Roscoe, D. Westermann, and especially Edwin Smith to be the pioneers of a systematic, coherent development of the concept of African religion. Influenced by liberal theology, they all worked at the beginning of this century in Africa and showed a similar positive appreciation of the belief systems of the peoples among whom they lived. Their works were a turning point in the history of Western representation of African indigenous religion.\textsuperscript{487}

Although it is difficult to explain the extent and reasons for such a reported attitudinal change, the contributions of some Western missionaries to the ‘Africanisation’ of Christianity seem to be far more than is generally acknowledged.\textsuperscript{488} Stanley observes that by the 1890s almost all branches of the Christian church had developed a keen social conscience which left Christians aware of the moral evil embedded in the fabrics of national life. Some missionaries, he notes, were hesitant of reproducing in their converts cultural patterns which might inhibit their evangelistic effectiveness.\textsuperscript{489} Stanley’s view however, does not dismiss the presence of an imperialistic attitude even during the period he cited. The idea of dialogue had at a later part of the period cited by Stanley, been advanced. However, according to Magesa dialogue between Christianity and indigenous religions has

\textsuperscript{489}Stanley, \textit{The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries}
never been a real conversation at any level. Rather it has historically been a monologue. Such monologue according to Magesa has been bedevilled by prejudiced assumptions about the indigenous religions, for example, that Christianity appears to be more vocal and ideologically more aggressive. This has resulted in Christianity speaking about indigenous religions rather than indigenous religions speaking for themselves. Furthermore, it has raised crucial questions as to what it means to be converted.

4.2 Conceptualising Conversion

Since the 1950s, social scientists and scholars of religion have debated about what really happens when the phenomenon described as religious conversion occurs. Two quite different sets of issues have been involved in that debate; the first concerns the nature of religious conversion as a phenomenon, while the second sets of issues involve an argument about its causes. While, on the one hand, some sort of divine-human encounter has been deduced; on the other hand, some scholars have proposed a range of social and psychological forces at work, implying interplay of religions and identity. Conversion is therefore often mentioned as part of a larger process of religious commitment, but is treated as either ineffable or obvious. Granville Hall suggests that adolescence is the typical age for conversion. His basic definition states that conversion was a fundamental redirection of life, a process necessary to maturity and growing out of earlier stages of development. Furthermore, Darrol Bryant and Christopher Lamb have raised crucial issues regarding the term ‘conversion’. Such issues include, is conversion ‘a dramatic emotional event in a person’s life that fades as suddenly as it occurs? Or is it a gradual and growing conviction in one’s mind that life’s meaning and purpose lie in a particular direction? … Is conversion always a dramatic encounter with spiritual reality or can it be the pressure of a community to

ensure conformity with the group? Is conversion another word for changing one’s institutional religious affiliation? Is conversion a Christian phenomenon or it is also found within other religious traditions?"  

Bennetta Jules-Rosette observes that in the social aspect, conversion resembles rites of passage in which the individual is acknowledged to move from one status and social environment to another. When examined more closely, conversion appears to be an experience that is rooted in both self and society. It involves a personally acknowledged transformation of self and a socially recognised display of change. Virgil Gillespie argues that conversion can occur in different dimensions such as changing from Roman Catholicism to Buddhism; a shift in belief within a church; or it may mean the crises in which a person comes to himself. Furthermore, some people tend to follow the religious tradition into which they are born and when there is a change in religious commitment among such persons it is often a change from one Christian group to another within a large tradition.

Religious conversion is characterised by its internal and subjective as well as external nature. It may be seen in terms of a self-consciously defined principle of change as opposed to external social marker through which status is negotiated. These changes take place with respect to a perceived body of knowledge and order of reality that become available to the convert. Furthermore, Comaroff and Comaroff note that potential converts also differ widely in culture, status, gender and social identity. These scenarios further raise the need to interrogate what conversion might be to indigenous people. Comaroff and Comaroff suggest that the typical missionary perception of Christianity and indigenous religions as discrete systems of beliefs was not always shared by indigenous people. Moreover, although it can


vary, there are many perspectives present in any one conversion situation: those of the convert; the members of the new religion; and, the group from which the convert has come. Therefore, to conceive conversion primarily as a radical change in personal beliefs appears to undermine the social context in which individual religious change takes place.

It seems more satisfactory to conceptualise conversion as a social process encompassing ‘an adjustment in self-identification through at least the nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting or useful. 498 In contrast to the absolute juxtaposition of ‘believer and heathen’ so typical of some Christians, this does not preclude the possibility that several moral authorities can co-exist, each having only local or situational validity. Until recently, discussion on the spread of Christianity in West Africa has often been influenced by general theoretical debates on conversion. This may be because the twentieth century sociology of conversion was mostly concerned with changes to minority religious groups. Thus, conversion has generally been understood as an expression of individual deviance and explained with reference to the specific psychological make-up of converts. 499 However, conversion has also been interpreted as a dimension of broader social changes in Africa. In some case, as previously demonstrated, conversion from indigenous religions to Christianity was the adoption of a world religion associated with the colonial power. In the light of this William James describes conversion thus:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right, superior, and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. 500

James’s definition is helpful, but it seems to be limited in scope essentially to Christianity and wholly in psychological terms. Although the psychological approach to conversion remains important, recent studies seem to regard it as a more

sociological phenomenon. Some contemporary scholars draw attention to the interconnection between the emotional, cognitive and moral dimension of conversion. Here, conversion is understood to be a process that extends beyond the single event of a sudden or dramatic religious experience.\textsuperscript{501} In addition, contemporary experiences show how often persons freely move from one religion to another. Some individuals rediscover the tradition they left behind after they had moved out of it. The experience gained from my fieldwork also shows the possibilities of people belonging to more than one religion. Bryant and Lamb describe this as ‘the Supermarket’ or ‘pick and mix’ approach to religion.\textsuperscript{502} Okechukwu Otta, in an interview, narrates thus:

I became a Christian during my Primary School days as then it was compulsory to be a part of the church. However, after that level of education and following my subsequent interaction with the wider world I simply found that I could not cope with the church’s ways of doing things, especially its coldness and slow responses to both spiritual and physical problems, so I left. Although, I still attend church services once in a while, I must tell you the truth that I am not part of the church again.\textsuperscript{503}

Friday Obiahu also noted that ‘Christianity could not offer me the needed protection from evil forces and so I turned back to the diviners, although I still maintain my membership with the church.’\textsuperscript{504} These comments from Otta and Obiahu demonstrate some internal impulses and factors that account for a significant positive alteration in the religious beliefs and convictions of individual members of religious groups. It further underscores Raphael Njoku’s point, that the Igbo did not uncritically accept any aspect of Western influence, but rather that the indigenous religions negotiated, reinvented and sometimes resisted the new ways in a fluid context of cultural assimilation.\textsuperscript{505} It should thus be pointed out that the change from one religious community to another may not necessarily imply a change in

\textsuperscript{503} Personal interview with Okechukwu Otta on 20:07:08.
\textsuperscript{504} Personal interview with Friday Obiahu on 27:06:08
\textsuperscript{505} Njoku, "Missionary Enterprise and Socialcultural Change in Igboland, Southern Nigeria: Realities, Myths, and Continuities, 1900-1960." p.77.
fundamental convictions or root reality. Numerous continuities with indigenous religious ideas and practices can be detected within the practice of Christianity. Caroline Ifeka-Moller contrasts two approaches to the understanding of religious change in Africa. First is the ‘intellectualist’ who sees new forms of religious behaviour as the outcome of people’s attempts to make sense of changes in their situation. The other approach sees new religious forms as the outcome of social-structural changes.  

Robin Horton explores the ‘intellectualist’ approach, arguing for the need to relate the conversion phenomenon to changes in the social, economic and political environment. Since conversion generally affects social identity and ties with other people, the attitude people take towards rival sets of religious ideas is not simply the result of an evaluation of their relative values as theoretical tools for understanding the world. Membership in a religious community can create political and moral pressures that preclude a clear-headed evaluation of old and new ideas. However, beyond that, Horton’s model appears to neglect the role of religion in sustaining different communities. Furthermore, Horton does not seem to consider the relationship between religion and power, but as Burridge aptly puts it, religion is concerned with the truth about power and the rules that govern its use and control. Religious activities will often change when the assumptions about the nature of power change. This can result in an evolution of new social-cultural identities, a process whereby religious motifs generate cohesion and common ties.

Consequently, conversion may not be conceived merely as the result of the search for a more coherent explanation of a changing world. It is also related to the pursuit of material interests, the struggle for prestige and the longing for self-worth and community. Wande Abimbola, in relation to the Yoruba of Nigeria, asserts that

the issue of religious difference is not considered important when it comes to solving problems – physical, mental, spiritual and mystical.\textsuperscript{511} Severe misfortunes like sickness, death, spirit possession, witchcraft and the inability to keep a lover are significant developments that prompt religious conversion within an indigenous community like the Amasiri clan. As demonstrated earlier in Chapter One, health does not merely entail a healthy body or a healthy mind. Disease thus is not just a physical or mental malfunctioning of the body system, but it is a religious matter. Sickness therefore implies that there is an imbalance between the metaphysical and the human world as the flow of life force may have been disturbed.

To counteract health problems the services of the indigenous healers and Western medical practitioners can be sought separately or simultaneously. The indigenous healers are perceived to serve priestly roles: consulting the ancestors and discovering their prescription. Within Amasiri, indigenous healers not only serve as healers but also as consultants on family, village and clan matters. They also take an interest in ecological issues and as such are often consulted when there appears to be a delay in rainfall and also when there is a flood or draught. Cheetham and Griffiths argue that the indigenous healer is ‘very conscious of social order and group cohesion, and particularly family harmony and group dependency.’\textsuperscript{512} Such healers operate within a specific social pattern of the people and also within the context of their religious experiences. Omezue Oko Isu Abua asserts that the indigenous healers exercise greater success in the alleviation of psychological disturbances than the Western-trained psychotherapists. According to him, such healers receive their powers from the ancestors and utilise them for the purpose of healing.\textsuperscript{513} An understanding of conversion and religious change should therefore take into account the range of issues raised and the underlying politics of definitions. Drawing on this discussion, conversion therefore appears to be an ambivalent experience which is often asserted by oneself or imposed. However, such experiences have both personal


\textsuperscript{513} Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
and interpersonal implications for individuals and society. The religious encounter between the indigenous religions and Christianity highlights the importance of conversion and it lays the foundation for understanding the divergent patterns of interaction between the two religions within Amasiri.

4.3 Dynamic of Conversion to Christianity

Within indigenous Amasiri, religions conversion, like ‘religion’, appears to be a newly invented concept. People were born into a community with defined rituals obligations and rights, and it was not until the establishment of colonialism and Christianity that the question of which religion individuals belonged become an issue. Mbiti observes that African indigenous religions ‘have no missionaries to propagate them’. As they are said to be community based, ‘people simply assimilate whatever religious ideas and practices that are held or observed by their families and communities.’ Therefore, the fluid and complex nature of religious conversion, as shown in the previous section is clearly a function of the characteristic dynamic nature of religion. Wilfred Smith has challenged the familiar concept of ‘religion’, on which part some of the traditional problems of conflicting truth claims rests. He argues that the notion of religion far from being universal and self-evident, is a distinctively Western invention that has been exported to the rest of the world. Although ‘conversion’ like ‘religion’ can be seen as an invention, its discourse is of relevance as its appropriations underpin the divergent ways in which people respond to the indigenous practices, especially in the Ogo society.

With its underlying complexities, the rate of transition by many members of the indigenous religion within Amasiri to Christianity can be described as dramatic. Mbiti writes in relation to the general radical change sweeping through the African continent thus: ‘Africa is caught up in a world revolution which is so dynamic that it has almost got out of human control….’ Mbiti points out the dynamic nature of the religious ‘revolution’ across the continent of Africa does not only play out in the cities, but also across indigenous communities like Amasiri. However, as previously

established, the phenomenal religious conversion that is taking place appears to be the direct result of a complex interplay of diverse impulses, and historical circumstances including political, socio-political and psychological factors.

Osuu Amadi Obasi, in an interview, argued that the Ogo society and other indigenous practices within Amasiri will fizzle out in about three to five years time. This, he insisted, was based on the fact that many people now go to church and in his opinion fewer people are becoming interested in indigenous rituals. On the contrary, Nwadinnia Ezichi and his group of seven (Oganiru) friends insist that such a view is far from reality. They argue that, rather than die away, even the forgotten practices of the Ogo society will be revitalised. They insist that even if one thinks that some indigenous rituals are dying out, that the indigenous worldview still survives in people’s vocabularies, the calendar, feast and taboos within Amasiri. Furthermore, Sir Richard Ajali in an interview agrees with Ezichi and argues that even the forgotten masquerades are being re-enacted. He explains that in March 2008 the ruling elders of the clan requested that a particular village display the Ottaka masquerade for the first time in thirty years.

The display, according to Ajali, was requested following the understanding that the clan was experiencing a series of evil omens. It was believed that the Ottaka masquerade had the ability to dictate and ward off every presence of evil spirits in the clan. Ajali therefore insists that instead of dying away, ‘Amasiri indigenous rituals are rather negotiating effectively with modern science and technology. We cannot throw away what makes us a people, but we need to make them more attractive to the outside world.’ Ajali’s point raises crucial issues concerning masquerades and masks. As previously highlighted in Chapter Two, Amasiri has a rich tradition of masquerades which serve as plays, ceremonies, and dances. These masquerades provide entertainment, define social roles and communicate religious meaning. Ajali highlights the need to preserve the masks used in such performances as works of arts and the history and cultures of the clan. This follows on from

517 Personal interview with Osuu Amadi Oko Obasi on 21:06:08.
518 Personal interview with Nwadinnia Ezichi on 28:06:08.
519 Personal interview with Sir Hon. Richard Ajali on 01:08:08.
Andrew Walls’ advice that, ‘a past is vital for all of us – without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are…’

Irrespective of the tendency for many people to identify themselves as Christians within Amasiri, Omezue Hilary Nzagha and Joseph Akwuba observe that the transition is more complex than imagined. Nzagha for instance observes,

Although I do not go to church, I know those who are truly Christians, my experience of many who go to church from my compound seems to suggest that many only do so in order to run away from some indigenous responsibilities. If you ask me, I will tell you that many of them are far from being Christians yet.

The statement by Nzagha raises the question of authenticity and power. While Nzagha’s view might be considered personal to him, it seems to suggest that there is more to conversion than simply going to church. As shown earlier, conversion is not only a personal experience, but it also has a sociological implication as people live and work within their contexts. Magesa has identified two different forms of thought and faith expressions within Christianity in Africa; official and popular. Official Christianity, he argues, is the faith expression promulgated in the seminaries and other training centres, as well as in church sermons. The vast majority of Christians, he argues appropriate the official teachings of their churches according to their own circumstances and needs using the dominant symbol system of indigenous religions.

Aylward Shorter thus underscores this point:

At baptism, the African Christian repudiates remarkably little of his former non-Christian outlook. He may be obliged to turn his back upon certain traditional practices which, rightly or wrongly, have been condemned by the church, but he is not asked to recant a religious philosophy. Consequently, he returns to the forbidden practices on occasion with remarkable ease. Conversion to Christianity is for him sheer gain, an ‘extra’ for which he has opted. It is an ‘overlay’ on his original religious culture. Apart from the superficial condemnations, Christianity has really had little to say about African Traditional Religion in the way of serious judgement of values. Consequently, the African Christian operates with two thought-systems at once, and both of them are close to each other. Each is superficially modified by the other.

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521 Omezue Hilary Eze Nzagha on 26:06:08.
Shorter’s observation draws attention to the complex identity issues within conversion experience. It further raises issues in understanding what conversion means within indigenous contexts. The subject of power is always central, in terms of who determines the yardstick for measuring conversion and the authenticity of the experience. Osuu Eze Otuu, a member of the PCN at Amasiri, notes that he aspires to maintain his traditional hold on the Ogo society just as his father did while at the same time maintaining his membership of the church. According to him, ‘Our tradition is our tradition and we cannot run away from it no matter how much we try.’

Furthermore, Elder Chukwu Okpara also argues that conversion to Christianity does not mean throwing away everything within the indigenous religions, for him conversion entails ‘picking the good values from both Christianity and the indigenous practices, after all our fathers lived securely with the indigenous religions before the church was established.’ Interestingly, Osuu Otuu and Elder Okpara are both retired school head teachers, who began their careers with the mission schools, yet they do not seem to see any contradiction with maintaining a connection with both the church and the indigenous religions.

Osuu Otuu and Elder Okpara’s views have further implications and continue to question the concept of conversion. Vincent Mula go observes that those who have insider knowledge both of the essence of Christianity and of African religious values do not see two realities opposed to one another. According to him, ‘God, who is the source of everything positive in our cultural patrimony is at the same time author of the Christian revelation…’ However, this further raises the problem of defining what conversion is in relation to an indigenous context like the Amasiri. Omezue Akwuba in an interview further accentuates this point and argues for the sameness of both the Christian and indigenous God:

> When we wake up in the morning or before we go to bed, we call on Ohasi bu ne’elu (God who lives in heaven). Before we travel, farm, plant or harvest our crops we call on him. All through life; during the initiation ceremonies and other life ceremonies we call on him. We worship the same God that Christians claim they worship, there is actually no difference.”

524 Personal interview with Osuu Eze Otuu on 17:07:08.
525 Personal interview with Elder Chukwu Okpara on 16:06:08.
526 Mulago, ”Traditional African Religion and Christianity.” pp.128-129.
527 Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akuba on 17:07:08.
Yet, Darrol Bryant draws attention to other sides of the discourse on conversion observing that it ‘meant in some contexts, a spiritual process of turning one’s life to God in Jesus Christ and in others, a formal confession of the Christian faith and participation in the sacramental life of the Christian church. At the time of The Reformation, the rhetoric of conversion loomed again as Western Christianity splintered and the new Protestant churches sought converts from Catholicism’.\(^{528}\) Bryant’s point helps to further demonstrate the diverse nature, development and appropriation of the term conversion.

Cornelius Ukochukwu, an indigenous minister of the PCN, sees conversion as ‘simply turning from an inward person to God. It means to withdraw from fetish and idolatrous worship to the worship of God’. According to Ukochukwu, the indigenous gods are not true ones, and people should turn away from them to the Christian God.\(^{529}\) Similarly, Silas Okpara sees conversion as ‘turning and backing the world in order to face the true God and heaven’.\(^{530}\) Furthermore, Grace Okpani observes that to be converted means ‘to say no to the world and yes to Jesus, in words and actions, as well as giving up pleasures for the sake of heaven’.\(^{531}\) Another interviewee, Ikechukwu Eze sees conversion to mean, ‘abandoning the fetish ways of life and holding to Jesus every day.’\(^{532}\) Yet, Anthonia Chukwu argues that ‘conversion means turning to God, seeking to follow him and being among those who would enrich one’s faith. If necessary leaving one’s former church to another where the person’s faith will be nourished, after all there is no church in heaven.’\(^{533}\)

These interviewees lay claim to the difference between the indigenous gods and the Christian God. As shown, their understanding of conversion seems to imply a break from the ‘false’ gods and turning to the ‘true’ God, thus demonstrating an appeal to authenticity and the resultant increase in one’s commitment following

\(^{529}\) Personal interview with Rev. Cornelius Ukochukwu on 17:06:08.  
\(^{530}\) Personal interview with Silas Okpara on 13:07:08  
\(^{531}\) Personal interview with Grace Okpani on 13:07:08.  
\(^{532}\) Personal interview with Ikechukwu Eze on 15:07:08.  
\(^{533}\) Personal interview with Anthonia Chukwu on 20:07:08
conversion. Conversion, according to these interviewees, therefore entails a dramatic turnabout and accepting a belief system and behaviour strongly at odds with one’s previous cognitive structure and actions. How these assumptions play out in real life provides space in which power and identity are contested and negotiated. However, Mbiti insists that the acceptance of Christianity or Islam in Africa means that Africans ‘come out of African religion but they don’t take off their indigenous religiosity. They come as they are. They come as people whose worldview is shaped according to African Religion.’ Although Mbiti admits that there could be changes in the process of conversion, these changes, according to him, ‘are generally on the surface, affecting the material side of life, and only beginning to reach the deeper level of thinking pattern, language content, mental images, emotions, beliefs and response in situations of need. Traditional concepts still form the essential background of many African people….’

Many people within indigenous communities like Amasiri are able to engage the two religions in dialogue, because according to Blakey, Wea and Thomson ‘Africans are translators, who by transculturating the incoming religious expressions, refit them for their own experiences and in so doing transform both expressions and experiences.’ This comment, like that of Mbiti, draws attention, especially in relation to the earlier comments by some of the interviewees. They show that converts to Christianity often take with them their worldview and indigenous cultures. However, this assertion may not in any way underplay the religious experiences of Christians within indigenous contexts like Amasiri, but rather shows the complex nature of conversion and also underlies the point that it is a process. According to Rolf Homann, ‘theories of recognition or understanding plainly show that our mind always leans first towards recognising what we already know.


Transferring this to cultures, it can be said that we recognise in another culture whatever is a component of our own culture.\textsuperscript{536}

Conversion discourse within indigenous communities like the Amasiri should therefore take into account context and underlying worldviews. Christianity thus can only be better established should it engage in dialogue with the ritual and religious experiences of the local people. Rebecca Norris questions the possibility of converting to a religion that is based on another culture. Norris contends that a convert does not merely take a new set of beliefs, but rather a new set of beliefs as understood through the old. That is from within a pre-existing worldview and identity, thus most converts choose their adopted religion because it corresponds with the ideas that have arisen within an existing context.\textsuperscript{537} While Norris’ point is helpful, it suffices to argue too that for some members of the PCN, the understanding that Christianity offers a radically different worldview seems to serve as their point of attraction. However, in real life experience, indigenous religions continue to influence the clan’s ritual, farming and social processes. Therefore, conversion from one set of religious beliefs to another must have profound cultural implications, both for individuals and for a group. Life changes people slowly at times, but still the intensity of change seems deep, the commitment to ideology equally intense, yet because of its nature, often little is said as to the dynamics that are playing out in such situations.

4.4 Religious Conversion and Relationship

Conversion experience, as explained previously has concrete implications for the day-to-day living of individuals and groups. The extent to which religious conversion causes changes in someone’s personality and relationship remains complex, but can be shaped by social context. Religious change, as previously highlighted in this chapter is often intended to be foundational and holistic. People have a need for meaning, belonging, identity and definition and commitment to religion forms one


crucial way to meet these criteria. Therefore, because of the sweeping nature of religious claims on a person’s life, there may be no doubt that membership of a religious group would impact on one’s intra-personal and inter-personal relationships. In order to further explore the extent of the changes, the following discussion centres on the intra-personal and inter-personal dimensions of the relationship and how the understanding of conversion shapes people.

4.4.1 Intra-personal Relationship

Intra-personal relationship implies that although an individual has inherited much from the indigenous religions, by belonging to another religion he/she would seek to integrate the values of the two religions. This could be called the interrelationship of worldviews within an individual. Bolaji Idowu asserts:

It is now becoming clear to the most optimistic of Christian Evangelists that the main problem of the church in Africa today is the divided loyalties of (some) of her members between Christianity with its Western categories and practices on the one hand, and the traditional religion on the other. It is well known that in strictly personal matters relating to the passages of life and the crises of life, African Traditional Religion is regarded as the final succour by (some) Africans.

As shown earlier, many converts to the PCN have a strong background in the indigenous religions especially the Ogo society. Thus, upon conversion, many of them incorporate some of its values into Christianity. In the course of their lives as Christians if they run into trouble (often interpreted as attack from witches or an evil spirit) as Christians, such persons often turn first to their pastors or prayer warriors or groups for a solution. However, if those consultations do not yield the required result, such persons often have no choice other than to return to their indigenous healers for a solution. They could directly or indirectly consult diviners and follow their advice to perform some rituals at their village or family houses or in a sacred space. When the problem is over, some of them return to Christianity and pick up where they left off. This process enables individuals to participate in Christian and indigenous traditions at the same time.

This shuttling between Christianity and indigenous religions can be a form of internal religious tension. This is often non-verbal and its primary purpose according to Maura Browne is to integrate the two worldviews so as to give the Christian an integrated religious personality.\textsuperscript{540} Conversion thus may not be absolute, as indigenous cultures are not always entirely discarded for Christianity. Many basic underlying beliefs of indigenous traditions are often retained in the adoption of the new religion.\textsuperscript{541} Cyril Okorocha notes that on becoming Christians many of the Igbo engage the new religion in dialogue, often seeking for a reinterpretation and an integration of the new and the old in an attempt to marry the two together meaningfully. He further argues that such a synthesis has not always been successful, as the two faiths seem to hang rather precariously in the convert’s single mind.\textsuperscript{542} Okorocha’s point appears to be an official representation as an interviewee argues that the two faiths can be well practiced all together. Obinta Ogbonnia insists that Christianity and the Ogo society teach one and the same principles; as such he argues that his firm belief in the Ogo society does not affect his Christian faith. Thus:

Initiation into the Ogo society is our traditional way of training young people for manhood which is needed in every society. The masquerades and masks are a means of entertainment; a way of making our people happy, thereby relieving them of some personal and communal tensions. I do not see such practices as being against my Christian faith. After all in the church, the leaders do their best to keep their members happy as well.\textsuperscript{543}

Ogbonnia, however, notes that his church leaders have often misunderstood his position and have on many occasions attempted to suspend him. Nonetheless, he insists that such attempts would not deter him from his belief in the efficacy of the Ogo society, as he was yet to find any Biblical grounds on which to change his position. Ogbu Kalu notes that festivals, music and dance have often been perceived within Igbo communities as forces which bind society, as modes of relaxation, entertainment, laughter, solidarity and the affirmation of roots with ancestors.


\textsuperscript{542} Okorocha, \textit{The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria}. p.262.

\textsuperscript{543} Personal interview with Obinta Ogbonnia on 28:06:08.
However, he argues that beyond these perceptions, masquerades are hardly aesthetic and dramatic parades, rather many dance steps and types of music were revealed and sounded the praises of the spiritual powers who controlled the particular festivals, thus serving as periods for ‘covenanitng’. Nonetheless, despite Kalu’s view, there is always a degree of indigenous belief which enables many indigenous Amasiri not to conform to the outward pressures. In Mbiti’s opinion, the reason for such behaviour is that many Africans tend to ‘…experience modern changes as a religious phenomenon, and respond to it in search of stability which is fundamentally coloured by a religious yearning or outlook.’

Conversely, Keshari Shay observes that the religious experiences among many Igbo Christians can be explained in terms of five interrelated processes involved in religious change. The first is the period of ‘Oscillation’, when the convert begins to have serious doubts about the old religion as well as weigh it up against the new religion. The second phase is ‘Scrutinisation’, during which the convert evaluates its religious quality in line with inherent definitions and value judgements regarding religion. The third phase features an attempt for the ‘combination’ of the old and new which is quickly followed by the fourth phase, characterised by an attempt to ‘indigenise’. The fifth phase is ‘retroversion’ when the convert attempts to further scrutinise the new religion which may occasionally tend to appear as a reversion to the old. While Mbiti and Sahay’s points are helpful, they raise further questions on how such complex experiences are represented within indigenous communities like Amasiri. To resolve the conflicts between members of the Ogo society and PCN, the intra-personal experiences cannot be underestimated. Overlooking them may have negative consequences for any peaceful negotiation. Furthermore, such personal conflicts impact not only on individuals, but also on the wider society.

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4.4.2 Inter-personal Relationship

This model represents the everyday interrelationships that exist between members of the PCN and the Ogo society. According to Hall, ‘identity stitches…the subject into the structure. It stabilises both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable.’\(^547\) Such relationships have been variously defined as ‘the interaction of mutual presence …speaking and listening….witnessing the commitments, the values, the rituals of others.’\(^548\) As previously described in Chapter One, Amasiri is organised in families, compounds, villages and clan. Within each of these structures, Christians live side by side with members of the Ogo society. This pattern of living is crucially important in the entire narrative of conversion. Although an individual may become a Christian, the person still lives within his or her traditional compound and at the same time may seek to maintain family networks.

Mrs. Dorothy Agwu expresses concern about the extent to which some women in the Women’s Guild Fellowship within the PCN appear to pay more allegiance to other indigenous women’s associations in their villages. Mrs. Agwu observes thus:

> This development is affecting our cooperation and commitment to the church. Some of these women often complain about being over-tasked when they are asked to make contributions towards some church projects. This is simply because although they are members of the church they also at the same time maintain membership with other welfare groups. I do not blame them, because increasingly they seem to derive more support from those groups than from the church.\(^549\)

Another interviewee, Mrs. Nkechinyere Oko notes that she took a break from attending the PCN after she felt neglected by its members during the period she was sick. She further observed, ‘worst still, even my immediate peers and family members could not come to my aid as they had given up on me joining the church’.\(^550\) Nkechinyere, on joining the church, separated herself from her family, her age grade and village meetings in the hope of paying undivided attention to

\(^{549}\) Personal interview with Mrs. Dorothy Agwu on 23:06:08.
\(^{550}\) Personal interview with Mrs Nkchinyere Oko on 15:07:08.
Christianity. However, as shown, she was left unattended to by the church and also the other communal networks that she had already withdrawn her membership from. In situations such as that of Mrs. Oko, some family members with whom church members live in the same compound may come to their rescue. Some of these relatives may be on hand to help, although as shown in the case of Mrs. Oko some relatives may occasionally abandon their kin too.

Furthermore, this pattern of living, as highlighted in Chapter One, means that members of the compounds are closely observed by each other, thus putting some degree of pressure on individuals. This situation is further popularised in an adage ‘Nchie gba gba no-wa nohele’ meaning that even if a person denies his family at some point the person would definitely return to his/her roots. This in essence implies that even if when converting to Christianity, an individual decides to stay away from his or her relatives or even travel away from home, a time must come when such a person, (such as in the case of Mrs. Oko) would want some family or village support. However, at such a moment, many members of the indigenous community may refuse to offer support by saying ‘Ibiasiagi’ meaning ‘we said it’. This situation therefore raises the need for a convert to maintain good relationships within the church and social community. However, there remains the question as to the extent that members of the PCN can go to maintain such relationships without breaking some of their church laws. How can they negotiate such relationships and multiple demands?

The varied understanding of ‘religion’ and religious conversion appears to be affecting some areas of the indigenous life including the Ogo society. This is partly because some Christian missionaries and some government administrations have attacked or discouraged the practices. Yet initiation into the Ogo society remains a part of the indigenous cycle of individual life with some modifications, as highlighted earlier in Chapter Two. Nna Okpara Otu Ocha asserts thus:

Some Christians often rejoice and celebrate the changes within the contemporary practices of the Ogo society. Some of them mistakenly attribute the changes to themselves and their prayers. That sounds ridiculous, each time we hear of such, because that is far from the truth. They ignorantly say so because some of them think we are not wise, but they fail to understand that we are consciously responding to changes in our society. Some of us have travelled and are even educated such that

551 Personal interview with Francis Eze on 18:07:08.
As previously highlighted, the clan’s indigenous religions and rituals rely on oral traditions, thus giving it much flexibility to adapt to changing social circumstances. As shown, people learn different things and live out their different cultures according to the interactions they experience within specific communities. The orientation thus, to land, nature and indigenous values forms the context out of which interpersonal relationships occur. Not all scholars agree on the extent of modernity’s influence on indigenous religions. Concerning the Middle East, for example, Robert Lee states that in discussing traditional values and modernity, the concept of ‘authenticity’ should be duly considered too. Lee notes that the fundamental idea of authenticity is to value the ‘self’, that is to say, ‘to be who you are without desiring to be someone else.’

Nna Ocha’s comment raises the desire by both indigenous elders and ritual officiants to maintain traditions as opposed to embracing an identity superimposed by Christianity. Participation remains central and forms the basis for community and interdependence of one’s interaction with other people and the cosmos. It is against this backdrop that the Ogo society continues to play a central role within the Amasiri, serving as an entry point into the wider social networks, which as shown is often cherished. The introduction of Christianity in Amasiri has not curtailed nor hindered innovations within the indigenous religions. Rather there is an active interest to revive indigenous ceremonies that had either been rarely performed or abandoned. Thus, instead of fading away, many structures of the indigenous Amasiri such as myths, symbols, and institutions continue to survive in the face of modernity.

Robert Horton takes a slightly different approach when defining modernity by challenging the notion that there is a fundamental difference between modernity and indigenous beliefs. Horton argues that there is a basic continuity of structure and intentions between indigenous religions and modern scientific thoughts. He observes that ‘traditionalists’ have demonstrated their own cognitive efficiency through the creation of adaptive mechanisms and institutions. This, according to Horton, is done

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552 Personal interview with Nna Okpara Otu Ocha on 29:06:08.
because the adapted mechanisms and institutions serve communal needs and functions.\textsuperscript{554} Thus the flexibility, awareness, co-existence and adaptability of alternatives are part of the indigenous religions’ response to modernity. Horton asserts that this change can take numerous forms, depending upon what is needed. According to him, a simple taboo, for example, may represent a mechanism of adaptive innovation. In other words, it may just be a way of preserving an unknown until a culture’s traditions can readjust to a new development.\textsuperscript{555} As shown earlier in Chapter Three and this chapter, these processes of change and innovation become evident in the pattern of selection (pick and mix), transition and transformation that occur when members of the indigenous religions convert to Christianity.

\textsuperscript{554} Horton, \textit{Patterns of Thoughts in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science}. p.316.

\textsuperscript{555} Olupona, "Introduction." p.3.
CHAPTER FIVE

NEGOTIATING CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Introduction

The ideas of culture and identity are important as they are not simply abstract philosophical constructions. Ross Abbinnett argues that the ‘self’ who participates in everyday social interaction can do so only through its recognition of certain cultural norms, values and ideas.\(^{556}\) This self is not permanently embroiled in questions of authenticity: rather it emerges through conflicts and negotiations which define the realm of human cultures. Douglas Kellner argues that, ‘far from identity disappearing in contemporary society, it is rather reconstructed and redefined.’\(^{557}\) Identities are thus constructed from within: as such there is the need to understand them as produced within specific historical and institutional contexts. It should be further understood that the constitution of identity is an act of power - inclusion and exclusion.

Immanuel Kant in his answer to the question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’ argues that once human beings have reached the point at which they are able to exercise their sovereign reason, they are under an obligation to question the traditional forms of religious and political authority which have held power over them.\(^{558}\) While such a development as pointed out by Kant is important, what often appear to be more visible are the patterns of negotiating the different cultures and identities to which individuals have been exposed. In everyday speech, according to Raymond Williams, culture is normally taken to refer to artistic and intellectual activities. However, he observes that this kind of definition is:

\[\ldots\text{ Now much more broadly defined, to include not only the traditional arts and forms of intellectual production but also all the signifying practices -- from language through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising -- which now constitute this complex and necessarily extended field.}\]^{559}\]


Williams points out that some other sociologists and social anthropologists use a much broader definition of culture including the whole ‘social order’ or way of life of a society. This kind of definition is reflected in Tylor’s work where he argues that, ‘culture or civilisation, taken in its wider ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.’\footnote{560} Thus for some scholars culture is far more than arts, music and literature, though these are important parts of the culture of a society.\footnote{561}

Therefore the term ‘culture’ is a contested concept; it embraces a range of topics, processes, differences and even paradoxes.\footnote{562} The concept, according to Chris Jenks is ‘at least complex and at most so divergent in its various applications as to defy the possibility, or indeed the necessity, of any singular designation.’\footnote{563} However, ‘culture’ as a concept is real in its significance both in everyday language and in its increasingly broad usage within the discourses of society and academia and has implications for both the individual and society. Every aspect of human life is influenced by culture since people often consciously or unconsciously refer to their society or social group for guidance about how to think or behave. According to Bill Sugrue and Calvin Taylor, culture ‘is located in society as a unique mediating apparatus between the individuals on the one hand, and the system of structural interrelationships (made up of social institutions like marriage and family) on the other hand’.\footnote{564} Culture, thus articulates the tension between two antithetical concepts of identity: ‘it tells us to think of ourselves as being who we are because of what we have in common with all the other members of our society or community, but it also says we develop a distinctive particular identity by virtue of our efforts to know and fashion ourselves as individuals’.\footnote{565}

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Although as already shown in Chapters Two and Four, Amasiri appears to be bound together by ties of kinship and ritual continues to serve as a uniting or dividing factor. Ritual, as previously explained also forms the basis for constructing and negotiating, identity, power and gender. Thus when reflecting on trends in religious research, one therefore looks for changes in how religion is practiced in the context of a complex set of historical and religious circumstances. It is also important to examine how such changes shed light on the dynamic of cultural identity and the power relations between institutions and social actors. Change of religious identity has primarily been characterised in the traditional conversion language as a radical reorganisation of identity, meaning and life or as an abandonment of one religious identity for a new and different one.\textsuperscript{566} However, an analysis of the interaction between the Ogo society and Christianity highlights a complex and subtle process of identity and cultural negotiation. Foremost, perhaps, is the importance of popular understandings and appropriations of official religious teachings and practices, for religious, social and cultural reasons. Related to this is the extent to which the PCN has always sought to adapt to local contexts and popular practices, even when attempting to eliminate them. Another theme is the link between religion and various types of identities, and how these interact with and confront the antinomies of modernity.

Identity is what individuals use to interact with and relate to others. However, it is the internal perception of self that one is constantly comparing to others in the social environment. In order to socialise ritual performances are constructed which enables individuals to negotiate social situations. Self-perception focuses on how individuals identify themselves. This identification is a product of the individual’s interaction with the world around them. This act of self-perception also provides the individual with a dynamic system which in turn gives meaning to the terms by which their concept of self is defined. Perception by others deals with the view that has been imposed upon an individual by others. As a conception of self, both individual

and other identities include the physical, emotional, social and psychological attributes of an individual.

People are the same in that they share a certain level of commonality – as humans and as women, men, etc. However there are also aspects of identity that highlight the ways in which an individual is unique and thus different from others. People’s lives are often influenced by the values and norms of their surrounding societies and social relationships, but they respond to life’s problems and circumstances differently from anyone else. This capacity is a reflection of someone’s identity which allows them to experience life in a way that is distinct from another person. In order to demonstrate these complex patterns of negotiation this chapter maps out four different phases of interaction between the Ogo society and the PCN. The period extends from the beginning of the mission in 1927 to the contemporary times (2008) when independent Charismatic and Pentecostal churches are challenging the missionary monopoly on Christianity. It should be noted that culture and identity are central to the understanding of human thoughts, feeling, and actions, as well as crucial when accounting for interrelationships between individual and larger socio-cultural institutions.

5.1 First Phase (1927-1944)

The earliest converts to the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCS) mission were Elders Stephen Enyim Oko, Jack Isu Obia, Samuel Mbe Chukwu among others. As previously mentioned, the Amasiri clan had well-established religious structures including the Ogo society before its encounter with the Christian mission. However, as Agha notes, conflict occurs when, ‘the old and the new meet because each will claim superiority over the other.’\textsuperscript{567} The old in this sense appears to have been institutionalised, such that the encounter between indigenous Amasiri and the UFCS missionaries was perceived as being synonymous with setting the clan ablaze. Chinua Achebe describes the scenario in his novel and asserts that it appeared to

\textsuperscript{567} Agha, \textit{Christianity and Culture: A Case Study of Unwara}. p.29.
many people as if their beloved society ‘had been cursed to fall apart’. Felix Ekechi further underscores this point thus:

One of the consequences of Christian conversion was the split in the unity of the society. Not only was there now a division in the religious persuasion, but conversions fostered sociological splintering of social units, thereby accentuating forces of social and political conflicts. As the church adherents identified with the values of their mentors (Europeans), they began inexorably to turn their backs to omenala (customary practices).

The situation as shown by Achebe and Ekechi’s comments was characterised by such acts considered by many members of the Ogo society as ‘abnormal’. The missionaries and their mission teachers discouraged the practices of the Ogo society, but it seemed difficult to stop them. The converts were taught, in strong terms, to totally reject the Ogo society which was considered to be a part of the old order and as being capable of dooming their future. This resilience of the indigenous worldview can be explained by following the thoughts of Yusufu Turaki who argues that the Africans received the Christian message while standing on the platform of their indigenous religious and cultural heritage. However, the effect of the strictness of some missionaries, and mission teachers regarding what they perceived to be the teachings of the ‘Scripture’ rather produced a set of converts that became more European than Christian. Many of them lived a life which merely mimicked the missionaries which was presented as the standard pattern of living. Unlike some other indigenous communities where separate villages were formed for the new converts and the missionaries, converts within Amasiri, as previously shown in Chapter Four continued to live within their compounds and villages.

The converts were taught to reject the jurisdiction of the indigenous leaders. They refused to participate in the communal cleaning up exercises on Sundays. Many of them objected to libations and participation in some annual ceremonies in

\[570\] Personal interview with HRH Ezeogo Ugwu Itiri on 03:08:08.
reverence to the ancestors.\textsuperscript{572} The division centred on what Parrinder terms, ‘the two vital questions of ancestral authority and the liberty of the Christian.’\textsuperscript{573} However, the Government of the then Eastern Central State of Nigeria prescribed a Labour Order to deal with the conflicts. This was the government’s response to the conflict which arose as a result of the converts’ refusal to work on Sundays. Section 19 of the Order states as follows:

\begin{quote}
It shall be lawful for any native authority or such other authority as may be prescribed to require the inhabitants of any town or village subject to its jurisdiction to provide labour for any of the following purposes: the construction and maintenance of buildings used for communal purposes, including markets, but excluding juju houses and places of worship; sanitary measures; the construction and maintenance of local roads and paths; the construction and maintenance of town and village fences; the construction and maintenance of communal wells; other communal services of a similar kind in the direct interests of the inhabitants of the town or villages…\textsuperscript{574}
\end{quote}

The government intervention at the time was helpful, but did not resolve the conflicts. The Order could not spell out whose duty or right it was to determine what was ‘in the interests of the inhabitants of the town or villages’. The Order thus had divergent interpretations and appropriation. Furthermore, it was difficult for the convert to litigate against their kinsmen as there was the possibility of ostracising such a person.

Nonetheless, at baptism, the converts were given ‘Biblical’ and English names which was to demonstrate their total transformation and separation from the ‘old’. Many of them were strict with their devotion to sacraments and the singing of hymns. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (\textit{Oriri nso} – holy meal) were viewed with great seriousness. Attendance at Catechism and preparatory classes was considered very important for participation in the Lord’s Supper. In her studies of the Borneo Villagers, Elizabeth Koepping underscores a similar incidence in which the missionaries insisted that those identifying themselves as followers of Christ must accept the new Christ-only way as is defined by the church.

\textsuperscript{572} Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
converts took the risk of being excluded from the Eucharist. However, given that the Lord’s Supper appeared to serve as an alternative to the ritual meals, the risk of exclusion would be meaningful.

Many of the converts were the first set of pupils at the mission school and they had to trek long distances to attend the catechism classes as there was no resident minister at Amasiri. The converts viewed the Communion elements with awe, as they believed that they embodied the full power of God. Some of the converts refrained from the Lord’s Supper, believing that they would die if they took the communion ‘unworthily’. The missionaries and mission teachers taught the converts to stand motionless when they sang hymns and during prayers. It was a grievous offence for pupils and church members to dance, listen or observe indigenous religious performances, like masquerades and indigenous musical concerts. Drums were strictly prohibited from being used in the church as they were perceived as instruments of the devil. Offending pupils according to Elder Chukwu Okpara were recklessly punished. Furthermore, deviations from such rules were considered to be disrespectful to God and attracted some punishment.

However, on the questions of polygyny, and initiation into the Ogo society, the converts were in a great dilemma. Many of them had two or three wives which served as a point of worry to the missionaries. The requirement of monogamy by the UFSC missionaries appears to have been a major obstacle (especially among the older men already married to many wives) to conversion within Amasiri. Dorcas Oko observes that polygyny means the deliberate act of taking additional wives with or without the consent of one’s first wife. Furthermore, this could arise in the case of divorce where the first wife had given birth to a son or sons; in which case the woman is said to be welcome at her former husband’s house (Ulo ee gere onu). When divorced the man may remarry, but at a later date, especially when the woman’s sons have grown up they may choose to bring their mother back, thereby

576 Personal interview with HRH Ezeogo Ugwu Itiri on 03:08:08.
577 Personal interview with Elder Chukwu Okpara on 16:06:08.
578 Personal interview with Mrs. Dorcas Oko on 19:07:08.
causing the man to have two or more wives at a time. Polygyny allows the man to marry additional wives, especially if the first wife has no children or only daughters. It is hoped that such a marriage would remedy the concern of childlessness and anxieties of infertility. Polygyny was believed to make for larger and stronger families since the children had many siblings (Nwadi). Heads of large families earn great respect in the eyes of other people.\textsuperscript{579} Children were a form of security for their parents in old age, and were expected to continue their family tree by having children too. Furthermore, the social status of a man appears to be determined by the number of wives he is able to take care of.

As highlighted in Chapters One and Two, Amasiri has visible gender roles, which at first glance may be considered to be male domination. Contrary to Levison and Simpson’s view, the intention of polygyny may not be to devalue women: ‘She is either regarded as part of a man’s property, an extra pair of hands in the house or the land – or she is reduced to the role of child-bearer, mistress or plaything. Such a relationship in which the partner dominates and uses the other is surely inferior to our modern view of marriage.’\textsuperscript{580} Although Levison and Simpson uses polygamy instead of polygyny, the point remains that polygyny took care of Amasiri women’s interests and yearning for a home and children of their own. George Basden notes that polygyny, ‘is supported nearly as much by the women as by the men; it is by no means a one-sided affair with the advantage on the side of the men-folk as is sometimes implied.’\textsuperscript{581}

A husband within Amasiri is expected to provide his wives with clothing and help her by sharing the cost of taking indigenous titles, performing age grade ceremonies, offering sacrifices and supporting her should she be involved in a dispute with persons outside the family. Women are not supposed to be overworked. Among Amasiri, families, villages and the clan abhors the ill-treatment of one’s wife by a fellow wife (Nyedi) in a family. Even the sexual lives of spouses were also of interest to the community. The husband must give his wives equal sexual access and

\textsuperscript{579} Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
not distinguish between them as to their personal qualities. Sexual misbehaviour attracted punishment from the earth goddess (Ali), ancestors (Ndi ichie) and the entire community, especially the women-folk.\textsuperscript{582} Maltreatment of one’s wife or wives by the husband or in-laws attracts the attention of the women’s group both at the parttrilineal and village levels and the consequences of such can be difficult.\textsuperscript{583} Ayandele further asserts that polygyny provided a husband for all women, but since the missionary era several women now go without husbands and this has increased sexual immorality.\textsuperscript{584}

Although there are elements of exaggeration, and there are no statistical records to back Ayandele’s claim, his comment gives an insight into the importance of polygyny to an indigenous community like Amasiri. It further draws attention to the role of the community in determining and safeguarding ethics and morality. Sexual misbehaviour, according to Omezue Oko Isu Abua, has never been a regular issue among Amasiri and whenever it occurred, it was viewed as a defilement of the land (Ome-ali).\textsuperscript{585} However, polygyny was seen as being incompatible with the teachings of the Gospel and it was thought to debase Christianity which was considered superior to the indigenous practices.\textsuperscript{586} Thus, it comes as no surprise that the majority of converts were females. Since 1927 when the mission was established, women have always out-numbered men by more than three to one. The question remains what attracted women to Christianity. This aspect of the socio-religious life of the clan, as already highlighted, constituted and still constitutes one area of conflict between Christianity and members of the indigenous religion.

Ayandele does not see any scriptural, rational or hypothetical basis upon which the missionary attitude towards polygyny could be justified.\textsuperscript{587} While polygyny remains acceptable by members of the Ogo society, the missionaries and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[583] Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 17:07:08.
\item[585] Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
\end{footnotes}
mission teachers taught that everyone who was married to more than one wife should divorce the additional wives to avoid living in sin. Such an instruction did not take into account the social-economic implications of displacing families.\textsuperscript{588} The perception thus of polygyny as an obstacle to the spread of Christianity led to numerous conflicts and the breakdown of existing social frame-works. Whereas the missionaries rejected polygynists, they accepted their wives for baptism.\textsuperscript{589} Interestingly, within contemporary PCN at Amasiri, a polygynist cannot be ordained as a ruling elder nor share in the Lord’s Supper, but his wives have no such ritual restrictions. This scenario presents a situation where rituals are offered to individuals as a reward for obedience or denied as a punishment for not abiding to the set rules of the PCN. Such a situation raises several irreconcilable problems for individuals and groups.

Moreover, each individual, as previously highlighted in Chapter One, is linked through membership by birth with the matrilineal (\textit{Ikwunne}) and partrilineal (\textit{Umudi}) groupings. Marriages provide the potentiality of ties between a person and his or her spouse’s matrilineal and partrilineal families. Polygyny also provides the opportunity for possible relationships between a person and the matrilineal groupings of his or her half-siblings (\textit{Nwadi}). The marriage of many wives and the ability to have many children seems to serve as an assurance for a befitting funeral, with fewer burdens on each child. As noted in Chapter One, a funeral is an important rite of passage for easy transition of the dead and within Amasiri can be financially taxing. Polygyny remained a sign of wealth, prestige and social status. It was highly valued by many traditional Amasiri, since it promised numerous progeny. Sons were expected to help with cultivation and in pre-colonial times to act as warriors. A daughter contributed to a man’s wealth through bride-wealth, while elaborate feasting with guests brought prestige. Women were required for agricultural work, and the preparation of meals.\textsuperscript{590}

\textsuperscript{588} Personal interview with Omzue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
\textsuperscript{590} Personal interview with Omzue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
Marriage rites feature the payment of *Ugwo Isi* (dowry) which is often distributed to the village and clan elders; signifying that the bride belongs not only to her parents but also to the clan.\(^{591}\) Furthermore, *Ugwo Ozi* (bride-wealth) is also paid to the bride’s family as a token and is accompanied by some gift items for the parents and relatives for the training they provided to their daughter. Moreover, the family of the bridegroom comes with drinks including palm wine and other types of alcohol, fish and other items.\(^{592}\) Interestingly, many members of the PCN are happy to undergo the indigenous marriage rites, but some would object to serving people alcohol, as doing so is perceived to be ungodly. Such resistance has often ended in conflicts.\(^{593}\) Contemporary marriages, as introduced by the PCN and most other churches involve, increased spending by the would-be couples. This is because the ‘church wedding’ ceremonies involve the duplication of expenses, which can plunge some couples into debt. However, two forms of marriage offer platforms for couples within Amasiri to negotiate and legitimise their identities with the church and indigenous community.

Amasiri women were perceived by many European missionaries and colonial administrators to play a subordinate role in most aspects of public life. They were, for example, expected to behave as juniors towards men all their lives, to respect their fathers and spouses, and to obey their orders without questions. *Omeali* (adultery) by women was disapproved of much more than adultery committed by males. The results of this ethnographic enquiry show that there were shared responsibilities and respect among men and women within Amasiri. On another level, in the pre-colonial period of Amasiri, the relationship between the spouses was mainly conceived of as a perpetual affinity between families and lineages. A family, for example in exchange for goodwill received from another family or kinsmen could give their daughter in marriage as a sign of gratitude.\(^{594}\) Whereas, marriage is conceived of as a social rather than private affair, uniting families as well as individuals, some early colonialists and missionaries interpreted marriage primarily

\(^{592}\) Personal interview with Mr. Egwu Nwosi on 26:06:08.
\(^{593}\) Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
\(^{594}\) Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
as an agreement between two individuals.\textsuperscript{595} This teaching appears to be one of the factors that have continued to weaken the lineages that are already under pressure from the new economic conditions.

Furthermore, initiation into the Ogo society remained a basis for marriage. It was thought that until a male experiences the ordeal and test of courage through the initiation into the Ogo society, such a male remained unfit to be a husband. However, as shown earlier in Chapter Two, some males went ahead with getting married without being initiated. Regarding this Osuu Obiahu Ekhie asserts, ‘the uninitiated male who went out to marry without passing through the process laid down by our ancestors, was not recognised by his kinsmen, and the children born in the marriage remained unacceptable within Amasiri.\textsuperscript{596} Nna Egwu Nwosi agrees with Osuu Ekehie, in his view, nobody should be forced to be initiated into the Ogo society; however, he notes that the discrimination that accompanies such a refusal has not been addressed. He argues that initiation into the Ogo society remains central as an identity marker. It is a seal of belonging which in his view will not die soon as some people have speculated.\textsuperscript{597} As previously noted the alternative rituals within the PCN leaves most members in doubt of ‘who they are’ as they seek to negotiate acceptance among other Christians and members of the Ogo society.

Elder Anasi Obasi, a mission head teacher at Amasiri in the early 1940s observes that due to the influence of the Ogo society on the church and school, few boys still turned up to school. He further notes that during the period of the initiation rituals, there were hardly any males at school let alone females. He however attests to the zeal of the converts, but stresses that they were still ‘immersed in the Ogo society.’\textsuperscript{598} The highlighted struggle of the converts raises the need to question the comments by Okorocha. Regarding the Igbo he writes that becoming a Christian implies ‘a new and superior socio-religious outlook’. According to him, the desire to

\textsuperscript{595} Wilson, \textit{For Men and Elders: Change in the Relations of Generations and of Men and Women among the Nyakyusa-Ngondé People, 1875-1971.} p.148.
\textsuperscript{596} Personal interview with Osuu Obiahu Ekhie on 21:06:08.
\textsuperscript{597} Personal interview with Nna Egwu Nwosi on 26:06:08.
\textsuperscript{598} Personal interview with Elder A. N. Obasi on 09:08:08.
keep up with the times was an important factor in the Igbo conversion and has its roots in people’s concept of Ezi Ndu, meaning good or prosperous life.\(^{599}\)

On the contrary, within Amasiri conversion to Christianity was perceived as a sign of defeat, weakness and poverty. It was thought that many people joined the church in order to escape from the financial demands of community involvement and the taking of titles. Omezue Joseph Akwuba notes, ‘Those early converts were seen as lazy people who would prefer to stay at a place, singing and clapping for someone (a being) who they do not see. They refused to participate in the communal wrestling contests, which were occasions to demonstrate one’s strength and abilities’.\(^{600}\) Nne Elum Obiahu echoes this in a popular song which is usually rendered to slight the converts. The song goes thus: *Nwanyi maobu nwoke gbagata obu ulo, yogbatagi, nogbaba na-chochi jee na-eti halleluyah neti chegara nu’,* an unsuccessful person uses the church as an escape route, and ends up shouting hallelujah, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Nne Obiahu insists that poverty remained the central contributing factor that motivated conversion to Christianity. Nne Obiahu further observes that the converts were given relatively good funerals. However, she asserts that the funerals were cheap, and that none of them were given heroic funerals.\(^{601}\)

Furthermore, as highlighted earlier in Chapter Three, the second visit and subsequent establishment of the UFCS mission at Amasiri was granted the consent of the elder, not the people (*Oha*). As a result, the first temporary shelter of the mission school was erected by the same four traders who invited the missionaries. However, according to Omezue Idam Ome the shelter was set ablaze later by some unknown people in reaction to the mission work at Amasiri.\(^{602}\) The four traders appealed to the ruling elders of the clan to organise communal labour in order to rebuild the school, but the elders refused. Consequently, the four traders reported the matter to the then District Officer at Afikpo who threatened that the clan would be punished by the government should they refuse to rebuild the school. According to HRH Ezeogo


\(^{600}\) Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 05:08:08. Akwuba notes that the converts were denied access to family and village land and were suspended from participating in family and village meetings.

\(^{601}\) Personal interview with Mrs. Elum Obiahu on 12:07:08.

\(^{602}\) Personal interview with Omezue Idam Ome on 10:08:06.
Ugwu Itiri, the threat ‘worked and the shelter was reconstructed *en masse* even with a better outlook.’

The mission’s relationship with members of the Ogo society and the colonial administrators was ambiguous. Although there were attempts by some members of the Ogo society to sack the missionaries, there were also cases of cooperation. However, attempts by the converts to negotiate their varied identities and culture continued in relationship with the missionaries and their kinsmen.

### 5.2 Second Phase (1945-1970)

During this period the Roman Catholic Church had been established alongside a primary school (St. Augustine Primary School). The establishment of the Roman Catholic Church in 1945 led to a period of rivalry and uneasiness on the part of the UFCS who before then were monopolising the clan. Some of the earliest members of the Roman Catholic Church were former members of the UFCS who joined them as a result of some complex factors. The factors include the quest for education, teaching careers, job opportunities and the desire to try something new. Chief Augustine Chukwu notes that he left the UFSC for the Roman Catholic Church in order to be trained as a teacher, training he could not receive from the UFCS. With regards to the Ogo society, converts within this phase were taught like the earlier ones to denounce their initiation into the Ogo society and to abstain from sharing in ritual meals. Such meals, according to Omezue Oko Abua, were taken at the entrance gates of each compound or village. The meal served the purpose of communal sharing and most importantly it was a means of declaring one’s innocence from guilt. It was believed that if anyone shared in the meal with any unconfessed immorality such a person would be severely punished by the ancestors.

Joseph Akwuba observes that many members of the Ogo society had no choice than to conclude that those Christians who were abstaining from the meal were ritually unclean. Conversely, Apostle Solomon Obasi argues that the ritual meals were ‘demonic’ and as such those who wished to live as ‘true’ Christians had

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603 Personal interview with HRH Ezeogo Ugwu Itiri on 07:07:06.
604 Personal interview with Chief Hon. Augustine Chukwu on 30:06:08.
605 Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
606 Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 17:07:08.
to abstain from them. Chukwu, however, notes that in those days some members of the PCN had no problem with sharing in the meals.\textsuperscript{607} The situation could be considered to be incipient of the dialogical relationship between Christianity and the indigenous culture. It appears that the converts faced internal struggles to become what their teachers and missionaries wanted them to be.

This period saw the establishment of the Youth Fellowship, which was putting stronger emphasis on prayers, singing (aloud), and evangelism. Among the leadership of the PCN such activities were considered to be ‘un-Presbyterian’ at the time, implying a radical shift from the norm. As such, the youths were severally summoned by the church’s leadership. Such acts of worship were not only considered offensive to the church leadership, but also to the members of the Ogo society. It was seen as a deliberate effort to replicate some of the Ogo activities within the church.

Elder Obinna Oka, in an interview, narrates a story of an event in which Samuel Mbe Chukwu, a member of the PCN was mercilessly beaten by members of the Ogo society for dancing and entertaining people in the church. Members of the Ogo society claimed that having been initiated into the Ogo society he should not have done such a thing.\textsuperscript{608} Furthermore, another interviewee, Elder Atu Ogburu recounts how he was beaten to the point of death by his father for being part of the church. He observed that sometime in the early 1960s his late father, who was a well-known member of the Ogo society organised some people to assassinate him. According to Elder Ogburu, his father could no longer stand seeing his first son become a ‘nuisance’, for his father it was better for Otu to be dead.\textsuperscript{609} However, the experiences of converts within this period were more complex. Some members of the PCN, especially those within the Youth Fellowship, perceived others as being unserious with their faith, a practice that could be likened to syncretism. Such people seem not to have had problems with maintaining their membership with the Ogo society in spite of being members of the PCN. Apostle Anthony Ogbonna further observes thus:

\textsuperscript{607} Personal interview with Apostle Solomon Obasi on 20:06:06
\textsuperscript{608} Personal interview with Elder Obinna Oka on 23:06:08.
\textsuperscript{609} Personal interview with Elder Atu Ogburu on 20:06:08.
My parents were not Christians, but I got interested in church activities through the primary school. At the school we were taught how to read the Bible and sing hymns. We used to gather in the evenings to study and sing after school. Within the church, however, there were lots of unchristian attitudes especially among the leaders. Some of them were secretly giving their sons up for initiation into the Ogo society even when they taught us not to do so. Some of them still retained (openly and some secretly) their second and third wives. From my understanding of the Bible such actions were unbiblical and thus raised some distrust in my mind and in the minds of some other younger people in the PCN.\(^{610}\)

As pointed out by Ogbonna, many members of the PCN within the second phase still struggled as they endeavoured to negotiate their indigenous cultures and identities. The position of the PCN regarding not compromising its faith needed to be interpreted further within context. Such laws for total abstinence in the practices of the Ogo society did not provide an alternative, nor did the laws seem to have engaged the socio-religious implications of the initiation into the Ogo society.\(^{611}\) As such, some members of the PCN could not afford to have their male children uninitiated and so they had them initiated into the Ogo society directly or through family agents. Ogbu Kalu, in relation to Egbele initiation in Edda, a neighbouring clan to Amasiri asserts that missionaries were appalled at the ‘ruthless social organisation’. He further observes that ‘Egbele was so central to the lives of the communities precisely because it was a form of covenanting the young ones to the ancestral spirit of the fathers….Christianity is still losing in those communities which have not destroyed Egbele, education cannot weaken the force.’\(^{612}\)

Kalu appears to highlight the crucial role of initiation rituals within indigenous communities. However, like the Ogo society, it is possible to dismiss such integral religious ceremonies on the basis of its ‘ruthlessness’ when one does not engage with the social implications of the practices. It might be important to ask from whose perspective the case for ‘ruthlessness’ is advanced. Does such a case represent the perspective of the ritual officiants and the ritual participants or is it an outsider’s representation? Is it enough to deny or dismiss the existence and importance of the Ogo society? The advice of Augustine Iwuagwu on such matters might help; ‘the church should find a way of incorporating those ideas in their

\(^{610}\) Personal interview with Apostle Anthony Ogbonna on 04:07:08.

\(^{611}\) Personal interview with Elde Obinna Oka on 23:06:08.
preaching, teaching and pastoral care. It is not enough to tell people that these spirits do not exist; they feel their existence.' 613 Western-influenced education alone, as observed by Kalu, cannot abolish the Ogo society, as today many educated elites within Amasiri are the greatest supporters of the Ogo society. 614

PCN members within this period witnessed World War II (1939-1945) and the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). The impact of these two events coupled with the hardship the two events brought on communities was devastating. Many members within the PCN at Amasiri had begun to perceive the church as helpless in a time of dire need. As a result some members went all out in search of psychological, spiritual and emotional satisfaction which the church could not provide. This, according to Apostle Ogbonna, was underscored by the saying, ‘Nwoke anagho agba eka’ meaning nobody should live unprotected. This presupposes that although a Christian, a person requires additional indigenous protection and coverage. 615 The war times offered opportunities for many people to renew not only their Christian vows, but also their initiation vows into the Ogo society, as it was thought that protection could only come one way or another. This phase also presented an opportunity for some members of the PCN to lose faith in the church especially given that the Federal Government of Nigeria took over all the mission schools at the end of the civil war. So some former mission teachers and pupils turned back to the indigenous practices while others left the PCN to establish other charismatic churches.

5.3 Third Phase (1970-1990)

This phase began with a period of reconstruction and restructuring as members of both the church and Ogo society were just returning home at the end of the war. As previously highlighted, the war period appears to have served as a period of spiritual

614 Personal interview with Chief P. M. Ukochialu on 04:08:08. Ukochialu notes that some educated elites that are from Amasiri often return home during the initiation processes so as to participate in the rituals. Some of the people, he observes, also return occasionally to be dressed in the masks of the Ogo society, as a way of enhancing their protection from evil forces.
615 Personal interview with Apostle Anthony Ogbonna on 04:07:08.
revivification, not only for Christianity, but also for members of the Ogo society. Time was given to rebuild the broken walls of the Ogo houses and sacrifices were offered to reinstate the sacred places for ritual activities. Although some members left the PCN at the beginning of the 1970s, some other youths continued the work that the Youth Fellowship, as highlighted in the previous phase, had begun. Chukwu Eleje, Eze Solomon, Pastor Light Anyim Oko, Emmanuel Aghachi and others championed a Charismatic movement within the PCN at Amasiri. They insisted on the purity of faith and total abstinence from the Ogo society and other ritual activities. They reacted in opposition to what could be likened to the ‘syncretism’ practice of the church leaders and called members to regular prayers, Bible studies, singing, dancing and door to door evangelism. The activities of this group were considered threatening and as an ‘extremist’ approach to faith by the leadership of the PCN who saw that their motivation only aimed at breaking away from the PCN. 616

During this period, the Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God Church, Cherubim and Seraphim, the Christian Fellowship as well as the Scripture Union were established at Amasiri. Most of the founders and leading members of these churches were once members of the PCN who left the church for complex reasons. 617 An investigation of such reasons does not fall within the scope of this thesis, but it is worth researching this area, as the findings would be helpful to further investigate the shift in the ways in which many people appropriate belief. Although some members of the ‘Charismatic’ group left the PCN a few others remained, they recruited new members, but faced more challenges within the PCN. However, the members who left the PCN continued to influence the church through their regular contact with PCN members at the Scripture Union (non-denominational group). 618 There was also some fluidity in membership, as although some people retained their membership with the PCN they saw nothing wrong with ‘church visitation’.

The reasons why people migrate from one Christian group to another remains very complex and personal although some say it is to find where ‘it works’. Thus, the

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616 Personal interview with Elder Charles Osim on 30:06:08.
617 Personal interview with Apostle Christian Chukwu on 20:06:08.
618 Personal interview with Elder Ogburu Atu on 20:06:08.
bottom line is based on the individual’s and group’s notion of what it means to say that something has worked. Furthermore, this notion involves a related engagement with pursuing whatever practices that will bring that form of efficacy. Nna Okpara Ocha, in an interview, notes with regards to this fluidity of movement thus: ‘They change church like clothes, leaving us confused as to which church is good enough.’ This period also saw the establishment of Amasiri Believers’ Fellowship (ABFN) in the 1980s. It was thought that the ABFN would form a platform to organise Amasiri Christians both home and abroad into one umbrella. This would serve as a channel of representation for the Christian constituency and a forum for networking. However, the current National President, Elder Etu Okpara observes that such dreams are yet to be realised:

Christians in Amasiri are very divided, not only in matters of faith, but even in the most common issues, including politics. In my eight years as the National President of the ABFN, I have seen gross misconduct and division among many Christians including Pastors. Such internal weakness is making us powerless before members of the Ogo society. There is hardly a meeting that does not end with a quarrel, thus making us look small. Each church group seeks to be on its own and none ever want a guide. Often individual members are left to fight their corner when they have trouble with members of the Ogo society; in fact we (the church) have been unfaithful to our members.

As shown by Okpara, the new community is made up of different Christian groups and often members of the group emphasise what makes each group different from the other, thereby raising questions of rivalry and problems of interpretation and application of the Bible. This is fuelled by diverse beliefs with regard to conversion experiences and responses to rituals. Such a scenario, as shown in Okpara’s comment, underlines the complexity of engaging with the Ogo society and the indigenous context. It further raises the need for an ‘intra-church’ dialogue before effective dialogue between Christianity and the Ogo society can take place.

As highlighted, the formation of new churches including the ABFN brought about dramatic changes in the socio-political and religious landscape and also some considerable pressure on the Amasiriri’s sense of community. Wotsuna Khamalwa, in relation to Uganda, observes that the new community being formed by some

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619 Personal interview with Nna Okpara Ocha on 29:06:08.
620 Personal interview with Elder Etu Ogbonnia Okpara on 30:06:08.
Christians presents ‘a change of worldview from the largely communitarian one of traditional life, to a new individualistic one propagated by Christianity largely through formal education’. He argues that education creates both dislocations in the physical and mental space among young generations; as it raises the spectre of the theory of obligation, such that questions the authority of the elders and communal rituals. While Khamalwa’s point is helpful, however, it appears to be limited; formal education alone especially among Amasiri may not be considered the cause of contemporary tendencies to ‘spiritual individualism’. As earlier shown in Chapter Four, many educated elites within Amasiri are the greatest proponents of the Ogo society, whereas many less educated Christians oppose indigenous practices.

Furthermore, even with this apparent separation from the community, the PCN within this period continued to create auxiliary ministries. These include: small group (districts), Women’s Guild, Men’s Christian Association (MCA), Christian Girls in Training (CGIT), Presbyterian Young People’s Association of Nigeria (PYPAN) among others. These groups not only serve as ‘religious’ groups they also offer welfare services to its members. The community sense of living thus does not seem to be discarded but is appropriated differently. In addition, many members of the PCN within this period continue to find ways of maintaining their ties with families, which as previously highlighted is capable of raising problems of competing loyalties. The Ogo society continues to play a central role in incorporating young people into adult roles and the power and identity it conveys on the males and families is yet to be replaced by any Christian ritual. As such this period witnessed some conflicts between some members of the PCN and members of the Ogo society as they both compete for space and influence.

One notable case of conflict between Christians and members of the Ogo society occurred in 1988. During that event many members of the Ogo society from all the villages of Amasiri destroyed the entire property of a non-indigene whose daughter was accused of seeing the ritual procession of the Ogo society. The entire

621 Personal interview with Apostle Anthony Ogbonna on 04:07:08.
family was ejected from the clan as a result of the conflict. The family involved were members of the PCN. Despite this, Elder Itiri Agwu, in an interview, notes that many members of the PCN could not speak openly on the matter because this would anger members of the Ogo society. In response to the incident, the Secretary to the then Military Government of Imo State wrote to the Chairman of the Afikpo Local Government Area thus:

I wish to refer to recent reports about the activities of the Ogo cult in Amasiri during which looting and burning of property were reported and to find out whether or not your local government has taken steps to ban the Ogo cult throughout your local government area. If not could you please take immediate action to ban the cult throughout your local government area. Please let me know when this action has been taken.  

The cited memo from the State government indicates the extent and impact of the loss following the conflict. However, it is difficult to understand what the Secretary means by suggesting that the ‘cult’ should be banned. Such an instruction appears to demonstrate an inadequate understanding of the Ogo society and the integral place it occupies within Amasiri. The memo seems to perceive the Ogo society as a ‘cult’ which in some sense might be considered derogatory, implying that the society is on the margin of the clan. However, initiation into the Ogo society is a rite of passage, a gateway to the wider community and an identity marker. Elder Obinna Oka who at the time was the Deputy Chairman of the local government and the Councillor representing Amasiri ward notes that the situation was a difficult one, as often he and some of his colleagues where considered to be traitors by the clan, while the State government perceived them as weak. According to him, even his intervention to restrain the State Police forces from undertaking mass arrests within Amasiri was still not enough to appease the clan. These patterns of perception of the other between many Christians and members of the Ogo society continue to impact on interpersonal relationships, thus some Christians and the uninitiated males live as strangers in their mother’s and father’s lands. From the foregoing it appears

624 Personal interview with Elder Itiri Agwu on 23:06:08.
626 Personal interview with Elder Obinna Oka on 23:06:08.
that PCN and Christianity in general has not had the required dialogue and interaction with the indigenous context.

5.4 Fourth Phase (Era of Charismatisation and Pentecostalisation, 1990-2008)

The ‘Charismatisation and Pentecostalisation’ of Christianity in Africa has benefited from scholarly scrutiny and analyses of scholars such as Ogbu Kalu, Allan Anderson, Afe Adogame, Paul Gifford, Matthews Ojo, David Maxwell, Birgit Meyer and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu. The growth of these movements marks the single most important development that has occurred within Christianity since the beginning of the twentieth century. In describing the phenomenon Ruth Marshall observes that ‘literally thousands of new churches and evangelical groups have cropped up in cities and towns, forming a broad-based religious movement which is rapidly becoming a powerful new religious force.’ This type of Christianity has been described as ‘the new dimension of Christianity in Africa which is drastically reshaping the face of Christianity.’ The description of the movement as ‘a force’ raises the need to explain its impact on a mission church like the PCN and on indigenous communities like Amasiri. The emergence of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity as the most


prevalent segment of world Christianity has further resulted in phrases such as ‘Pentecostal Power’, to illustrate its trend and the dynamic nature of the phenomena.630

The Charismatisation and Pentecostalistion of Christianity in Africa began with the rise of the African Independent Churches (AICs) and indigenous Pentecostal churches. Some members of these churches walked out of existing historic mission churches in order to give active expression to their faith. From the middle of the twentieth century, but particularly within the last three decades, new forms of Charismatic and Pentecostal movements have emerged in Africa. At the last count in July 2008, there were over fifty of them in Amasiri.631 As already noted, many leaders within these churches have their roots in the PCN and some of their members are drawn from the PCN. There is also a ‘backward and forward’ movement from within the PCN to these Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. These processes could be considered as ‘religious window shopping or shopping in the spiritual market place’.632 A number of members within the PCN thus consequently adopted a system of plural belonging by maintaining membership of their mother churches, but worshipping at one of the many spiritual churches around.

Although admittedly such movements are characterised by complex factors, it seems that the spiritual churches provide the indigenous ecclesiastical contexts where the phenomena facing resistance within the PCN enjoy freer expression. These movements have been manifested in three ways: firstly, as independent indigenous Charismatic churches; secondly as trans-denominational fellowships (e.g. Scripture Union, ABFN); and thirdly as renewal groups within mission based churches such as the PCN. Bill Roberts observes that the Scripture Union is an overspill of the radical Evangelical revival of modern Nigeria.633 As noted earlier, the Scripture Union became a catalyst for renewal within the PCN at Amasiri in the 1990s. Such

631 Personal interview with Pastor Kenneth Daniels on 14:07:08.
Charismatic and Pentecostal renewal groups sustained an unprecedented impact on their host churches within which they operate. Cephas Omenyo’s study, ‘Pentecost outside Pentecostalism’ has drawn attention to the growing significance of Charismatic and Pentecostal groups within non-Pentecostal denominations.  

Such a development can best be described as mission churches becoming more ‘Pentecostal than the Pentecostals’. Scholars have identified two major phases of revival within Christianity in Africa which has led to the evolvement of two strands of churches. Matthews Ojo distinguishes between Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, while Ruth Marshall distinguishes between Pentecostal and Holiness movements. Marshall’s term appears to be based more on the historical foundations of these movements and their doctrinal emphasis. While there are efforts by some renewal groups to Charismatise and Pentecostalise the PCN, it must be noted that there are also groups and individuals who are keen to preserve what they consider as their ‘Presbyterian heritage and identities’. However, the challenges from the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches and the attraction that their informal, exuberant, and expressive charismatic worship hold for their members often forces some members and even leaders within the PCN to incorporate some elements of the Charismatic/Pentecostal flavour into their liturgies.

Decisions such as these often raise tensions, because some members of the PCN would want to maintain the traditional form of worship. In the 1970s the PCN in its annual Synod meeting assessed the situation and set up a Committee to study and offer advice on the phenomenon of Charismatic and Pentecostal renewal. There was an expression of concern about the large number of members who were leaving the PCN to join other Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Not only were members attending the prayer meetings of ‘spiritual healers and prophets’ there was an increasing number of groups and members who had adopted and were exhibiting similar unfamiliar practices during regular worship. Such unfamiliar practices

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637 Personal interview with Rev. Cornerlius Ukochukwu on 17:06:08.
include: ‘speaking in tongue’, placing an emphasis on healing and deliverance sessions, holding all-night prayers characterised by loud extemporal prayers, prophecies, visions among other things.\(^{638}\)

As I observed during my filed work in 2006 and 2008, features of the Charismatisation and Pentecostalisation of the PCN at Amasiri, include the insertion of informal segments of ‘Praise and Worship’ into the church’s liturgy, the use of exclamations like shouts of ‘Amen’ and ‘Hallelujah’ in response to preaching. Other features include, hand-lifting, kneeling, drumming, the singing of locally composed choruses, dancing, prayer vigils, the use of olive oil and spontaneous applause during corporate worship. Elder Chukwu Okpara, in his interview, observes that all these ‘renewal-oriented’ programmes intended to empower members in the ‘spirit’ appear to be PCN’s response to the forceful challenge of Pentecostal and Charismatic groups.\(^{639}\) The period 1995-1998 saw increased influence of the Charismatic and Pentecostal experiences within the PCN at Amasiri. In the first year (1995) of this period Rev. Kalu Kalu Oti, the minister at that time, launched a campaign titled, ‘Enough is Enough’. Oti charged members to break away from every entanglement with the indigenous cultures in order to position themselves for God’s blessings. In the following year Oti took forward his revival programmes under the title ‘Oh God Revive your Church, beginning with me’. In his interview, Elder Itiri Etu recounts the events of the period thus:

> The church was turned into a different scene altogether. It became hard for some of us to withstand what was happening. The prayer group as was led by the minister became the leading group in the church, thereby undermining the authority of the ruling elders. Most elders were set aside as they were perceived as ‘spiritually weak’ or un-spiritual. Prophecy became the order of the day, as there was no prayer session without many of them. There were instances of deliverance and increasingly some members began to live in fear. Although more new members joined the church in that period, it seemed to some of us that strange and unacceptable things were happening in the church and so some of us stood to oppose it.\(^{640}\)

This period, as previously described, featured ‘warfare and aggressive prayers’, regular praying and fasting, family deliverances and prayer vigils. The opposition which Etu describes was not only internally presented to the minister and

\(^{638}\) Personal interview with Elder Obinna Oka on 23:06:08.  
\(^{639}\) Personal interview with Elder Chukwu Okpara on 16:06:08.  
\(^{640}\) Personal interview with Elder Itiri Etu on 12:07:08.
his team of prayer warriors, but the situation was considered to be disturbing by the Presbytery officials. There were questions relating to the authenticity of the prophecies which Rev. Oti saw as ‘persecution for righteousness’. He often described the Presbytery officials as ‘blind leaders who are seeking to lead those who see’. Rev. Oti persistently threatened that God will definitely punish those who stand in his way. Prayers such as the one described by Adogame of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church thus became a regular feature in the prayer patterns of the PCN:

I paralyse every evil hand pointing at my blessing, in the name of Jesus. I withdraw every satanic instruction targeted against me…. Every evil river dry up, every shrine working against me, be roasted…. I refuse to be subdued by the forces of darkness…. I nullify every night arrow fired against me…. Devil, you are a liar; you cannot capture my destiny…. I break every agreement made between my parents and Satan on my behalf…. I break every covenant formed between my enemies against me…. Every stronghold of wickedness fashioned against me, let the fire of God burn them to ashes…. Every evil bird delegated against me, fall down to the ground and die…. I refuse to dwell in the building constructed for me by my enemies…. I paralyse every spirit of wastage, I shall not borrow…. I command confusion and disagreement between my hardened enemies….  

Mrs. Felicia Nnachi notes that she had always been a member of the prayer team before the era of Rev. Oti, but that the unfolding events of 1994 in the PCN left many of them speechless. She further notes that such prayers became a regular feature in regular Sunday worship. It was hoped that through the performative force of such prayer rituals, benevolent forces would be attracted, while malevolent forces would be repelled. Emphasis on deliverance, with its focus on liberation from the influence of evil spirits, is perhaps the best example of this. While this resonates with traditional piety, it is also elaborated in forms that appear to be consistent with global Pentecostal and Charismatic culture. The idiom of witches and evil spirits

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641 Personal interview with Elder Iri Agwu on 23:06:08.
643 Personal interview with Mrs. Felicia Nnachi on 15:06:08.
continues to influence explanations of indigenous life experiences and constitutes a pillar of local cosmologies.645

During this period emphasis was also put on public denunciation of sin and Satan. Conversion stories thus became a regular feature during public services and were listened to with great fascination. The keen attention that was paid to such stories was because they were confessions that provided an insight into attitudes and deeds from which a ‘good’ Christian was to refrain. Furthermore, the period featured much singing and dancing during church worship, practices which according to Elder Paul Otuu were sometimes disturbing. Elder Otuu further observes that the period also witnessed extensive teachings from the Bible and further quests to separate member from all forms of indigenous practices. Otuu notes it became a regular practice for Rev. Oti to change people’s names to ‘Bible’ and English names, because for him most of the members’ former names had ‘fetish’ backgrounds from which they needed to be delivered. Interestingly, Otuu observes that some of the elderly members found it difficult to place themselves with their new names. Some of them, he notes, could not respond when they were called because their new names appeared to be unfamiliar, some of them could not even pronounce these new names.646

The movement took another dimension from 8th September 1996 when the Fellowship of Amasiri Christian Students (FACS) was formed. The group is non-denominational and many PCN members play active roles. The group again had radical evangelism and conversion as its main focus and it has over the years continued to insist on the ‘Charismatisation and Pentecostalisation’ of the PCN.647

The group holds a religious expression that seems to value, affirm and promote the experiential presence of the Holy Spirit as part of ‘normal’ Christian life.

In 2000, a prayer network ‘Land Army’ was formed by the FACS which drew members from different churches mostly from the PCN. The network was formed following a ‘Community Deliverance Crusade’ which was organised in order

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646 Personal interview with Elder Paul Otuu on 17:07:08.

647 Personal interview with Joshua Okorie on 17:06:08.
to deliver Amasiri from the hands of the devil. The invited Prayer Warriors argued that the setbacks which Amasiri had experienced in the past are connected to the covenantal relationship between the clan and the devil. It was believed that by undertaking the community deliverance Amasiri would henceforth begin to experience some progress. The Land Army was formed to continue the crusade and to make sure the ‘devil does not return’. Rev. Cornelius Ukochukwu observes that: ‘Our environment is such that there are many evil spirits moving around and if people do not regularly clean themselves, and their houses, the evil spirits may lodge there, notwithstanding one’s level of education’. Onyekachi Oma, a member of the PCN and a key leader of the group asserts:

We are committed to praying down every Satanic Road block in Amasiri. The ancestral powers within the Ogo society which has held our clan in darkness must give way for the reign of Christ to begin. Our job is a difficult one, we move secretly, often at night from one sacred place to the other across the clan for specific prayers aimed at ‘pulling down the stronghold’ of the enemy among our people.

The comment from Rev. Ukochukwu and Mrs. Oma is indicative of how the indigenous practices can be perceived. The Ogo society is represented as the road block to the progress of the Amasiri clan, which according to them must be destroyed if the clan is to experience some peace. As a result of this understanding, many religious rituals are branded as being ‘fetish’ including dances, music, and indigenous displays. One main thrust of members of this group appears to be the preponderance of deliverance and spiritual warfare rituals in their cosmological tradition.

Within the three PCN branches at Amasiri that I visited during the research in 2006, 2008 and 2010, much time was devoted to warfare prayers and war-like songs. There is an increasing number of night prayers and deliverance sessions as well as a radical approach to conversion experiences. Furthermore, there is an extensive prayer repertoire which often indicates the importance of invoking God, the name of Jesus, Holy Ghost and the Angels in order to demolish and claim victory over Satan. Such

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648 Personal interview with Amadi Chukwu on 14:07:08.
649 Personal interview with Joshua Okorie on 17:06:08.
650 Personal interview with Rev. Cornelius Ukochukwu on 17:06:08.
651 Personal interview with Mrs. Onyekachi Oma on 23:06:08.
phrases as: ‘in Jesus’ name’, the ‘blood of Jesus’, ‘Holy Ghost fire’, and the ‘Sword of God’ therefore serve as spiritual weaponry. The aggressiveness and literal militancy with which prayer rituals are enacted and targeted against the enemies suggests a total rejection of the Biblical injunction that Christians should love and pray for their enemies. However, regarding this critique, Mrs. Oma responds that the target of the verbal, spiritual war is the devil (Satan) and not human beings, although Satan could also manifest through humans themselves. Thus there is a considerable use of militaristic language and imagery in the battle against Satan and his troops.

Within the PCN, those officiating or preaching during worship instruct members on how they should live, citing Biblical examples, including the ‘Patriarchs’ while neglecting the clan’s ancestors. No mention is ever made of the ancestors during worship and whenever they are mentioned, it is often in connection with ‘idolatry’ and the understanding that they are responsible for the pain and sorrow of the present generation. It is within this context that prayers of deliverance from ‘ancestral covenants’ are popular. Interestingly, the spirit of the dead continues to be important to many Christians, although many would refer to it as *Mmo Ojoo* ‘a demon’.

However, this indigenous view about spirits appears to be much more widely held by members of this group and contemporary members of the PCN. There seems to be an intersection of the indigenous and Christian worldviews. The intersection first involves acceptance of the idea that lesser spiritual entities play a part in the material world and second, as noted by Mrs Oma, prayer ritual can influence them. Interestingly, while some members reject indigenous systems of divination and sacrifices, they retain the belief in the influence of lesser spiritual entities over the material world and the efficacy of prayer as a key ritual for influencing the powers.

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653 Personal interview with Pastor Kenneth Daniels on 14:07:08.

Pentecostal and Charismatic approaches to worship, as evident in the PCN, tend to demonise the indigenous spirit world and then devote much of their energy to struggling against it. This scenario appears to be reinforcing the existence of the spirit world and the relevance of the spirit world to ‘post-conversion’ life.655

The cross-denominational influences and networks have created a situation where some new members of the PCN at Amasiri reject the authority of the traditional elders and ridicule the many indigenous practices of the clan. The elders, as demonstrated in Chapter One, closely direct communal rituals. They use initiation into the Ogo society as a strategy to catch young males and to bring them under social control. As such the males live at the mercy of the clan in general and the elders in particular. However, the increasing revivification within the PCN and other church groups within Amasiri is prompting a process in which the devotion which was formerly paid to the elders, Ogo society and ancestors is questioned.656

Some members within the PCN are committed to burning down symbols and ritual objects of the Ogo society in their compounds, or villages, thus making a mockery of masks and sacred spaces. Furthermore, many objects associated with decorations have been destroyed because of their association with so-called ‘fetish’ worship. The International Herald Tribune of 4th September 2007 reports thus:

Generations ago, European colonists and Christian missionaries looted Africa’s ancient treasures, arts still coveted by collectors around the world. Now Pentecostal Christian Evangelists – most of them Africans – are helping to wipe out the remaining traces of how Africans worked, played and prayed in the distant past. As poverty deepened in Nigeria from the mid-1980s, Pentecostal Christian church membership surged. The new faithful found comfort in preachers like popular Nigerian evangelist preacher Uma Ukpai who promised material success was next to godliness. Ukpai has boasted of overseeing the destruction of more than one hundred shrines in one district in December 2005 alone.657

656 Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akuba on 17:07:08.
The issue of destroying religious artefacts is not simply an experience that existed with colonial or Western missionaries, but one which Amasiri is witnessing today. As shown earlier, some artefacts belonging to the Ogo society are destroyed by other Prayer groups, stolen or exposed to harsh weather which ends up destroying them. The contemporary attempts by some members of the PCN and other churches to displace the Ogo society by force have been on the increase in the past twenty years. Such situations have fuelled conflicts between Christians and members of the Ogo society. In addition, such attempts to destabilise the indigenous religions has clearly left wide gaps in the social structure, particularly inter-personal bonds. Osuu Simon Uche observes, ‘We used to think that the PCN was a quiet type of church, but recent events have proved us wrong. As a result we have to treat them the same way we treat other noisy churches in the clan. The point is that our tradition has to be safe-guarded for our children, which are the pride of our clan.’658 As underscored by Uche the PCN has experienced some level of renewal, yet Pastor Matthew Okpara insists that PCN is still not considered to be a Pentecostal church.659

However, the indigenous worldview, including a strong belief in the dynamic presence and activities of spirit beings in people’s lives, persists among many members of the PCN. Thus, there is a continual search for security and protection from evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery. Such beliefs may be considered to be mere superstition only found in non-literate minds, but it is as much present among well-educated males and females within Amasiri. Many people still regard them as channels of misfortune and as such seek protection through the spiritual agencies. Such belief in spiritual power forms the basis on which some traditional Amasiri and members of the PCN search for ways to harness them to their advantage.660 An interviewee narrates thus:

I graduated from the University having studied Engineering. Soon after my graduation I got a job with the National Power Authority, and soon after that I rose to the position of Manager to the envy of some people including some members of my extended family. Suddenly I was spiritually attacked by an evil spirit and I lost my job and am still struggling with my health. Over the past five years I have

658 Personal interview with Osuu Simon Uche on 01:08:08.
659 Personal interview with Pastor Matthew Okpara on 23:06:08.
660 Personal interview with Elder Timothy Agu on 15:07:08.
suffered from a series of misfortunate events including an automobile accident which nearly claimed my life.  

The interviewee is a member of the PCN, but is a resident from outside Amasiri. However, he believes that his problems are projected by members of his family. Strangely, he is already initiated into the Ogo society and, as was highlighted in Chapter Two, the initiation is expected to offer security to the initiates from evil spirits. However, Nna Okpara Ocha contends, that ‘the spirit of the Ogo society and our ancestors can only protect those who are loyal to them. You cannot reap where you do not sow. The Ogo society has its regulations and if for any reason one does not abide by them, the persons loses the benefits of the ancestors as well.’

Joshua Otuu (the leader of the youth fellowship in one of the PCN branches), responding to whether he would initiate his son into the Ogo society noted that: ‘it is a hard thing to answer, but certainly I would not encourage my son to be initiated, but I would be flexible on it knowing full well the implications of not being initiated into the society. I would not want to see my son discriminated by his fellow indigenes.’ As shown by Achi, initiation even in the face of the ‘Charismatisation and Pentecostalisation’ of the religious landscape of Amasiri still remains central. It offers the platform for both initiates and the community to celebrate life’s achievements. This could explain why some mothers, at the end of the initiation, address their sons as Agu Nna (his father’s Lion), or Nwoke Ike (the strong man). Therefore, initiation into the Ogo society continues to serve as religious, political and social symbols. Thus, Christians who fail to participate in the rituals experience marginalisation in the community and as such live as foreigners in their own land with no rights and privileges.

A resident minister of the PCN, Rev. Anthony Ufere further notes that the Ogo society is still a central part of Amasiri’s indigenous practice. However, he argues that the practice is not acceptable, but states that the PCN is handicapped in terms of protecting its members who are marginalised as a result of their refusal to be

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661 Personal interview with Daniel Okorie on 26:08:08.
662 Personal interview with Nna Okpara Ocha on 29:06:08.
663 Personal interview with Joshua Otuu on 27:07:08.
initiated. Rev. Ufere’s response demonstrates the individual and corporate dilemma of both members of the PCN in negotiating the Ogo society. Interestingly, although the PCN is unable to protect its members when they refuse to be initiated into the Ogo society, the PCN still punishes those who do undergo the initiation process.\textsuperscript{664}

On another level, continuity with the past therefore appears pronounced, so strong is the belief in the powers of witchcraft; indigenous medicine men and women and diviners.\textsuperscript{665} However, the methods of consultation are not necessarily the same today, but belief in them appears to be as strong as ever. Many members of the PCN believe in the ubiquitous nature of the spiritual forces and as such a lot of warfare prayers are expected to be said in order to ward them off.

There are thus some intra-personal and inter-personal conflicts which need to be accounted for in the analyses of the expansion of Christianity within indigenous communities like Amasiri. There appears to be some perceived contradictions beneath the expressed Christian beliefs. This is in contrast to the perception that African gods went on retreat following the upsurge of the missionary enterprise among indigenous communities. Kalu notes that Igbo gods survived the advance of the British gunboats; their perceived demise, he argues, did not indicate a rout, but that they merely went underground and are now waging war against Christianity in the minds of the converts.\textsuperscript{666} However, Cyril Okorocha points out that persistence of the old values in the mind of the converts is not necessarily indicative of non-conversion.\textsuperscript{667} Rather it means that to define conversion in terms of social change is inadequate, since the transformation in an indigenous context like Amasiri does not mean a total eradication of the old value system, but an attempt to redefine the old value system. Such attempts to redefine the old values in the face of the new have often resulted in both intra-personal and inter-personal conflicts.

\textsuperscript{664} Personal interview with Rev. Anthony Ufere on 18:06:08.


A case of conflict between members of the Ogo society and Christians include that which involved Eze Solomon. He was a former member of the PCN, but later joined the Apostolic Church. He was expelled from his village for refusing to be initiated into the Ogo society and also for getting married as an uninitiated person. He settled and worked in a distant town until his death. Upon his death members of his village did not allow his corpse to be buried within his compound and it was argued that his kinsmen had long disowned him.\textsuperscript{668} Furthermore, on 7\textsuperscript{th} November 1993, some members of the Life Evangel Church at Amasiri were involved in another conflict. Their members were accused of undertaking a counter procession at the same time that the Ogo ritual procession was in progress. Those who participated in the procession included uninitiated males and females. The church had before that day been involved in other open confrontations with some members of the Ogo society and had already declared that their mission was to pull down every structure of the Ogo society. To this end, they had on some occasions entered into the Ogo houses to beat their drums and sing and pray.\textsuperscript{669}

The conflict of 7\textsuperscript{th} November was disastrous: about seven houses were burnt down including the church’s Bible school and two cassava processing mills. Peter Ologwu estimates the total loss to be six million naira (about £300,000).\textsuperscript{670} At the end of the clash, most Pastors at the church and their families and students at the Bible school relocated out of Amasiri. At the time of the conflict some members of the PCN had been drawn to the church and were involved in those crusades which meant that many members of the Ogo society had become unsettled with the PCN’s missions as well. As in the case of 1988, many leaders of the PCN distanced themselves from the crisis, as it was possible for some members of the Ogo society to launch further attacks on any person who was perceived as standing in the way of tradition.\textsuperscript{671} The relationship between religion and conflict is thus a complex one. Although not necessarily so, as can be seen in the case of the Life Evangel Church,

\textsuperscript{668} Personal interview with Elder Charles Osim on 30:06:08.
\textsuperscript{669} Personal interview with Omuez Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
\textsuperscript{671} Personal interview with Elder Itiri Agwu on 23:06:08.
there are some aspects of religion that make it susceptible to being a latent source of conflict. The Life Evangel Church seems to have been involved in significant streams of evangelism which can escalate conflicts. The church’s approach to evangelism appears to be borne out of the desire to minimise beliefs in the Ogo society, thus making it look as inferior as possible.

Mr. Akwari Mbe is fifty-four years old and is another person who until now has lived outside his village, due to his refusal to be initiated into the Ogo society. He is described with an appellation (Akwari *Enna* – the uninitiated Akwari) which makes it easier to identify him as an unusual adult. Osuu Obiahu Ekehie describes Akwari as ‘being on his own’ implying that he has nothing to do with his family and village. Mr Ekehie further notes that Akwari cannot cultivate on the family or village land nor can he be allowed to build or own a house within his compound, thus his rightful portion of land was allocated to his younger brother.\(^{672}\) Interestingly, Akwari Mbe observes that he had made attempts twice to pay for the cost of his initiation, but that his late father embezzled the money, and in anger he decided to live with it.

According to him, he has already had enough insults and humiliation and he does not think it would make a difference if he got himself initiated now.\(^{673}\) The case of Akwari Mbe, like other highlighted cases of conflict between Christians and members of the Ogo society appears to centre on the facts of belief. Religious beliefs can become inflexible and intolerant in the face of other beliefs, hence leading to conflict. Thus, instead of banning the Ogo society or Christianity as suggested by the memo from the State government, it would rather be helpful to examine the causes and areas of conflict. This would be helpful when developing alternative methods including discussions, negotiations and dialogue in order to promote mutual understanding and respect.

5.5 *Discourses on Conflict: The Ogo Society and Christianity*

The phenomenon of conflict is known and experienced in every part of the world. In the words of Kenneth Boulding, ‘Conflict is an activity that is found everywhere.’\(^{674}\)

\(^{672}\) Personal interview with Osuu Obiahu Ekehie on 21:06:08.

\(^{673}\) Personal interview with Mr. Akwari Mbe on 22:06:08.

It often exists within and between individuals, families, villages, communities, organisations, groups and nations. Conflict according to L. A. Dunn is related to identity. He argues that what we disagree about raises questions of who we are and who we want to become. This approach is helpful in understanding the conflicts between Christians and members of the Ogo society. Some academic theories demonstrate that conflict is an inevitable product of human relations. In other words, as long as people relate to one another and share common or varied circumstances, there may be conflicts. Conflict is thus a complex term; it is used to explain many opposing and strange actions, ranging from simple non-verbal grudges between parties to outright violence and war.

Conflict may be based on a principle of opposition and it may involve the use of force, however, such situations often end up leaving many casualties. This kind of conflict is referred to as Armed Conflict, Violent Conflict or Deadly Conflict. Following the Charismatisation and Pentecostalisation of churches in Amasiri for the past twenty years, these armed or mild conflicts, have become a recurrent feature among some Christians and members of the Ogo society. Efforts made by the government to address the situation appear not to have been fully implemented, thus leaving space for continuous tension. Ogbo Kalu with regard to indigenous communities observes:

When Christianity comes into …a community…. a hidden warfare below the obvious acts of persecution would ensue. A spectrum of reactions would emerge as individuals respond to the spiritual challenge. Grooves of shared worldviews and explanation of spiritual realities may point to certain lines of response but the deep gullies of difference produce conflicts.

Kalu underscores the attempts by converts and members of the indigenous community to negotiate their varying identities and cultures in the face of change.

With this situation in mind, as shown by Kalu, it has been convenient for conflict resolution practices within Amasiri to involve the immediate restoration of peace, without an effective engagement with the root causes of the conflict. In order to engage with the increasing conflict within the Amasiri religious landscape, it is important to locate the root causes of the various conflicts which have taken place in the past.

Civil or religious conflicts are a product of multiple and complex factors. Given the complexity of an indigenous community like Amasiri and the complex nature of ‘conflict’, a single variable may not explain its causes. However, as argued earlier in the last section, religion can and does play a role in both fermenting and preventing conflict. Oliver McTernan notes two possible perspectives on the role of religion in conflict. McTernan observes that people tend to react in one of two ways to stories that link religion and violence. According to him, they either exaggerate religion’s role, denouncing it as the root cause of all conflicts, or they deny that ‘real’ religion could be responsible in any way for indiscriminate violence. Within Amasiri, the conflicts between Christians and members of the Ogo society appear to be rooted in discrimination based on indigenous or church knowledge, status and gender. Furthermore, the causes of conflict are classified on two levels including the remote reasons and the immediate causes. The remote causes are those conditions rooted in the fabric of the society or religion which form the reasons for conflicts. It does appear that the remote causes are hardly capable of causing conflict without the immediate causes. The immediate factors often trigger conflicts of various magnitudes and usually open the doors for the contingent causes of conflicts to be expressed.

Currently there is still restricted movement for both females and the uninitiated males especially during the initiation rituals. Yet, some members of the PCN seem to apply forceful evangelism strategies which sometimes results in the destruction or desecration of the Ogo society’s sacred places and ritual objects. In reaction to such radical evangelism strategies, some members of the Ogo society also


680 “Ogo/ Church Relationship in Afikpo Local Government Area.”
form intensive opposition which often leads to a loss of property including private houses, belongings and church buildings. While some members of the PCN and other Christians seem to maintain an uncompromising attitude to the Ogo society, many members of the society appear to maintain a stand: ‘it is the tradition of our fathers (Omenali)’. Thus, initiation into the Ogo society is continuously seen as the recognised means of transition from childhood to manhood, needed in order to engage with the society. This understanding, however, implies the exclusion of some Christians, the uninitiated males, and especially females, from participating in the affairs of the clan to which they belong. These scenarios can best explain the resilience of certain cultural practices and the inability of Christianity and modernity to eradicate the Ogo society.

The PCN, as previously noted in Chapter Three, officially teaches and promotes baptism, the Lord’s Supper and other rituals as the new and alternative ways of Circumcision and initiation, but they appear to be alien practices to the Amasiri indigenous religious landscape. Moreover, those PCN rituals do not appear to address the communal bond which as discussed in Chapter Two is central to the initiation rituals of the Ogo society. The PCN and many other churches in Amasiri have introduced new symbols, but not all of them have become grounded in the realities of local life. The necessity of a built structure to symbolise the community of worshippers appears to be popular and everywhere within the clan there are buildings which house different churches which members gather within for regular services. The structure of the churches conspicuously differentiates them from the sacred places of the Ogo society and separates those who gather within from outside society. This has reduced the number of people who pay attention to many indigenous rituals. Further, many deny the credibility of the Ogo society.

Vincent Oko Uche in a memorandum to the Church and Ogo Peace Committee notes that the conflict between the church and members of the Ogo society is the result of ‘differences in religion’. He insists that Christianity forbids idolatry totally, which according to him is the hallmark of the Ogo society. He argues

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681 Personal interview with Pastor Kenneth Daniels on 23:06:08.
682 Personal interview with Omezue Oko Isu Abua on 18:07:08.
683 Personal interview with Rev. Anthony Ufere on 18:06:08.
that what members of the Ogo society call development do not mean the same to Christians. Such things according to Uche include:

Building a common resting place (Obu); it is the custody of idols such as Mma Obu. The church will not involve itself in such an exercise. Erecting a public toilet which men own which is often located at Ogo and is known as ‘Ohoro Ogo’. The church has nothing to do with Ogo will always refuse to be involved…. Forceful initiation – Ogo practice, as a cult involves initiation, secrecy, oath taking, signs, symbols and apartheid. The Ogo practitioners practice the compulsory, forceful initiation of every male indigene even without the consent of the parents who may be Christian. The church abhors initiation because it is idolatry which contravenes its faith…. In other parts of the country age grade is a good arm for development but now a greater part of projects handled by age grades is loyal to idols and Ogo such as erecting Ulo-Ogo ekani (an Ogo house). The church does not participate in such an exercise that promotes idols and Ogo….  

The comment from Uche is helpful as it outlines some specific areas and causes of conflict between many Christians and members of the Ogo society. Uche seems to touch on many aspects of the clan’s life, which he identifies as idolatry. His memo appears to suggest a distinctive separation of the church from the indigenous context. According to Omezue Eze Nzagha such negative representation appears to be the basis of many conflicts between Christians and members of the Ogo society. Uche’s view seems to agree with a section (Article 5a and 5ai) of the draft constitution of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Afikpo Branch, which states thus:

Ogo cult is a clear contradiction of Christian faith. No member of CAN should be forced to initiate into Ogo, or to participate in any activities carried out around the Ogo shrine, where such activity is against the ethics of Christianity. Yet every member of CAN shall be entitled to every benefit accrued to him as a member of the society where he belongs.  

CAN identify cultures as being the totality of the way of life of a group of people. As such it seems inconceivable that it can disassociate itself from all aspects of culture and tradition including, i) Initiation into the Ogo society; ii) Age grade system and iii) Ita Erusi (oath taking). All of these are considered as ‘fetish’ practices

685 Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Eze Nzagha on 26:06:08.  
that are against the Christian faith. Interestingly, the constitution appears silent on how Christians who do not abide by the indigenous means of acquiring identity and culture can possibly be entitled to all the rights and privileges of an indigenous community. HRH Joseph Egwu further identifies other causes of conflicts thus:

The revelation of all the aspects of the Ogo practices to the women and non-members in the public places, thereby provoking ‘the peace loving Ogo culture members’; the early morning preaching which invariably disturbs people at sleep. Here they abuse men and women who are not the so-called Christians. They regard non Christians as foolish people; tricking girls and ladies into what they call healing worship at the church from 6pm to about 4am daily. Married women and girls are ransomed illegally against the wishes of their husbands and families. No girls or married women cook for their families. This leads to disrespect and consequently immorality in the community and finally the Christians carry on their crusades within the area the Ogo people operate and they order their women to pass through Ogo where the Ogo members operate, thereby causing confusion and trouble.

HRH Egwu touches on some fundamental issues that describe the conflicts between Christians and members of the Ogo society. As can be seen, the upsurge of different churches with varying approaches to mission has accelerated the conflict situation. These new churches and their practices include the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches which have influenced the mission based churches like the PCN. Yet, Mr. Ewa Ogeri argues that conflicts are the result of intolerance, bad utterances, impatience, abusive language and actions and extreme fanaticism. It is against this backdrop that the Ogo society’s practices are not evil he insists: ‘We would like to emphasise that our traditional religionists are not atheists. We believe in God and the possibility of converting us to Christianity is a matter of faith. We say Obasi di elu (God above), we observe the same laws of brotherhood and love.’

It is possible to argue in light of the discussion so far that the conflict between many Christians and members of the Ogo society is the result of a misrepresentation of the other. The greatest obstacle to a smooth relationship thus centres on the

687 Ibid. p.1.
prejudice which appears to separate Christians from members of the Ogo society.\textsuperscript{690} Questions of description, depiction or representation are not merely issues of authenticity or realness of this or that image. The issue, as Edward Said points out, is that such descriptions of the ‘other’ are framed in the ideological structure of the objectifier, with the local being a passive object in the objectifier’s gaze.\textsuperscript{691} As previously discussed in Chapter Three, the cultural representation of the other, especially of the many Christians of the Ogo society appears to follow similar lines of thoughts which were a core feature of Western colonial, missionary and neo-colonial discourses. This appears to be demonstrated in the practices of stereotyping that provide the backbone as well as various strategies (such as, eroticisation, debasement, idealisation and self-affirmation) that flesh out the imagined other.\textsuperscript{692}

However, a concentration on Christian or Western representation does not deny the fact that representational practices were prevalent among members of the indigenous communities too. In fact, cultures have their own particular representational practices for perceiving those considered as the other. Production of knowledge about the other through representation goes hand in hand with the construction, articulation and affirmation of differences between self and others, which in turn feeds into the identity politics amongst the representer as well as the represented. Pastor Daniel Ekwe argues for example that:

\begin{quote}
Initiation into the Ogo society contradicts the Christian faith and morals. It is a confirmation of the spirit of Paganism, the spirit of darkness. No well-meaning Christian should dare involve himself or his or her son in that ‘cultic’ practice which has kept both our forefathers and our present clan in bondage. The initiation into the Ogo society is responsible for the retarded progress of our clan.\textsuperscript{693}
\end{quote}

Furthermore, Charles Osim and Prince Itiri describe the Ogo society as the ‘highest cult in the land…This passage of transition from childhood to manhood is a process

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{690} Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
\item \textsuperscript{693} Personal interview with Pastor Daniel Ekwe on 23:06:08
\end{itemize}
of initiation enveloped in fetish ritual practices and ceremonies….in Amasiri context it is fetish in all ramifications.\textsuperscript{694} Once again here there is some form of stereotyping which does not seem to give consideration to competing interpretations of indigenous phenomena like the initiation rituals. ‘Stereotype’ is a one-sided description of a group or culture resulting from the collapsing of complex differences into a simple cardboard cut out, seeing people as a pre-set image and more of a formula than as human beings. It reduces people or culture to a few simple characteristics, which are then represented as fixed by nature.\textsuperscript{695}

As previously noted, the representation of the Ogo society by many Christians appears to be continued from the missionary and colonial structures. The observation of Polonhons Pokawin appears evident within contemporary Amasiri: ‘Traditional cultures have been treated as something merely human – to be easily done away with – but Christianity has been accepted as something from God and not to be questioned.’\textsuperscript{696} Thus it is easier for some members of the PCN and other Christians to treat the Ogo society with disdain and its members with contempt. This attitude is shown in the countless derogatory terms and appellations used to describe the Ogo society and its members. They include: Paganism, Animism, Fetishism, Idolatry, Polytheism and Heathenism. Members of the Ogo society are thus called, (nde nekperi erusi) idol worshippers, (nde amaghi Chineke) pagans, (nde nachu ejja) animists and (nde amaghi Chinke ndu) heathens.\textsuperscript{697}

‘Christianity having knowingly or unknowingly anchored itself in modern European cultures has engendered in its members a superiority complex, which sees indigenous religions and cultural values as primitive and unprogressive.’\textsuperscript{698} An


\textsuperscript{697} Personal interview with Pastor Daniel Ekwe on 23:06:08.

understanding of the ways that indigenous communities were represented within the colonial and missionary discourses can therefore assist in identifying similar processes that continue in contemporary societies. It highlights the essentially politicised nature of representations of the ‘Other’ and representational practices. In contrast to the ways in which the Ogo society has been represented, Ewa Ogeri argues:

It is the law that every male child of our land must be initiated into the Ogo culture. Initiation into the Ogo culture is training, improvement of the mind, morals and test which enables the person to become a full fledged man… The laws of initiation help us to prevent the uninitiated from committing fornication. It is an offence for anyone who is not initiated to impregnate a woman and the law forbids him from marrying. Non initiates have no control over the affairs of the land…. Women and non initiates are disallowed from knowledge of anything about the cult.  

As Ogeri points out, the initiation into the Ogo society occupies a central place within Amasiri. It is a legitimate means of religious experience and communion with God and the ancestors, and these issues should be well considered and recognised if there is to be a fairer understanding between the competing religious constituencies within Amasiri. Ogeri’s point underscores the fact that the Ogo society is no less an inadequate attempt, but that it is an equally intellectually and spiritually viable way of perceiving and living in the visible world. Emefie Metuh argues that for ‘Africans, especially those who have not embraced Christianity, there are no other means of expression and realisation of their relationship to God than through their religions, which could be said to be legitimate and have a special place in God’s salvific place.’  

The point thus is that indigenous perspectives to life, morality and worship require genuine respect by others for a more effective engagement and understanding. Patrick Kalilombe argues regarding African religions that it is ‘essentially a way of living in the visible sphere in relation with the invisible world.’  


\[\text{699} \ Ogeri, "Memorandum Presented to the Secretary to the State Government of Abia State by the Essa Traditional Council Ehugbo (Afikpo) on Ogo/Church Issues." \ p.5. \]

\[\text{700} \ Metuh, \textit{African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation}. \ p.135. \]

\[\text{701} \ P. A. \text{ Kalilombe,} \textit{Doing Theology at the Grassroots: Theological Essays from Malawi}, \textit{Kachere} Book (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1999), p.212. \]
One, Two and Four pervade the whole of life, of individuals as well as of the community – or rather, of the individuals in the community. Therefore, for many indigenous Amasiri, the *Ite isiji* (initiation) into the Ogo society is not only a means of relating with God and the ancestors, it is also a process of acquiring political and social rights in the community. In addition, it confers the individual with the right to own a land and build a house. Omezue Hilary Eze Nzagha further notes:

> In a unique way initiation into the Ogo society marks the rite of transition into manhood. In addition, it provides sources of informal education and military training. The rigorous spiritual and ritual activities that qualify one for this, last for a period, but is intended to inculcate into the initiate a sense of belonging and responsibility. It is a type of school, similar to the Western type of studies. The strenuous training exposes the candidates to the art of traditional warfare, and use of herbs.\(^{702}\)

Nzagha’s point further demonstrates the competing interpretations of the Ogo society which should be understood for effective resolution of the lingering conflicts between some Christians and members of the Ogo society today. The initiation into the Ogo society enables the initiates to acquire moral conduct and the discipline to keep secrets. As a mark of identity, it instils the spirit of pride in initiates who regard themselves as superior to other uninitiated males. As noted previously, in Chapter Two, successful initiates are conferred with the status of full-fledged members of the clan and are thus regarded as complete. The initiation has many implications for both Christians and members of the Ogo society and will not be easily wished away. Chief Augustine Chukwu notes that the uninitiated persons are not allowed to take up Chieftaincy titles or become traditional rulers and would not be allowed to compete for elective political offices.\(^{703}\) Furthermore, most uninitiated persons would not be allowed to belong or lead their age grades, because they are not considered to be fully belonging. Age grades, as previously explained in Chapter One, serve as a crucial agency for socio-economic and political empowerment and the development of both individuals and community. Every age grade is expected to present a completed project to their village. The projects are usually allocated by the ruling elders of each village. However, contemporary experiences show a critique of the

\(^{702}\) Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Eze Nzagha on 26:06:08.

\(^{703}\) Personal interview with Chief Augustine Chukwu on 30:06:08.
uninitiated males’ involvement in executing community projects. Friday Obiahu observes:

Although we disregard the uninitiated males into the Ogo society, when it comes to age grade projects we do all we can to involve as many people as possible including the uninitiated who may ordinarily not be registered members of our age grade. We do so because the more the members the lesser the cost per head in order to undertake such projects. I must tell you that it is never easy to arrive at allowing the uninitiated males to contribute toward an age grade’s projects. In our age grade for instance, it took a lot of discussion which nearly tore us apart before we could allow such a thing to happen.  

This observation from Obiahu demonstrates the contemporary impact of funding on indigenous traditions. However, the dilemma remains that although the uninitiated male into the Ogo society (depending on the age grade involved) may contribute towards the development projects, he is still not valued as a full member of the community. Strangely, for some already initiated males who later become Christians, their situation also varies. Charles Osim observes, ‘Christians could contribute to development projects, but must be careful not to be involved in the fetish activities of the Ogo society. Any contribution that makes for the perpetuation of the barbaric activities is unchristian and should be avoided.’ While Osim’s point is helpful, it leaves lots of ambiguities, for instance whose place is it to determine what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘fetish’ or ‘unfetish’ within an indigenous community. As shown in Chapters One and Two, the development of Amasiri depends on the extent that the age grades are able to pool their resources. The non-involvement of some Christians in the age grade system thus implies less participation in both developmental activities and the leadership of the clan. Participation however, impacts on integration and social cohesion which includes economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions. As such, those Christians who in defence of their ‘faith’ disengage from the society also in some sense lose their pride of belonging and identity as members of the community.

As previously described, the PCN and other Christian groups appear to be the most divided on the subject of initiation into the Ogo society. On the surface it may appear as though they speak with one voice, but a closer study reveals the extent of

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704 Personal interview with Mr. Friday Obiahu on 27:06:08.
705 Personal interview with Elder Charles Osim on 30:06:08.
division and diversity of opinions on the matter. Some Christians who have tried to resist attempts to be initiated have often ended up excluding themselves from the social community and its networks. Such seclusion impacts on the sense of belonging and participation and most importantly on the extent that an individual is regarded or valued within the social networks. This scenario therefore calls for a reassessment of the integral place of the Ogo society, including its essence, socio-religious symbolism and the role it can and does plays within a contemporary indigenous community like the Amasiri. Such a renewed approach may unmask the various forms of internalised representation and stereotyping of the ‘other’, which as argued, has formed the basis for many conflicts between many Christians and members of the Ogo society.

5.6 Conflict Resolution

As noted earlier, the relationship between religion and conflict is an ambivalent one, thus many conflict resolution theorists have largely adopted the view that organised religion is primarily, if not necessarily, an instigator of violence. As a result, such theorists have tended to ignore religion as a force in peace building. However, in recent times, some scholars have argued that religion can and does contribute constructively towards conflict resolution. Individuals internalise cultural components differently, and as such the deeper the cultural content is internalised, the more likely images or schemes will motivate actions. As highlighted earlier, religion does influence the cultural behaviour and perceptions of an individual or group to varying degrees. When religious values, norms and behaviour are the integral part of the interaction between individuals and among groups like in the case of the Amasiri clan, then religion can help to construct both individual’s and the group’s value system and worldview. On the other hand, if an individual or a group


has internalised a set of religious values, these beliefs can motivate changes of attitude and action.\textsuperscript{708}

Conflict resolution should therefore examine the decision-making of religious actors and leaders more systematically in order for strategies of peacemaking to be effective in relevant contexts. Issues related to the mixture of religious and pragmatic motivations in behaviour, the struggle between intra-communal moral values and other indigenous values that generate conflict must be given adequate consideration.\textsuperscript{709} In the case of the conflict situations highlighted earlier in this chapter, the police and church leaders of the individual members involved were notified, but as already shown, most church leaders and members seem to have stayed away from engaging with the situation in order to avert the attack of some members of the Ogo society. The police, in most cases, only arrived when the situation was dying down and only ended up taking statements from a few individuals.

Following the recurrent nature of the conflicts, the then Secretary to the State government directed the Afikpo Local Government Area (L. G. A.) chairman to set up a Peace Committee. The committee’s term of reference was as follows: ‘To determine issues that had led to conflicts in the past; to meet and resolve all conflicts between Christians and members of the Ogo society and to propose how the conflict could be eliminated in future.’\textsuperscript{710} The committee was inaugurated on 8\textsuperscript{th} May, 1995, it had five representatives each from the government, CAN, the Ogo society and three ex-officio members and it was headed by Rev. Fr. Innocent Ekumauche Okoh. The committee received thirty-five memoranda and worked for five months before presenting their report.\textsuperscript{711} Due to the limited time, the committee merely examined

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the contents of the memoranda that it received as well as a few public and private interviews where necessary. It appears that no efforts were made by the committee to visit either the conflict sites nor were any of the victims of the conflicts invited, as all their meetings were held at the local government council chambers.\textsuperscript{712} Such shortcomings appear to have impeded the overall submission of the committee.

Following the submission of the peace committee’s report, the then State government issued a ‘white paper’, which read thus: ‘the Government is fully conscious of the importance of the maintenance of peace in all communities of Abia State, worried by the constant breach of peace in Afikpo caused by regular conflicts between the adherents of Ogo traditional customs and the Christians and the subsequent destruction of life and property set up a committee made up of five delegates representing the Government, five delegates representing the Christian Association of Nigeria, five delegates representing the Ogo traditionalists and five Traditional Rulers who served as ex-officio members.’\textsuperscript{713} In relation to the Ogo society, the white paper read:

No one should be compelled to undergo the Ogo cultic initiation. Initiation should be voluntary or optional. Note: Section 37 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979 grants every citizen the right to freedom of association for the protection of his interests. It therefore amounts to an infringement of a citizen’s fundamental rights if he is compelled to belong to any association. No one should be denied the right to live in a village compound of his/her choice because he/she is not initiated or has refused to perform certain rituals that are against his/her faith. Note: Section 39 of the 1979 Constitution provides that a citizen shall not be discriminated against on grounds \textit{Inter alia}, of religion. Oath taking/swearing is according to one’s faith. It should be left to the dictates of one’s conscience and religious belief. Note: Section 35 of the 1979 Constitution provides for the right of every citizen to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Christians should not be forced to participate in any non-Christian burial rites, such as \textit{Okwa Ozu}, \textit{Igbu Inyanya}, until such a time the Christians and the Ogo practitioners will work out a way to avoid the ‘fetish’ aspect of such ceremonies. Note: As in (3) above. Wrestling in Afikpo is still associated with sacrifices and homage paid to the shrine before and after wrestling. Wrestling is a cultural practice which should be encouraged. However, in the interests of peace, Christians who do not wish to participate should be left alone until such a time that wrestling is divested of all sacrifices. Note: As in (3) above. Demolition of houses, looting of livestock and property as punishment for avenging the wrath of the Ogo god is a primitive and ‘barbaric’ act. Such acts constitute a criminal offence for which the offender should be prosecuted according to the law of the land. Note: Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to own property whether movable

\textsuperscript{712} Personal interview with Elder Obinna Oka on 23:06:08. Elder Oka was a member of the Peace committee.

or immovable subject to the general law. The criminal code and other penal laws have adequate provisions for the protection of properties. Masquerades are for entertainment. But when a masquerade constitutes itself into a nuisance by terrorising people, conflicts are bound to occur. To avoid a masquerade losing its ‘life’ the Ogo cultists should avoid harassing non-members of the Ogo cult. Cultural practices that subject mothers of twins to some indignities are repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience. Such practices are therefore declared illegal by law. Cases of that nature should be reported to the police for necessary action.

Although none of these conditions have been implemented, the white paper suggested the relocation or walling of all Ogo squares and said that membership of age groups and town unions should be open to all who so desire. Therefore, fund raised for development purposes by these two groups should only be used for that purpose. This section is not explicit on how individual members of the community can participate in the developmental activities of the clan. This point is crucial given that as earlier argued the age grade system is mainly the indigenous agency for social and community development, given that the government has failed to offer service deliveries to the community.

The white paper seems to have taken a view which suggests that most of the activities of the Ogo society are fetish. Such a perception seems not to give considerations to the socio-religious implications of the Ogo society including, education, training and its role in maintaining social order. As can be seen from the extract, there is repeated use of derogatory terms such as ‘barbaric, fetish and heathenism’ in describing the Ogo society. Such representations appear to follow the same line of thought as those of many colonial administrators and missionaries. The representations of the Ogo society thus remain enmeshed in asymmetrical power relations. Another section of the white paper focuses on Christians and states as follows:

Christians should not advocate the total eradication of Ogo cultural practices. Rather the Church should advocate the adaptation or inculturation of some practices that are not offensive to the Christian faith and morals. This cannot be achieved by open confrontation with adherents of the Ogo tradition. Christians should refrain from early morning street preaching and confine themselves to Church premises. Christians should avoid the use of provocative and abusive language against the Ogo tradition or any religion, especially during the early morning preaching or at any other time. Christians should not trespass the Ogo walled enclosures to avoid conflict. Note: Trespass is a civil offence. Clearance should be sought from the police before any public gathering takes place outside the Church premises.

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714 Personal interview with Chief Dickson Osim on 30:06:08.
Christians should from time to time restrain their new converts and teach them to respect the traditions of other people. Christians should contribute towards identified development projects and participate in administering such funds. Note: Section 31 (2) (d) of the 1979 Constitution empowers any community to impose any normal communal or other civil obligations for the well-being of the community.\footnote{Okoronkwo and Ekeleme, "The Ogo/Church Conflict in Afikpo: The Stand of the Government of Abia State." p.2.}

As shown in the white paper, there are many ambiguities; for instance, Christians are to advocate the adaptation or inculturation of some cultural practices that are not offensive to the Christian faith. The paper does not seem to be clear on how the inculturation can be achieved, and it does not take into account the indigenous approach to conflict resolution. Indigenous value systems and structures as demonstrated in Chapter One can offer an effective service to resolve these lingering conflicts. It is important to take the social context into due consideration in which potential and actual conflicts occurs. Values and beliefs, fears and suspicion, interests, representation and stereotyping, relationships and networks duly have to be taken into consideration. Family ties and community networks are constantly respected, maintained and strengthened. When there is a dispute between different parties, priority is often given to restoring the relationships. Birgit Brock-Utne observes in relation to Africa that the method of negotiation generally used is the neighbourhood system. He argues that the success of this method in conflict resolution can be attributed to its elemental simplicity, participatory nature, adaptable flexibility and complete relevance. The approach according to Brock-Utne often looks forward to the future, for improved relationships – not only between the disputants but also in the whole community.\footnote{B. Brock-Utne, "Indigenous Conflict Resolution in Africa." in \textit{Week-end Seminar on Indigenous Solutions to Conflicts} (University of Oslo, Institute for Educational Research: http://www.africavenir.org/uploads/media/BrockUtneTradConflictResolution.pdf (Date accessed, 29th April 2010), 23th – 24th February 2001). pp.6-10.}

Assessing the ‘white paper’ since its release in 1995, Pastor Daniel Ekwe argues that it was ‘a demonic attempt to silence Christianity in Amasiri, but thank God the paper died naturally.’\footnote{Personal interview with Pastor Daniel Ekwe on 23:06:08.} On the contrary, Elder Mrs. Esther Ukandu sees no problem with the paper, but argues that the problem of its realisation lies among
many Christians and members of the Ogo society who opposed it from the onset. On the other hand, Omezue Joseph Akwuba observes that most of the issues raised in the paper are unrealisable and as such many members of the Ogo society never thought of giving it any consideration. Furthermore, Nna Egwu Nwosi argues that ‘strangers cannot tell us how to administer our clan. As such the paper is of no relevance.’ Rev. A. N. Ukoma also asserts that the ‘white paper’ was never implemented owing to the fact that even among those who sat on the committee; the paper was simply seen as a quick response to the State government’s directive. As a result of this, the intended purposes of the paper have not been achieved and many Christians and members of the Ogo society continue to live in continuous tension.

The tension appears to be that which involves a contest of cultures and identities within social groups. How people function within different social situations and relate to a range of other people is crucially important within the discourses of cultures and identities. These groups may involve families, communities, cultural connections, friends and churches. All these networks serve varying and essential purposes which are often contested and negotiated. Contemporary indigenous communities like Amasiri continue to experience a gradual erosion of the values that existed within it and their replacement with foreign ones. However, many of the indigenous values and practices still survive, as previously noted even in the face of Christianity and other innovations. This is the result of complex factors including the continuous attempts by many members of the Ogo society and some Christians to preserve their cultural identities. Consequently, an understanding of identities and cultures call for a re-examination of the conventional discourses of social relationships and the need for dialogue.

718 Personal interview with Elder Mrs. Esther Ukandu on 04:08:08.
719 Personal interview with Omezue Joseph Akwuba on 17:07:08.
720 Personal interview with Nna Egwu Nwosi on 26:06:08.
721 Personal interview with Rev. A. N. Ukoma on 24:07:08.
CHAPTER SIX
PARADIGM SHIFT: INTERACTION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND
THE OGO SOCIETY

Introduction
Religious diversity appears inherent in all contemporary societies and sometimes the role of religion as a means of peaceful co-existence and social cohesion remains ambivalent. Within Amasiri, religious plurality has been a part of the clan’s social life at least since the establishment of Christianity in 1927. In an era of religious pluralism, the analysis of the intersection and interactions between and within religious groups and sub-groups has brought forth innovative scholarship that at times challenges the notion of identity, belief and expression. As shown in the previous chapters of the thesis (especially Chapter Five), Christianity appears to be visible, however, the Ogo society still have members within Amasiri. The influence of religion on all aspects of life, including family, village and community remains substantial. Religion viewed in this way allows for a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between indigenous Amasiri and Christian mission. The indigenous religion (especially the Ogo society) retains resiliency and adaptability that enables it to maintain cohesion in changing societies. Furthermore, as Adogame points out, indigenous religions are characterised by their negotiation between continuity, change and transformation.\textsuperscript{722}

In 1962 Thomas Kuhn wrote ‘the Structure of Scientific Revolution’, in which he defined and popularised the concept of ‘Paradigm shift’. Kuhn argues that ‘scientific advancement is not evolutionary, but rather is a series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions and in those revolutions one conceptual worldview is replaced by another. A paradigm shift can thus be viewed as a change from one way of thinking to another. It is a revolution, a transformation which does not simply happen, but rather is driven by acts of change.\textsuperscript{723} As a major model of events, the term ‘paradigm shift’ has since become widely applied to many other areas of human experiences as well. Here it is used to

\textsuperscript{722} Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa." p.529.
argue for a shift from the old paradigm of representation of the ‘other’ and stereotyping as highlighted in Chapter Five to dialogue. Although as previously argued, the Amasiri clan’s situation represents a complex variety of religious expression and interreligious dialogue appears to be a relatively new phenomenon within the clan. Today ‘inter-religious dialogue’ has become a well-used phrase and it finds its promoters and sponsors in many walks of society. However, as Hans Ucko notes, the more dialogue has proliferated, the more difficult it has become to change its course in order to make it suit the particular demands of the societies. Different views have been represented in the discourses of dialogue including the ‘exclusivist’ by Lesslie Newbigin; ‘pluralistic’ represented by John Hick; and ‘inclusivist’ by Gavin D’Costa.

This chapter explores the option of dialogue for the current religious climate within the Amasiri. It stimulates a deeper understanding of the dynamic of dialogue and also shows the benefits and challenges of interacting, both as individuals and communities with different religious traditions. The chapter includes a discussion and comparative study of religious beliefs and possibilities of agreement and community. Religions, according to Volter Kuester, are pluralistic complexes, which are partly related to each other or influence each other. He argues that inter-religious dialogue does not take place between religions, but between the members of different religious systems. Anastasios (Yannoulatos) underscores this point thus: ‘The inter-religious dialogue is not an encounter between religious systems in abstract ways, but rather a meeting between human persons who share a common human nature.’ Members of different religions thus appear to construct their religious


identities on the basis of their life experiences and the continuously changing contexts. However, it should be pointed out that neither the constructions of identities nor the inter-religious encounter take place in a space without power relations. Firstly there is the question which group within a religious community has the power to define what is accepted, and what is not. Secondly, it is important to ascertain which religious tradition is in the majority position in a certain context. The aim of promoting dialogue, however, between Christianity and the Ogo society is to make diversity a source of mutual enrichment and to foster understanding, reconciliation and tolerance.

6.1 Engaging the Two Models: Dialectic and Dialogic

Through an assessment of the ways in which Christianity has been understood by many people (including Amasiri) in relation to indigenous cultures, Julius Lipner, shows that it is possible to distinguish (without necessarily separating) two major tendencies or models, namely, dialectic and dialogic models. According to the dialectic model, the gospel and culture are opposed to each other, in perpetual conflict with each other, and their struggle against each other is irreconcilable. Such polarity is often expressed according to Ernest Ezeogu ‘in the language of contrasting spatial, temporal, and circumstantial metaphors, such as these: the gospel is from above, culture from below; the gospel is light, indigenous cultures is darkness; the gospel is from God, indigenous cultures is from human; the gospel is eternal, indigenous cultures time-bound, and so on’. Richard Niebuhr describes this as an uncompromising affirmation of the sole authority of Christ over the Christian. The overall view of indigenous cultures is negative: indigenous cultures are thus exploited and deprecated, not respected. The consequence of such a tendency is the trivialisation of indigenous cultures. Irrespective of whatever issues that might possibly arise between the Bible and indigenous cultures, the dialectic

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mind often has a pre-packaged answer: ‘yes to the Bible, no to indigenous cultures’. Paul Gifford, on the rapid church growth in Africa, writes about the ‘enormous increase of Christianity South of the Sahara’. Gifford highlights the dominant phenomena of the religious scene. First is Pentecostalism, or neo-Pentecostalism, which he describes as ‘undoubtedly the salient sector of African Christianity today.’ The second according to him is the so-called ‘faith gospel’, or ‘prosperity gospel’. As noted earlier in Chapter Five regarding the PCN, Gifford demonstrates that the teachings of these two movements have even penetrated the mainline churches. He insists that Africa’s new Pentecostal churches largely ignore church tradition, demonise indigenous religions and cultures and dismiss the contemporary socio-political situation as religiously irrelevant. These phenomena are therefore not simply a case within the Pentecostal or Charismatic churches, but also reflects within mission-based churches like the PCN. While Gifford’s analysis appears crucial, Ogbu Kalu notes that contrary to Gifford’s assumption, the church is not like the state in Africa and as such Gifford’s approach fails to produce an accurate image of a lived faith. His approach seems to undermine the vibrant creativity and complex situations which in the opinion of Kwame Bediko makes Africa the laboratory of modern Christianity.

As Gifford highlights, this attitude to indigenous cultures by many contemporary Amasiri Christians can be seen as a continuity of the Western missionary paradigm. Although the missionaries devoted quality time to translating the Bible and strove to enable their converts to read it, the missionaries and their converts actually used the Bible above all as a symbol of Christianity’s claimed superiority. As such they did not merely read the Bible to their listeners, but rather

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737 Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
demonstrated its purpose. According to advocates of the dialectic model, the
dichotomy between the gospel and indigenous cultures can only be resolved in one
possible way, by indigenous cultures yielding to the demands of the gospel. John Cobb, Jr notes with regret:

Today, as we look back, we are not as proud of these accomplishments as we once were. We see that what crumbled and was lost was not without its own value. We see that the Christian institutions and beliefs that replaced it have been highly ambiguous. What we once confidently considered progress now seems mixed.  

Cobb draws attention to the foundational implications of the Christian missions to indigenous communities like the Amasiri and the ways in which the missions impacted on indigenous cultures. As noted earlier, there appears to be a continuity of such impacts, which persist in the missions of many members of the PCN today. It is a reconstruction and sustenance of such a superiority complex which has continued to increase the level of conflicts among Christians and members of the Ogo society.

The dialectic model contrasts with the dialogic model which views indigenous cultures as ‘mutually inimical on the whole, but in some sense, as complementary.’ The gospels are thus a result of the dialogue between God’s saving action and the Jewish cultures in the life and teachings of Jesus, and between the living Christ’s expression and the Greek medium in which the gospels have been transmitted. It is also possible to go through the history of Biblical interpretation and to see how the reading of the Bible has influenced and been influenced by the evolution of cultures. Cultures then are the medium – the living situation, language, imagery, myth, signs, and rituals – through and in which the gospel is received, experienced, expressed, communicated and transmitted. Interestingly, the Christianity that reached indigenous clans like Amasiri had undergone several stages of re-organisation. Andrew Walls argues that Christianity in some ways has been the


most syncretistic of the great faiths. In the dialogic model the interaction is acknowledged to exist between gospel and cultures as the origin and transmission of the gospel. The dialogic model presupposes that the gospel and indigenous cultures can and should have a dialogue and blend harmoniously. However, as demonstrated earlier in Chapter Five, the contemporary experiences of many Christians and their attitude towards the Ogo society appears to be overtly dialectical and seems to form the basis on which tension continues to exist between many Christians and members of the Ogo society.

6.2 Mapping the Factors for Dialectic Approach to Culture

The factors for the dialectic approach of relating the Bible and indigenous cultures can be enormous, but two basic factors can be identified including: external (missionary teachings and strategy) and internal (novelty of the written word). As earlier noted in Chapter three, many Christian missionaries sent to Africa in the early days of the missionary movement were apparently theologically ill-equipped for the task ahead of them. Many of them, were recruited in the same way that the Crusaders of the Middle Ages were recruited for war. Kalu further underscored this point thus:

R. P. Wilder’s visit to Cambridge in January 1892 set in motion the development of the Students’ Volunteer Movements. Conferences and meetings became regular aspects of Christian living. The dramatic features in Exeter Hall conferences when the lights would be put out and in the dark, a voice call out: Whom shall I send, who will go for me? ....The recruitment strategy was most dramatic.... Deputation was another strategy for recruitment. As missionaries on furlough recounted their experiences, others felt like striking a blow for Christ.

It appears therefore that the qualification for missionary work heavily depended on how robust the volunteer’s spirituality was adjudged. Health, according to Kalu, was also considered to be important as successful candidates were sent to doctors for a medical examination. Thus, a satisfactory medical result formed a crucial basis on which missionaries were recruited. Through this process many missionaries saw

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742Ezeogu, "Bible and Culture in African Christianity.” p.29.
themselves as ‘Christian soldiers marching as to war’ against demonic powers and the forces of darkness in order to liberate the land for Christ and save the hell-bound souls of its helpless inhabitants. Indigenous communities like Amasiri, together with its cultures and religions, represented for many of them the kingdom of Satan, fit only to be overthrown and brought to subjection to the superior power of the Cross of Jesus.

Stanley notes that it was the belief that the cultures which the missionaries were penetrating were in no sense religiously neutral – rather they were under the control of the ‘Evil one’. It was said, according to him, that ‘heathen societies were the domain of Satan in all their aspects – not merely religiously, but also in economics, politics, public morals, the arts, and all that is embraced by the term ‘culture’. Modern responses to this tend to be clouded by the current unacceptability of idololatry as a category for describing other faiths. Furthermore, Alan Dundes describes such an attitude to culture as the ravages of bias. He argues that many nineteenth and twentieth century missions compared African practices and cultures to the ideals of Europe, thereby concluding that indigenous practices were inferior.

The question however, is if one does insist on comparing cultures, whose value system is to be employed? The Enlightenment, however, together with the scientific and technological advances that followed in its wake, appear to have put the West at an unparalleled advantage over the rest of the world. It is only logical that the feeling of superiority would also rub off on the religion of Western Christianity. The sense of progress was imposed upon history to create the sense of order that the Victorians craved. In a very real sense they invented the past, since all the factual discoveries of antiquaries and archaeologists had to be interpreted within a conceptual scheme that satisfied the cultural demands of the age. David Bosch

744 Ezeogu, "Bible and Culture in African Christianity." p.29.
745 Stanley, The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries pp.160-162.
notes that ‘as a matter of fact, in most cases there was no attempt to distinguish between religious and cultural supremacy – what was applied to one was applied equally automatically to the other.’\textsuperscript{748} Just as the West’s religion was predestined to be spread around the globe, the West’s cultures was to be victorious over all others. Georg Hegel argued that ‘Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia is the beginning’. Furthermore, Hegel with regards to Africa wrote, ‘Africa is characterised by concentrated sensuality, immediacy of will, absolute inflexibility, and inability to develop’. Thus in the light of his findings he concluded an indisputable and self-evident superiority of the West.\textsuperscript{749}

Writing on the implications of such a dialectic and superior attitude towards indigenous cultures, Lesslie Newbigin observes that the young churches that were established by the missionaries were ‘planted on the mission fields as replicas of the churches on the mission agency’s home front, ‘blessed’ with all the paraphernalia of those churches…..’\textsuperscript{750} Hegel and Newbigin’s comments draw attention to the power dimensions which characterised many nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries. It is thus important to underscore the point that Christianity grew out of a period of exhilaration, ideology, new information and colonialism. As shown, attempts were made to impose categories and structures on the newly established churches without due consideration of their indigenous context. Jenkins further observes that ‘Western Christians who ventured into the mission fields were more commonly drawn from conservative churches, or from conservative and traditional-minded branches of mixed denominations. Less fervent believers, or the broad-minded, tended to stay at home.’\textsuperscript{751} While Jenkins and Hegel’s points are helpful, it should be pointed out that the missionaries were children of their time, and seem to have played the game of the

time. Ogbu Kalu underscores the impact of home-based cultures on the missionaries thus:

> From a historical perspective, the forces in the homebases or metropoles of missionaries determined, to a large extent, what they did in the field…. Those who came on cross-cultural missions were children of their culture and times. Many came with pre-set notions of what they were to do and how they should go about the task. They had a certain motivation as well as an image of the host communities…

Missionaries thus did not arrive in the indigenous communities from socio-cultural vacuums. They went to the mission fields equipped with many ideologies and basic orientations. Therefore, an understanding of the ideology which guided the mission’s enterprise is crucially important in order to be on familiar terms with what many missionaries did in the field. However, such an understanding of Christianity and Western societies appears to have given rise in practice to a missionary strategy that emphasises not dialogue but authority, not love but power. This is in keeping with the missionaries’ self understanding as ‘soldiers of Christ’.

As shown in Chapter One indigenous leaders were often presented in a bad light as inimical to the gospel and converts were sometimes encouraged to disregard them. Jon Miller asserts that, ‘Missionaries sent to Africa typically believed that their special calling was to guide the natives to salvation by teaching them a way of living radically different from what they had previously known…. Converts were required to accept European names, dress, customs, and family forms….’ The assumption was that indigenous communities like Amasiri were at a low stage on the evolutionary scale. It was therefore thought that through the presence of the (white) missionaries, the indigenous people could be brought to a higher stage of culture. The nexus between the convert as a religious dissenter and the convert as a colonial subject broadens the scope of conversion narratives to include a trans-cultural

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754 Ezeogu, ”Bible and Culture in African Christianity.” p.29.
perspective not otherwise visible in the nineteenth century. The Director of the Scottish Missionary Society for instance wrote to the serving missionaries thus:

In labouring among the heathens, we would recommend to you not merely to converse with them, but to deliver discourses, to them on the subject of religion. Though conversation is certainly a very important means of usefulness, yet to this you must by no means confine yourself. The director’s comment seems to suggest that the SMS missionaries were simply expected to deliver discourses without listening to the indigenous people. This implies that the missionaries already had pre-packaged answers to the questions which the indigenous people never asked. Furthermore, Hendrick Kraemer observes thus:

The missionary is a revolutionary and he has to be so, for to preach and plant Christianity means to make a frontal attack on the beliefs, the customs, the apprehensions of life and the world, and by implication (because tribal religions are primarily social realities) on the social structures and basis of primitive society.

This suggests that the indigenous practices of the host communities should be uprooted in a bid to ‘plant Christianity’. This option spelt doom to many missionaries among the Igbo including those within the UFCS mission. However, the challenge for Christian mission to Amasiri was the problem of defining the relationship between Christianity and the indigenous practices. Steven Kaplan has noted that of the many issues confronting African Christianity today, none would appear to have received more attention than the problem of defining the precise relationship between Christianity and indigenous religions. Charles Groves argues that to handle such a

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problem the missionary should distinguish between Christianity and Western cultures, and should also appropriate the existing cultures. Groves warns that an attempt to ignore this caution would produce a set of Christians who show loyalties to the new demands while in reality are continuing with their former indigenous practices. It could also produce Christians who after a while would relapse into their former indigenous religious life because of gross dissatisfaction with the demands of Christianity.\textsuperscript{762}

A former UFCS missionary to Nigeria, Faith Adrian, in an interview remarked, ‘I think we missionaries were too inclined to think we should train students in our ways of doing things. As a teacher everything was done in English and there was no opportunity for language study.’\textsuperscript{763} Adrian’s observation may not simply be limited to language, but also to the Europeanised ways of learning and teaching. These attitudes explain what Okot p’Bitek terms, ‘the myth of superiority’.\textsuperscript{764} Thus following these processes an attitude of dichotomy between Christian gospel and indigenous cultures was sown in the minds of the young converts, which as shown in Chapter Five has continued to the present. This, as shown under the periodisation of PCN at Amasiri, is evident in the derogatory terms that many contemporary members of the PCN use to describe the indigenous practices. Within Amasiri, the conflict between the UFCS and members of the Ogo society is more obvious because there appears to have been a clash of worldviews and cultures. Alastair Brown, a former UFCS’s missionary to Nigeria asserts with regards to the Ogo society thus:

One night my wife and I looked out of the window and saw a large number of naked men moving around the market square in Afikpo, some carrying cudgels. We understood that women, in particular, were not expected to view this sight, so we drew the curtains and returned to what we were doing… It seemed to be something that was practiced in the dark and did appear threatening. It was apparently exclusive of women.\textsuperscript{765}


\textsuperscript{763} Personal interview with Faith Adrian on 22:05:07.

\textsuperscript{764} p’Bitek, \textit{African Religions in Western Scholarship}, p.44.

\textsuperscript{765} Personal interview with Alastair Brown on 17:05:07.
The exclusion of females within the Ogo society and its practices appears to have increased the difficulties of Brown and some other UFCS missionaries in tolerating the society. Ogo society was perceived as promoting male dominance over the females, a practice which the mission opposed. However, such perception and stereotyping as demonstrated in earlier chapters appears questionable.

The initiation rituals into the Ogo society, as shown in Chapter Two not only involve males, but also females and the entire community. It does appear that Brown only saw a part of the Ogo rituals, but a holistic understanding of the ritual processes within the Ogo society is needed for a more balanced assessment of its activities. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the males’ attitude towards females is not only a complex issue within indigenous communities like Amasiri, but can be traced within the missionary discourses. It was perceived, for instance in the days of Miss Mary Slessor, to be proper for females to be recruited and sent as missionaries, thus occupying leadership positions in foreign fields. However, within the United Presbyterian Church (UPC), now the Church of Scotland, at home females were not accepted as ordained ministers or elders until the late 1960s. The first woman elder in the Church of Scotland was ordained on 19th June 1966. Similarly, women were only made eligible for ministerial ordination in 1968, a year after a group of six women made an appeal to its General Assembly for them to be fully ordained to the ministry of word and sacraments. This analysis is helpful in underscoring the power and gender struggles within mission and how such engagements have shaped contemporary Christianity. It was easier to condemn many practices within indigenous communities like Amasiri, ignoring such similar issues within the home


of the mission agents. However, Nna Obiahu Orie argues that, ‘the fact that the Ogo society offers the initiation of only males does not imply that all females among Amasiri are oppressed, it is rather a means of preparing the males for their defined roles within the clan.’

As highlighted earlier in Chapter Three, the UFCS missionaries saw the introduction of schools as an effective means of undermining indigenous practices. They recognised that the church could grow out of the mission schools, but rejected converts’ participation in the Ogo society. However, some converts devised some other means of combining both the mission teachings and the Ogo society. This was often done through the use of intermediaries, for instance to have their sons initiated into the Ogo society. This demonstrates the beginning of the dilemma of some Christians who felt it necessary to have their children pass through the initiation into the Ogo society, thus exposing them to practices which could prevent them from being church members in good standing.

Furthermore, concerning the problem of interaction between Christianity and the indigenous cultures, is the role of the Bible. Philip Jenkins argues that the Bible is relatively new and informs the initial phases of a ‘love affair’ with which many Christians in Africa generally approach it. At the time the Bible was introduced to Amasiri, the clan had no written traditions. Furthermore, the crux of conversion was to accept the claimed superiority of the Christian religion. The converts were thus expected to transcend the analogy of indigenous religions and accept the Bible as the only way to reveal the truth. In this way, they were to achieve a means of interpretation independent and superior to those of the indigenous elders and ritual officiants. As already noted in Chapter Two, foundational stories, myths and sacred narratives were passed on from one generation to the other in oral form which made room for updating, amendments, and contextual reformulation where necessary. As

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769 Personal interview with Nna Obiahu Orie on 28:06:06.


771 Jenkins, The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South, p.18.

in the case of the Bible, fixed and sacrosanct phrases and formulae that could no longer be reshaped to serve the needs of the clan appear to be alien to the indigenous religious experience. This in time raised a problem and continues to raise a problem among many members of the PCN and other churches in Amasiri.

Joshua Otuu, in his interview, observes that there is evidence that some members within the PCN assume a one-sided view of the Bible and the way it relates to indigenous cultures. However, John Mbiti has identified the Bible in Africa to be ‘a major contributor to the spreading of the Christian faith and in the building up of a Christian presence and communities.’ Gerrie ter Haar has also pointed out the role of the Bible among many Christians in Africa thus:

The place accorded to Bible-reading is a significant point of distinction between African and Western Christians in general. African Christians carry their Bibles with them, and they read and quote from them constantly…. The close attention devoted to the Biblical texts may also be seen as the re-appropriation of what they consider to be the true word of God.

Furthermore, like Mbiti and ter Haar, Ernest Ezeogu argues that the Bible is certainly a much valued material and is used by Christians in many contemporary indigenous societies. According to Ezeogu when asked ‘what is the Bible?’ the average African church-goer will almost certainly reply, ‘The Bible is the Word of God’, forgetting to add the other equally important aspect ‘in the words of men.’ This response in Ezeogu’s view has led to the popularity of a fundamentalist viewpoint, according to which the Bible is held to be literally backed up by God’s own authority and therefore not subject to re-examination on the grounds of scholarship, common sense or experience.

Such a view, according to Ogbu Kalu, further brings a new approach that appears to circumvent the crises in the art of interpreting the Bible that change with shifts in the theory of knowledge. The dialectic approach to Biblical interpretation appears evident among many contemporary members of the PCN at Amasiri. This, as

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773 Personal interview with Joshua Otuu on 13:07:08.
776 Ezeogu, "Bible and Culture in African Christianity." p.25.
Elder Chukwu Okpara notes, in his interview has informed the increasing interests in Charismatic and Pentecostal styles of worship.\footnote{778}{Personal interview with Elder Chukwu Okpara on 20:08:08.} Such an approach, as was argued in Chapter Five, enables many members to connect to what is often perceived as the higher realm of the ‘spirit’ from which deliverance, healing and miracles take place. Philip Jenkins describes the dialectical attitude to the Bible in relation to indigenous cultures as a ‘conservative’ approach to Biblical authority. He argues that, while many Christians from the global South are aware of the rival arguments and interpretations arising from historical criticism, they choose to reject them. Jenkins therefore, suggests that an understanding of the means by which the Bible is understood and communicated allows the appreciation of the special weight of authority that the text bears on many churches.\footnote{779}{Jenkins, \textit{The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South}. pp.18-19.}

Yet this pragmatic approach to the Bible can lead to what Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu refers to as a selective hermeneutical method, where the tendency is to wrench Biblical texts out of context to support predetermined arguments. Asamoah-Gyadu suggests that this ‘proof-texting’ approach can result in ‘truncated, if not erroneous, views on theological issues’.\footnote{780}{Asamoah-Gyadu, \textit{African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana}. p.215.} Ogbu Kalu describes such an approach to the Bible as ‘bumper sticker’ hermeneutics or ‘experiential literalism’, where ‘personal and corporate experiences are woven into the hermeneutical task,’ fusing the horizon of the past and present with a ‘pragmatic hermeneutical leap’.\footnote{781}{Kalu, \textit{African Pentecostalism: An Introduction}. pp.266-267.}

Thus the model tends to offer easy and clear-cut answers on issues that would otherwise involve long and painful deliberations that often produce no definite or final answers. As shown, the type of Western Christianity sent to Africa by Nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries brought with it nineteenth and twentieth century Western culture and attitudes. Thus, many members of the PCN at Amasiri bring with them complex Christianity shaped by missionary understanding of indigenous cultures.
6. 3 Engaging with the Dialogic Model

Unlike the dialectic, the dialogic model holds that the Bible and indigenous cultures are, and can be, compatible. Although some essential values of the Bible may not be found in indigenous cultures and vice versa, that does not mean that they are incompatible. According to Ezeogu, the essential values of the Biblical traditions and those of the African cultural traditions may be contrary but not contradictory.\(^{782}\) As has been examined in the previous section, the indigenous knowledge and external influences that shape the indigenous Amasiri’s cosmologies needs to be contextually understood and interpreted. There ought to be a dialogue between African religious traditions with the traditions of the Bible on one hand and between Christians and members of the indigenous religions on the other hand. Paul Knitter describes it as 'the confrontation with utter, bewildering, often threatening differences and at the same time, trusting that such differences are, for most part, friendly rather than hostile, fruitful rather than barren.'\(^{783}\) Knitter’s definition offers a helpful critique to a simplified approach to inter-religious dialogue. His definition highlights four pivotal elements in dialogue, namely: experience of difference, the trust that such differences are native rather than separative; the resolve to witness, which is to make known to one’s dialogical partner one’s own religious experiences and convictions; and resolve to listen and learn from the experiences and convictions of one’s partner.

Absence of dialogue, can lead to suspicion and ultimately conflict and contempt. Furthermore, like Knitter, Anastasios Yannoulatos notes that for inter-religious dialogue to be effective, ‘we are not obliged to become religiously neutral, or to water down our own faith; rather, we need to be deeply religious, sincere and patient in our encounter, respecting the identity and freedom of others. In the process of trying to better understand the other, we understand ourselves in a deeper way.’\(^{784}\) Inter-religious dialogue in essence is not meant to change the personal persuasion of members of a particular religion. It can and should help overcome misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the religious views of others and facilitate a better

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\(^{782}\) Ezeogu, "Bible and Culture in African Christianity." p.32.


understanding of the basic points of other cultures’ and people’s experiences. In dialogue one faces the other and trusts that one can speak to, learn from, and even work with that other.

Knitter, further argues that anyone who begins an inter-religious conversation with the announcement of how much ‘we have in common or that we are really saying the same thing in different words’ can only say so on the surface of the dialogue. He argues that such a presupposition would fade away as one goes deeper into the experiences, the beliefs and practices and the historical development of the different religious traditions.\textsuperscript{785} It is crucial to lay the basis upon which a dialogical relationship can be undertaken. People are in a sense caught in their own cultural-religious perspectives – or at least inescapably influenced by them.\textsuperscript{786} Thus an interpretation of experiences shows that people are always looking at the world through inherited cultural spectacles. John Cobb further raises some crucial questions thus: ‘Might we not hear ideas that are in conflict with our deepest convictions? How can we be open to those? Do we not need, before entering into dialogue, to clarify the non-negotiable elements in our faith, so that we can be clear about that to which we can be open and that which is beyond the pale?’\textsuperscript{787}

The point which Cobb raises is crucial and draws attention to the need to consider the nature of dialogue more closely. As Yannoulatos has pointed out, some members of different religious traditions can and do raise objections or hold some reservations about inter-religious dialogue. Such projects can be seen as dangerous: there is a danger of syncretism and compromise within their belief.\textsuperscript{788} This assumption is often based on the understanding that it is not easy to listen to others with respect and patience without running the risk of watering down one’s own faith. Thus dialogue is seen as capable of polluting the Christian faith. It cannot be denied that dialogue is a risky business. However, Benebo Fubara-Manuel in an interview

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\textsuperscript{787} J. B. Cobb, "Dialogue." p.2.
\textsuperscript{788} Yannoulatos, "Problems and Prospects of Inter-Religious Dialogue: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective." p.352.
\end{flushright}
notes that it is a risk the PCN has to take in order to accomplish its mission. Based on this, it would be crucially important to find a path between extremes, to clarify the character, scope and hope of inter-religious dialogue.

Some dialogues may begin with confrontations. Those involved in dialogue should not undermine the presence of difference between them and should be prepared to take those differences seriously. That would involve having one’s position explained more carefully. On another level, especially within Amasiri, some Christians hold the opinion that Ogo society is dying naturally and thus discourage any form of dialogue. It is assumed that dialoguing might imply recognising the dying practices. Pastor Daniel Ekwe, in an interview, argues that Christianity, education and other change agents will soon sweep the Ogo society into oblivion. According to him ‘dialogue with the Ogo society would appear to be propping up an institution whose demise would benefit Christianity.’

As highlighted in Chapter Five, such views are not only held by some Christians, even some members of the Ogo society hold similar views. Osuu Amadi Oko Obasi, for instance, argues that the Ogo society is passing away, ‘many young people and females are abandoning the Ogo society in large numbers for the church, the demise of the Ogo society is just a matter of time.’

Pastor Ekwe and Osuu Obasi’s comments seem to undermine the values which have been highlighted about the Ogo society. Such views that they represent may not create a favourable condition for an effective dialogue. Benebo Fubara-Manuel argues strongly for inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria, between Christianity and Islam. However, his point is crucially important especially in relation to the comments made by Pastor Ekwe and Osuu Obasi. Fubara-Manuel observes thus: ‘At one time Christians thought that this problem would be resolved when all Muslims are converted to become Christians. But today, it is clear to most people that

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789 Personal interview with B. F. Fubara-Manuel on 22:07:08.
790 Personal interview with Omezue Hiary Nzaga on 26:06:08.
791 Personal interview with Pastor Daniel Ekwe on 23:06:08.
792 Personal interview with Osuu Amadi Oko Obasi on 21:06:08.
religious pluralism is a reality which the world would ever live with.' Amasiri indigenous religions including the Ogo society may not be considered as a dying religion as many of its practices appear to have lasting values. As earlier highlighted in Chapter Two, a group of young people within Amasiri called ‘Oganiru’ (Progressive Group) insists that no aspect of the Ogo society and the indigenous religions of Amasiri will die away, their leader Nwadinnia Ezichi rather insists:

Even the seemingly dead or forgotten indigenous practices of the Ogo society and Amasiri will live on. Although we are Christians, we belong to different church groups, but we are yet to find any ground on which to abandon the traditions of our fathers. As a group and individuals we are committed to fostering the Ogo society and its practices. It is as a result of this that we often return home to participate in several if not all the practices of the Ogo society. We enjoy the music and masquerades. One of our brothers who lives in Israel has often returned to join us in promoting the Ogo society. Our brother from Israel has always said that even Israel has not lost their indigenous religions and wonders why we would let ours die away.

The position of the Oganiru group as represented by their leader is helpful in understanding the varied and complex responses to the Ogo society, it further shows the extent of the continuity of indigenous practices and efforts to revitalise them. Furthermore, the inspiration which the group draws from their ‘brother’ who lives in Israel is also intriguing and demonstrates the role of diaspora in shaping and preserving indigenous identities and religiosity. With the growing revitalisation of indigenous religions, many indigenes of Amasiri too are beginning to appreciate their indigenous religions or engage in both ‘indigenous’ and other newer religions juxtaposingly. As Afe Adogame argues, many indigenous peoples have experienced something of a religious revival and have become concerned with the preservation of their cultural and religious heritage. Christianity and education thus appears to have failed to eradicate the indigenous religious thoughts and practices of Amasiri. Rather, the impingement of Christianity led on the one hand to the denigration of indigenous religions, culminating in their rejection and abandonment by some indigenous peoples. On the other hand, the encounter served as a catalyst for

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794 Personal interview with Nwadinnia Ezichi on 28:06:08.
innovation and creativity thus portraying them as versions of indigenous modernity.\footnote{Ibid. p.534.}

Geoffery Parrinder further observes, ‘the traditional religions are not dead.’\footnote{Parrinder, \textit{Religion in Africa}. p.165.} This comment is appealing and shows the need for effective dialogue between Christians and members of the Ogo society. Indigenous traditions have proved to be adaptable; instead of offering inflexible dogmatic information, they often provide frameworks for viewing and processing information.\footnote{J. K. Olupona, "African Religion," in \textit{Global Religions: And Introduction}, ed. M. Juergensmeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). p.80.} As such, instead of arguing for the death of the Ogo society and Amasiri indigenous religions, attention should be drawn to their changing patterns of expansion, continuity and resilience. The indigenous religions still influence people’s thinking and Christianity cannot undermine its strength and powers. Ennio Mantovani argues. ‘Religion is the core of a tribal culture, and so even Christians cannot ignore primal religion; they are continuously confronted by it in daily life.’\footnote{Mantovani, "Dialogue with Primal Religions." p.53.} As shown earlier, many highly-educated people and Christians are affected by it, though sometimes unconsciously. It can be said that indigenous religions is ever present within Amasiri. This being the case, there is the need for Christianity to have a dialogue with members of the indigenous religions, especially the Ogo society.

Fubara-Manuel argues that the phenomenon of religions is ordered to God’s glory by sovereign wisdom. As such he argues, ‘if it is God who orders these religious manifestations, then we must be cautious in the things we say about them, no matter how imperfectly we think they reflect God’s will.’\footnote{Fubara-Manuel, \textit{In the Missio Dei: Reflections on the Being and Calling of the Church in the Sovereign Mission of God}. pp.18-19.} This call for caution is helpful especially given the stereotyping that has characterised the relationship between many Christians and members of the Ogo society. Dialogue thus is based on the understanding that God always transcends our comprehension and expression, so that the best that any one can say may be partial and figurative, not excluding what others may have to say. Dialogue enables participants to gradually learn more about
their partners and in the process shuck off the misinformation about them. Dialogue partners can serve as a mirror in which members of religious communities can perceive themselves in ways they could not otherwise do.\textsuperscript{801}

Pastor Kenneth Daniels notes in an interview that church groups including the PCN should enter into dialogue with one another and with the wider indigenous context in which it serves. He argues that dialogue should not simply be an invitation into the Christian persuasion, rather Christians should endeavour to know and respect and appreciate what members of the Ogo society represent.\textsuperscript{802} Christianity and indigenous cultures could act as each others mirror for greater self-awareness and self-improvement. Today, with the growing recognition that both the Bible and indigenous cultures are endowed with both constants and variables, it is no longer as simple as that. Ennio Mantovani observes:

\begin{quote}
A precondition for any dialogue is an appreciation of the partner. There is no dialogue if one looks down on the partner, if one regards the partner as inferior, as childish, as 'primitive.' Mature appreciation, in opposition to romantic appreciation, is based on understanding. However, understanding is not absolute approval…. Primal religions have been denigrated as primitive. In order to have a truly open mind, one must actively overcome this cultural bias against primal religions. This is done in one’s mind before one enters into the dialogue.\textsuperscript{803}
\end{quote}

Although Mantovani uses primal religions as a category to describe religions like that of the indigenous Amasiri, he makes clear his point which argues for the appreciation of the other as a basis for effective dialogue. An appreciation of Amasiri indigenous religious practices and values including the Ogo society should shape the very content of the PCN’s ‘God-talk’. Christians may not effectively speak of God to the members of the Ogo society, unless they first let themselves be taught about God by the indigenous religions.\textsuperscript{804} His point further highlights the possible dangers of religions that are undertaken by those who have a shallow grasp or closed view of the dynamic of religions. Dialogue may involve taking a self-critical attitude towards oneself and traditions. If one is not willing to take a self-critical look at his or her

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{802} Personal interview with Pastor Kenneth Daniels on 14:07:08.
\item\textsuperscript{803} Mantovani, "Dialogue with Primal Religions." pp.54-55.
\end{footnotes}
own tradition’s position on a subject, the implication might be that such a person may have nothing to learn from the dialogue partners.

In approaching any concrete religious systems today, both Christians and members of the Ogo society should avoid either easy enthusiasm or contemptuous criticism. Vague knowledge about religions can create a negative illusion and through fragmented knowledge people may risk coming to a ‘positive’ illusion that all religions are the same, thus generalising their view of one religion to be applicable to others as well.

### 6.4 Christianity, Cultures and Dialogue

It is imperative for Christians and members of the Ogo society to enter into dialogue. It is often suggested that the indigenous cultures by its very nature is open to enter into such a symbiotic relationship with the Bible. This is because as Pastor Kenneth Daniels asserts, ‘cultures can be perceived to be open-ended, while the Bible is fixed and has transcending and transforming characters.\(^{805}\) However, it would be necessary to ask if the Bible, by its very nature, is amenable to a dialogic relation with indigenous cultures? Many Christians within Amasiri sometimes perceive ‘the Bible to be so heavenly, so encyclopaedic and so authoritative that it has no time to dialogue.’\(^{806}\) An Eastern Orthodox bishop however argues; ‘The gospel, while retaining it’s eternal and divine character, finds it not difficult to be incarnated into the concrete cultural body of anytime.’\(^{807}\) Furthermore, Archbishop Desmond Tutu further argues for yet another reason why Christians can and should enter into dialogue with members of the indigenous religious thus: ‘Many of Africa’s religious insights had a real affinity with those of the Bible…..’ \(^{808}\)

There seems to be a high level of compatibility between the Bible and indigenous cultures. Lessile Newbigin asserts that, ‘All our reading of the Bible and all our Christian discipleship are necessarily shaped by the cultures which have

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805 Personal interview with Pastor Kenneth Daniels on 14:07:08.
806 Ezeogu, "Bible and Culture in African Christianity." p.32.
formed us….the only way in which the gospel can challenge our culturally conditioned interpretation, its through the witness of those who read the Bible with minds shaped by other cultures.\textsuperscript{809} One’s perspective, as Newbigin emphasises is particularly influenced by where a person or culture stands in relationship to power and privileges. As such, effective inter-religious dialogue may be hindered without the awareness that – where there is difference – there are inevitably power differentials. Multiple diverse lines of contemporary research demonstrate that self and identity are central to the understanding of human thoughts, feelings, and actions.\textsuperscript{810} Dialogue between Christians and members of the Ogo society may involve mutual correction, mutual enrichment and mutual learning since each cultural interaction opens up new insights into the Bible, and mutual criticism.

These factors are therefore crucial in accounting for interrelationships between individual and larger socio-cultural institutions and systems. Dialogue thus presupposes that each party is able to be open to hearing alternative voices and experiences, thus creating a ‘sphere of between’. Within this sphere lies the potential for living interpretations of the Bible and indigenous cultures. Through exposure to other perspectives as Newbigin suggests – whether those of other cultures or those of marginalised communities within one’s cultures – change and transformation do occur. Listening to the conversations of others may address the problem of prejudice, stereotyping and condescension. Furthermore, it would enable many Christians to obey the commandment not to bear false witness against their neighbour.\textsuperscript{811} The option of dialogue suggests that the Bible should be studied in their cultural context and that aspects of their cultural elements should be highlighted. The indigenous cultures should be well appreciated by Amasiri Christians and recognise that the Christian symbols may not be absolute.\textsuperscript{812} Mantovani has illustrated the point thus:

\begin{quote}
In the West people obey God, by among other things, honouring their father and mother, as the Bible demands. If the dead in a given culture are an integral part of
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\textsuperscript{812} Personal interview with Chief Geoffrey Oko on 02:08:08.
As already shown in Chapter Two, initiation into the Ogo society not only serves as a means of incorporation into manhood, but also as incorporation into the community which includes the ancestors. This relationship between the living and the ancestors has social and psychological dimensions and plays a vital role, not only among males, but also among females and families within the clan. As such from the indigenous viewpoint, participation in such religious rituals means honouring the founding fathers of the clan. Such respect for ancestors is not merely an expression of fear of the dead or because of a strong belief in the afterlife, but because of the importance of the descent system in defining the social relationship.

Indigenous cultures have universally visible values that they can share with or contribute to the universal understanding of the Bible. Furthermore, that the Bible is the Word of God may not imply that the totality of the Word of God is contained in the Bible. Aspects of the Word of God can be found in indigenous cultures; thus what would be gained by the Bible and indigenous cultures in the event of dialogue and possible integration may be mutual enrichment. First, it is a symbolic relationship between the Bible and cultures. Second each enriches the other by a dual process: a positive one of encouraging valuable elements, and a negative one of discerning and checking harmful or outdated elements in the other.

It often seems easier to admit that there are obsolete elements in indigenous cultures. However, it is imperative to ask if Christians and scholars are equally prepared to admit that there are such obsolete elements in the Bible as well. John Paul II was clear about this in his address to members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1979 when he said that in the Bible there should be a ‘distinction between what is obsolete and what must always keep its value’. The Old Testament of the Bible contains a list of many sacrifices including those involving

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the killing of human beings. Today, such religious acts are hardly performed even by Christians. The Bible also presents cases of the Israelites’ involvement in war as a fight for God. Today human destruction for whatever reason is condemned, yet those passages are still in the Bible. The Bible and indigenous Amasiri cultures therefore should help each other to nurture what is relevant and promising as well as to prune out the deadwood that has become obsolete.

6.5 Dialogic Model: Key Implications

The pluralistic nature of contemporary Nigeria as underlined by Fubara-Manuel raises the need for dialogue between the competing religious constituencies. In undertaking such projects, efforts should not only include the religious/theological elites, but also the everyday adherents. The question of who is qualified to speak for the indigenous religions is crucial. However, to think that the very fact that one is born or lives within an indigenous community automatically qualifies him or her to speak, might be misleading. This is because as Gwinya Muzorewa notes, knowledge may not be defined by geography.815 Furthermore, Edward Said has asked, ‘Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These it seems are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients of interpretation.’816 This would make the dialogue more a ‘bottom-up’ rather than a ‘top-down’ project. This approach would debunk the argument that there are no competent persons with whom dialogue can occur.

Dialogue is not simply an abstract scholarly exercise requiring literacy and systematic reasoning. Such dialogues would need to pursue a new understanding of the practices of religions and to learn from the rich values of both Ogo society and Christianity. There is the need for a dialogue of life which emphasises relationships through inter-religious social networks at the grassroots levels. Both the government and religious institutions should promote healthy social programmes that are able to bring both members of the Ogo society and Christians together. Both religious

groups need an engaging dialogue of action. Dialogue, as previously explained, is not merely a discussion just involving experts; it should include sharing and an active collaboration in life situations, especially sharing life experiences by the simple ordinary members of both Christianity and the Ogo society.

There are vast opportunities for members of both religions to engage in joint programmes towards alleviating ignorance and the advancement of equality. Oliver McTernan citing Paul Collier notes that one of the ways to overcome collective conflict is by building what social scientists call ‘social capital’. This implies that one has to develop trust and tolerance between people by forming networks and clubs that will give them the opportunity to socialise and work together. This can create an enabling environment to re-examine the stereotypes which members of different religious groups have for each other. Furthermore, the government and religious leaders need to be more pro-active in promoting the culture of tolerance among their members. To facilitate this, church leaders should work out modalities that would enable PCN members and other Christians to participate in some indigenous activities which may have religious overtones like title-taking, the cultural roles of the chief and family heads, initiation rites, some traditional marriage rites, oath and covenant taking and festivals. Failure to participate, as previously highlighted, in any of these activities leaves many Christians marginalised in their various families and villages. The situation is such that although the PCN leadership insists on abstinence from the Ogo society, they cannot help those who are marginalised. On the other hand, ritual officiants of the Ogo society should come to terms with the fact that it may not be possible to have all males initiated into the Ogo society or to participate actively in its ritual practices.

Effective education at formal and informal (vocational) educational institutions that demonstrates concern for the common good of society becomes crucial. At the local church levels teachings on dialogue and courses on indigenous religions should form a part of the formation of candidates for catechumen and the PCN’s ministry. This will enable several Amasiri Christians specifically within the

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818 Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 26:06:08.
PCN, to have a broader perspective of life and to live a fully integrated life both as Christians and members of the indigenous clan. Other means of information dissemination should be explored in order to promote the campaign among rural and urban residents. Effective education is therefore needed in order to enlighten members of the different religious groups of the need for peaceful co-existence regardless of their differences.

A dialogic instead of a dialectic approach is urgently needed in relating Christian teaching to indigenous cultures. This as argued is based on the historical basis that indigenous cultures have been unduly despised and rejected by Christianity. The indigenous cultures on the other hand may not be made into an absolute, but it should be challenged in order for both Christianity and indigenous cultures to be enriched. A careful study therefore and an interpretation of indigenous cultures may make meaningful contributions in symbols and liturgy, social structures, relations, arts, music, dance and drama to Christianity. For an effective dialogue to take place, some structures must be put in place at the village and clan levels. A peace resolution committee set up by the government may not achieve such a dialogue especially given that more often than not such committees operate with well defined and limited terms of reference.

The PCN congregations at Amasiri should jointly or independently set up panels to carry out research on the interaction between Christianity and the Ogo society. Furthermore, Omezue Hilary Nzagha in an interview argues for the need to set-up a ‘Religious Council’ with the duty of discussing religious issues in concrete terms, thereby resolving the pending religious issues. It would be helpful to clarify the extent to which the PCN could accept the initiation into the Ogo society without distorting its beliefs. The other issue should be to ask if one could undergo the initiation in proxy, thus not passing through all the phases of the ritual. This is crucial given contemporary experiences of migration and economic limitations. Other points that require clarification include: the possibility of the PCN’s respect of those who participate in the Ogo rituals without impacting negatively on what it stands for.

819 Personal interview with Omezue Hilary Nzagha on 21:08:10
Thus the PCN should be ready to accept without condition those who have been or have had their children initiated into the Ogo society.

With this understanding, the initiation into the Ogo society should be seen and accepted by the PCN as a symbol of community identification. Yet, attempts should be made to develop an understanding of the place of Christian rituals within an indigenous context. The religious council may give consideration to how baptism and confirmation within the PCN can be understood as suitable alternatives for initiation into the Ogo society. Peaceful co-existence between Christians and members of the Ogo society requires a clear understanding on a meeting point between its members. While Christians must refrain from the use of derogatory utterances against members of the Ogo society, members of the Ogo society must also learn to respect Christians, each being aware that there can never be a monolithic Amasiri. Through these processes boundaries may therefore be jointly worked out, that do not impede on the freedom and collective good of the clan.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION

This thesis has set out the historical context in which the UFCS mission to Nigeria, and Amasiri in particular, was established. It has shown the ambivalent attitude of the mid-nineteenth century mission to indigenous cultures and the roles of the local agents. As has been argued, much of the mission work undertaken among the Amasiri clan was carried out by the indigenous mission teachers who served under strict directives from their Western trainers and employers. This offers an explanation for the strict attitude of those mission teachers regarding indigenous practices. It is therefore possible to argue that whatever success or failure the Christian mission has had among Amasiri it may not be discussed in isolation from the indigenous people’s efforts. The account demonstrates the conflicts between the UFCS mission and members of the Ogo society and the ways in which the 1920s and contemporary converts, members of the Ogo society, missionaries and mission teachers have negotiated the multiple religious situations of the clan. As has been argued, interaction during the 1920s laid a foundation for missionary Christianity and, in order to understand the contemporary patterns of interaction between the PCN and members of the Ogo society, it is important to investigate the mission activities of the UFCS.

The thesis has illustrated the complex and problematic relationship between indigenous cultures, power, identity and gender and how these relationships are shaped and reshaped by the struggles between individuals and groups. Gender as a social category exists within Amasiri, but appears to be informed by flexibility and complex configurations. Gender, as argued in Chapters One and Two is an assumed, but complex, feature of the clan which is negotiated through ritual processes. As shown, women play a central role within the indigenous religious landscape, although this fact appears to have often been subsumed under male-focused interpretations. While this thesis has focused on the male initiation ritual into the Ogo society, the role of women in the process remains central. Furthermore, the initiation ritual for females would need to be further investigated in order to ascertain the dynamic of women’s religious experiences thus offering another view on gendered religion in general. The tension of self-description and social or community
ascription is fundamental for individuals and groups, as ritual processes serve as a means of constructing and negotiating the understanding of self. As highlighted in Chapters Two and Five, identities are constructed from within. As such there is the need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional contexts within specific discursive formations and practices.

Identity is seen as culturally specific and socially produced, and is conceived of as the result of a whole range of different possible identifications. This is, however, linked to specific social and historical conjectures. As highlighted, the identity issues (self-description and social ascription) among the Amasiri, is fundamental for individuals and groups to construct, negotiate, defend and resist their self-understanding. The conception of self and world affects what one is like and the way one would like to be or would like to avoid being. As promoted by many members of the Ogo society, being uninitiated imposes some limitations on the full attainment of civil, political, social and cultural rights of the individual. As shown in Chapter Six, there has often been a reluctance to engage with the issues and a reluctance to change opinions which have been in vogue for the past few decades and with which many indigenous Amasiri have grown up.

Social and religious prejudices, thus, are psychological processes and those psychological inclinations do not change by themselves. Rather, they need a platform of debate along which the benefits and disadvantages can be ironed out and various factors established so that new understandings may eventually begin to emerge. It should be further understood that the constitution of identity is an act of power and, as such, the unities that identities proclaim are, in fact constructed within the play of power – inclusion and exclusion. One way humans have to emphasise their uniqueness is to exploit the differences between themselves and others in the use of physical space. Power, as shown, is expressed by the monopolisation of space and the relegation of less powerful groups in a society. Thus, power is produced and reproduced through intricate mechanisms of articulation between hegemonic projects and everyday life. Resistance to power, in turn, emerges through counter-hegemonic projects that are intertwined with alternative alignments of every day practice.

This scenario, as demonstrated in Chapter Five and Six underpins the continuous tension between members of the Ogo society, some members of the PCN
and other churches. As argued in Chapters Two and Five, initiation into the Ogo society remains central in the formation and exercise of power. This implies that the uninitiated are socially excluded, and cannot change their position of exclusion if they do not have access to the resources to do so. Therefore, socially excluded groups cannot fully participate as full members of the indigenous clan in which they live. As argued, the spectrum of rituals reveal basic ways in which members of the Ogo society ritualise; that is, create, deploy and reproduce rites. The ritual processes tend to be a matter of communal ceremonies closely connected to formally institutionalised religions. However, a ritual never exists alone; it is usually one ceremony among many in the larger ritual life of a person or community. As argued in Chapter Four, following the establishment of Christianity in Amasiri, the clan has experienced multiple and overlapping ritual systems which tend to form yet other basis for the tensions. As noted previously, some members of the PCN appear to be caught between the two ritual systems deemed incompatible – reverence to the ancestors on the one hand, and Christian rites that forbid the ‘idolatry’ of worshipping other gods, on the other hand.

In the process of these interactions, various constructed identities could function as forms of cultural capital (the knowledge of appropriate behaviour codes attached to each of those identities). Cultural capital, as previously discussed in Chapter Two is used because like money, cultural inheritance can be translated into social resources (like wealth, power, identity and status). The accumulated cultural capital can be spent in an attempt to achieve things that are considered culturally important. Furthermore, as shown in the latter part of Chapter Two, such identities are translated into social capital, which can enhance an individual’s chances of inclusion or exclusion. The ability to create or destroy social capital depends on how power structures and indigenous norms of a group or community are negotiated. However, it should be pointed out that participation in group networks can be costly for individuals in terms of time and labour. On the other hand, the communal nature of the clan often serves as a source of support to members.

Similarly, it has been argued that identity is always formed within the limits of established power relations such as the control of mode of cultural and material production. As in the case of indigenous Amasiri, these power relations often
circumscribe an individual’s ability to define and present himself/herself. Jeannette Mageo therefore argues that self is constituted by acts of identification with internal elements of experience and with persons.\textsuperscript{820} The situating of self often takes place, at least in part, through the development of a self-narrative that starts, not at one’s own birth, but with one’s forbears. As such, an individual’s and group’s identification and representations in the cultural world are implicated in power relations. The overriding argument therefore is that cultural realities are always produced in specific socio-historical contexts and that it is necessary to account for the processes that generate those contexts in order to offer explanations for the nature of the practice of identity and culture.

Religion, as argued, is a source of social capital. It brings people together in networks and creates interest in each other’s welfare. Further, it serves as a social resource and meets individual’s needs. Religious traditions can be a source of values that can defend dignified life for many; these traditions need to be explored. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, it seems that as a result of many Christians in Amasiri’s interpretation and understanding of the Bible, they are becoming less engaged with the larger community and have focused more on reinforcing within-group networks. This scenario results in neglecting or discouraging ties outside one’s congregation, and therefore being directed more inward rather than outward. Organised religions can heal divisions, but they can also exacerbate them; religious instructions can reduce tension, but they can also increase it. The challenge therefore is to find ways in which ritual officiants and institutions can fit safely into a clan like Amasiri, characterised by the presence of the Ogo society and Christianity.

The importance of participation and belonging, as earlier noted, permeates the life of the traditional Amasiri. Initiation into the Ogo society, as argued earlier in Chapter Two is considered to be the basis for participation in the age grade, leadership, title-taking and even for marriage. Relationships arising from an individual’s participation in these social and religious activities securely anchors the individual in a community oriented existence. Community plays a crucial symbolic

role in generating people’s sense of belonging. As argued, self-identification does not occur in a vacuum, but in a world already defined and in relation to others.

The thesis has demonstrated the relationship between the practices of identity as a process and the constitution of meaningful worlds, specifically of historical schemes. While preferences may belong to individuals, the process by which they are generated is collective. As shown in Chapters Two and Five, there are a number of ways in which this collective process can be analysed. One relates to the different ways in which identities can be acquired as a by-product of action, and the other refers to the way in which groups and societies can attempt to induce certain identities among their members.

As a collective self, families, villages and clans often suffer in attempts to reconcile competing claims made on it by its collective members. This therefore puts pressure on many people to avoid such serious crimes like adultery, stealing and murder. An individual offender is not expected to be punished alone; the members of his family will also be punished. They could all be ostracised, banished from their compound or asked to perform elaborate sacrifices or pay heavy fines. This situation is not without some ambivalence; sanctions can only be applied to observable behaviours and not internal mental states and as such it does not take into account unexpressed forms of rebellion against collective norms.

The huge stress on the collective self results in a situation where larger interests supersede that of individuals. Thus, groups can also be rewarded for the achievements of one person as well as punished for the offence of one of its members. In view of this many kinsmen would seek to prevent their members from offending the ancestors or community. Although there are merits and relevance of group and clan identity, it remains doubtful about how elements of the past can be disputed in a competitive contemporary society like Amasiri. Despite many popular preconceptions, ritual is not primarily a matter of unchanging tradition; rather it is an effective means of mediating traditions and change, that is, as a medium for appropriating some changes while maintaining a sense of cultural continuity.

In addition, the gendered dimension of initiation into the Ogo society, as discussed in Chapters Two and Five is apparent in the depiction of the uninitiated males as essentially female in character. The initiation transforms individuals by
investing them with socialness, and enables the indigenous Amasiri to reproduce itself culturally, thus the compelling requirement for a strong sense of self extends beyond individuals to groups. As shown in Chapter Two, the initiation into the Ogo society is not simply about religion, it is also about education, sports, leisure, endurance and knowledge. The gathering of young males for the initiation rites enables the clan to turn a ceremony into the affirmation of collective identity. Young males grow to respect their people and traditions, and to be in position to defend them. Through this process community elders and ritual officiants impart indigenous lessons on history and morality on the initiates, thereby sustaining and maintaining social order. The initiation, as argued in Chapters Two and Five reinforces a system of morality that establishes right from wrong, good and appropriate. It enables the initiates to acquire some indigenous knowledge about systems of values, attitudes and beliefs which provide them with the mechanism to understand the world in which they live.

The initiates into the Ogo society acquire respect as adults; they have evidence to show that they could endure pain; and they are able to marry freely and practice sexual relationships in ways approved by the community. It is therefore argued that the maleness and femaleness are cross-culturally and historically varied, thus acceptance is socially attributed on the basis of explicit or implicit socially defined criteria. The main purpose of the Ogo society rites is to turn boys into men. The critical mechanism of this transformation is the removal of the boys from the care of their mothers, and instruction in which the boys assume new duties and social identities that reinforce their relationships to their fathers, and extended families and the clan. Religious or ritual knowledge is often restricted in access and gained only through initiation into the Ogo society. However, it should be pointed out that rituals may not be simple or one message or purpose, rituals have many and frequently some of these messages and purposes can modify or even contradict each other. Nonetheless, rituals like the initiation into the Ogo society seeks to formulate a sense of the interrelated nature of things and to reinforce values that assume coherent interrelations. The initiation into the Ogo society, as argued in Chapters One and Two acknowledges powers beyond the invention of the clan and implies correct and
incorrect relations with these powers, thus the society is more likely to generate a social consensus.

Participants at the initiation rituals see their ritual activities as that which enables them to respond more appropriately to God, the presence of the ancestors, the demand of tradition and history, status and destiny. Thus, the belief in ancestors inculcates certain social ideals: the vibrant reality of the spiritual world, the continuity of life and human relationships beyond death, the unbroken bond of obligations and the seamless web of community. It links the individuals and their families to their past and ancestors and forms a part of and an expression of spirituality. Belief in ancestors, as enacted through rituals, acts as a form of social control by which the conduct of individuals is regulated. The constant reminder of the good deeds of the ancestors act as a spur to good conduct on the part of the living; and the belief that the dead can punish those who violate traditionally sanctioned mores acts as a deterrent. Ancestral beliefs therefore represent a powerful source of moral sanction for they affirm the values upon which society is based.

These understandings of community and interrelationships are celebrated through rituals, thus the initiation into the Ogo society provides a form of social control and social order. The idea of social control, as argued in Chapter One and Two, amounts to the idea that within many societies like Amasiri, a system is in place to deal specifically with the sanctioning or punishment of individuals who do not comply with the rules. Beyond food, warmth, clothing, shelter and emotional support, families and the indigenous clan provide the growing child with a set of guidelines for proper conduct often enshrined and passed on through rituals, especially the initiation into the Ogo society. The ultimate goal of this process is the production of a self-controlled individual and society at large. This crucial role of the ritual, sanctity and community has not died off in the face of modernity. Rather, the case of the Ogo society suggests the enduring nature of indigenous practices in the face of modernity. This resilience, as shown earlier, is the result of complex factors including the extent to which the Amasiri social and political life is connected to the

Ogo society and replicated at all levels of the clan. Here ‘political’ is used to refer not simply to a system of offices and office holders, but more broadly to include those who make decisions affecting others in the use and distribution of resources perceived as scarce.

As demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, many missionaries to indigenous communities like the Amasiri despaired at the sight of some indigenous people worshipping their God and venerating their ancestors. Their approach to worship lacked written texts and followed a different pattern which appeared radically different from what many missionaries were used to, hence some of the condemnations of many indigenous practices. Historically, religions have played a major role in both the gradual change and the major upheavals that have transformed societies. The PCN, for instance through its auxiliary ministries, as shown in Chapters Three and Five have always sought to recreate this sense of community, identity and power within its congregations.

The conceptualisation of rites like baptism and confirmation thus serves as a source of social capital, bringing people of like-minded beliefs together to form social networks that create interest in each other’s welfare. Such constructs may not form a substitute for the social community which initiation and participation in the Ogo society offers. Furthermore, the increasing polarisation of indigenous practices by some Christians seems to ignore the stress on a group, while putting emphasis on individual success and failures. Many scholars, in view of this, have often claimed imperialist attitudes on the part of many Western missionaries to indigenous cultures. While this may not be denied, it seems that the rich contributions which some of the missionaries made to the lives of the communities in which they served can be underestimated in the process. Thus a balanced approach is required in scholarly accounts of the ambivalent nature of missionary interaction with indigenous communities like Amasiri.

Over the centuries there have been constant struggles between Christianity and cultures, both at individual and institutional levels. Part of the question which the thesis has sought to address is to see where Amasiri Christians should stand regarding Christianity and indigenous cultures, as Christians cannot afford to ignore it. Christianity developed out of a culture and is practiced within cultures. As such
the question to ask should rather be: Is there any lesson that Christianity can learn from the indigenous practices of Amasiri? The thesis has shown there are countless resemblances between the Amasiri indigenous beliefs and the Christian faith. It is on this premise that the dialogic model is proposed in order to address the lingering intra-personal and inter-personal tensions among many Christians and members of the Ogo society. The aspect of community life as it features within the initiation into the Ogo society avails members of the PCN and gives other churches the opportunity to experience the warmth of family and community life. In view of the current nature of the interaction between Christians and members of the Ogo society, there is the need to closely examine the nature and history of Amasiri’s indigenous religion, especially the Ogo society. It would be important to access the assumptions and policies of the UFCS and contemporary missions within the PCN.

The introduction of some aspects of Western culture went hand in hand with the spread of Christianity among indigenous communities. This however, resulted in the discrediting of many valuable aspects of indigenous cultures as well as attempts to bring about a whole range of changes in other areas of the culture and with it, a new life style. The life of indigenous Amasiri is shown in their arts and their rituals because they symbolise life itself. It might be difficult, if not impossible, to understand what would happen if one merely grasps the essence of two ‘opposing religious systems; without interacting with their formative histories. Furthermore, the mission’s dependence on education as a tool for the spread of Christianity had countless weaknesses and strengths. It was perceived that through the systematic teaching of the Bible at schools, the pupils could gain significant knowledge of Christian teachings. The result was not as successful as was expected. Many pupils thus considered Bible knowledge as merely one of their subjects and although they participated in religious instruction classes, were baptised and so became church members, many of them seem not to have made personal commitments to Christianity. Thus the influence of indigenous religions on many Christians cannot be ignored, so it is crucially important to take into account the role of indigenous religions in the construction of the categories of thoughts, and attitudes which are used to interpret life events.
The 1920s mission to Amasiri appears to have underplayed the importance of the indigenous experiences in the formation of its mission strategy, thus emphasising belief. The introduction of baptism, confirmation, the Lord’s Supper and other rituals by the UFCS missionaries as substitutes to the initiation into the Ogo society did not give a male child the identity and sense of belonging within the clan which the initiation offers. As a result of this the initiation into the Ogo society has not disappeared as earlier anticipated. As observed by Georffrey Parrinder the ‘greatest danger in African religious life is that the old should disappear without some new religious force to take place…. Yet the past has been so thoroughly impregnated with religions and its ethics that it is difficult to see how an ordered society can be established without them.’823 Parrinder’s point is important, however, within Amasiri there is the dilemma of who it is that should determine the values or ideas within the Ogo society and Christianity that should be retained. It is on this premise again that the option of dialogue is central as it may create an enabling environment for open discussion and possible resolutions for the common good of the clan. The values may only be tolerable should they emerge from an engaging dialogue and not be imposed by forces within the government or church or members of the Ogo society. Such decisions should evolve from the people who are directly affected by the complex religious identities.

The success of some African Independent (Indigenous or International) churches (AICs), which share affinity with some aspects of the indigenous religion is an indication that the PCN may be richer if it takes into account and has a dialogue with the indigenous life of Amasiri, including the Ogo society. Such an approach may pave the way for a fresh understanding of how Christianity can best be related to the indigenous context. The advice of Willem Hooft should therefore be taken seriously. He urges Christians to have the freedom and courage to interpret the Bible in such a way that will bring it closer to the culture in which, until now, has generally been proclaimed in a Western, and therefore, foreign form. He argues that: ‘the time has come when the multi-coloured wisdom of God must express itself in new Asian

and Africa expressions of Christian thought and life.824 The dialogue model, as discussed in Chapter Six becomes imperative in order to engage the intra-personal and inter-personal conflicts which have characterised Amasiri over the years. Religious groups therefore, face the task of renewing their traditions in the context of pluralism and modernity. Dialogue as proposed is not merely doctrinal discussions involving experts or elites; it should also include sharing, active collaboration in life situations, and especially the sharing of life’s experiences by simple ordinary Christians and members of the Ogo society.

It appears that Christianity may make more of an in-road into the Amasiri clan by interacting with the themes and symbols of its religious beliefs and practices. It would be difficult to stop the initiation into the Ogo society, as the powers and identities it confers on the initiates are yet to be replaced. Furthermore, the continuous belief in the powers of witchcraft and the need for protection by whatever means possible, appears to be strong in the minds of some Christians. Thus, the idea that many indigenous religious practices are ‘primitive, barbaric, heathenistic and devilish’, as advanced by the 1920s mission to Amasiri should be revisited. It is possible that some present Christians are operating with the same mentality. Efforts should therefore be made by contemporary PCN to integrate new teachings and new ways of life, with a strong purpose to develop a culture that could be considered to be Amasiri and Christian. This has become imperative given the fact that although the UFCS had been established in Amasiri since 1927, and many people are identifying with different church groups, there still does not seem to be an available alternative to the Ogo society. As a symbol of indigenous and communal identity and belonging, the ritual processes of the Ogo society have continued to be resilient. It provides the process of disassociation through initiation into the Ogo society which is necessary for the maturing male to function as an adult. The initiation appears to posit a religious idea of power and the art of leadership.

The PCN and members of the Ogo society must learn to co-exist, by striving to gain better knowledge of each other and appreciate what each other represents and stands for. There appears to be practices among many Christians within Amasiri to

reduce or avoid interactions with members of the Ogo society, as they view them as a threat to their ‘faith’ and those who must be converted. Such practices in essence increase stereotyping instead of reduce it. Stereotyping is a simplification of complex experiences and denies the play of difference; it is often one-sided and represents a group as fixed by nature. Indigenous societies and cultures are never static and they continue to respond to globalisation and modernity. An appreciation and affirmation of religious differences may make for an inter-relationship of dialogue in which both parties make mutual contributions and listen to each other.

In other words, inter-religious dialogue is a conversation in which each party is serious in his approach both to the subject and other person and has a desire to listen and learn as well as speak. It is a sustained conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognise and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking. Rather than searching for agreement, a dialogue should search for an understanding of the other. As argued in Chapter Six, an enhanced understanding of the other may lead to a more peaceable co-existence in a pluralistic culture. However, there must be a change of attitude by both the PCN and members of the Ogo society before they can do that. Real dialogue only takes place when participants listen carefully to what each has to say to the other. Any attachment of labels to the other person such as ‘unbeliever’ or ‘pagan’ is not only offensive but also stifles conversation. Listening before acting helps a person or an institution to ensure a more sensitive and intelligible response to the people’s conversation.

Furthermore, the PCN must formulate a new missionary approach which respects the practices of the Ogo society. The dialogue should not concentrate on re-fighting past battles, but should rather seriously examine alternative courses of action. Such a dialogue would enable participants and later non-participants to correctly identify areas of genuine religious disagreement as well as misconceptions regarding the beliefs and practices of the different religions. There should be new ways of understanding particularity, universality and plurality. Members of the PCN must learn to practice their religion with integrity while respecting and accepting others. Likewise, members of the Ogo society should respect the beliefs of Christians. However, it should be noted that refraining from initiation into the Ogo
society by members of the PCN and some other churches has consequences for the males’ and group’s relationship and acceptance within the extended families and the larger Amasiri clan. A call for withdrawal without effective substitution might leave the church members vulnerable to the community in which they live. The PCN should therefore seek to address this legitimacy problem of the uninitiated males and females through effective dialogue.
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Oko, Francis, General Coordinator, Fellowship of Amasiri Christian Students (FACS) – an interdenominational group to which many Presbyterian youths belong. Age: 30; gender: male, 22nd June 2008.


Oko, Nkechinyere, described herself as being on a waiting list; had begun attending the Presbyterian Church, but stopped after being a core adherent of the indigenous religion. Age: 42; gender: female, 15th July 2008.

Oko, Okechukwu, Primary five pupil, he was initiated into the Ogo society at the age of 8. Age: 11; gender: male, 15th July 2008.

Oko, Onyinyechi, Primary School pupil (Six). Permission was sought from her parents to undertake the interview. Age: 14; gender: female, 15th July 2008.


Okorie, Joshua, member of the PCN and uninitiated into the Ogo society. Age: 27; gender: male, 17th June 2008.

Okpani, Grace, student, a member of the Youth group PCN Amasiri Junction. Age: 26; gender: female, 13th July 2008.

Okpara, Uchenna, Secondary school student who was initiated at the age of 10. Age: 18, gender: male, 12th July 2008.

Okpara, Ogbonnia Etu, Elder of TAC and National President of the ABFN. Age: 49; gender: male, 30th June 2008.


Okpara, Chukwu, retired Head teacher and an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Amasiri. Age: 68; gender: male, 16th June 2008.


Oma, Onyekachi, women’s leader within the PCN in Amasiri and leader in the Land Army inter-denominational Prayer group in Amasiri. Age: 40; gender: female, 23rd June 2008.

Ome, Idam, a retired elder (Onikara), holder of the highest indigenous title and
Orie, Obiahu, a retired ruling elder and member of the Ogo society. Age 98; gender: male, 28th July 2006.
Osim, Charles Ekuma, Elder of the Apostolic Church, Amasiri, National Secretary General Amasiri Believers’ Fellowship, Nigeria ABFN. Age: 56; gender: male, 30th June 2008.
Osim, Dickson, a titled Chief; member of the PCN and Chairman of OPI Customary Court, Amasiri. Age: 69; gender: male, 30th June 2008.
Osondu, Godwin, a holder of the highest traditional title in Amasiri turned a Christian. A member of the Cherubim and Seraphim. Age: 54; gender: male, 26th June 2008.
Oti, Promise, PCN minister from Ehugbo, a neighbouring clan to Amasiri. Age: 36; gender: male, 21st July 2008.
Otta, Okechukwu, a former member of the PCN, but dropped out and now a member of the Ogo society. Age: 53; gender: male, 20th July 2008.
Otua, Martha, adherent of the Ogo society, some of her children attend the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. Age: 50; gender: female, 19th July 2008.
Otua, Elechi, a titled Chief and civil servant, resident at Abakaliki. Age: 50; gender: male, 4th August 2008.
Otua, Eze, retired teacher; astute traditionalist, and also a member of St. James PCN, Amasiri Parish. Age: 74; gender: Male, 17th July 2008.
Otua, Joshua, President, PCN, Amasiri parish Youth Group. Age: 34; gender; male, 27th June and 13th July 2008.
Uche Maduabuchi, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, home based. During the fieldwork his wife was ejected out of their compound, and was told that his wife must offer the necessarily sacrifice before being readmitted. Age: 39; gender: male, 12th July 2008.
Uche, Onwunta, Accountancy undergraduate student (a non-indigene, but born and raised in Amasiri). Age: 24; gender male, 19th June 2008.
Uka, Emele Mba PCN minister and retired Professor at University of Calabar. Age: 65; gender: male, 29th July 2008.
Ukandu, Esther Civil servant, an ordained elder of the PCN. Age: 45; gender: female, 4th August 2008.
Ukandu, Enoch, retired civil servant, a Presbyterian and titled Chief resident at Abakaliki. Age: 65; gender: male, 4th August 2008.
Ukoma, A. N. PCN minister, Lecturer, Ebonyi State Uni. Abakaliki and immediate
past Special Adviser to the Governor on Religious Matters and Conflict Resolutions, Ebonyi State. Age: 54; gender: male, 24th July 2008.

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277


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